
Address correspondence to: Dr. Ofra Mayseless, Faculty of Education, University of Haifa, Haifa mount Carmel Israel 31905.

Fax (972) 4 8240911; Phone (w) (972) 4 8240322 Email: ofram@construct.haifa.ac.il
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Israel is a young country founded in May 1948 about 55 years ago. Most of its citizens are either themselves new immigrants to the country or second and third generation immigrants. These immigrants came mostly from Eastern Europe, many of them following the Holocaust, or from Arab countries, many as refugees. Thus, themes of trauma and of persecution are part of the experience, or the family or collective legacy of many Israelis (Elon, 1971). As well, the integrity of the diverse cultural heritage of Jews from all over the world has been a major concern that the Israeli society had to struggle with.

Another significant characteristic of Israel has to do with its security situation. During its 54 years of existence, it has undergone seven wars with its Arab neighbors; these were major threats to its very existence. In addition, between the wars, there were constant acts of violence along the borders and acts of terrorism inside the country; most recent of these are the events of the previous and the current Intifada (the term employed to describe the uprising of Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza strip – the territories occupied by Israel during the Six-Days war in 1967). Further, and most pertinent to our focus on adolescence, a large majority of each 18-year-old cohort of Jewish young men and women (85% for men and 65% for women) serve a compulsory military service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) of a 2 to 3 years' duration.

How do these distinct aspects become reflected in the experience development and characteristics of adolescents in Israel? In this chapter we describe several distinct characteristics of Israeli adolescents and relate them to the general societal context. Throughout the chapter we use the term Israeli culture or Israeli adolescents as if there is only one main overarching culture. However, one should note that Israel, like many other countries, is composed of various sub-cultures and ecological contexts defined by their ethnic origin, religiosity, socio-economic class, and level of education, to name just a few of the relevant factors. In particular, the state of Israel includes several minorities, the largest being an Arab minority of about 20% of the population. This Arab minority, itself quite diverse, has a distinct cultural context as well as trajectories of adolescent development, which markedly differ from the
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ones of the Jewish majority (Smooha, 1992). Thus, it deserves a distinct extended delineation and is therefore not considered here. When using the term Israeli culture or Israeli adolescents we here refer to the experiences and characteristics of Jewish youth. Furthermore, the current Israeli Jewish population includes a large group (one million) or Jews that have recently (during the last ten years) emigrated from the former USSR. This group has distinct cultural characteristics and developmental trajectories (Eisikovits, 1997; Horenczyk, & Ben-Shalom, 2001; Ullman & Tatar, 2001), which are also not considered here. The general descriptions offered here should be accepted as gross generalizations and should be treated with caution. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify several general characteristics of Israeli Jewish society that have been described in sociological and ethnographic research (e.g., Elon, 1971; Eisenstadt, 1967; Katriel, 1991; Kimmerling, 1989; Ram, 1993), and which are relevant to the experiences and the development of adolescents.

Themes in Israeli Jewish Culture

Life of Hardships and Imminent Danger

Israel as a young state has known many difficulties and had to overcome a series of hardships. First, since its independence, it has absorbed waves of immigrants, usually people who escaped from their country of origin with very few personal possessions. These waves of immigration started with holocaust survivors, continuing with refugees from Arab countries, people immigrating from eastern Europe and Russia, till the last wave of about one million immigrants from the former Soviet Union. From a nation of 700,000 Jewish citizens it has grown into a nation of 5 millions mostly by immigration. Absorbing these new immigrants culturally and economically has posed great challenges for the young Israeli state resulting in cultural and economical upheavals.

Furthermore, because of the constant threat to its existence from its Arab neighbors, the state of Israel had to allocate a large part of Israeli tax-payers’ money to defense resulting in less resources to promote the welfare of its citizens and the absorption of the immigrants. Moreover, throughout the years Israel has experienced almost constant armed clashes and terrorist acts with its Arab neighbors and
with the Palestinian Arabs in the West bank and Gaza strip who are under its occupation since 1967. These ceaseless hostilities have exposed most Israelis to experiences of anxiety, loss and trauma. In the words of Lavee and Katz (in press) “The percentage of Israeli families who have suffered injury or loss, or who have close relatives or personal friends who have experienced this suffering approaches 100% (Milgram, 1993)”. Altogether these factors along with the imminent danger inherent in living in Israel contributed to a strenuous life of hardships for its citizens resulting among other things in a hectic life style. (Breznitz, 1983; Horowitz and Lissak, 1990; Milgram, 1986). For example, Horowitz and Lissak (1990) speak of “Trouble in Utopia” - a society burned out from continuous exposure to threats to its security, unresolved economic strain, and the need to deal with the complex problems associated with immigration. This state of affair may foster solidarity, cohesion and commitment to the nation. However, it may also result in high levels of stress and anxiety as well as hostility, violence and low levels of tolerance towards others as discussed later.

Centralized Orientation together with Heterogeneity and Cleavages - The educational system

In line with being a young country formed mostly by continuous waves of immigration from 70 different nations and cultures, Israeli Jewish society has been described as a melting pot of diverse cultural groups. Cleavages with regards to ethnic origin (Ashkenazi referring to Jews originally from Europe and other western nations vs. Mizrahi referring to Jews originally from Arab countries) and religious orientation (orthodox, traditional and secular) being the most prominent. Several societal mechanisms were implemented to address the need to forge a unifying national identity as well as to take into consideration this diversity (Schwarzwald & Amir, 1984; Shavit, 1984). Both the educational system and military service were deemed central socializing agencies to accomplish this aim.

