
North American Conservative Jewish Teenagers' Attachment to Israel

For 13 and 14 year olds affiliated with Conservative synagogues attachment to Israel is very high. In fact, it is much stronger than among American Jewish adults in general.

The implications are clear: by communicating with their children, it is parents who are the prime agents in creating strong ties and a deep commitment to the Jewish homeland. It is family discussions-even more than formal education-that is shown to have the greatest impact. What's more, it's cost free.

In addition, our results suggest that family trips to Israel-even at early ages-can make a positive difference.

Ariela Keysar and Barry A. Kosmin

Preface

The study of Israel-Diaspora relations forms a key component of JPR's policy research programme on Israel: impact, society and identity. We recognize that the self-image of Jews and the prospects for Jewish continuity worldwide are closely linked to the development of a meaningful and mutually satisfactory relationship between the Jewish communities of Israel and the Diaspora.

JPR is currently involved in international studies of this relationship in the United Kingdom, South Africa, Hungary, Sweden and Denmark. However, on this topic nothing can be more significant than the study of trends among Jewish youth in North America, the largest population concentration of Diaspora Jews. Among this population nothing could be more important than the study of the largest body of synagogue affiliated youth-those affiliated with the Conservative movement, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Conservative Jews constitute almost half of all synagogue members in the North America and their Jewish commitments are an important barometer of the vitality of the larger Jewish community.

This study relates to a survey of Bar and Bat Mitzvah students from the class of 5755 (1994-5) interviewed in the year after their celebration of this profound and formative Jewish experience. It is an event which links the generations and begins a new stage in the educational and socializing process. This should lead to a new generation of Jews beginning to assert their commitment and loyalty to their family, their synagogue and to the Congregation of Israel. The intriguing role that Zionism and the state of Israel play in this process in the 1990s is the research question investigated in this report.

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1/ Introduction (1)

In the Jewish tradition, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony marks a transformation of 13 year olds from youth to adulthood. It is interesting to study, at this turning point in their lives, how strong an attachment they have to Israel and what factors influence that attachment, such as gender, Jewish education and parental input. Israel, after all, is the spiritual homeland of world Judaism. For generations Israel has been part of Jewish consciousness. Jews all over the world pray for the welfare of the land of Israel. They visit Israel and direct their philanthropic campaigns to the state of Israel and its people. Some Jews may regard attachment to Israel as important in its own right, while others view it mainly as a way to strengthen Jewish identity. In either case, the attachment to Israel by young adolescents, the next generation of American Jewry, is an important issue, and highly topical in light of recent strains between religious leaders in Israel and the US.

The rite of passage known as the Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony occurs at a sensitive age when adolescents are developing their religious group identity (McCandless and Evans, 1973). At a vulnerable age boys and girls have to prepare and train to show competence in a variety of social skills, ritual, ceremony and memory. The teenagers have to undergo a public initiation in a synagogue and sing in a foreign language before an audience containing many strangers. In the process these teenagers gain the attention, admiration, respect and applause of many adults and peers. In fact when asked in our survey: 'Was your Bar/Bat Mitzvah worth the time it took?' 99 per cent of the students said it was worth the time.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony is a highlight of the process of socialization of young Jews. Religion, after all, is an important socializing agent in contemporary American society (Kosmin and Lachman, 1993). Religious socialization is the teaching of religious roles and their supporting values. In the early years, parents are the primary agents for transferring cultural and religious elements across generations by transmitting values, norms and knowledge to their children. Of the many forces that are believed to be key to the formation of children's religious identity, the initial influence of parents and the home environment is generally acknowledged to play a central role (Elkind, 1971). Once children reach adolescence, peers and religious education join parents as important influences on religious development. Erickson (1992) argued that familial influence acts indirectly through adolescents' religious education experience. This approach recognizes that the general trend in contemporary society is for formal institutions increasingly to take over the responsibility for socialization of children and adolescents from the family.

Although Jewish tradition regards the Bar/Bat Mitzvah as moving from childhood to adulthood in terms of religious obligations, the social and psychological reality today is that it marks a transition from childhood to adolescence: 12 or 13 years of age marks entry into puberty and acceptance as a 'teenager'. The child and parents must renegotiate the terms of control, responsibility and autonomy. In the search for self-definition, the adolescent interacts with his or her environment and seeks out those to whom he or she can relate. The peer group, as opposed to the family, thus increasingly dominates the adolescent's thinking and behaviour, and it begins to serve in its important role as a catalyst for identity development (Martin and Stendler, 1959; Strain et al., 1976; Rubin and Ross, 1982). Adolescence is a critical time when young people begin to consider various loyalties and belief systems in the pursuit of their future adult loyalty (Erickson, 1997). Adolescence as an exploration stage is the time when the role repertoire is expanded, whereby child-oriented roles are replaced by adult-oriented ones (Rapoport and Kahane, 1988). Adolescents are gifted with the ability to adjust to new ideas and ideals. Thus, this is the time to expose them to new role models so they can accept a more explicitly Jewish outlook as they begin to shape the patterns of their Jewish identity and fidelity.

In studying Jewish teenagers' attachment to Israel, it is valuable to study whether there are any differences in the attitudes of boys and girls. A new situation without historical precedent has emerged in North America in recent decades: a society geared to the elimination of specific gender roles and the abandonment of legal and social restraints on female participation in all aspects of public life. This process of female emancipation has gone further among well-educated, middle-class members of the baby-boomer generation, who form the majority of the adult Jewish population (Wertheimer, 1996). It is particularly pertinent to note that the Conservative movement, the congregations affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, has evolved from traditional Jewish

gender norms to an egalitarian model of religious participation over the past few decades. This has involved both clergy and laity, the ordination of women rabbis and cantors, and the full participation of women in synagogue services and religious life. We are thus studying the first generation of youngsters who have been raised in a 'gender neutral' secular American and Jewish religious environment, and the first generation of parents to take on their responsibilities in this new structure. In fact, the 1995-96 Conservative Congregational Study (Wertheimer, 1996) revealed that the vast majority (80 per cent) of synagogues treat boys (Bar Mitzvah) and girls (Bat Mitzvah) the same way. Therefore, we would expect boys and girls today to be closer to each other in their religious beliefs in general and attachment to Israel in particular.

