

Current Trends in Jewish Teen Participation with Out-of-School Activities

A Survey and Analysis of Relevant Research

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Project Background and Summary

This project was initiated in the fall of 2009 by Rose Community Foundation to identify, evaluate and document recent research and study into Jewish teens and their involvement with Jewish and non-Jewish out-of-school activities. The purpose was to identify trends and patterns in motivations of Jewish youth in choosing to participate (or not) in different out-of-school activities. Declining participation rates in both formal and informal Jewish programming have been well documented nationally, and local programs have not been immune to this trend. Developing an understanding of common motivations and interests of Jewish teens will help local organizations serving Jewish youth adapt both programmatic and marketing strategies to be more responsive to the interests of local teens. The goal is that this research will guide philanthropists, Jewish institutions serving teens, program staff, and social innovators when they assess current programs and create new programs and marketing strategies.

Background and Research Questions

The initial scope for this research effort was developed in partnership with Lisa Farber Miller, Senior Program Officer for Jewish Life at Rose Community Foundation. Through this process, we identified a list of questions of primary and secondary importance to this study. Due to time constraints, and the volume of information, the study focused almost exclusively on the list of primary research questions.

This study was designed to be comprehensive, but not exhaustive. The focus was on uncovering the majority of recent data and analysis germane to the primary research questions. It is entirely possible, if not likely, that some studies were missed during this effort. The only criteria used to exclude particular studies were if the data was too outdated, or if the conclusions were based primarily on anecdotal data sets.

Primary Research Questions:

1. What are the trends in participation in both Jewish and non-Jewish out-of-school activities?
2. How do these trends differ between boys and girls and why?
3. Do participation rates differ for youth growing up in communities with a more highly concentrated Jewish population?
4. How do the trends differ across groups of youth raised in families with varying degrees of connection to Judaism?
5. What are the primary motivations for teens to choose to participate (or not) in afterschool programming (both Jewish and non-Jewish)?
6. What are the most common reasons that Jewish youth drop out of out-of-school programming prematurely?

7. How significant a role does parental preference or pressure play in teen participation in Jewish out-of-school activities?
8. What programs have been successful in attracting Jewish teens and are there trends that we can identify or lessons learned from these examples?
9. Are there marketing techniques that have proven particularly effective in encouraging Jewish youth to participate in out-of-school activities?

Secondary Research Questions:

1. Does Jewish youth involvement with Jewish activities change during the college years? If so, why?
2. What trends can be identified in participation in after school programs by non-Jewish youth and what implications (if any) are there for Jewish youth programs?
3. Are there other examples of culturally specific teen programming that have had growing participation rates in recent years?

Methodology and Structure of the Report

This was a secondary research study designed to create a summary reflective of current research in the field pertaining to the primary research questions listed above. Sources included published research papers, books, magazine articles, and web-based resources (websites, newsletters, blogs). Secondary research was augmented by some informal conversations with local Jewish parents, teens, and one Rabbi.

This report has been organized into sections that correspond with the primary research questions. Each section provides a summary of relevant research, implications of that research, and gaps in the data or research available. It should be noted that there is often some substantial crossover between the different research questions, so the analysis of available data on one question in many cases has implications for one or more of the other research questions. While the author strove to maintain clear and logical delineations between the questions, this was more easily done in some cases than others. From this perspective, it is recommended that the report be read in full rather than ferreting out the information in response to one question of particular interest to the reader.

Key Findings

This report was designed primarily to summarize existing research so that local leaders in the Greater Denver area community of Jewish youth formal and informal education could draw conclusions that might influence programmatic and

marketing strategies. Some of the key themes and implications that have been sifted out through the process of conducting this research are summarized below.¹

- ***Need for Qualified, Trained Instructors.*** This was a recurrent theme in the research. Poor instructional and classroom/group management techniques have been linked directly to diminished participation rates of teens in Jewish programming. Levels of formal training are too often low, and similarly there does not often exist a clear training and professional development path for those working with youth. While there have been some strides, this still remains a clear and significant gap in many programs, and a key component of successful programs.
- ***Teens Need Authentic Leadership Opportunities and Meaningful Adult Leadership.*** Youth need to have their opinions valued and have an authentic role in designing and developing programs but need adult leadership and ultimate control. Research has shown that teens are turned off when leadership opportunities are in-authentic or “dumbed down.” Also, some research has demonstrated that when too much leeway is granted the teens, without appropriate and thoughtful adult leadership, outcomes diminish as well.
- ***Keep Your Clique to Yourself.*** Teens (boys and girls alike) were clear that they were far less likely to participate programs in which cliquish or exclusive behavior is common, or where the same group of kids is always present. That said, Jewish teens are eager to meet new friends and enjoy welcoming experiences where that is possible, and cite with dramatic frequency positive social interaction as being a significant contributing factor in their participation.
- ***Do As I Say (and As I Do).*** Jewish teens are significantly influenced by both the beliefs and actions of their parents. The data are clear that parental encouragement of participation in Jewish activities dramatically increases actual participation rates. Similarly, teens report being less likely to participate if they observe their parents to be pushing them to participate, while the parents themselves demonstrate limited involvement in Jewish community life.
- ***We Don’t Want to Do This Alone.*** Jewish teens report the highest rates of any common U.S. religion of both desiring, and lacking quality adult connections with members of their faith. With what we know about how significantly Jewish parents positively influence their teens, it leaves one to wonder if initiatives aimed at forging strong, meaningful connections between Jewish teens and adults might not tap into an untapped well of positive influence within the Jewish community—if in fact, teens are similarly influenced by these relationships (even if we assume that the influence would be somewhat less strong than parental influences).

¹ It should be noted that the author of this report is not Jewish and conclusions and any (unintended) misinterpretations of information should be viewed in that light.

- ***Teens Evolve (Research Proves It).*** The research is clear that teen’s needs and interests clearly evolve during the high school years. Programming that is designed to be responsive to these changes, or that targets a more highly focused subset of the teenage population is more likely to be successful than programming that offers a one-size-fits-all approach to teen programming.
- ***Pink and Blue Doesn’t Cut It.*** There are clear differences between Jewish teenage young men and women, and these differences evolve throughout their teenage years. Programs that adapt effectively to these differences and adjust programming accordingly are likely to be more effective. Simple fixes such as simply separating the genders and offering same-gendered staff members have been shown in some instances to have little to no effect. This clearly is linked to the need for increased training and professional development of Jewish youth educators and also to the need for increased rigor in program design. Unfortunately little research has been done recently to examine the unique needs of Jewish adolescent boys.
- ***Less Is Not More, More Is More.*** The research demonstrates that as involvement with after school activities increases among Jewish teens, so does their willingness to participate with Jewish-focused activities. Perhaps counter-intuitively, organizations targeting Jewish teens may have increased marketing success by targeting those teens already involved with other activities. Additionally, the more time teens spend with Jewish programming, the more significant the impacts, so while some “gateway” programming will likely be important, it will be infinitely more impactful when it leads to sustained and on-going engagement. Research highlights a continuum of increasing long-term impacts as you move from less intensive to more intensive programming (youth groups, camps, Sunday school, day school).²
- ***My Life as a Cultural Jew Is More Important...at First.*** Research suggests that Jewish teens gravitate more generally to programs and activities less centered on religious aspects of Judaism, but that those engaged with culturally Jewish activities are then more inclined to engage with religiously Jewish activities.
- ***Unengaged or Uninspired.*** There appears to be a potentially sizable population of Jewish teens who are interested and willing to participate more fully in Jewish life activities, but have not (for a variety of reasons—some discussed in the report below) been engaged effectively. In some cases, data suggests that there are some who are simply unaware of offerings, or for whom the marketing approach has been ineffective—but the programs themselves may be appealing. Research suggests that in many cases these

² It should be noted that the research on the impact of day schools is skewed by the fact that most of the data sets include predominantly Orthodox students, and therefore more research is needed to isolate and understand the impacts on non-Orthodox students.

youth long for a deeper connection, and therefore there is much to be hopeful for in studying these populations of Jewish teens.

