

# A Research Training Internship (RTI) Report | July 2021

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 DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

**Acknowledgments**

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We would like to thank all the RTI cohorts who paved the way and served as an inspiration for us, and we want to thank our families for driving us and supporting us through the many hours spent working on this project.

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**A**s feminist researchers, we believe that our positions in the world, such as race, class, and gender, add important context and depth to our work. We do not think it is possible to avoid all bias; we want to acknowledge that bias exists as a part of life. By acknowledging our positionality, we can help the reader situate the subjectivities and power structures that impact our research.

This year, instead of typical headshots, the interns have chosen to showcase one of their favorite pieces of clothing.



## Lauren Tapper

**(SHE/HER)** UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LABORATORY SCHOOLS, 10TH GRADE

I am a Jewish woman and feminist from Chicago, Illinois. I grew up surrounded by the Jewish community and value equality, expression, and voice. This work is important to me because it raises awareness about an aspect of expression that is not talked enough about in the Jewish community. Clothing, media, and advertising of products all connect to confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth, and they are all crucial to the development of young people. Educating younger communities on unfair marketing methods and ending the reign of oppressive marketing is an important step towards equality and improving the self-image of young people around the world.



## Naomi Altman

**(SHE/HER)** LATIN SCHOOL OF CHICAGO, 11TH GRADE

I am a Jewish woman, and I live in Chicago and have lived there my whole life. I am interested in clothing because it is a great form of self-expression and has importance in virtually every culture and religion. As someone who often dresses against traditional gender expectations, I like learning about clothing and how gender roles fit into it.



## Eliana Bernat

**(SHE/HER)** VERNON HILLS HIGH SCHOOL, 11TH GRADE

I am a Jewish teen living in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. Researching the ethics and sustainability of clothing is important to me as I am very interested in the intersections of social and environmental issues, and the fashion industry is a manifestation of how these issues overlap. Additionally, I was inspired to learn about how many of the garment workers striking for safer working conditions, shorter work-days, and higher wages in the early 1900s were young, immigrant Jewish women, and connect that to the injustices that so many female garment workers face today.



## Yasiel Ewing

(THEY/THEM) JOHN HERSEY HIGH SCHOOL, 11TH GRADE

I am a Jewish nonbinary person living in the Chicago suburbs. This research is important to me because, as a nonbinary person, clothing shapes how people see me and treat me. It's difficult to find clothes that I like or that fit me the way I want them to in stores, so I'm also learning to make my own clothes. Clothing impacts everyone, and it also shapes everyone's unique self-expression, but clothing can also be a means of oppression. I'm really glad that I got to look into clothing from a variety of angles in our research.

## Hannah Goldwin

(SHE/HER) WALTER COLLEGE PREP, 11TH GRADE

I am a Jewish woman born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. This research is important to me because, throughout my childhood, the clothes I liked to wear did not fit the norm for my friends or classmates. A football jersey was not perceived the same way a Justice crop top was. Clothing is the way we express what we value, believe in, prioritize, and see ourselves. I have adored exploring the intersectionality between clothing, our culture, the environment, and society as an entity.



## DALIA HELLER

(SHE/HER) ADLAI E. STEVENSON HIGH SCHOOL, 11TH GRADE

I am a Jewish woman from Buffalo Grove, IL. This research is important to me because I feel that clothing and the issues surrounding it are often taken for granted or overlooked and deserve more attention than they receive. Having the opportunity to delve into a topic that is rarely touched on has been incredibly meaningful and eye-opening. I was also inspired by the legacy of Jewish immigrant women who participated in the labor movement of the early 20th century by protesting injustices in garment factories, particularly when it came to researching the ethics of the fashion industry.

# Tova Kaplan

(SHE/HER) WHITNEY M. YOUNG MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL, 11TH GRADE

I am a young, proud Jewish woman and a fifth-generation Chicagoan. I am thrilled to be able to collaborate with so many other passionate Jewish teenagers on this research. Studying clothing is crucial because it is how we present ourselves to the world and an integral part of who we are (clothing literally touches us all day). While we might not consciously think about it, our clothing choices are influenced by our unique identity and place in society, and it is important to dig deep into that relationship.



# Yanira Kaplan

(SHE/HER) BEACON ACADEMY, 11TH GRADE

I am a Jewish woman from Chicago, Illinois. This topic is important to me because I believe it is essential that we gain a deeper understanding of how something that we interact with on a daily basis and may not put much thought into, such as clothing, can have significant impacts on our world. It is important to acknowledge that fashion is a social issue, whether we are looking at the ways that our hyper-sexualization of clothing perpetuates rape culture, the effects of unrealistic clothing advertisements on mental health, or the exploitation of overworked and underpaid workers. It is also important to recognize that clothing is an important form of self-expression, and it allows us to show off our individuality and go against the norm. I am grateful that I got this opportunity to explore its impacts on our society and to better understand my relationship with clothing.

# Sofia More

(SHE/HER) JONES COLLEGE PREP, 11TH GRADE

I am a Jewish woman from the city of Chicago. It was eye-opening and extremely wonderful to be able to collaborate with so many of my Jewish peers on this program. As someone who has been studying abroad in Israel for the past two months, I have seen first hand how much clothing affects people's Jewish identities. Being able to explore that in my hometown has been deeply impactful and interesting. The idea of how social media and advertising affects such a seemingly simple part of your day, getting dressed, has really made me rethink how I express myself and how I want others to be able to view themselves and their bodies. This program has also pushed me to want to dress outside my comfort zone and seek more traditionally Jewish ways of dressing and presentation.



## Ania Sacks

(SHE/HER) OAK PARK AND RIVER FOREST, 11TH GRADE

I am a Jewish woman from Oak Park, Illinois. This research is important to me because I think it's incredibly important to learn about other people's experiences. Everyone has their own relationship with clothing and hearing others speak about body image, mental health, and social media's effects on their clothing choices has been really impactful. Through this project, hopefully, more Jewish teens will realize that they are not alone and that there is work to be done to make the clothing industry more inclusive and less harmful for all. Clothing is something we are surrounded and impacted by daily, and it has been very beneficial to explore, in-depth, what clothing means to other members of this community and me.



## Zoe Haith

(SHE/HER) UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MADISON, 12TH GRADE

I am a mixed-race Jewish woman who grew up in Wauconda IL, a suburb of Chicago. As a mixed-race woman, this program of RTI really allowed me to take a look and see if I was being represented. I got to research the impacts of social media and advertising on young women's clothing choices and a lot of what I researched related to me. I realized that my race and body type are really not represented which causes me to feel I can't wear what I want. Being able to participate in the program allowed me to accept myself for who I am more than I did before.



## Sofia Thompson

(THEY/SHE) GLENBROOK NORTH HIGH SCHOOL, 12TH GRADE

I am a non-binary Black Jewish woman who grew up in Chicago but is currently living in the suburbs. As a Black woman, I see non-black people appropriate my culture on a daily basis. Clothing, in particular, is important to me because so many non-black people appropriate Black clothing and accessories, whether it's bamboo hoops or the Y2K aesthetic. Being able to explore the topic of cultural appropriation and gentrification of clothing through interviews with my Black friends was an incredibly valuable experience.

# INTRODUCTION

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This year's Research Training Internship was unlike any other. Each of us found ourselves adjusting to what it meant to live and work amid a global pandemic. We set out, as always, to do the important work of learning about social justice issues with a feminist research lens, not knowing exactly what to make of the world around us. Our cohort of twelve interns committed to this program even as everything around them constantly changed, and it was because of, and not despite, those changes that we were able to build a community of safety and care that allowed RTI Cohort 7 to create the research before you.

At the beginning of the year, we were lucky enough to meet in person a few times, socially-distanced and with masks on, of course. It wasn't quite the same, but we adapted the best way we could. Being able to spend even a short amount of time together helped immensely when it came time for us to be together on zoom. As the months grew colder and the teens' lives got busier, we began to entirely virtually. With an ethic of care in mind, our zoom meetings included plenty of breaks, turning cameras off, and getting snacks. All 12 of our interns deserved grace as they grappled with powerful topics and a strange world, and they all advocated for their needs during these continued strange and unsettling times.

In the world outside RTI, 2020 brought a tumultuous presidential election. Interns came together after candidate debates to work through feelings they had, particularly thinking about various media outlets' portrayals of female and minority candidates. It was through the relentlessness of a presidential election and a pandemic that our interns entered their research. Given that we explored issues such as sexism, racism, ableism, antisemitism, and ageism, our interns wanted to apply new frameworks to several topics and apply an intersectional approach to examining the world around them.

Ultimately, Cohort 7 chose to research clothing and its impact on Jewish teen life. Clothing provided a lens through which the teens were able to research modesty in the Jewish community, fast fashion as an issue of human rights, racism and the gentrification of clothing, hyper-sexualization, body image, and the accessibility of clothing as a tool of self-expression. The creativity and depth of this year's research speaks directly to the dedication of Cohort 7. Despite a tumultuous world, each intern took their commitment to exploring clothing and its effects on Jewish teens incredibly seriously. Our year together has ended without the typical in-person relationships, but Cohort 7 created a beautiful community for themselves and critical and timely scholarly work. We know you will be in awe of their work, which is sure to make a difference in the multitude of communities they represent.

