Reshaping Jewish Lives? - American Jewish College Students and the Trip to Israel

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to look at trips to Israel as a vehicle for Jewish engagements of the millennial generation—those born after 1980—and to assess the relationship between connections to Israel and Jewish involvement both in the private and the public spheres. The analyses are based on the Demographic Study of Jewish College Students, 2014, an online survey of four-year institutions of higher education in the U.S. with over 1,100 Jewish students.
The road to Jerusalem on an educational tour does lead to the *Kotel*, the Western Wall, yet it does not elevate religious observance. However, visits to Israel connect or reconnect young people with their Jewish cultural roots, elevate Jewish pride, and create a sense of peoplehood. This is true of any kind of visit, whether with Taglit, another educational program, or family. A personal visit to Israel, in any capacity, seems to be a stronger predictor of feelings of Jewish pride and commitment to Jewish peoplehood more than growing up with two Jewish parents.

Keywords: Jewish students, United States, millennial generation, Israel trips, Jewish peoplehood

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Introduction

Jewish educational tours to Israel are created to be life-changing for the next generation of young Jews by connecting or reconnecting them to Israel and their Jewish heritage. Through informal learning outside of the classroom, the trips are designed to be positive lived experiences in Israel with Jewish role models and are aimed at developing Jewish identity and enriching Jewish attachments (Chazan, 1997). Customized for a restless generation, which is used to multimedia and expects to be constantly entertained (Buckingham, 2002; McMillan & Morrison, 2006), Jewish educational encounters are geared to inspire. The purpose of Israel programs is to enhance Jewish identity and Jewish peoplehood through cross-cultural peer-to-peer personal encounters (Mittelberg, 1999). In the background is the hope that the programs will provide new possibilities for Jewish friendships and even foster Jewish marriages and Jewish continuity (Saxe, et al., 2013).

The perception of tourism as a socialization tool stems from the concept of lived experience. The understanding is that young people would engage in an immersive environment not in the abstract, but in a situation that "generates affect and awareness of a self-in-context," (Kelman, 2010, p. 182). The curriculum programs built for youth trips to Israel were designed in a pedagogical framework of Jewish socialization invoking Jewish values and principles of Jewish peoplehood, highlighting the collective responsibility of all Jews around the world for each other (Chazan, 1994). For Lev-Ari and Mittelberg (2008), the value of heritage tourism is the construction of a collective identity "where it otherwise might not have been, namely across the homeland-Diaspora divide" (2008, p. 82).

Debates over the "distancing hypothesis," namely "*Are Israel and young American Jews growing apart*?" continue to generate ample interest and soul-searching in news media (The Jerusalem Post, 2014; Jewish Journal, 2014) and in academic articles. While Cohen and Kelman (2007; 2010) describe attitudinal shifts among American Jewry toward Israel with cohort replacement of the older generation with young Jews who are less supportive and less committed, Sasson et al. (2010) challenge this claim, arguing that there is no consistent evidence of distancing and no significant decline in the attachment to Israel. Sasson et al. assert that "American Jewry attitudes to Israel show that a large majority of survey respondents consistently agrees that Israel is a 'very important' aspect of their Jewish identity" (2010, pp. 313-314). At the same time, they affirm that younger American Jews, Reform, and unaffiliated exhibit lower levels of attachment to Israel. The growing segment of Jews with no religion is less attached to Israel than Jews-by-religion. In 2001, 62% of Jews by religion said that they were very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel, compared with only 32% of Jews with no religion (Keysar, 2010).

In 2013 these gaps have persisted, whereby 76% of Jews-by-religion are attached to Israel compared with 45% of those with no religion (Pew, 2013). While educational travel has gone on for decades, the debate over the "distancing narrative" provided a new justification and contributed to expansion of travel programs.

The most far-reaching educational program, Taglit-Birthright Israel, was designed as a 10-day trip of a lifetime with peers, which immerses them in an Israel experience. Dr. Yossi Beillin first proposed the subsidized trip to Israel in the early 1990s, when he was the deputy foreign minister. The trips, viewed as a Jew's "birthright," aspire to fortify the link between Israel and the Diaspora and to combat intermarriage (Beilin, 2000). As explained on its website, "The vision of Taglit-Birthright Israel is to strengthen Jewish identity, Jewish communities, and solidarity with Israel by providing a 10-day trip for young Jewish people."

Over 400,000 young Jews aged 18-26 from 66 countries have participated in Birthright Israel since it was launched in 1999. Birthright tours are visible all around Israel with their specially marked buses and loud teenagers. Scholars have expressed mixed opinions about the assertion of the project as life changing. Kelner (2010, p. 189) writes that "any self-understandings that emerge on these tours are necessarily fragile, and any intentions that they give rise to are necessarily provisional…the realization of these intentions depend less on the tours than on the lives to which the travelers return." Saxe (2008) asserts, in a more positive vein, "Birthright Israel provides a taste of the honey of Jewish Peoplehood. For ten days, it creates a cultural island that allows participants to see themselves as part of something larger than themselves." The theory of educational tourism to Israel is that surrounding young people with Jewish peers, teaching them Jewish history, instilling in them love of Israel, Zionism, and Jewish pride will enhance their Jewish identity, and ultimately curb assimilation (Mittelberg, 1992; Saxe & Chazan, 2008).

