Strengthening Jewish Identity: What works?

An analysis of Jewish students in the UK

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Reflections on the findings

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Summary of key findings

Motivated by a clear desire to secure the continuity and vitality of Jewish life in the United Kingdom, the Jewish community has, for the past twenty-five years, channelled considerable investment into Jewish educational programming. Now, almost a generation on, this report asks a simple but important question: to what extent has this investment in education 'worked'? Whilst there is more than one way to approach the issue, our focus is on measuring the 'value added' component of Jewish identity using a sample of British Jewish university students.

Data reveal a general belief among Jews that Jewish education works, i.e. that it strengthens Jewish identity. For example, in its recent National Jewish Community Survey (NJCS), JPR found that eight out of ten respondents believe Jewish schools strengthen Jewish identity.[1] Indeed, the same data also appear to show a clear, positive relationship between the amount of Jewish schooling (and several other Jewish educational initiatives) people have experienced, and their Jewish identity. Such findings are hardly ground-breaking, but they do prompt some important questions. What exactly do we mean by 'Jewish identity'? Can such a complex and contested concept be 'reduced' to a measurable, yet still meaningful, variable? And, more subtly, what is the direction of the relationship between Jewish educational programming and Jewish identity? – i.e. does Jewish educational programming strengthen Jewish identity, or rather, is Jewish educational programming simply more attractive to those who already have strong Jewish identities and therefore creates a misleading impression of efficacy? Put another way, what comes first, the educational 'chicken', or the Jewishly-engaged 'egg'?

In 2011, JPR conducted a nationwide study of the identities of Jewish students in the UK in its National Jewish Student Survey (NJSS).[2]

1   Graham, D., Staetsky, L. and Boyd, J. (2014). *Jews in the United Kingdom in 2013: Preliminary findings from the National Jewish Community Survey.* London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.
2   See: Graham, D. and Boyd, J. (2011). *Home and away: Jewish journeys towards independence. Key findings from the 2011 National Jewish Student Survey.* London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research.

Containing thirty-six separate indicators of Jewish identity for almost 1,000 Jewish students, this dataset provides a substantial resource to address exactly these questions. The analysis used conventional statistical techniques which uncovered six distinct aspects or 'dimensions' of Jewish identity exhibited by the sample. These were labelled:

- Cognitive religiosity;
- Socio-religious behaviour;
- Cultural religiosity;
- Ethnocentricity;
- Student community engagement; and
- Jewish values.

Used together, these six dimensions provide us with a multifaceted definition of 'Jewish identity', a term which is frequently used, but is notoriously difficult to characterise. Above all, they offer us a tool for accurately measuring Jewish identity in a nuanced and meaningful way, allowing us to address the second central concern of this study, namely, the direction of the relationship between Jewish education and Jewish identity. Using other statistical techniques, we were able to put controls in place which not only ensured the direction of the relationship could be reasonably asserted, but also allowed us to measure the likely impact several major British Jewish educational programmes have independently had on student Jewish identity.

Our results show that after controlling for the substantial effects of Jewish upbringing on Jewish identity, educational programmes do indeed have a collective, measurable 'value-added' impact on all six dimensions of student Jewish identity. However, even the combined impact is very limited on most dimensions, especially when compared with the effects of Jewish upbringing. For example, home background explains up to a third (33%) of the variance of any of the six dimensions of Jewish identity, whereas Jewish educational programmes account for less than 5% on four out of six dimensions, and on only one is it above 10%.

In other words, whilst Jewish education does have a collective, independent impact on Jewish identity, this impact is comparatively weak; indeed, **we found that the impact of Jewish educational programmes combined was six times weaker than the impact of Jewish upbringing on most aspects of Jewish identity.** The impact of Jewish education appears to be greatest in terms of *Socio-religious behaviour* (that is, Jewish religious practices such as synagogue attendance and Shabbat observance and engagement with Jewish life outside the student/campus context). But on other dimensions of Jewish identity, we found little evidence that Jewish educational initiatives have much of an impact. These include *Student community engagement* (students' engagement with university Jewish Societies or other Jewish student organisations, Friday night dinners at university and other Jewish social events) and

Jewish values (attitudes towards Jewish moral and ethical themes such as charitable giving, volunteering and social justice).[3]

The analysis is sufficiently detailed and powerful to provide us with a measure of the impact of particular educational programmes, in value-added terms, on each Jewish identity dimension. Overall, **the most important Jewish educational programmes were those involving an extended yeshiva/seminary experience or gap year in Israel.** And whilst youth movement involvement and attending a Jewish school were found to have had a positive effect on some aspects of Jewish identity, these were comparatively limited. Finally, we found that short-term Israel tours and synagogue classes (cheder), in and of themselves, had little or no positive measurable effects on any aspect of Jewish identity.

3   There is a significant academic literature on this issue and these findings are by no means unique. See further: Dashefsky, A., and Lebson C. (2002). "Does Jewish schooling matter? A review of the empirical literature on the relationship between Jewish education and dimensions of Jewish identity." *Contemporary Jewry* 23(1): 96-131; Goldlust, J. (1970). "Jewish education and ethnic identification: A study of Jewish adolescents in Australia." *Journal of Jewish Education* 40(2): 49-59; Cromer, G. (1974). "Intermarriage and communal survival in a London suburb." *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 16: 155-169; Miller, S.M., Schmool M. and Lerman A. (1996). *Social and political attitudes of British Jews: Some key findings of the JPR Survey.* London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research; Miller, S.M. (1988). "The impact of Jewish education on the religious behaviour and attitudes of British secondary school pupils." In: *Studies in Jewish Education*, 3rd edition, ed. Aviad J. Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press; Miller, S.M. (2003). "Changing patterns of Jewish identity among British Jews." In: *New Jewish identities: Contemporary Europe and beyond*, Gitelman Z., Kosmin B., and Kovacs A. (eds.), 45-60. Budapest: CEU Press.

Background

In the early 1990s, communal concern about assimilation, rising intermarriage and the long-term demographic future of Britain's Jewish community helped to establish a common view that Jewish education, in the broadest sense, was critical to the future vibrancy and viability of the Jewish community.[4] What followed was a massive injection of communal investment in Jewish educational programmes—in the form of Jewish schools, Israel programmes, youth movements and so on—which continues to this day.

Clearly, this investment was premised on the notion that such educational programmes are effective tools for strengthening young peoples' Jewish identity. In other words, it was grounded in a belief that Jewish youth groups, Jewish schools, organised trips to Israel, 'work'.

Like any significant investment, but especially one within an environment of limited resources, it is vital to ensure that money is spent not only efficiently but, above all, effectively. Almost twenty-five years later, we ask whether this is indeed the case. How effective are the educational programmes, which the community has so generously funded and so heavily relied upon, at strengthening Jewish identity? What, after all, works in Jewish education?

This report explores this fundamental question by means of an analysis of data from JPR's 2011 National Jewish Student Survey (NJSS)[5], and presents the findings of a robust, industry standard, statistical data analysis.[6] It also draws upon data from JPR's 2013 National Jewish Community Survey (NJCS) dataset.[7] In doing so, it provides reliable, empirical evidence about the impact educational programmes are likely to have had on young Jewish adults. It also points to which, if any, are the most effective, whilst controlling for other potentially mitigating factors, in particular, the Jewish home background.

Jewish opinions on the impact of Jewish education on Jewish identity

Of all the Jewish educational programmes the community has developed since the early 1990s, perhaps most faith has been placed in Jewish schools. The number of Jewish school places has expanded dramatically since then (by over 70% to date) while the population itself has contracted and, perhaps unsurprisingly, survey evidence shows that there is general agreement, across the community, that Jewish schools have a positive impact on Jewish identity.