# How Gen Z Jews View Jewish Modesty Standards

BY **TOVA KAPLAN**

Jewish modesty standards are thousands of years old and very complex. They cover everything from skirt length to kippahs to wigs and more. I wanted to know whether these ancient rules still held any meaning for young people today. With the rise of feminism, people of all genders have more freedom than ever on how to dress. Many societal expectations have been erased as people (particularly women) have sought the right to wear what they want. Against this backdrop, I wondered what value, if any, teenagers today might still find in adhering to Jewish modesty standards that often seem at odds with the zeitgeist. I interviewed four teens on their evolving views of Jewish modesty standards. While each person's personal views on modesty standards differed, I found that all of the people I interviewed expressed a desire to let people dress "how they want to" without judgment, whether that means dressing modestly or not. This seems to echo our generation's wider values of inclusivity, diversity, and individuality. These conversations inspired me, and I hope it leaves readers with optimism for a future of free expression.

**COREY R. (HE/HIM)**

**What, if any, Jewish modesty standards were you raised with?**

So, I grew up attending Jewish day school and going to a Jewish sleepaway

camp (I still go). And, it's kind of hard because my mom grew up in a more Orthodox environment, and my dad grew up very Reform, so in a sense, they met in the middle, and we ended up as Conservative Jews. At my school, a lot of things we did were more Reform. So, I never had to wear a kippah growing up. If I wanted to, obviously I could, but that wasn't necessarily something that was a custom within my family.

But, of course, I remember when it was my Bar Mitzvah, and I was inviting some of my soccer friends and some of my friends who weren't Jewish and explaining to them that when you come to my bar mitzvah, you have to act a certain way, you have to dress a certain way. Like for girls, make sure you wear clothing above the shoulders and a skirt below your knees, and for guys, making sure to wear the kippah. In my middle school, during lunch, we always had to wear a kippah during meals which was interesting. Reflecting on it, it always kind of confused me a little bit. But overall, I never had to wear a tallis or kippah or anything. Except, my mom's family still attends a more Orthodox synagogue, so whenever we visit for the High Holidays, I'm always wearing a kippah in my Bubbe's house and dressing more formally. But I think a lot of people have that idea, that during the High Holidays it's supposed to be a time of difference and turning over a new leaf. So, for me, that includes starting off dressed more modestly.

**How have your perceptions of Jewish modesty standards changed over time? What modesty standards do still keep?**

I remember very distinctly the first instance of recognizing there was a difference [in Jewish modesty standards]. My librarian in elementary school wore a wig (because she's a married Jew), and I saw her adjusting it, and I was so confused. I went to my mom and questioned it, and she explained to me that "when you're an Orthodox Jew and a married woman, you cover your hair to show modesty and respect for your husband."

And that's the first instance I remember questioning and feeling curious about that. I remember going to Florida for vacation and seeing Orthodox girls in skirts and boys in their black hats. As for where I am now when it comes

to dressing like that, I understand it and respect it, but I don't think that that makes them more Jewish than me. Personally, I think that Judaism and religion are what you make of it. I do think that to be considered Jewish that you do have to do Jewish things. There are people who are culturally Jewish; but to be truly religiously Jewish, I think you at least have to attend a service now and again or just do something Jewish.

But I don't think you need to adhere to Jewish modesty standards all the time to be Jewish. Obviously, when you're in shul, I understand that 1000%, but in your everyday life, I don't think it's necessary. Like for me, I don't feel the need to constantly wear a kippah as a reminder that G-d is above me because I know it. So as of where I am in my Jewish journey through life, I understand and respect the modesty standards of other people, but for me, it doesn't make me feel any more or less of a Jew when I do it.

**How do you think Jewish modesty standards affect the genders differently?**

Even the simple idea of wearing a wig, the idea that a woman's true beauty is reserved solely for her husband, that's definitely something that feels out of place in the 21st century. But you have to take it with a grain of salt that these are standards that have been practiced for thousands of years. That's kind of something that's difficult for people to understand, and sometimes it's hard for me to understand.

I watched Unorthodox (and my whole family read the book), and it's so easy as a third party, even as a Jewish person, to look in on this and be critical of it. But, even though it's difficult for me to understand it because I've never lived through it, I respect it, and I understand that they believe that this is their obligation. Although it seems quite sexist to me, like the rules for girls are much more restrictive, at least in my opinion. Even just the way that they act.

I feel like clothing, in a way, is a symbol of the way that people are supposed to act. Like boys can wear slacks and a white shirt, and they're done. But for girls, it's the tights and the shoes and the dress and the shawl, and I think



religious modesty standards, whether it's Jewish, Muslim, or anything else. Since women are so over-sexualized and sexualizing yourself is seen as free-thinking or rebellious, many people can't understand why people would choose to dress modestly, so they assume that those standards are forced on people. I kind of fell into that camp early on.

But then I started spending more time in Orthodox circles, and I saw that so many of my assumptions were wrong. I saw that so many people find genuine value and beauty in those restrictions. Actually, they don't even view modesty standards as restrictions at all; they view them as a way to connect with G-d or be reminded of their Jewishness in everyday life or to stand out. And I think that's cool. So, I think my assumptions have changed a lot.

I went through a phase in middle school where I tried to be super religious. I'd wear skirts and long-sleeved shirts to school every day and put so much pressure on myself to meet those standards. When I couldn't fully meet them, I'd feel so ashamed, like I was disappointing G-d. But over time, I've developed a much more healthy relationship with that. Now I know that I don't need to follow every rule to be a good Jew, and I can do certain things to empower myself, but I don't have to be so strict on myself.

As of now, I don't consciously keep any modesty standards, but I usually dress modestly just because of my personal style. Like, I love wearing flowy skirts and dresses and long-sleeved shirts. But not because of Judaism; that's just what I feel comfortable with. When I show my body off, like wearing a revealing swimsuit or wearing other revealing clothing, I tend to feel really self-conscious, like I'm constantly thinking about how I look to other people, and that distracts me from whatever I'm doing. So like, if I wear a dress or something, I can just ignore my body and focus on what I'm doing. I do really love fashion, though; it's not like I'm trying to hide myself. I love wearing bright colors and stylish clothes, but I just like the style of modest clothes personally. I don't judge anyone for wearing revealing clothing. If it makes them happy, that's great! People look super cute in revealing clothing. It's just

not for me personally.

### **How do you think Jewish modesty standards affect the genders differently?**

I do think that they affect women more because women are seen as being more inherently tempting. If you actually look at the Torah, the modesty standards for women and men should be equally important (like men have to do a ton like wear kippahs, tzit tzit, cover up, etc.). But in practice, people definitely seem to care more about how women look and enforce things more when it comes to women because our appearance is seen as more important to who we are. I do wish that the emphasis on Jewish modesty was more about empowering women and less about "covering up" for the benefit of men because that doesn't make sense to me. Like, men are still going to harass and sexualize women no matter what we wear, so it makes more sense to regulate how men act, not how women dress.

### **Any other thoughts?**

Well, I just wish that everyone could just appreciate each other for who we are and let people live how they want to. Secular people shouldn't judge people who dress modestly and assume they're oppressed. And people who dress modestly shouldn't look down on people who dress more revealing and think that they're less Jewish or less holy than they are. And no one should ever force others to dress a certain way. Like, in Iran, where women are forced to dress modestly, or in France, where they banned hijabs. Neither makes sense. Just let people live how they want to.

## **ALI S. (SHE/HER)**

### **What, if any, Jewish modesty standards were you raised with?**

I wasn't raised with any modesty standards that were specifically religion-related. My parents were not super huge on crop tops and stuff like that. They still aren't. My sister and I try to push back on that as much as we can. But it was never really a Jewish thing; it was more of a societal thing.

### **How have your perceptions of Jewish modesty standards changed over time? What modesty standards do still keep?**

So when I was younger, I went to a

Jewish school for ten years, and I'll say that a lot having that environment every single day for ten years made me less enthusiastic about engaging as much because I was doing it every day. So when I was little, I was like, "why would you cover your hair? Why would you cover your legs? It doesn't matter. No one cares, you know?"

But when I got to high school, I became much more connected with Judaism because I didn't have it shoved at me every single day. Like, I didn't start fasting until high school, et cetera. And it was when I got to high school that I took a step back and realized that some people do that to feel closer to G-d, closer to their religion, and I respect whatever choice anyone makes about their religion. I just personally don't feel the need to dress modestly to feel closer to Judaism.

Like I said, Jewish modesty standards for me were more of like a societal thing, like "you can't wear that," or "you're naked," or "you're not covered up," etc., and that feels restrictive and gets on my nerves. But, one of my best friends is Muslim, and she doesn't wear a hijab, but she dresses modestly because it's her religious choice. Good for her! I respect it.

### **How do you think Jewish modesty standards affect the genders differently?**

I've noticed that they affect women more than men. I guess it depends on how religious the family is, because often in families where you see women wearing an ankle-length skirt and tichel, you also see the men in full suits, with tzit tzit and a hat and all that jazz. So I guess it affects the genders a little bit differently. In society in general, there is a lot more pressure for women to be modest, but in Judaism, I'm not sure.

### **Any other thoughts?**

Societally, I wish we could just get it through our heads that women have shoulders and bellybuttons and stuff. Like, men can't tell women to put a shirt on while they're walking around in a sports bra if men get to walk around shirtless.

# Ethical and Sustainable Clothing in the Chicago Jewish Community

BY **ELIANA BERNAT & DALIA HELLER**

## What's Wrong with the Fashion Industry? Through the life of a piece of clothing

### FABRIC

Before our clothing goes to a factory or reaches our hands, it starts as a plant or plastic. As it is turned into fabric, it is dyed using harmful chemicals that not only damage water and soil but also take enormous resources. Despite 1.1 billion people worldwide lacking access to water (World Wildlife Foundation), the fashion industry uses 79 billion cubic meters of water a year (Pulse of the Fashion Industry 2017 report).