The goal of this paper is to explore trips to Israel as a vehicle for Jewish engagement among students of the millennial generation—those born after 1980. The analyses are based on a 2014 study of Jewish college students in the U.S. (Keysar & Kosmin, 2014). The broader objectives of the 2014 study were to explore the opinions and beliefs of American Jewish college students nationwide and to compare their worldviews to those of young British Jews as well as to American college students in general (Kosmin & Keysar, 2013).

Hypotheses

The main hypotheses of this paper revolve around the trip (or trips) to Israel of young Jews and their association with markers of Jewish identity.

1. The Israel experience, measured by visits to Israel, helps fortify ties with Israel and with the Jewish people. Emerging adults who visited Israel, I hypothesize, exhibit stronger

attachments to Israel and to the Jewish people compared with those who have never visited Israel.

2. I hypothesize that visits to Israel strengthen Jewish social networking; visits cultivate Jewish friendships and Jewish dating among young Jewish visitors.
3. I hypothesize that visits to Israel's holy sites elevate religiosity among Jewish students by connecting or reconnecting them to Judaism.
4. I hypothesize that family visits have effects that are similar to educational tourism in reinforcing non-religious and cultural Jewish connections among young Jews.

Data

The data are based on the Demographic Study of Jewish College Students, 2014, an online survey of four-year institutions of higher education in the U.S. The survey was conducted in March-April 2014 and was administered from Trinity College. It utilized open-access databases of college students with distinctive Jewish names (DJN).[1] Thus one might expect more paternal than maternal Jews to be represented. The net was cast wide: An e-mail message to the students said: "*We would like you to complete this survey if you consider yourself to be Jewish in any way, such as by religion, culture, ethnicity, parentage, or ancestry*."

The survey yielded responses from over 1,100 students from 55 colleges and universities, and included residents of 41 states. The response rate was 12%.[2] In the absence of national sampling frames for the American Jewish population and for Jewish college students in particular, it was impossible to build a representative sample of college students, a segment of the Jewish community that is hard to find and is often missing in national demographic studies. Not only is the overall Jewish population unknown, but there is no consensus on its boundaries because of the ongoing disputes about "who is a Jew." Despite these limitations, the students, who self-identified as Jewish and completed the survey, reflect much of the diversity of the Jewish people in terms of denominations, upbringing, religiosity, and, it will be shown, views about Jewish peoplehood. Notwithstanding the lack of a representative sample, its sheer size allows for internal comparisons between different sub-groups of students, for example, students who have visited Israel and those who have not.

It is useful to compare the Jewish sample to the ARIS national sample of four-year colleges and universities surveyed in February-March 2013 (Kosmin & Keysar, 2013). On some key variables, the Jewish student sample is very similar to the national one. In both cases, as reflected in today's higher education, more female than male students responded to the survey; 59% of respondents were women and 41% men. The mean age of the 2013 national student sample was 22.9 years while the Jews were younger with a mean of 21.2 years and a median age of 19.9 years. Ethnic and racial minorities were 28% of the national respondents and 10% of

the Jewish respondents (mainly from inter-racial/interfaith families and adoptees). Freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors as well as a few graduate students took part. The patterns of educational choice of college majors were almost identical between the two samples: 35% major in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); 31% in social and behavioral sciences; 29% in arts and humanities; and about 5% had not decided yet on their major.

The demographic study of Jewish college students that began in 2014 was designed to be the first stage of a panel-longitudinal project. It aims to follow the same students over time to explore the evolution of their worldviews and Jewish connections. A longitudinal design is the best way to understand long-term impacts and to establish causality, rather than simply correlation. In the absence of a panel data at this stage, this research note includes a regression analysis that attempts to single out the impact of travel to Israel on feelings of Jewish peoplehood by holding other measurable factors constant.

Findings

Testing the Hypotheses

Sixty-two percent of the Jewish college students surveyed have visited Israel. Almost 40% of visitors participated in a Taglit-Birthright Israel trip. The rate of Israel visits is probably higher than that of the young Jewish population overall, although how much higher is impossible to say in the absence of a reliable statistical frame. That said, the survey includes robust numbers of all types: almost 400 college students who never visited Israel; 240 Birthright Israel participants; and almost 400 who visited Israel with family or in some other way but not on Taglit. In all, it creates a triad within the millennial generation and provides an opportunity to test the hypotheses and answer research questions without a vested interest in any of the educational programs. The relatively large sample of Jewish college students in 2014 allows us to look at educational tourism, specifically Taglit participants, and compare them to two types of non-participants, namely those who participated in other tours to Israel, and those who have never visited the Jewish homeland.

Overall, the surveyed 2014 college students' propensity to travel to Israel has exceeded adult American Jews aged 18-29, of whom only 44% visited Israel (Pew, 2013). The Pew Study showed that Orthodox Jews are the most likely to have travelled to Israel, 77% compared with 26% of Jews who have no denominational affiliation. This paper shows that students who have never visited Israel have overall weaker Jewish connections, manifested not only by less religious observance but also in a smaller amount of Jewish social networks and feelings of Jewish peoplehood.

