
Evaluating *birthright israel*: Long-Term Impact and Recent Findings

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
Study 1: Long-Term Impact.....	5
Study 2: Winter 2003-04 Cohort	6
Conclusions.....	7
Introduction.....	9
Study 1: Long Term Follow-Up	11
Methodology: How Long-Term Change Was Measured.....	11
Characteristics of Respondents.....	13
Returning to Israel.....	14
The Creation of Community Among Alumni.....	15
Israel and the Jewish People	17
Ethical Life.....	25
Religious Behavior.....	25
Jewish Learning	26
Jewish Organizational Interest and Behavior	29
Study 2: Winter 2003-04 Cohort	31
Who Applied and Who Went?	31
Trip Experiences	38
Impact of the Trip	41
Jewish Study	47
Other Jewish Activities.....	47
Post-Trip Activities.....	48
Views of the Israeli Security Situation and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.....	49
Returning to Israel.....	50
Affiliation with Jewish Organizations	51
Conclusions.....	55
References.....	57
Appendix A Methodological Notes on Study 1: Long-Term Follow-Up.....	59
Appendix B Methodological Notes on Study 2: Winter 2003-04 Analyses.....	67
Appendix C Survey Instrument	75

List of Figures

Figure 1: Overall Ratings of the Trip at Time 3 (All Three Cohorts).....	14
Figure 2: Return to Israel and Level of Observance (By Cohort).....	15
Figure 3: Factors That Make It Difficult To Return to Israel (All Three Cohorts)	15
Figure 4: Current Contacts With Others From the Trip (By Cohort)	16
Figure 5: Confidence in Explaining the Current Situation in Israel (By Cohort).....	17
Figure 6: Feelings of Connection to Israel (2000 Cohort).....	17
Figure 7: Caring about Israel (2000 Cohort).....	18
Figure 8: Feelings of Connection to Israel (2001 Cohort).....	19
Figure 9: Caring about Israel (2001 Cohort).....	20
Figure 10: Feelings of Connection to Israel (2002 Cohort).....	21
Figure 11: Caring About Israel (2002 Cohort)	21
Figure 12: Importance of Dating Only Jews (2002 Cohort).....	22
Figure 13: Feelings of Connection to Israel (All Cohorts)	23
Figure 14: Feelings of Connection to Jewish People (All Cohorts)	23
Figure 15: Importance of Dating Only Jews (All Cohorts)	24
Figure 16: Importance of Raising Children as Jews (All Cohorts).....	25
Figure 17: Level of Jewish Knowledge at Time 3 (All Three Cohorts)	27
Figure 18: Interest in Learning More (All Three Cohorts).....	28
Figure 19: Relationship Between Interest in Jewish Learning and Jewish Learning Behavior Among Participants (All Three Cohorts).....	29
Figure 20: Jewish Reading and Study at Time 3 (All Three Cohorts).....	29
Figure 21: Participants' Denominational Affiliations Compared Across Trips	32
Figure 22: Three Main Reasons for Applying Compared Across Trips.....	35
Figure 23: Safety as a Reason for Not Going Compared Across Trips	37
Figure 24: Relative Influence of Parents and Friends on the Decision to Participate	37
Figure 25: Overall Ratings of the Trip.....	38
Figure 26: Ratings of Specific Trip Activities	39
Figure 27: Change Effects of the Trip on Feelings of Connection to Israel and Judaism	42
Figure 28: Change Effects of the Trip on Life Style	43
Figure 29: Change Effects of the Trip on Jewish Identity	44
Figure 30: Change Effects for Jewish Activities After the Trip	45
Figure 31: Jewish Engagement of Non-Participants After the Trip	46
Figure 32: Participation in Jewish Activities After the Trip.....	46

Figure 33: Communication with Participants	48
Figure 34: Awareness of and Participation in Post-Trip Activities	48
Figure 35: Attitudes Towards the Peace Process	49
Figure 36: Likelihood of Returning to Israel	50
Figure 37: Effects of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on the Decision to Return to Israel	51
Figure 38: Parents' Membership in Jewish Organizations	52
Figure 39: Participants' Membership in Jewish Organizations	52

List of Tables

Table 1: How Participants Learned About the Trip	33
Table 2: Reasons for Applying	34
Table 3: Reasons for Not Going on the Trip	36
Table 4: Learning Experiences During the Trip	40
Table 5: Opinions of Trip Content	40
Table 6: Amount Participants are Able to Pay to Go on Another Trip	50

Executive Summary

Since the launch of *birthright israel* at the end of 1999, nearly 50,000 Jewish young adults from North America have traveled to Israel to take part in the program's ten-day educational experience. An additional 22,000 young adults from 36 Diaspora countries have also participated. Created in response to fears of heightened assimilation, *birthright israel* was premised on the notion that a meaningful encounter with Israel has the potential to spark a positive change in the Jewish identities of young adults. The philanthropists who conceived of the program, and who subsequently enlisted the support of the Government of Israel and Jewish communal organizations, wanted to influence the Jewish trajectory of a generation.

Since *birthright israel's* inception, the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies has conducted a systematic evaluation of the program, in particular its impact on participants from the United States and Canada. Researchers have interviewed and followed North American participants and non-participant applicants. The current report summarizes two studies. Study 1 presents the findings of a long-term follow-up of early participants in the program. Data were collected from participants and non-participants both before and after trips that took place during the winters of 1999-2000 through 2001-02. This was followed by a follow-up survey beginning in November 2003 to ascertain the program's effects after several years. Study 2 assesses the short-term effects of the *birthright israel* trips held during the winter of 2003-04. Findings are based on comparisons between pre-trip survey data from American and Canadian participants and non-participants, and data obtained several months after the program.

Study 1: Long-Term Impact

Prior evaluation reports have documented a consistent set of attitudinal and behavioral changes among participants after the trips. Until recently, however, it has not been possible to determine whether these effects persist and whether the trip brings about long-lasting change in participants' Jewish identities and engagement. Results of the present long-term follow-up study indicate that, in fact, the program's effects persist over time. Consistently, the most significant changes observed shortly after the trip are still found several years later. In several cases, changes become more pronounced with the passage of time.

Participants continue to recall the trip positively, even after several years, and the personal bonds created among participants remain strong over time. Perhaps the most pronounced effect of the trip is that it evokes greater feelings of connection to Israel and the Jewish people. Participants also report that they have more confidence in explaining the situation in Israel.

From the perspective of Jewish continuity, the trip increases participants' interest in dating only Jews and raising Jewish children. It also evokes a greater interest in Jewish learning. However, despite positive attitudes toward Jewish peoplehood, the trip has little effect on ethical behavior, religious behavior, or participation in organized Jewish life.

On several outcomes, there were “sleeper” effects, that is, changes that increased with the passage of time. Perhaps these reflect the maturation of *birthright israel* participants.

Study 2: Winter 2003-04 Cohort

Much has changed since the program was launched in late 1999. Although the structure of the trips has remained relatively stable, Israel’s situation has changed and the composition of groups has correspondingly shifted based on applicants’ perceptions of the threat of violence. In light of these changes, the focus of the second study is to acquire a better understanding of whether the program continues to attract a diverse group and to affect their attitudes and involvement with Jewish life.

For purposes of this study, information about recent *birthright israel* participants was gathered from the more than 15,000 young adults who applied for a trip in the fall of 2003. Over 7,000 of these applicants took part in the program and traveled to Israel in December 2003 and January 2004. All of those who applied were asked to complete surveys prior to the trip, and both participants and non-participants were asked to complete surveys nearly three months after the trip. The data obtained from these latest surveys reflect the program as it has evolved over time. They also are the most sophisticated findings to date, since both the data collection process and survey questions have improved with each subsequent trip cohort, yielding higher response rates and more nuanced responses.

The winter 2003-04 trips were remarkable for the interest they generated among applicants. Many more young Jewish adults applied than could be accommodated. The applicants reflected the socio-demographic diversity of North American Jewry. Like the Jewish population at large, a substantial number consider themselves “Just Jewish” (nearly 30%), while most others identify either with the Conservative or Reform movements. In addition, paralleling the general population, about one in nine (11%) consider themselves Orthodox.

For previous trips, concern about security was the major determinant of whether applicants actually decided to go, but for this trip, logistics – whether applicants could fit the trip into their schedules – was the major determinant. One out of every three applicants who did not go in the winter applied for the summer.

Consistent with the extremely positive evaluations of previous trips, winter 2003-04 participants saw the trips as highly educational, meaningful, and fun. Participants indicated their most significant learning experience was expanding their knowledge of Jewish history and the most appreciated activities were visiting sites holy to Judaism and visiting ancient historical sites. Complaints about the trip were relatively minor and focused on participants wanting more information (including “negative” information) and more opportunities to learn about Israel.

Two types of change were examined, “conversion” effects and “preserving” effects. Conversion effects refer to the degree to which participants were changed by the trip, exhibiting positive attitudes and behaviors afterward that were not present beforehand.

Preserving effects refer to the degree to which positive attitudes and behaviors existing prior to the trip were still present afterward.

The strongest conversion effect was on feelings of ethnic connection – to Israel, to the Jewish people, and to Jewish history. There were also strong positive changes regarding attitudes about caring for Israel. In addition, there were several changes in lifestyle choices – participants felt more positive about being Jewish and were slightly more inclined to express positive feelings about the importance of dating only Jews, marrying a Jewish person and raising future children as Jews. Regarding preserving effects, there was no erosion of feeling among those who had positive attitudes before the trip.

Participants, in comparison with non-participants, were much more confident in their ability to explain the situation in Israel. Participants indicated more of an inclination to participate in activities that made them feel Jewish, to engage in Jewish activities in their local community, and to read Jewish books. The most popular activities among alumni were those that reinforced peer bonding (reunions and get-togethers). The trip had minor effects on the importance of observing the Sabbath and supporting Jewish organizations.

Perhaps the most significant finding was that more than nine out of ten participants reported that there is at least some likelihood that they would return to Israel in the next two years.

Conclusions

The evaluative evidence makes clear that *birthright israel* has touched the imagination and spirit of young adult Diaspora Jews. The analyses, both of groups after 2-4 years and of the most recent cohort after several months, underscore the success of the program in providing a meaningful encounter with Israel. Participation on a *birthright israel* trip, although it only provides brief exposure to Israel, appears to transform attitudes and creates a link to Israel and Jewish identity. Although it may be too soon to know whether *ahavat Yisrael* becomes a core element of participants' Jewish identities, in the short-term, the trip creates an interest and concern about Israel at a time when hostility to Israel is spreading in the world.

Rising antisemitism and the volatile political situation in Israel have led some stakeholders to identify an additional goal for *birthright israel* – to enable young Diaspora Jews to speak intelligently about the situation in the Middle East from a perspective sympathetic to Israel. The trip appears to be meeting this goal, insofar as the data indicate that it “preserves” existing positive feelings about Israel and increases participants' confidence in explaining the situation there.

Although the findings of the impact assessment are generally positive, the trips do not seem to have much of an effect on attitudes about religion and on religious practice. Overall, the program does not transform the religious beliefs and behavior of participants. Such a transformation was not a goal of the program. A reasonable aspiration is that participants will return to Israel encouraged to learn more. Ample evidence exists that such reaching out for learning does take place when participants return to school.

The assumption of *birthright israel*'s founders was that many young Jews had lost their connection to Judaism and were in danger of being lost to the Jewish people. The data show that *birthright israel* has engaged a far broader group – not only those from highly assimilated families, but also those who have had substantial Jewish education and have maintained ties to the community. What is clear is that assimilation is not the only challenge facing the Jewish community and, even for those who are engaged with Jewish life, the nature of their identity is changing. The world is unsettled, peace remains a distant goal for Israel, and antisemitism has resurfaced around the world. These changes challenge young Jews and, in turn, challenge *birthright israel*. But they also present new opportunities for *birthright israel* to create pluralistic experiences for young adult Jews and inspire them to make identification with Israel an important element of their Jewish identity.

Introduction

Since *birthright israel* was launched in December 1999, nearly 50,000 Jewish young adults (aged 18-26) from North America have traveled to Israel to take part in the program's ten-day educational experience. The initiative has attracted participants from all backgrounds and streams of Judaism. From the program's inception, a systematic evaluation of the program's impact on North American participants has been conducted by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University.¹ The present report summarizes the results of several studies conducted by the Cohen Center to assess the impact of the program. The focus of these efforts is to assess reactions to the program as it has matured and to gauge the degree to which *birthright israel* has meaningfully influenced participants' Jewish engagement and identity. Two separate studies are highlighted in this report. Study 1 addresses the program's long-term impact – how have participants been changed by the trip after several years? Study 2 looks at the short-term impact of trips that took place during the winter of 2003-04.

Perhaps the most important question about the value of *birthright israel* has been the degree to which it has a lasting effect on the Jewish identity and engagement of those who participate. To answer this question, data obtained from a sample of those who participated during the winters of 1999-2001 were compared with a similar group of those who applied but did not go on a trip.

Conducting this longitudinal research has been a challenge. For one, it has been difficult to follow individuals who move frequently as they leave college, enter graduate school, or pursue careers. In addition, many of those who were initially categorized as non-participants later took part in a *birthright israel* trip. Although this is good news for the program, it complicated the evaluation because this group could no longer be used for comparison purposes. Despite these obstacles, long-term impact has been assessed in several ways and the results are summarized below. The data show that the effects of the program persist over several years.

The second study is an assessment of the impact of the trips that took place during the winter of 2003-04. In the fall of 2003, more than 15,000 young adults from North America applied for a *birthright israel* trip. From late December through January, more than 7,000 of these applicants actually traveled to Israel under the sponsorship of one of 31 trip organizers approved by *birthright israel*. Assessment of the impact of these recent trips provides the best data about the program and the curriculum as they have evolved. The data show that participants on the most recent trip represent the most diverse group since program launch.

Both participants and non-participants completed surveys before and after the winter 2003-04 trip. Response rates from this group were the highest ever as a result of improvements in the registration database system and refinements in evaluation procedures.

