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Jewish Girls and Their Experiences of Antisemitism

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The effect of antisemitic experiences on Jewish children has not been fully explored. To that end, a qualitative study of sixteen Jewish girls (ages 10-12) was conducted over a three-year period. The data suggests that all respondents were adversely affected by their antisemitic experiences—e.g., internalizing antisemitism, hiding their Jewishness, and contemplating conversion. These girls spontaneously related antisemitism to both Israel and the Holocaust, and in the first year of this study, over 40% reported decreased life satisfaction ratings because of antisemitism. Future research is needed both to advance our theoretical knowledge and to formulate effective ways of supporting Jewish children facing antisemitism.

Key Words: Anti-Israelism, Antisemitism, Children, Girls, Holocaust, Israel, Mental Health

Antisemitism has existed for over 2000 years, and since World War II, numerous scholars have sought to understand this phenomenon, including its causes and effects (e.g., Cohen et al, 2009; Cotler 2009; Fineberg, Samuels, and Weitzman 2007; Langmuir 1990; Lappin 2008; Laqueur 2006; Maccoby 1996, 2006; Millman 2009; Poliakov 1965; Wistrich 1991, 1999, 2010). One area that has not yet been empirically explored is the effect of antisemitism on contemporary Jewish children. There are historical accounts and memoirs written by Jewish adults, including Holocaust survivors, that describe Jewish childhoods deeply damaged by antisemitism. Yet, there are no studies that employ social science research methods to document and analyze the experience of contemporary Jewish children. The lack of these studies is a significant lacuna, given that antisemitism is and has been for the past two decades on the rise globally (B'nai Brith 2010; Penslar, Marrus, and Stein 2005). This increase includes Canada, which has a long history of antisemitism (Abella and Troper 2000; Brym, Shaffir, and Weinfeld 1993; Davies 1992; Penslar, Marros, and Stein 2005; Tulchinsky 2008). In a recent national survey (Statistics Canada 2010), about two-thirds of the religiously motivated hate crimes in Canada were committed against "the Jewish faith." Judaism was the most commonly targeted religion, and the number of antisemitic hate crimes—165—represented an increase of 42% over the previous year.

Children are not immune to the violence that surrounds them, including ethnically related violence (Cummings et al. 2010; Maschi, Perez, and Tyson 2010; Pachter et al. 2010), even when their parents try to protect them. It is crucial, then, to try and understand the impact of contemporary antisemitism on Jewish children, both to address this gap in theoretical knowledge and to be able to help those who are confronted with antisemitism.

The following study evolved from a previous project conducted by this researcher: a national study of Canadian Jewish women and their experiences of antisemitism and sexism (Gold 1997, 1998, 2004). This study, which involved focus groups in Phase One and a random sample of Jewish women from across Canada in Phase Two, demonstrated clearly the extent of the antisemitism and sexism that Canadian Jewish women encounter in their everyday lives. It also showed the different mental health implications of these two kinds of oppression: The women in this study who reported having had many antisemitic experiences in the past had significantly higher scores on the Beck Depression Inventory than the other women in the sample. No such relationship was found, however, between sexism and depression (Gold 2004). Another intriguing finding was that when the women in this study were asked where their encounters with antisemitism had taken place, the second most frequent response was “at school.” Given that some of these respondents were as young as 18, such responses led this researcher to wonder whether present-day public schools were sites of antisemitic encounters for Canadian Jewish girls. Consultations with colleagues involved in anti-oppression work at several Canadian school boards revealed that antisemitism was definitely a problem in at least some of the schools (e.g., Russell et al. 1993). A search of the literature, however, turned up no research at all on contemporary Jewish girls’ (or boys’) experiences of antisemitism. The present project was therefore initiated to explore this issue.

In terms of conceptual framework, this research, like the Jewish women’s study, is grounded in Jewish feminist scholarship (e.g., Beck 1995; Cantor 1995; Elior 2004; Goldstein 2009; Hyman and Ofer 2006; Nadell and Sarna 2001; *Nashim* 1998–present; Pinsky 2010; Prell 2007; Siegel, Cole, and Steinberg-Oren 2000). Jewish feminist scholarship focuses on the complex ways that the lives of Jewish women and girls are shaped by the dual oppression of antisemitism and sexism. This Jewish feminist work is, in turn, part of the broader feminist literature on dual oppression, which analyzes the double vulnerability of being both female and part of any diverse ethnic or cultural group (i.e., sexism + racism), as well as the additional vulnerabilities (multiple oppressions) women can experience, related to classism, ageism, ableism, and/or heterosexism

(Crenshaw and Morgan 2003; Szymanski and Stewart 2010; Williams 2004). Since this study of Canadian Jewish girls was originally conceptualized as paralleling the Jewish women's study (i.e., studying sexism + antisemitism), only girls were included. It became clear, however, in the course of this study, that these girls, at ages 10 and 11, were not interested in discussing sexism and had little to say about it. In contrast, they were quite preoccupied with antisemitism and wanted to comment on this at length. Hence, this research project became focused almost exclusively on antisemitism.

