

CHAPTER 7

DIALECTIC CONTRADICTIONS IN THE EXPERIENCES OF ISRAELI JEWISH ADOLESCENTS

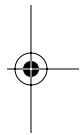
Efficacy and Stress, Closeness and Friction, and Conformity and Noncompliance

Ofra Mayseless and Gavriel Salomon

Israel is a young country founded in May 1948. Most of its citizens are either themselves new immigrants or second- and third-generation immigrants. They 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 of the family or of the collective legacy of many Israelis (Elon, 1971). Moreover, Israeli society has had to struggle with the integrity of the diverse cultural heritage of Jews from all over the world.

Another significant characteristic of Israel has to do with its security situation. During its 55 years of existence, Israel has undergone seven wars with its Arab neighbors. In addition, between the wars, there were constant acts of violence along the borders and acts of terrorism inside the country;

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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). Furthermore, and most pertinent to our focus on adolescence, a majority of each 18-year-old cohort of Jewish young men and women (85% for men and 65% for women) serve compulsory military service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) for 2–3 years.

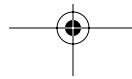
How do these distinct aspects become reflected in the experience, development, and characteristics of adolescents in Israel? In this chapter we describe some characteristics of Israeli adolescents and relate them to the general societal context. Throughout the chapter we use the terms “Israeli culture” 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 subcultures and ecological contexts defined by their ethnic origin, religiosity, socioeconomic class, and level of education, to name just a few. In particular, the state of Israel includes several minorities, the largest being an Arab minority consisting of about 20% of the population. This Arab minority, itself quite diverse, has a distinct cultural context as well as trajectories of adolescent development that markedly differ from those of the Jewish majority (Smootha, 1992). Thus, it deserves a distinct and extended delineation and is therefore not considered here.

When using the terms “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, i.e., 20% of the population) of Jews who have recently emigrated from the former USSR. This group has distinct cultural characteristics and developmental trajectories (Eisikovits, 1997; Horenczyk & Ben-Shalom, 2001; Ullman & Tatar, 2001) that are also not considered here. The general descriptions offered here should be accepted as generalizations and should be read 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., Eisenstadt, 1967; Elon, 1971; Katriel, 1991; Kimmerling, 1989; Ram, 1993) and are relevant to the experiences and the development of adolescents.

THEMES IN ISRAELI JEWISH CULTURE

Life of Hardships and Imminent Danger

Israel has known many difficulties and had to overcome a series of hardships. Since its independence, it has absorbed waves of immigrants, usually





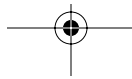
people who escaped from their country of origin with few personal possessions. These waves of immigration started with Holocaust survivors and were followed by refugees from Arab countries and immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia. From a nation of 700,000 Jewish citizens, Israel has grown into a nation of 5 million mostly through immigration. Absorbing these new immigrants culturally and economically has posed great challenges for the young state and has resulted in cultural and economical upheavals.

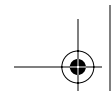
Furthermore, because of the constant threat to its existence, Israel allocates a large part of Israeli taxpayers' earnings to defense, resulting in fewer resources to promote the welfare of its citizens and the absorption of the immigrants. Throughout the years, Israel has experienced almost constant armed clashes and terrorist acts with its Arab neighbors and with the Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip who have been under 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, contribute to a strenuous life of hardships for its citizens, resulting among other things in a hectic lifestyle (Breznitz, 1983; Horowitz & Lissak, 1990; Milgram, 1986). Horowitz and Lissak (1990) write about "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 affairs may foster solidarity, cohesion, and commitment to the nation. It may also result in high levels of stress and anxiety as well as hostility and low levels of tolerance toward others.



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 IDF was instituted for all Jewish 18-year-olds, excluding ultra-orthodox males and females. Of the 18-year-old cohort, 90% of Jewish men and 65% of Jewish women serve in the IDF. Recently, some combat positions were opened to women, but the overwhelming majority of units that 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





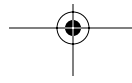
who decide to pursue a military career following the completion of compulsory service.