The findings of both the short-term and long-term analyses support earlier, extremely positive findings about the impact of *birthright israel*. As has been described in previous

¹ See Saxe, et al, 2000; Saxe, et al., 2002.

evaluation reports, participation in the program results in both attitudinal and behavioral changes.² There is no question that the trips, in their own right, are viewed as highly meaningful, educational, and fun. Almost universally, visiting historical sites and bonding with other Jews are experienced very positively. Perhaps more importantly, the trips seem to have value beyond the immediate experience and have a long-lasting impact. Overall, participation results in substantial attitude change, in particular, by increasing the importance of Israel in participants' Jewish identities. There have also been modest behavioral changes, which include gains in involvement in Jewish education.

The data highlighted in the present report support the earlier assessments of the program and document its broad appeal for all Jewish young adults – both those who are already engaged in the community, as well as those who are not. The data make clear the kinds of changes that result and how impact varies depending upon a participant's initial education and background. The present data also suggest the elements of the program that seem to work best and the elements that have the potential to be strengthened.

In contrast to most evaluation studies of educational programs, the present approach not only includes comparison groups, but measures change at multiple points in time – both several months and two to four years after participation.³ The vast majority of educational programs are assessed within a shorter timeframe. Given *birthright israel*'s goal of setting people on a path toward ever-increasing Jewish engagement, a longer view is necessary. The present analyses strongly support the idea that the program is changing attitudes and influencing behavior. The true impact of the program may not be evident until participants are older and have made decisions about marriage and having children. Nonetheless, the results of the evaluation make a strong case that large numbers of young adults who may otherwise have been indifferent toward their Jewish heritage have instead taken a new direction. For many, participation on a *birthright israel* trip appears to have been a catalyst for shaping and strengthening Jewish identity.

As *birthright israel* begins its second five-year phase, the potential import of these evaluation findings is enhanced. They provide critical feedback about the value of the \$150 million investment that has been made in the program. Even more importantly, the data make it possible to assess the validity of initial assumptions about the program. It is hoped that these data can be used both to validate the program and to assist its developers in extending its reach and enhancing its impact.

² See, in particular, Saxe et al., 2002.

³ Compare the current study with, for example, Mittelberg, 1999, and Cohen and Cohen, 2000.

Study 1: Long Term Follow-Up

The key question about *birthright israel* is whether it has lasting effects on those who participate. The first attempt to answer this question took place in 2001, when a one-year follow-up study was conducted with those who went on a *birthright israel* trip when the program was first launched. Participants were surveyed approximately one year after the program ended, and compared with non-participants. The findings indicated that the program did have measurable lasting effects.⁴

Methodology: How Long-Term Change Was Measured

Beginning in 2001, all applicants to the winter trips were asked to complete surveys before their trip, and both participants and non-participants were then asked to complete surveys shortly after the trip took place.⁵ Responses of both groups were compared across the two time periods so that changes in attitudes and behaviors that might be attributable to the trip could be tracked. All survey responses were carefully archived over the years so that a comprehensive long-term study could be conducted at the appropriate time.

To determine whether *birthright israel* has had lasting effects, data needed to be obtained from participants and non-participants a third time several years after the trip to learn about their current feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. The logic was to utilize individual respondents as their own "controls" and observe what the *same* people said on the pre-trip survey (Time 1), the post-trip survey (Time 2), and on the third, follow-up survey (Time 3).⁶

Selecting the Sample In order to compare responses across the three time periods, participants and non-participants who had previously completed both pre-trip and post-trip surveys first needed to be identified. A random sample of this group was then selected and asked to complete a third survey.⁷ Three cohorts were sampled:

- Participants and non-participants from the original launch in the winter of 1999-2000 who completed surveys one year later in the spring of 2001 (subsequently referred to as the 2000 cohort)
- Participants and non-participants from the winter 2000-01 trips who completed pre-trip and post-trip questionnaires (2001 cohort)

⁴ See Saxe et al., 2002.

⁵ In the winter of 1999-2000, no pre-trip surveys were administered to those who went on the launch trip (subsequently referred to as the 2000 cohort), and a post-trip survey was administered in the spring, a few months after the trip. In addition, a follow-up survey was conducted one year later. Because of database problems associated with the launch trip, only data from the follow-up survey conducted one year after the trip can be matched with participant and non-participant data collected for the long-term follow-up. Therefore, this data is the only data available from the 2000 cohort for long-term follow-up analysis.

⁶ See Appendix A for a more detailed explanation of each data collection period.

⁷ See Appendix A for a detailed description of the sampling procedure.

- Participants and non-participants from the winter 2001-02 trips who completed pre-trip and post-trip questionnaires (2002 cohort)

A complication in developing the sample was that many of those who were originally surveyed as non-participants subsequently went on a trip and could no longer be used as a control group for comparison purposes. Thus, the number of non-participants in the cohorts sampled is very small, particularly as compared with previous studies.⁸ These small numbers reduce the statistical power of the analysis; that is, the capacity to detect any change.⁹

Survey Administration As with previous *birthright israel* surveys, the follow-up survey was a web-based instrument sent to respondents' last known email address. Unlike the post-trip surveys administered several months after a trip, the administration of the long-term survey proved difficult. College students, who comprise the vast majority of those who apply to the program, frequently relocate and many change e-mail addresses after graduation. As time passed, more and more of the contact information recorded at the time of registration had become obsolete. Another factor affecting the ability to contact those sampled was the quality of the information recorded in the registration database. After the first administration of the launch trip survey it became clear that the database used for registration was inadequate for purposes of follow-up research and continued contact with applicants. Although the quality of the information in the registration database has improved dramatically since the initial phase of the program, some information about applicants to the first trips, in particular information about non-participants, remained incomplete. The result was that those who applied for a trip in 2000 or 2001 were especially difficult to locate.¹⁰ Despite these limitations, intensive phone follow-up during the spring of 2004 substantially improved the ability to obtain current contact information and increased the number of responses to the survey.¹¹

Cohort Differences In order to analyze whether a *birthright israel* trip had lasting effects, each individual served as his/her own control to evaluate changes across time, and then, participants were compared with non-participants to evaluate the effects of the trip. The basic premise is that if participants and non-participants are identical in terms of characteristics and attitudes before the trip, then (while controlling for initial responses) any change observed after the trip can be attributed to participation. To determine whether any initial differences within cohorts were present, demographic characteristics of participants and non-participants were compared within each cohort.

⁸ See Table A2 in Appendix A for specific sample sizes.

⁹ Statistical power refers to the probability of detecting a meaningful effect if one is present. It depends on: a) the sample size; b) the expected size of the effect; c) the accuracy of the instrument used to measure the effect. Small sample sizes thus make it harder to detect change.

¹⁰ The anticipated difficulties in tracking down respondents made it necessary to select a sample, rather than try and survey the entire eligible population.

¹¹ See Appendix A for details of follow-up efforts and response rates.

For the 2000 and the 2001 cohorts, there were no significant differences between participants and non-participants with respect to gender, Jewish denomination, or religious observance. The 2002 cohort was, however, somewhat different. Those who went on a trip in 2002 were more likely to be Orthodox than those who did not go and accordingly, were more observant. Participants in 2002 were also more likely to be male. The differences observed in the 2002 cohort were directly related to terrorism incidents in Israel and media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When Israel was viewed as less safe, more men went than women, and observant Jews were more likely to go than nonobservant Jews.

These differences complicated the data analysis and made it more difficult to determine whether changes observed in participants across the three time periods could be attributed to the trip. If participants and non-participants were different before the trip, then differences observed after the trip could result from different “starting points.”

The data analysis needed to take these differences into consideration and as a consequence the three cohorts could not be treated as one homogenous group. Each cohort needed to be analyzed separately. Since this approach resulted in a smaller sample size, there is a consequent reduction in the statistical power of the analyses, making it more difficult to detect change. This is especially problematic for the 2000 and 2001 cohorts, which were smaller to begin with.

Once change was analyzed for each cohort, cohorts were then combined to increase statistical power. In addition, several tests were conducted to determine whether particular variables could control for the differences between the cohorts. Jewish religious observance at the time of registration (or for the 2000 cohort, at the time of the one year follow-up) was used as a surrogate to the level of attachment to Israel and the Jewish people prior to the trip. By using religious observance to statistically “adjust” the raw data, participants and non-participants became equivalent for analytic purposes, and the effects of the trip could be more easily isolated. In the following analyses, all comparisons between participants and non-participants are adjusted for observance level.¹²

Characteristics of Respondents

Across all cohorts, more women (56%) than men (44%) responded. The average age of respondents in 2004 is just under 25. Ninety percent are singles who have never been married, 9.6 percent are married, and 0.4 percent are divorced. Only 2 percent have children. Just over half (52%) are currently students: 60 percent of these are undergraduates and 40 percent are graduate students. Three out of every four (74%) have a job.

Almost half of the respondents live in the Northeast (47%). Fourteen percent live in the West (CA, AZ, OR, WA), 15 percent live in the South, and 13 percent live in other areas of the United States. Eleven percent of the respondents live in Canada.

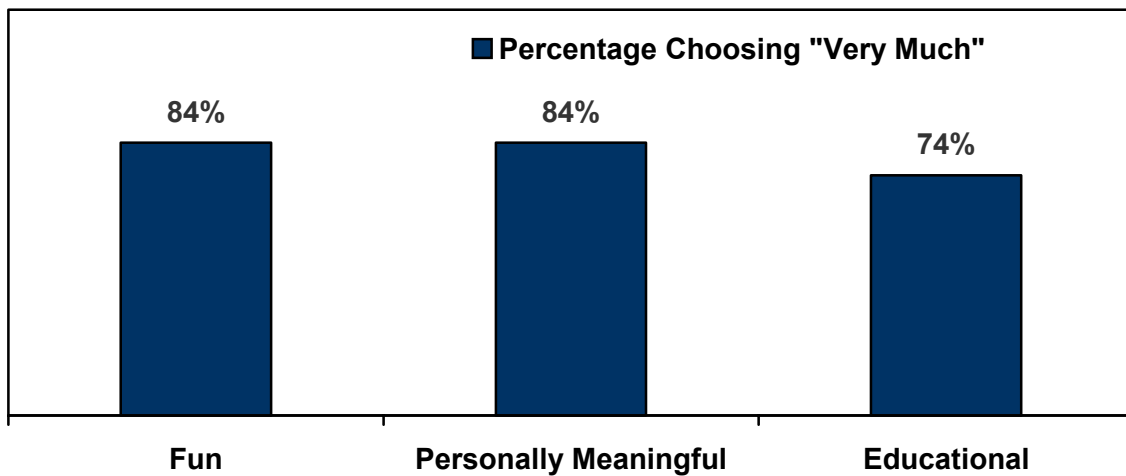
¹² See Appendix A for a detailed discussion of how observance level was calculated and incorporated.

Almost a third of the respondents (32%) were raised in what they described as a Conservative household. Twenty-three percent were raised in a Reform household, 10 percent Orthodox, and 23 percent Just Jewish.

Feelings About the Trip

If *birthright israel* is to have a long-term impact on participants, a prerequisite is that they feel good about the trip. For all three cohorts, the evidence is overwhelming that they continue to have highly positive feelings (see Figure 1). Despite the passage of several years, the vast majority of alumni recall the trip as fun (84% selected “very much”), personally meaningful (84%), and educational (74%). These figures are virtually identical to the way participants recalled the trip shortly after they went. Only 5 percent said they would *not* recommend the trip to their friends and relatives. In contrast, 79 percent reported that they had told others to go on *birthright israel*.¹³

Figure 1: Overall Ratings of the Trip at Time 3 (All Three Cohorts)



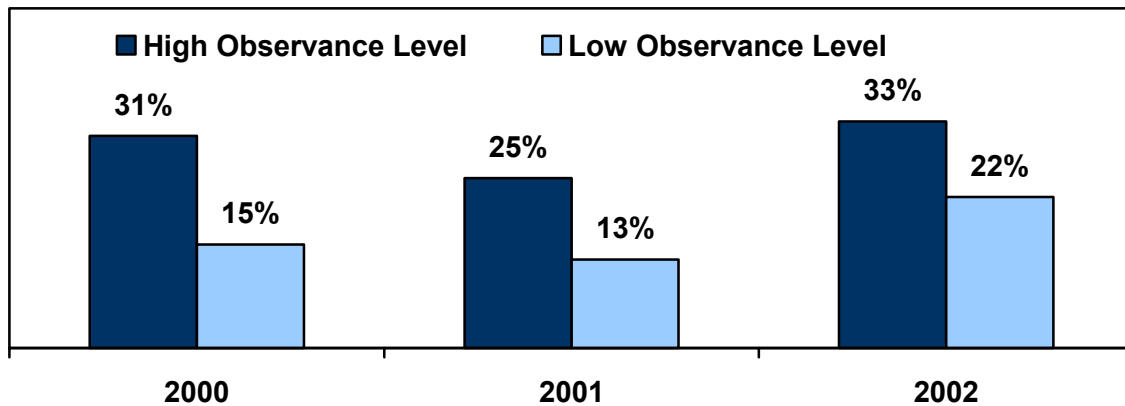
Returning to Israel

The developers of *birthright israel* recognized that a ten-day experience in Israel would, at best, only start participants on a new Jewish journey. It was hoped that the trip would inspire participants to want to return. The data show that within 2-4 years of participating in the program a substantial number of participants actually do return. The inclination to return appears to be related to the level of Jewish observance. As shown in Figure 2, among the more observant participants, between one-quarter and one-third did return (depending on the

¹³ Data obtained from those who applied to the winter 2003-04 trip, which is presented in the second section of this report, indicated that 92 percent of participants and 80 percent of non-participants had heard from their friends on earlier trips that it was a great experience.