For example, in JPR's National Jewish Community Survey (NJCS), respondents (aged sixteen and above) were asked about the impact they thought Jewish schools have on Jewish identity. These questions were posed irrespective of whether respondents had attended a Jewish school themselves, or whether or not they had sent, or were sending, their own children to a Jewish school. Asked whether they felt that Jewish schools 'strengthen Jewish identity', a large majority, eight out of ten (80%), agreed (Figure 1). In addition, a sizeable majority (60%) agreed that Jewish schools increase the chances of children ultimately marrying another Jew. We also saw that a majority (43%) of respondents felt that Jewish schools were better at imparting 'positive moral values' to pupils than non-Jewish schools.[8]

4   See: Kahn-Harris, K. and Gidley B. (2010). *Turbulent times: The British Jewish community today.* London: Continuum; and Graham, R. (2011). *Jewish community education: continuity and renewal initiatives in British Jewry, 1991-2000.* Doctoral thesis, University of Huddersfield.

5   The National Jewish Student Survey (NJSS) was a nationwide survey which gathered 925 complete questionnaires from respondents attending 95 different UK institutions of higher education. This total was estimated to represent between 11% and 14% of the total Jewish student population in Britain. See: Graham and Boyd (2011), ibid.

6   Most of the findings were first published in a peer reviewed academic journal article: Graham, D. (2014). "The Impact of Communal Intervention Programs on Jewish Identity: An Analysis of Jewish Students in Britain", *Contemporary Jewry* 34 (1) 31-57 (http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12397-013-9110-x). The aim of this report is to render those findings more readily accessible to the lay reader and contextualise them with results from other JPR surveys.

7   Graham, Staetsky and Boyd (2014), ibid.

8   These figures are based on previously unpublished data from JPR's NJCS Panel survey. For further details, see Graham, Staetsky and Boyd (2014), ibid.

Figure 1. Attitudes towards Jewish schools, NJCS, 2013*
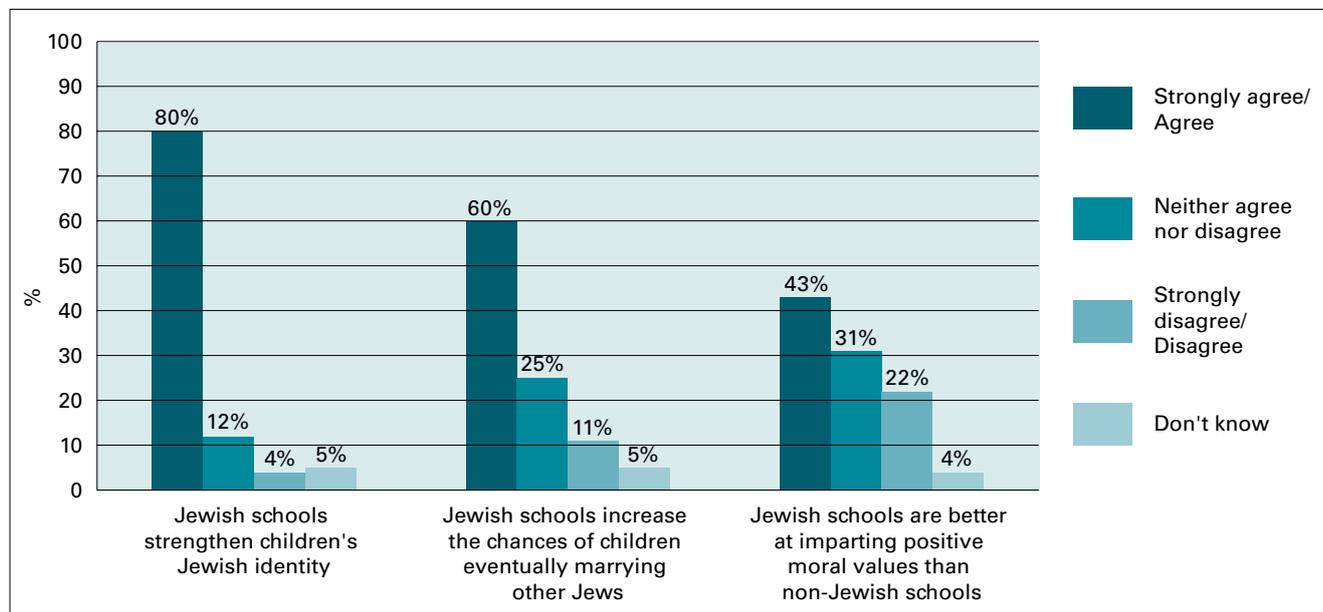
* NJCS Panel data (weighted) N=305 per statement

Similarly, organised short-term trips to Israel have also come to be seen as an essential tool for strengthening Jewish identity. As the former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks has argued, "Israel is Jewry's supreme educational environment […]. It is impossible to overestimate the impact of Israel on the formation of Jewish identity".[9] The enormous Taglit-Birthright Israel programme, established in December 1999, is testament to the power of this type of thinking. Birthright Israel was "conceived with the hope that engagement with Israel would strengthen Jewish identities and counter the threat to Jewish continuity posed by assimilation and intermarriage".[10] Research on Birthright has suggested it has "effects on participants' feelings of connection to Israel and the Jewish people, and on their views regarding the importance of marrying a Jewish person and raising children as Jews."[11]

9 Sacks, J. (1995). *Will we have Jewish grandchildren? Jewish continuity and how to achieve it.* London: Vallentine Mitchell and Co. p.98.
10 Saxe, L., Kadushin C., Kelner S., Rosen M., and Yereslove E. (2002). *A Mega-Experiment in Jewish Education: The impact of Birthright Israel*, Research Report 3. Waltham, MA. Cohen Centre for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University. p.ix. (www.ssc. wisc.edu/*jpiliavi/965/boxer_ref.pdf).
11 Saxe, L., Phillips B., Sasson T., Hecht S., Shain M., Wright G., and Kadushin C. (2009). *Generation Birthright Israel: The impact of an Israel experience on Jewish identity and choices.* Waltham, MA. The Cohen Centre for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis

What is 'Jewish identity'?

Whilst we may commonly believe that Jewish schools or trips to Israel have a positive impact on Jewish identity, it is important to be clear about what we mean by this phrase. The fact is that Jewish identity is a concept that eludes simple definition. Its meaning has been endlessly contested and debated since it potentially encompasses a very wide array of components such as religious practice, community involvement, ethnic and or racial belonging, cultural engagement, attachment to Israel, belief in God, Jewish historical attachment, and so on.

However, whilst 'identity' is a firmly social and therefore fluid concept, society itself, and especially planners and investors within society, rely on the possibility of quantifying identity in a manageable and meaningful way. For example, the national census asks several questions about identity—on religion, ethnic group, nationality, and country of birth—in order to provide a practical approach to its measurement. Such fixed categorisations are used by society to describe social groups because they are vital to help develop policy based on robust empirical evidence rather than on more subjective anecdote and opinion. This is no less true in the Jewish context.

University, p.3. (www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/pdfs/Taglit. GBI.10.25.10.final.pdf).

There are many approaches to quantifying Jewish identity. To demonstrate this, two examples from NJSS are presented below, one which takes a denominational approach to measurement and one which takes a psychological approach.

In the first example, students were asked, "Which of the following comes closest to describing your current Jewish identity?" Six options were presented, all of which map onto Britain's Jewish communal landscape. The results, presented in Figure 2, show that the largest group is 'Traditional', a label selected by just over a quarter (28%), followed by 'Orthodox', selected by just under a quarter (23%). Although the vast majority of respondents located themselves in one of the available categories, it is also notable that 2% reported being 'Mixed', and 5% could not, or would not, place themselves in any of the categories offered.

This typology has long proved to be a simple, but effective, method of predicting Jewish religious practice. However, since it explores Jewish identity in only one way, it gives us a somewhat limited insight, by itself, into the full spectrum of Jewish identity.