Attachment to Israel is a marker of Jewish identity (Lev Ari & Mittelberg, 2008). Supporting Israel is "very important" to what being Jewish means to 35% of American Jewish college students who responded to the survey and "fairly important" to 36%. In comparison, 43% of Jewish adults and 32% of those 18-29 said that "caring about Israel" is an essential part of what being Jewish means to them (Pew, 2013). In addition, 44% of adults in general and 49% of those 18-29 in the Pew survey said it was important but not essential. For the college students surveyed, supporting Israel is more important to what being Jewish means than believing in God (only 20% said believing in God is "very important" to what being Jewish means), and far more important than observing Jewish law (halakha)—only 8% deemed it "very important."

The Jewish expressions of these millennial college students are mostly cultural as they reject religious authority, distancing themselves from religious services (see below), halakha, and God. Yet many of them have visited a Jewish art or historical museum or exhibition in the U.S. or overseas in the past 12 months. These findings go hand in hand with the overall rise in Jewish secularism (Kosmin & Keysar, 2012).

Supporting Israel, as we have found, does not mean endorsing the government of Israel or agreeing with its policies:

- 45% of the students overall support Israel fully, regardless of how its government behaves. That support varies by students' political views:[3]
    - 87% of Conservative students
    - 62% of Libertarian
    - 53% of Moderate
    - 37% of Liberal
    - 25% of Progressive Jewish students support Israel fully, regardless of how its government behaves.

This split among Jewish college students could reflect the political outlook influenced by anti-Israel protests and rallies of the vocal Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) movement. The majority (66%) of college students blame the media for negative coverage of Israel; 25% strongly agree and 41% somewhat agree with the statement "The media regularly portrays Israel in a bad light." Only 5% strongly disagree. Conservative and Libertarian Jewish students are far more likely to "blame the media" (84% and 78% respectively), than Liberal (62%) and Progressive (only 54%) by strongly or somewhat agreeing about biased coverage of Israel in the media.

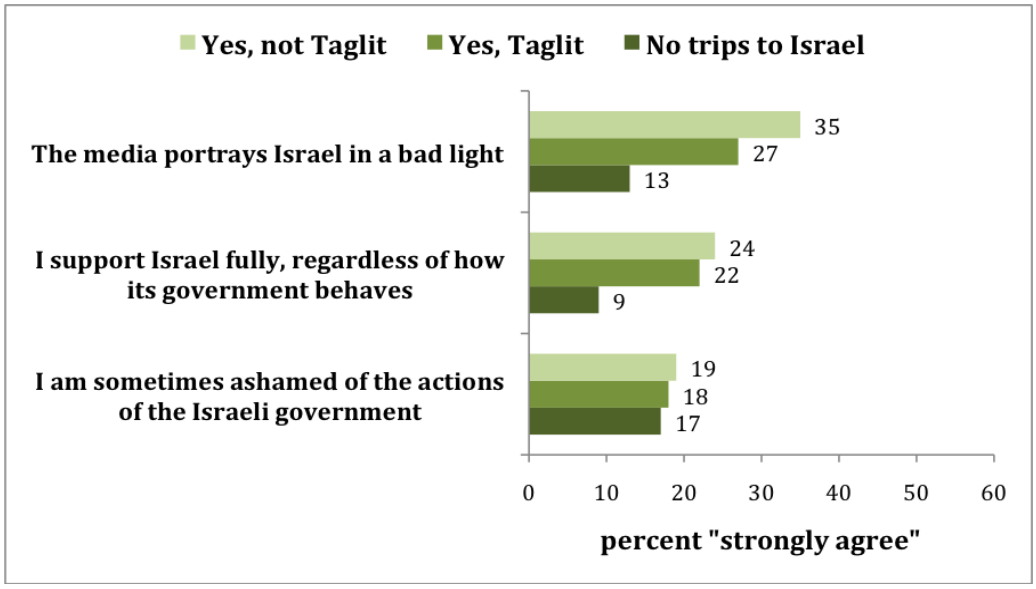
The exploratory section begins with a series of bivariate analyses to illustrate the correlations between students' Israel experiences and their Jewish attitudes and behaviors. The second section presents a multivariate analysis, which controls for the students' Jewish

background, and allows for further exploration and comparisons of the effects of various factors on expressions of Jewish peoplehood.

Trips to Israel and Support of Israel

This millennial cohort of Jewish students expresses strong support for Israel. A great majority of them are not ashamed of the Israeli government's actions or policies, regardless of whether they have already visited Israel or not. The 2014 online survey took place a few months before the summer conflict in Gaza.