Israel is widely perceived as the homeland of the Jewish people. It has absorbed Holocaust survivors and Jews from all over the world in the last fifty years. There is a broad consensus among American and world Jewry that Israel's existence is essential. It enhances Diaspora Jews' sense of security and has a pivotal role in strengthening cohesive Jewish group identity. Though recent political and religious debates on topics such as the peace process in the Middle East and religious pluralism complicate the relationship between the state of Israel and Diaspora Jewry, the strong ties and shared obligations are generally acknowledged (Kosmin, Goldberg and Lerman, 1997).

Diaspora Jewish children's attachment to Israel is developed both at home and in religious school. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah training enhances strong feelings toward Israel through biblical stories about the 'promised land', the teaching of history and learning about the struggle to build the state of Israel and the wars to defend its existence. Telling stories about the Holocaust also appeals to young teenagers as they realize the importance of the state of Israel for the survivors and for all Jewish people.

Cultural continuity is maintained by the transmission of values from one generation to the next. 'Parents' affiliation and their faith in that affiliation act as cognitive anchors from which children's beliefs evolve over time' (Ozorak, 1989). Parents transmit to their children their own emotions toward Israel through discussions at home about Israel: its history, its politics and its special role as a place for Jews. Thus, parents carry out conscious religious-cultural-national socialization at home. Moreover, parents can expose children to Israel by taking them to visit the Jewish state, celebrating their Bar/Bat Mitzvah in Jerusalem by the Kotel (the Wailing Wall), or sending them with organized youth trips to Israel.

The topical political and religious issues mentioned above are of interest to young teenagers as they develop their own social and political attitudes. Furthermore, the debate regarding religious pluralism also touches these youngsters because they are involved in the Bar/Bat Mitzvah training within a synagogue setting, and are aware of the friction between the different branches of Judaism.

Attachment to Israel is one marker and consequence of the religious upbringing young children are experiencing. This marker is associated with other aspects of young people's Jewish identity and connections with the Jewish community, such as Jewish summer camps and youth groups. It is of a particular interest to track teenagers at the peak of their religious involvement and participation in synagogue activities (primarily with their family).

The main goal of our research is to test the following hypotheses:

Parental behaviour can positively influence teenagers' outlook and attitudes toward Israel.

Family visits to Israel make young people more attached to the country.

Attending a Jewish day school can make young people more attached to Israel.

Attachment to Israel is strongly correlated with participation in Jewish summer camps and youth groups.

Further, we wish to examine similarities and differences in attitudes toward Israel by teenagers' gender, geography and religious background.

Data

The data are based on a telephone survey of Conservative Jews carried out in the fall of 1995. The survey consisted of two interviews per household, one with a child and the other with a parent. Both interviews were of approximately 15 minutes. In total 1,412 child-parent pairs across the US and Canada participated. Four per cent of the sample consisted of Canadian families.

The sampling procedure was multi-staged. First, a sample of Conservative synagogues was drawn by size. Second, Bar/Bat Mitzvah children of the 1994-95 class and their parents were contacted. In total, 115 synagogues agreed to participate and provided a list of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah families.

Parental permission to speak with the child was sought first. Among the parents who were successfully contacted, 19 per cent refused to co-operate. Among co-operating families, the child was interviewed prior to the parent, in order to minimize parents' influence on their children's answers. In only a handful of cases did the teenagers refuse.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah study has a panel longitudinal design, in which participants will be interviewed again in their high school senior year and once again in college. There will be opportunities to see whether the children tend to converge toward their parents' beliefs over time or diverge from them.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah study offers a unique opportunity to explore attitudes and beliefs of young people of similar age, similar religious background and somewhat similar socio-economic attainment from different communities in the US and Canada. Furthermore, the study design enables us to compare children and their parents by using data that were gathered from the respondents themselves, unlike commonly used social science studies where parents report on behalf of their children. This highlights the importance of the follow-up phases of the study as students progress to different developmental stages of self-identity.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah study is a part of a larger project under the auspices of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, titled, 'The Study of North American Conservative Synagogues and Their Members 1995-96'. It included:

- a congregational survey of 378 synagogues
- a membership survey of over 1,700 members from 27 congregations
- the Bar and Bat Mitzvah study of about 1,400 celebrants and their parents
- ethnographic studies of four Conservative congregations in the Northeast and the Midwest

Characteristics of the sample: gender

Among the student sample 45 per cent were females and 55 per cent were males. Allowing for the random sampling error, this suggests that there is still a slight residual bias against female participation in this rite of passage in Conservative Jewish congregations.

The balance of the sexes among the parent sample goes in the opposite direction with 60 per cent being mothers and 40 per cent fathers. This is largely the result of the timing of the telephone calls. Our desire initially to interview a child prior to a parent led us to concentrate on early evening calls when more mothers than fathers were at home.

Findings

Attachment to Israel Bar/Bat Mitzvah students from Conservative synagogues in 1995 identified strongly with Israel and its culture. The identification was stronger than among American Jews in general in 1990 (NJPS, 1990).