- ***Innovators Welcome.*** Teens (and their parents) are interested in programs that are seen to be new and different. Research also suggests that innovations developed by teens alone, have been less successful than innovations developed in partnership with adults.
- ***Collaboration or Competition, Engaging the Next Generation Is Vital.*** Many researchers cite the need for increased coordination across the portfolio of organizations serving the needs and interests of Jewish teens and that the current competition and fragmentation often observed does not serve the needs of teens, nor ultimately of the Jewish community. With intermarriage rates so high, and with the documented declines in participation with Jewish formal and informal activities by children from intermarried households, the stakes are high. In addition, the research suggests that the long-term impacts of informal Jewish education are very slight when researchers control for other contributing factors. Further, it shows that when teens participate in more than one category of informal Jewish education (e.g. camp and youth group) the long-term impacts increase dramatically. Therefore, collaboration between such programs is essential, and tactics to bundle experiences, perhaps even charging one fee for both a camp and a youth group experience could be effective strategies.

Primary Research Questions

Participation Trends in Out-of-School Activities (Question 1)

Research Summary: Colorado youth generally have participation rates in out-of-school activities that are significantly higher than national averages. In particular, the data for 12-17 year-olds show that as of 2007, 89.2% of Colorado youth aged 12-17 participated in at least one out of school activity vs. 83.9% as a national average³. Additionally, the same study (*National Survey for Children's Health*) documented the following trends:

- Participation in sports teams or lessons over the preceding 12 months (6-17 year olds). Colorado= 68.7%. National average= 58.3%⁴
- Participation in clubs or organizations during the last 12 months (6-17 year olds). Colorado= 60.4%. National average= 56.9%
- Participation in volunteer/community service work during the last 12 months (6-17 year olds). Colorado: Never= 25.9%; A few times a year= 41.3%; Few times a month= 21.6%; Once a week or more= 11.2%. National average: Never= 22.0%; A few times a year= 40.8%; Few times a month= 22.2%; Once a week or more= 15.0%.

³ <http://nschdata.org/DataQuery/DataQueryResults.aspx>

⁴ All data accurate with a 95% confidence interval.

- Work for pay outside the home during the preceding week (12-17 year olds only). Colorado: Did not work for pay= 63.5%; Less than 1 up to 9 hours= 24.9%; 10 hours or more=11.6%. National average: Did not work for pay= 64.4%; Less than 1 up to 9 hours= 24.1%; 10 hours or more=11.5%.

With the exception of community service and work outside the home, this data suggests that Colorado youth are generally more active both with sports and out-of-school clubs and organizations than the national averages.

Next we turn to look at the data about Jewish teen participation in out-of-school activities. According to the 2000-01 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), 26% of adult Jews reported regular participation in Jewish youth groups between the ages of 6-17 (Cohen, 2004). Unfortunately this simple average masks the trend in the data that documents a steady decline in participation that has been taking place over the past few decades. Among those surveyed who were between 50-60 years old at the time of the survey, 31% reported regular participation in Jewish youth programs, contrasted with only 22% of respondents aged 18-34 (Cohen, 2004).

Not only has participation declined generationally, but we also observe declines in participation throughout the teenage years within a generation as well. In a study of 1,300 13-18 year old Jewish youth and their parents, researchers mapped a decline in participation in Jewish activities (formal schooling, youth groups, volunteering, Jewish camps, use of a JCC) from an 86% participation rate in the seventh grade to only 56% by the 12th grade (Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe et al., 2000). Despite increases in participation during high school due to Israel experiences and paid employment with Jewish organizations, the overall participation still declined. The decline is in large part due to declines in participation with formal Jewish education (60% in 7th grade to 22% in 11th), and in fact the researchers found that regular participation rates in Jewish youth groups do not decline, but rather hold relatively constant at a rate of roughly 20% (once/month involvement) throughout middle and high school (Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe et al., 2000).

Other studies have documented even lower rates of participation. When the focus is on just the school year, participation rates in Jewish communal activities, both formal and informal, one study found approximately 50% of respondents who indicated that they had no engagement whatsoever with the community (Leffert, Herring, 1998). There is also a significant amount of anecdotal data about declining enrollment in programs for Jewish teens both locally and nationally⁵.

In terms of how Jewish teens generally spend their available time during high school, it is consistent with how the majority of American teens spend their time: homework, jobs, watching television, athletics, school clubs, and youth groups (Leffert, Herring, 1998; Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe et al. 2000). Not surprisingly, the

⁵ Based on conversations with staff at BBYO International at the regional and national levels.

Shema study found no significant difference in frequency or nature of secular out-of-school activities for Conservative or Reform adolescents (Leffert, Herring, 1998). This finding is in keeping with other, more recent research that highlights the extent to which Jewish teens are increasingly influenced by secular society, and perhaps as a result are increasingly emphasizing Jewish culture in their lives, while de-emphasizing Jewish religious institutions (Heft, 2006; Smith, Denton, 2005).

There is some research that suggests that the more active Jewish youth are in secular afterschool activities, the more likely they are to participate in Jewish activities as well. In fact, for grades 7-9, with each increase in the number of afterschool activities the observed participation in Jewish activities increased. During the 10th and 11th grades participation in Jewish activities declined for those students with three other afterschool activities. Interestingly, however, there has been research documenting the notion of “gateway” activities leading to increased engagement with Jewish life on the part of teenagers. A study of active teen JCC members found that 72% participated in community service activities (against an average of 52% (Heft, 2006)), and 55% participate in Jewish youth groups (against an average of 34% (Heft, 2006)).

Implications of the Research: Youth in the Greater Denver area are engaged with a variety of activities during the high school years, and at rates greater than national averages. Jewish teens likewise are busy and engaged with sports activities, youth groups, jobs and friends. The competition for teens’ time has only increased in recent years, and the influences of the secular world are strongly felt by Jewish teens as well. Clearly the most significant factor in the decline in Jewish teen participation in Jewish formal and informal education is the significant decline in participation rates in formal Jewish education programs. The problem is that while participation rates in the informal programming options remain relatively stable, with the significant declines in participation with formal educational programming, there is clearly a sizable population of teens that becomes disengaged or highly under-engaged with Jewish community activities and learning during these critical developmental years.

The data contained in the report by Kadushin, Kelner and Saxe reviewed in combination with the research conducted during the National Study of Youth and Religion offers some interesting potential insights/hypotheses. Specifically, the Kadushin, Kelner and Saxe data highlights a significant gap between “regular” (at least once monthly) participators in Jewish youth groups and “sporadic” (less frequently than once/month). The regular participators average 20% of Jewish teens, and this rate holds relatively constant throughout the middle and high school years. However often 50% to nearly 70% of Jewish teens (depending on age and region) report being “sporadic” attendees. While there may be some turnover through the years among the “regular” attendees, this data suggests that a large portion of Jewish teens just dabble in the youth programming, but are never “hooked in” and more significantly engaged (a contributing factor in successful programming as discussed later in this report). In evaluating why this might be,

there are certain to be a wide number of contributing factors, but the outgrowth of the NSYR research, suggests that Jewish teens today are significantly more attracted to cultural rather than religious aspects of Judaism (Heft, 2006). Other research tells us that engaging Jewish teens in Jewish activities is often easier if “gateway” programs are used as an initial hook (e.g. the research on engaged teen JCC members). Perhaps youth programs more focused on emphasizing cultural aspects of Judaism could serve as better “hooks” for teens, if they were then followed with a scaffolded approach to programmatic offerings that ultimately provided youth opportunities to extend and deepen their experiences both culturally and religiously.

Research Gaps: One study captured data documenting a lack of decline in participation with Jewish life among Conservative Jews (Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe, et al., 2000). That particular study included youth from Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist and independent congregations. It would be interesting to see if teens from Orthodox backgrounds experience similarly consistent levels of engagement, and ultimately to examine what unique characteristics of the Conservative and/or Orthodox approach, philosophy and culture can be attributed to influencing this result.

In the Greater Denver area, it would be interesting to gather data systematically throughout the portfolio of Jewish teen serving organizations to begin mapping participation rates, observing trends, and mapping changes. This data would enable interested parties to begin to study programs with significant increases or decreases in participation, those with better results attracting boys, girls, and mixed groupings, those more successful at attracting different ages of youth, and those successful at engaging youth over longer periods of time. While the existing research does offer some suggestions for components of effective Jewish programming and marketing, it is still a highly complex problem to solve and often having better information about the inner workings of successful and unsuccessful programs and strategies locally would be helpful. It seems not unlike challenges with public education—there are reams of research about effective teaching strategies, curricular approaches, leadership strategies, structural solutions—but at the end of the day it is still a highly complex problem that requires at some level knowledge of an individual school, its teachers, administrators, and operating environment to unpack why some succeed and others fail.