Chart 1: Support of Israel by Trips to Israel



Source: Demographic Survey of American Jewish College Students, 2014

Students who visited Israel tend to express greater support of Israel, "regardless of how its government behaves." On this item there are no differences between Taglit participants and visitors who did not participate in Taglit. The only aspect of discrepancy between Taglit and non-Taglit visitors to Israel relates to their views on how the media portrays Israel. Taglit participants are the most likely to strongly agree with the claim "The media portrays Israel in a bad light" (See Chart 1). Perhaps part of Taglit's educational curriculum is to raise consciousness on behalf of Israel and showcase to young Jews the "other Israel" by explaining the actions Israel is blamed for in the media. The informational sessions, which include *mifgashim* (shared encounters) or visits with Israeli soldiers, seem to humanize the IDF and resonate with Taglit participants who identify with the young Israelis their age who serve in the military (Saxe & Chazan, 2008). Yet without pre- and post-trip data, it is hard to assess if attitudes were affected,

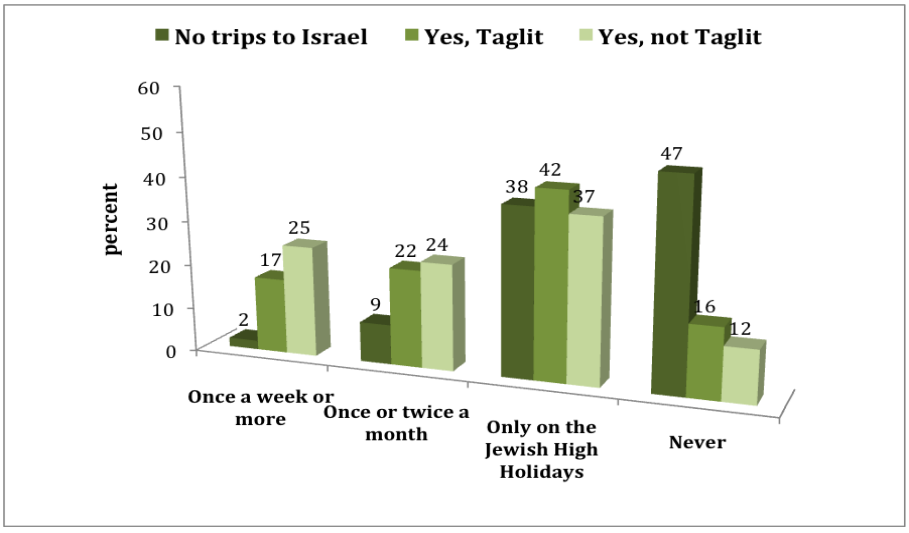
if at all, by tourism to Israel, or whether students who have already had positive attitudes toward Israel join tourism programs. Complicating the link between government policies and connections with Israel is the lack of differences between the three groups in expressing negative feelings of shame about the actions of the Israeli government. In all, about 18% of the students "strongly agree" with the statement "I am sometimes ashamed of the actions of the Israeli government" regardless of their travel to Israel experience.

Trips to Israel and Religious Observance

With regard to attendance at synagogue services, two polarities emerge: Students who visited Israel, but not on a Taglit trip, dominate regular attendance (hypothesis 3). Sixty-six percent (not shown in chart) are regular attendees in Jewish religious services at a synagogue, temple, *minyan*, or *havurah*. At the other extreme, students who never visited Israel dominate non-attendance, as two-thirds never attended synagogue services in the past 12 months.

Chart 2 shows the pattern of synagogue attendance for each of the triad groups. Almost half of students who never visited Israel also never attend services, and only 11% of them attend regularly. In contrast, almost half of students who visited Israel, but not on Taglit, are regular synagogue attendees.

Chart 2: Attendance of Services at a Synagogue in the Past 12 Months by Trips to Israel



Source: Demographic Survey of American Jewish College Students, 2014

Taglit participants seem to be occasional attendees as they stand out among students who occasionally attend synagogue services, primarily only on the Jewish High Holidays.

We expect young people who have visited Israel with their parents to be raised in more observant families whose Jewish socialization was not limited to synagogue activities but also included family trips to Israel. The multiple Jewish involvements (Cohen & Eisen, 1998) are clearly manifested in this pattern. A minority of young Jews, albeit a growing minority (Pew, 2013), have no Jewish religious involvement.

Chart 3: Attendance of Services at a Synagogue in High School by Trips to Israel

Source: Demographic Survey of American Jewish College Students, 2014

Chart 3 illustrates that half of college students who visited Israel with family or friends but not on Taglit came from religiously observant families. During high school they attended synagogue services regularly (27% once a week or more and 24% once or twice a month). In contrast, students who never visited Israel were by far more likely to never attend synagogue services during high school (22% compared with 4% who went on family or other trips).

Trips to Israel and Peoplehood

Trips to Israel are not only associated with religious observance. Visiting Israel seems to also strongly correlate with Jewish pride and expressions of Jewish peoplehood (hypothesis 1). While half of Jewish college students who never visited Israel said they were proud to be Jewish,

over three-quarters of those who visited, regardless in which program, strongly agreed with the statement "I am proud to be Jewish."