With regards to the educational system this resulted in two almost opposite trends. On the one hand Israel has established a centralized education system in which schools are directed and governed by a central Ministry of Education and is in charge of setting the requirements for teachers’ education, hiring the teachers, paying their salary, allocating other resources to the schools, and deciding on the
curriculum. Consequently there are very few private schools in Israel and parents have usually very little to say in terms of choosing a curriculum, hiring teachers, or allocating resources.

On the other hand, from the start several specific central educational systems were established, some quite independently run (e.g., with regards to setting a curriculum, hiring teachers, etc) by a different department within the centralized ministry of education. For the main body of students there are two major centralized systems, one for religious and the other for secular families/students. In addition, the Arab large minority has a separate centralized system of schools where most Arab students study. Furthermore, the Ultra orthodox Jews have a separate system of schools, which are financed by the ministry of education but which enjoy a high degree of autonomy. In fact, there are actually two separate systems of orthodox religious Jews, one for Jews from Ashkenazi ethnic origin and the other, a more recent organization, for families from the Mizrahi ethnic origin. Parents can choose which type of school they want to send their children to, but in most cases have little say beyond that. Similarly municipalities can fund and promote extra curricular activities but are highly dependent on the central Ministry of Education with regards to the formal educational system. In many cases this segregation into various school systems reflects and further strengthens division also in terms of neighborhoods and municipalities. Thus, though centralized, the educational system has in certain respects reinforced in-group orientations, and societal cleavages in terms of values and traditions and has not fostered understanding, appreciation, and respect for other social and cultural groups (Horenczyk, & Ben-Shalom, 2001).

According to Israeli law compulsory education applies to all children between the ages of 5 and 15 (grade 10) inclusive and is provided free of charge (Ministry of Education, 2003). In addition, grades 11 and 12 are also provided free of charge for those who choose to stay in the education system. The school system is usually divided into three age levels: elementary (1\textsuperscript{st} to 6\textsuperscript{th} grade), middle school (7\textsuperscript{th} to 9\textsuperscript{th} grade), and high school (10\textsuperscript{th} to 12\textsuperscript{th}grade). Middle schools are usually quite large and include on average six classes per grade and comprise students coming from several elementary schools (circa 30
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students per class). High schools are further divided into two major categories, academically oriented and inclusive. The academically oriented high schools are usually a bit smaller (five classes on average in each grade level) and include students who intend to graduate with a full matriculation diploma. Most of the subjects are academically oriented (e.g., languages, math, science) and do not include technological subjects such as electronics, mechanics, graphics design, etc. Students are expected to successfully pass matriculation exams in several subject matters such as language, history, literature, mathematics, heritage (i.e., bible), and second language (mostly English). If a student passes all the required subjects at least at the basic level he or she is entitled to a matriculation diploma, which is an obligatory requirement to apply for studies in higher education in regular colleges but not in the Open university.

In contrast, inclusive schools are usually larger (10 classes per grade on average) and they also include technological classes comprised of students who do not intend to finish high school with a matriculation diploma where a profession, such as electronic technician is often taught. About 90% of each cohort finish 12th grade in the Jewish sector. Yet, only about 65% of the students pass at least one matriculation exam, and only 44% are eventually entitled to a matriculation diploma at the end of their high school. Following military service there is a strong trend of youth to complete the requirements for a matriculation diploma and/or to improve their grades in order to be able to be accepted to their desired programs in colleges and universities. Six years following graduation there are about 55% of each cohort who are entitled to a matriculation diploma, of whom about 70% have continued in their studies in institutions of higher education by that time (age 24; Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Thus, though the majority of students finish 12 years of schooling, only one half are entitled to a matriculation diploma. This is related to another cleavage often discussed with regards to the educational system, discrepancies in terms of achievements (in particular being entitled to a matriculation diploma) which, in many respects reflect the tracking into academic or technological classes (e.g., Resh, 1998). Because a
matriculation diploma often serves a gate to higher education, and higher social and economical status, this tracking may be seen as preserving instead of closing some of the ethnic and SES gaps in Israel.

Most students in high schools study between 5 to 7 hours a day, six days a week. Students belong to one class with a homeroom teacher who usually teaches one of the subjects in this class. Students take most of their courses in this class with the same students beside the two or three subjects which they study either at a basic or at an advanced level with students from other classes. Teaching of the regular curriculum is mostly divided into different subject matters rooted in different disciplines (e.g., language, math, physics, history, geography, etc). These are mostly compulsory and only 20% are elective. Besides the regular curriculum 20% of the hours are devoted to general education, such as heritage, cultural events, workshops, visits to museums, field excursions, etc.