Gender Differences in Religious Participation (Question 2)

Research Summary: There is a substantial body of research that documents clear and consistently observed differences between Jewish male and female teens in the reasons they report for enjoying and also for being frustrated by formal and informal religious activities. Similarly the majority of the research highlights participation rates weighted in favor of girls over boys—although it should be noted that the 2000-01 NJPS data show that among Jewish adults aged 18-34 (at the time

of the survey) more men than women reported having engaged in regular participation in informal Jewish youth programs.

Interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly these trends are consistent with those documented for adolescents of a wide range of religious backgrounds in America. In 2002, a comprehensive study was performed to examine the religious and spiritual development of adolescents in America (Smith & Denton, 2005). This study found that girls had increased levels of involvement with religion than boys across all religions. For example, the study found that 14% more boys than girls reported never having participated in a religious youth group.⁶ Similarly the Shema study documented lower participation rates for boys than girls in Jewish activities and also highlighted the fact that boys consistently report finding less meaning in Jewish activities than do girls (Klau, 2009).

Given that the research seems to be conclusive and consistent in reporting that there are in fact appreciable differences in the rates of participation between Jewish boys and girls in Jewish programming during the teenage years, it logically followed to explore some of the reasons for these differences. In examining the key differences in what appeals to, and frustrates both boys and girls about formal and informal Jewish education, there is in fact a wealth of research. Much of the research suggests that girls prefer programs (e.g. Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!⁷) where they are able to talk about their feelings and share in a more open manner, than do boys. It is also common that research suggests that adolescent boys require more physical activities and programs where they can display competence and comfort (UR, 2005; Klau, 2009). When asked what makes Jewish activities meaningful, Jewish adolescents responded as follows (abbreviated list to highlight key points) (Klau, 2009):

- I like talking to other kids and sharing what we think and feel: 70% boys; 83% girls
- These activities really help me grow as a Jew: 65% boys; 76% girls
- Doing things with my friends: 93% boys; 93% girls
- I like to meet new people: 91% boys, 94% girls
- They are fun: 81% boys; 85% girls
- They are a part of passing down Jewish traditions: 61% boys; 70% girls

When asked what turns them off about Judaism, youth responded as follows (Klau, 2009):

- There are cliques or snotty kids there: 58% boys; 67% girls
- My parents force me to do them: 23% boys; 19% girls
- I don't like the people or teachers leading the activities: 29% boys; 30% girls
- It's always the same people there: 47% boys; 43% girls
- Kids aren't involved in decision making: 35% boys; 28% girls

⁶ As presented in *Promoting the Religious Development of Jewish Boys*. A draft report by Dr. Max Klau, summarizing the study by Smith, Denton, et al 2002).

⁷ <http://roshhodesh.org>

The social aspects (both negative and positive) clearly have a strong effect on youth and in their attraction to, and enjoyment of programming. Generally, boys tended to be more “negative” and respond with greater frequency to things that turned them off about various activities. This obviously connects with the reality that we observe fewer boys participating than girls in Jewish activities.

There are a few additional items of note that arise from the research. First, according to the data in the Ravitch (2002) study, girls tend to be more interested in the social and ritual aspects of activities, with boys more interested in sports and action-related activities. A BBYO (TRU, 2005) study found that Jewish teen girls tend to value religion in their lives more than boys. Data from the *Jewish Teen Engagement Planning Report* (Port, 2005) finds that boys prefer to demonstrate caring through actions rather than words; prefer problem solving to processing; and prefer to play in structured and competitive environments with strict rules of fairness.

It is also essential to understand the developmental evolution that adolescents experience during the high school years and how their interests and needs change during those years. Data and analysis that aggregate adolescents into one larger “high school” age grouping will typically mask some of these differences and make analysis less meaningful. There is some research that does a good job of disaggregating the data so that we can observe what appear to be key differences between the factors that motivate 9th and 10th graders from those that motivate older teens (Ravitch, 2002; Smith, Denton, 2005). For example the NSYR research suggests that the traditionally perceived gap between adolescent girls being more interested in discussing their feelings and emotions starts to narrow (with boys increasing in their interest in these kinds of programs) as youth reach their junior and senior years of high school (Smith & Denton, 2005).

It appears that youth programs frequently understand that boys and girls have fundamental and significant developmental differences during the high school years, but it also appears too common that responses to these differences are limited to modest programmatic differences or to simply separating the genders into separate but quite similar programs. Additionally, some of the common and perhaps intuitive responses to these developmental differences—male leaders for groups of boys, female for groups of girls; hands-on community service projects for boys; single-gender programming—have been shown to meet with mixed results (URJ, 2005).

Recently there have been some new gender-specific programs for girls that have risen to prominence locally and nationally—Rosh Hodesh: It’s a Girl Thing! for Jewish adolescent girls, and Girls on the Run⁸ a non-denominational program for pre-adolescent and adolescent girls are two examples—but there are few similar

⁸ <http://www.girlsontherun.org>

examples for boys. An initial survey of research to date on the unique needs of the current generation of Jewish teenage boys conducted by the developers of Rosh Hodesh, uncovered almost no pertinent research, specifically finding only two Jewish organizations that had done any formal study of the unique needs of adolescent boys (Klau, 2009).

What each of these programs (Rosh Hodesh, Girls on the Run) has in common is a rigorous research-based approach to program design, outcomes and evaluation/assessment. Each has been well received by participants and by parents and each has enjoyed significant growth nationally and in the Greater Denver area in recent years. This suggests that those developing programming strategies for Jewish teen boys could potentially benefit from approaching their program design with a similar rigor.

Implications of the Data: It is clear that the current portfolio of programming for Jewish teens taken as a whole appeals more to girls than to boys and that additional research into strategies for effectively reaching each gender independently and also in mixed-gender groupings is warranted. There were few programs highlighted in the research that were equally effective at attracting boys and girls to Jewish programming, but we can assume that some such programs exist, and that more study of what makes these models successful would be useful. Those investing in the development or expansion of programs would do well to insist on sound evaluation of what strategies are more or less effective at attracting, retaining and ultimately impacting both Jewish boys and girls. In addition, staff of existing programs should be focused on leveraging what is known about the interests and needs of Jewish teens of different genders and how these needs evolve during the high school years, to modify current offerings or to initiate new programs that might be more effective.

Gaps in the Research: It appears that research into the specific types of programs and services that are valued by Jewish boys and girls at different developmental stages during the teenage years as well as the types of programs and services that are particularly effective at enhancing connections to Judaism are needed. Additionally, it may be that some programs are effective at attracting teens, but less effective at retaining/engaging them, and ultimately achieving meaningful long-term impacts. Therefore a gender-specific analysis of effective marketing strategies would be useful. Generally it does appear that more research has been done to date on Jewish adolescent girls than on adolescent boys. There is some interesting research that has been done of late that deals generally with adolescent boys (Tyre, 2008), but the unique attributes, needs and perspectives of Jewish boys are in need of further review.

In addition, I was not able to uncover much available data about the impacts of different programs for Jewish youth. Much of the research into mid- and long-term outcomes appears to happen at the level of the individual organization (BBYO as an example has some good data about long-term outcomes). There is also plenty of

research about the long-term benefits generally of participation in religious programming and in Jewish religious programming. However it appears that more formal research assessing the impacts of various programs and comparing results across programs would be useful.

Participation Rates in Cities of Different Sizes and Demographic Profiles (Question 3)

Research Summary: Jewish youth programs in the Greater Denver area experience the impacts of a variety of important demographic trends. First, demographic data from the NJPS survey document higher participation rates in both formal and informal Jewish education in the Northeast and Midwest than in the South and the West (Cohen, 2004). Yet another demographic trend that has been documented as a significant influence upon participation rates in regional programming for Jewish teens is the impact of the significant influx of new Jews to the region in recent years. The 2007 Metro Denver/Boulder Jewish Community Study documented that new arrivals to the region made up fully 46% of the Jewish population in the region and also that new arrivals were 50% less likely to join congregations (Ukeles & Miller, 2008).