METHOD

The overall objective of this study was to qualitatively explore the antisemitic experiences of a sample of Canadian Jewish girls as well as the emotional or psychological impact on them of these experiences, and whether this was related to any characteristics of their families or their schools. There was also interest in examining how these girls' experiences or understanding of antisemitism changed over a three-year period, as they matured cognitively, emotionally, morally, and socially. In order to explore these questions, this researcher made use of qualitative methodology, since this is most appropriate for exploratory studies in areas not previously investigated (Grinnell and Unrau 2005; Merriam 2009). The research design used was a longitudinal one, which is ideal for tracking developmental changes over time (Statistics Canada 2008).

SAMPLING

The girls selected for this study were 10 years old at the beginning of this research, and were located through advertisements in newspapers—one Jewish and one non-Jewish, to reach participants with varying degrees of affiliation with the Jewish community. The respondents were also located through more informal methods, such as putting up signs at schools and community centers, ads in synagogue bulletins, and word of mouth. Because this researcher found in her previous project that Canadian Jewish women's experiences of antisemitism and/or sexism were significantly related both to their socioeconomic backgrounds and the amount and kind of Jewish education they had received, half the participants in the girls' study (8 Ss) were drawn from Jewish day schools and half from public schools,¹ and the sample as a whole reflected socioeconomic diversity.

1. The Jewish schools in this study, it should be noted, included schools affiliated with three different streams of Judaism: Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative, and the public schools were not all typical public schools, even though funded by

With reference to geographical location, no differences were found in the Jewish women's study in the incidence of antisemitism by region of the country or by province; therefore, all the participants were selected from the same city, Toronto. In terms of attrition, one girl left the study after the first year, and one left after the second, so in the third year of this research, there were 14 girls taking part. See Table I for a summary of several demographics.

TABLE I—SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE GIRLS AND THEIR FAMILIES (YEAR 1)

Denomination/ Philosophy	Type of School	Parents' Marital Status	Siblings	Annual House- hold Income
1. Orthodox	Jewish	Married	3	\$70,000
2. Conservative	Jewish	Married	2	\$95,000
3. Reform	Secular (Public)	Divorced	2	\$90,000
4. Conservative	Jewish	Married	2	\$200,000+
5. Reform	Secular (Public)	Married	2	\$150,000+
6. Conservative	Jewish	Married	2	\$100,000
7. Conservative	Secular (Public)	Married	1	\$200,000
8. Culturally Jewish	Secular (Public)	Married	1	\$150,000
9. Traditional Egalitarian	Secular (Public)	Divorced	0	<\$30,000
10. Orthodox	Jewish	Divorced	3	\$250,000-\$300,000
11. Orthodox	Jewish	Married	2	\$200,000-\$300,000
12. Conservative	Secular (Public)	Married	2	\$200,000
13. Conservative	Secular (Public)	Married	0	\$100,000+
14. Orthodox	Jewish	Married	3	\$300,000
15. Conservative	Secular (Public)	Married	2	\$250,000
16. Secular/Non-Practicing	Jewish	Married	2	\$200,000+

PROCEDURES AND METHODS

Participants for this research were recruited via phone contact by this researcher. Each respondent received an explanation about the study and appointments for interviews were set up. The interviews were held once a year for three years, lasting approximately one hour each, and each candidate was asked to complete an informed consent, as were their parents. During the first interview only, the parents completed a brief questionnaire that included information about the family's income, the parents' occupations, and the girl's developmental and academic history. For all three years, in the first part of each interview, each girl completed the Child Attribution Style Questionnaire (CASQ) (Shatte et al. 1999), which measures

public monies. For example, one girl attended a French immersion public school that also taught mandatory Mandarin, another girl went to a prestigious, publicly funded performing arts school, and a third attended a very small alternative school situated within a regular public school.

children's well-being. Following the completion of the CASQ, each girl was shown a poster with seven topics on it, and was asked to talk about these topics in any order she chose. These topics were: friends, family, holidays, hobbies, school, being Jewish, and being a girl. An eighth topic, the bat mitzvah, was added in the second and third years of the study; at ages 11 and 12, all the girls were planning their bat mitzvah celebration. These eight topics were selected to learn as much as possible about these girls' everyday lives—essential to understanding the meaning and impact of the antisemitic events they experienced as this was the context in which they occurred.

The girls in this study were not asked explicitly about antisemitism, because this is not a word that most 10- to 12-year-olds know. Instead, the questions regarding antisemitic experience were indirect—e.g., “How do you feel about being Jewish? What are some of the good things about it (if any)? What are some of the bad things about it (if any)? Has anything good or bad ever happened to you because you are Jewish? If so, what was it? How did you feel and react at the time?” If a girl mentioned an incident that seemed to her clearly antisemitic, she was asked why she thought that had happened or why she thought things like that happen in the world. Toward the end of each interview, the girls were also asked: “If 10 is a perfect life, and zero is a terrible life, what number would you give your life right now?” Then they were asked why they had given this numerical rating to their lives. (This question was developed in the course of the Year 1 interviews, so during that year this question was asked of only 12 out of the 16 girls.) In addition to the individual interviews, most of the girls also participated in focus groups that occurred once a year on two out of the three years (each year there were two groups of about eight each). During these focus groups, occurring after the last of that year's individual interviews, the girls discussed the same seven or eight topics they had already discussed individually.