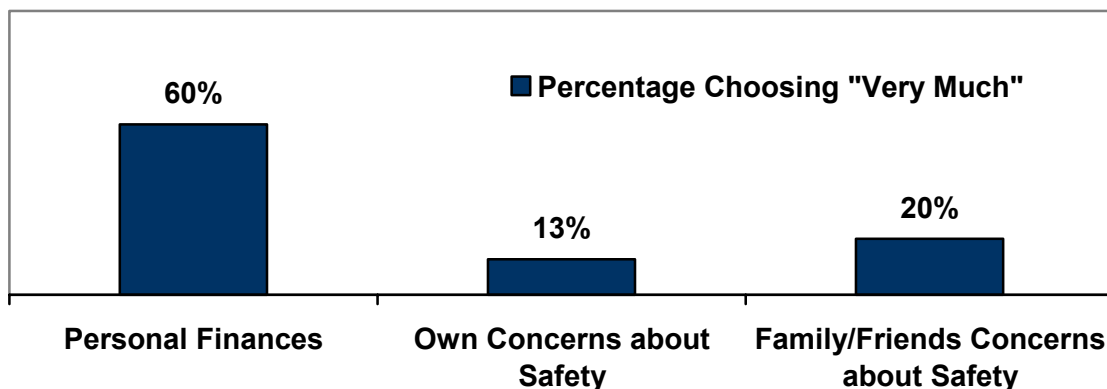
cohort), while among the less observant, the range is from 15 percent to 22 percent. The question was not asked of non-participants, since they could not “return” if they did not go in the first place.

Figure 2: Return to Israel and Level of Observance (By Cohort)



Other data suggest that, while there is great interest among participants in making a return trip, there are practical limitations. The most important one is finances. As indicated in Figure 3, three out of five participants indicated that their personal financial situation made it difficult to return to Israel (60% chose the response category “very much.”). Figure 3 also indicates that concerns about safety were not a major deterrent to travel to Israel. The experience of being in Israel appears to have altered their perceptions of safety. Still, the data show that friends and family remain more concerned about safety than participants.

Figure 3: Factors That Make It Difficult To Return to Israel (All Three Cohorts)

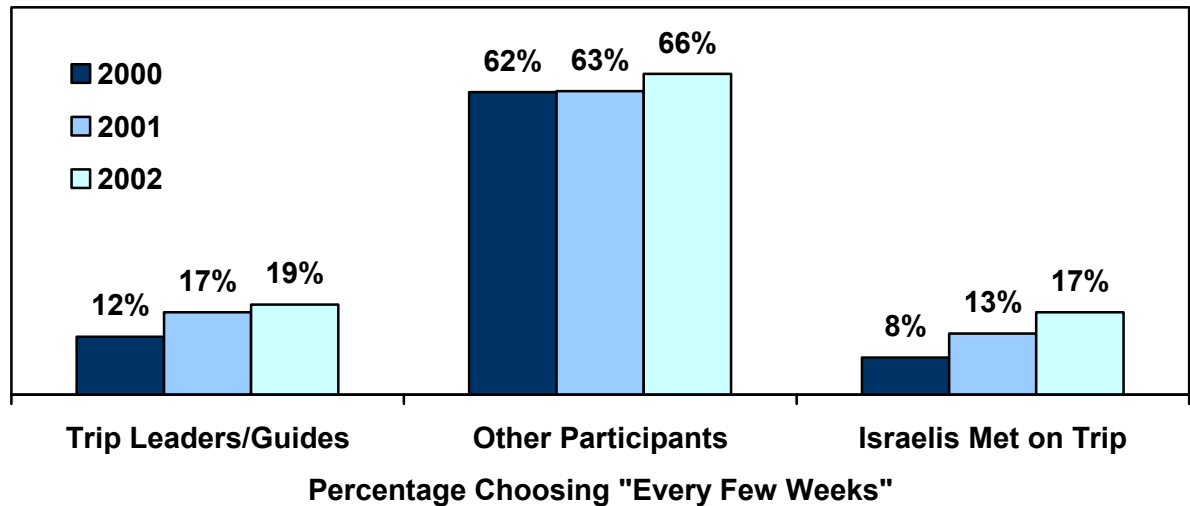


The Creation of Community Among Alumni

Another aim of *birthright israel*'s developers was to create a feeling of community among those who went. If participants made connections with each other, this could facilitate further interest in Israel and Jewish life. The data summarized in Figure 4 indicate that the aim of creating community was largely achieved. Close to two-thirds of alumni, depending upon the

cohort, have kept in touch with their peers. In the case of the 2000 cohort, the contacts have continued even after four years. Interestingly, there was no increase over time in the proportion that have Jewish friends. Rather, the community formed is a direct result of having been on a trip.

Figure 4: Current Contacts With Others From the Trip (By Cohort)



Ability to Explain the Situation in Israel

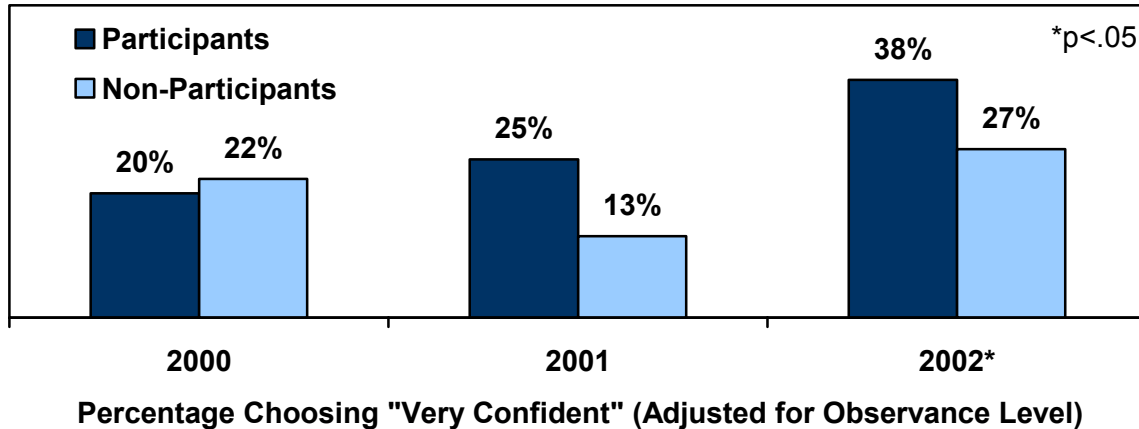
Given the general atmosphere on college campuses toward Israel, in which Israel is often under attack¹⁴, the ability to explain the situation in Israel to skeptics and those with little sympathy for the Israelis became an important goal of some stakeholders in the program. To see if the trip had an effect, respondents were asked how confident they felt in explaining the current situation.

As shown in Figure 5, for the most recent cohort (2002), there is a statistically significant difference between those who went and those who did not go. Among those who went, this cohort also had the highest percentage (38%) of those who felt "very confident" explaining the current situation. The difference between the two groups for the 2001 cohort approaches significance ($p < .08$), and about a quarter (25%) felt very confident. There was no difference between the two groups for the 2000 cohort and only a fifth (20%) felt confident.

There are two possible reasons why the 2002 cohort exhibited the largest percentage of those who felt confident and the largest difference between participants and non-participants. First, the 2002 trip took place in the midst of a particularly tense period of confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians. Anyone who chose to go under these circumstances was likely to be positively inclined toward Israel, or they would have stayed home. Second, the 2002 trip was the most recent, so it is closer in time to the current situation.

¹⁴ See, for example, Bard, 2004.

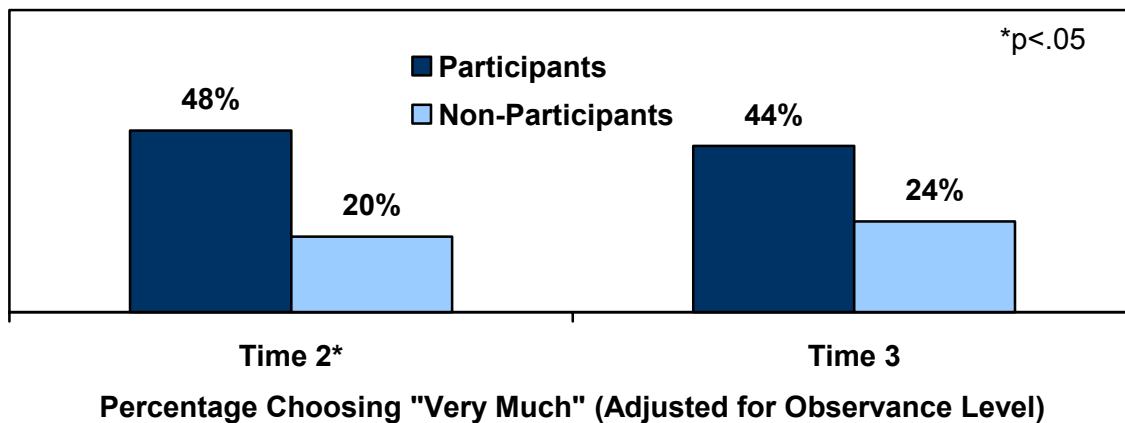
Figure 5: Confidence in Explaining the Current Situation in Israel (By Cohort)



Israel and the Jewish People

2000 Cohort As noted above (see Footnote 5), comparisons for the 2000 group are available only for Time 2 and Time 3. Of all of the changes produced by the trip, the strongest involve feelings about Israel. Even the 2000 cohort with its small number of respondents showed pronounced differences between participants and non-participants that were still present four years after the trip.¹⁵ Feelings about Israel were examined in two ways. The primary approach was to ask respondents whether they felt connected to Israel. As shown in Figure 6, at Time 2 (for the 2000 cohort, one year after the trip) there was a 28 percent difference between those who went and those who did not go. At Time 3, there was still a 20 percent difference.

Figure 6: Feelings of Connection to Israel (2000 Cohort)

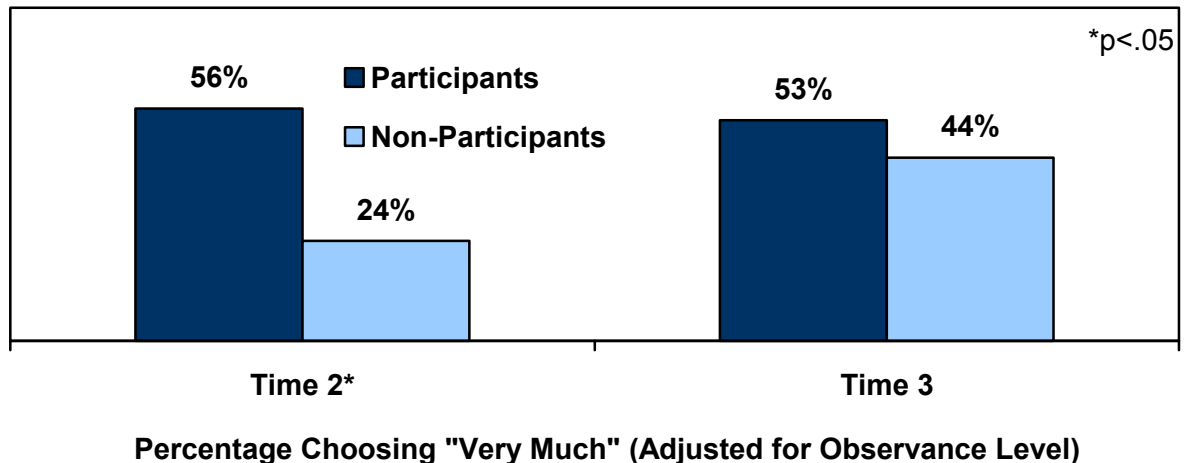


¹⁵ Because this cohort had the smallest number of non-participant respondents, change was harder to detect, and therefore significant differences are especially noteworthy.

Another way to examine feelings about Israel is to look at the role Israel plays in respondents' Jewish identity. Specifically, respondents were asked whether being Jewish means caring about Israel. Figure 7 shows that at Time 2 there is a significant difference between those who went and those who did not go in terms of feeling that being Jewish means caring about Israel. Adjusted for observance level, 56 percent of those who went feel that being Jewish involves caring about Israel compared with 24 percent of those who did not go. However, by Time 3, the gap between those who went and those who did not go is smaller – 53 percent and 44 percent respectively. It appears that there has been little change among participants between Time 2 and Time 3, yet there is a change in a positive direction among non-participants. This change may be a result of increased sympathy for Israel generated by media coverage of terrorism. So, while the difference between those who went and those who did not go may not reach statistical significance, there appears to be very little erosion in feeling among participants.

One complicating factor in this analysis is that the act of applying to the program potentially makes individuals more sensitive to events in Israel, even among those who did not go on the trip. Research on decision-making suggests that the very act of making a decision (here, applying to the program) changes individuals so that they are not the same as they were before the decision.¹⁶ This works against the ability to detect change in participants since non-participants also change. In the specific case of a question connected to current events in Israel, asked multiple times over a period when respondents are exposed to media information, any change in non-participants would tend to manifest as a latent, or “sleeper” effect – a change that would only be observed after the passage of time. This is, in fact, what the data in Figure 7 indicate. There is a large increase in “caring about Israel” at Time 3 for non-participants. This same “sleeper” effect is also seen in the 2001 cohort.¹⁷

Figure 7: Caring about Israel (2000 Cohort)



¹⁶ See Kadushin, 1968.