Inside a fabric dye factory in Hangzhou, China. Image Credit: Feature China/Barcroft Media/Getty Images via CNN

### FACTORY

To say that factory conditions where clothing is manufactured, which is often in Asia, are less than ideal is an

understatement. 40 million people are employed as garment workers, and the vast majority of them work long days in unsafe working conditions with little pay (The True Cost documentary). These conditions are so unsafe that 1.4 million injuries happen in garment factories each year (Common Objective), not to mention the health issues caused by breathing in noxious fumes inside the factory. In addition, although the vast majority of garment workers are women, most of the managers and bosses are men, resulting in significant gender-based violence, including sexual violence, physical violence, assault, overwork, retaliation, and verbal abuse (Global Labor Justice).



A garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Image Credit: Labour Behind the Label

As activist Hoda Kotebi writes, "These experiences sit at the intersections of particularities of class, gender, and race: the abuse female garment workers face is no isolated accident. Garment factories exist in nations of color due to the legacies of colonialism and are systematically dependent on exploitation and gender-based abuse to function within the fast-fashion model of production."

Furthermore, the harm garment workers face extends beyond the walls of the factory. Waste and chemical dyes from garment factories pollute local air and water, rendering traditional water sources undrinkable and the air unsafe to breathe. For the surrounding villages and population, this causes numerous health issues.



Pollution from chemical dyes can even turn rivers unnatural colors, such as red (seen here in China's Jian River) and black (in Dhaka, Bangladesh). Image Credit for left photo: STR/AFP/Getty Images via CNN. Image Credit for below photo: Rakib Hasan/CNN

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Once the garment workers finish constructing the clothing, it gets shipped to Global North countries, often along the same trade routes used during the colonial era (Sourcemap).

### STORE

Some of the fast fashion brands that receive this clothing to sell at their stores include H&M, Zara, Walmart, GAP/Banana Republic, American Eagle Outfitters, and Forever 21. These corporations release new products nearly every week, creating 52 "micro seasons" instead of the common-sense four. This massive volume of clothing is unsustainable in and of itself, regardless of whether the companies release "conscious" or "sustainable" collections to sway public opinion and convince people that they care about the environment. In reality, the vast majority of these companies' clothes are still made in sweatshops using unsustainable material at an unsustainable volume for the purpose of achieving the highest possible profit. The deception these companies use to further their own gain has been coined "greenwashing." See our guide on page 12 titled "10 Steps to Ditch Fast Fashion" (specifically, the Buy Better section) for tips on how to avoid this trap and ensure the clothing you buy is actually ethical and sustainable.

### CONSUMER

As consumers, we often buy our clothes from stores or suppliers without considering or being aware of any of the aforementioned issues. In our survey of 62 Chicago Jewish community members, 66.4% of respondents were at a 1 or 2 (out of 5) when asked how often they consider the environmental impacts of their clothing, and 42% were

in the same range when asked about the social impacts\*. And because we buy much more clothing than we actually need, much of that clothing sits in our closets unworn. Since much of our clothing is made from polyester (plastic-based synthetic fabric), microplastics are released into the water supply during washing when we do wear it. Finally, after we are done with the clothing, likely long before the lifespan of the piece is exhausted, the resources used to make the clothing and the clothing itself go to waste.

*\*These numbers may not be representative of the entire Chicago Jewish community, as the majority of our respondents were White females from the North/Northwest suburbs who identify as Reform Jews.*

## WASTE

Because of the sheer volume of clothing we are producing and consuming, clothing waste accounts for a shocking amount of total municipal waste— after which it gets sent to a landfill, and it takes hundreds of years to degrade. You might be thinking, "But I donate my clothes!" Unfortunately, even donating our clothes is not the perfect solution one might initially think. 40% of the clothing donated in the U.S. — over a billion pounds of used clothing every year— is exported overseas, often to East African countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda (Council for Textile Recycling, NPR). The influx of our donated clothing has damaged their local textile markets.



Piles of second-hand clothes, likely part of the U.S.'s billion pounds of donated clothes we send overseas every year, sit at a market in Nairobi, Kenya. *Image Credit: Noor Khamis / Reuters via Huffpost*

The problems with fast fashion are overwhelming and seemingly endless. Fortunately, there are many steps that we can take in our own lives and as a community to reverse the trends of pollution and exploitation in the industry.

# Fast Facts About Fast Fashion

- The fashion industry produces 10% of global greenhouse carbon emissions, which is more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined
- 150 billion pieces of clothing are produced each year. 3/4 of those end up in landfills, where they take up to 200 years to decompose
- 2,700 liters of water are needed to produce the cotton used in one t-shirt
- 1 garbage truck of textiles is sent to a landfill or burned every second
- 98% of workers earn less than the American minimum wage, but the top 15 richest people in fashion have a combined net worth of \$442 billion
- The industry workday standard for garment workers is 10-18 hours per day
- Of the 40 million garment workers worldwide, it's estimated 80-95% are women

# 10 Steps to Ditch Fast Fashion

## BREAKING DOWN BUZZWORDS

**"Ethical clothing"** refers to having a positive social impact, such as safe working conditions in the place it was made and properly compensating the people who made it.

**"Sustainable clothing"** refers to being made and used in ways that preserve the planet, such as few resources wasted to make it and the item being able to biodegrade.

## MEET THE EXPERTS WHO INSPIRED THIS LIST

**Miranda Thompson** is a Master's of Social Work candidate at the University of Chicago and was previously the Lead Designer at Mata Traders, a fair trade fashion outlet that supports female garment workers in India and Nepal. She believes that when it comes to making a difference in the fashion industry, "it's little things that add up. Once one person educates themselves and others about the implications of fast fashion, it becomes a lot bigger than just them."

**Theresa VanderMeer** is the founder and CEO of the ethical sourcing and cut + sew business WORK+SHELTER, which is headquartered here in Chicago but has its production centers in Delhi, India. On how people can start being more ethical and sustainable with their clothing, Theresa advises individuals and organizations to "start with ensuring that every single thing you purchase has one qualifier." Whether that is it needs to be recycled, be bought from a women-owned business, made locally, fair trade certified, or something else, starting small will help you progress over time. See Step #8 of the 10 Steps to Ditch Fast Fashion for other certifications to look out for.

## 1. Buy less

As we mentioned in our article, "What's Wrong with the Fashion Industry?", the frequency with which we (consumers) buy clothes is one of the main determinants of the environmental and social impacts of our clothing. The Chicago Jewish community is certainly not exempt from perpetuating the overconsumption of clothing, as over a fifth of our survey respondents reported buying new clothes every month, and over half reported they buy new clothes 4-6 times per year. That means one of the biggest ways you can become more ethical and sustainable with your clothing consumption is simply being more intentional with how much clothing you buy.

Additionally, 92% of individual survey respondents listed cost as a factor they consider when buying clothes, and the majority cited high costs as a barrier to purchasing ethical and sustainable clothes. If it works within your personal budget, simply shopping less frequently and instead investing periodically in ethical and sustainable clothing is a great way to make your shopping habits better for people and the planet while keeping costs manageable. Theresa believes that even though ethical fashion tends to be pricier than fast fashion, consumers with the privilege to do so have "to be willing to pay more" in order for progress to be made.

## 2. Support female garment workers

Women working in garment manufacturing are on the frontlines of the fight against fast fashion, so it is crucial that our advocating to change the fashion industry centers their voices and resistance. One example of female garment workers resisting is in Myanmar, where women used their experience from years of labor organizing to lead work stoppages, walkouts, and marches against the government's coup. In Japan, Bangladesh, Nicaragua, and Korea, women who are denied leadership opportunities have created their own women-only unions. A great organization that gives support to these women is Fashion Revolution!



Garment workers protesting to "resist sexual harassment" and ensure their rights are protected near Dhaka, Bangladesh. Image Credit: Taslima Akhter



Garment workers in Myanmar led a nationwide general strike against the military coup. Image Credit: Jacobinmag

### 3. Thrift or buy second-hand

Another way we can make our clothing consumption more sustainable (after buying less) is by buying the clothes that we do need second-hand or thrift instead of new. Along with local thrift or second-hand stores, there are also several apps that allow users to sell and buy second-hand clothes, such as ThredUp, Poshmark, and Depop.

### 4. Wear clothes longer

Fast fashion companies want you to buy from them as often as possible, leading to dramatic overproduction of clothing. As consumers, we can help combat this trend by wearing clothing longer and repairing it (by simply hand sewing holes or rips) until it is absolutely unwearable. Another option is to upcycle old clothing into new items, such as embroidering an old shirt, making pants into shorts, or a dress into a crop top.

### 5. DIY

A great (and fun) way to ensure that your clothing is ethical and sustainable is to make it yourself! Check out moodfabrics.com for patterns and instructions for sewing your own clothing, as well as how to pick eco-friendly fabrics.

### 6. Hold corporations accountable

The fast fashion corporations that are causing this crisis won't know we care about what they're doing unless we tell them. An impactful direct action you can take is to email brands you like and ask them about their sustainability and/or ethics. Find their email at [bit.ly/3f8kOSJ](https://bit.ly/3f8kOSJ) in a list compiled by Fashion Revolution! Another way to hold corporations accountable is to leave a product review mentioning their ethics/sustainability.

Another great resource to gauge the ethics and sustainability of fashion corporations is the website <https://payupfashion.com/tracking-brands/>, which shows if 40 major fashion brands have met PayUp's 7 Actions to advance garment worker rights.

### 7. Smarter laundry habits

Washing garments on cold and hang drying them instead of using the CO<sub>2</sub>-producing dryer is much better for the environment and is more affordable, too!

### 8. Buy better

Many fast fashion companies engage in the process of "greenwashing" or making it look like they are more ethical and sustainable than they actually are in order to woo good-intentioned customers. As Miranda explained, "Unless the brand has laid out transparent rules for what they're doing that is sustainable and ethical, then it is probably being greenwashed." Below is a list of some good certifications to look out for on a company's website that can help you determine how dedicated they really are to being ethical and sustainable and avoid the trap of greenwashing.