The data in the report by Kadushin, Kelner and Saxe includes a great deal of interesting data about participation trends in various afterschool activities that is well worth the reader's time pursuing in more depth. One salient point has to do with rates of "sporadic" (less frequently than once/month) participation in Jewish youth groups by grade, across regions with different population densities. As might be expected, regions with medium and low Jewish population densities have significantly higher rates of participation in youth groups—ranging from 61% to 39% for medium density cities and between 44% and 60% for low density cities (Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe, 2000). While Metro Denver/Boulder currently ranks as the 16th largest Jewish community in the U.S. the population has become increasingly dispersed throughout the region (Ukeles, Miller, 2008). It would require further analysis to accurately compare Denver's concentration to the "medium" and "low" criteria in the study, but it is likely that the data in this report offers more accurate benchmarks for evaluating participation rates in these programs.

The relationship of class and teenage religious and spiritual activity is one that has apparently been only lightly examined in recent years. Philip Schwadel of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and one of the researchers in the NSYR study has devoted some attention to this issue using some of the data from the NSYR study. The NSYR data suggest at the broad level, a fairly clear relationship between the level of median family income by county of residence with religious participation rates—as average family income declines, religious participation increases (Smith, Denton 2005). Other research has shown demonstrated some degree of elasticity of demand for programming based on the cost—as family income decreases, so too does their interest in more expensive programming options.

Implications of the Research: The data on participation variances across communities with different Jewish population densities is interesting for a variety of reasons. Simplistically it may help programmers better spot demand for services and spur them to envision business models that enable more significant and cost-effective reach into more geographically dispersed communities. In addition, it speaks to communities where by population figures alone, there is a relatively significant Jewish population, but where that population is relatively dispersed throughout the region—in these communities, there may well be pockets of higher concentration (where Jewish programs would likely be somewhat less successful in attracting participation), and pockets of lower concentration/higher dispersion (where programs should tend to be more effective at attracting youth involvement). This has obvious implications for advertising/outreach strategies for programs locally.

Gaps in the Research: One area that was not addressed in the research was how class may affect participation rates in Jewish formal and informal programming during the teenage years. While there is general population data that provides some general demographic data about income levels of Jewish households, and there is some data suggesting (not surprisingly) that families with less money do reduce participation in programs with higher costs (Leffert, Herring, 1998), there appears to have been little systematic analysis of how economic class impacts participation rates generally with Jewish programming among Jewish teens. There have been studies that have documented higher rates of intermarriage among Jewish young adults from lower income backgrounds (DellaPergola, 1991) and higher Jewish commitment among teens from higher-income backgrounds (thus potentially replicating an existing class bias). A related stream of research that would be of potential interest would be to examine how perceptions of existing Jewish programming for teens vary across class, and similarly to examine whether class contributes to differences in optimal programmatic strategies.

Differences in Participation Rates in Families with Different Levels of Connection to Judaism (Question 4)

Research Summary: While the numbers are sometimes debated, the incidence of intermarriage within the Jewish community has clearly and significantly risen in recent decades. The 2007 Metro Denver/Boulder Jewish Community study documents a rates of intermarriage ranging from a low of 40% in Denver to highs of 65% in Boulder and 76% in Aurora (Ukeles, Miller, 2008). Unfortunately it has been well documented that teens from intermarried households are less likely to participate in Jewish formal and informal religious activities, and therefore the high rates of intermarriage locally are of particular concern (Cohen, 2004; Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe et al. 2000). According to the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), adolescents with two Jewish parents were *five-times* more likely to report regular participation in a Jewish youth group than were youth from intermarried families—34% vs. 7% (Cohen, 2004).

While this data may be distressing, data from the NSYR suggest that Jewish teens exhibit rates of practicing their faith (as measured by participation rates in formal religious education and religious observances) similar to those of teens being raised in other common religions in the U.S. (Smith, Denton, 2005). This study does delineate separate responses for Jewish teens identifying as “religiously Jewish,” “culturally Jewish,” and those not self-identifying as Jewish but with at least one Jewish parent. Participation rates for those teens identifying as religiously Jewish range from 70-100%, while responses in the other two categories range between 22-100 and 17-80 respectively. It would be useful to analyze the underlying data further to assess differences in responses between teens with two Jewish parents from those with only one Jewish parent.

Overall parental engagement with Judaism is also linked with increased levels of Jewish teen participation in informal Jewish education programs (Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe, et al., 2000). While this is discussed in more depth in section seven below, it is also an important issue to raise when examining the importance of familial connections to Judaism and the extent to which these connections are passed down to teenage children.

Implications of the Research: The research suggests that while there may still be some “low hanging fruit” (those teens from households with two Jewish parents, but whom don’t currently participate in Jewish education post Bar/Bat Mitzvah), attracting other, more difficult to engage youth will be a challenge that only gets worse with each generation. If intermarriage rates continue at similar rates, the ability to attract teens from these households is likely to continue to be a challenge unless programs and strategies are developed that begin to close the gap in participation rates observed between intermarried and non- intermarried households.

Gaps in the Research: An interesting point of reference from the data gathered in the NSYR study relates to the extent to which Jewish families discuss religious or spiritual topics together. The data from this study show that as a whole, Jewish families report rates of discussing religious and/or spiritual topics together “every day” or “a few times a week” at the same rates as youth who reported coming from non-religious families. While it is not unlikely that there is a cultural component that is central to this discussion, it is interesting to note that Jewish teens report the second lowest rates of participation in religious youth programs of any of the major religions surveyed (Smith, Denton 2005). The study does not link these two data points, nor is the author of this report suggesting that there is in fact a connection, but it does appear to be worthy of further consideration or research.

Motivations in Jewish and Non-Jewish Teens for Participating (or not) in Out-of-School Programming (Questions 5 and 6)

In examining this question, it quickly became clear that primary research questions five and six⁹ were asking substantially similar things, and attempting to answer them separately would not be logical. Therefore, the analysis of these two questions has been combined in this section.

Research Summary: This is a complex question with multiple facets that need to be addressed in order to begin to pursue its answer. There is a fair amount of good research about the reasons that Jewish youth elect not to participate in formal and informal Jewish education post Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The challenge lies less in describing the problem, and more in devising and implementing effective and scalable solutions.

A variety of authors have discussed a wide range of potential explanations for why Jewish teens are disengaging with Jewish activities post Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Reasons include: time constraints (largely a red herring it turns out), frustration or burnout with formal Jewish education, anti-Semitism, social factors, hypocritical adults.

Frustration/Burnout with Formal Jewish Education

Researchers have consistently documented that a significant percentage of Jewish teens feel frustrated and burned out by formal Jewish education by the time they become Bar or Bat Mitzvah (Ravitch, 2002; Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe, 2000). This burnout leads to a lack of interest in pursuing continued formal Jewish education, with some spillover effects to informal education environments.

“These students communicated, with striking consistency, that they found synagogue school to be no more than the “same old stuff” year after year and that because it felt “so useless” there was no reason to return after they were not required by their families to do so.”¹⁰

This same sentiment was documented in another research study that found:

“More than half of the teens reported that at the age of 11 or 12 they seldom or never enjoyed Hebrew school. Moreover, they experienced Hebrew school differently from schooling generally. Two-thirds always or often felt bored, compared with one-third in regular school. One-quarter said they regularly failed to turn in their Hebrew school

⁹ 5: What are the primary motivations for teens to choose to participate (or not) in afterschool programming (both Jewish and non-Jewish)?

6: What are the most common reasons that Jewish youth drop out of out-of-school programming prematurely?

¹⁰ Ravitch, Sharon M. (2002).

assignments, three times the percentage in non-Jewish or Jewish day schools.”¹¹

Consistent with these feelings, researchers documented declines in weekly participation in formal Jewish education from 60% in 7th grade to 22% in 11th grade (Ravitch, 2002).