At the end of the three years of this study, the data from the interviews and focus groups was analyzed, using thematic content analysis on the girls' responses to the above questions, examining the data separately for each of the three years. The girls' comments about antisemitism were analyzed with reference to the numerical ratings they gave their lives, their scores on the CASQ, the type of school they attended (public or Jewish), and the kind of Judaism with which their family identified. All of the individual interviews and focus groups were also filmed, and out of this footage, this researcher made a 13-minute documentary film, entitled *Jewish Girl Power* (see www.noragold.com).

RESULTS

Positive and Negative Aspects of Being Jewish (Excluding Antisemitism)

In order to put into context these girls' experiences of antisemitism, it is important to note that all of the girls, throughout the three years of this study, felt that being Jewish was overall a positive experience. They all liked the Jewish holidays (the family get-togethers, the special foods, and the presents), some of them liked going to synagogue or "believing in God," and others enjoyed learning Jewish history or Jewish languages (one girl said that having Hebrew was like having "a secret language"). Several girls felt that being Jewish was "important" to them, and that it made them feel proud. A few girls said also that they liked being Jewish because they liked "being different." Finally, a girl in Year 1 of the study, when she was 10, indicated that she liked Judaism because of monotheism (although she did not yet know this word):

I like being Jewish because you know that there's only one person out there who controls you, you don't have to worry about praising everything . . . like a god for every single thing . . . There's only one and I know I only have to trust one.

In terms of the negative aspects of being Jewish (other than antisemitism), participants identified four main categories:

1. Jewish dietary restrictions: having to keep kosher, fasting on fast days, eating special foods on Passover, etc. (One girl admitted to "cheating," i.e., eating non-kosher food when outside her home.)
2. Other religious prohibitions: not traveling on major Jewish holidays (and therefore having to miss field trips from public school), or not being allowed to pierce one's bellybutton (because Judaism prohibits body piercing).
3. Feeling singled out because of being the only Jew, or one of the only Jews, in one's class or school.
4. Attending Hebrew school or synagogue, which is "boring."

Items 1 and 2 were issues only for the religiously traditional girls in the study, item 3 pertained only to girls attending public schools, and item 4 (being bored at synagogue or Hebrew school) was shared by girls from all types of schools and religious backgrounds.

Antisemitic Experiences

The experiences of antisemitism that the girls in this study identified can be divided into two groups: direct ones (incidents experienced personally by the girls themselves) and indirect ones (incidents occurring to these girls' relatives, friends, and acquaintances, or in the larger environment).

1. Direct Experiences

In terms of direct experiences, there were two direct incidents described by these girls in each of the first two years of this study, and one incident in the third year, that these girls felt were antisemitic. All five of these incidents took place in public schools.

- In Year 1 (age 10), a girl heard a group of her classmates saying that there was a book about Hitler they'd heard of and wanted to read, because Hitler was "cool." In the second incident, a girl's music teacher decided to teach the class a Jewish song for Chanukah, but an Iranian girl told the class, "I'm not allowed to do a Jewish song because Jews are my enemy."
- In Year 2 (age 11), one girl heard a boy in her class tell the rest of the class (referring to her), "I don't like her because she's Jewish." Another girl heard "offensive comments" at her school about Jews.
- In Year 3 (age 12), a girl was sitting next to a classmate who drew a swastika on his hand and showed it to her, clearly intending to upset or offend her.

2. Indirect Experiences

Regarding indirect incidents, girls in all three years reported events that they had heard about, and experienced, second-hand from relatives, friends, or acquaintances. They also had indirect experiences of antisemitism from the larger environment, but this sort of indirect experience was a major factor for these girls only in Year 1 of this research. During that year, there were three very dramatic antisemitic attacks in Toronto all in one weekend in March. Within three days, the windows of a synagogue were smashed, tombstones at a Jewish cemetery were destroyed, and half a street in a Jewish neighborhood had its front doors spray-painted with swastikas. The girls in this study were deeply affected by these events, and in the nine interviews that took place after that weekend, all of the girls brought up at least one of these incidents. Some of them also mentioned with concern the additional fallout from that weekend—for example, seeing antisemitic graffiti on the outer walls of their (Jewish) schools, and having to have guards

posted there at the entrance doors. Two girls were very upset about the cemetery desecrations, because their grandparents were buried at the cemetery that was vandalized (two of the grandparents were “in the front row”), but fortunately none of their tombstones were broken. Two other girls knew people living on the street where the swastikas had been spray-painted on the doors (in one case it was a cousin, and in the other a school friend). The second girl, too young to be certain about the word *swastika*, said that her friend’s house had been “Suzuki’ed.” Another girl alluded to the high-profile murder two years before of an Orthodox Jewish man by a skinhead on one of the main streets of the Jewish neighborhood, and said that she was a little scared of what was happening now in Toronto. A fourth girl said she was worried about “the pushing down of the Jew.”