## 9. Tips for organizations & synagogue

Organizations also have a part to play in being more ethical and sustainable with the clothing they provide. Along with implementing the above applicable tips (such as buying less), sourcing clothing from local vendors makes it easier to find out where the clothing you order is coming from and how it's made. Plus, it helps support the local economy. Organizations can also check out ethical and sustainable clothing suppliers such as Royal Apparel, BlankClothing, and AlwaysTrendin.

## 10. Talk and learn about fast fashion

One of the best ways to further combat the issues in the fast fashion industry is to educate yourself and others. Miranda says that "the more people that do their research, the more people that can hold brands accountable and demand more transparency." Below are some resources to help you start the conversation:

- Watch documentaries like "The True Cost" or Hasan Minhaj's "The Ugly Truth of Fast Fashion"
- Follow ethical and sustainable fashion advocates on social media like Aja Barber, Manpreet Kalra, and Aditi Mayer
- Follow and support organizations working on these issues like Intersectional Environmentalist, Global Labor Justice, Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Fashion Revolution, and Blue Tin Production, and Chicago Fair Trade (both based in Chicago!)
- Read Fashion Revolution's Get Involved Pack 2021: Citizens and Why we still need a fashion revolution



### GLOBAL ORGANIC TEXTILE STANDARD (GOTS)

GOTS is a leading certification in the textile industry meant to regulate the production process of textiles used to make clothing, from the harvest of the plant material used to make the fabric all the way through dyeing and labeling.



### WORLD FAIR TRADE ORGANIZATION (WFTO)

WFTO members follow the ten principles laid out by the organization, including having transparency and accountability, respecting the environment, and providing good working conditions.

Besides these certifications, Miranda says that "one good way of knowing whether a brand is actually doing the work or not is by looking at the language [on their website] and seeing how specific they are." The more specific, the more likely it is that they are actually ethical and sustainable.

Here are a few ethical and sustainable clothing businesses for individuals to check out:

- WearPact
- Know the Origin
- Groceries Apparel
- Girlfriend Collective
- Tentree
- Threads 4 Thought
- And any local businesses

And remember: the most sustainable clothing is what you already own!



### FAIRTRADE INTERNATIONAL

Fairtrade International ensures that farmers and workers producing raw materials and manufacturing garments receive fair compensation and that they do not get left behind in the global fashion industry.



### PETA

PETA is an organization devoted to protecting animals' rights. PETA-certified garments are made from environmentally-friendly fibers and are also vegan-friendly.

## KEEP IN MIND: THE ETHICAL/SUSTAINABLE FASHION INDUSTRY ISN'T PERFECT

While ethical and sustainable clothing businesses have made strides in ensuring workers are treated fairly and that the planet is not exploited, the industry still has its issues. For example, many brands lack options for plus-size people. Another important thing to consider is that blaming low-income people for buying from fast fashion companies is NOT the solution: the overarching problem here is overconsumption, which is primarily coming from high- and middle-income people in Western countries.

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As Theresa mentioned, "When you're learning about this stuff, you can feel really overwhelmed. Start with one thing, let it add over time, and everything gets better and better. It's about progress, not perfection. Little by little, things can change."

# The Colonization of Clothing

BY **SOPIA THOMPSON**



is non-black people wearing protective hairstyles meant for Black people, it also exists within the fashion world. I call this phenomenon the gentrification of clothing. The

term “gentrification of clothing” is more accurate because clothing that has dominated the Black community is now being colonized by non-black people. Not only are non-black people colonizing clothing, but they are pretending as if they are the ones who invented the aesthetic. Thus, Black people are being pushed out of fashion trends they created.

In the past year, I’ve noticed an enormous amount of clothing gentrification and cultural appropriation occurring on the clock app, otherwise known as Tiktok. Unfortunately, this was not surprising, as Tiktok is a cesspool of non-black people in Black business. Too often, I see non-black people making racist comments about Candace Owens and justifying it by saying it’s okay because she’s a conservative. Too often, I see non-black people offering their hot takes on anti-Blackness. The colonization of Black culture and clothing started with videos of non-black people laying their edges



with Ecogel on my “for you page” and somehow snowballed into non-black people showing off their massive Jordan collections. I wish I could say that this was the worst of the content I’ve seen, but I would be far from correct. One of the most popular clothing styles right now is Y2K, which is essentially clothing from the 2000s. Low-rise jeans, mini skirts, crop tops, and tank tops are all part of the Y2K aesthetic. Black women were the ones to popularize many of these styles 20 years ago, but if you were to go on Tiktok right now, the only people being praised as Y2K icons are white women like Paris Hilton

or Megan Fox. Non-black people can wear a mini skirt and a corset with platform heels on Tiktok and wake up to thousands of likes, but the same cannot be said for Black women, the pioneers of the aesthetic.

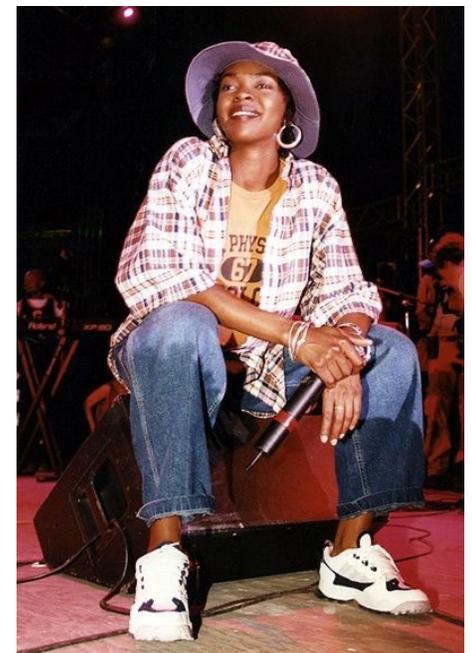
Another clothing aesthetic that’s become very popular on Tiktok is “cyberghetto.” Given the history behind the word “ghetto” and its derogatory usage against Black people, ghetto coming out of any non-black mouth feels like a slur. So, you can imagine my surprise when I opened up Tiktok one day to see non-black people in cyberghetto clothing all over my for you page.

The amount of cultural appropriation I see on Tiktok infuriates me, and I know I’m not the only one who feels this way. I interviewed a few of my Black friends, and their responses were extremely similar. The first person I interviewed is a seventeen-year-old nonbinary Black woman who identifies as Muslim and Jewish. When I asked them what cultural appropriation they had seen recently, they told me they had seen an Asian family creating their own streetwear brand, as well as non-black people in the Y2K aesthetic. The other person I interviewed is a nineteen-year-old genderfluid person who identifies as an atheist. They told me that the most recent examples of cultural appropriation they had seen were the reselling of Air Force 1s and Jordan 1s, as well as ThriftCon. Both of

Over the years, we’ve seen a TON of cultural appropriation in the media, whether it be Kim Kardashian wearing yet another protective style or Adele sporting bantu knots while wearing a Jamaican flag bikini. So, what exactly is cultural appropriation? Cultural appropriation is the colonization of an oppressed people’s customs, hairstyles, clothing, ideas, languages, or practices. Cultural appropriation is not and should not be limited to the colonization of protective styles. Protective styles include braids, cornrows, twists, and faux locs. Cultural appropriation can look like non-black people using AAVE, as seen in the “Gen Z Hospital” SNL skit

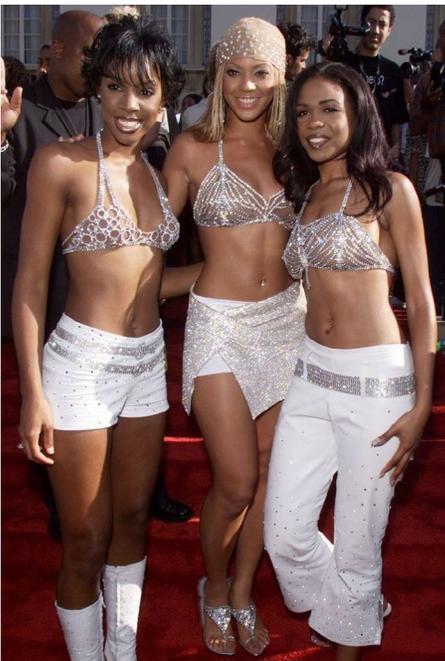


on May 8, 2021. It can also look like non-black people wearing bamboo hoops and durags. Although the most well-known form of cultural appropriation



the interviewees expressed extreme anger and frustration with these clothing gentrifiers. For decades, we have been told that our clothing was “ghetto.” Now, all of a sudden, non-black people are able to wear these pieces and are praised for it. Not only are they praised for wearing aesthetics that Black people popularized, but they never give credit to the Black people that started the trend years ago. Additionally, both of the people I interviewed said that they saw the most gentrification occur on Tiktok.

When I interviewed a non-black person, I received a different response. The person I interviewed is an eighteen-year-old nonbinary Jewish person. Although they knew that the cyberghetto aesthetic was problematic, they didn’t see an issue with non-black people reselling sneakers until I explained it to them. They also did not have the same emotional reaction that both my Black friends and I had when talking about how cultural gentrification made us feel. I think this is a perfect example of why non-black people need to listen to Black people. Non-black people will never truly understand why we say that they can’t do certain things or wear certain clothing simply because they’re not Black. However, if they listen to Black people explain why things are harmful, then maybe they’ll get a better understanding of the issue and work on making sure that they don’t perpetuate it.