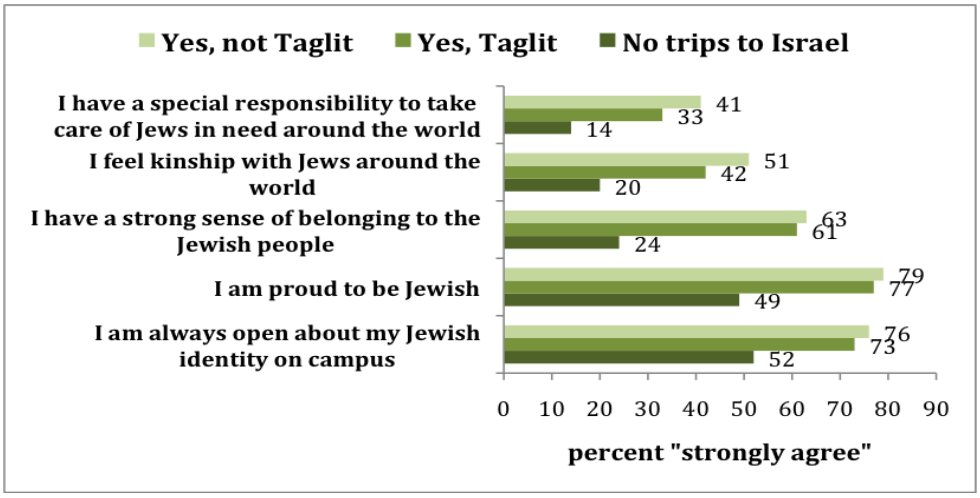
Visits to Israel, again with Taglit or in another capacity, are strongly correlated with being open about one's Jewish identity on campus. Students who never visited Israel are more likely to "never" or "hardly ever" reveal their Jewish identity on campus.

The largest gaps are found in students' feelings towards "belonging to the Jewish people." Only 24% of students who never visited Israel strongly agree compared with over 60% of those who did (See Chart 4).

Trips to Israel seem highly correlated with a strong kinship and commitment to help other Jews around the world. Taglit participants seem to lag behind visitors to Israel with other youth programs or family trips in Jewish kinship.

The students' triad composition with regard to trips to Israel (no trips to Israel, yes Taglit; yes, but not on Taglit) triggers further research questions. Who are the students who have already visited Israel, some more than once? In what ways does their family background differ from those who never visited? Why do Taglit students score lower on Jewish peoplehood than those who visited Israel but not on Taglit? The possible explanation is confounding variables. The confounding variables are most likely family background, religious upbringing (as shown in Chart 3), and other Jewish educational experiences. All are discussed further in the multivariate analysis later on.

Chart 4: Expressions of Jewish Pride and Peoplehood by Trips to Israel



Source: Demographic Survey of American Jewish College Students, 2014

Note: Statements 1-4 refer to level of agreement. The last statement is a response to: How open are you, if at all, about your Jewish identity on campus?

Having family and friends in Israel humanizes the homeland and its people and is correlated with higher Israel connections and Jewish engagements. This raises a research question: Do trips to Israel impact students beyond their family and friend ties in Israel? We find large gaps in expressions of Jewish pride and Jewish peoplehood among Taglit participants between those who have family and friends in Israel (37%) and those who do not (22%). Among non-Taglit visitors to Israel, there is a smaller gap in expressions of Jewish pride and peoplehood between those with family and friends in Israel and those without. One explanation is that non-Taglit visitors are more likely to connect to Israel through religion, so for them family ties are less of a factor. As the regression analysis (Table 3 below) demonstrates, overall visits to Israel, regardless of the program, is an important predictor of feelings of Jewish peoplehood.

Trips to Israel and Jewish Social Network

Jewish friendships are indicators of a Jewish social network—the circle of friends one interacts with and shares values and experiences with. As peers become prime socialization agents for post adolescents and emerging adults (Zukauskiene, 2014), their circle of friends is often a predictor of their worldviews as well as religious and secular behaviors.

Table 1 shows different clusters with regard to Jewish friendships. While 50% of post-adolescent students who visited Israel with family or friends, but not on Taglit, have all or mostly Jewish friends, 14% of students who never visited Israel have all or mostly Jewish friends.

Table 1: Jewish Friendships by Trips to Israel

Close friends are Jewish	***No Trips to Israel***	***Yes, with Taglit***	***Yes, not with Taglit***
All of them	1%	5%	7%
Most of them	13%	33%	43%
Some of them	56%	49%	39%
Hardly any of them	30%	13%	10%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Source: Demographic Survey of American Jewish College Students, 2014

Trips to Israel and Dating Patterns

College students' dating patterns mirror other Jewish engagements in intensity and characteristics. A minority—18%—of male and female Jewish students dates only Jews. Once

again, students who were never in Israel are at the top of "'only non-Jewish" relationships: 8% current and 34% previous ones. In contrast, students who visited Israel, but not with Taglit, are at the top of "only Jewish" relationships: 9% current and 20% previous, thus lending support to hypothesis 2. Taglit students fall between these two groups (See Table 2).

Table 2: Dating patterns by trips to Israel

Relationship	No Trips to Israel	Yes, with Taglit	Yes, not with Taglit
My current relationship Jewish	3%	6%	9%
My current relationship not Jewish	8%	5%	7%
All previous relationships Jewish	5%	13%	20%
Some, but not all, previous Jewish	23%	41%	32%
None of previous relationships Jewish	34%	16%	10%
Prefer not to say	2%	3%	2%
I have never been in a relationship	23%	16%	21%
Total*	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

(Total may not sum to 100% because don't know is not included.)
Source: Demographic Survey of American Jewish College Students, 2014

These dating patterns resemble those of the Class of 5755, young American and Canadian college students who were raised in Conservative synagogues and were part of the *Eight Up* study. In 2003, 18% said that they "date only Jews," 41% "prefer Jews but will also date non-Jews," 35% "do not care if the date is Jewish," and only 2% "prefer to date non-Jews," while 3% "do not date" (Keysar & Kosmin, 2004).