In contrast to Year 1, in Year 2 of this study there were no such dramatic antisemitic events in Toronto, and none of the girls mentioned incidents of antisemitic vandalism in their interviews. Two girls, however, still did describe disturbing indirect events. In one, a girl was told an anecdote by her Hebrew school teacher. This teacher’s father’s car had broken down and he had to call a towing company. The man with the tow truck arrived and asked him if he wanted to stop somewhere on the way for a coffee, and the teacher’s father declined, saying he wanted to just get his car fixed as soon as possible. Soon afterward the tow truck driver’s cell phone rang, and he said to his daughter, “I’m with this guy, and I asked if he wanted to stop at a coffee shop, but the Jew wouldn’t buy me a coffee.”

In the second Year 2 incident, a girl had a classmate, an Orthodox boy (who therefore wore a skullcap), and one day he was riding on a bus, and a woman who was sitting down kept kicking him. He said to her, “Excuse me, you’re kicking me. Can you please stop?,” but she didn’t say anything, and kept on kicking him. Then the bus got to her stop, she stood up, and, trying to get through the dense crowd to get off, she gave this boy a push, saying to him, “Move away, Jew boy!”

In Year 3, also a year without unusually dramatic antisemitic events, eight girls described indirect incidents. One girl had a Hebrew school teacher who worked part time in a synagogue. One day, this teacher answered the phone there, and it was an antisemitic hate call. A woman started screaming obscenities at her into the phone, shouting, among other things, “You Jews are the fault of every death in the world.” Another girl said she knew people who had been insulted that year or made fun of because they were Jewish—for instance, being called a “dirty Jew.” A third girl was told a joke by a Jewish boy who had had it told to him: “What’s the difference between a Jew and a pizza? Pizzas don’t cry in the oven.”

In Year 3, some of the girls also spoke about antisemitism in the larger environment. This is consistent with the developmental changes these girls

were undergoing at age 12, especially as many of them were switching that year from elementary school to middle school, and were becoming more aware of, and interested in, the world around them. In Year 3, two girls brought up the antisemitic vandalism in Toronto two years before, one of them having seen a story about it on the news. Two other girls either read in the newspaper or heard from someone else about the Jews in Iran being forced to wear an identifying symbol on their clothing, “like a Jewish star.” Another girl referred to how dangerous it was to be a Jew in Afghanistan nowadays, because that country is “strongly antisemitic.”

3. *Antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Israel*

In these interviews, there were two particular themes that emerged from the girls’ comments about antisemitism, and these were the Holocaust and Israel. In these girls’ minds, there were clearly strong connections between antisemitism and the Holocaust, antisemitism and Israel, and the Holocaust and Israel. This was all the more striking given that in this study they were never asked about either the Holocaust or Israel; these were associations they spontaneously made themselves. This also happened more frequently as the girls grew older. In Years 1 and 2, a third of the girls related antisemitism to the Holocaust, but in Year 3 more than half of them did this (8 out of 14, or 57%). Similarly, regarding Israel, in Years 1 and 2 about a third of the girls related antisemitism to Israel, but in Year 3 this nearly doubled, with almost two thirds of the girls making this connection (9 out of 14, or 64%).

a. *Antisemitism and the Holocaust*

Regarding the Holocaust, one girl in Year 1, after talking about the antisemitic vandalism in Toronto, said, “It’s like the Holocaust again,” and two other girls expressed the same idea. One of these girls went on to say that the Holocaust scares her, “because I can’t believe they did that and stuff, and like I could never survive and stuff.”

In Year 2, the girl who described the incident with the tow truck driver, after saying “The Jew wouldn’t buy me a coffee,” continued:

Which is sad. I was, like, sad that someone would say something like that, especially, like, after the Holocaust and, like, stuff. And also, that guy on, like, the Internet denied the Holocaust. I don’t know who he is, but I heard [him] on the radio. Well, it [the incident with the tow truck] is not as bad as that, except it’s still, like, that’s how it all started, you know. Well, like, with people excluding Jews, or, like, saying bad things

about them one by one. And then it got bigger and bigger. And then the concentration camps.

Similarly, in Year 3 the girl who related the story about the antisemitic phone call at the synagogue began talking about an antisemitic incident that had happened not long before in France, and then she spoke about the Holocaust:

Wow, there's people in my area doing this. That's pretty scary. Like, if this were to ever happen again, which it could. Like, did you hear about the thing in France with the guy who got tortured? Like, these things are still happening, and if, if it comes back again I don't know if we're going to be able to, like, deal with it any more. So many of us are lost . . . Like, to think—six million. You just . . . Like, how could this many people be lost?