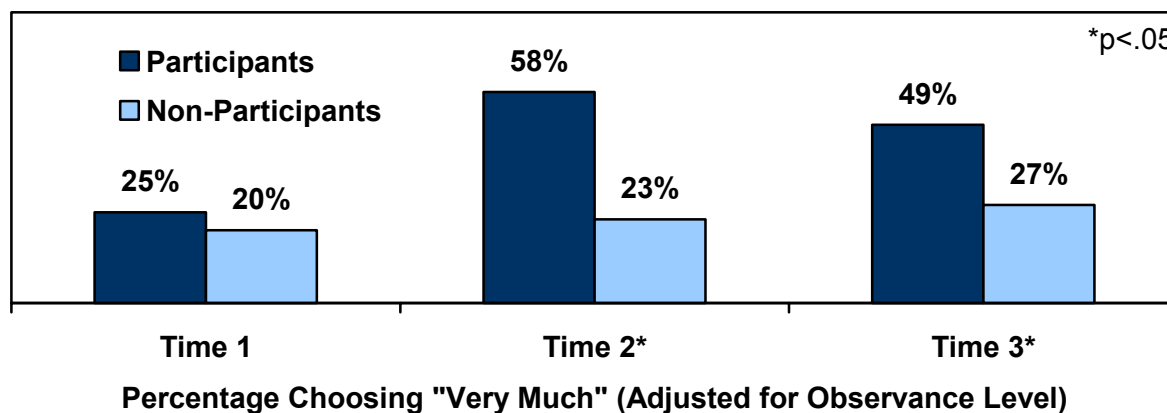
¹⁷ See page 20.

For the 2000 cohort, there are no statistically significant differences between participants and non-participants on responses to a question about feelings of connection to the Jewish people. Nevertheless, differences are in the direction desired by the program. Other indicators of identification with the Jewish people such as the importance of dating Jews, the importance of marrying a Jewish person, and the importance of raising children as Jews show no statistically significant differences in this cohort. Again, however, most of the trends are in the desired direction; that is, those who went are more likely than those who did not to hold a more “Jewish” point of view. What appears to have happened is that non-participants, in particular, have become more positive.

To summarize the findings regarding the 2000 cohort, there was little or no erosion in positive views regarding Israel and the Jewish people among participants. However, non-participants increased in their positive views sufficiently so that at Time 3 there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups. This may represent a maturing on the part of non-participants, who demonstrated an interest in going to Israel by virtue of having applied for the trip.¹⁸

2001 Cohort Unlike the 2000 cohort, pre-trip data at Time 1 was obtained for the 2001 cohort. Figure 8, shows that for this cohort, prior to the trip, feelings of connection to Israel were virtually the same for those who went and those who did not go.¹⁹ A few months after the trip there is a strong difference. Although this difference appears to be somewhat smaller by Time 3, it is still statistically significant.²⁰ Thus, the pronounced change in feelings of connection to Israel found shortly after the trip was still present after three years.

Figure 8: Feelings of Connection to Israel (2001 Cohort)



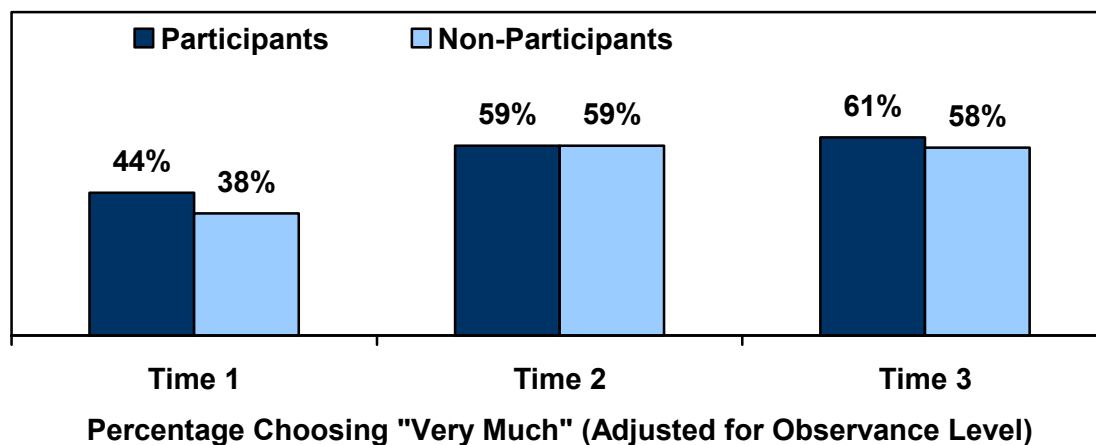
¹⁸ Another possible explanation for the increase in positive views among non-participants is response bias. Those who elected to respond to the survey may have been more inclined to offer positive responses than those who did not because they were more interested in Israel.

¹⁹ The similarity between the two groups validates the design of this study. For a more detailed explanation of the “pseudo-experimental” design used in both Study 1 and Study 2, see Appendix B.

²⁰ To determine whether this drop was statistically significant, logistic regression was used. See Appendix A.

For those in the 2001 cohort, caring about Israel was an important component of Jewish identity for both participants and non-participants, but as was the case with the 2000 cohort, there was an increase from Time 1 to Time 2 for *both* those who went and those who did not go (see Figure 9). At Time 1, 44 percent of participants and 38 percent of non-participants selected the response category “very much” when responding to a question about whether being Jewish meant caring about Israel. At Time 2, 59 percent of both groups selected “very much.” Percentages remained virtually the same at Time 3, three years later. Once again, awareness of terrorism in Israel through the media appears to have had a positive effect on non-participants’ feelings about Israel, even though they did not go on a trip.

Figure 9: Caring about Israel (2001 Cohort)



Just like the 2000 cohort, there were differences at Time 2 and Time 3, for the 2001 cohort between those who participated and those who did not on responses to the question asking about feelings of connection to the Jewish people. However, the statistical significance of these differences was marginal. Those who went felt more connected than those who did not. Similarly, participants were more likely to hold positive views than non-participants on issues of Jewish continuity, but these differences were not statistically significant.

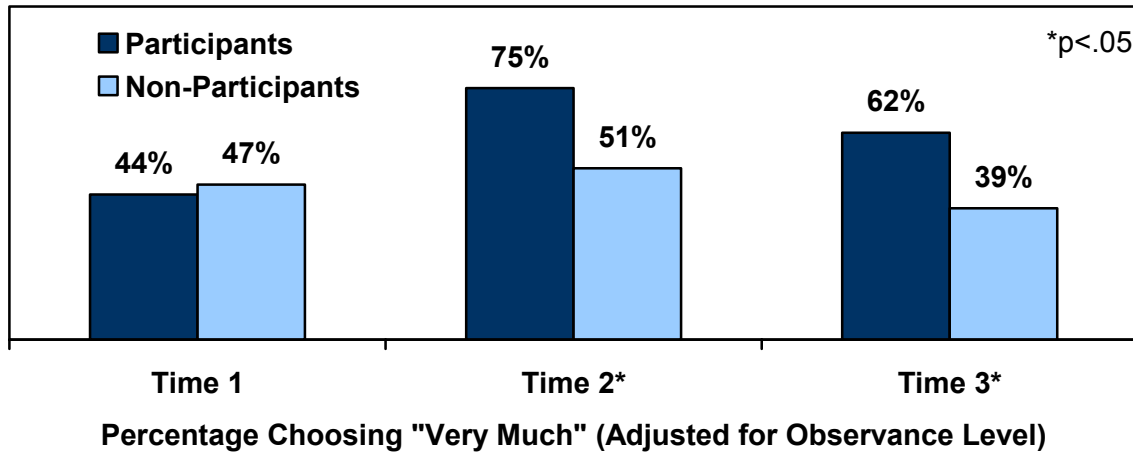
The 2002 Cohort The 2002 cohort is different in several respects. The respondents in this cohort applied for the program most recently, and there are more responses from non-participants as a result of improvement in the database. Both of these factors make it more likely that differences found between participants and non-participants will be statistically significant. In addition, as noted earlier, this cohort is more religiously observant than prior cohorts. The present analyses take this into account.

As is the case with the other two cohorts, connection to Israel is the strongest effect of the trip, and this is still the case after two years. Figure 10 shows that the differences between those who went and those who did not go are about the same at Time 3 as at Time 2.²¹

²¹ Lower overall percentages at Time 3 result from non-response to this particular question.

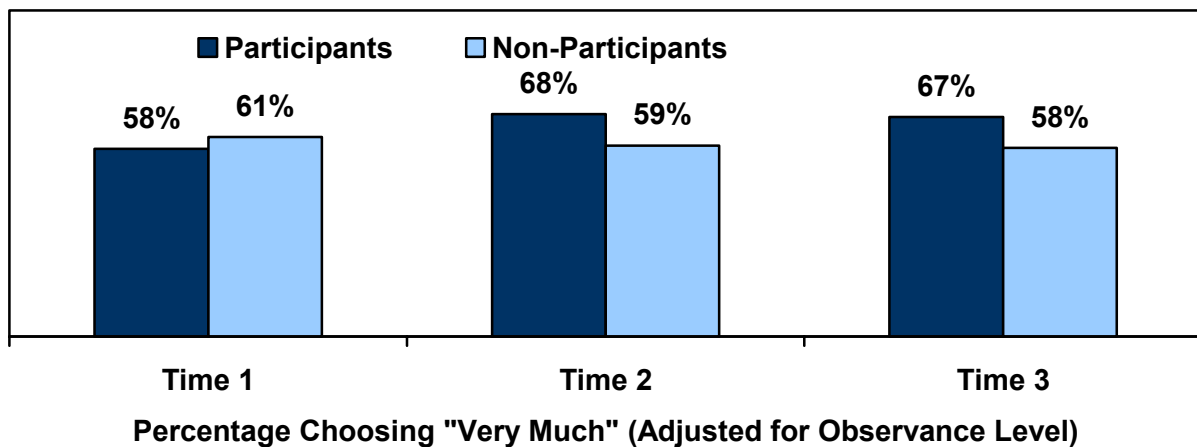
Regression analysis shows, however, that the differences between the two groups increase from Time 2 to Time 3, suggesting a “sleeper” effect – the effects of the trip actually become greater over time.

Figure 10: Feelings of Connection to Israel (2002 Cohort)



At Time 3, differences between groups on the question about whether being Jewish means caring about Israel were not statistically significant for the 2000 and 2001 cohorts. For the 2002 cohort, differences were not significant as well (see Figure 11 below). Nonetheless, for all three cohorts, differences are in the desirable direction. Interestingly, non-participants' feelings about caring about Israel in the 2002 cohort remained virtually the same across all three time periods – before, shortly after, and two years after the trip.²²

Figure 11: Caring About Israel (2002 Cohort)

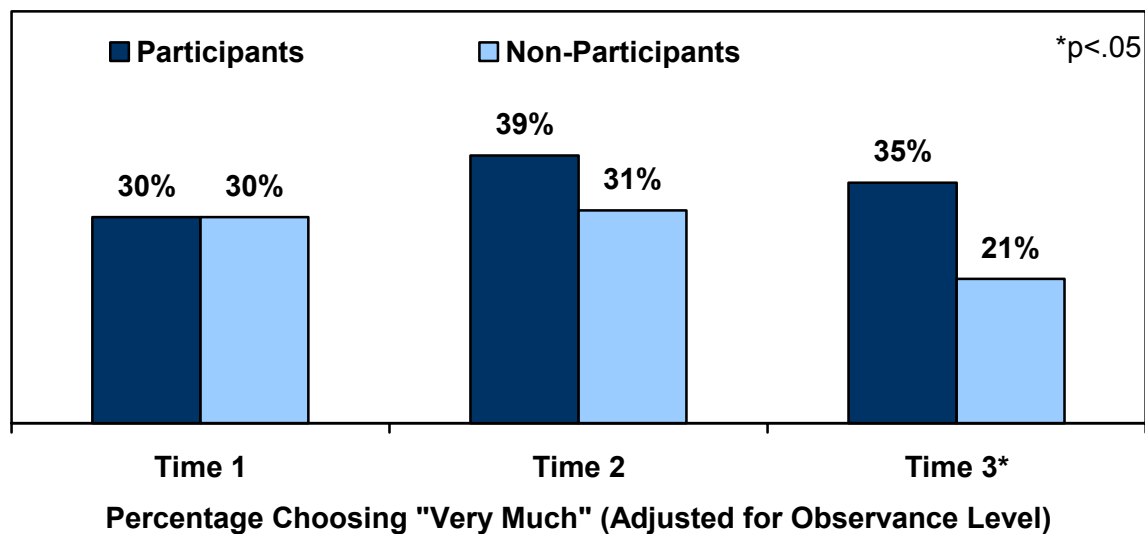


²² Note that although non-participants scored slightly higher on this measure at Time 1, differences between participants and non-participants were not statistically significant. Non-response did not affect overall percentages for this particular question (in contrast with the data reported in Figure 10).

Feelings of connection to the Jewish people are marginally affected by the trip for those who went in 2002 but differences are not statistically significant. Regression analyses suggest that between Time 2 and Time 3 having gone on the trip results in a preservation of the feelings of being connected to Israel. Again, this is a type of “sleeper” effect.

Figure 12 shows a “sleeper” effect for the 2002 cohort on the importance of dating only Jews. That is, there is no immediate impact (i.e., at Time 2), but as the cohort matures, there is a difference at Time 3 between those who went and those who did not go.