In line with the high percentage of compulsory courses in the curriculum there is a strong emphasis in most of the schools on achievements and intellectual attainment and less focus on enjoyment of the studies. For example, only 12% of 15 year olds in Israel report that they like their school very much as compared with 26% in Canada and Germany (Harel, Kanny, & Rahav, Harel, Kanny & Rahav, 1997). In a multinational research involving adolescents in 25 western nations Israel tops the list in the percentage of youth who report that they do not like school at all (18% in Israel compared to 6% in Canada and 4% in Germany; Harel, Kanny & Rahav, 1997). Similarly, only 40% of Israeli adolescents state that their school is a nice place to be in compared with 60% in Canada and 67% in Germany. With regards to their teachers, Israeli adolescents perceive them as not so fair towards them (only 42% perceive them as fair compared with over 60% in Canada and Germany) but they believe that the teachers are somewhat interested in them as people (45% in Israel compared with 47% in Canada and Germany) and encourage them to express their opinions in school (60% compared with 50% in Germany). Furthermore, they feel appreciated by their teachers. For example, less than 40% believe that their teachers think that their achievements are less than average compared with more than 65% who think so in Germany or France. They do not feel stressed by their studies (only 30%
perceive stress as compared with 60% in Canada), but compared with other nations they think that their teachers and their parents expect too much of them. This set of findings accords with the view of high schools in Israel as characterized by an ecology that focuses on achievements and not on enjoyment. It further highlights that in general the school climate allows for the free expression of ideas and opinions and includes some level of personal relationships between teachers and students. Thus, students do not like the school or their studies too much but they are not too stressed by the demands of the school and believe that they are doing fine and that they are successful.

*Military Service as a Central Developmental Phase for Israeli Youth*

With the establishment of Israel as a new state a mandatory military service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) was instituted for all Jewish 18 year olds, excluding ultra-orthodox Jews who study in “Yeshiva” (post secondary religious educational institution), and religious women (women who declare that they observe the religious laws). From the start (Gal, 1986; Izraeli, 1997) men and women’s military service was devised as different in terms of duration (approximately 2 years for women and 3 years for men), type of service (i.e., combat positions were only open for men) and the universality of the service (90% of the 18-year-old cohort of Jewish men vs. 65% of Jewish women serve in the IDF). Recently, more combat positions were opened to women but still the overwhelming majority of units, which participate in actual fighting, are composed of men. The Israeli army heavily relies on the service of these young men and women, who constitute the majority of its soldiers. The professional soldiers are usually those who decide to pursue a military career following the completion of the mandatory service.

Military service has a very significant impact on the lives of Israeli youth. This is related to the rather long duration of the service, to the imminent danger to one’s life during that service, to the stirring and transforming experiences youth undergo as they perform their service, to its universality in terms of phases in the life span for most Jewish youth, to the importance attributed to the IDF in assuring Israel’s existence, and the malleability of this age period. First, being a universal path en route to maturity in
Israel, military service has been a highly significant period in shaping and defining youth identity (Dar & Kimhi, 2001; Lieblich, 1989; Mayseless, 1993a; 1995). It is quite common for adults in Israel to refer to the type of service and the unit in which they served when referring to who they are and what they have done in their lives, and to maintain contact with the group of their fellow soldiers. As well, perceived success in meeting the demands of the service has a far reaching effect in terms of success in adult roles beyond other indicators, such as level of education, ethnic origin, SES, or family climate (Mayseless, 1993b).

Second, in principle, all positions in the military are open to all the youth, regardless of their SES, ethnic origin, religiosity, or place of residence. Assignment to a military unit is based on personal merit and an independent quite impartial process of selection. Thus, military service opens up new opportunities for youth who have not previously succeeded in the education system, and military career is a viable option for upward mobility of less advantaged youth (Gal, 1986; Horowitz & Kimmerling, 1974; Mayseless, 1993a). Furthermore, soldiers from diverse cultural groups may end up serving in the same units, and military service often involves first encounters among the diverse ethnic and cultural groups in Israel and serves as a melting pot for Israeli society. Thus military service promotes cohesiveness and a common identity for the varied cultural groups of Israel and may serve an important role of unification.

Third, military service in Israel includes active duty in real life military actions. This is related to the constant acts of violence of Israel with its Arab neighbors, as well as to numerous armed clashes with Arab Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Most young males serving in the IDF are involved in various ways in actual combat as active participants who engage in fighting or as witnesses who see others, be them Israelis or Arabs, wounded or dead. Hence military service places many of the soldiers in real danger to their life and in situations where they may take other people's life and thus exposes many of the soldiers to difficult and stirring experiences. These experiences might foster hardiness and enhance their psychosocial maturity, and their capacity to withstand pressure, but may
hamper their well being and sense of security, as well as heighten their level of frustration, intolerance and even aggressiveness (Lieblich, 1989; Lomsky-Feder, 1992).

Military service also involves highly demanding and challenging situations. As part of their military service, 18-year old youth in Israel are assigned duties, which include responsibilities rarely assigned to adolescents at that age. These include responsibility with regard to the lives and physical safety of others in dangerous situations, the need to make major decisions in urgent situations, which considerably impact others, and responsibilities with regards to very expensive equipment costing millions of dollars. These responsibilities as well might enhance the development of self-efficacy, consideration for others and psychosocial maturity (Dar & Kimhi, 2001; Mayseless, 1993b). By contrast, military life might restrict the opportunity to form and maintain romantic ties (e.g., most military units, especially combat ones, include very few females and furloughs are infrequent and short), or to further explore career options and educational avenues. Thus, experiences during military service may open up processes of self-exploration and reflection, promote psychosocial maturity and the capacity to withstand pressures, as well as foster anxiety, stress, aggressiveness and hinder normative processes of exploration in the interpersonal domain as well as in the area of identity. It should be noted that although the military context is difficult, taxing, and challenging, the large majority of soldiers successfully completes their military service, adjust and cope well with its hardships, and find these experiences valuable as discussed later (Dar & Kimhi, 2001; Mayseless, 1995).