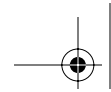
Military service has a significant impact on the lives of Israeli youth. This is related to a number of factors: the long duration of the service; the imminent danger to one's life during that time; the stirring and transforming experiences youth undergo as they perform their service; its universality in terms of phases in the life span for most Jewish youth; the importance attributed to the IDF in ensuring Israel's existence; and the malleability of this age period. Being a universal path en route to maturity in Israel, military service is a significant period in shaping and defining youth identity (Dar & Kimhi, 2001; Lieblich, 1989; Mayselless, 1993d, 1995). It is 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. They also maintain contact with their fellow soldiers. Perceived success in meeting the demands of the service also 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 (Mayselless, 1993b).

In principle, all positions in the military are open to all youth, regardless of their SES, ethnic origin, religiosity, or place of residence. Assignment to a military unit is based on personal merit and an impartial process of selection. Thus, military service provides 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; Mayselless, 1993d). Furthermore, soldiers from diverse cultural groups end up serving in the same units, and military service often involves first encounters among the diverse ethnic and cultural groups in Israel, thus serving as a melting pot for Israeli society. Consequently, military service promotes cohesiveness and a common identity for the varied cultural groups of Israel and may serve an important role of unification in terms of sharing a common national narrative (Bartal, 1998).

Military service in Israel includes active, often violent, and dangerous duty in real-life military actions. These experiences might foster hardiness and enhance the psychosocial maturity of adolescents and their capacity to withstand pressure, but may also debilitate their well-being and sense of security, as well as heighten their levels of frustration, intolerance, and even aggressiveness (Lieblich, 1989; Lomsky-Feder, 1992).

Military service also involves highly demanding and challenging situations. As part of their service, 18-year-old youth in Israel are assigned duties that include responsibilities rarely assigned to adolescents at that age. These responsibilities include protecting the lives and physical safety of others in dangerous situations, making major decisions in urgent situa-

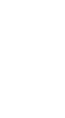
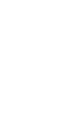




tions that considerably affect others, and taking care of equipment costing millions of dollars. These responsibilities might enhance the development of self-efficacy, consideration for others, and psychosocial maturity (Dar & Kimhi, 2001; Mayseless, 1993b). By contrast, military life might restrict the opportunity to form and maintain romantic ties (e.g., most military units, especially combat ones, include few females, and furloughs are infrequent and short) or to further explore career options and educational avenues. Thus, experiences during military service might open up processes of self-exploration and reflection; promote psychosocial maturity and the capacity to withstand pressures; foster anxiety, stress, and 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 complete their military service, adjust and cope well with its hardships, and find these experiences valuable (Dar & Kimhi, 2001; Mayseless, 1995).

Communal and Familial Values, and the Importance of the Peer Group

The Israeli Jewish middle class is 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; Smootha, 1998). However, an important characteristic of Israeli society, even today, is its emphasis on communal values and practices (Elon, 1971; Sagy, 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) 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" (p. 4). The value of the family has also been a long tradition in the Jewish way of life and in Jewish religion. Considering that Israel is a modernized Western culture, divorce rates are low even within the secular population (approximately 15% depending on the cohort) and are even lower within the more traditional or religious sectors (approximately 5%) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Strong and frequent contact with family members and especially with parents is kept throughout one's life; it is a common practice that, even after marriage, children live near their parents and visit them frequently.



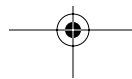


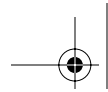
Both of these aspects are related to the strong sense of involvement that Israelis have regarding their country and their fellow countrymen. News is broadcast hourly, and most Israelis listen to the news at least several times a day and discuss current issues with others. Furthermore, there seems to be a large overlap of social networks. As a result, Israelis are very involved in whatever happens to other Israelis. Moreover, Israel's small geographical size (similar to New Jersey)—7 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 to the importance of the collective. Though a gradual change toward more individualistic values has occurred during the last two decades, Israel can still be characterized as a culture with a collectivistic orientation (Roniger, 1994; Sagy, Orr, Bar-on, & Awwad, 2001; Schwartz, 1994; Weller, Florian, & Mikulincer, 1995).

In line with the general communal orientation, there is also a 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. 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 in which children can learn to be social and to cooperate with others (Sagi & Koren-Karie, 1993). It is not uncommon for a child to be a part of the same group of peers from infancy to late adolescence. Furthermore, children are expected from early on to get along by themselves with their peers and to take care of their "social problems" with peers (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, may result in high levels of friction among Israeli youth, with low levels of politeness and courtesy in their interactions with each other and with adults.