Figure 12: Importance of Dating Only Jews (2002 Cohort)



In examining the data further, the effect of the trip on this measure of Jewish continuity was to “preserve” the feelings that were present prior to the trip, rather than “convert” those who did not take a Jewish perspective prior to the trip.²³ Those who did not go on the trip actually decreased over time on these two measures. The trip had no effect on other variables related to Jewish continuity or connection to the Jewish people such as the importance of marrying someone Jewish, the importance of raising children as Jews, the importance of being Jewish, and exploring one’s Jewishness.²⁴

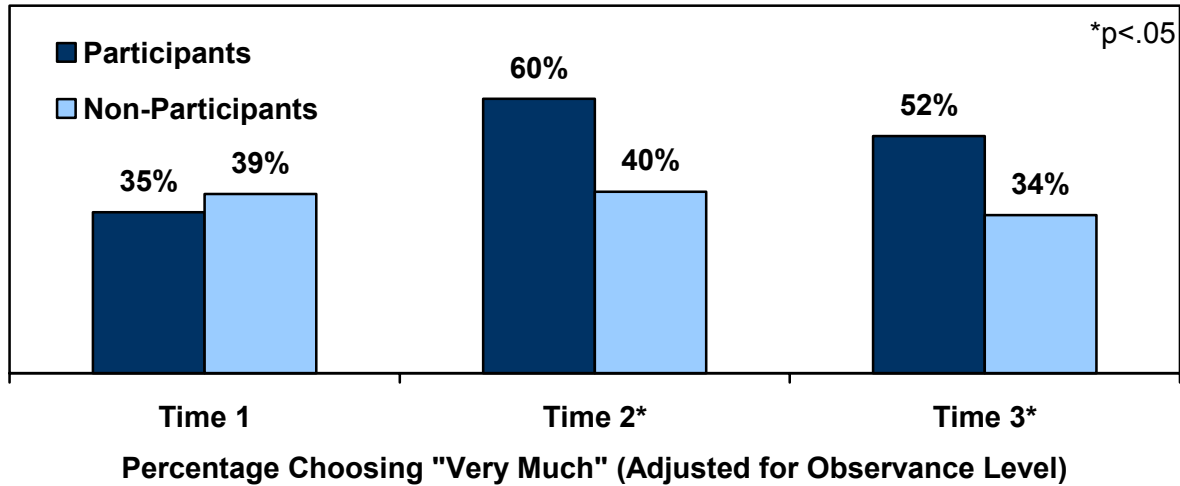
All Three Cohorts When the three cohorts are combined, the probability of detecting effects from the trip increases, but the effects are dominated by the larger, more engaged, 2002 cohort. Still, the findings are consistent with what has already been presented. Two to four years later, feeling connected to Israel is the most prominent effect of the trip, as Figure 13 indicates. At Time 2, 60 percent of participants felt “very much” connected to Israel while only 40 percent of non-participants felt this way. Although at Time 3 there is some decline in

²³ See pages 41-42 in this report for a detailed explanation of conversion and preserving effects.

²⁴ It was especially difficult to determine the effect of the trip on “exploring one’s Jewishness” since there were significant differences at Time 1 between those who went and those who did not go.

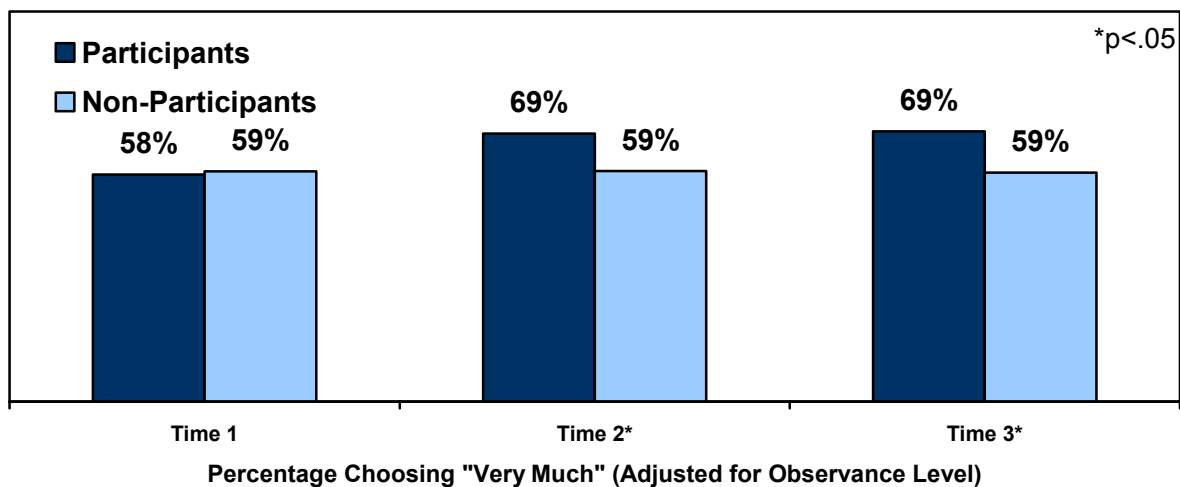
feelings of connection to Israel, the difference between participants and non-participants, evident at Time 2 (20%) is maintained at Time 3 (18%), two to four years later.

Figure 13: Feelings of Connection to Israel (All Cohorts)



When each of the three cohorts was examined separately, respondents' reported feelings of connection to the Jewish people did not change enough to create statistically significant differences between participants and non-participants at Time 3. However, when the cohorts were combined, the differences were statistically significant (see Figure 14). At Time 3, 69 percent of participants felt "very much" connected to the Jewish people, compared to 59 percent of non-participants. These percentages represent no change from Time 2.

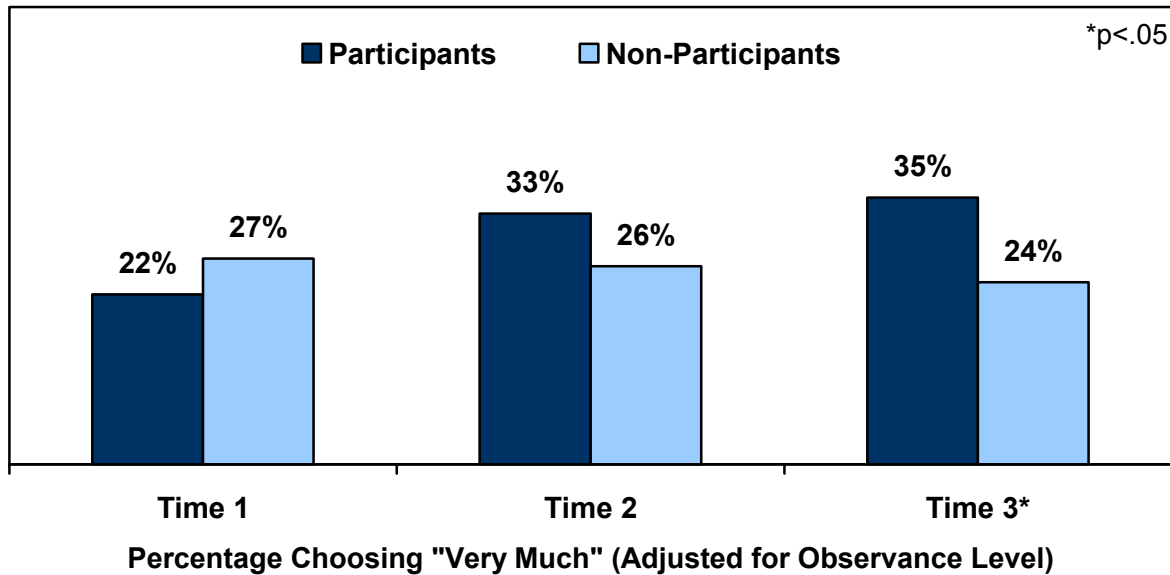
Figure 14: Feelings of Connection to Jewish People (All Cohorts)



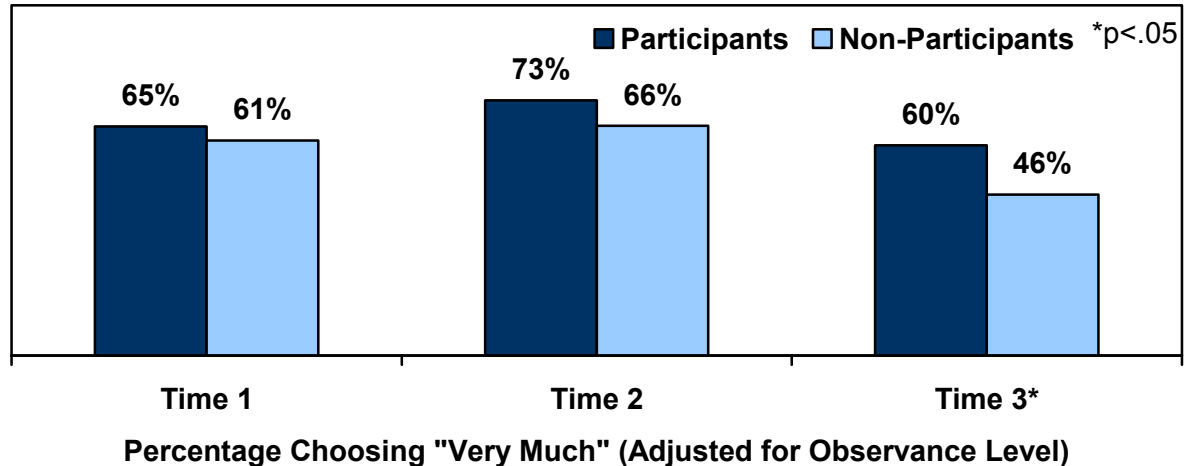
As noted earlier, for the 2000 and the 2001 cohort, the effects of the trip were not statistically significant for three measures of Jewish continuity (dating Jews, marrying a Jewish person and raising children Jewishly), although differences between those who went and those who did not were in the direction desired by the program. For the 2002 cohort, the effect of the trip was significant for one of the three, dating Jews, at Time 3. When the cohorts were combined, the findings were significant at Time 3 for dating Jews and raising children as Jews, but not for marrying a Jewish person.

For the question about dating only Jews, the “sleeper” effects are very evident (Figure 15). At Time 1, before the trip, non-participants are actually more inclined to consider it important to date only Jews, although the difference is not significant. At Time 2, participants are more inclined to say it is important to date only Jews, but again the difference is not significant. However, at Time 3 there is an 11 percent difference between participants and non-participants that is statistically significant. Across the three time periods, non-participants remain relatively consistent while participants show a total 13% increase on this variable.

Figure 15: Importance of Dating Only Jews (All Cohorts)



On the question asking about the importance of raising children as Jews (see Figure 16), the differences between participants and non-participants increase over time, but this is due to the fact that non-participants decrease over time while participants remain relatively consistent.

Figure 16: Importance of Raising Children as Jews (All Cohorts)

Interest in combating antisemitism is not affected by going on a trip for any cohort or for the cohorts combined. The same is true of remembering the Holocaust. Nonetheless, although the trip did not have an effect on either of these indicators of Jewish consciousness, it should be noted that percentages were high on both indicators for participants and non-participants before and after the trip.

To summarize, participation on a *birthright israel* trip has a significant effect on connections with Israel and the Jewish people, and is associated positively with several indicators of Jewish continuity.

Ethical Life

In addition to studying participants' views of Israel, the Jewish people, and Jewish continuity, the trip's effect on participants' views of an ethical life were also examined. Specifically, the importance of *Tikkun Olam* (making the world a better place) was looked at, and the extent to which being Jewish involves having a rich spiritual life. The analyses showed the trip had little or no effect on these matters, although it is important to point out that these considerations were not a direct focus of the trip's educational efforts.

Religious Behavior

Participants on *birthright israel* trips chose from among a number of different trip organizers. While certain core experiences, such as Shabbat observance, were mandated, trip organizers varied widely in their religious inclinations. Despite the fact that trips varied in their religious emphasis, *birthright israel* trips were neither intended nor designed to foster religious

observance. Not surprisingly then, the analyses show that participation on a trip did not have a major impact on religious observance or behavior.²⁵

At Time 2 and Time 3, just over half of respondents said they attended services in the last month. When controlling for religious observance, the trip had no effect on attendance at services for either the 2000 or 2001 cohort. There was, however, an effect for the 2002 cohort, both at Time 2 and at Time 3. When the cohorts are combined, there is a small effect at Time 2 but only a marginal effect at Time 3 due to the religious inclinations of the 2002 cohort. In summary, the trip doesn't seem to have much of an effect.

Respondents were asked to what extent their personal way of “being Jewish” involves “observing the Sabbath.” After controlling for religious observance, the trip had no effect for the 2000 and 2001 cohorts, but did have an effect for the 2002 cohort at Time 2. This effect is somewhat problematic due to the more religious nature of the 2002 cohort – this cohort was more likely to feel that for them, personally, being Jewish means observing the Sabbath even before they went on the trip. With the cohorts combined, there is a difference at Time 1 (due to the 2002 cohort) and at Time 2, but not at Time 3. These findings indicate that the trip had no lasting effect on the place of observing the Sabbath in Jewish identity.