Consequently, social researchers rely on multiple indicators to measure Jewish identity, such as psychological aspects of Jewish identity, our second example of identity measurement. When student respondents were asked "How conscious are you of being Jewish?", we found

Figure 2. Self-defined current Jewish practice among students (N=925)
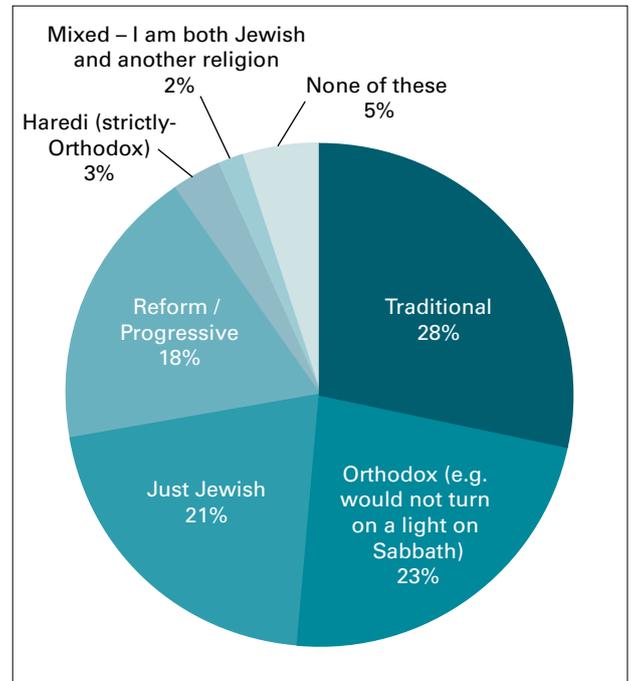
that four out of ten (41%) said they felt 'extremely conscious', whereas less than 1 in 10 considered their Jewishness to be fairly unimportant to them (Figure 3). This suggests that for the majority, being Jewish was far more than an incidental aspect of their identities; it was a prominent, *mental* trait.

In the remainder of this report, we apply rigorous statistical methods to the NJSS dataset in order

Figure 3. "How conscious are you of being Jewish?" (N=925)
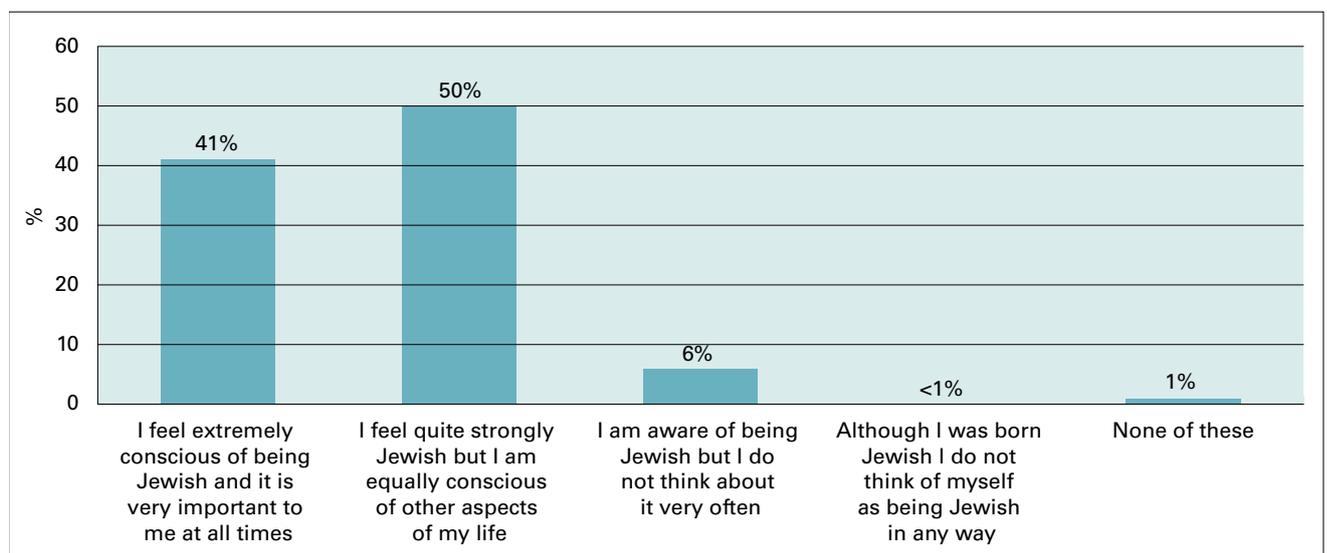
to answer the two central questions that underpin our understanding of the impact of Jewish education on Jewish identity. First, how can we measure Jewish identity? And second, what is the *direction* of the relationship between Jewish educational programming and Jewish identity? Part 1 explores the development of a set of six

statistical measures of Jewish identity; part 2 addresses the directional relationship between education and identity; and part 3 homes in on the impact of individual educational programmes. A prior understanding of statistics is not required beyond a basic understanding of concepts such as percentages.

Part 1: Getting a measure of Jewish identity

NJSS contained thirty-four indicators of Jewish identity, in addition to the two examples discussed previously, each focusing on a slightly different aspect of this multifaceted concept. However, such a large array of data can quickly become bewildering. What is ideally needed is a measurement which incorporates the majority of the information captured by these variables, but which also presents it in a manageable, yet statistically valid and informative way. Fortunately, there are statistical techniques that can be used to achieve this, and a common approach is known as 'factor analysis.' This technique harnesses the principles of correlation in order to identify variables that are statistically related to each other, and that can consequently be used to derive any 'underlying dimensions' of Jewish identity that may be hidden in the wealth of data.[12]

When we applied this approach, it automatically derived six, statistically robust, dimensions of Jewish student identity. It revealed a view of Jewish identity that consists of three distinct dimensions of religiosity, in addition to three further dimensions relating to ethnicity, communal engagement and values (details of the matrix showing this can be found in the Appendix). Each of these dimensions has been labelled according to its component variables, but ultimately, the labels we have applied are a matter of authorial interpretation.

The six dimensions of Jewish identity

The first three dimensions pick up on aspects of Jewish religiosity.

- The first dimension is **Cognitive religiosity** and it measures, in particular, mental aspects of Jewish religiosity. It encompasses attitudes towards prayer, Shabbat observance, and belief in God, as well as measures of religious self-perception. In other words, it tells us how cognitively religious respondents are, as opposed to how behaviourally religious they are; what they think rather than what they do.

- The next dimension is **Socio-religious behaviour** and, in contrast to Cognitive religiosity, it relates more specifically to Jewish religious practice. This second dimension includes measures of synagogue attendance and Shabbat observance. However, it also includes variables with a social bent, such as regular attendance at Jewish social events *outside* the university context, as well as volunteering within the wider Jewish community. The fact that the analysis has separated this dimension from Cognitive Religiosity already indicates that for these students, *feelings* of Jewish religiosity do not necessarily correlate with Jewish *practice*.

- The third dimension we have termed **Cultural religiosity**, and whilst it consists of variables that are, ostensibly, religious in nature, they are not overtly so. The items are attendance at a Passover *seder* and fasting on Yom Kippur. It is likely that the analysis did not include these in the Socio-religious behaviour dimension because they are fundamentally different: they are among the most commonly observed practices, partly because they occur infrequently, but also because they are associated with human universal themes (freedom and repentance). Furthermore, unlike many other rituals, their observance has a strong familial dimension – they tend to be observed to some extent within a family environment (i.e. the *seder* is typically a family occasion, and the Yom Kippur fast is commonly preceded and followed by a family meal). Thus, these are both commonly observed because they are at least as much, if not more, expressions of Jewish *cultural* identity as they are expressions of *religious* identity.