Some of these girls seem to have been encouraged to think about the Holocaust by being given books to read about it by their teachers or parents. In Year 1 of this study, only one girl mentioned reading a Holocaust book, but in Years 2 and 3, about a third of them referred to books they were reading about the Holocaust (usually for school, but not always). In addition, in Years 2 and 3, the girls alluded to other types of Holocaust-related educational experiences they had been exposed to: one saw a movie about it, another saw a play, and one was taken to visit a Holocaust museum. These girls were very affected by these experiences. They also seemed, as a result of them, to identify strongly with what happened to Jews during the Holocaust, and in some cases to identify especially with the Jewish children in that period. For example, one girl in Year 3 spoke about pictures she saw at a Holocaust museum, including photographs of Nazis making people remove their clothes:

If they didn't strip they'd be killed. Or they, like, they tested with little boys, like 5-year-old boys, to see how long they can go without food. And then . . . And it's just disgusting, like, what they did. And, like, to know all these people were Jewish and they were, like, kids like me.

Because of this identification, light-hearted comments these girls sometimes heard about the Holocaust (e.g., about Hitler being cool, or the joke about the pizza) were very painful to them.

In all three years there were some girls in this study who thought that the Holocaust could never happen again. Others felt, however, that it definitely could, because “some people don't even believe it happened,” and even among those who do, many “haven't really learned the lesson from it.”

b. Antisemitism and Israel

In terms of the connection between antisemitism and Israel, Israel was very much on the minds of the girls in this study. As with the Holocaust, they repeatedly brought up the subject of Israel unsolicited. In all three years they recognized that the conflict in Israel was a political problem and a complex one, and different girls in this study had different political opinions (most likely reflecting their parents' views). Basically, though, the girls all saw what was happening in Israel as a Jewish issue and as related to antisemitism. For instance, one girl in Year 1 said that Israel keeps getting bombed "because that's the Jewish homeland." Another one offered, as an example of antisemitism, that "A lot of people are having wars with the Jewish people . . . Like in Israel." Many of the girls in this study were worried about the terrorist attacks in Israel. One girl had a friend who had been quite close to a bomb that had exploded there. Two other girls heard of bombs going off in places in Tel Aviv, where they themselves had been visiting a week or two before. Most of the girls felt some attachment to Israel, and six of them also had close relatives, including siblings, living there. Several girls had visited Israel, some numerous times; one girl in Year 2 was going to sleepover camp there that summer, and another girl was planning to celebrate her bat mitzvah there. Because of all these personal, cultural, historical, and religious connections, any attack on Israel (physical or ideological) was experienced by these girls as attacks on them as Jews, and therefore as antisemitic events. For example, in Year 2, one girl's sister, who was a university student, came home very upset because there had been an anti-Israel rally on her campus, which to this girl and her whole family was an antisemitic demonstration. Similarly, in Year 3, another girl heard from a friend of hers that one day she was strolling through a mall with another friend, and this friend was wearing a shirt with the insignia of the Israeli army on the front. Someone walking by them made a sour face and a rude gesture toward her friend's shirt, as if to say, "Yuck, disgusting." The girl in the study who heard this story was very distressed by it, and said that although she, too, has the same Israeli shirt, after this incident, she will no longer wear it when she goes to the mall, "just in case . . ."

In Year 3, at age 12, two girls in this study commenting on the political situation in Israel were clearly trying to view it with some objectivity, and were obviously struggling with the competing claims of Jews and Palestinians for the land. For example, one girl said about the Palestinians:

. . . In their Bible they kind of think that we're on their land. Like that it's their land, given to them by their people. Which it also says in ours. They

can't both be true . . . We think ours is right, but obviously from their point of view . . . they must think that theirs is right . . . Like, we think they're evil cause they want to steal our land from us, but they probably think that we're evil cause we have their land and we won't give it back.

Two other girls in Year 3 commented on the role played by the Canadian media in influencing the way many Canadians regard Israel. For instance, one said, "You don't really hear about the good stuff that happens there. You only hear about the bad."

In general, the girls in this study were quite disturbed by the lack of peace in Israel. One girl in Year 1, after talking about a terrorist attack, said:

Everything that's happening in Israel right now makes me really sad that so many people are dying and getting injured with, well, not really a reason—well, not a good reason . . . Because it's just not right for someone to do such a thing and people shouldn't like even think about doing stuff like that. And what my question would be is: Why were weapons invented? Like, why were guns and bombs and stuff invented in the first place? Because right now they're not coming to any good use . . .

This view was also echoed by several other girls over the three years of this study. And in Year 2, two girls out of 15 gave their lives lower ratings (an 8 instead of a 9, and a 7.5-8 instead of a 9), because of the lack of peace in Israel.

c. Israel and the Holocaust

With reference to the connection between the Holocaust and Israel—and implicitly the three-way connection between antisemitism, the Holocaust, and Israel—with some of the girls it was quite noticeable how they switched quite seamlessly back and forth between these topics. For example, one girl in Year 1, talking about the Holocaust, said, "I don't think [the Holocaust] would happen now—except in Israel," and then went on to talk about the bombs going off there. Another girl in Year 1 said she worries about antisemitism and what's happening to Jews around the world, because "like in Israel how there's like, when, like there's so much bombings and stuff . . . Well, the Holocaust is obviously worse, but this is still really bad."