Communal and Familial Values

In general, being a developed, industrialized and Western country the Israeli Jewish middle class is very similar to the North American one in its focus on individualistic values (Schwartz, 1994). This focus has become stronger during the last two decades (Katriel, 1993; Smooha, 1998). However, an important characteristic of Israeli society, even today, has to do with its emphasis on communal values and practices (Elon, 1971; Sagi, Orr & Bar-on, 1999) and on placing high value on the family (Lavee & Katz, in press; Peres & Katz, 1981). The importance of the collective and reliance on that
collective in times of trouble have been hallmarks of Jewish life throughout the 2000 years when Jews lived as a minority in other countries (Izraeli, 1991). Katriel (1991, p.4) refers to this strong sense of cohesion and states: "The strong accent on community, on the primacy of the collective voice, has been a central strand in the Israeli nation-building ethos". The value of the family has also a long tradition in the Jewish way of life and in Jewish religion. For example, considering that it is a modernized Western culture, divorce rates are quite low even within the secular population (circa 10 – 15% depending on the cohort), and are even lower within the more traditional or religious sectors (circa 5%; Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Strong and frequent contact with family members and especially with parents is kept throughout one’s life, and it is common practice that in many cases even after marriage offsprings live near their parents and visit them almost every weekend or at least once a month.

Both of these aspects are related to the strong sense of involvement that Israelis have regarding their country and their fellow countrymen. News is broadcast every hour and most Israelis listen to the news at least several times a day and discuss current issues with others. Further, there seems to be a large overlap of contexts and of social networks. As a result, Israelis are very involved in whatever happens to other Israelis and know personally many other Israelis. Moreover, Israel’s small geographical size (similar to New Jersey) - seven hours drive from North to South, and about one hour drive from East to West, and rather small population size (approximately 6 million) contributes to the sense of density and involvement and the importance of the collective.

With regards to the education system, this strong accent on the collective finds expression in several characteristics. For example, the cohesion of each class or school is highly valued and even has a specific term in Hebrew - “Gibush” (Katriel, 1991). Teachers and other educational figures (i.e., counselors) purposefully organize activities designed to enhance the cohesion of the class and getting students to know and form close relations with each other. "Good" classes are described as ones in which there is a high level of cohesion (Gibush) and parents or students may complain and demand implementing various interventions if cohesion is low.
Though a gradual change towards more individualistic values has occurred during the last two decades Israel can still be characterized a collectivistic culture (Sagy, Orr, Bar-on, Awwad, 2001; Schwartz, 1994; Weller, Florian, Mikulincer, 1995; Roniger, 1994).

**Low Obedience to Law and Order**

Interestingly, however, the prominence of collectivism in the Israeli culture does not entail submissiveness and conformity to law, order and regulations. A person is not expected to be very polite and to show respect to authority figures or to obey them. Rather, questioning and challenging authorities is appreciated and someone who primarily does what he or she is told may be ridiculed. This is also related to the strong value placed in Israel on being open and direct in the expression of attitudes and emotions (Margalit & Mauger, 1984). The slang word "dugri" was suggested by Katriel (1986) as capturing this quality, which is most conspicuous of Israeli society. A person is appreciated if he or she is dugri, namely, openly expresses his or her beliefs, ideas and criticism without regard to etiquette, being polite, or whether communicating with equals or with authority figures.

While conformity to general law and order is not highly valued, most Israelis would value a person who finds his or her way around the law, who is practical and resourceful, and initiates and improvises rather than goes by the book. In Hebrew this capacity is called “Lehistader”, namely to get your own way despite rules and regulations. Similarly, people are warned from being a “Freier”. This term refers to individuals who wrongly assume that people and institutions are to be trusted and therefore do not stand on their own and do not defend their rights, but foolishly expect them to be honored (Roniger & Feige, 1992). This capacity is most important because public institutions and administrations are not considered reliable and accountable in Israel (Ram, 1993). Together these characteristics of Israeli society may be captured by two related expectations: (1) A person is expected to say what he or she feels and thinks without taking too much into consideration other people’s boundaries and needs, and the general rules of etiquette; (2) A person is expected to try and get what he or she wants without too much consideration of law, order, procedures and regulations. These
general societal expectations when internalized by Israeli youth may culminate in the development of resourcefulness and initiative as well as in noncompliance and disregard for regulations and procedures as discussed later.

**Small Power Distance and the Importance of the Peer Group**

In line with the low levels of obedience to law and order, and the low levels of politeness and etiquette there is also small power distance (using Hofstede’s, 1983 term) between authority figures and lay people in Israeli society. This is manifested in moderately low levels of respect for authority (i.e., teachers are called by their first names) and high degree of interpersonal equality in social relations. Israelis are better described as a group of equals and from early on, children are encouraged to be part of groups of equals and to learn to play with peers. For example, daycare centers in Israel are chosen by many Israeli parents for their young babies, even as early as 6 months old, because they are seen as good contexts where children could learn to be social and to cooperate with others (Sagi & Koren-Karie, 1993). It is not uncommon for a child in Israel to be a part of the same group of peers from infancy to late adolescence. This is exemplified in a common practice employed by middle schools when constructing the new classes of 8th grade students. Having a number of different elementary schools feeding the same middle school, classes are constructed so that for each student they include the student’s best friends as identified via a psychometric procedure conducted specifically for this purpose several months in advance. Further, children in Israel are expected from early on to get along by themselves with their peers and to take care of their “social problems” with peers mostly by themselves (Katriel, 1991). This focus on early interactions in the peer group without adult supervision and scaffolding, along with the expectation that children should fend for themselves (“not be Freier”) may result in high levels of friction and fighting among Israeli youth, with low levels of politeness and courtesy in their interactions with each other and with adults.