The final three dimensions deviate from the religiosity theme.

- The first of these is ethnic in nature and is called **Ethnocentricity**. It is essentially attitudinal, and it pertains to issues that have a strong ethnic, or 'peoplehood', component to them, i.e. Israel and intermarriage. It also includes a measure of attitudes towards Jewish social exclusivity, itself a central aspect of

12 See: Graham (2014), ibid.

intermarriage discourse. Since these variables point towards a theme of Jewish survivalism, they are ultimately ethnocentric.

- The fifth dimension is about socialisation and is called **Student community engagement**. For most students, Jewish community is campus based, and in contrast to Socio-religious behaviour, this dimension relates to students' Jewish engagement *within* the university environment. Thus, this measure incorporates involvement with a Jewish Society (JSoc), membership of, or involvement with, other Jewish student organisations, attendance at Jewish social events on campus, and attendance at Friday night dinner events on campus.

- Finally, the sixth dimension, **Jewish values**, focuses on attitudes towards certain ethical issues vis-à-vis Jewish identity. This measure incorporates charitable giving, volunteering and social justice. It also includes a more general item about the place of moral and ethical behaviour within respondents' concept of Jewishness.

Collectively, these six dimensions of Jewish identity provide a more rounded and complete measurement of Jewish identity than any single variable, or set of variables, can achieve. Although they do not cover every possible aspect of Jewishness—their scope is ultimately limited to the variables included in the survey—they do form a highly detailed quantitative description of Jewish identity which is both statistically robust and, as will be shown, meaningful.

A better understanding of student Jewish identity

These six dimensions can be used to gain valuable insights into student Jewish identity. For example, referring back to the measure of self-defined Jewish religious alignment (Figure 2), they allow us to understand in more detail what students mean when they say they are 'Orthodox' or 'Traditional' or 'Just Jewish'. They help, for example, to understand whether Traditional students are more 'religious' than Reform students and, if so, in what sense.

Thus, we can use the six dimensional identity analysis to clarify our understanding of Jewish sub-groups. The relative scores that each of the four categories achieve ('Orthodox', 'Traditional',

'Reform/Progressive' and 'Just Jewish'), are shown in Figure 4. First, it is apparent that on five of the six dimensions, column heights shorten sequentially from left to right, suggesting that the intensity of Jewish identity steadily weakens as we move from Orthodox through to Just Jewish. The one exception is Ethnocentricity, where Reform/Progressive score more weakly than Just Jewish, rather than the other way round. Thus we can conclude, as one might expect, that the label Traditional describes a stronger Jewish identity than Reform/Progressive but weaker than Orthodox.

Further, the gradient of the columns on each dimension tells us something about how different each of the religious groupings is from one another. For example, in terms of Cognitive religiosity, not only do these four categories 'line up' in an intuitive order, the steep gradient suggests that, on this dimension, the position of each group is clearly differentiated: Orthodox have substantially greater Cognitive religiosity than Traditional who, in turn, have greater Cognitive religiosity than Reform/Progressive, with Just Jewish having the lowest scores on average for this dimension.

Yet this is not the pattern seen across all dimensions. For example, on Socio-religious behaviour it is clear that Orthodox stand out from all the other groupings—they are far more likely than even the Traditional to exhibit relatively high scores on this dimension, which is closely related to Jewish practice. Indeed, on this evidence, there is little to separate the other three groups in terms of Socio-religious behaviour.

Another example can be seen with respect to Student community engagement and Ethnocentricity. Here the Orthodox and Traditional groups stand apart from Reform and Just Jewish. This implies that Orthodox and Traditional students not only score more strongly than Reform/Progressive and Just Jewish on these two dimensions, but they also have more in common with each other than the other two groups.

Thus, this analysis allows us to draw solid, empirically grounded conclusions about labels which, on the surface, may appear ambiguous. For example, the Traditional group lies midway

Figure 4. Jewish identity scores based on self-defined religious grouping*
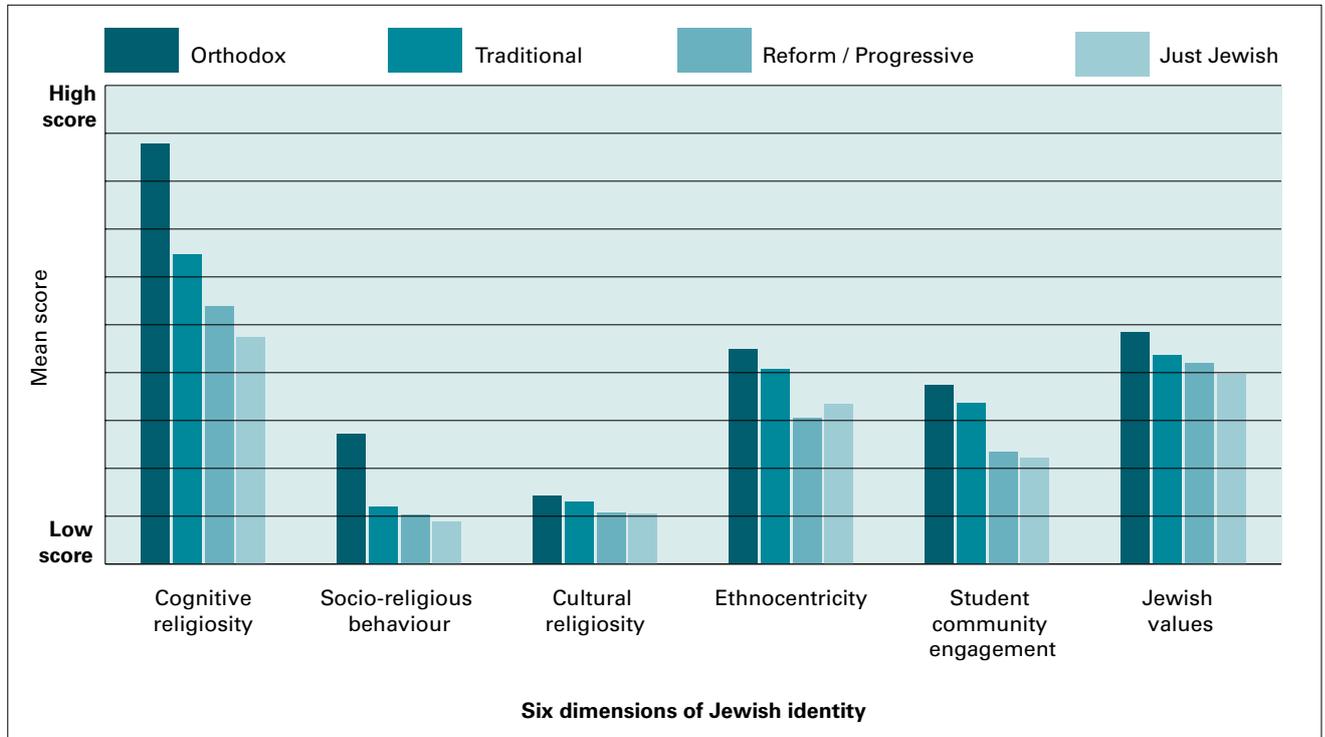
*The relative height of the columns within each dimension is statistically more relevant than their absolute heights, which are based on the mean scores achieved by each religiosity group on each dimension of Jewish identity. Greater mean scores are associated with stronger Jewish identities.

between the Orthodox and Reform/Progressive groups when it comes to Cognitive religiosity, but it is nearer to Reform/Progressive on Socio-religious behaviour, and closer to Orthodox on Student community engagement

and Ethnocentricity. On this evidence, other than being slightly weaker on five out of six dimensions, there is little to separate those who self-define as 'Just Jewish' from those who self-define as 'Reform/Progressive' on most of them.