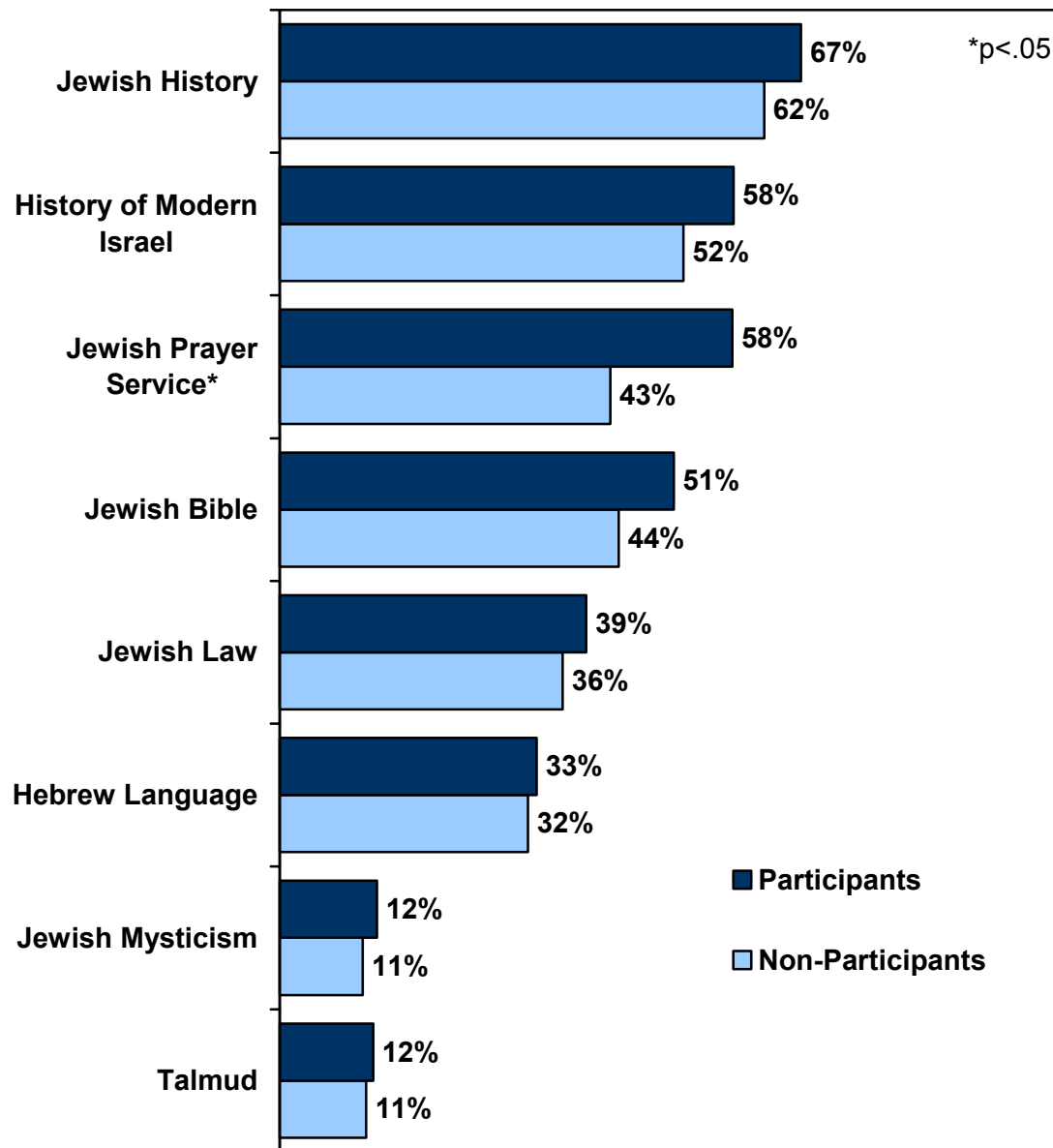
Jewish Learning

Participants on *birthright israel* trips, who range in age from 18 to 26, are overwhelmingly college students or recent college graduates. This makes them the ideal group for *birthright israel*, since the program's primary focus is educational. Although *birthright israel* is by no means a traditional educational experience, and is far removed from the traditional setting of a classroom, it is not just a tour. The curriculum of the program was carefully developed based in part on years of experience with previous Israel programs. Participants undoubtedly have fun, but they also receive the equivalent of a ten-day crash course. As informal education, *birthright israel* differs from a typical college course. Participants learn from their setting and are not burdened with examinations or papers.

Analyses of the evaluation surveys assessed whether the learning that took place on the trip created an interest in learning after the trip.²⁶ The first stage of these analyses was to find out what people knew so that they could then be asked what they wanted to learn. Figure 17, which shows respondents' knowledge level at Time 3, indicates that respondents have the most knowledge of Jewish history and modern Israel. The only statistically significant difference between participants and non-participants is on knowledge of Jewish prayer. This may be a result of exposure to prayer on the trip – everyone experienced some Jewish prayer, whether the blessing after a meal or the blessing over Shabbat candles.

²⁵ The analyses are complicated by an inconsistency in question wording. The question about attendance at services asked at Time 1 was not exactly comparable to the questions asked at Time 2 and Time 3, so there is no data for Time 1.

²⁶ Questions about Jewish studies and Jewish learning were not uniformly asked of all cohorts and, in particular, there was little pre-trip inquiry (at Time 1).

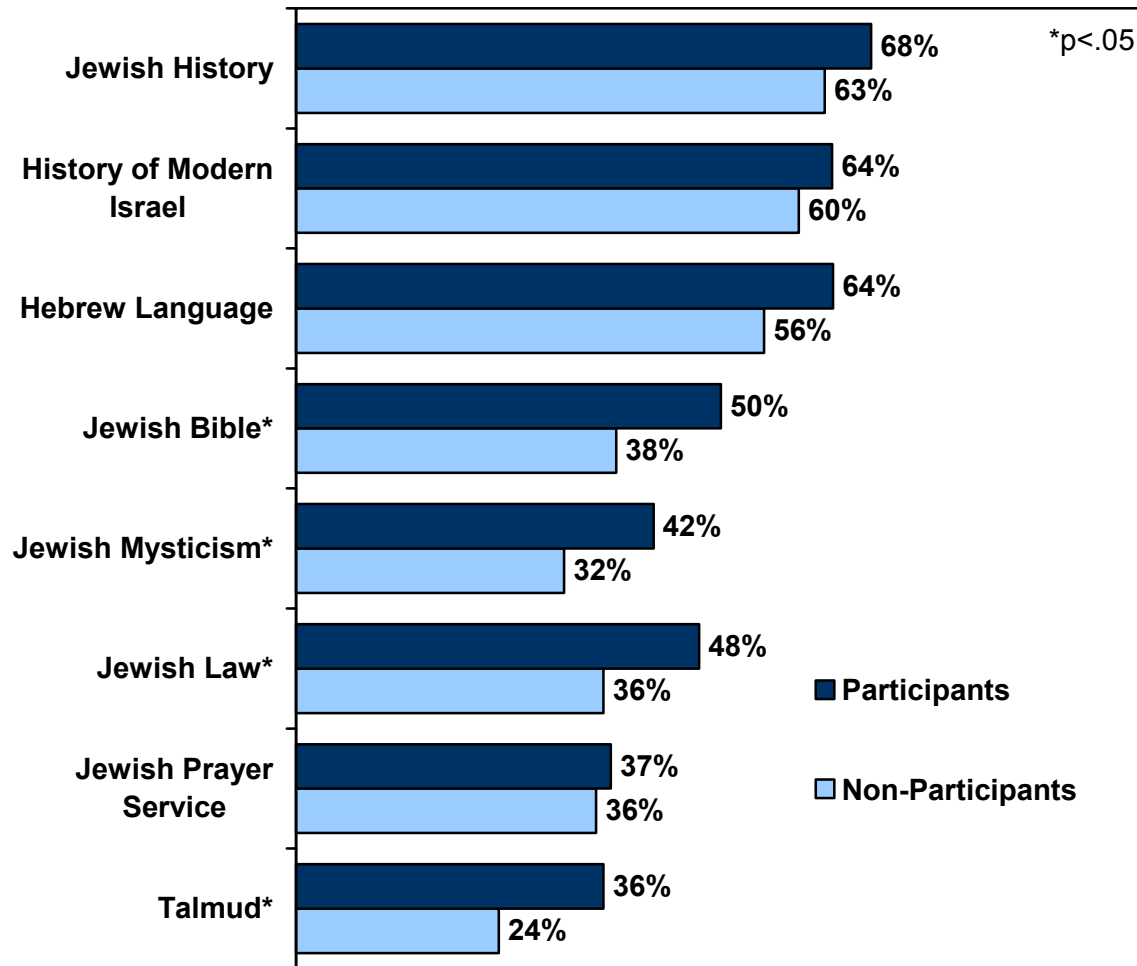
Figure 17: Level of Jewish Knowledge at Time 3 (All Three Cohorts)

**Percentage Indicating "Intermediate/Advanced" Knowledge
(Adjusted for Observance Level)**

Figure 18 summarizes responses to questions about interest in learning. Significant differences between those who went and those who did not go were found in the following areas:

- Jewish Bible (50% compared with 38%)
- Jewish Mysticism (42% compared with 32%)
- Jewish Law (48% compared with 36%)
- Talmud (36% compared with 24%)

Figure 18: Interest in Learning More (All Three Cohorts)



**Percentage Choosing "Considerable/A Top Priority"
(Adjusted for Observance Level)**

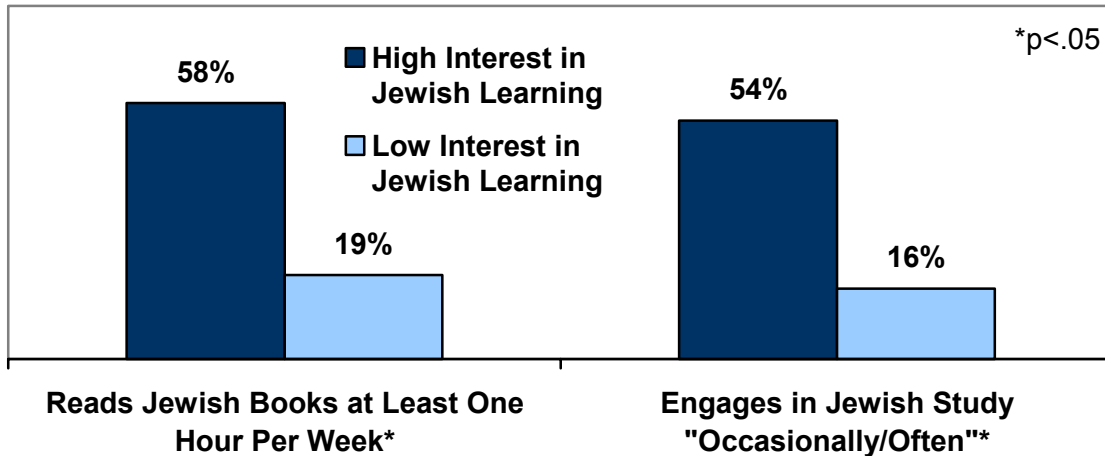
Overall, those who went on the trip are more likely to express a high interest in learning more about Jewish subjects than those who did not go (54% compared with 41%, respectively).²⁷ An important outcome of any educational experience is not merely what is learned but whether the learning experience generates a desire to learn more. By this criterion, *birthright israel* appears to be a major success. Participants are highly interested in Jewish study and learning.

To determine if interest in learning among participants generated actual learning behavior, the relationship between the two was examined. As shown in Figure 19, 58 percent of those

²⁷ An overall score for interest in learning was created by summing the scores for each respondent across all topics of interest. These interest scores were then dichotomized into two groups, a “high interest” group and a “low interest” group.

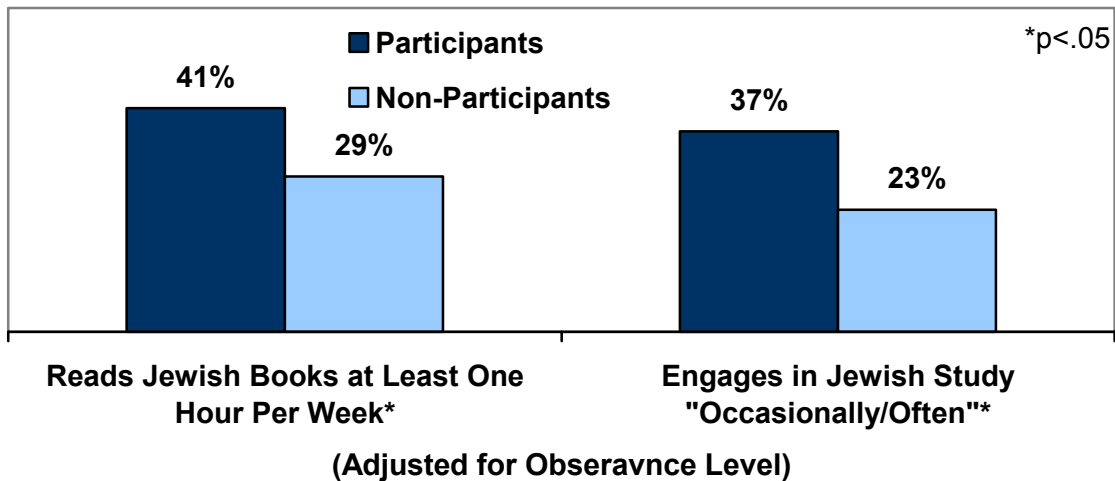
in the high interest group read Jewish books at least one hour per week during the last few months as compared with 19 percent in the low interest group. Fifty-four percent of participants in the “high interest” groups had engaged in Jewish study either “occasionally” or “often” as compared with 16 percent of those in the low interest group.

Figure 19: Relationship Between Interest in Jewish Learning and Jewish Learning Behavior Among Participants (All Three Cohorts)



Comparisons between participants and non-participants show that participants engage in more reading and learning than non-participants (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Jewish Reading and Study at Time 3 (All Three Cohorts)



Jewish Organizational Interest and Behavior

Participation on a *birthright israel* trip did not appear to translate into an interest in Jewish organizational life, nor did it generate actual participation in Jewish organizational life. After controlling for Jewish observance, such measures as the importance of supporting Jewish organizations, participation in political activities related to Israel, and participation in Jewish

cultural events were found to be unrelated to trip attendance. As one might expect, those individuals who identified themselves as being leaders in Jewish activities were more involved in these activities, whether or not they had gone on a trip.

At Time 2 and Time 3 respondents were asked about their participation in activities for *birthright israel* alumni. At Time 3, 45 percent of alumni indicated that they read the *birthright israel* newsletters. Other activities are less popular – only 18 percent participated in reunions and parties, and 4 percent went on retreats.²⁸ There are no differences across cohorts for participation in these activities. An additional activity, participation in orientation for new registrants, while also low, was more prevalent among the 2000 cohort (10% participated) and the 2001 cohort (13% participated), than the 2002 cohort, in which only 5 percent participated.

Does participation increase, decrease, or remain steady over time? An examination of responses at Time 2 and Time 3 show that the only activity that increased is newsletter reading, perhaps because of improvements in the database and the frequency of publication. Participation in reunions decreased and participation in retreats and orientations remained the same.

Summarizing the Long-Term Effects of the Trip

Results of the long-term follow-up study indicate that, in fact, the program's effects persist over time. The most significant changes observed shortly after the trip are still found several years later. In several cases, the effects become even stronger.

Participants continue to recall the trip positively, even after several years, and the personal bonds created among participants remain strong over time. Perhaps the most pronounced effect of the trip is that it evokes greater feelings of connection to Israel and the Jewish people. Participants report that they have more confidence in explaining the situation in Israel.