Characteristics of Israeli Adolescents
How are these different characteristics reflected in the experiences of Jewish adolescents in Israel? These diverse sources of influence become manifested in an intriguing mix of qualities, which are best portrayed as dualities or polarities at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal and developmental spheres. From the outside these dualities may be seen as contradictions but at a deeper level they complement and balance each other forming a dialectics of opposites. These dualities are apparent at four different spheres of analysis reflecting the different systems described in Bronfenbrenner’s (1986; 1992) ecological model of human development – the microsystem (intrapersonal), the mesosystem (inter-personal), the macrosystem (societal), and the chronosystem (development through time).

The Intrapersonal Sphere (the Microsystem): Esteem and Efficacy vs. Stress and Distress

Two almost opposing profiles of Israeli youth emerge with regards to their sense of self. First, in line with the promotion of efficacy and initiative, epitomized in the term “Lehistader” described above, Israeli youth report a high sense of efficacy, high levels of esteem and low levels of felt helplessness compared with adolescents in 25 other Western nations (based on a multinational representative samples of adolescents - Harel, Kanny & Rahav, 1997). For example, more than 75% report feeling sure of themselves most or all of the time as compared with only 60% in Ireland and Scotland or 50% in Canada. Similarly, less than 20% Israeli adolescents report feeling helpless sometimes as compared with around 60% in France, 50% in Ireland or 40% in Canada. High levels of self-efficacy were also reported in other studies examining young recruits in the IDF (e.g., Mayseless & Hai, 1988).

However, in line with the stressful context in which they live Israeli adolescents also report high levels of psychological and physical symptoms and low to moderate levels of happiness (Magen, 1998). For example, in the same multi-national survey (Harel, Kanny & Rahav, 1997) Israeli adolescents reported very high levels of feeling angry, agitated, upset and/or distressed. Specifically, around 40% of them reported feeling this way almost every day during the past 6 months as compared with 20 - 30% in Belgium, Ireland and France. Similarly, compared with the other nations participating in the survey,
Israeli youth reported the highest incidence of different physical symptoms, such as headaches, stomachaches or dizziness with 25% of them reporting feeling this way more than once a week. Thus, for Israeli adolescents high sense of efficacy and esteem is coupled with physical and psychological signs of stress.

The Interpersonal Sphere (Mesosystem): Closeness and Intimacy vs. Friction and Aggression

In line with the strong communal values, the strong accent on the family, and the concomitant emphasis on the peer group adolescents in Israel enjoy high levels of closeness and intimacy with their parents, friends and romantic partners. However, at the same time they evince a high level of friction and aggressiveness in their peer relations.

Relationships with parents. One of the most salient characteristics of adolescents in Israel is the warm and affectionate relationship they hold with their parents (Mayseless 2001a). Most adolescents (over 80%) describe good relationships with their parents, relationships in which they can turn to their parents for help, and in which they feel that their parents can be depended upon (Mayseless & Hai, 1998; Mayseless, Wiseman & Hai, 1998; Tishby et al., 2001). In fact, in the multinational survey involving more than 25 Western countries, such as Belgium, France, Austria, Germany, Norway, Canada, Russia, Slovenia, Spain (Harel, Kanny & Rahav, 1997) Israeli adolescents reported one of the highest rates of general sense of support from their parents, and the highest degree of parental support regarding their studies and academic endeavors. Encouragement to succeed in their studies was the highest among Israeli adolescents compared to all other participating nations (90% said that their parents encourage them to do well at school).

As in other Western countries, relationships with mothers are perceived as closer than with fathers. In most cases the mother is depicted as the first person the adolescent will turn to in times of difficulty or trouble, and relationships with her are seen as close as those with the best friend or the romantic partner, and in many cases even closer (Scharf & Mayseless, 2001). Interestingly, and in line with studies in other Western cultures (e.g., Sullivan & Sullivan, 1988; Thornton, Orbuch & Axinn, 1995),
the relationships with parents become even closer once the young men or women leave home to serve in the IDF (Mayseless, in press; Maysless & Hai, 1998). For example, in a study examining a representative sample of released soldiers, 56% of the respondents reported becoming closer to their mother following conscription, and only 14% reported becoming more distant. Similar proportions of respondents (circa 45%) reported that their mother showed more respect towards them, that they respected her more, and that they mutually understand each other better following conscription (Mayseless, 1993a; Mayseless, 2001b). Following the completion of military service, most youth return to live at home and report close, warm, and trustworthy relationships with their parents (Mayseless, 1993c; Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron under review). Thus, in line with the strong accent on the family in the Israeli culture, adolescence and emerging adulthood do not entail breaking away and disconnecting from one’s parents but almost an opposite process (Kacen & Wittenberg, 2000). Parents continue to serve as a secure base and a haven of safety for their children throughout these developmental phases (Mayseless, in press).