Low Obedience (Small Power Distance) and High Resourcefulness

Interestingly, the relative prominence of collectivism in the Israeli culture does not entail much submissiveness and conformity to law, order, and regulations. A small power distance (using Hofstede's [1983] term) between authority figures and lay people characterizes Israeli society. 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 those who primarily and consistently do what they are told may be ridiculed. A strong social emphasis is put on resourcefulness





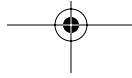
(*Tushia*) whereby one manifests ability to creatively and independently solve problems and overcome challenges. Indeed, most Israelis would value a person who is practical and resourceful and who initiates and improvises rather than goes by the book (Roniger & Feige, 1992). This is also related to the strong value placed 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. People are appreciated if they are *dugri*, namely, openly expressive of their beliefs, ideas, and criticism, whether communicating with equals or with authority figures, without regard to etiquette or to being polite.

Together these characteristics of Israeli society may be captured by two related expectations: (a) People are expected to say what they feel and think without taking too much into consideration other people's boundaries and needs or general rules of etiquette; (b) people are expected to creatively find solutions to problems they face without much consideration of regulations and institutional rules. These general societal expectations, when internalized by Israeli youth, may culminate in the development of resourcefulness and initiative as well as in noncompliance, intolerance, and disregard for regulations and procedures.

The Educational System: Communally Oriented, Accommodating Diversity, and Achievement Focused

Israeli Jewish society has been described as a melting pot of diverse cultural groups. Cleavages with regards to ethnic origin and religious orientation are the most salient. 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). The education system was designed from its early establishment to be a central agent that cultivates the collective narrative of a newborn nation through its universality, choice of curricular materials, ceremonies, rituals, and holidays (Bar-Tal, 1998; Zrubavel, 1995).

In line with the view of the education system as an important socializing agent, Israel provides 13 years of free education (ages 5 to 18), of which the first 11 years (until age 16) are compulsory (Ministry of Education, 2003). In fact, most youth make use of this free education, and in the Jewish sector about 90% of each cohort finish grade 12. Reflecting the societal call for integration of diverse cultural groups, middle schools (grades 7 to 9) as well as high schools (Grades 10 to 12) are usually heterogeneous and comprise students from various sectors and neighborhoods. Furthermore, to implement a common ground of values and heritage, Israel has established a centralized education system in which



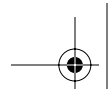


schools are directed and governed by a central Ministry of Education that sets requirements for teacher education, hiring teachers, paying salaries, allocating resources to the schools, and making curricular decisions. Consequently, there are few private schools in Israel, and parents have until recently had little to say in terms of choosing a curriculum, hiring teachers, or allocating resources. The regular curriculum is mostly (80%) compulsory, and besides the regular curriculum, 20% of the hours are devoted to general education, such as heritage, cultural events, workshops, visits to museums, and field excursions.

The education system also reflects the strong accent on the collective and the peer group in Israeli society. In most schools, at all levels, students belong to one class and take most of their courses with the same students. Each class is assigned a homeroom teacher who usually teaches one of the subjects and is educationally and academically responsible for the conduct of the students. 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 (e.g., counselors) organize activities designed to enhance the cohesion of the class and get students to know and form close relations. “Good” classes are described as ones in which there is a high level of cohesion, and parents or students may demand implementing various interventions if cohesion is low. This is exemplified in a common practice employed by middle schools when constructing the new classes of grade 7 students. Since a number of elementary schools feed into the same middle school, classes are constructed so that each student’s best friend is included. The friends are identified via a psychometric procedure conducted for this purpose several months in advance. Thus, the education system provides the scaffolds for the typical collective ability to cope with military threat and hardships (Salomon, in press) and to reinforce common collectivist orientations.

To accommodate the different cultural groups within Israel, several central educational systems have been established, some independently run (e.g., in regard to setting a curriculum, hiring teachers) by different departments 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 large Arab minority has a separate centralized system of schools in which most Arab students study in their own language with an emphasis on Arab culture and tradition. Ultra orthodox Jews have a separate system of schools financed by the Ministry of Education that enjoy a high degree of autonomy. Parents can choose the type of school to which to send their children, but usually have little say beyond that. Thus, though centralized, the educational system has accommodated the heterogeneity of cultural groups in Israel. In certain respects, the educational system has reinforced in-group orienta-





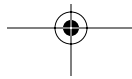
tions and societal cleavages in terms of values and traditions and has not been able to foster understanding, appreciation, and respect for other social and cultural groups (Horenczyk & Ben-Shalom, 2001).