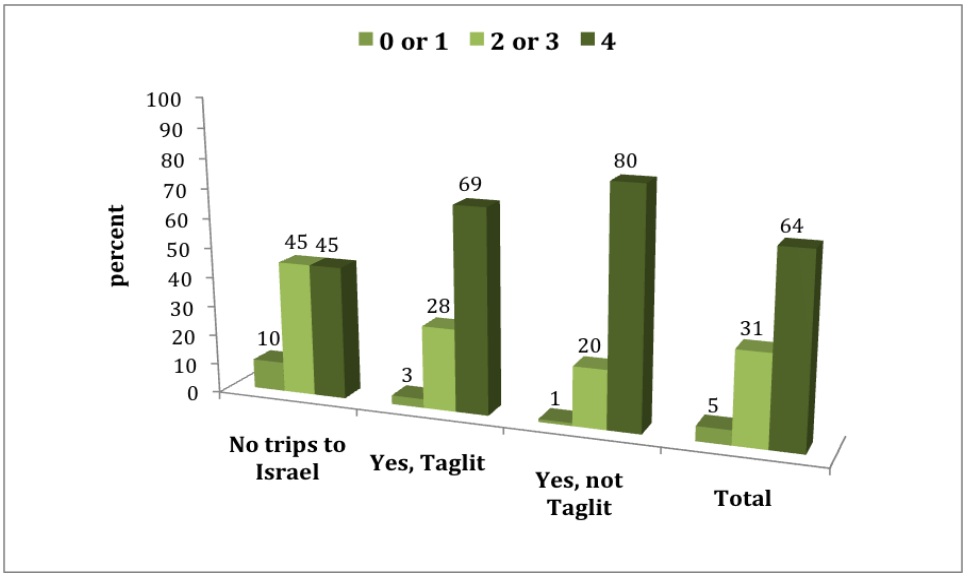
Interfaith Families

The Demographic Survey of Jewish College Students in 2014 documents students' family structure in a new way. It asked the college students how many Jewish grandparents they have.

Chart 5 portrays the Jewish ancestry distribution of this cohort of millennials: 64% have all four Jewish grandparents, while 36% have non-Jewish grandparents, and presumably a non-Jewish parent. The number of non-Jewish grandparents is a proxy for mixed-faith families, although of course in some cases the non-Jewish spouse may have converted, creating an all-Jewish household.

The multiple Jewish engagements are illustrated in these data once again, as students who went on trips to Israel, with Taglit or with other programs, were most likely to be raised in all-Jewish families (four Jewish grandparents). Students who never went on an Israel trip are far more likely (55%) to come from interfaith families.

Chart 5: Trips to Israel by Number of Jewish Grandparents



Source: Demographic Survey of American Jewish College Students, 2014

Multivariate Analysis: Expressions of Jewish Peoplehood

To investigate the various expressions of Jewish peoplehood in more detail, a multivariate analysis was developed. The dependent variable is a composite of expressions of Jewish peoplehood. The expressions are: feeling "kinship with Jews around the world," "a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people," and "proud to be a Jewish," as well as a responsibility "to take care of Jews in need around the world." A logistic regression helps determine the net effect of each variable on expressions of Jewish peoplehood when all other variables are kept constant. Respondents who responded "strongly agree" on all four aspects score 1 while others score 0. I introduced the various variables in stages, in all utilizing four models, to predict strong expressions of Jewish peoplehood among Jewish college students. The first model introduces

gender, the second adds Jewish educational experiences, the third adds number of Jewish grandparents as a proxy for interfaith family and attendance at synagogue services as a proxy for religious upbringing, and the last adds trips to Israel as a proxy for educational tourism and current religiosity. The relationship between the independent variables and level of commitment to Jewish peoplehood are presented in Table 3 as odds ratios, which express the relative odds of an occurrence of the event (strong Jewish peoplehood) compared to the reference category. The base categories are: female, no summer camp, no youth group, no Hebrew High School, all Jewish grandparents, frequent synagogue attendance in high school (once a week or more, or once or twice a month), no trips to Israel, and identity as a religious person.

Model 1 shows that gender is a significant predictor. The odds of strong Jewish peoplehood are higher for male than for female students. Model 2 indicates that all three Jewish educational experiences (summer camp, youth group, and Hebrew high school) increase the odds of strong Jewish peoplehood. Interestingly, there is no significant effect of attending a Jewish day school.

Model 3 adds religious upbringing and interfaith family as predictors, which elevate further the power of the analysis (R^2= 0.14). While both number of Jewish grandparents and attendance at services during high school are highly statistically significant in explaining Jewish peoplehood, the informal Jewish educational experiences, in particular Jewish summer camp and youth group, are not statistically significant in Model 3. Finally, Model 4 increases the explanatory power even further by adding trips to Israel and current religiosity, comparing students who describe themselves as religious, spiritual, or secular. Taken together, the model explains 25% (shown in Table 3 by R^2) of the variation in expressions of Jewish peoplehood.