Part 2: Unpacking the relationship between Jewish education and Jewish identity

This exercise can be repeated in multiple contexts. For example, we can use the six dimensions to explore the relationship between Jewish education and Jewish identity. Figure 5 shows the relationship between the number of Jewish educational experiences students have had (such as a Bar Mitzvah or taking a GCSE in Jewish Studies) and their Jewish identity (based on the six dimensions). As with Figure 4, the absolute scores (height of the columns in Figure 5) is of less significance than their relative heights within each identity category. In this instance, it is immediately apparent that the more Jewish educational items students have experienced, the greater their levels of Jewish identity on every dimension.

Similarly, with respect to Jewish schooling itself (which was not included within the list of experiences reported in Figure 5), Figure 6 also suggests that on *every* dimension,

more Jewish schooling is associated with heightened levels of Jewish identity. Looking more closely, we can see that more Jewish schooling makes a greater difference (indicated by a steeper gradient) on Socio-religious behaviour, Ethnocentricity and Student community engagement than it does on Cultural religiosity. Furthermore, those who experienced Jewish schooling at all stages score notably higher on Cognitive religiosity than even those who experienced just one stage of Jewish schooling.

Jewish education and Jewish identity: the chicken or the egg?

These findings appear to vindicate the results presented in Figure 1 showing that most Jews in Britain believe Jewish schools provide an effective means of strengthening Jewish identity. However, before we can conclude this definitively, we need to be clear about *cause*

Figure 5. Relationship between Jewish educational experience* and Jewish identity*

Figure 6. Relationship between Jewish school attendance and Jewish identity*
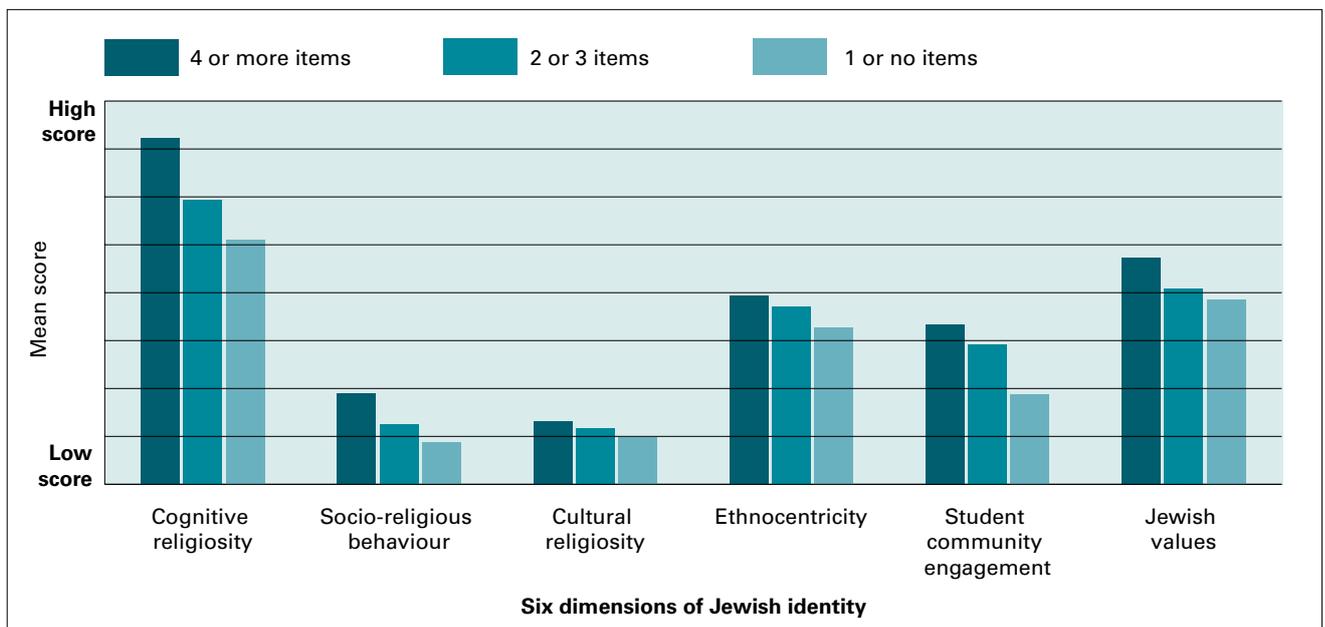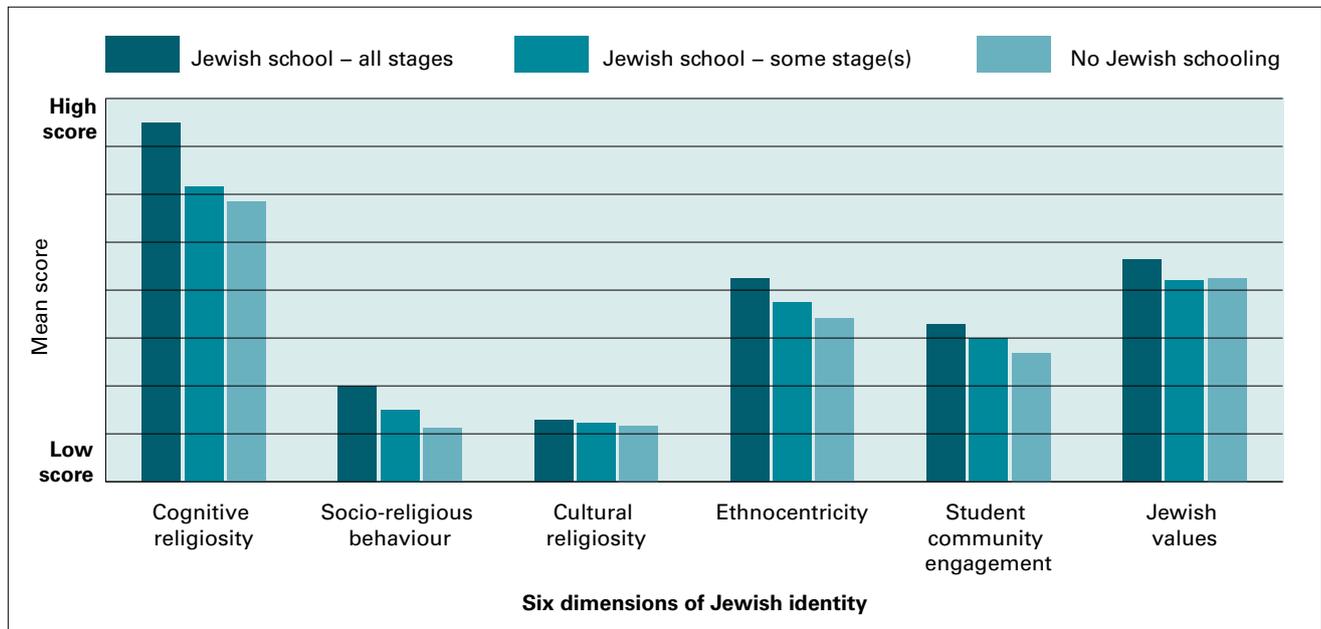
* Columns measure the mean score achieved by each group on each dimension of Jewish identity; stages are divided between primary, secondary and years 12 and 13 (sixth form).

and effect. The central issue is that, whilst increased exposure to Jewish education of all kinds may strengthen Jewish identity, it is also possible that families with strong Jewish identities are more likely to expose their children to more forms of Jewish education than families with weaker Jewish identities, in effect making it appear that it is Jewish schools that work, rather than Jewish families.

This is the chicken and egg dilemma. What is the *direction* of the relationship between Jewish education and Jewish identity? Does more Jewish schooling indeed enhance Jewish identity, or are Jewish schools simply more attractive to more Jewishly identifying people, thus giving the *impression* of an impact? If, as seems likely, Jewishly-engaged parents have a greater propensity to send their children to Jewish schools than less Jewishly-engaged parents, could the difference we observe in Figure 6 be chiefly a result of what happens at *home* rather than what happens at *school*? What we need to establish, therefore, is the *value-added* of Jewish schooling and, moreover, of Jewish education in general, once parental background and other potentially mitigating factors have been taken into account in the formation and strengthening of Jewish identity.