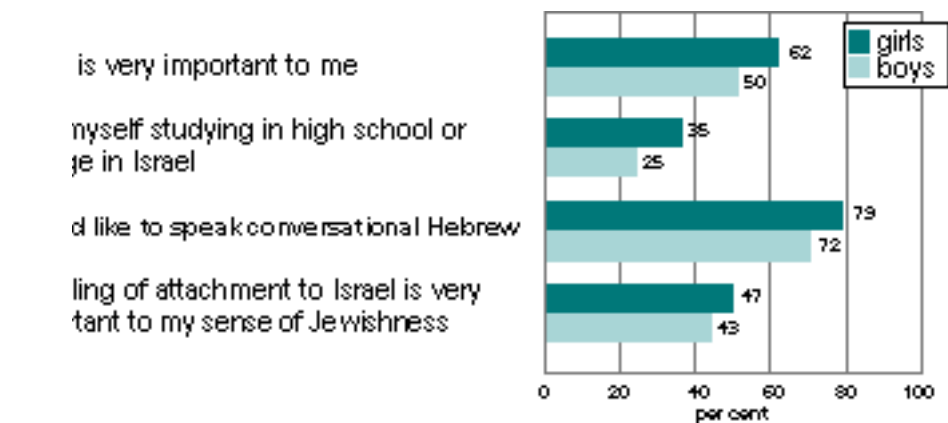
Bar/Bat Mitzvah children have positive feelings toward and attachment to Israel. In fact, 81 per cent of them would like to visit Israel with a teenage group at age 16 or 17 (see figure 1). The teenagers expressed a remarkably high degree of interest (75 per cent) in speaking conversational Hebrew. More than half of the teenagers said that Israel is 'very important' to them. Overall 30 per cent of the teenagers could see studying at high school or college in Israel as possible.

Figure 1: Bar/Bat Mitzvah students' level of attachment to Israel



Does gender make a difference? The Bar/Bat Mitzvah study showed that girls have a consistently stronger pattern of Jewish identity and a stronger Jewish commitment than boys. Boys and girls were compared on the importance of beliefs and feelings, Jewish observance and peoplehood. As for attachment to Israel, we find again that girls express stronger commitment - 62 per cent of girls and 50 per cent of boys stated that Israel was 'very important' to them. Moreover, 35 per cent of the girls but only 25 per cent of the boys saw themselves going to study in high school or college in Israel. Girls were more interested than boys in speaking conversational Hebrew (79 per cent and 72 per cent respectively). Girls were slightly more likely to say that a feeling of attachment to Israel was 'very important' to their sense of Jewishness (47 per cent, vs. 43 per cent of boys) (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Student responses by gender



Almost three-quarters of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah parents discuss Israel or current events in the Middle East with their children. Do children who are well informed or 'cognitively aware' express more or less interest in Israel? Are they more or less attached to Israel? Indeed, children whose parents discuss Israel and Middle East events are by far more attached to Israel - 63 per cent said that Israel is 'very important' to them compared with only 35 per cent of the children whose parents do not discuss Israel with them. They were more interested in speaking conversational Hebrew - 81 per cent and 61 per cent respectively. They were more likely to state that a feeling of attachment to Israel is very important to their sense of Jewishness - 51 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. These children were also more interested in going to study in high school or college in Israel - 34 per cent and 18 per cent (see figure 3).

One-quarter of Bar/Bat Mitzvah students have already visited Israel. How are these students with empirical experience different from students who have not had a chance to visit Israel? Children who have already been to Israel might have formed more coherent attitudes toward Israel. Indeed, Bar/Bat Mitzvah children who visited Israel were more likely to feel that Israel is 'very important' - 76 per cent compared with 49 per cent of children who never visited Israel. Teenagers who have already visited Israel were also more interested in speaking conversational Hebrew-86 per cent compared with 72 per cent of those who never visited Israel. They were by far more likely to state that a feeling of attachment to Israel is very important to their sense of Jewishness - 70 per cent and 36 per cent respectively. These children were more interested in going themselves to study in high school or college in Israel - 44 per cent and 25 per cent (see figure 4).

Figure 3: Students' attachment to Israel by whether parents discuss Israel/Middle East with them

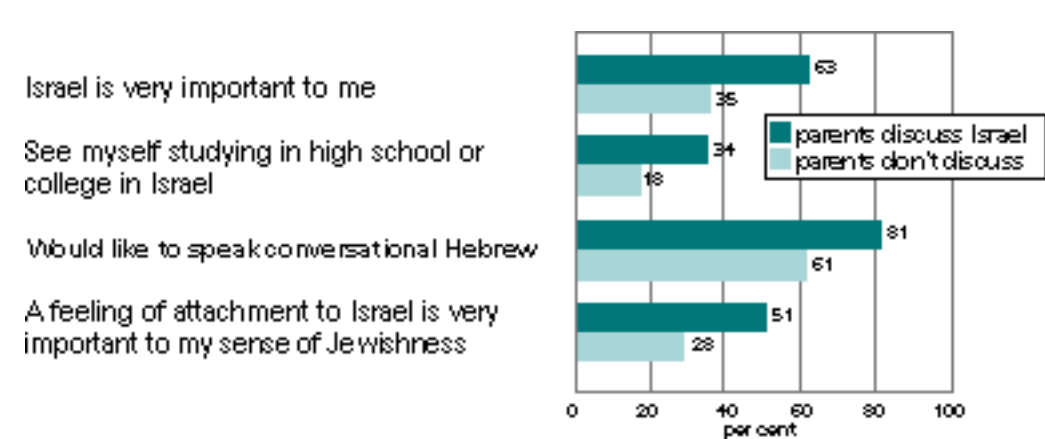
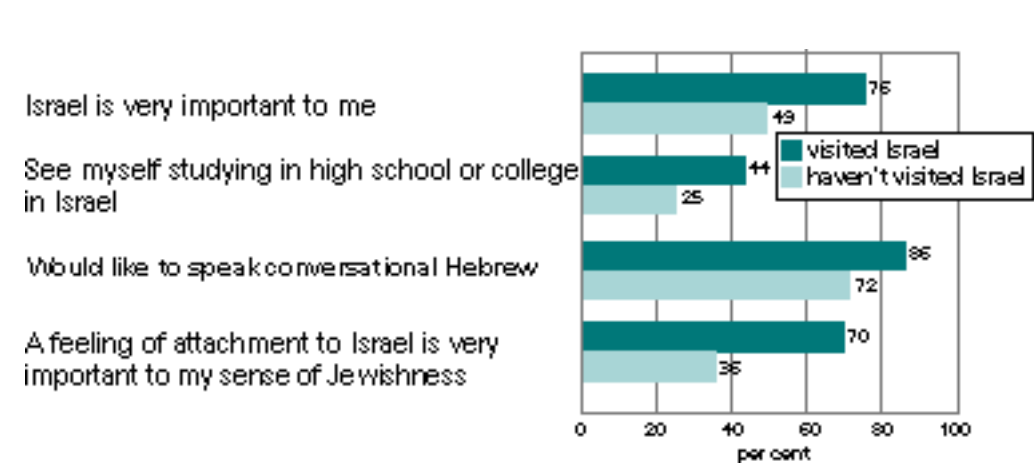