# Access to Clothing for Self Expression

BY YASIEL EWING & NAOMI ALTMAN

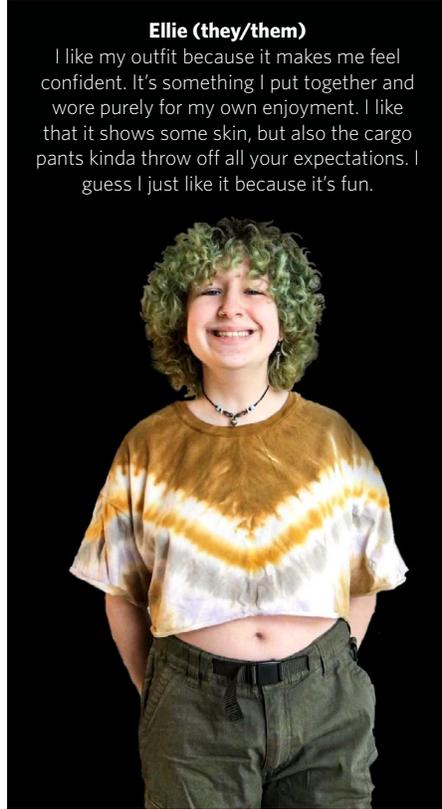
We decided to study Jewish teen access to clothing for self-expression because it is a topic that interested us. As Jewish teens, we use clothing to express ourselves, and we were interested in seeing how other Chicagoland area teens felt about their clothes. We decided to use a survey-based research method and received responses from 47 Jewish teens. We then decided to reach out to people who left responses that we felt would warrant more information and asked them to share a photo of their favorite outfit or the outfit that they feel best expresses themselves. We hope that you like our research!

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Respondents to our survey ranged from responding that it was very easy to find clothes that allowed them to express themselves (23.4%) to that it was fairly difficult (21.3%), with the majority saying that it was neither easy nor hard to find clothes that allowed them to express themselves.

**Ellie (they/them)**

I like my outfit because it makes me feel confident. It's something I put together and wore purely for my own enjoyment. I like that it shows some skin, but also the cargo pants kinda throw off all your expectations. I guess I just like it because it's fun.



59.6% of respondents said that their clothes often allow them to express themselves, but only 10.6% said that their clothes always allowed them to express themselves.

There are a variety of barriers that prevented people from accessing clothes that allowed them to express themselves. Cost, reliance on a caregiver, ability to find the clothes, comfort buying the clothes, and comfort wearing clothes that allowed respondents to express themselves were all factors that we asked about.

None of the respondents were completely financially independent, and 87.2% of respondents relied on their caregiver to pay for at least 50% of their clothes.

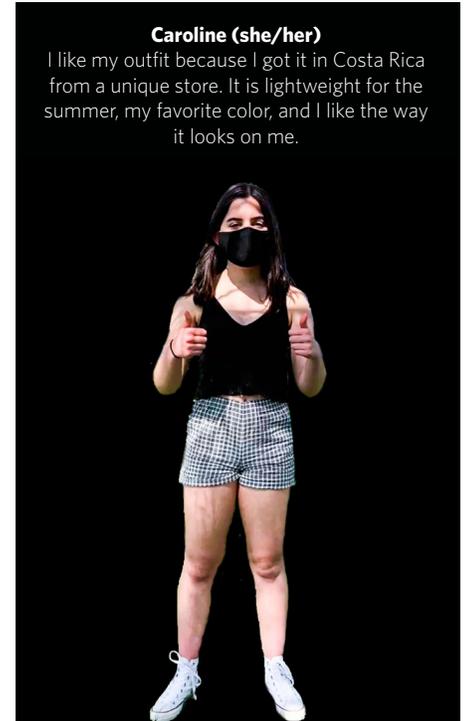
One respondent cited peer pressure as a reason why they don't always buy

clothes that they feel accurately expresses who they are, responding, "I feel like sometimes I buy clothes that don't necessarily allow me to fully express myself because I see the clothes fit in with what is popular for teen girls to wear." If the clothes that accurately represent a Jewish teen aren't the type of clothes that are "in style," peer pressure can play a role in teens not buying or wearing clothes that allowed them to express themselves. In fact, 55.3% of respondents said that they were less than very comfortable wearing clothes that allowed them to express themselves.

21.3% of respondents said that it was somewhat difficult to find clothes that allow them to express themselves accurately. One potential reason is that "it's hard to find clothing for plus size [women]. It's either expensive or at a store 20 miles away from where you currently shop." Both cost and availability are barriers for plus-sized Jewish teens trying to find clothing that accurately reflects who they are.

**Caroline (she/her)**

I like my outfit because I got it in Costa Rica from a unique store. It is lightweight for the summer, my favorite color, and I like the way it looks on me.



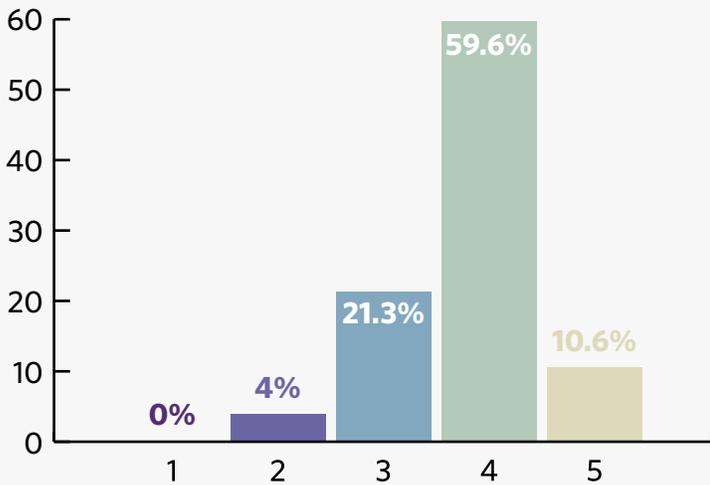
**Ali (she/her)**

I like my outfit because I feel confident when I'm in it. I also really like stripes.

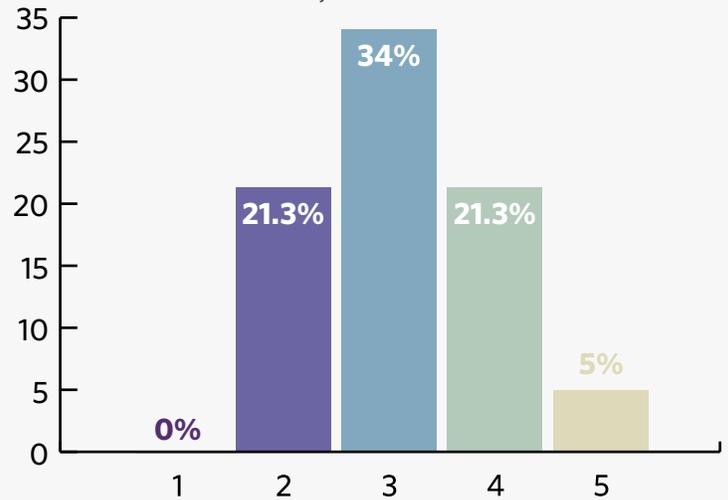


Below are some graphs of the responses we got to our survey. We had participants assign a numerical value to demonstrate the level that they agreed or disagreed with the statement. 1 is the least, and 5 is the most.

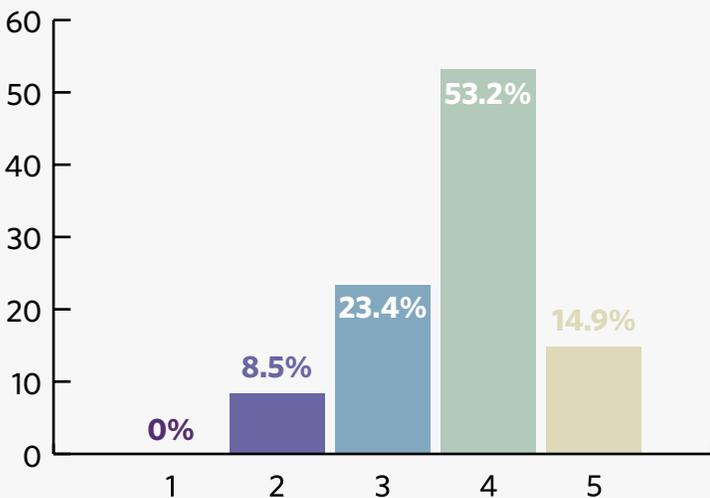
How much do the clothes you own reflect how you want to express yourself?



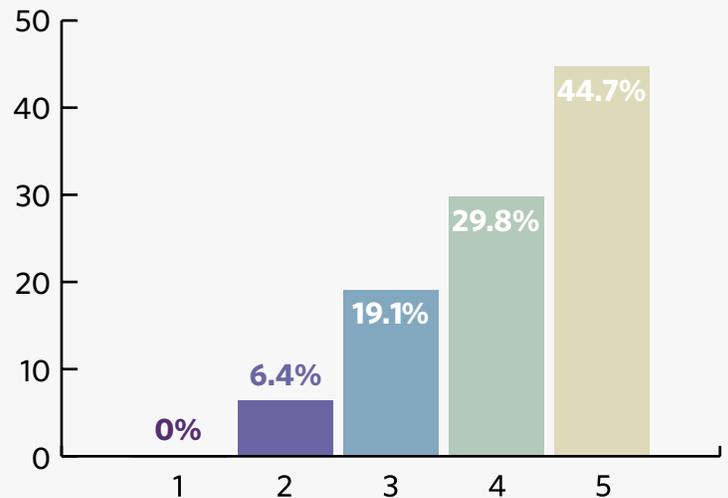
How easy is it for you to find clothes that allow you to express yourself?



How easy is it for you to buy clothes that allow you to express yourself? (whether with your money or asking someone else)



How comfortable do you feel wearing clothes that allow you to express yourself?