Interestingly, however, these declines may in fact not be attributable to the fact that youth were frustrated by their experiences. A 1996 study from Minneapolis found that while Jewish adolescents report being bored by Jewish education as a contributing factor as to why they don't participate, only a small percentage reported this as a reason—5% of respondents aged 14-16 and 5% of 17-19 year olds. Much more significant factors included: experiencing anti-Semitism (42% and 46% respectively—increasing from 20% of 11-13 year olds); parents who push participation but don't participate in similar activities themselves (24%/7%); and, “Judaism separates me from my Christian friends” (19%/27%).¹² That said, the same study found a significant number of respondents who said that their formal; Jewish education was boring (it just wasn't a contributing factor in their non-participation)—34% of Conservative respondents, 18% of Reform and 37% of Jewish day school students.¹³ Even though this research is getting somewhat dated at this point, more recent research continues to document teens' frustrations with formal Jewish education, and it seems safe to assume that it remains not a motivating factor in decisions to pull back from continued participation.

Influencing Decision Making

To this point, a more recent study highlighted a theme for Jewish teens of frustration with not having sufficient opportunities to be an authentic part of the decision-making structure for determining curriculum and programming (Ravitch, 2002). Jewish teens have strong and sophisticated opinions about what they want from Jewish institutions, and want to have a voice in influencing these same institutions.

Societal Influences

A related trend of note is an observed general and growing distrust of formal institutions and leadership, among current teenagers (BBYO, 2008; Smith & Denton, 2005). One of the impacts of this trend is that teens are more likely to be hesitant about joining long-standing institutions and programs.

In their book *Soul Searching: The Religions and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton suggest that a related and concurrent trend influencing today's teens is the rise of individualistic capitalism and its influence on religion. They posit that as a result of the individualistic nature of the American capitalist system, more and more people are

¹¹ Saxe, Leonard (2001).

¹² Leffert, Herring, Nancy PhD. (1998) Page 17.

¹³ Leffert, Herring, Nancy PhD. (1998). Page 19.

self-defining their beliefs—the power and authority rests in the individual rather than in the institution—and have a diminished interest in following the leadership of formal religious institutions and religious leaders, wanting instead to put their own stamp on their religious beliefs and observances.

Desire for Adult Relationships

Jewish teens also long for meaningful connections with adults in the Jewish community. It is clear that parents play an important role in influencing decisions of their teens, but Jewish teens also long for significant relationships with other adults in the community. In reviewing the NSYR data, there are some data points relevant to this discussion that really jump out. First, Jewish teens report the highest rates of any religious group of having adults in the congregation, other than family members, with whom they enjoy talking (92%). Of those teens reporting that they did not have an adult with whom they enjoyed talking, 100% of the Jewish teens said that they in fact would like to have one (as opposed to averages between 56-75% for other denominations). This is all quite encouraging. Things get discouraging when we turn to the next pieces of data. Only 28% of Jewish teens indicated that they had adults in their lives to whom they could turn for support, advice or help (versus a range for the other denominations between 53-68%). Further, 72% of Jewish teens said that there was not a single adult in their congregation or youth group to whom they could turn for support, advice or help (Smith & Denton, 2005). Clearly there is a wonderful opportunity here to meet the interest Jewish teens have for greater connections with adults—a need that is clearly not currently being met¹⁴.

Some have argued (Smith, Denton, 2005) that the separation of adolescents from the “adult” world is a relatively recent phenomenon in America, and that the duration of this artificial separation has been increased by college, graduate school, and later average age of marriage to the point where many people don’t enter the “adult” world fully until they are into their 30’s. This period of limbo where people are by age adults, but by circumstance (e.g. college, graduate school) largely surrounded by age-mates can in many ways be frustrating for youth/young adults, and leads to increased sensitivity to being “shut out” from substantive decision-making processes. Jewish teens have been shown to both value and to seek deeper and more meaningful connections with adults in environments that are more collaborative and authentic. Too often, adults maintain a distance with teens, and teens are savvy enough to identify this quickly and shut down. This dynamic speaks to the need for highly trained youth leaders who have the maturity and wisdom to effectively manage the balance between leading a group and developing authentic and meaningful relationships with the teens at the same time.

Quality of Program Leadership

¹⁴ The paper by Muffs Botnick and Rotenberg (2007) details a program in Palm Beach that attempted a mentoring model to engage the younger generation.

There are a wide range of anecdotal studies, and more rigorous research that speak to the need for having more highly trained and effective leaders of formal and informal programming for Jewish teens (Ravitch, 2002; Leffert, 1998; Sales, 2007). Ravitch in her 2002 report, documented a divide between teens who elected to stay in synagogue school after a Bar or Bat Mitzvah largely because of the quality of the programmatic leadership and how it translated into increased feelings of engagement and personal connection versus those who lacked such leadership and thus elected to cease their participation (Ravitch, 2002). Ravitch followed this thread to say:

“This contrast speaks directly to the need for the professional development of educators through training in which the teachers are engaged as whole people and inspired to teach and connect with students around powerful Jewish concepts and values. It also speaks to the need for development of sequenced and innovative curricula and enhanced programming that provides multiple gateways for Jewish youth to learn about and express their Judaism. Further, this contrast makes clear that there is a dire need for more accountability within the synagogue school system, as well as for focused, supportive, and ongoing professional and leadership development for teachers and their educational directors.”¹⁵

In addition, anecdotal data suggests that the quality of programmatic leadership is a significant factor in securing participation of youth, and importantly, the support of the parents.¹⁶

In the case of Judaism, it may in part be an under-commitment as a faith to staffing youth ministers that contributes to under-engagement by teens. According to the data in the NSYR, Judaism ranks last in the percentage of synagogues with a youth minister (on a full, part time or volunteer basis) with 43% of synagogues meeting these criteria compared with 94% of LDS congregations, 55% of Catholic congregations, 73% of Black Protestants, 66% of Mainline Protestants, and 70% of Conservative Protestants. Similarly, Jewish teens were second only to Catholic teens in their low participation rates in congregation-sponsored youth groups, with 73% not participating (Smith & Denton, 2005). Clearly the quality and training of youth ministers is essential, but it appears that there is also a correlation between the number of youth ministers and the rate of participation of teens.

The Importance of Cultural vs. Religious Programs

In his chapter in the book Passing on the Faith, Philip Schwadel discusses an important trend among Jewish youth—the increasing interest in exploring the

¹⁵ Ravitch, (2002). Page 8.

¹⁶ Each of the parents and teens with whom I spoke, as well as Rabbi Brian Field had multiple examples of programs that either succeeded or failed that they attributed to the quality of leadership.

cultural aspects of Judaism and a declining interest (at least during the teen years) in the religious side of Judaism. Citing data that show 16% of Jewish teens surveyed (NSYR data) responding that religious faith is very or extremely important in shaping their lives (compared to 41% of Catholics and 65% of Protestant teens), Schwadel highlights how Jewish teens are increasingly less attracted to activities that emphasize religious aspects (Heft, 2006). The findings were independent of geographic location, parental denomination, or level of Jewish education.

Similar analysis has been provided by others, with one set of authors suggesting that this may in part be an outgrowth of an interest in not setting themselves apart from a largely secular, pluralistic culture in which they reside (Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe et al., 2000). Regardless of the reason, it appears to be a real trend, and one with implications for Jewish youth programming.

Academic and Collegiate Pressures

Academic pressures clearly have a heavy influence upon Jewish teens. As a group, Jewish teens are highly focused on a successful high school and collegiate academic experience. Ninety-seven percent of respondents to one survey indicated that earning a college degree was “essential or very important to my future”; and 86% indicated that they were extremely/very concerned about getting into a good college (Cohen, 2007). Another study highlighted that Jewish teens “...worry about getting good grades, finding jobs and socializing with friends more than they worry about their religious identities.¹⁷”

When asked by researchers to indicate those things that made it difficult for them to participate in Jewish activities, 65% of 14-16 year olds and 49% of 17-19 year olds cited “homework and other school activities” (Leffert, Herring, 1998). Other challenges listed included:

- Transportation problems or the location being too far: 20%, 14-16; 10%, 17-19
- Program cost being too high: 20% of both age groups
- Fear of not knowing anyone: 38%, 14-16; 29%, 17-19
- Lack of knowledge of the programs’ existence: 22%, 14-16; 28%, 17-19

Anti-Semitism

Jewish teens today still feel the effects of discrimination and anti-Semitism, and it is likely that this plays a role for some teens (one would imagine more especially in areas of lower Jewish population density) in decisions not to participate in Jewish programming. According to the NSYR, Jewish teens by a significant margin reported the highest rates of religious discrimination with 56% of respondents indicating that they felt pressured or made fun of due to their religious practices and beliefs either “a lot” “some” or “a little.” Next highest were Mormon teens at 44%, followed by the rest of the pack averaging roughly 16% (Smith & Denton, 2005).