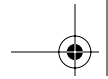
In line with the societal focus on resourcefulness and efficacy, in most schools there is also a strong focus on achievement and intellectual attainment and less on enjoyment of the studies. The regular curriculum is divided into different subject matters rooted in different standard disciplines (e.g., language, math, physics, history, geography). High school students are expected to take a series of state-mandated matriculation exams in these subjects that, when successfully completed, entitle them to a matriculation diploma. This diploma often serves as a ticket to higher education and to higher social and economical status. About 65% of the students pass at least one state-mandated matriculation exam, and 44% are eventually entitled to a full matriculation diploma at the end of high school. Following military service, there is a strong trend by young adults to complete the requirements for a matriculation diploma and/or to improve their grades in order to be accepted to their desired programs in colleges and universities. Six years following graduation, about 55% of each cohort is entitled to a matriculation diploma, and about 70% continue study in institutions of higher education (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Thus, a strong push to achieve characterizes most schools in Israel.



CHARACTERISTICS OF ISRAELI ADOLESCENTS

How are these different societal and educational characteristics reflected in the experiences of Jewish adolescents in Israel? These diverse sources of influence become manifested in an intriguing mix of qualities that 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 to form a dialectic 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 (interpersonal), the macrosystem (societal), and the chronosystem (development through time).





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

Two almost opposing profiles of Israeli youth emerge in regard to their sense of self. First, in line with the promotion of resourcefulness earlier described, 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 (Harel, Kanny, & Rahav, 1997). 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, fewer than 20% of 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 are also reported in other studies examining young recruits in the IDF (e.g., Mayselless & Hai, 1998).

In line with the stressful context in which they live, Israeli adolescents also report high levels of psychological and physical symptoms of stress and low to moderate levels of happiness (Magen, 1998). They report high levels of feeling angry, agitated, upset, and/or distressed (Harel et al., 1997). Specifically, around 40% report feeling this way almost every day as compared with 25% in Belgium, Ireland, and France. Similarly, Israeli youth report 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 the high sense of efficacy and esteem is coupled with physical and psychological signs of stress.

The Interpersonal Sphere (Mesosystem): Closeness and Intimacy versus Friction

In line with strong communal values, strong accent on the family, concomitant emphasis on the peer group, and communal orientation of the educational system, adolescents in Israel enjoy high levels of closeness and intimacy with their parents, friends, and romantic partners, as well as good relations with their teachers. At the same time, they evince a high level of friction and aggressiveness in their peer relations and reveal negative perceptions of the school climate.

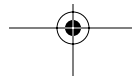
Relationships with parents. One of the most salient characteristics of adolescents in Israel is the warm and affectionate relationship they hold with their parents (Mayselless, 2001a). Over 80% describe good relationships with their parents, relationships in which they can turn to their parents for help and feel that their parents can be depended on (Mayselless & Hai, 1998; Mayselless, Wiseman, & Hai, 1998; Tishby et al., 2001). Israeli adoles-



cents report a high rate of general sense of support from their parents and a high degree of parental support regarding their studies and academic endeavors (Harel et al., 1997). Encouragement to succeed in their studies is highest among Israeli adolescents compared to other nations (90% say that their parents encourage them to do well in 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 or closer as those with a best friend or a romantic partner (Scharf & Mayseless, 2001). Interestingly, and in line with studies in other Western cultures (e.g., Sullivan & Sullivan, 1980; Thornton, Orbuch, & Axinn, 1995), relationships with parents become even closer once young men or women leave home to serve in the IDF (Mayseless, in press; Mayseless & Hai, 1998). In a study examining a representative sample of released soldiers, 56% reported becoming closer to their mother following conscription, and only 14% reported becoming more distant. Similar proportions (circa 45%) reported that their mother showed more respect toward them, they respected her more, and they mutually understood each other better following conscription (Mayseless, 1993d, 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 Israeli culture, adolescence and emerging adulthood do not entail breaking away and disconnecting from one's parents but rather the opposite (Kacen & Wittenberg, 2000). Parents continue to serve as a secure base and a safe haven for their children throughout these developmental phases (Mayseless, in press).