Figure 4: Students' responses by whether or not they have visited Israel



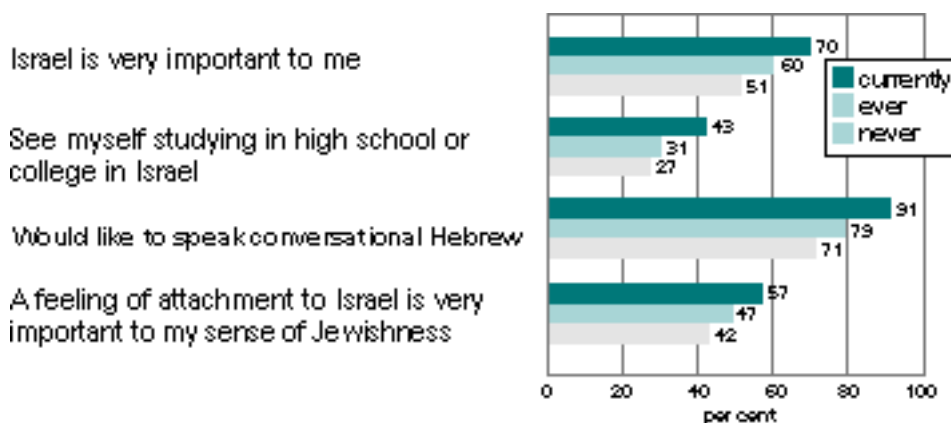
2/ Jewish education-formal and informal experiences

Are Jewish educational experiences associated with attachment to Israel? The Jewish day school is a relatively recent phenomenon in American Jewry and particularly in Conservative Judaism. It is often asserted that the day school graduate is a much more involved and identifying Jew as a direct result of the type of education he/she receives (Fishman and Goldstein, 1993). Overall, just under half (46 per cent) of children aged 6-17 years have received any formal Jewish education according to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) (Keysar, Kosmin and Scheckner, 1999). This figure includes various levels of Jewish education: from intense Jewish day school or yeshiva to synagogue supplementary religious school or even private tutoring. Within the contemporary Conservative movement an observant religious elite emerges primarily with the influence of the Solomon Schechter day schools.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah children were divided into three groups: those who were currently in day school, totalling nine per cent of the sample; those who had attended day school in the past, comprising 33 per cent of the sample; and those who had never attended a day school and whose education had been confined to the synagogue supplementary religious school, comprising 58 per cent of the sample.

The strongest correlation is between day school education and teenagers' interest in speaking conversational Hebrew. While almost all current day school children (91 per cent) are interested in speaking conversational Hebrew, only 71 per cent of those who never attended a Jewish day school are interested. This is possibly attributable to the day school curriculum. In addition, day school education is associated with a feeling of attachment to Israel: 70 per cent of day school children compared with 51 per cent of those who never attended day school said that 'Israel is very important to me'. Also day school children tend to be more interested in studying in high school or college in Israel than those who have never attended (43 per cent compared with 27 per cent). The three types of Jewish schooling form linear patterns with regard to the different aspects of attachment to Israel, whereby teenagers who had attended day school in the past always fall in the middle between the current day school children and those who never attended. Day school children are clearly leading the other two groups, showing much stronger and more consistent commitment to Israel and its culture (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Students' responses by whether or not they have attended a Jewish day school



The choice of a Jewish day school versus non-Jewish schooling reflects primarily parental rather than student aspirations. Thus, looking at other forms of Jewish socialization to see whether they correlate with Jewish-Zionist identity, we turn to the youngsters' involvement with Jewish youth groups and participation in Jewish summer camps. Participation in these informal Jewish educational experiences is more likely to reflect the youngsters'

autonomous attitudes and peer influences.

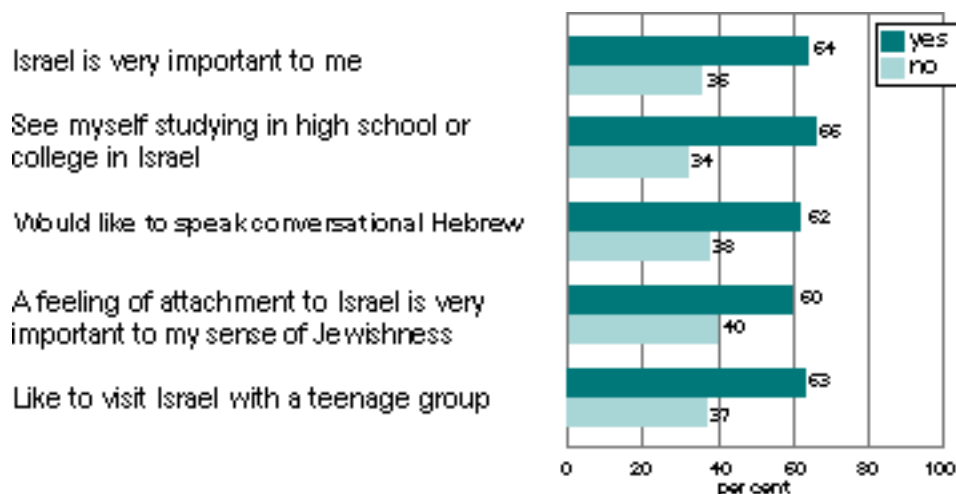
NJPS data show that about 25 per cent of all Jewish children ages 10-14 belonged to Jewish youth groups and 26 per cent had attended Jewish camp programmes in 1989-90 (Keysar, Kosmin and Scheckner, 1999). The Conservative movement has two vital arms in the area of informal Jewish education. These are the United Synagogue Youth (USY) organization and Camp Ramah, the network of summer residential camps under the sponsorship of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Among the sample of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah students, 33 per cent belonged to Kadimah, the USY section for 6th-8th graders. Since only 57 per cent of the youngsters actually attend a Jewish youth group, Kadimah accounts for about 60 per cent of all the memberships in Jewish youth groups.