Once again we can use statistics to help clarify and illuminate the relationships. A commonly used approach is known as 'multiple regression analysis', which provides a means of assessing the *independent* relationship between independent variables (such as attending a Jewish school) and dependent variables (i.e. the six dimensions of Jewish identity), exclusive of potentially mitigating factors (such as parental religiosity).

To do so, twelve independent variables were identified in the NJSS data that could potentially influence Jewish identity outcomes, and these were assembled into three groups, as shown in Table 1. Whilst multiple regression cannot definitively demonstrate the direction of any relationship, the analysis has been set up in a way that ensures the direction of influence can reasonably be inferred. Demographic variables are examined and controlled for first, followed by upbringing variables. Once these have also been controlled for, only then are the educational programmes tested.[13]

13 For technical details see: Graham (2014), ibid.

Table 1. Independent variables to be tested in three stages

Variable groupings	Independent variables
1. Demographic	• Gender • Age
2. Jewish upbringing	• Friday night (Sabbath) meals most/every week • Kosher meat at home • Type of Jewish upbringing
3. Jewish educational programmes	• Part-time classes in synagogue or *cheder* • Jewish schooling • Youth movement involvement • Israel 'tour' • Youth summer camp • Gap year programme in Israel (not yeshiva) • Yeshiva/seminary

Figure 7. Total variance explained by each type of independent variable for each dimension of Jewish identity
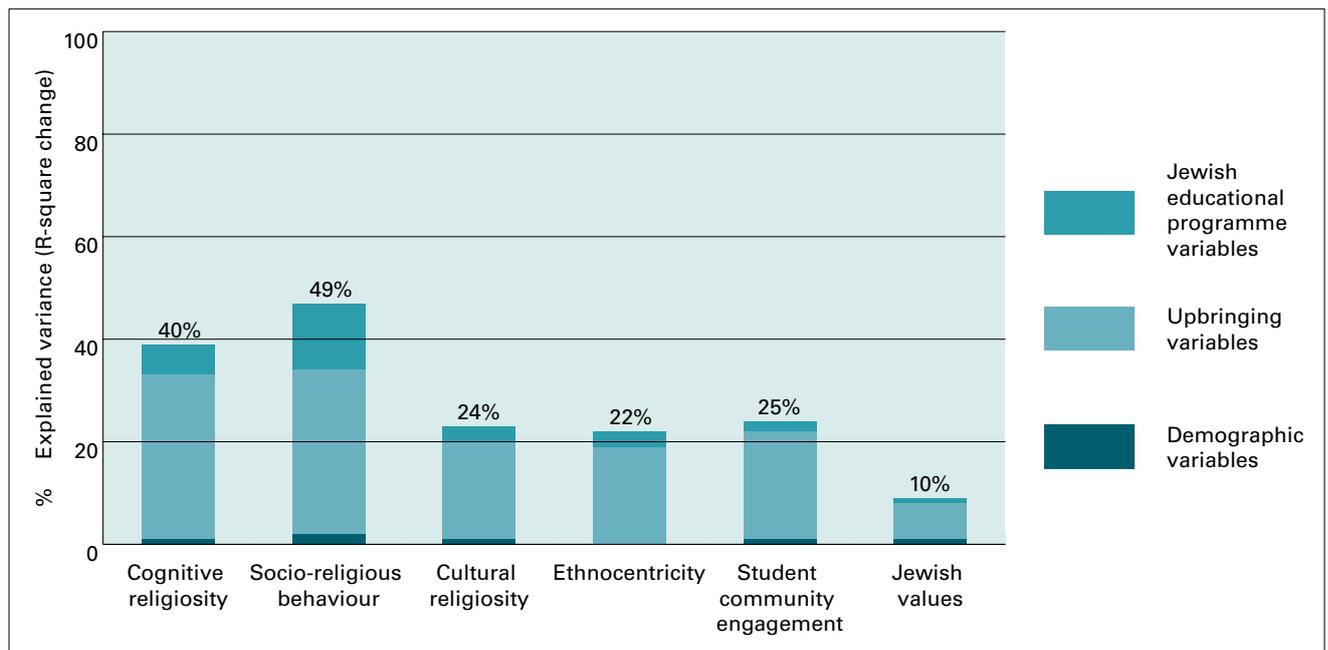
The first stage of the results is presented in Figure 7. The graph shows the amount of 'variance'[14] that is explained[15] for each dimension of Jewish identity by the independent variables listed in Table 1. Focusing firstly on the *total height* of each column, it is apparent that the independent variables have the greatest predictive power on Socio-religious behaviour; indeed, 49% of the total variance in Socio-religious behaviour can be explained by the set of variables in Table 1. In other words, these twelve variables account for half of the variance observed among students in terms of their Jewish religious practice and Jewish

14 Variance is the average of all the deviations from the mean. To take a simple example, in a classroom of pupils of varying heights there will be an average height. Some will be a little bit taller and others will be a little bit shorter than the average. i.e. there is *variation* in height either side of this average. 'Variance' is a statistic related to that variation.

15 To continue the pupil height analogy, the method employed here is effectively seeking to identify the factors that might explain why we observe variation in pupil height. For example, we might hypothesise that gender (men are taller than women), genes (tall parents have tall children) and diet (those with a healthy

balanced diet are taller than those without) are key predictors of height. We can use multiple regression to statistically test whether any of these hypotheses is true.

social engagement *outside* the university context. A similarly high proportion (40%) of the total variance in Cognitive religiosity (mental aspects of religiousness) is also explained by these variables.

We can also see in Figure 7 that on three of the variables, about a quarter of the total variance is explained. On one, however, Jewish values, only 10% of the variance is explained overall—in other words, independent variables other than these twelve explain much of the variance in Jewish values.

Moreover, the fact that the twelve predictor variables are only able to explain up to half of the variance on any single dimension of Jewish identity implies that half or more of the variance must be explained by other factors that we are not able to test here. Such results are common in any social scientific research; they reflect the immensely complicated reality being modelled. Evidently, many more, ultimately unique, factors are responsible for shaping Jewish identity, and a single questionnaire can only accommodate a finite number.

The second stage of the analysis is to examine the contribution made by each variable grouping (Demographic; Upbringing; Educational programming) to the overall amount of explained variance. In Figure 7 it is apparent that demographic variables – the age of the students, or whether they are male or female – explain very little of the variance in any of the dimensions. By contrast, upbringing variables account for the majority of the variance. The remainder is accounted for by the combined effect of Jewish educational programmes. However, we can see that this actually explains a rather limited amount of the total variance for each dimension, with the clear exception of Socio-religious behaviour and, to a lesser extent, Cognitive religiosity.

This already strongly suggests that the apparent causal relationship between Jewish educational programmes and Jewish identity (shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6) may be somewhat misleading, and that the attitudes described in Figure 1 are based on false premises. At best, the above results suggest that Jewish educational interventions, in the broadest sense, have a quite limited impact on most of the dimensions of Jewish identity tested (Figure 7) and, moreover, any direct impact these experiences have appears to be far less important than those related to upbringing. In other words, the 'value added' of Jewish education, whilst significant in statistical terms, is nevertheless, quite weak.

Part 3: Which educational programmes have the strongest and weakest impact?

Even so, since some measurable effect of educational programming is clearly apparent (Figure 7) and any positive value-added impact of a Jewish educational programme on any aspect of Jewish identity is to be welcomed, it is important to understand whether some programmes have a stronger impact than others.