¹⁷ Grande Soy Latte, Pg. 7

Social Factors

When most adults remember back to their time in high school, there are likely some fond memories, and also likely some awkward and uncomfortable moments. Teens often struggle with insecurity, and from the research about the interests of boys at this age we know that they gravitate towards activities in which they feel confident and comfortable (most particularly during 9th and 10th grades). Multiple studies have demonstrated that this is often a significant factor in Jewish teens' decision not to participate in a particular program. If there are perceived to be cliques, unfriendly teens, participation is unlikely. When asked to list the things that turned them off about Jewish youth programs, respondents to one survey indicated "cliques or snotty kids" at the rate of 58% for boys and 67% for girls (Leffert, Herring, 1998). Interestingly, teens were equally distressed by programs to which the same group of kids showed up every week (47%/43% indicated this would be a reason for them not to attend), and programs to which if they attended they were likely not to know anyone (see above statistic—38% of 14-16 year olds indicate this would make them hesitate to attend). Clearly creating an open, welcoming dynamic where the activities and context are significantly appealing (perhaps enough to outweigh any social insecurities) is a vital aspect of program development (and again speaks to the need for highly skilled facilitators).

Paid Employment

The frequency of paid employment increases throughout the high school years, with more than 80% of U.S. adolescents working during their high-school years, with approximately half working at any one time. The percentage of Jewish adolescents engaged in paid employment during the school year doubled from 36% to 71% between 7th and 12th grades. The majority of work happens during the summer months, but teenage employment generally and during the academic year has been increasing in recent years (Kadushin, Kelner Saxe et al. 2000). Motivations for teen employment include enhancing college applications, practical experience, and more significantly simply to earn spending money (Hine, 1999; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

Implications of the Research: One of the implications frequently noted by researchers is the need for substantially improved professional development efforts for adult leaders of both formal and informal Jewish programming. Not surprisingly, youth satisfaction with programming is consistently linked to the quality of the adult leadership. While there have been some efforts (e.g. BBYO International's professional development programs; the model proposed by Richard and Elaine Solomon that appeared in Jewish Education News in the Fall of 2007) to strengthen the training and quality of youth program staffing, it appears that there is still significant room for improvement.

There appear to be some structural challenges to engaging Jewish teens: they are busy with school, secular activities, jobs and athletics. These constraints are not likely to change significantly, and also the data suggests that having multiple commitments actually increases the odds of Jewish youth participating in Jewish

programming. Therefore it is likely to be far more productive to focus on addressing some of the non-structural barriers to participation outlined above. Addressing social factors in program design and promotion seems to be a potentially highly leveraged place to begin. Programs should strive to create environments that are not perceived to be cliquish and that are welcoming to new youth. The research also highlights the need for improved relationships with adults, and more focus on creating developmentally and gender-appropriate “gateway” activities that may in some cases have less explicitly religious content than some may want.

Research Gaps: What would be most interesting would be to develop a regional database of shared data tracking information about why youth drop out of different programs in the area. For example, if youth are consistently frustrated (across different programs) with the quality of facilitators, local foundations may elect to target capacity building in that direction. Similarly, if teens are dropping out of programs because of travel requirements, it may prompt leaders to explore different programmatic strategies (e.g. programs located on school grounds).

Parental Influence (Question 7)

Research Summary: The headline summary of the research into the level of influence that parents have over their children’s participation in formal and informal Jewish education is that parents still rule the roost in this respect. It is a clear and consistent finding in the research that parental influence is a key factor in whether or not teens participate in religious programming. Research conducted in 2000 (Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe, et al., 2000) found that among Jewish families, parental attitudes—both positive and negative—had a direct impact upon their children’s level of interest and willingness to participate in formal and informal Jewish education programs. There was a significant and consistent correlation between the attitudes of parents and children towards Jewish education. The researchers also found that active parental participation in the Jewish community also increased the likelihood of their children participating in Jewish activities and significantly that teens were more likely to continue participation post Bar/Bat Mitzvah (Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe, et al., 2000; Wertheimer, 2005). Having parents who either required or strongly encouraged post Bar/Bat Mitzvah education was the second strongest predictor of actual participation (second to age). Other studies have supported these conclusions, as evidenced by the following:

Our interviews, in short, confirmed that parents are actively engaged in making educational decisions for their children, and the attitudes of parents are often the critical factor affecting how children come to regard their Jewish education.¹⁸

¹⁸ Wertheimer, Jack. (2005). Pages 11-12.

Interestingly, although perhaps not surprisingly, research has also shown us that parents have significant influence upon their children's religious beliefs and activities across all religions. The recent (2005) National Study for Youth and Religion (NSYR) documented this trend, finding that of parents reporting that their faith was "extremely important," 67% of their teenage children reported that faith was either "extremely" or "very" important to them (Smith, Denton, 2005). Conversely for parents reporting that faith was "not very important" to them 48% of their teenage children reported similarly that faith was either "not very" or "not at all" important to them (and only 14% of these teens reported faith being either "extremely" or "very" important). Another interesting data point from this study suggests that in Jewish households, teens are influenced slightly more by mothers than by fathers, with 68% of teens saying that their religious beliefs are very or somewhat similar to their mothers, and 60% reporting the same in relation to their father's beliefs (Smith, Denton, 2005).

Knowing that parental influence is of significant importance in participation in Jewish programming during the teenage years, it becomes important to understand how this influence changes in intermarried households. With a 71% intermarriage rate within the Greater Denver Jewish community (Ukeles, Miller, 2008), this becomes an issue of potential significance. What we find is that Jewish youth raised in a household with two Jewish parents are (according to some estimates—(Cohen, 2004)) four times more likely to participate in formal Jewish education activities. Other research has extended this relationship (although not the specific magnitude of the influence) to informal Jewish education (Kadushin, Kelner Saxe et al. 2000).

Implications of the Research: Outreach to parents should be a critical piece in the marketing mix for any Jewish youth program. Ongoing communication with alumni will also be important in order to maintain a strong positive affiliation with the program and increase the likelihood of parent alumni advocating that their children ultimately attend the same, or a similar, program. Advertising and outreach efforts should incorporate strategies that will target parents as well as youth.

Research Gaps: It would be helpful to have data about whether parents tend to encourage their children to engage in the same or similar Jewish youth organizations to those with which they were engaged themselves as youth, or if it is more common that parents care more that their children are involved in *any* Jewish youth group or activity. One would assume that is it more common for parents to promote what worked for them (e.g. synagogue youth group, BBYO, NFTY) and to be less inclined to promote participation in activities with which they are not familiar. More research into effective and ineffective tactics by which parents motivate or discourage teen participation in religious activities would also be useful. A better understanding of what aspects of new programs (those that have been developed since the parents were kids themselves and therefore of which they could not have first-hand knowledge) and what marketing strategies resonate with parents (both male and female) would be helpful in developing effective marketing strategies for new programs/models. Finally, understanding of how social networks can be

better utilized to influence parents (especially those who did not participate heavily in Jewish youth programming themselves) could offer some important insights.

Characteristics of Effective Informal Programs for Jewish Teens (Question 8)

Research Summary: At the outset, it is worthwhile to briefly examine the research about effective approaches to youth development and teen programming generally and independent of religion. At the general level, research (Larson, 2000) has shown that schools generally are better at getting teens to concentrate than they are at getting kids motivated, and that the converse is often true in youth development programming. Researchers suggest that successful youth programming should combine the two in part by providing activities that appeal to the youth facilitated by highly trained leaders who provide developmentally appropriate activities and engagement (Klau, 2009; Hall, 2007). This suggestion is consistent with other analyses that strongly emphasize the need for a professional class of Jewish youth developers with significantly expanded training and professional development (Sales, 2007).

There have been a number of studies that evaluate the common factors associated with successful youth programming. Unfortunately a fair portion of this analysis has been based on faulty data or statistically insignificant population samples. Still, there are likely some useful insights to come from this work, and therefore I have elected to summarize some of it below, progressing from the less to the more, formal studies.