Relationships with peers. Israeli adolescents enjoy close and involved relationships with their peers. As described earlier, it is common for children to be part of the same group of friends throughout their childhood. Daily interactions with friends are usually spontaneous (as opposed to prearranged) and in most cases without adult supervision. From early on, children visit their friends' houses or meet with them in playgrounds or other public places without the need of prior coordination by adults. Adolescents usually form a group of friends who meet often during recess and after school. 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 et al., 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 in regard to their non-same-sex friends.



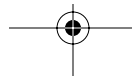


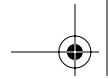
In a similar vein, despite less than optimal conditions during military service for the development of romantic intimacy, young adults in Israel are able to develop this capacity during their young adulthood (Dar & Kimhi, 2001; Mayseless, 1993d; Scharf & Mayseless, 2001; Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron, under review). About 50% of 21- to 22-year-olds report having already developed mature levels of romantic intimacy that include the capacity for closeness. This is evidenced in their high levels of confiding and sharing of worries, problems, and personal matters, as well as genuine caring for the partner and the capacity for separateness within the relationship. This separateness includes 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 daily life in Israel, because of the low scaffolding and supervision of peers' interactions by adults and the societal expectation to fend for oneself, relationships with the peer group are also marked by constant friction and aggression. More than 40% of Israeli 15-year-olds (54% boys and 34% girls) report that they were victimized by peers at school, compared with 26% in Belgium or 22% in Canada. Similarly, 60% of boys and 30% of girls report bullying another peer at least once, compared with 45% and 26%, respectively, in Canada. Among Grade 11 students, 57% of boys and 17% of girls report being involved in a fight at least once during the year. These scores are even higher (reaching 80%) for younger adolescents. About 9% of high school boys and 4% of high school girls report being involved in a fight in which they were injured and needed medical attention (Harel et al., 1997).

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 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 both warmth and intolerance, closeness and anger.

Relationships with teachers and perception of the school climate. In regard to the school context, similar dualities in feelings and attitudes are apparent. On the one hand, and in line with the depiction of Israeli high schools as stressing achievement rather than enjoyment, Israeli adolescents do not like school and feel that their parents and teachers expect too much of them. Only 12% of 15-year-olds in Israel report that they like their school very much as compared with 26% in Canada and Germany. Furthermore, in multinational research involving adolescents in 25 Western nations, Israel topped the list in the percentage of youth who reported that they do not like school at all (18% compared to 6% in Canada and 4% in Germany) and the percentage of youth who perceived their teachers as expect-





ing too much of them (14% compared to 5–7% in most countries. 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 (Harel et al., 1997).

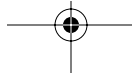
On the other hand, Israeli adolescents do not feel stressed by their studies (only 30% perceive stress, compared with 60% in Canada), and on average perceive good relationships with their teachers. They believe that their teachers are "interested in them as people" (45% compared with 47% in Canada and Germany) and encourage them to express their opinions in school (60% compared with 50% in Germany). Furthermore, they feel appreciated by their teachers. Fewer than 40% believe that their teachers think that their achievements are less than average compared with more than 65% who think so in Germany and France (Harel et al., 1997).

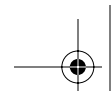
These findings are consistent with the view of high schools in Israel as characterized by an ecology that focuses on achievements and not on enjoyment. However, although students do not like school or their studies very much, they are not terribly stressed by academic demands, which is in line with the general high level of efficacy and success they report. Furthermore, in line with the general communal orientation, Israeli adolescents enjoy reasonably good personal relationships with their teachers.

The Societal Sphere (Macrosystem): Conformity versus Noncompliance

At the societal levels we again encounter an intriguing duality. On the one hand, youngsters in Israel evince a high level of conformity, which might be expected in light of the security situation, military service, and communal orientation. On the other hand, they are noncompliant and show low levels of politeness and respect for others and for authority figures. 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 conform in regard to (a) their attitudes toward the country and toward military service, (b) the general values they hold, and (c) their reproduction of their parents' political and religious values.