Certainly Kadimah members are more committed young Conservative Jews than others, but whether this is a cause or an effect cannot be definitively stated. Obviously there is a screening process at work as well as a selection bias. There are children who agree to go to a religious group at their synagogue and there are children whose parents make the effort to take them there. Home background as well as the personality of children are the likely explanations for the differential.

Camp Ramah is a Hebrew-speaking environment with a strong Zionist ethos and is widely considered the nurturing ground for the recruitment of the Conservative movement's religious and lay leadership. The median number of years of attendance for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah group is three summers. Camp Ramah members in our study are a small group, accounting for only 11 per cent of the sample. Overall, 61 per cent of Bar/Bat Mitzvah students have ever attended Jewish summer camps, which include Ramah, a 'Y' or Jewish Community Center (JCC), Jewish scouts, Young Judaea, Habonim and privately run camps.

Jewish youth group experience is clearly and strongly associated with an interest to study at a high school or college in Israel. Two-thirds of B'nai Mitzvah who belong to a Jewish youth group compared with only a third of those who never belonged to a Jewish youth group expressed such an interest. The strong and serious commitment toward Israel among Jewish youth group participants is reflected in their level of interest - 64 per cent said that Israel is 'very important' to them, but only 36 per cent of non-participants said so. Similar differences are found between these groups regarding visiting Israel with a teenage group and an interest in speaking conversational Hebrew. These attitudinal gaps slightly decrease with regard to the importance of feeling a sense of attachment to Israel - 60 per cent of Jewish youth group participants and 40 per cent of non-participants regard these feelings toward Israel as 'very important' to their own Jewishness (see figure 6).

Figure 6: Students' responses by whether or not they belong to a Jewish youth group



Summer camp participants express strong attachment to Israel far more than those who never attended a Jewish summer camp. A majority of summer camp participants - 68 per cent - see themselves going to study at a high school or college in Israel compared with only 32 per cent of those who never attended a Jewish summer camp. Quite similar are the differences between participants and non-participants of Jewish summer camps with regard to the importance they attribute to Israel (32-point gap); to how important feeling a sense of attachment to Israel is to their own sense of Jewishness (32-point gap); to interests in visiting Israel with a teenage group (28-point gap) and to speaking conversational Hebrew (28-point gap) (see figure 7). All of the above relationships are highly statistically significant (at the 0.001 level).

Turning to the parents, an overwhelming majority (91 per cent) of Bar/Bat Mitzvah parents agreed (either 'strongly agree, 'or 'agree') with the statement: 'I want my children to have a strong sense of attachment to Israel.' (See figure 8.) Further, the pattern of parents' attitudes directly correlates with the students' opinions along the typology of Jewish schooling. Current day school parents exhibited the greatest desire for their children to have a strong sense of attachment to Israel: 53 per cent strongly agreeing with this aspiration, compared with 44 per cent of former day school parents and 30 per cent of supplementary school parents.

Figure 7: Students' responses by whether they ever attended a Jewish summer camp

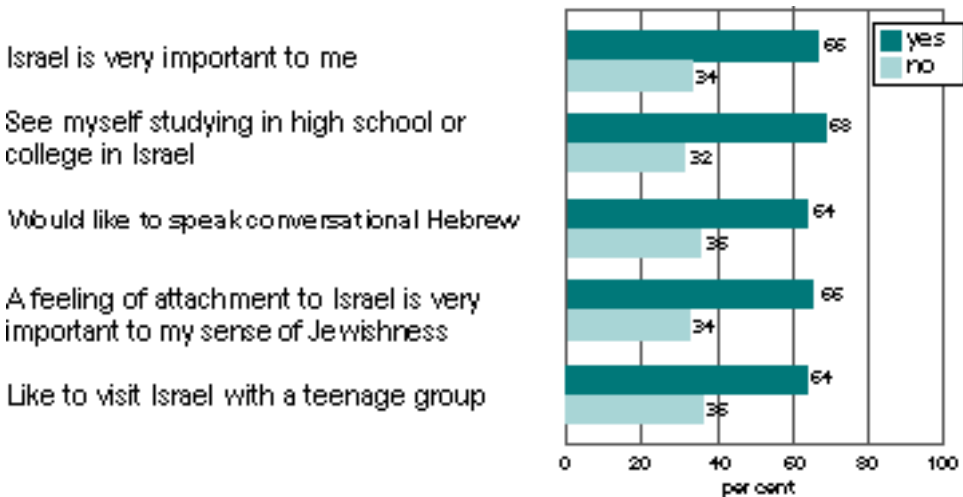
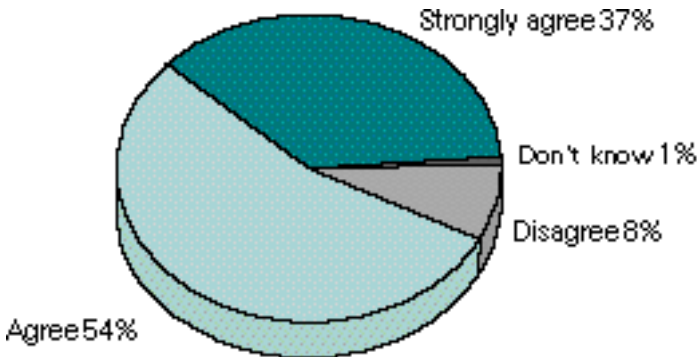


Figure 8: Pattern of parental response to the statement 'I want my children to have a strong sense of attachment to Israel'



3/ Teenage trips to Israel

The parents were also very supportive and willing to send their child or children on an organized trip to Israel. Parents were asked: 'Would you be willing to send your child or children on an organized trip to Israel during the summer after their junior year of high school?' Eighty-five per cent of the parents said 'yes'.