*Relationships with peers.* Israeli adolescents also enjoy close and involved relationships with their peers. As described above it is quite common that children in Israel form part of the same group of friends throughout their childhood and the daily interactions with friends are usually spontaneous (as opposed to prearranged) and in most cases without adult supervision. From early on Israeli children visit their friends’ houses or meet with them in playgrounds or other public places without the need of prior coordination by adults. In adolescence youth usually form chums of friends who meet quite often during recess and after school. For example, whereas 30% of 15-year-olds in France and Belgium (or 15% in Germany) report that they do not spend even one night during the week with friends, in Israel only 6% of adolescents report that (Harel, Kanny & Rahav, 1997). Similarly, more than 80% of 15-year-olds in Israel report that they find it easy and even very easy to talk with their same-sex friends on things that bother them and 60% feel so with regards to their non same-sex friends as compared with 70% and 50% respectively in France, Germany and Belgium.
In a similar vein, despite less than optimal conditions during military service for the development of romantic intimacy, young adults in Israel were able to further develop this capacity during this period. This was apparent based on their retrospective self reports (Dar & Kimhi, 2001), and also based on interviews assessing their intimacy statuses (Mayseless, 1993a; Scharf & Mayseless, 2001; Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron, under review). For example, about 50% of the 21-22 year olds interviewed in these studies have already developed mature levels of romantic intimacy which included the capacity for closeness in the relationships evidenced in their high levels of confiding and sharing of worries, problems and personal matters and genuine caring for the partner as well as the capacity for separateness within the relationship which included maintenance of own interests while caring for partner’s needs and wishes, encouragement and valuing of partner’s autonomy and the capacity to perceive and appreciate the partner’s perspective.

In contrast, and in line with the high stress evident in the daily life in Israel, the low scaffolding and supervision of peers’ interactions by adults, and the societal expectation to fend for oneself and not be “Freier”, relationships with the peer group in Israel are also marked by constant friction and aggression. For example, in the multinational study described above (Harel, Kanny & Rahav, 1997) more than 40% of Israeli 15-year-old adolescents (54% boys and 34% girls) reported that they were victimized by peers at school (one of the highest rates in this survey) as compared with 26% in Belgium or 22% in Canada. Similarly 60% of the boys (30% of the girls) reported bullying another peer at least once as compared with 45% and 26% respectively in Canada. Among 11th graders 57% of the boys and 17% of the girls reported being involved in a fight at least once during the previous year. These scores are even higher (reaching 80%) for younger adolescents (Harel, Kanny & Rahav, 1997). About 9.3% of high-school boys and 4.2% of high-school girls in the large multinational survey reported being involved in a fight, in which they were injured and needed medical attention. The parallel rates are only available from a national survey in the U.S. where the respective rates are very similar – 12.9% and 3.8%.
In sum, despite the strong communal values and the closeness and involvement of Israeli youth with parents and peers they also evince high levels of aggressiveness in the peer relationships. Israeli youth seem to be highly involved and invested emotionally and instrumentally with others and to be highly expressive demonstrating strong emotional displays of warmth and aggression, and closeness and anger at the same time.

The Societal Sphere (Macrosystem): Conformity vs. Noncompliance

At the societal levels again we encounter an intriguing duality where on the one hand youngsters in Israel evince a high level of conformity which might be expected in light of the security situation, the military service and the communal orientation, but on the other hand they are noncompliant and show low levels of politeness and respect for others and for authority figures.

Several studies conducted with Israeli youth during the past 20 years underscore one of the most prominent characteristics of Israeli adolescence – their conformity. Israeli youth seem to be conformist with regards to (1) their attitudes towards the country and towards military service; (2) the general values they hold; and (3) their reproduction of their parents' political and religious values.

Attitudes towards the country and towards military service. In two comprehensive studies undertaken in 1988 (Mayseless, Gal & Fischof, 1989) and 1994 (Ezrahi & Gal, 1995) amongst a representative sample of Jewish high school students findings point to a number of characteristics, which could be termed consensual, as they are shared by the overwhelming majority of the respondents regardless of the sectors they represent (religious and non-religious, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi, political right-wing and left-wing.)

In general, adolescents expressed very positive attitudes regarding military service (Mayseless, 1993d; 1995). This was seen both in general attitudes regarding the Israeli Defense Forces (confidence in the IDF's strength and capabilities as well as respect for officers in the professional army) and in attitudes of a more personal nature. For instance, roughly 85% of males responded that they “wanted” or “wanted very much” to serve in the military, and about 95% responded
that they would enlist even if service was voluntary. Additionally, a large majority of the young (about 70%) hoped their service would be meaningful, both in terms of personal investment and in terms of contribution to the country. These positive attitudes replicated those found for the same age group 15 years earlier (Levy & Guttman, 1975). The motivational basis behind the desire to undertake military service included intrinsic personal factors such as “searching for a challenge” and “to test myself”, as well as patriotic motives such as the desire to defend the country and to contribute to its welfare.