Therefore, this third stage of the analysis focuses on a statistic called the 'standardized beta coefficient' (ß).[16] This tells us what statistically valid effect, if any, each of the Jewish educational programmes tested has on each dimension of Jewish identity. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 2.

The greatest amount of variance explained by Jewish educational programmes collectively is in Socio-religious behaviour (15%) (Table 2 bottom row). Of the seven programmes analysed, five

have a measurable, independent, effect on this dimension of Jewish identity (Table 2, column 3). Since the figures in each column are directly comparable as they are standardized, we can see that the programme with the greatest effect on Socio-religious Behaviour is Yeshiva/seminary (.39), followed by Youth movement involvement (.15). It can also be seen that the short-term Israel summer tour programme appears to have a small but *negative* effect (-.08) on this dimension. It is important to remember that these relationships are *independent* of all other factors, including upbringing variables and other Jewish educational programmes.

The dimension with the second largest amount of variance explained by the Jewish educational programmes tested is Cognitive religiosity (7%). Here, only two of the programmes have a measurable effect, and only one has a positive

Table 2. Beta (ß) scores for each type of educational programme on each dimension of Jewish identity

Jewish educational programme	Cognitive religiosity	Socio-religious behaviour	Cultural religiosity	Ethno-centricity	Student community engagement	Jewish values
Synagogue classes (*cheder*)			.08			
Jewish schooling		.09		.12		
Youth movement involvement		.15	.12			
Youth summer camp		.05		-.08		
Israel tour	-.10	-.08	-.06			
Yeshiva/seminary	.30	.39	.16	.12	.11	.18
Gap year in Israel			.09	.10	.13	.09
Total variance explained (R^2) by all Jewish educational programmes collectively	7%	15%	4%	3%	3%	2%

16 The standardized beta coefficient is a statistical indicator which tells us, in comparative terms, the effect that a unit change in an independent variable (such as Jewish schooling) has on a dependent variable (e.g. a dimension of Jewish identity). See: Graham (2014), ibid.

effect: Yeshiva/seminary (.30). The short-term Israel tour programme again shows a small *negative* effect (-.10). No other Jewish educational programmes tested have a statistical effect on Cognitive religiosity.

Which educational programmes have the greatest effect overall?

Although the numbers are not directly comparable across the rows of Table 2, they do indicate whether or not there is a statistically measurable effect, as well as its direction. This therefore reveals that Jewish schooling has a (positive) effect on two out of the six dimensions of Jewish identity—Socio-religious behaviour and Ethnocentricity. Indeed, on Ethnocentricity, Jewish schooling has the joint largest effect (alongside Yeshiva (.12 each)). However, this also indicates that *Jewish schooling has no measurable effect on four out of six dimensions of Jewish identity*, including Student community engagement and Jewish values.

It is also apparent that Israel summer tour, perhaps surprisingly, has no positive effect on any dimension, and a small negative effect on three dimensions. In complete contrast, *Gap year*

in Israel programmes have a positive independent effect on four out of the six dimensions, and have the largest effect of any educational programme on Student community engagement. Overall, *Yeshiva/seminary is the most successful programme* impacting on every dimension of Jewish identity in a positive way, and in four cases it has the largest effect.

The impact of Jewish education on Jewish identity compared with Jewish upbringing

It is evident that the amount of variance explained overall by the educational programmes in at least four of the six dimensions is small (Table 2, bottom row). Moreover, upbringing variables have the greatest measurable effect on all six dimensions of Jewish identity (Figure 7). This raises a further question: which aspects of upbringing are the most important? Whilst admittedly, the survey provides a limited assessment of Jewish upbringing, it is apparent that two variables stand out—Friday night meals and Kosher meat at home (Table 3). These two variables explain the majority of the variance measured in all six dimensions of Jewish identity, and far more than any Jewish educational programme, including Yeshiva/seminary.

Table 3. Beta (β) scores for each type of upbringing variable on each dimension of Jewish identity

Jewish upbringing variables*	Cognitive religiosity	Socio-religious behaviour	Cultural religiosity	Ethno-centricity	Student community engagement	Jewish values
Friday night meals	0.13	0.14	0.16	0.19	0.21	0.19
Kosher meat	0.32	0.16	0.26	0.12	0.25	
Type of Jewish upbringing	0.08	0.09		0.09		
Total variance explained (R^2) by all Jewish upbringing variables collectively	32%	33%	18%	19%	22%	7%

* For technical details of these variables, see: Graham (2014), ibid.

Reflections on the findings: How can we impact Jewish identity?

Jonathan Boyd

In examining the findings of this study, four issues emerge that are particularly worthy of consideration. These are not presented here as policy solutions, as setting policy is ultimately the responsibility of community service providers, but rather as ideas to consider in the ongoing debate about how best to cultivate the identities of young Jews in the United Kingdom.

1. The complexity of Jewish identity

Perhaps first and foremost, the findings demonstrate the complexity of Jewish identity and how difficult it is to shape it. In this study, we effectively shine a ray of Jewish identity 'light' through the prism of factor analysis, to reveal some of its component parts: religious piety, cultural religiosity, ethnocentricity, communal engagement, Jewish values, and so on. When we then examine how each of these components of Jewish identity is impacted by different community educational interventions, we see that they respond to them in particular ways. Sometimes the impact is positive, sometimes we see little or no effect at all, and sometimes it is even shown to be negative. Furthermore, we also see that the lion's share of the observed variance in Jewish identity is unexplained, once we account for the impact of Jewish educational programmes, Jewish upbringing in the home, and demographic factors such as age or gender. Instead, it must be influenced by other causes, unique to the individual – perhaps psychological, perhaps biological, perhaps through personal experiences and interactions. So in policy terms, at the most basic level, we have to acknowledge that we are trying to shape and influence something that is multi-faceted and profoundly complex, and that however good our educational programmes, institutions and organisations may be, ultimately, there are genuine limitations to what they can achieve. However, if we are to be successful, we need to invest far more time and energy in enhancing our shared understanding of what Jewish identity is, and how our efforts

may contribute – positively or otherwise – to its development. Developing such an understanding should help to guide our efforts to ensure that we are utilising the educational opportunities we have in the most effective ways.

2. The importance of the Jewish home

In recent decades, a great deal of time and money has been invested by the community in a range of educational interventions designed to shape and strengthen people's Jewish identities. These findings clearly demonstrate that such efforts, collectively, have an impact on the overall picture of Jewish identity development. However, they also show that their degree of impact is rather modest compared to the effects of Jewish practices and behaviours in the home, measured in three ways – regularly having Shabbat dinner with the family, observing *kashrut*, and the type, or flavour, of Jewish upbringing experienced. Indeed, of all the items that were measured, what happens in our homes is paramount. If we are concerned about the Jewishness of the next generation, we need to internalise this critical finding. It strongly suggests that the task of forging our children's Jewish identities cannot simply be delegated to others – teachers, youth workers, etc. – but must be a central preoccupation of parents, and possibly grandparents, as well. Utilising the data available to us, we can only speculate about why this is so important. Regularly sharing Shabbat dinner with the family is probably influential because it constantly associates Judaism with family warmth and togetherness in a way that is generally enjoyable and largely undemanding. Observing *kashrut* at home in some way is probably impactful because it requires Judaism to be a constant presence in one's life – even mundane activities such as laying the table or going shopping are infused with a strong element of Jewishness. The data suggest that, practised regularly over time, these play a vital role in Jewish identity development. From a policy perspective, this raises a question about how, or whether,

Jewish charities ought to offer advice and support to people interested in creating an effective Jewish home environment for their children. If we know that the home is essential to the development of Jewish identity, are there initiatives that should be established that can optimise its value?