When asked about their interest in visiting Israel with a teenage group: 'Would you like to visit Israel with a teenage group when you are 16 or 17?' 81 per cent of Bar/Bat Mitzvah students replied positively. This indicates a high level of consensus within families on teenage trips to Israel.(2)

A consensus within families is important for teenage trips to Israel because parents are usually the ones who pay. True, in some families grandparents help in paying for a trip to Israel, a community-based sponsorship can provide a scholarship toward the trip, or the Bar/Bat Mitzvah money is possibly used for a trip to Israel. Yet, even in these scenarios parents' consent to their children's excursion to Israel is required.

Multivariate analysis I

What are the factors most likely to predict strong attachment to Israel, while holding other factors constant? To answer this question, we develop a multivariate model which includes the relevant variables and those presented in our research, such as Jewish education (formal and informal), gender, visits to Israel, and parental input (defined as discussions about Israel and current events in the Middle East at home).

The analysis of variance indicates that all the independent variables are highly statistically significant at the .001 level, except the Jewish education variable which is significant at the .05 level. The only interaction between two independent variables that is found is one between gender and parents' discussing Israel/Middle East at home. Thus, we can assume an additive model and look at the results of the multiple classification analysis. Parenthetically, it should be noted that the analysis of variance is used rather than logistic regression (given that the dependent variable is dichotomous) since the distribution of the dependent variable is in the range of 40-60 per cent. As a general rule, in this range the results of both forms of analysis are virtually the same.

Table 1: Multiple classification analysis of strong importance of Israel

Table 1 provides a Multiple Classification Analysis. On a scale of zero to 1, with zero meaning Israel is somewhat important or not important to the student and 1 meaning it is very important, the grand mean is 0.56. The numbers in the table express the deviation from the mean of each category of the explanatory variable, holding the other factors in the model constant. Positive deviations mean more attachment to Israel and negative deviations mean less attachment.(3)

For strong attachment to Israel, the most important explanatory factor is parental input, i.e. discussions on Israel and current events in the Middle East at home - with 22 percentage points difference between youngsters whose parents discuss Israel

Variable /Category	Grand Mean=.56 Effect	N
Jewish day school		beta=.07
current	.09	130
past	.02	447
never	-.03	786
Belong to a Jewish youth group		beta=.12
yes	.05	787
no	-.07	576
Parents discuss Israel/Middle East at home		beta=.19
yes	.06	1008
no	-.16	355
Gender		beta=.09
male	-.04	742
female	.05	621
Ever visited Israel		beta=.18
yes	.16	345
no	-.05	1018

Multiple R Squared = .130

and the Middle East with them and those whose parents do not. In fact, B'nai Mitzvah whose parents do not discuss Israel and the Middle East with them were the least likely to express strong attachment to Israel independent of other factors. A similar gap (21 points) is found regarding visits to Israel. B'nai Mitzvah who have already visited Israel were the most likely to be above the grand mean in exhibiting strong interest in Israel - 72 per cent of them said that Israel is very important in their lives.

There is a 12-point gap in the attachment to Israel between students currently in Jewish day school and those who have never attended Jewish day school. There is an equally large gap, 12 points, between students who belong to a Jewish youth group and those who do not. The effect of youth group membership is somewhat higher than the effect of Jewish day school attendance, as measured by its higher beta score. On the other hand, it is important to note that attachment to Israel among those who belong to Jewish youth groups, at 0.61 (the grand mean plus 0.05) is not as high as the attachment of those currently attending Jewish day school at 0.64 (grand mean plus 0.09). Overall, the model explains only 13 per cent of the variance in attachment to Israel.

As noted earlier, an interaction between gender and discussing Israel and current events in the Middle East at home is detected. Looking further into the data we discover again that girls, regardless of whether their parents discuss Israel with them or not, express stronger interest in Israel than boys.

Furthermore, family attendance at synagogue services ceases to be statistically significant once other factors are controlled for in a multivariate analysis. Similarly, parents' wishes that their children have a strong attachment to Israel are not found to be statistically significant to their children's actual attitudes in the multivariate analysis. B'nai Mitzvah whose parents wish them to have a strong sense of attachment to Israel are quite similar to those B'nai Mitzvah whose parents do not express such wishes, again while holding other factors constant.

Jewish identity and attachment to Israel

Looking at Table 2, we find that 86 per cent of those Bar/Bat Mitzvah students stating that Israel is very important to them claimed that being Jewish is 'very important ' in their life, compared with only just less than half (49 per cent) of those who feel that Israel is 'somewhat important'.

Table 2: Importance of being Jewish and importance of Israel

Importance of being Jewish	Importance of Israel			
	very important	somewhat important	not important	
very important	678 86%	286 49%	8 17%	Moreover, children who are exposed at home to discussion about Israel and the Middle East are more likely to declare that being Jewish is very important in their life (73 per cent compared with 55 per cent of children whose parents do not discuss Israel/Middle East with them). It is possible that the first group are Jewishly active families who also expose their children to other Jewish practices which strengthen their Jewish identity.
somewhat important	108 13%	286 49%	23 49%	
not important	5 1%	14 2%	16 34%	
Total	791 100%	586 100%	47 100%	Another question posed to the students is willingness to visit Israel with a teenage group. Those who want to visit Israel with a teenage group are by far more likely to

identify as Jewish - 73 per cent say that being Jewish is very important in their life as compared with only 44 per cent of youngsters who do not wish to visit Israel with a teenage group.