Travel to Israel turns out to be the most important factor. The odds of expressing strong Jewish peoplehood are more than double among students who visited Israel compared with students who never visited. This finding is highly statistically significant. There are only small differences between Taglit Birthright participants and those who visited with family or other tours. This finding seems to lend support to hypothesis 4. Although having a strong sense of Jewish peoplehood might encourage some people go to Israel, the direction of causality could very well go the other way. Visits to Israel, the Jewish homeland, connect and unite Jews around the world as they discover Israel, which stands for a nation with a Jewish majority. For young people, the encounters with Israeli peers could elevate a sense of Jewish peoplehood and the commitment to other fellow Jews beyond their own Jewish family, classmates, or American Jewish friends.

Students who describe themselves as spiritual or secular are less inclined to express strong Jewish peoplehood compared with those who describe themselves as religious. Expressions of Jewish peoplehood are significantly stronger among students who were raised by

two Jewish parents, among students who have all Jewish grandparents, and among students who attended synagogue regularly (weekly or monthly) during high school (although the latter is not a statistically significant determinant of Jewish peoplehood once other factors are controlled for – see Model 4). Upon further investigation, we find an interaction between gender and level of religiosity of the students. While 20% of the male students in the sample attended synagogue in high school once a week or more, only 14% of the female students had such frequent synagogue attendance growing up. The male students' higher religiosity has persisted with only 64% saying they currently never attend synagogue services compared with 73% of the female students. However, it is plausible that other unobserved factors are also at play in explaining Jewish peoplehood.

Table 3: Expressions of Jewish Peoplehood Logistic Regression (Odds Ratio)

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Demographics				
Gender (male)	1.44*	1.53**	1.44*	1.81***
Jewish Educational Experiences				
Summer camp (yes)		1.74**	1.38	1.31
Youth group (yes)		1.55*	1.34	1.22
Hebrew high school (yes)		1.95***	1.47*	1.26
Interfaith and Religious				
Upbringing			0.49***	0.65*
Some Jewish grandparents				
Rarely or never attended synagogue			0.46***	0.71
in high school				
Trips and Current Religiosity				
Taglit-Birthright				2.25**
Yes, Trip (not Birthright)				2.42***
Spiritual				0.42***
Secular				0.19***
Constant	0.29	0.13	0.36	0.37
R^2	**0.009**	**0.094**	**0.14**	**0.25**

* < .05; **<.01; ***<.001 N=920
Reference categories are as follow: for trips – no trips to Israel; for religiosity – religious; for synagogue attendance in high school – a few times a year, only on High Holidays, or never; for Jewish grandparents – all; for gender – female; for Jewish educational experiences – no summer camp; no youth group; no Hebrew high school.

Discussion

There has been enormous investment in educational tourism programs that promise, as Taglit-Birthright Israel does, to transform the future of Judaism. According to a 2014 letter sent by the Birthright Israel Foundation and signed by its president, "One journey at a time…one young Jewish adult at a time … we are creating a stronger future for all of us." The philanthropists who responded to the call to help to transform the next generation of young Jews monitor the results.

This paper provides support for the belief that educational tourism to Israel strengthens Jewish connections. It is true that the students surveyed may not be representative of all young Jews. A potentially bigger concern is that it is hard to separate the cause and effect of Jewish connections, as those who exhibit multiple connections tend to also express greater connections to Israel and greater Jewish peoplehood. Are these educational programs simply preaching to the choir? Presumably, Jews who travel to Israel are already more motivated about their Jewishness than those who do not. As the 2014 college students demonstrate, a greater share of young Jews who never visited Israel have never had a strong sense of Jewish peoplehood to begin with and were not raised on strong Jewish values. This reflects a typical selectivity bias and not the success of the programs.

With those caveats in mind, this research note adds to the literature suggesting that visits to Israel enhance the Jewish life of young people. It reaffirms that there are many ways to look at Jewish identity and Jewish engagements, both religious and secular. Religious leaders might be disappointed by the findings. The road to Jerusalem on an educational tour does lead to the *Kotel*, the Western Wall, yet it does not elevate religious observance. This is not surprising because for decades, research has documented that to be a Jew in America does not necessarily mean being part of a religious group (Kosmin et al., 1990; Keysar & Kosmin, 2004; Pew, 2013). Young people again and again emphasize the cultural aspects of their Jewish connections. Over 79% of Jewish college students in 2014 said that to be a young Jew in America today means being a member of a cultural group, and only 58% said it means being a member of a religious group (respondents were able to choose more than one option). This is not surprising since observance among college students, particularly synagogue attendance and kashrut observance, even among those who were raised in religiously observant families, decline as young adults separate from their families and lead independent lives on campus (Keysar & Kosmin, 2004). Evaluation of Birthright Israel by researchers at Brandeis University among Taglit applicants and alumni five to nine years after the Taglit experience, found only small differences in religiosity between participants and non-participants, whereby participants were more likely to belong to a Jewish congregation, have a special meal on Shabbat, and celebrate Jewish holidays (Saxe et al.,

2012). As for the 2014 college students, young Jews today delay marriage and childbearing (Hartman & Hartman, 2009). Thus, we expect current emerging adult Jews to reestablish their connections with Judaism and religious engagements in their 30s, when they marry and raise children.