From the perspective of Jewish continuity, the trip increases participants' interest in dating only Jews and raising Jewish children. It also evokes a greater interest in Jewish learning. However, despite positive attitudes toward Jewish peoplehood, the trip has little effect on ethical behavior, religious behavior, or participation in organized Jewish life.

²⁸ This lack of popularity may be due to the fact that the latter two activities have only begun recently. Alumni did not have an opportunity to participate earlier.

Study 2: Winter 2003-04 Cohort

To learn about the experiences and perspectives of the most recent cohort of *birthright israel* participants, surveys were administered via e-mail and the Internet to all participants and applicants. Survey questions were drawn from research conducted on prior trips, and new questions reflecting current concerns were added. Pre-trip surveys were completed in November and December of 2003 (2-4 weeks before the start of the trip), and post-trip surveys were completed in March and April of 2004 (3-4 months after the trip).²⁹

Who Applied and Who Went?

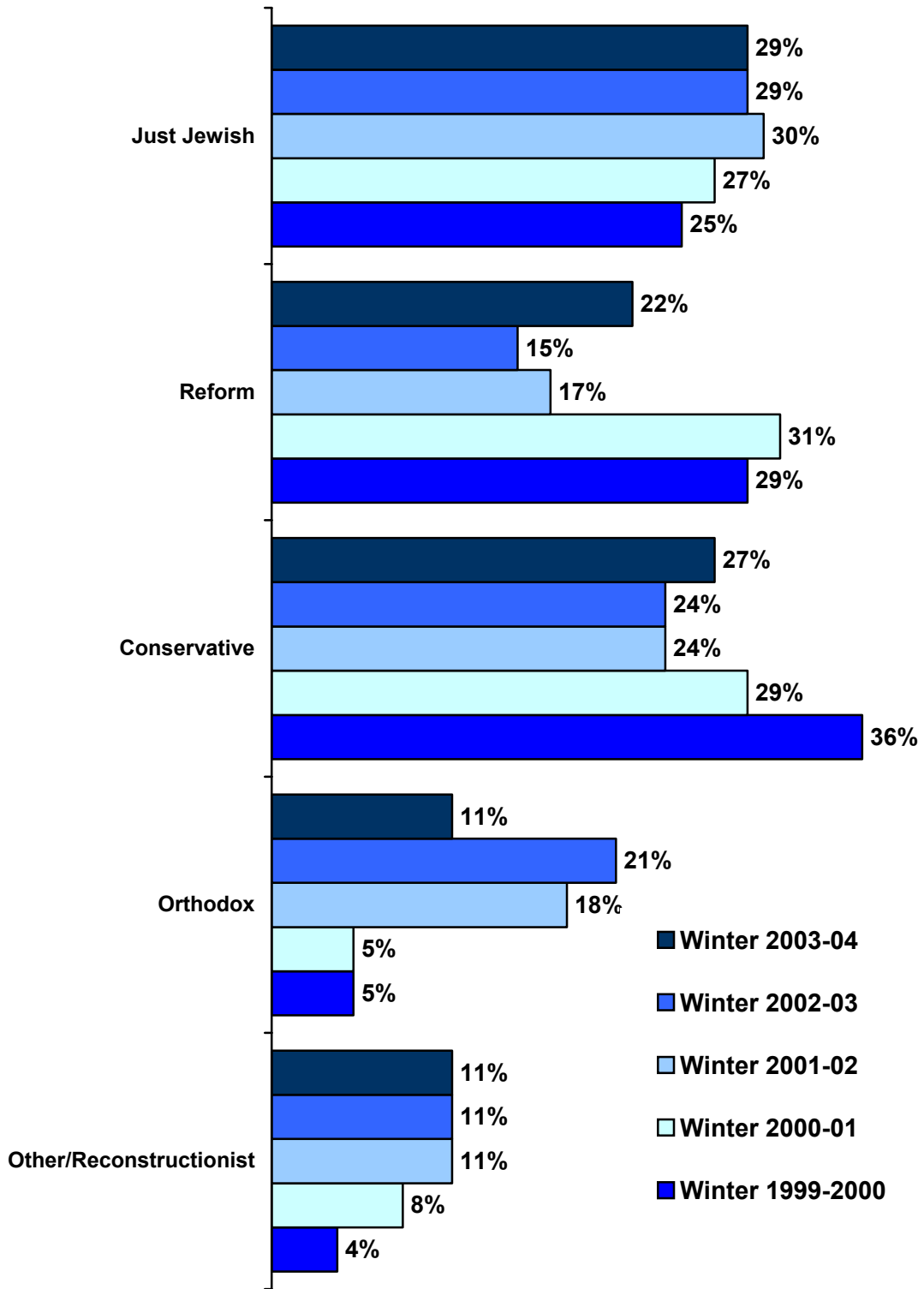
As noted earlier, since the launch of *birthright israel* in the winter of 1999-2000, data have been collected on participants' backgrounds. The mix of participants has changed across trips. External events, including the collapse of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, 9/11 and the war in Iraq have had a major impact on the willingness of North American Jews to travel to Israel. As a result, for each trip, *birthright israel* groups have differed slightly by gender, age, and denomination. In the beginning, there were more women than men. The reverse was the case after the fall of 2001, when security concerns were substantial – both as a result of 9/11 and the situation in Israel. On the most recent trip, however, there were near-equal ratios of women and men. The current group is also older than previous groups, with a quarter (25%) age 23 or older, and slightly more than half (52%) age 20 or younger.³⁰

Denominational Composition of Trips Figure 21 shows how the denominational makeup of trips has changed over the course of *birthright israel's* initial five years. Most noteworthy is the change in the makeup of recent trips relative to the launch trips. The recent trip showed a substantial increase in participants with a Reform background and decrease in participants with an Orthodox background. Although smaller numbers participated during 2001 and 2002, security is also a factor explaining the shift. As mentioned in the previous section, when terrorist acts inside Israel were frequent, those who were more religious appear to have been less affected and chose to go on a trip, while those who were less religious appear to have been more affected.

²⁹ See Appendix B for the methodological details.

³⁰ There were rumors that this might be the "last chance" to take a trip (the initial funding cycle was ending and it was not clear at the time whether the trips would be continued). Many older students may have decided that they might not have another opportunity.

Figure 21: Participants' Denominational Affiliations Compared Across Trips



Awareness of the Trip Table 1 shows that while applicants learned about the trip from a variety of sources, almost three out of every four (74%) learned about it through favorable word of mouth from friends and family. This was the case even when friends and family were not *birthright israel* alumni. Clearly, the word on the street is that the trip is a great experience. Information from campus organizations, rabbis, media exposure, the Internet, and all other sources combined were primary sources of information for only about a fourth (26%) of the applicants.

Viewing the data from the perspective of those who recommended the trip, 92 percent of participants and 80 percent of non-participants indicated on post-trip surveys that they told their friends to go.

Table 1: How Participants Learned About the Trip

Primary Source of Information	2004	2003
Friend/family member who went on a previous trip	47%	39%
Friend/family member who did not go on a previous trip (word of mouth)	27%	23%
Other (not specified)	8%	10%
Campus organization or poster/flyer/announcement from trip organizer	3%	7%
Synagogue or rabbi	3%	4%
Trip organizer website	2%	3%
Jewish Community Center	2%	2%
Email message	2%	3%
Article or story in newspaper, magazine or on television	1%	1%
Jewish Federation	1%	1%
birthright israel poster or flyer	1%	2%
Newspaper advertisement	1%	1%
Recruitment event or meeting in community or on campus	1%	2%
Online banner ads or search engine (Google, Yahoo) listings	1%	1%
Other organization website	1%	1%
Total	100%	100%

Reasons for Applying Based on data from the pre-trip survey, Table 2 summarizes the reasons why respondents (both those who went and those who did not go) applied. The three most prominent reasons were:

- They thought it would be fun (78% indicated this was “extremely important”)
- They always wanted to see Israel (78%)
- The trip was free (62%)

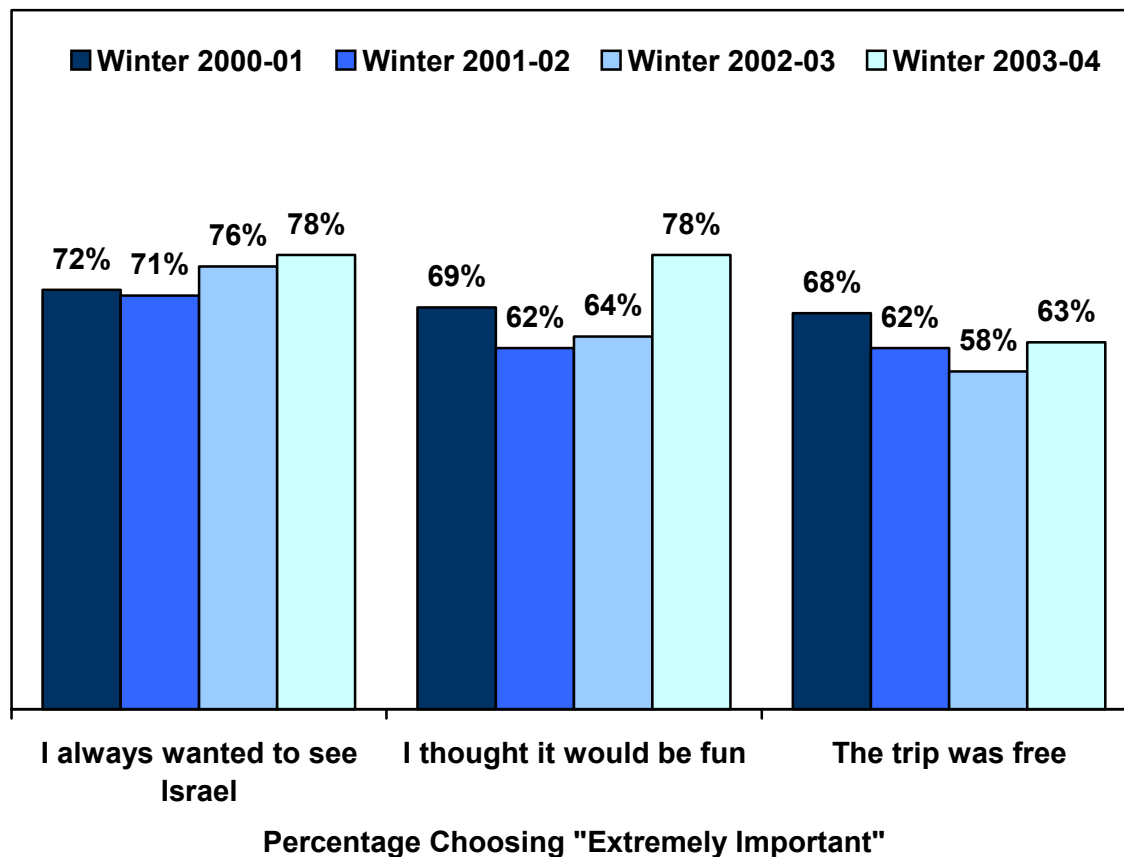
Table 2: Reasons for Applying

	Percentage Choosing “Extremely Important”	
	Participants	Non-Participants
I always wanted to see Israel	78%	79%
I thought it would be fun	78%	76%
The trip was free	63%	61%
Friends said it's a great experience	56%	57%
I wanted to meet other Jewish students	34%	36%
I wanted to learn more about Judaism	33%	40%
It was more attractive than other options	24%	22%
My friends were applying	22%	20%
My parents wanted me to go	11%	10%

Interestingly, among those who applied for the winter 2003-04 trip, there are virtually no differences between participants and non-participants. Both groups responded identically to the question, “I always wanted to see Israel.” Nearly 80 percent also said it was “extremely important,” when asked about the importance of the trip being “fun”. The fact that the trip was “free” was also important – it was selected as “extremely important” by more than 60 percent of the applicants. There was only one question on which participants and non-participants were substantially different, “I wanted to learn more about Judaism.” A higher percentage of those who did not go wanted to learn about Judaism than those who did end up going (40% compared with 33%).³¹

Comparing data from the current trip with previous trips reveal some interesting trends about motivation for participation. Although past data show that the desire to see Israel and to have fun are at the top of applicants’ list of reasons for joining the trip, these factors are even stronger for participants on the most recent trip in comparison with participants from previous trips (see Figure 22). In addition, the free cost of the trip continues to be a strong factor and is, in fact, stronger than it was the previous year.

³¹ In the following discussion, whenever participants and non-participants are compared in the text, a figure, or a chart, differences are always statistically significant at a probability of .05 or lower unless noted.

Figure 22: Three Main Reasons for Applying Compared Across Trips

To summarize, there appear to be three reasons why people applied for the trip. First, there were situational considerations – it was free and it seemed like it would be fun. Second, there were pre-existing internal desires – there was an inner drive to see Israel. Third, there were influences from the external environment – applicants received positive encouragement from friends and family.

Reasons for Not Going One question raised by these data is why non-participants applied but then did not actually choose to go. If they “look” the same as those who participated, and have similar motivations to see Israel, what kept them from participating? As Table 3 shows, the major difference between participants and non-participants was primarily a matter of logistics. The major reason for *not* going on the trip was inconvenient timing (48% of those who did not go). The second reason was parents’ concern about safety in Israel (42%). However, since there was no difference between those who went and those who did not go with respect to parents’ concern about safety issues, inconvenient timing seemed to have been the most prominent obstacle to going. There were also differences on several other timing-related questions – the need to earn money during vacation and the need to study.

One additional explanation for the fact that some chose not to go has to do with the way trips were scheduled by *birthright israel*. Because of the high number of applicants, there was a

shortage of available places. This led to delays in flight assignments, and some applicants were assigned to dates that conflicted with school and other obligations.

Some of those who applied for a winter 2003-04 trip, but did not choose to go, applied for a later trip. An examination of the data from the *birthright israel* database indicates that 35 percent of those who originally applied for the winter 2003-04 trip and did not go reapplied for the summer of 2004. Of those who reapplied, 50 percent actually went.