Attitudes toward the country and toward military service. In two comprehensive studies undertaken in 1988 (Mayseless, Gal, & Fischof, 1989) and 1994 (Ezrahi & Gal, 1995) with a representative sample of Jewish high school students, findings point to a number of characteristics that could be termed consensual, as they are shared by the overwhelming majority of respondents regardless of the sectors they represent (religious, ethnic, or political). In general, adolescents expressed positive attitudes regarding military service (Mayseless, 1993a, 1995). This was seen both in general

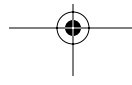


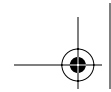


attitudes regarding the IDF (confidence in the IDF's strength and capabilities as well as respect for officers in the career army) and in attitudes of a more personal nature. For instance, roughly 85% of boys responded that they "wanted" or "wanted very much" to serve in the military, and about 95% responded 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 of contribution to the country. These 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 includes 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 toward the nation and its security status, findings paint an interesting picture in which adolescents are quite pessimistic in envisioning the future of Israel yet declare a moderately strong commitment to it (Ezrahi & Gal, 1995; Mayseless et al., 1989). 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 they are not convinced that a peace agreement will bring about calm and normalcy. In line with the depiction of Israeli society as somewhat unstable, young Israelis express only moderate trust in their leaders or different societal institutions (e.g., parliament), and this level of trust has 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 (Ezrahi & Gal, 1995; Mayseless et al., 1989). As with attitudes toward the IDF and the nation, youth differing in their socioeconomic and demographic background show a similar structure of values (Assor & Eilat, 2001; Mayseless, 1998). Moreover, the value structure is similar across two surveys 6 years apart (from 1988 to 1994) and comparable to that found 15 years earlier (Levy & Guttman, 1975). Similar ranking of values was also recently reported by Sagy and colleagues (2001). Conformist values such as "having an interesting vocation," "establishing a family," "acquiring/succeeding in education," and "getting a secure job" are rated highest, reflecting the communal and achievement orientations. 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 differs from the way adolescence is typically described in developmental literature as an age



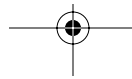


that includes exploration, questioning of adults' values, and sensation seeking, and it presents a conformist culture of youth in which social roles such as marriage and settling into a stable career seem prominent.

A similar indication regarding the conformist, communal, and familial value structures of Israeli adolescents comes from a study comparing conceptions of maturity among U.S. and Israeli youth (Maysseless & Scharf, in press). In general, Israeli adolescents present an 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, establishing relationships with parents as an equal adult). However, they ascribe significantly more importance than do their U.S. counterparts to responsible norm-abiding behavior such as driving safely and avoiding getting drunk as well as 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 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, Israeli adolescents demonstrate a moderately strong indication for intergenerational transmission of values in regard to political attitudes (left versus right) and religious inclination. For example, the overwhelming majority adopts the same religious characterization (secular, traditional, religious, or orthodox) as their parents (Maysseless, 1993b). Researchers also report moderately high correlations (circa .40) between parents' political views or gender role ideology and that of their children's (Arian, 1992; Kulik, 2000; Maysseless & Gal, 1989). Thus, the strong focus on the family unit, as well as the segregation within the educational system in regard to religiosity and other aspects, tends to strengthen the intergenerational transmission of parents' political and religious attitudes (Ichilov, 1991).

Noncompliance and low levels of tolerance, respect, and politeness. Israeli youth tend to show low espousal of respect for others and for authority figures (e.g., teachers are called by their first names) and low endorsement of universalistic values such as helping others, tolerance, and politeness. This might be related to the general values in Israeli society stressing resourcefulness rather than going by the book, low power distance, and diversity in the educational system that may not have been conducive to the cultivation of social tolerance. For example, adolescents rank the value of "helping others" the lowest among a list of 40 values (Maysseless et al., 1989). Similarly, most Israeli youth do not espouse values of tolerance. For example, they 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 that examined the correlates of leadership in the peer group. In the United States as well as in other countries, a factor that includes sociability, politeness, observing rules, and leadership emerges when peer evaluations regarding their classmates are obtained (Chen, Rubin, Li, & Li, 1999; Morison & Masten, 1991). Leadership and sociability are associated with politeness and rule compliance. However, in Israel, items referring to good manners, observing rules, and being polite did not cluster with either the sociability or the leadership factor (Krispin, Sternberg, & Lamb, 1992), underscoring that leaders or sociable peers are not expected to be polite, have good manners, or observe regulations.

Shouval, Kav-Venaki, Bronfenbrenner, Devereux, and Kiely (1975) measured children's responses to moral dilemmas by asking them to choose between conventional standards approved by adults and mildly "antisocial" actions 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.