True, it is hard to know in such measures which is the cause and which is the effect. One might argue that the strong Jewish feelings of some Bar/Bat Mitzvah students lead them to develop strong connections with Israel, rather than vice versa. Nonetheless, these positive correlations, though only suggestive, support the call for building ties with Israel as an enhancement of Jewish identity.

Multivariate analysis II

In order to assess the importance of the attachment to Israel in enhancing Jewish identity we introduce here a multivariate model. Our task is made easier by the homogeneity of our sample. Many of the factors that typically affect the degree of Jewish identity are not at issue here. All the youngsters in the sample are the same age (13-14) and the same religious denomination (Conservative), and all come from families that belong to synagogues, as required for Bar/Bat Mitzvah training. Due to this uniformity, it is possible to focus on finer distinctions-specific traits, beliefs or patterns of behaviour that seem to be associated with stronger or weaker Jewish identity. We focus in particular on the role of a strong relationship with the Jewish homeland, Israel, in further connections with Judaism. We chose to look at the youngsters' wish to visit Israel - 'Would you like to visit Israel with a teenage group when you are 16 or 17?' - as a proxy for their attachment to Israel. We did not choose the simple attitudinal question about the importance of Israel. The latter question is highly correlated with and nested within Jewish identity, and thus may present a distorted picture of the magnitude of the relationships.

The dependent variable

The importance of being Jewish in the student's life (very important vs. somewhat or not important)
The independent variables (4)

- Jewish day school (current, past, never)
- Like to visit Israel with a teenage group (yes, no)
- Gender (male, female)
- Belong to a Jewish youth group (yes, no)

The willingness to visit Israel is the most important factor predicting very strong Jewish identity among Bar and Bat Mitzvah students, according to the analysis of a logistic regression. The odds that B'nai Mitzvah who would like to visit Israel with a teenage group have a strong Jewish identity is almost three times the odds of those who do not wish to visit Israel with a teenage group (see table 3).

Table 3: Logistic regression-predictors of Jewish Identity of B'nai and B'not Mitzvah

The second notable factor is the type of Jewish schooling: those currently in Jewish day school are twice as likely to express strong Jewish identity as those who never studied in a Jewish day school. The other vital factor influencing Jewish identity is gender. Girls more than boys tend to be outspoken regarding the importance of their Jewish heritage.

Variable	Reference category	B	Odds ratio
Jewish education	never		
current		0.744*	2.11
past		0.189	1.21
Willingness to visit Israel w/teenage group	no		
yes		1.034*	2.81
Gender	female		
male		-0.509*	0.60
Jewish Youth Group	no		
yes		0.334**	1.39
Constant		0.664*	

*p<.001; **p<.005

The above three variables are highly statistically significant. B'nai Mitzvah who received Jewish day school education in the past also seem to have higher Jewish identity but the relationship is not statistically significant. With regard to informal Jewish education, we find that youngsters who belong to a Jewish youth group were more likely to cite the importance of being Jewish in their life compared to those not belonging to a Jewish youth group. This latter variable is also statistically significant. Though these findings are not surprising, given that formal and informal Jewish education plants the seeds of strong Jewish identity, the attachment to Israel as a predictor of enhanced Jewish identity further supports the arguments in favour of early development of close and intense relationships with Israel.

4/ Discussion

Our research demonstrates that both cognitive and behavioural inputs positively influence North American teenagers' attitudes toward Israel. Parents can play an important role in reinforcing strong feelings toward Israel by visiting Israel with their children when they are young, but mostly by engaging their children in discussions about Israel and current events in the Middle East.

It is true that the relationships shown above are associational and do not prove causation. It could be, for example, that children themselves are the initiators. That is, if children already have an interest in Israel, then parents are more likely to discuss Israel with them, or even agree to take them to Israel. However, it seems more likely in most cases that parents are the principal initiators.

Communication with the children about Israel and the Middle East can also take place in Jewish schools or during synagogue activities for children and families. An emphasis placed by curricula upon Israel may foster positive attachment to Israel. Our results indicate that the family and the community can make a difference in teenagers' attitudes toward Israel already at age 13-14. Thus, with creative reinforcement, young people could become more attached to Israel.

Connections to Israel can be reinforced in a formal cognitive context (school), an informal cognitive context (discussions at home about Israel), or experientially (through trips to Israel). This study's findings on the potential market for Hebrew language, teenage trips and college studies in Israel suggest the need for policy assessment, dialogue and collaboration between North American and Israeli educators in order to satisfy this latent demand.

Unfortunately the current crisis in relations between the Conservative movement and the State of Israel could endanger this enthusiasm for Zionism. It could also undermine the positive Zionist outcome from Conservative educational institutions which we discovered among the class of 5755/1995.

The longitudinal study design gives an opportunity to follow Bar/Bat Mitzvah students in high school and college and explore if attitudes toward Israel change over time. The follow-up research question for further study is what are students' ties to Israel as they grow older and are more removed from the strong influence of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah training. Have the aspirations of these young people been fulfilled with regard to study and visits?

5/ Policy implications

A number of strategies were identified in our research for policy makers to consider and enhance so young people and their parents - from North America's largest synagogue movement - maintain their commitment to Israel over time. We suggest reinforcement of this positive attachment to Israel through school, through peers (youth

movement, summer camps) and through teenage trips to Israel.

What is the most effective policy? Let's start at home. Confirming the socialization theory, parents are very important in reinforcing attachment to Israel. The parents themselves, we found, are very attached to Israel. Ideological Zionist awareness of parents can make a difference since they have a lot of influence on their children at this age and can discuss issues concerning Israel with their children. Discussion about Israel at home is free and is found to have the strongest effect. Day school education, on the other hand, is very expensive, but we believe that it has a long-term effect. In the next phase of the longitudinal study we will again assess its impact.