With respect to attitudes towards the nation and its security status, findings in these two surveys (Ezrahi & Gal, 1995; Mayseless, Gal & Fischof, 1989) paint an interesting picture in which adolescents are quite pessimistic in envisioning the future of Israel yet declare a moderately strong commitment to it. Israeli adolescents are convinced that life in Israel is dangerous - roughly 65% see acts of terror as personally threatening, and about 70% believe that terror is a permanent aspect of Israeli life. The young also see war with the Arab states in the foreseeable future (within the next 6 years) as probable, and are not convinced that a peace agreement will bring about calm and normalcy. Furthermore, and in line with the depiction of Israeli society as somewhat unstable young Israelis express only moderate trust in their leaders or different societal institutions (i.e., parliament), and this level of trust has even decreased over the years. Nevertheless more than 90% strongly perceive themselves first and foremost as Israelis and about 80% believe that they will continue to live in Israel and do not wish to emigrate.

General values. Indications for the strong communal focus can be found in the general values espoused by Israeli youth as indicated in the same large-scale national surveys of high-school students (Ezrahi & Gal, 1995; Mayseless, Gal, & Fischof, 1989). As with attitudes towards the IDF and the nation, youth differing in their socioeconomic and demographic background showed a very similar structure of values (Assor & Eilot, 2001; Mayseless, 1998). Moreover, the value structure was quite similar across the two surveys (6 years apart) and comparable to that found 15 years earlier (Levi & Guttman, 1975). Similar ranking of values was also recently reported by Sagy, Orr, Bar-on and Awwad
Israeli adolescents (2001). Across the various sectors, the quite conformist values of “having an interesting vocation”, “establishing a family”, “acquiring/succeeding in education”, and “getting a secure job” were rated highest. Self-actualization values such as “reaching my full potential” or materialistic individualistic values such as “making a lot of money” were rated as intermediate in importance. This depiction is different from the way adolescence is described in developmental literature as an age, which includes exploration, questioning of adults’ values, and sensation seeking and presents a conformist culture of youth where social roles such as marriage and settling into a stable career seem prominent.

A similar indication regarding the conformist, communal and familial value structure of Israeli adolescents comes from a study comparing conceptions of maturity among U.S. and Israeli youth (Mayseless & Scharf, in press). Embedded in a general individualistic view stressing internal, psychological attributes as the most important markers of adulthood (e.g., accepting responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions, deciding on personal beliefs by oneself and establishing relationships with parents as an equal adult), Israeli respondents ascribed significantly more importance than their U.S. counterparts to responsible norm-abiding behavior, such as driving safely and avoiding getting drunk and to role transitions such as being employed full time or getting married. This accent seems to reflect the importance of social structure and social roles in the Israeli society and the relevance of the social stratum in defining one’s place as an adult, a characteristic of a communal orientation.

*Intergenerational transmission of parent’s political and religious attitudes.* In line with the segregation within the educational system a moderately strong indication for intergenerational transmission of values with regards to political attitudes (left vs. right) and religious inclination was demonstrated. For example, the overwhelming majority of young men and women in Israel adopt the same religious characterization (secular, traditional, religious, or orthodox) as their parents (Mayseless, 1993b). Similarly studies have shown a moderately high correlation (circa .40) between parents’ political views or gender role ideology and their children's (Arian, 1992; Kulik, 2000; Mayseless & Gal,
Thus, the strong focus on the family unit, as well as the segregation within the educational system with regards to religiosity and other aspects tend to strengthen the intergenerational transmission of parent's political and religious attitudes (Ichilov, 1991).

**Non-compliance and low levels of tolerance and politeness.** In line with the moderately high level of friction and aggressiveness in the peer relationship Israeli youth tend also to show low levels of general compliance, low espousal of respect for others and for authority figures and low endorsement of universalistic values such as helping others, tolerance and politeness. For example, in the national survey of values and attitudes described above the value of “helping others” ranked the lowest among a list of 40 values (Mayseless, Gal & Fischof, 1989). Similarly, most Israeli youth do not espouse values of tolerance and for example, do not think that the Arab minority in Israel should receive full citizenship rights (Ichilov, Bar-Tal, Mazawi, 1989; Ezrahi & Gal, 1995).

Another indication for the low importance ascribed to politeness and showing respect for others comes from a study, which examined the correlates of leadership in the peer group. In the U.S. as well as in other countries one factor, which includes sociability, politeness, observing rules and leadership emerges when peer evaluations regarding their class mates are obtained (Morison & Masten, 1991; Chen, Rubin, Li, & Li, 1999). Thus, leadership and sociability are considered associated with politeness and rule compliance. However, in Israel, the items referring to good manners, observing rules and being polite did not cluster together with either the sociability or the leadership factor (Krispin, Sternberg, & Lamb, 1992) underscoring that leaders or sociable peers are not expected to be polite, to have good manners or to observe regulations in Israel.

Another intriguing finding highlighting in particular the advocating of noncompliance was reported by Shouval, Kav-Venaki, Bronfenbrenner, Devereux, and Kiely (1975). They measured children's responses to moral dilemmas by asking them to choose between conventional standard approved by adults and mildly "antisocial" action urged by peers. Unlike children in other countries who gave their most moral answer when they thought that their parents would know of their action, and the
least moral answer when they thought their peers would know, Israeli children gave their most moral answer when they thought no one would know their answer and gave their most "immoral" answer when they thought that either their peers or their parents would see it.

Together, these characteristics portray a notable picture of Israeli youth. They seem to have internalized highly conformist attitudes and values with regards to their country, their national identity and national duty (i.e., military service) as well as internalized their parents' specific attitudes and values with regards to religiosity and politics. At the same time and in line with the same process of conformity they seem to have internalized the norm and expectation to be non compliant and to disregard regulations, politeness, and etiquette in their conduct. Thus, the polarities in their conduct may actually reflect the ostensible contradiction in the societal expectations and norms, namely the expectation to comply with a norm that demands noncompliance. Viewed this way, Israeli adolescents may actually be seen as highly compliant with respect to their society's norms, despite their unruly conduct in certain respects.