## CONCLUSION

There were a variety of barriers to getting and wearing clothes that allowed the Jewish teens we surveyed to express themselves. From cost, size, peer pressure, availability, and not being financially independent, Jewish teens faced many challenges when trying to get and wear clothing that allowed them to express themselves. All of these barriers are possible explanations as to why only 23.4% of respondents said

that it was very easy for them to find clothes that allowed them to express themselves. In the future, focusing on accepting people for who they are, supporting more size-inclusive clothing brands, and having a variety of clothing styles in all price ranges could help increase the accessibility of clothing that allows Jewish teens, and all teens, to express themselves. Clothing impacts all of us, and access to clothing is something that anyone can struggle with. As you can see, there

are a variety of different experiences with clothing and access to it within the Jewish community. How do you think clothes and access to them impact someone and allows them to express themselves? How can you remove barriers to accessing clothing? As a community, we should all strive to make people feel accepted in what they choose to wear.

"There was a point when I realized, for some of these men, that I had a job. That job was to be as sexual as possible. To be this hyper-sexualized image of myself."

"I feel like because of hyper-sexualization, I can't feel beautiful without showing some skin."



"When buying clothing, I find myself focusing on how other people will view it on me, rather than how it makes me feel wearing it."

"Every time I leave the house, someone makes a sexual reference towards me purely because I'm a woman."

# Rape Culture, The Hyper-Sexualization of Clothing, and Its Intersections

BY YANIRA KAPLAN & HANNAH GOLDWIN

## ARTISTIC STATEMENT

**D**ehumanization: "The process of depriving a person or group of positive human qualities" (from Merriam-Webster dictionary). Throughout our survey of 75 female-identifying and gender-fluid teens across the country, the sense of feeling reduced to their bodies popped up consistently. Many respondents felt that when wearing clothing considered more revealing in public, they were viewed by others, specifically men, as strictly their breasts and butt. They felt dehumanized. Their character and personality meant nothing if it wasn't sexual. As one respondent summed it up, **"it sounds stupid to say right now, but I felt like all I was, was my body."**

This feeling of dehumanization is something that each person experiences

differently and in a different capacity. Despite this, we attempted to illustrate it to the best of our abilities. The photo of these two mannequins showcases how many female and non-binary teens feel walking down the street - as if they are nothing like their bodies. The mannequin on the left, whose outfit may be considered more modest and conservative, may not be the subject of as many catcalls, whistles, and hyper-sexualized remarks or glances compared to the mannequin on the right, solely due to the different amounts of "skin" showing. However, at the end of the day, women and non-binary people are hyper-sexualized no matter what they are wearing. Neither mannequins have a face, meaning that they have no identity, because when we are constantly hyper-sexualized, to the point that all other aspects of ourselves are ignored, we are reduced down to just our bodies.

## OUR SURVEY RESULTS

The survey responses make it clear that the effects of rape culture and hyper-sexualization on respondents are indisputably present. While varying in degree of impact, 74% of respondents felt the impact of rape culture "sometimes", "often", or "extremely often", with over a third answering the latter two. This feeling of discomfort and apprehension from conversations, words said, or actions by others manifested itself in different ways for people. A common issue that was mentioned is the presence of rape culture online and on social media. One respondent elaborated, "jokes online that have misogynistic undertones and contribute to toxic misconceptions about what makes rape, rape." Similarly, another stated, "One thing I always notice is when a girl was raped, almost every girl on Instagram I follow posted about protecting women, and not a single boy posted about it." The ability to hide behind a phone or social media profile allows teens and adults to perpetuate rape culture without fear of retaliation or facing consequences. Beyond cowardly online comments, 71% of respondents said that they feel rape culture is present in their schools, and 72% said it was present in social settings. These instances affect over 75% of respondents' actions "often" or "extremely often" and have an impact on 89.7% of the teens' mental health and well-being.

Hyper-sexualization of women and women's clothing is also extremely prevalent among teenagers. A whopping 92% of respondents believed that women's clothing is hyper-sexualized in the media "a lot" or "a great deal." This affects over half of the respondents' experiences with buying or wearing specific items of clothing. A common theme was the feeling of being watched when showing more skin and a sense of censorship by men, authority figures, and older generations.

Jewish respondents had mixed feelings regarding what extent they believe rape culture and/or the over-sexualization of women's clothing present in the Jewish community, with 37% saying "a little," 22% saying "a moderate amount," and 18% saying "a lot." Many stated they felt that hyper-sexualization is prevalent at

their Jewish schools, synagogues, and most notably, camps and youth groups. Respondents expressed their frustration with how the hyper-sexualization of women's clothing manifests into restrictive dress codes, especially in religious schools. One survey taker wrote, "I attended a religious day school, and girls were never allowed to wear shorts, short sleeves, tank tops, shorts, LEGGINGS, or short skirts. After a large group meeting with the principal, we were told it was because we would distract the boys and male teachers." Another issue that was brought up is the problematic hookup culture that is present among Jewish youth groups. As one respondent put it, "there is a highly vocalized expectation that teens should hookup at a variety of different conventions held by certain Jewish youth groups. The aim is to rack up points. Points are a source of pride for a few, but for many, it's an obligation that encourages quick hookups and puts mass amounts of pressure on teens... The problem is cyclical and dangerous." On the following pages, you can read examples of how teens feel about the issues of hyper-sexualization, rape cultures, and the intersection of those issues with clothing.

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**51.9%** of our 77 survey respondents said that the hyper-sexualization of women's clothing in marketing and media affects the clothing they purchase.

**53.2%** said it affects their relationship with clothing.

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When asked where they think that they or others are hyper-sexualized because of their clothing:

**34** respondents answered family life/family gathering

**57** answered social settings

**68** answered school

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When asked, "To what extent do you think women's clothing is hyper-sexualized in marketing, media, etc.?"

**44.2%** answered "a lot"

**48.1%** answered "a great deal"

"I often have to remind myself when I am out alone at night, what is a 'safe action' and how to protect myself if I needed."

"The other day, I was walking around my relatively safe neighborhood alone, and a person pulled up in a car right next to me. It got me scared and thinking about bad outcomes the situation could have even though a few seconds later I saw the guy was just parking."

### HOW MUCH DOES RAPE CULTURE IMPACT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING? HOW MUCH DOES RAPE CULTURE IMPACT YOUR ACTIONS?

"It also forces me to view my everyday decisions from a different light."

"I feel like rape culture mostly applies to how I dress as well as how I perceive myself. Every time I leave the house, I have to put thought into what I'm wearing and if I'll be safe depending on the time and place."

"If something looks like it could be considered sexual, I may not buy it depending on the occasion."

"I stray away from buying clothes at stores that do hyper-sexualize their clothes and how they are presented on models."

"I also used to wear uniforms in elementary school, and the school girl sexualized image made me stressed about wearing it in public."

"I'll see something cute but won't buy it because I'm scared of how I may be perceived in it or what people have to say or how they act around me."

### DOES YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH THE HYPER-SEXUALIZATION OF WOMEN'S CLOTHING AFFECT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CLOTHING?

"I find that there are many things about society that are unfair, and I choose to not let what society thinks about my clothing affect what I wear."

"While I usually buy less revealing clothing, that is because that is what I feel more comfortable in, it is not a result of hyper-sexualization in marketing and media."

"I really just buy clothes that make me happy if someone is going to sexualize me for what I wear, that's their problem, not mine."

"Jewish youth groups and their hookup culture are entirely problematic."

**TO WHAT EXTENT IS RAPE CULTURE AND/OR THE OVER-SEXUALIZATION OF WOMEN'S CLOTHING PRESENT IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY?**

"I've seen non-jews hyper-sexualize women who are tznius and cover up, but in the community itself, people are pretty respectful."

"I went to a Jewish private school and was so unhappy with the dress code and the insults on women. A student in my class even called Batsheba (a prominent figure in the tanach) a whore and only received a talking to, with no real punishment."

"I've seen so many people (especially guys) joke about grooming, raping people, not being able to control themselves, and nobody says anything."

**HOW OFTEN DO YOU FEEL THE EFFECTS OF RAPE CULTURE?**

"It's always ignored or laughed off. I haven't seen it taken seriously in real life."

"Multiple friends of mine have been sexually harassed, assaulted, or raped."

"I have personally been sexualized based on what I wear. Although as a cis male, clothing that displays 'sexual features' aren't as apparent, if I were clothing like tighter joggers and jeans, certain physical features are pointed out or looked at by others."

**HOW OFTEN DO YOU FEEL HYPER-SEXUALIZED BECAUSE OF THE CLOTHING YOU ARE WEARING?**

"Looks at the gym when I'm just trying to work out."

"Walking home in school uniform."

"Boys at my school commented a lot on my shirts because I would wear low cut, skin-tight shirts a lot."

# The Impacts of Social Media and Advertising of Clothing

BY **ZOE HAITH, SOFIA MORE, ANIA SACKS & LAUREN TAPPER**

**W**e believe it is important to evaluate the impacts of social media and advertising techniques of clothing on the self-esteem, self-worth, and confidence of teenagers across the country. Marketing teams have different codes and tricks that they use to target young audiences. They point out “flaws” and “imperfections” that people might have never noticed before. Marketing teams and beauty companies profit off of women feeling insecure and inadequate, fostering inequality and insecurities across impressionable youth.

We surveyed and interviewed several Jewish teens across the Chicago area and a Women and Media professor at Texas Christian University to gain perspective into the impacts of social media on youth and the techniques used by media companies to target specific groups. Our conclusions across every method were consistent:

marketing of clothing and products are hurting young communities and preying on insecurities and existing oppressive practices for profit. The main takeaway, and the thing we hope you learn most from this research, is to be wary of what you consume. Media is specifically crafted and manipulated to target impressionable groups of people, and photo editing platforms are more accessible than ever.