The importance of the findings on informal education are very relevant to synagogues. Youth groups and summer camps require less financial investment and resources for buildings and personnel than day schools. These are also more flexible instruments that can be geared to programmes in local facilities. Moreover, local congregations can have much more influence and control over the programmes. Perhaps even more importantly, the activities can be offered to a much larger proportion of young people in the congregation than can a day school.

A study of British Jews' attachment to Israel (Kosmin et al., 1997) reveals that having Jewish youth group connections is associated with stronger attachment to Israel. This study of adult Jews portrays the potential influence of involvement in youth groups in the teen years into adulthood, whereby such experience carries a significant role in forming pro-Israel opinions later in life.

We found that 73 per cent of the teenagers discuss Israel with their parents, 25 per cent of the teenagers have already taken a trip to Israel, and 10 per cent are currently enrolled in a Jewish day school, mostly Schecter Schools. Out of these three factors, discussions at home is the most likely to make the biggest difference in youngsters' attachment to Israel. A further question arises: how much overlap is there between the groups of students answering yes to each of the above questions? Actually only 10 per cent of the students could have answered yes to all three. We can call them the Zionist elite.

The impact of parenting in transmitting strong ties and commitment to the Jewish homeland by communicating with adolescents at home about Israel and events in the Middle East is shown to be more important than other channels that require more resources. Friday night meals where Jewish issues are discussed with teens seem to be a key approach to strengthening Jewish identity. Nevertheless, our results also suggest that trips to Israel at early ages (13-14 or earlier) can make a significant difference, thus suggesting, let us not wait until age 17. Family trips are very worthy of consideration and need to be encouraged.

Females of all ages are usually more religious than males, both in belief and in practice. Our data also pointed at some gender differences. We found that Jewish identity is not developed among boys at age 13 as much as among girls. Girls seem to be more traditionally conformist, while boys rebel with regard to Israel. Girls and later women are more attached to and interested in Israel. Here we present early evidence for the male/female intensity differentials in the attachment to Israel of teenagers already at age 13-14. This was found in the practical possibility of going to school in Israel, chosen more by Bat Mitzvah girls. Thus, more efforts should be made for boys. Boys should be approached differently in order to attract them to programmes associated with Israel. We recommend collaboration between educators and psychologists on these issues.

As children grow older, parents will be less important to their decisions, and peers will play a major role in their life. Currently, Jewish day schools involve only 10 per cent of teenagers. Thus trips to Israel with peers are very important. Having an Israel Experience is related to who one's peers are, because teenagers go to Israel together at age 16-17. They have the opportunity to meet and socialize with other Jewish teens, both Israeli and North American. At a critical time in their developmental growth, these young people having an Israel Experience learn about Jewish life and culture in an experimental way rather than in formal classroom settings.

Barry Chazan claimed that teenagers' Jewish identity has been enriched as a result of the Israel Experience.

Participants expressed stronger concern and positive feelings toward the state of Israel. In addition, they showed greater concern for Jewish peoplehood and a sense of kinship with Jews everywhere. The Israel Experience participants regard their summer in Israel as 'one of the most positive Jewish moments and memories in their lives' (Chazan, 1997). Indeed, these positive reflections are key elements to affirmative group identity. Our data validate the approach of the Israel Experience as an educational resource. Again, our data suggest that trips to Israel are important to maintain and develop Zionist and Jewish continuity. Currently about 8,000 young people are sent annually with the Israel Experience programme out of a cohort of 150,000 American Jewish youth who are 16-17 years old, namely only about 5 per cent.

A new programme, Birthright Israel, announced that beginning in the year 2000 it plans to make it possible for any Jew in the world between the ages of 15 and 26 to travel to Israel for 10 days. Those who originated the programme, the two philanthropists, Charles R. Bronfman and Michael H. Steinhardt, thought of promoting the trips to Israel in the attempt to rebuild religious identity among young Jews and consolidate support for the Jewish state. Mr. Steinhardt even said: 'Our hope is that a trip to Israel will be another rite of passage of Jewish life' (The New York Times, 1998). Birthright Israel will sponsor a variety of trips such as kibbutz trips, archeological trips, hiking treks, ecological journeys and historical trips. Though this new initiative received great publicity, many details have yet to be clarified, including perhaps the most challenging one—who is eligible for the programme. This reopens the whole controversy over 'who is a Jew'. Mr Steinhardt said he would lean toward 'inclusiveness' and open the programme to any young person 'who chooses to voluntarily associate his or her future with that of the Jewish people' (The New York Times, 1998).

The long-term effect of trips to Israel on preserving Jewish heritage among successive generations will continue to be debated by policy planners and leaders in the Jewish community. It also remains an intriguing research question whether trips to Israel or day school education is more important to maintaining Jewish continuity. As we demonstrated by means of the logistic regression in table 3, willingness to visit Israel is the best predictor of a strong Jewish identity among teens.

We showed a strong attachment to Israel of Conservative Jewish parents and teenagers. Israel plays more of a role in their view of the world and Jewishness than we thought. One would assume a negative impact from the policies of the Netanyahu government on the good news that we present. For this generation of young Conservative Jews the attachment to Israel is real and not theoretical. It is even emotional. Because they care, the political problem and rift with Israel is dangerous. This is an important group of people with strong feelings toward Israel who might now feel alienated. We showed that issues concerning Israel are discussed at home, so religious matters, the Law of Return and conversion to Judaism are of interest to these committed Jews. We will continue to follow these families in the next phases of the study. We will be able to measure and assess the impact of the changes in the relationships between the Conservative movement and the religious authorities in Israel.

Footnotes

1 An early version of this paper was presented at the 12th World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, 29 July-5 August 1997.

2 We note the differences in wording of questions asked of children and parents.

3 The gap between positive and negative deviations is a rough measure of the explanatory power of the variable. The statistic beta is the measure of the strength of the effect of each variable when holding other factors in the model constant.

4 The reference category is the last one for all the independent variables.

5 Previous models included frequency of synagogue attendance of the family as well as the student's attending a Jewish summer camp. None of these variables were found to be statistically significant in predicting strong Jewish identity.

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