A third girl referred to a Holocaust book she had read where the girl in the story had had her parents taken away, and people around her were getting shot. The girl in this study then said:

And sometimes you hear on the news just like people who've done bad stuff to Israel, like if they want the land of Israel, they'll just go to war because they want the land, and then people just . . . and then people . . . like, they just war, and then people die.

Another way in which the Holocaust and Israel were connected conceptually for some of these girls was through the idea of historical antisemitism, and the way Jews have often been unjustly blamed by the countries in which they have lived. One girl in Year 2 said she saw Israel as getting all the blame for the problems in that region, continuing:

That's how World War II started. Cause Hitler, um, convinced Germany that, like, everything that's a problem, that's wrong with the world is because of the Jews. Like, the Russian president, or something like that, like, he told his country, like, he was, like, really bad. Like, he took advantage. Like, he always took the money and everything and when they would complain, he goes, "It's all the Jews' fault. Everything that's bad is the Jews."

The associations in these girls' minds between antisemitism, Israel, and the Holocaust were very striking, and the implications of this are discussed below.

Emotional and Psychological Impact

The direct and indirect antisemitic incidents described above had both emotional and psychological effects on the girls in this study. In all three years, when the girls were recounting their antisemitic experiences, they also expressed feelings of fear and anxiety, and although most of them thought it unlikely that anything bad would happen to them in Canada because they were Jewish, some felt otherwise. In Year 1, for example, one girl said she could see something bad happening to her in Canada because she was Jewish. Another girl that year said that, as a result of recent antisemitic events in Canada, she is now sometimes a little afraid of people who are not Jewish. A third girl, the one who had the incident with the Iranian girl, said she was "sometimes really happy, but sometimes really sad" that she's Jewish.

In Year 2, after telling the story about the boy being kicked on the bus, this girl said that she was glad that, unlike Orthodox Jewish boys with their skullcaps, she is not identifiable as a Jew when she goes out in public. She thinks she is safer that way. That same year, another girl, talking about her (public) school, said: "I don't point out that I'm, like, a Jewish person. If somebody doesn't ask me I'm not going to go . . . tell everybody I'm Jew-

ish . . . I don't fully make myself a contact." In Year 3 one girl, when talking about her (public) school, said, "Sometimes I'm scared to tell people there my religion cause, like, you never know, like, there could be people in the world who, like, are antisemitic."

Two other psychological effects were noted, as well. One girl in Year 1 showed some evidence of internalized antisemitism. "I wonder," she said, "if I wasn't Jewish, would I make fun of Jewish people? I just wonder that."

And in Year 2, several weeks after her bat mitzvah (which was a very positive experience for her), a girl spoke about the possibility of converting to Christianity because of the dangers of antisemitism:

Sometimes I feel like I want to be Christian, because I always hear about, like, this stuff about, like, people killing Jews because they're Jewish . . . I usually hear about it in Israel, but sometimes . . . like, near me, like in Toronto. Like, I think once I heard about this guy, he shot someone cause he saw that he was Jewish or something. And so he shot him.

The following year this girl repeated this idea, saying that she could see herself converting at some point in the future, but not at the moment. When asked what sort of thing in the future might persuade her to convert, this girl answered:

Well, I know that there's been, like, some shootings or, like, in Toronto, just because people are Jewish or, like, they've, like, graffiti on some houses. That wouldn't make me convert, but it would make me, persuade me a little bit maybe. Just like, safety.

In terms of the overall emotional or psychological well-being of the girls in this study, no relationships were found between their CASQ scores, the antisemitic experiences they related, the types of schools they attended, or their families' religious affiliations. There was a relationship, however, between these girls' experiences of antisemitism and the ratings they gave their lives, though only for Year 1. (In Year 3 there was no such relationship, and in Year 2 this relationship showed itself with only two girls out of the 15, the ones who lowered their life ratings because of the lack of peace in Israel.) In Year 1, however, out of the 12 girls who were asked to give their lives a rating, five of them rated their lives lower than they would have otherwise, because of antisemitism. This appears to be related to the weekend of antisemitic vandalism in March of that year, because all five of these girls had interviews that fell after that weekend, rather than before. These five girls came from both kinds of schools and all religious backgrounds, and constituted 55% (5 out of 9) of the girls interviewed after that particular weekend. When asked the reason for her lowered rating, one girl, who had

given her life an 8 instead of a 10, said, “Because I’m really happy with everything that’s happening [to me], but people for our culture, things aren’t so good.” Someone else who lowered her score said: “Because of what goes on to people who are Jewish.” The fact that 5 out of 12 10-year-old girls in Year 1 (41%) rated the quality of their lives lower because of antisemitism strikes this researcher as disturbing.

These Girls’ Conceptualization of Antisemitism

Given the well-established relationship between cognitive and emotional processes (Oatley 2004), it is important to understand how these girls not only felt about antisemitism, but also how they thought about it. All the girls in this study who described antisemitic incidents were asked why they thought that that incident had occurred, or why things like that happen in the world. Below are some of their answers, according to each year of this study.

Year 1

“People think that they [the Jews] are lesser people. That we’re lesser people.”

“Because they have to blame their problems on someone, so they decided on Jews.”

“Because being Jewish . . . there’s always going to be hatred towards you.”