In addition to our survey and interviews, we compiled images of real Jewish teens in Chicago modeling clothes that they feel confident and empowered in. These are real teens, real bodies, and real clothes. When so much of media and advertising is fake, we wanted to provide a real side of clothing and show that “imperfect” bodies are normal and perhaps more perfect than those crafted by magazines and photo editing software.

## INTERVIEW WITH WOMEN IN MEDIA PROFESSOR JACQUELINE LAMBIASE AT TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Lambiase is a professor and department chair of the strategic communication department at Texas Christian University. This is the home for advertising and public relations research at the university, and Texas Christian is recognized nationwide for its work in gender studies. Lambiase's work focuses specifically on social ethics, writing, diversity, women and advertising, diversity in advertising, and representation.

Lambiase talked a lot about how different advertising techniques impact women's self-image and worth. She says that the way women are portrayed in media and clothing advertising can impact self-esteem, body image, and sex-esteem (sex self-confidence). Much of advertising is made to make people feel sexy (think: Superbowl commercials that sexualize things like alcoholic beverages). By objectifying women in a majority of these commercials and advertising techniques, women are sexualized and often experience lower self-esteem and physiological harm. Eating disorders are also often heavily

influenced by the media, relating to how the media impacts body image.

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Other forms of hurtful advertising are things like comparison advertising, which is the use of before and after pictures of products or diet programs. Advertisements pick at things that people would normally see as flaws. For example, many TikTok videos have surfaced talking about the “hip dip”, the inward depression along the side of your body, just below the hip bone, something most people didn't even know about before. People and advertising companies get famous off of pointing out flaws like the hip dip. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was the same with cellulite--many of these trends repeat themselves. Another example of an advertising technique that makes women feel self-conscious is using a small number of “unicorn models.” This means only using one type of body or face with no representation of minorities or other normal bodies. Often, this unicorn isn't even real for those select few models and is achieved through photo editing. Lambiase used the metaphor of “objectified coat hangers.” Models act as coat hangers that can display clothing and be molded and changed by editing programs to be the beauty standard.

The type of clothing advertised also plays an important role. Deb Merskin at the University of Oregon has done a lot of research on this, and she came up with the theory of “codes” to sell clothes. Many of these codes are related to pornography and the sexualization of clothing. Clothing stores borrow from pornography and import the same tactics into advertising. For example, female submission, objectification, violence, and gender hierarchy are used in both clothing advertisements and pornography. A strong example of this is how sexualized fishnet tights are, despite the fact that they are just an item of clothing. Women are also often treated with the same kind of abuse in fashion as they are in pornography.

Lambiase also brought up an interesting point about the amount of control media has on the everyday life of a woman. Media and online sources completely control what is considered fashionable

or appropriate for women. Although it used to be more through magazines and major designer shows, influencers and social media stars have taken over the role of using media to define fashion trends. Even though many preach changing the environment to be more natural and representative, many of these influencers end up using the same techniques of the magazines before them--they pose in the same ways, edit their photos, and normalize only one kind of body. Lambaise went as far as to say that influencers were copying the advertising tactics of large brands, using this to advertise themselves and their lifestyle rather than a clothing brand. Advertisements also depict what it means to be a professional woman, and women feel they must follow these guidelines to be seen as professional in the workplace. However, many of these advertisements sexualize working women, normalizing sexualization in the workplace.

The interview with Lambaise ended on a somber note. We discussed that although a lot of progress has been made for women's rights in media, there is still a long way to go to normalize diversity and representation in advertising. Women are still told to smile, what to wear, where to look, and are treated as objects in the studio. Social media makes the poor treatment of women and the projection of the "clothing hanger" metaphor easier to reach younger, larger, more impressionable audiences. Many of the things told to girls in their developing years will stay with them throughout their lives--there is no recovery from this kind of deep, personal trauma. Lambaise ended by talking about a display culture that women live in and how impossible it is to escape.

## INTERVIEW WITH CHICAGO-AREA TEENS

**Zoe Klein** is 16 years old, female-identifying, and Jewish. We spoke with Zoe in order to get an in-depth perspective of a Jewish teen in the Chicago area on her relationship with clothing, social media, and body image. We hope Zoe's experience illuminates the dangers of social media, the devastating effect that the media and advertising has on body image, and the faults in the fashion industry. Below are

*some quotes from Zoe's interview that sum up her feelings on this matter:*

"Even though a lot of the models have similar body types to me, I still understand that they're not diverse and I can see how that's not good."

"It [social media] has brought up things I didn't know I was self-conscious about. It'll be like, 'Oh, it's okay if you have a big nose,' and then you're like, 'Wait, do I? I've never noticed that before, but I guess I do.' It's sort of like, in an effort to try and make it more inclusive, it can show more insecurities."

"It [social media] has pretty much only done harm. I don't think it's actually ever helped."

When asked if what she sees ever makes her wish she looked different, Zoe responded, "Every day."

"Social media makes me get in my head about things, and when I get in my head about things, it affects my mental health... I don't like getting my picture taken or taking pictures of myself ever because I get self-conscious about it."

"I try to shop less at the one-size-fits-all places because I find it to be frustrating and frankly discriminatory. I don't think it affects me personally, but I have tried to shop less at those places because I know the message they're sending out to other people."

"Throughout time, a lot of Jewish or more ethnically Jewish characteristics have been told that they're ugly and not conforming to the 'standard of beauty'. Curly hair, bigger noses, larger features. I think that's another reason [Judaism] is not shown, because people don't find it as beautiful or as worthy of being shown."

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**Zevdah Drizen** is 17 years old, female-identifying, and Jewish. We spoke with Zevdah in order to get an additional, in-depth perspective of a Jewish teen in the Chicago area on her relationship with clothing, social media, and body image. Zevdah explained her experience with not feeling represented in advertising and the media, as well as the negative impact

*social media has had on her mental health and body image. We hope that from Zevdah's interview, you can see another perspective on this topic. Below are some quotes from the interview that encapsulate provoking parts of Zevdah's thoughts:*

"I feel that generally, even with the entire body-positivity movement that has become a lot more popular in recent years, I feel that the clothing that is seen in stores, especially with mannequins, are definitely the beauty standard, which I consider the European beauty standard. It's around white women and what their bodies are supposed to look like based on genes and what we've come up with the 'best body' to have is."

"All of these outlets people watch on a daily basis in terms of what their bodies look like and how they look in these clothes, for me at least, it's really affected what clothes I would feel confident in and what clothes people wouldn't judge me for wearing because I might not have the specific body type that's portrayed with the women who are wearing these clothes."

"I do not see my body type represented as much. I think what also makes that hard is that I know that there's a lot of photoshop used, so you also can't even tell if these models and their body types are real, or it was just created by people behind the scenes."

"I don't know one other girl in my life who does not have issues with her body. It's such a massive thing."

"It's so difficult to find models where it's like, 'That's what I look like.' It's also just a difficult standard because everyone's always different. The range is so small that you feel like you have to fit into this box of what these very specific women look like."

"Honestly, I can say wholeheartedly that the majority of my day is spent viewing and judging my body based on what I see. Especially with our generation, I feel like we've gotten so many standards shoved down our throats. You literally click on TikTok, and it's just a curated list of things to make you feel bad about yourself. It feels like we should've

progressed past this point. But for me at least, I feel like it really, really does harm my mental health."

"We've turned the outlet of social media, that should be used for positive things, information, and sharing your life, into something that's a constant beauty contest and comparison thing that's just so toxic."

"The whole one-size-fits-all mentality just continually pushes the narrative of if you can't fit into this one size that's supposed to fit everyone, where are you then? It just makes you feel worse about yourself."

"The majority of my clothes are thrifted because I just feel like going to major corporations and stores is always super discouraging because I feel that sizing is just never right. I've never really felt super comfortable going to major department stores for clothes because it never ends well, and I always pick the wrong size, which increases the narrative of me feeling not good in my own body and me feeling uncomfortable."

"The negative portrayals of Jews in the media make me feel ashamed of the religion that I'm part of. Of course, I'm proud to be Jewish, but I don't want to identify with something that people consider to be bad. It just makes me feel uncomfortable in my own identity."

"Children growing up and seeing these influences in their everyday lives makes me very nervous."

## SURVEY RESULTS

To collect research on the relationship between media/advertising and clothing/body image for Jewish teens in the Chicago area, we sent out a survey and collected a total of 53 responses.

Social media posts generally consist of people at their best. The images people share on social apps are very often the versions of themselves they want people to see. Therefore, most of the time, these pictures are not realistic to what many people's bodies look like. When asked on a scale of 1-5, how much do you think social media impacts the way you think about your body, 86% of those surveyed responded with three or higher.

This spotlights the large impact social media has on teens' relationships with their bodies. One person's submission states, "I think [social media] has had a large impact on my body image. Even some TikToks that are meant to make people more body confident end up just drawing attention to insecurities I didn't know I had. Before TikTok and Instagram, I didn't realize there were so many standards of beauty out there, especially for things like nose shape and waist size. It has made me hyper-aware of my body and anything that changes on it, which is probably not the best." This is, unfortunately, not a unique experience.

In addition to social media, advertisements and magazines have a detrimental effect on teens' relationship with their body image and clothing choices. One survey respondent explained, "I feel that they [advertisements] heavily impact my self-esteem, which further impacts my choices in what clothing I choose to wear/purchase." Another person's response to the survey states, "The pictures displayed in stores play a large role in dictating what items I choose to purchase. Either I'm not good enough, not skinny enough, not pretty enough to wear the clothes, so I don't purchase them. Or, I want to be good enough, skinny enough, and pretty enough as the girls wearing the clothes that I purchase them but feel terrible afterward when the clothes don't fit my body the same way." Similar to social media, advertising is only the best version of people. Advertisements generally portray slim, hairless, and flawless women, when in reality, the majority of the population does not look that way, or at least not all the time.