These characteristics paint a fascinating portrait of Israeli youth. They seem to have internalized highly conformist attitudes and values in regard to their country, their national identity, and national duty (e.g., military service), as well as their parents' specific attitudes and values in regard 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 noncompliant 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 and the capacity to withstand pressures and delay gratification, are developed early,

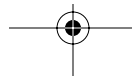
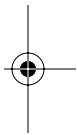


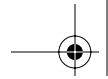


but other aspects of maturity, such as forging an identity in regard to world-view, lifestyle, and career choices, are delayed (Mayselless, 1993d). Several studies underscore the high level of psychosocial capacity of Israeli youth. In regard to the capacity to delay gratification, a majority of adolescents 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 pregnancy, is low compared with that of other Western nations (Harel et al., 1997). In a representative sample of high school students age 14 to 18, only 20% of Israeli adolescents reported ever having sexual relations compared with more than 50% in the United States. Similarly, only 2.6% of Israeli adolescent high school girls reported ever being pregnant, compared with 15.7% in the United States. Israel ranked the lowest among 25 nations in regard to cigarette smoking; 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 United States. Thus, Israeli youth seem to behave in a mature, controlled manner in regard to the risk behaviors that often characterize adolescents in other Western countries. This may be related to the communal values in Israeli society as well as to impending military service, which may 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 in the civilian sphere.

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; Mayselless, 2001a). Examination of changes in these aspects have indeed corroborated that some experiences during military service (e.g., combat service, perceived success, position of an officer) contribute to higher ego-strength above base level prior to military service (Mayselless, 1993d, 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 until after they finish their military service. When asked about their hopes and dreams for the future (future orienta-





tion), they give less consideration to career choices and academic pursuits than to military service options (Seginer, 1988, 2001; Seginer & Schlesinger, 1998). This delay seems to extend also to the following period of emerging adulthood. Responding to Marcia's (1993) Identity Status interview with young males (age 21–22) shortly after their release from the military, only 21% were identity achievers. A follow-up study with released soldiers 3 to 5 years after their discharge further showed that less than half fully explored various vocational options and felt certain that they knew what they want to do in life in terms of vocational career (Maysseless, 1993b). Despite considering "settling into a long-term career" one of the markers of adulthood (Maysseless & Scharf, in press), youth in Israel tend to postpone this maturational milestone until they are well into their late twenties. Similarly, moving from their parents' household into an independent residence and becoming financially independent are accomplishments attained by most Israeli youth only in their late twenties (Maysseless, 1993c). Together, these findings underscore the uneven path of maturation taken by Israeli youth. In regard to psychosocial maturity, they seem to develop 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.

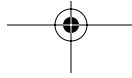


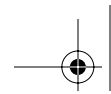
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION



Findings presented in this chapter regarding the lives and the experiences of Israeli Jewish adolescents depict young people who are conformist and conservative and attached to their parents and to their country despite realistically perceiving the dangers inherent in living in Israel in the present and in the future. At the same time, they are resourceful and non-compliant, and they try to get their way without much regard to manners, etiquette, or regulations. They further seem to have a moderately low sense of universal values. They appear to be under pressure, somewhat distressed, and depressed and anxious; yet they show a 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. They do not like their school and feel that teachers and parents expect too much of them, yet they feel quite competent at meeting these demands and feel valued by their teachers.

This state of affairs is radically different from the picture of adolescence depicted in typical developmental conceptualizations regarding this period (Arnett, 1998; Steinberg, 2002), in which adolescence and emerg-

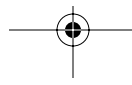




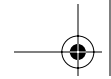
ing adulthood are seen as a time for self-exploration, critical examination of the adult world and its values, and the search for gratification and excitement. The distinct cultural milieu of Israeli society with its particular characteristics (e.g., life of hardships and imminent danger, military service) seems to have shaped the experiences of adolescents in Israel in a unique way, exposing an intricate dialectics of efficacy versus stress, closeness versus friction, and conformity along with noncompliance.

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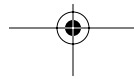
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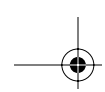


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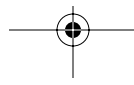
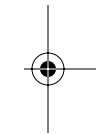


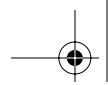
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Dialectic Contradictions in the Experiences of Israeli Jewish Adolescents 173

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