3. Three critical factors: Jewish immersion, group experience, and duration

Whilst there is no magic formula to successful Jewish identity formation, the evidence here nevertheless demonstrates that certain interventions are positively impactful on most, if not all, the dimensions of Jewish identity we have discussed. Yeshiva programmes come out particularly well, as do gap year schemes in Israel. Home upbringing is also distinctly influential. What is it about these particular arenas that causes them to be more impactful than the other ones investigated? Studies in the philosophy of Jewish education point to three particular contributing factors. The first is that all of these contain a strong immersive element. Yeshiva and gap year programmes involve moving away from home, and immersing oneself completely in an entirely new and profoundly Jewish social and educational environment. This environment is typically in Israel, which for Jews who have grown up in Britain is, in and of itself, also an entirely new and profoundly Jewish environment. This context is a constant – one does not dip into it for a few hours a day or a few days a week and then leave – it is all-encompassing, informing one's behaviours and attitudes consistently. Several educational thinkers have highlighted the importance of this, including Professor Barry Chazan who has argued, for example, that "it is the total cultural milieu that teaches, by presenting, creating and reinforcing values, ideas, experiences, norms, and ultimately a worldview."[17] Whilst all educational initiatives operate within some kind of cultural environment, these ones stand out by virtue of the intensity and totality of the immersion. The home is slightly different in that one inevitably moves in and out of that environment, but it is similarly constant and immersive – most people live within the same home environment that reinforces the same

values, ideas, norms and experiences, every day throughout their upbringing.

The second contributor is the group, or the collective. Each of these three interventions involves a group of people. In the home environment, the group is the family; in the cases of a yeshiva or gap year programme, it is a collection of peers, all of whom are going through the same fundamental experience. What happens in these contexts is that a key part of the Jewish learning takes place through group interactions – informal discussions, arguments and debates, shared experiences, friendships, relationships and the like. There is no clearly-defined curriculum in this regard; one learns through being part of the group, and by being shaped by, or actively shaping, the practices and behaviours that occur within it. Again, academic commentators have often stressed the value of the collective in learning, maintaining that it is an integral component of the learning experience, and highlighting the importance of socialisation into a collective as a key part of identity development.[18] Whilst many educational interventions involve collective experiences, these ones all situate the group, knowingly or unknowingly, at the heart of the endeavour.

Third, these are all long-term undertakings. These immersive, group experiences do not last for a week, or a month, but rather for several months, at least, in the case of yeshiva and gap year programmes, and many years in the case of home upbringing.

The results appear to show that there are no quick solutions to the challenges of Jewish identity development – one-off, short-term, even immersive, experiences ultimately show little long-term measurable impact. Developing a robust Jewish identity requires the investment of time, and it is only through considerable personal

17 Chazan, B. (1991). "What is Informal Jewish Education?" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 67(4).

18 See, for examples: Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning. Legitimate Peripheral Participation.* New York: Cambridge University Press; Nahapiet , J. and Ghoshal, S. (1998). "Social Capital, Intellectual Capital, and the Organizational Advantage." *Academy of Management Review* 23(2); Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone. The collapse and revival of American community.* New York: Simon and Schuster; Palmer, P. (1998). *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

effort and experience that particular attitudes and behaviours can develop.

Importantly, it is only when these three elements are combined in a single educational intervention, that we see observable, significant impact. It is insufficient to apply one or two of them alone. In essence, Jewish identity appears to be strengthened most when Jews are given an opportunity to immerse themselves completely in an intensively Jewish environment, with a group of people around them to learn from and with, over an extended period of several months at least. If our goal is to enhance and strengthen the Jewish identities of the next generation, these are important principles to explore in our educational planning and programme development.

4. The importance of robust evidence

Some of the findings in this report breach existing orthodoxies about Jewish educational effectiveness, and some will no doubt be challenged; that, after all, is how we make progress. But what we all must be cautious about is the faith we have in our own convictions. Many of us *know* intuitively that certain interventions 'work'. We see evidence of it in ourselves or in our children, especially straight after they return home from an event when they seem to be enriched, enthused and enlightened. Yet an immediate impact is not necessarily a sign of an enduring one, and in the realm of educational policy, we need to understand both the difference and the interplay between these. If we are serious about the Jewish future of the next generation, we need to do more to assess and understand which factors are really making a difference. Whilst we would hope these findings prompt a constructive debate about the efficacy of the community's current educational programmes, if the reader accepts nothing else in this report, it should be this: that to understand the real impact our programmes are having, it is vital that we gather evidence in a thoughtful and independent fashion. If we are to succeed in our efforts to cultivate in young Jews deep, meaningful and empowering Jewish identities, we need to continually test our assumptions using the most robust approaches we can find.

Appendix

The following table shows the results of the factor analysis carried out on the thirty-six variables measuring Jewish identity which were included in the National Jewish Student Survey. It shows the variables which were automatically grouped together by the analysis based on the magnitude

NJSS variables	Dimensions						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Cognitive religiosity	Socio-religious behaviour	Student community engagement	Jewish values	Ethnocentricity	Cultural religiosity	Excluded from analysis*
Feel that being Jewish is about prayer	.76						
Feel that being Jewish is about observing at least some aspects of the Sabbath	.71						
Feel that being Jewish is about believing in God	.70						
Feel that being Jewish is about studying Jewish religious texts	.69						
Feel that being Jewish is about keeping kosher	.67						
Feel that being Jewish is about having a religious identity	.63						
Self-described category of current Jewish outlook	.51						
Whether attend Jewish social events most weeks (At home‡)		.64					
Frequency of synagogue service attendance (At home‡)		.62					
Frequency of voluntary work for Jewish-related charities		.57					
Whether switch on lights on the Sabbath (At university)		.57					
Frequency of synagogue service attendance (At university)		.52					
Self-described category of Jewish consciousness*							
Self-described category of current Jewish identity/practice*							
Whether been to any [university Jewish Society] JSoc meetings or events			.82				
Whether attend Jewish social events most weeks (At university)			.76				
Whether attend a Friday night (Sabbath) dinner most/every week (At university)			.68				
Whether currently connected, in any way, with the other (Jewish student) organizations			.64				

of their factor loadings (correlations) (for clarity, only the highest values have been reproduced here).[19]

Note the analysis originally derived seven dimensions, but Dimension 7 in the table was excluded due to its very low reliability score (.42).

	Dimensions						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
NJSS variables	Cognitive religiosity	Socio-religious behaviour	Student community engagement	Jewish values	Ethnocentricity	Cultural religiosity	Excluded from analysis*
Whether feel that being Jewish is about volunteering to support a charity				.81			
Whether feel that being Jewish is about supporting social justice causes				.80			
Whether feel that being Jewish is about donating funds to charity				.74			
Whether feel that being Jewish is about strong moral and ethical behaviour				.58			
Whether feel that being Jewish is about working hard and being successful*							
Whether feel that being Jewish is about supporting Israel					.65		
Whether feel that being Jewish is about socializing in predominantly Jewish circles					.62		
How respondent feels about Israel					.62		
Whether feel that being Jewish is about marrying another Jew					.61		
Proportion of closest friends who are Jewish*							
Whether attend Passover Seder most or all years (At university)						.84	
Whether fast on Yom Kippur most years or every year (At university)						.77	
Whether feel that being Jewish is about feeling part of the Jewish People							.64
Whether feel that being Jewish is about having an ethnic identity							.62
Whether feel that being Jewish is about combating antisemitism							.52
Whether feel that being Jewish is about remembering the Holocaust							.52
Whether feel that being Jewish is about sharing Jewish festivals with my family							.52
Whether feel that being Jewish is about Jewish culture (such as Jewish music, literature and art)							.51
% of variance	27.6	9.2	6.2	5.3	3.9	3.3	2.9
Reliability (α)	.89	.74	.66	.81	.72	.71	.42

* These items were excluded from the analysis for technical reasons

19 See: Graham (2014), ibid. for full details.

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