An informal study of 15 successful youth programs identified the following common factors in their success: peer influence, Judaic substance, the amount of time participants spent together, the impact of the setting, staff leadership, and lay support (Alexander & Russ, 1992). Some of these findings have been echoed by other subsequent studies—staff leadership, (positive and lack of negative) peer influence, Judaic substance, duration of program—and therefore are likely to be worthy of consideration when designing or evaluating programs.

The birth of the Positive Youth Development movement transitioned thinking about youth development from a deficit-oriented approach to an asset-minded approach. Research conducted by the Search Institute mapped 40 “internal assets” that have been correlated with positive impacts on youth based on substantial research. They propose a system whereby youth development programs literally map their programmatic model against this asset inventory to maximize the number of assets incorporated (see Klau, 2009 page 14 for a complete listing).

A still more rigorous analysis conducted by the Harvard Family Research Project found three primary factors critical to creating positive settings that lead to positive youth outcomes: “(a) access to and sustained participation in the program; (b) quality programming and staffing; and (c) promoting strong partnerships among the program and the other places where students are learning, such as their schools,

their families, and other community institutions.”¹⁹ These findings obviously echo some of those detailed above, and serve to re-emphasize the importance of sustained participation and high-caliber staffing in developing successful models of youth programming.

In analyzing participation patterns among 13,000 New York City youth in 176 different programs (again not specific to Jewish youth), the Harvard Family Research Project found the following factors to be positively correlated with higher rates of youth retention over the course of two years (Little et al. 2007):

- Higher director salaries
- More advanced education credentials
- Parent liaison on staff
- Youth reported a greater sense of belonging
- More positive interactions between youth and staff
- Higher academic self-esteem
- Strong academic or arts focus
- Improved academic performance through enrichment

The first two criteria in the list again connect with the theme of more highly trained and professional staff. Establishing a “greater sense of belonging” is consistent with the research cited earlier about how Jewish teens frequently cite cliquishness of programs as a key factor in decisions to avoid or discontinue membership with informal Jewish programming. The academic and arts foci are less germane to Jewish-specific programming, but the role of a parent liaison is worth examining as recent research specific to the interests of Jewish teens documents a strong interest in establishing strong and meaningful connections with adults (Smith & Denton, 2005).

Separate from the specific programmatic components that increase the efficacy of teen programming, there are also some approaches to programmatic development that may have an ultimate impact on outcomes. For example, there is a well-documented phenomenon similar to the Hawthorne effect²⁰(the “Hawthorne effect”) that new and different ideas have a significant attractive effect in getting people to try new products or services, even when the core service is fundamentally unchanged (think about the constant stream of “new” toothpaste varieties available). This reality has been documented with Jewish teens as well (Sales, 2007), which has led some to call for more highly targeted and niche programming (e.g. Hazon, Rosh Hodesh, Jewish Youth Philanthropy) (Sales, 2007; JTA Print News 2006). In keeping with the notion of the Hawthorne effect, innovations don’t

¹⁹Little et al. (2007). Page 9.

²⁰ So named for a productivity study of employees in a factory called “Hawthorne Works” where productivity was shown to increase by virtue of the fact that they were being studied and paid attention, and that productivity decreased at the end of the study period independent of whether the change that apparently spurred and increase in productivity (i.e. lighting, flooring) remained in place or was removed.

necessarily need to be dramatic, or to the core of the program, but rather can be highly visible and marketable “tweaks” akin to the “surprise-and-delight” features on new cars (e.g. iPod docks, GPS, rear-mounted cameras, DVD players), and there is some indication that these approaches can be successful in attracting youth (Sales, 2007). Obviously these strategies need to be coupled with programmatic models and content that are as effective at eliciting outcomes as the marketing tactics are at attracting youth.

Finally, the research suggests that program development should intimately involve both youth and adults. Sales documented in her 2007 report *Lessons from Mapping Jewish Education* that there are indications that a wave of programs in the 1990’s that pursued a largely teen-driven programming strategy had spotty results and that generally the programs were not perceived to be innovative or fresh (Sales, 2007). When you pair these conclusions with the data (Smith & Denton, 2005) about Jewish teens’ desire for more significant relationships with adults Jews and the multiple studies pointing to the need for programs to be more responsive to the developmental needs of Jewish boys and girls (in a gender-specific manner), and for more highly trained staff, leads to the plausible hypothesis that jointly (adult and youth) developed programming may lead to more frequently to the development of programs that are both appealing and impactful for youth.²¹

Another design aspect that was highlighted by a few articles as a potentially promising strategy (Gordis, 2008; Strunk, 2007) is to develop some programs with short-term or limited time commitments as gateways to hook youth in and get them connected so that from that place they will be more likely to make the longer-term commitments that have been shown to be an important ingredient in successful programming.

An interesting strand of recent research found in the NYSC data highlights a gap in the quality of adult, non-parent relationships for Jewish teens. In the study, Jewish teens reported the highest rates (among all of the major religions studied) of having supportive adults in their congregation with whom they can talk and who offer encouragement, but the *lowest* rates of reporting adults in the congregation with whom they can talk about real issues. Related to this, the Jewish youth reported generally feeling as though they are a low priority to the adults in the synagogue (at higher rates than teens from other religious backgrounds reported). The teens also indicated that they long to have these deeper, more meaningful relationships as well. Perhaps consistent with these findings, parents of Jewish teens reported not feeling as though synagogues do an adequate job of supporting parents in raising their teens (Smith, Denton, 2005).

Lessons Learned from Jewish Camps: Attendance at Jewish camps is an important experience for many Jewish teens, and for a significant percentage represents the

²¹ A key to following this approach would be to ensure that the process is authentic in

majority of their engagement with Jewish programming post bar/bat mitzvah. Camp is a place where teens can openly engage with religious learning and observances in a safe and engaging manner. Demand for camps is also significant—with 96% of available spaces being used (Sales, Saxe, 2002), with roughly 1/3 of all Jewish youth attending a Jewish camp before they reach adulthood (Cohen, 2006). While there is a range of intensity of the Jewish observances and education that takes place at camp, and in the way they are handled and juxtaposed with secular influences and activities, it is clear that the camp experience leaves lasting impressions upon teens, and studies have documented a variety of long-term positive impacts. Teens report higher levels of religious observances while at camp, and greater levels of connection to Judaism (Sales, Saxe, 2002), and campers are significantly more likely to send their children to camp themselves when they grow up (Cohen, 2006).

The positive long-term impacts of Jewish camp participation have been found to be nearly identical to those of Jewish youth groups (Cohen, Kotler-Berkowitz, 2004). When the researchers control for external influences, to isolate the impacts of each form of informal education, the impacts of camp and youth program participation remain substantially the same. It should be noted that the impact of each in isolation (as measured by the study by rates of inmarriage; the percentage indicating that most/all of their closest friends are Jewish; ritual observance rates; synagogue membership rates; self-reported importance of being Jewish; and the level of attachment to Israel) is not insignificant, but increases substantially as the number of different activities increases to two, and also to three (Cohen, 2007). The study notes that for the small population of people who participated in all three activities (camp, youth group and Israel experience) the differential between those who did not participate in any is significant. This again speaks to the importance of strengthening the collaborative system of informal Jewish education of teens to maximize the crossover between camping and youth groups.

Again, as with other areas of Jewish education, the key ingredient to successful programming is the staff. Similarly, lack of proper training and leadership is cited as a common reason for why camp programming misses its mark or falls short of its potential (Sales, Saxe, 2002), and in recent years there have been notable shortages of qualified staff that has further exacerbated this challenge. In terms of what motivates staff to work at summer camp, the interests are overwhelmingly social, with 87% of youth citing having fun as being “very important” to their decision to work at summer camp—as opposed to 44% who cited the importance of spending the summer in a Jewish environment, and 25% who indicated that making money was a very important component of their decision (Sales, Saxe, 2002)—consistent with other studies that highlight the importance of the social aspect for teens.

Camps are limited in their impact to some extent in that there is a documented shortage of qualified and properly trained counselors, and also a lack of physical capacity (and expansion is incredibly expensive--\$20,000/bed by one estimate). In addition, camps operate only during limited months of the year and therefore are

limited in their capacity to ensure the sustained, ongoing participation in Jewish programming that has been shown to be an important ingredient in successful programs. With these constraints, and with the research showing us that the camp experience is more fully leveraged when combined with youth group and/or Israel experiences, it becomes important to better figure out how to convert campers into participants in these other experiences (and visa/versa).