Furthermore, when asked about practices such as Brandy Melville's "one size fits all" policy, one person responded, "When I do fit into Brandy Melville I feel great about myself; however, when I don't, it serves as a constant reminder that my body isn't the beauty standard." Brandy Melville is a clothing brand known for its "one size fits all" policy that has caused an uproar of conflict from society. Many people feel as though this policy is detrimental to customers, who may not fit into these clothes, even though they are labeled as fitting everyone.

As for Judaism's role, an overwhelming majority of survey respondents stated that they do not see Judaism represented in the media and advertising. However, a few people did have experiences seeing Judaism represented. One person wrote that Judaism, when it is shown, is "typically shown through modest clothing." This is not inherently bad or good; it is just one type of Judaism. Regardless of the way Jews are shown, most of the survey respondents stated that media representation of Jews does not affect the clothing they choose.

"Judaism doesn't affect my relationship with clothing. However, it does affect my body image." This was a very common response on our survey. Other responses followed suit. The Jewish stereotype is not always seen in clothing industry, but it is often portrayed in the media in a harmful way. The majority of survey responses brought up the "curly hair and big nose" stereotype. Zoe Klein, previously interviewed, explains, "Throughout time, a lot of Jewish or more ethnically Jewish characteristics have been told that they're ugly and not conforming to the 'standard of beauty'. Curly hair, bigger noses, larger features. I think that's another reason [Judaism] is not shown, because people don't find it as beautiful or as worthy of being shown." Even though Judaism is not explicitly shown very often through clothing, the stereotypes portrayed are negatively affecting Jewish teens and their body image, a harsh reality that should not be the case.

Many survey responses were laced with one word: insecure. This is the message that advertisements, social media, and magazines are sending. Far too many people are internalizing that they are less than, simply because they are not seen in the media. There is a serious lack of representation in the media, and it is affecting many of us negatively. We hope that with this research, the community will know they are not alone in the way the media and advertising affect their body image and clothing choices. We hope our research will bring awareness to media and advertising's harmful effects as well as spark a movement for more inclusion in these outlets.

Advertising techniques, such as the comparison and objectification of women, allow companies to take advantage of and influence young consumers. The personal results of advertisement methods are clearly seen throughout these interviews with Jewish teens in Chicago. Each individual is hurt and affected by social media and its competitive nature. It has taught young people to hate themselves, and find imperfections in places no one has looked before. The detailed findings of poor self-image, body-confidence, and self-worth are not only found in the girls we interviewed but in the rest of the Jewish teens we surveyed. Additionally, a failure to represent different body types, along with different races, sexualities, and religions in media, also contribute to the poor self image crafted by media. It is our responsibility, not only as RTI Cohort 7, but as the Jewish community, to fight to end hurtful advertising techniques and foster a safer and more supportive environment for young consumers of media.

## REAL CLOTHES ON A REAL BODY



Here Talia Lasko is pictured in an outfit that she feels confident in. She uses clothes to express herself and her identity. As part of the advertising subgroup, we are focused on showing clothing on real people and real bodies. This means different body types, unedited figures, and natural bodies. Talia talked about her insecurity of her long legs, but says that this outfit and

photo help her embrace them. She says that every body is different, and just because her legs are longer than others doesn't make them less beautiful or less worthy.



Pictured here are two Jewish teens from Chicago that traveled with Sofia More to Israel. Maya Cohen (above, 17), feels that because she is shorter than most, at barely 5 feet tall, the only clothes she can wear are kids size or not marketed to teens. She wishes that her body type was represented more and that there were more options for her to wear what she wants.



Mollie Dubner (above, 16), feels comfortable in her workout clothes because she feels healthy and strong when she works out. However, she wishes the media would show more that

you can wear whatever you want whenever you want (for working out or anything), and it doesn't have to ever be confined to a certain image or look.



Here Jewish teen Stella Dale is pictured wearing an outfit from her younger sisters Bat-Mitzvah. This is again showing clothing on a different body type. Clothing should be shown on a range of heights, sizes, and measurements in magazines, not just the beauty-standard models that they are shown on today. Stella says she feels confident when she wears unique items of clothing that make her feel like herself. Clothing is a strong form of self expression, and it makes sense why this would make her confident. She did speak on feeling inadequate when she failed to see someone that looked like her in a magazine. She is 5'2", and wishes she saw more people like her showing up in her favorite clothing brands in ads and magazines.

## HANNAH

For me, RTI has been a space where I can come and ask away. No question was off limits as each individual was there to learn and to teach. Everyone has a hunger for knowledge and it was a beautiful space to be a part of.

## NAOMI

I love RTI. After a long week, it is a great place to destress and get into important conversations about issues that matter to us. Beckee and Cassandra are supportive and make RTI such a welcoming place. I would definitely recommend this program to anyone who wants to learn more about the intersection between social justice, feminism, and Judaism.

## TOVA

RTI has been a wonderful part of my year, allowing me to connect with other teenagers at a time when social connection was limited. In this program, I feel comfortable speaking up and exploring my unique identities. I would highly recommend this program for anyone who is interested in social justice, research, Judaism, and community. Shoutout to Beckee and Cassandra for making the program so enjoyable and creating a safe and welcoming space!

## LAUREN

Through a one year internship, I have not only been able to identify an area of study that I am passionate about, but also work with a driven and determined group of Jewish teens to explore this topic and educate others. RTI is a space where I truly feel comfortable speaking up and exploring how Judaism and feminism intertwine, and what being a Jewish feminist really means. If you are passionate about your identity, the Jewish community, or being an active ally and leader to those around you, I strongly urge you to join next year's cohort. I am proud to have been a part of this program, and am confident that the things I have learned and the skills I have gained over the past year will stay with me throughout my adult life as I navigate prejudice, anti-semitism, and being a Jewish woman in the 21st century.

## ANIA

RTI is a space where you can have real, honest, important conversations about what's going on in the world with a group of people who are as interested in these topics as you are. Throughout my time in RTI, I have learned so much about feminism, Judaism, how to create a research project, and how all of those intertwine, while also meeting so many teens like me. If you are someone who enjoys learning new things in a meaningful, unique, way that allows you to explore your identity, dive into social action, and find community, RTI is the program for you. I will carry the knowledge I gained from RTI through the rest of my life, it has truly been a one of a kind experience.

## YASIEL

RTI is, at its core, a place where you can be yourself and learn about the world around you. It's welcoming to any person or question, and everyone was encouraged to ask for or about anything. It intertwines Judaism and a love of learning into a research project that you will be proud of. RTI is a space where everyone can be themselves and learn about what's important to them in a uniquely Jewish way, and I would encourage anyone who loves to learn with others who share your passion for learning to join RTI.

## DALIA

Participating in RTI has given me the opportunity to look at the world through a completely new and different lens. The program has taught me invaluable research skills and has given me the language to engage in meaningful and complex discussions surrounding social justice topics and current events. Even more importantly, the culture of RTI is so supportive and open, and Beckee, Cassandra, and all the participants make RTI the perfect place to build community, explore your identities, and grow as a person.

## ELIANA

RTI has been a space where I can connect with other Jewish teens who also are passionate in learning about social issues in a Jewish context. Throughout gaining new perspective and knowledge about the complexities and intersections of different oppressions, I have always felt supported both by my peers and the leaders in RTI. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this program and I know I will carry everything I have learned with me going forward.

## SOFIA

RTI has given me the opportunity to explore cultural appropriation in depth. I've also gotten a lot better at academic research because of RTI. I am very grateful to both Beckee and Kass for advocating for me to ensure that RTI is a safe place for me.

## YANIRA

RTI has been such an impactful experience for me. It has provided a space where I feel supported and comfortable to ask questions and be myself. This past year, I have gotten the opportunity to participate in meaningful discussions and conduct a research project with a group of passionate and intelligent Jewish teens. Beckee and Cassandra are so incredibly kind and supportive, and work so hard to make RTI both a safe and enjoyable space. If you are considering applying, I strongly encourage you to do so. It is an amazing opportunity, and I am extremely grateful for my time in RTI.

## ZOE

Throughout this crazy year of covid there has been one thing that is consistent for me, RTI. After a long hard week of school I could always count on smiling faces during our calls on Sunday before starting the next week. RTI has given me so many opportunities, from creating new relationships, researching a topic in depth, to debating with other teens on an important matter, without RTI I wouldn't have gotten to grow as an individual. I am incredibly thankful for our mentors, Beckee and Kass, throughout the process for checking in even when it didn't have to do with RTI, and to the other young ladies who were in RTI that made me look forward to coming.

## SOFIA

RTI has been an amazing experience for me. Although I was unable to participate in it as much as I wanted to, I was able to find solace in the consistency of this program as well as my amazing Jewish peers. To find people who are interested in the same things as me as well as a shared religion was really impactful. Beckee and Kass were amazing mentors and extremely supportive to my unique situation, and while I wish we were in person the whole time, they still made this year feel as though I was learning as much as I could and allowed us to grow extremely close as a cohort. I would recommend this program to each and every person who wants to join/is thinking about joining as it has not only given me a group of like-minded peers but allowed me to grow individually.

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Fast Facts About Fast Fashion

UN Environment Programme, Ellen MacArthur Foundation, World Economic Forum, Remake, WWF, Blue Tin Production, Labor Behind the Label, The True Cost, Global Labor Justice

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