“People are making out that being Jewish is something like that’s a bad thing, but there’s nothing bad . . . it’s just a different . . . just believing different things.”

“Because they hate Jews . . . But I don’t know why they hate us—I don’t think we did anything bad to hurt them.”

“I don’t get why people would ever do that just because of a religion. Like, I don’t think we’re bad or mean or anything like that.”

Year 2

“There always is going to be [antisemitism], cause some people just feel that way. Like some people feel that we should not be here . . . They don’t like us. They’re followers of Hitler.”

“I think they have their own problems and sometimes it’s just them, like they may be sick. But sometimes it might be just, like, people who dislike Jews because of their own reasons. And I don’t know what those are.”

One girl in Year 2 expressed some self-doubt because of antisemitism, and perhaps some self-blame. She said that when an antisemitic incident

happens, she asks herself, “Is there something wrong with us?” This researcher asked her if she believes there is. Her answer was equivocal:

I’m not really to say because I haven’t learned all the history of our past, of our present. I’m not fully in contact about what’s happening in Israel, what’s going on everywhere. If we’ve done something to those people. So I don’t think I can really, like, fully answer that question.

Year 3

In this year, the conceptualizations of antisemitism reflected these girls’ increased intellectual maturity, for example, in these two comments on the idea of stereotypes:

“Well, sometimes they [antisemites] have their own personal problems. I don’t know what their problems would be, but, pretty much all, all in all they stereotype. They think that all Jews are bad and it’s like one Jewish person was mean to them. Like they usually just stereotype one bad person.”

“People just don’t like other people to be different or they just, they stereotype and they think that, let’s say, all the Jewish people are mean, or are rich, or, as I’ve heard, have big noses.”

Antisemitism and Other Oppressions

In Year 3, these girls’ greater intellectual maturity and sophistication was reflected as well in the understanding that antisemitism is one form of hatred among many others. In the first two years of this study, two girls each year showed evidence of this understanding, but by Year 3 it was manifested in almost half the girls (6/14). This ability to see the link between antisemitism and other kinds of oppression reflected increased maturity, not only intellectually, but also in terms of these girls’ moral development.

In Year 1, the two girls who connected antisemitism with racism attended the same (Orthodox Jewish) school, and there they had been shown a puppet show about Black and Hispanic children getting stereotyped. One of the girls said that in that show, “a white person told a Black person that they were, like, lesser because they were Black. It’s so stupid, because it’s just a pigment.” Then she drew a parallel between racism and ageism: “I don’t think anyone [should] be . . . less treated. Well, I think that kids are less treated than adults.”

In Year 2, one girl connected the historical struggles of the Jews with the struggle of Black people for their freedom, and said it makes her angry whenever people—any people—“aren’t treated the same.” Another girl in

Year 2 talked about going with her class to see a performance by a group of people with disabilities, and in describing it, related ableism to antisemitism and racism.

In Year 3, one girl related antisemitism to racism, sexism, and homophobia:

Discrimination . . . makes me sad. Discrimination against Jewish people and against women, and against other people, like Chinese people and Black people and Native people . . . And the way the Nazis and some of the Germans treated the Jews was just terrible. And that makes me sad and it makes me angry that people can treat other people that way. It doesn't really matter who you are . . . what your background is. They're just people. I mean, they're, we're all people. We're all equal. I don't get how they could feel that they're higher than the gypsies and the Jews and the homosexuals.

Similarly, another girl in Year 3, speaking about the Holocaust, connected this to racism, homophobia, and ableism: "It's not just the Jews that were affected. Like, a lot of other people were affected: Homosexuals are affected, gypsies are affected, people with special needs are affected."

At the broadest level, these girls were talking about hate. This came up explicitly in Year 3 in one of the focus groups, where a discussion took place among the girls about the hate in the world, and what they could do to fight it. One girl said that it is not possible to get rid of the hate in the world, because "even if there are just two people in a store, they will want the same item, and they'll start fighting, and sooner or later someone will say, 'I hate you.'" Another girl said that at school they were discussing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and how good things could be "if everyone would just accept each other, and if there was not hate in the world." Someone else mentioned that at school they were reading *The Giver*, and in that book there is the idea of a pill that could make everyone love each other. In response, one girl said that to make the world perfect, someone would have to put a magic spell on everyone, "and then, everyone would become nice and no-one would hate anyone." Finally, one girl said, "We need more love in the world and less hate."

Similarities and Differences by Religious Background and Type of School

In this study, no differences at all were found between the girls from the various religious backgrounds. This is the case regarding the girls' antisemitic experiences, their life ratings, and their CASQ scores—a very interesting finding because there were very large differences in lifestyle and worldview between, for example, the girls from Orthodox and Reform

backgrounds. The similarities between these girls, however, obviously outweighed the differences.

With reference to the different types of schools attended, there were no differences between the girls on their indirect experiences of antisemitism, their CASQ scores, or their life ratings. It was only the girls from public schools throughout the three years of this study, however, who had direct experiences of antisemitism. The girls from Jewish schools may have direct experiences of antisemitism later in life, but for the time being, from a developmental perspective, their type of school is a protective factor for them, since according to the literature the younger one is when exposed to environmental stressors, the more vulnerable one is (Davies 2004; Webb 2006).