It is also worth examining how other programs could learn from the Jewish camping experience and integrate some of the aspects that make it effective into academic-year programming. Amy Sales, in her 2008 article looked at just this issue and identified a few essential aspects: intensiveness, isolation/separation and finitude (Sales, 2008). Her advice to year-round programs was to incorporate the notion of “camp spirit” into year-round programming, and also to leverage camp-based friendship networks during the year. There are clear opportunities for year-round programs to collaborate with the professionals who design Jewish camp programming to create more seamless experiences, and to share tactics and professional development activities. Jewish camps could be great proving grounds for informal Jewish education approaches, curricula and programs that could be modified or expanded to be used in non-camp settings.

Implications of the Research: The research points to some consistent themes related to effective programming for teens. Perhaps the most common theme (not necessarily the one that has the highest probability of improving programmatic outcomes) is the need for more highly trained facilitators. Factors also of importance appear to be the role of adults and adult relationships with youth, the (at least perceived) newness and innovation, and the importance of partnerships and collaboration within the sector. Overall, the nonprofit sector generally suffers from a proliferation of programs and services that often aren’t rooted enough in their design in research into best practices, but rather are based on anecdotal evidence of what has been in a few isolated cases an effective strategy. Some of the academics reviewed in this study have also identified both this lack of rigor and lack of collaboration as a significant issue:

A vast infrastructure has been built for Jewish youth education. Though impressive, the size is more suggestive of an impulse to proliferate programs, create new organizations, and build facilities than of a massive, concerted effort to tackle the community’s fundamental educational challenges. Our estimate is that 90% of the current investment and effort is aimed at programming; only 10% is dedicated to capacity building....The infrastructure has not been organized into an effective educational system. The entire enterprise...is largely structured around sub-sectors—camping, year-round youth group, Israel experience, day schools, congregational schools, campus work, and so on. Little advantage is taken of the potential synergy among these sub-sectors.... Within local communities, turfism is

more common than collaboration, and allocations are often perceived to favor one institution over another.²²

Research Gaps: The biggest gap appears to be in developing rigorous studies with statistical significance more specifically focused on assessing factors contributing to the efficacy of programs for Jewish boys and girls during the high school years. In addition, research into effective models that integrate adults and/or parents into the programmatic model would be useful to better understand what approaches are more or less effective. Relating to the need for increased quality and training of the staff responsible for implementing programs, it would be useful both to compare and contrast the training, backgrounds and career ladders commonly observed in Jewish teen programs with those in non-denominational teen programming—and ultimately to compare this to indicators of programmatic efficacy. Similarly it would be important to examine the traits in Jewish teen program leaders that are most valued by Jewish teens and how responses differ by age and by gender.

Effective Marketing/Outreach to Jewish Teens (Question 9)

Research Summary: In reviewing the literature on this topic, there is limited information specific to Jewish teens, or to teens generally in relation to out-of-school youth programming. That said, there is some good information about how programs might better segment the Jewish teen market, and also some good general tips for program promotion.

Interestingly in identifying Jewish youth who might be high-potential candidates to target for advertising and outreach, perhaps counter-intuitively it is the more active rather than the less active youth who may be more easily attracted. A study of Jewish teen users of JCC's found that frequent users of JCC's are between 400% and 600% more likely to participate in youth groups, community service or cultural events (Ravitch, 2002). The same research suggested that sports and social events are potentially good “gateway” activities (as was suggested by other studies might be an effective strategy) for Jewish teens as rates of participation in more explicitly Jewish activities increased after teens became frequent users of JCC's.

Interestingly there also seems to be a segment of “disengaged” Jews who have simply not been engaged effectively. They are disengaged not necessarily because that is their preferred state, but because the offerings, reputations, or approaches taken by existing organizations have not compelled them to action. Rose Community Foundation tapped into a similar population of adults in developing its Next Generation Initiative, finding (anecdotally) a sizable segment of previously “unengaged” Jewish young adults who were interested in becoming more engaged, and through this initiative ultimately did so (Kelman & Schonberg, 2008). In one of the studies of Jewish teens (Ravitch, 2002), a significant number of respondents indicated that simple outreach might have made a difference in their decision to

²² Sales, A.L. (2007). Pages 2-3.

engage with Jewish programming. This suggests that a small subset of the unengaged may simply not have been reached effectively, consistently, at the right time, or in the right manner, but that existing programming options were still appealing. A likely larger component of the unengaged youth have reservations about the existing avenues of participation and will need alternative approaches—but would like to be engaged nonetheless, just in a manner that for them is more authentic²³.

In terms of segmenting the market of teens to increase odds of success, programs should target teens of parents who attended Jewish youth groups themselves. Research clearly supports that these parents are significantly more likely to either require or strongly suggest that their children to attend youth programs, and this translates into behavior, with 61% of their children attending Jewish youth groups compared to only 38% of parents who did not themselves attend (Wertheimer, 2005). Encouragingly, recent research (Chertok et al., 2008) demonstrates that whether they are raised in inmarried or intermarried households, Jewish youth who engage in similar levels of critical Jewish activities as children, look remarkably similar as adults in terms of their engagement with Judaism²⁴.

BBYO International sponsored some research into effective strategies for marketing to teens and came up with the following list (among others):

- Teens demand instant gratification.
- Teens don't respond to inconsistency in ad campaigns.
- Marketing must be “cool” without trying too hard to grab their attention.
- Teens respond well to humor and music in ads.
- Teens are smart and know when you're trying to “get” them.
- Teens like interactive campaigns, websites with games, etc.
- Market to parents as well.
- Don't try to define involvement, but let teens define what being Jewish means to them.²⁵

Implications of the Research: The notion of identifying developmentally and gender-appropriate “gateway” activities, engaging teens and then broadening and deepening their participation in Jewish communal life suggests that more significant, collaborative, and ongoing partnerships between a wide variety of Jewish teen agencies may be warranted. If the JCC has been shown to be a powerful and significant gateway into increased teen involvement in Jewish life, if JCC's were

²³ A 2005 research study done by TRU found that 67% of Jewish teens would like to better connect with their religion, with 48% saying that they don't know how and 55% of those respondents saying that they want a less conventional way of doing so.

²⁴ A 2006 study by Cohen about marketing Jewish camps to parents, echoes the importance of truly segmenting marketing efforts and tailoring specific messages to different audiences.

²⁵ BBYO, (2008).

partnering more closely with other providers of teen services and programming, transitions between activities would likely become more seamless and more common. Rather than protecting organizational territory, as a system, the different organizations might work together to protect the “territory” of this generation of Jewish youth. Others have advocated this system-based, collaborative approach as well (Ravitch, 2002).

On a related note, if organizations (especially new, untested programs) are going to have a leg up in terms of being able to target marketing efforts to those teens more likely to participate in programming (e.g. frequent users of the JCC, children of alumni of other longer-standing Jewish programs), a willingness and capacity to share information within the community would be a significant step forward. Ultimately it seems that as an ecosystem, a majority of the Jewish organizations have a shared goal in common: igniting, re-igniting, or tending the flame of Judaism within each Jewish teen in the Greater Denver area in a manner perhaps unique for each, but in every case authentic.

The experiences of Rose with its Next Generation Initiative program and with research into Jewish teens that uncovered similar populations of Jewish teens who were under-engaged rather than disengaged, speaks to the need to reach outside of traditional structures to identify and contact teens, and also to conduct a thorough questioning of the process by which organizations approach teens currently (as the methods are clearly not effective at reaching segments of the teenage population).

The fact that there appears to be a potentially non-trifling (in size) population of Jewish teens who are un- or under-engaged, but who would like to be more deeply engaged, should leave programmers incredibly optimistic. In addition, we have anecdotal data to suggest that in some cases it is simply a matter of reaching out to these teens in a direct, personal manner that may be enough to prompt them to participate in a program.

Research Gaps: More data about the size and makeup of the “unengaged but interested in being engaged” population in the Greater Denver area would be useful, along with a breakdown by denomination. In addition, indentifying the reasons that Greater Denver Jewish teens cite for choosing not to participate in Jewish programming would be very useful. Data about the utilization rates and trends of the Denver and Boulder JCCs by local teens would be useful in identifying opportunities to expand the number of youth exposed to “gateway activities.”

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