*The Developmental Continuum (Chronosystem): Uneven Maturation*

Israeli youth seem to undergo an uneven process of maturation in which several aspects of maturity, such as emotional maturity, the capacity to withstand pressures and to delay gratification are developed quite early, but other aspects of maturity, such as forging an identity with regards to world-view, life style and career choices are delayed (Mayseless, 1993a). Several studies underscore the high level of psychosocial capacity of Israeli youth. For example, with regards to the capacity to delay gratification a majority of adolescents report thinking ahead and obtaining information from various sources rather than rushing before making a decision (Friedman, 1989). Similarly, the rate of risk behaviors, such as drinking, smoking or teen pregnancies is very low in Israel compared with other Western nations (Harel, Kanny & Rahav, 1997). For example, in a representative sample of high school students (ages 14 to 18), only 20% of the Israeli respondents reported ever having sexual relations compared with more than 50% in the U.S. Similarly, only 2.6% of the Israeli adolescent high-school girls
reported ever being pregnant compared with 15.7% in the U.S. In the same study, Israel ranked the lowest among 25 nations with regards to cigarette smoking (e.g., among 15 year olds only 12% reported smoking at least once a week). Alcohol consumption is also quite low in Israel: among 15 year olds around 30% report drinking at least once a month compared with more than 50% in Canada, Spain, and Austria, and more than 60% in Belgium, Scotland and the US. Thus, Israeli youth seem to behave in a mature, controlled manner with regards to risk behaviors often characterizing adolescents in other Western countries. This may be related to the communal values in Israeli society as well as to the impending military service. Military service might be perceived as a legitimate avenue for youth to channel their normative needs to test their limits, and seek intense sensations and experiences thus lowering the need to behave this way during adolescence in the civilian sphere (Mayseless, 1995).

In line with the depiction of military service and experiences as challenging and fostering maturity, following military service, Israeli youth report that the service contributed to their psychosocial maturity by enhancing their capacity to assume responsibility and withstand pressures, as well as by promoting a broader perspective on life and teaching them to work in collaboration with others and to take other people’s perspective (Dar & Kimhi, 2001; Lieblich, 1989; Mayseless, 2001a). Examination of changes in these aspects have indeed corroborated that some experiences during military service (i.e., combat service, perceived success, position of a officer) contributed to higher ego-strength above their base level prior to military service (Mayseless, 1993a; 2001a).

In contrast, other aspects related to expected maturation during this developmental phase seem to be frozen during this period, in particular issues that have to do with developing a vocational identity. Not surprisingly, Israeli adolescents devote more time and thinking to their impending military service and postpone the consideration and reflection regarding vocational career till after they finish their military service. For example, when asked about their hopes and dreams for the future (future orientation) Israeli adolescents devoted less consideration to career choices and academic pursuits than to military service options (Seginer, 1988; 2001; Seginer & Schlesinger, 1998). However, this delay
seems to extend also to the following period of emerging adulthood. Employing Marcia's (1993) Identity Status interview with young males (age 21-22) shortly after their release from the military, only 21% were considered identity achievers. A follow-up study with released soldiers three to five years after their discharge further showed that less than half fully explored various vocational options and felt quite certain that they knew what they want to do in life in terms of vocational career (Mayseless, 1993b). Thus, despite considering "settling into a long term career" one of the markers of adulthood (Mayseless & Scharf, in press) youth in Israel tend to wait with this maturational milestone till they are in their late twenties. Similarly, moving from the parents' household into an independent residence and becoming financially independent are accomplishments attained by most Israeli youth only in their late twenties (Mayseless, 1993c). Together, these findings underscore the uneven path of maturation taken by Israeli youth. With regards to psychosocial maturity they seem to develop quite early. However, other aspects such as settling into a long-term career, moving into an independent residence and becoming financially independent seem to take longer.

Summary and Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter regarding the lives and the experiences of Israeli Jewish adolescents depict a community of adolescents who are conformist and conservative, attached to their parents, and to their country despite perceiving without illusions the dangers inherent in living in Israel in the present and in the future. At the same time they are resourceful and noncompliant, and try to get their way without much regard to manners, etiquette or regulations. They further seem to have moderately low sense of universal values. They appear to be under pressure, somewhat distressed, depressed and anxious, yet they show high sense of efficacy and esteem, are hardy and seem to develop mature responsibilities and the capacity to withstand pressures at a relatively early stage in life. In their interactions with close others they are highly expressive showing closeness and warmth as well as aggressiveness and assertiveness.
This state of affairs is radically different from the picture of adolescence depicted in developmental conceptualizations regarding this period (Arnett, 1998; Steinberg, 2002), where adolescence and emerging adulthood is seen as a time for self-exploration, critical examination of the adult world and its values, and the search for gratification and excitement. The distinct cultural milieu of Israeli society with its particular characteristics (e.g., life of hardships and imminent danger, military service, and expectations regarding noncompliance) seems to have shaped the experiences of adolescents in Israel in a fairly unique way exposing an intricate dialectics of efficacy vs. stress, closeness vs. friction and conformity along with noncompliance.
References