To assess educational tourism's success, one can also measure to what extent Jewish values have been inculcated. Cultivating and nurturing communal values, such as social justice and solidarity, kinship, and belonging to the Jewish people, is part of the curriculum of many educational programs. The evidence is that visits to Israel have managed to succeed in connecting or reconnecting young people with their Jewish cultural roots, elevating Jewish pride, and creating a sense of peoplehood. This is true of any kind of visit to Israel, whether with Taglit, another educational program, or family.

Our findings demonstrate that a trip to Israel is an important predictor of commitment to Jewish peoplehood, exceeding religious upbringing and even family background. A personal visit to Israel, in any capacity, seems to have an impact on young people more than growing up with two Jewish parents.

The peer-to-peer encounters or *mifgashim*, the educational-tourism-facilitated cross-cultural connections between American and Israelis, are golden opportunities to cultivate a global Jewish social network. Our findings show higher rates of Jewish friendships among participants of Taglit and among college students who visited Israel on other programs or occasions. Fortifying global Jewish friendships with personal and online communication might help stop the process of young people distancing from Israel.

Early visits to Israel, on Taglit or other educational programs or on a family tour, are also strongly correlated with students' openness about their Jewish identity on campus. Lev-Ari and Mittelberg (2008) reflect on the power of heritage visits on reconnecting with one's self and one's people. This Jewish "coming out" is a useful indicator of students' self-esteem and a reflection of young American Jews feeling comfortable in their own skin. Overall, two-thirds of the Jewish students in 2014 said that they are "always" open about being Jewish on campus and 23% said that they are "sometimes" open. Only 9% said either "never" or "hardly ever" open about being Jewish on campus. This is quite revealing since the campus environment has become antagonistic and unfriendly with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

A second question is the lastingness of the impact of travel to Israel. The challenge is how to make educational tourism a long-lasting experience and not a mere short-term tourist visit. With regard to intermarriage, for example, decision-making is a work in progress at ages 18-21. At this stage of their lives, college students are not committing themselves romantically. Most young women say that they are still looking for Mr. Fun, not Mr. Right (Keysar, 2014).

American college students, the bulk of Taglit-Birthright Israel's participants, leave their parents and family with a sense of liberation, independence, and rebellion. For many, the visit to Israel becomes an adventure and a party away from home (Kelner, 2003). That said, other research shows that Taglit participants are more likely than non-participants to date only Jews. Indeed, a study on the impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel on its alumni five to nine years after their visits to Israel finds that "Taglit participants were 51% more likely than non-participants to be married to a Jew" (Saxe et al., 2011). It would be valuable to follow participants over even longer periods to see how long the effect lasts and compare them not only with those have expressed interest in visiting Israel with Taglit but did not go, but more importantly with a larger group of young Jews who were never interested in visiting Israel.

The world has changed since educational tourism programs became popular in the last decade and a half. One important change is the rise of social media, which make it easy for participants to remain in touch with each other long after they return from Israel. Our study found that college students are more likely to keep in touch with their Jewish friends from their Israel trip through social media than in person. In light of this finding, it appears that organizations such as Taglit-Birthright may have opportunities to strengthen ties to Israel by making fuller use of social media, which according to their website, they do.

Clearly, the 2014 students' survey was not designed to compare their Jewish attachments before and after their visits to Israel, and as such it is limited. Lev-Ari and Mittelberg (2008) pre- and post-trip analysis of Birthright's North American participants looked at short-term impacts. They demonstrated that pre-trip engagements in social networks and synagogue attendance, as well as motivation to strengthen ties between Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, explain about 24% of the variance in the post-trip emotional attachment to Israel (2008, p. 97).

This paper has primarily covered the short-term impacts of educational tourism to Israel. As noted earlier, to better understand the long-term impacts, we plan on tracking the same students over time. The advantage of tracking the same people, as opposed to drawing different samples from the population with each study, is that it would be easier to establish cause and effect. The demographic study of Jewish college students in 2014, as the first stage of the longitudinal study, created the baseline results, which were presented in this paper. The results provide ideas for communal policy makers about the target population(s) for educational tourism and validate the need to continue and develop programs that enrich the Jewish lives of young people and harness strong and enduring Jewish social connections. The Brandeis' post-trip approach of panel studies of the lasting impact of the Birthright Israel program (Saxe, et al., 2011; 2012) is another medium to follow up participants and non-participants and evaluate in what ways, if at all, the trip to Israel is truly life changing.

A taste of milk and honey with visits to the Jewish homeland seems to be connected with young people's awareness of belonging and commitment to the Jewish people yet not to religious observance. The troubles in the Middle East seem never-ending. On a personal note, it was heartwarming to watch the Taglit buses continuing to roll in the summer of 2014 while Israel was under rocket attacks. The visits of young Jews to Israel have endured. Let us continue to track these educational journeys in the hope of closing the geographical and metaphysical distancing.

Endnotes

[1] The DJN list was updated to include 250 distinctively Jewish surnames covering Israeli, Sephardi, Russian, and Iranian origin in addition to the usual and obvious Ashkenazi surnames.
[2] The low response rate is a sign of today's lack of willingness to participate in national surveys. For instance, the recent 2013 Pew Jewish Survey yielded only a 16% response rate.
[3] These political views were part of unexplained categories in the survey.

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