In terms of developmental similarities common to all the girls in this study (from both kinds of schools, and from all religious backgrounds), at the beginning of this research, when the girls were 10, their families acted as the main filter through which their information about, and understanding of, antisemitism was conveyed and interpreted. This parental centrality is typical for this age and developmental stage (Davies 2004). At age 11, these girls' Hebrew school teachers also began playing a role in shaping their ideas about antisemitism. By age 12, however, as these girls approached adolescence and their general awareness of the world around them increased, they were influenced as well on this topic by peers, acquaintances, current events, the media, and the Internet.

Finally, one more similarity among all the girls in this study was that there was no relationship between their scores on the CASQ and the ratings they gave their own lives, or between the CASQ scores and their experiences of antisemitism. This latter point may be because the CASQ focuses on the general personality trait of optimism vs. pessimism (Shatte et al. 1999), whereas the question about life rating picked up on the girls' more transient feelings of the moment, and therefore may have been more sensitive to external events like antisemitic incidents.

DISCUSSION

This research was initiated out of concern for the emotional and psychological well-being of Jewish girls in Canadian public schools, because a previous study suggested that antisemitism there may be putting them at risk. The findings of the current research indicate that to some extent this is the case. All five of the antisemitic incidents experienced directly by the girls in this study occurred in public schools. In addition, this research found that indirect incidents of antisemitism were experienced by girls from both public and Jewish schools. When they discussed these incidents, the

girls in this study expressed worry, fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, and self-doubt. In addition, some of them responded to their antisemitic experiences by trying to hide their Jewishness, internalizing the antisemitism, or considering converting to Christianity. Over 40% in Year 1 had lowered life satisfaction ratings linked to antisemitism.

All the above seems cause for concern. So is the fact that, as early as age 10, before most of these girls even knew the word antisemitism, they were aware of, and in varying degrees, worried about this phenomenon.

In the first year, and in the two subsequent years, girls were able to identify by name those countries where they had heard antisemitic incidents had occurred, such as Afghanistan, Iran, France, and Russia, and they also grasped with remarkable acuity that the essential characteristic of today's "new antisemitism" is anti-Israelism (Cotler 2002; Macshane 2008; Penslar et al. 2005; Stern 2006). As previously noted, these girls also repeatedly connected antisemitism with the Holocaust. This connection appeared to be encouraged at Jewish schools and by some of the parents, and although this focus on the Holocaust gave these girls some sense of Jewish history and identity, it also seemed to give them an increased sense of personal vulnerability. In addition, it was striking how, for some girls, the Holocaust was a barometer against which they measured their own experiences of antisemitism (e.g., "The Holocaust is obviously worse, but this is still really bad"). It gives one pause to think of 10- to 12-year-old girls using the genocide of six million Jews as a frame of reference for analyzing their own lives.

In terms of trying to understand what these antisemitic experiences really meant to these girls, it seems from these interviews that, for them, Israel and the Holocaust were their two touchstones for antisemitism: The Holocaust, on the one hand, was antisemitism past, while Israel represented antisemitism present and future. This may explain at least somewhat why two-fifths of the girls in Year 1 responded to the vandalism weekend with lowered life satisfaction scores. While community violence may generally have a major impact on children (Cummings et al. 2010; Maschi, Perez, and Tyson 2010), it is also possible that that weekend of antisemitic violence brought close to home both Israel (since these events took place in the context of the second intifada) and the violence of the Holocaust (since it was the swastika, the Nazi symbol, that was spray-painted on all those front doors). This dual image, both aspects of collective annihilation—past or potential—would have greatly intensified the psychological impact on these girls of that weekend's events.

In terms of future research, this project is a first step toward understanding how Jewish girls—and Jewish children in general—experience, and are psychologically affected by, antisemitism. Additional research is necessary to build on this work. Future studies may wish to compare the

experiences of Jewish girls with those of Jewish boys, conduct an international project on Jewish children from many different countries, and employ (as this research did) both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, as well as a variety of different instruments to measure children's psychological resilience and well-being. It will also be valuable in future to compare the antisemitic experiences of Jewish children with the ways that non-Jewish children experience other forms of oppression, for example, racism.

Finally, it is heartening to note that, in spite of their experiences with antisemitism, all the girls in this sample liked, or were proud of, being Jewish. This is very important, and we, as Jewish adults, need to do whatever we can to help Jewish children build on the positive aspects of their Jewish identities, rather than inadvertently fostering negative Jewish identity by overemphasizing antisemitism in Jewish education or at home. It is challenging, to say the least, to put antisemitism in realistic perspective when communicating about this topic with young people, and to help them find a balance between denying and exaggerating this phenomenon. Research like this, however, has a crucial role to play in helping us to understand the external reality that surrounds us, the factors related to how Jewish children process this reality, and what we, as scholars, parents, and educators, can do to protect the next generation of Jewish children, and at the same time prepare them for the future.

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