The finding that applicants for the winter 2003-04 trips chose not to go for practical reasons differs from the results of earlier pre-trip surveys. Among earlier cohorts, concerns about safety and security were much more important predictors of the decision by applicants to not go. Historical data about safety issues are summarized in Figure 23. Although the decline in concerns about safety (respondents' own and parents' views) is no doubt related to events "on the ground," it may also be a function of *birthright israel*'s exemplary safety record. The fact that no *birthright israel* participant has been injured in a terrorist incident is, no doubt, very reassuring to both participants and parents.

Table 3: Reasons for Not Going on the Trip

	Percentage Choosing "Extremely Important"	
	Participants	Non-Participants
The timing is not convenient	17%	48%
My parents don't think Israel is safe	42%	42%
I am concerned about terrorism	36%	30%
I don't think Israel is safe	27%	26%
I need to earn money during vacation	18%	24%
My friends don't think Israel is safe	19%	16%
I should spend time studying	7%	12%
A personal emergency has come up	7%	9%
I want to spend time with friends	10%	9%

To what extent did the opinions of parents and friends influence the decision to participate? Both participants and non-participants were asked to rate the effect of their parents as compared to their own decision-making, as well as the relative effect of their friends versus their parents. Figure 24 indicates that relative to the applicants themselves, parents had little influence on the decision to participate, but it also shows that parents still had more of an effect than friends. As noted earlier, parents' concerns about safety did not seem to carry much weight regarding the decision to go, as is seen in Table 2, where responses between those who went and those who did not go on the question: "My parents don't think Israel is safe" were the same.

Figure 23: Safety as a Reason for Not Going Compared Across Trips

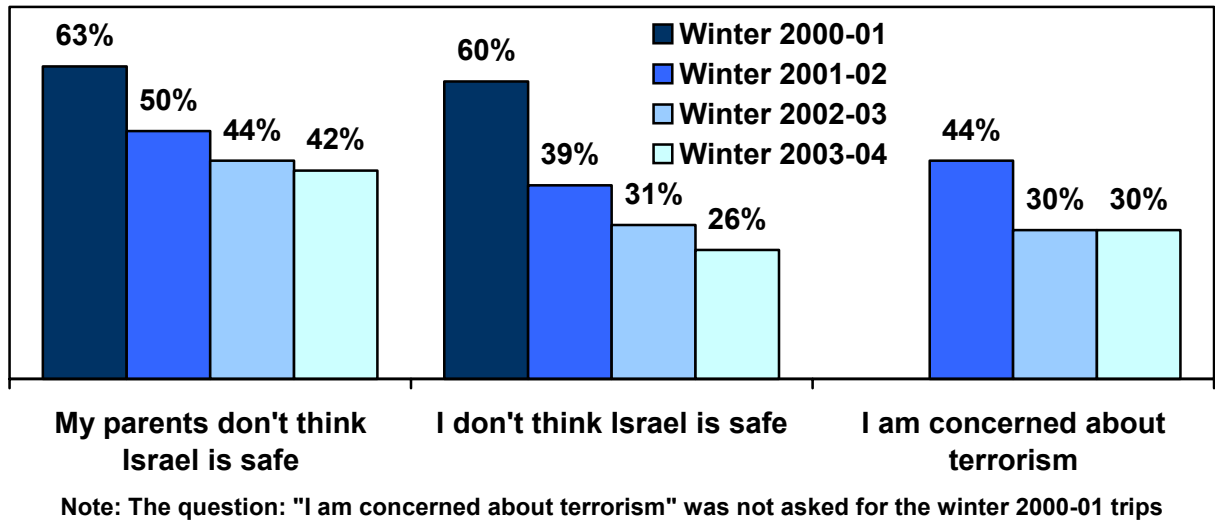
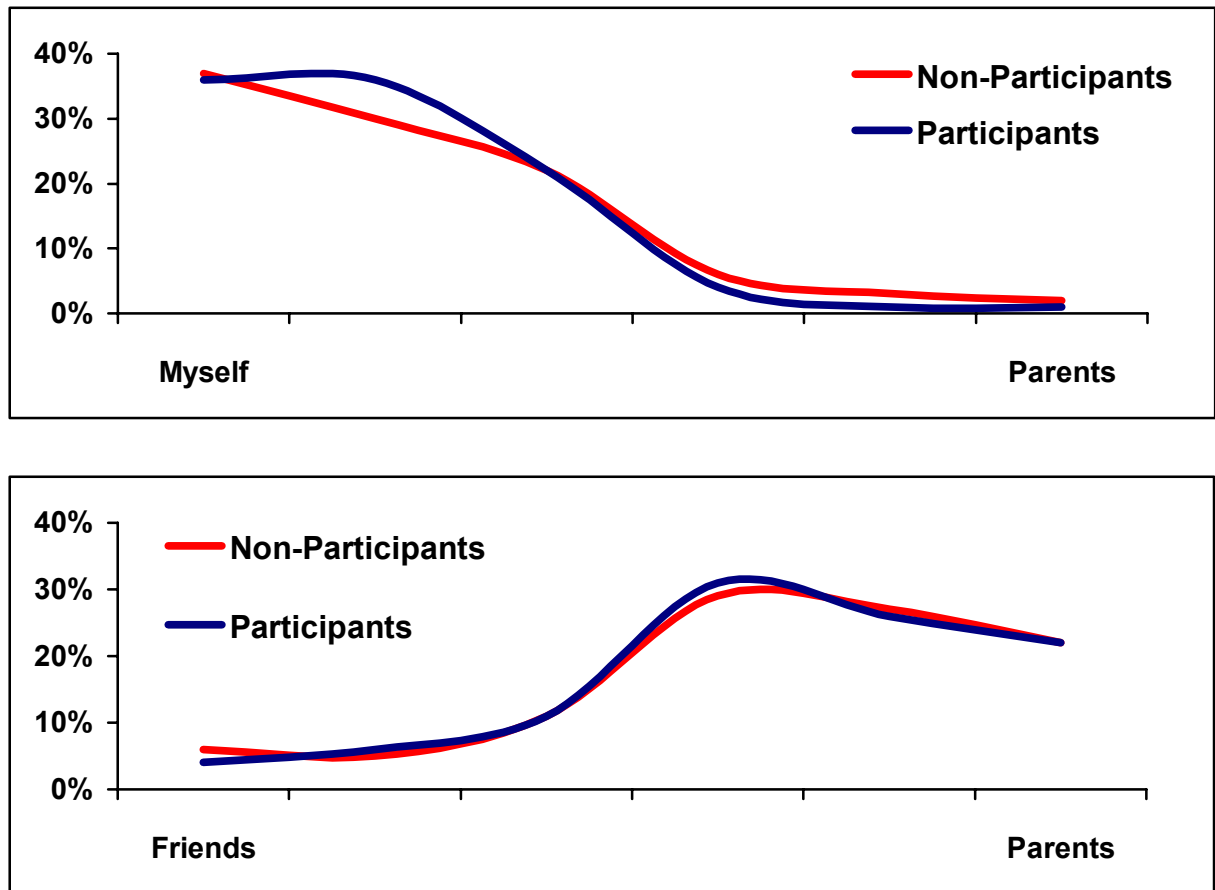


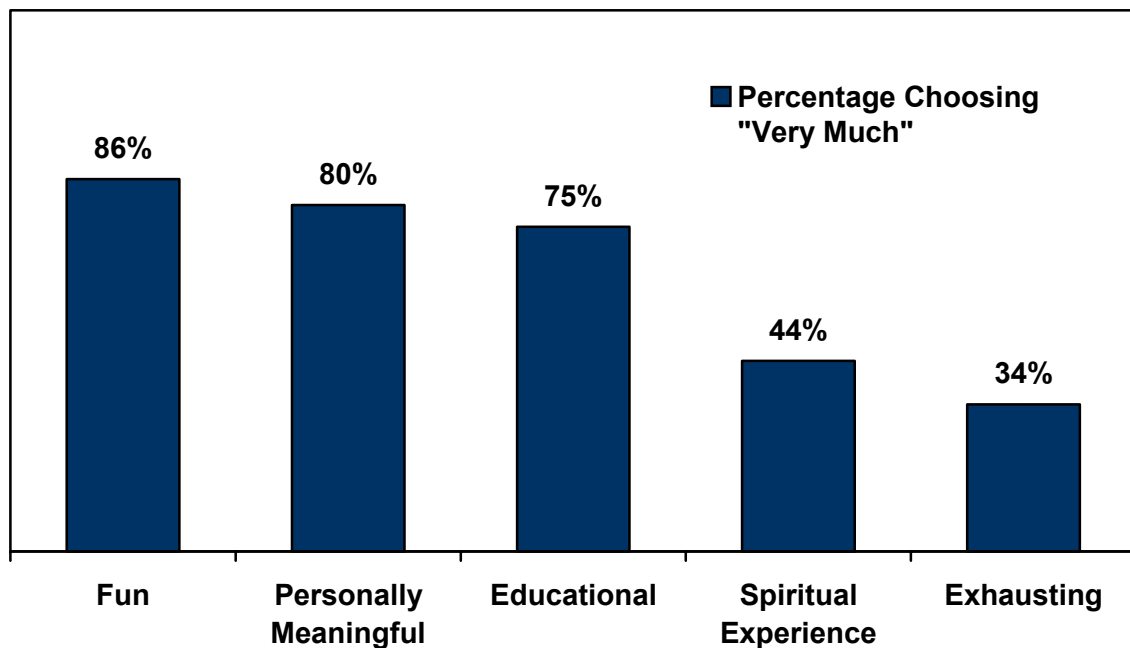
Figure 24: Relative Influence of Parents and Friends on the Decision to Participate



Trip Experiences

Consistent with evaluations of previous trips, participants evaluated the trip experience very highly. Figure 25 summarizes these evaluations. It shows that when trip participants were asked to describe their experiences on the trip, five out of six (86%) said it was fun. Four out of five (80%) felt it was personally meaningful, and three out of four (75%) felt it was educational. Less than half (44%) felt it was a spiritual experience, and despite the intense level of activity, only about one in three (34%) found it exhausting.

Figure 25: Overall Ratings of the Trip

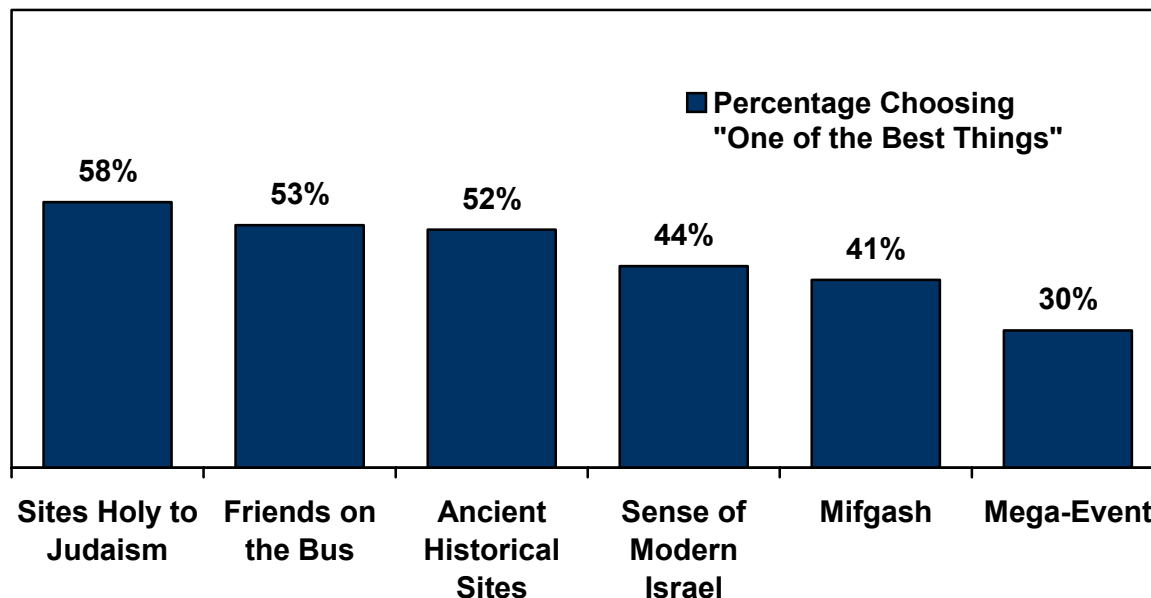


Which trip activities were viewed most favorably? Figure 26 indicates that the activities regarded as “one of the best things” on the trip are:

- Visiting sites holy to Judaism (58%)
- Talking with friends on the bus (53%)
- Visiting ancient historical sites (52%)

Other activities that participants considered “one of the best things” were getting a sense of modern Israel (44%), the *mifgash*, (41%) and the Mega-Event (30%).³² Comparing these latter views across cohorts of earlier participants, evaluations of the Mega-Event did not change, but participants on the most recent trips evaluated the *mifgash* and experiences with Israelis more favorably than earlier cohorts. Greater attention to the *mifgash*, including more time devoted to encounters with Israeli peers, appears to have yielded dividends in terms of more favorable participant evaluations.

³² The *mifgash* links participants with Israelis. The Mega-Event brings participants from all of the various trip organizers together at the Jerusalem Convention Center for an evening of speeches and performances.

Figure 26: Ratings of Specific Trip Activities

Central to *birthright israel*'s design is the experience of being with a peer group of fellow Jews. Virtually all participants come from communities or colleges where they are a minority and many come from communities where there are relatively few Jews their own age.³³ Thus, the experience of being part of a Jewish group for ten days is novel. Accordingly, almost three out of every five participants (58%) reported that bonding with peers on the bus was a very important experience. Almost one in three (32%) reported that they formed friendships with Israelis that participated in their group activities. Almost one-third (30%) reported that they engaged in religious discussions with people on their bus.³⁴ About one in eight (12%) reported that they started dating someone during the trip.³⁵

Although peer experiences are important, the essence of *birthright israel* is to educate young Jewish adults about their history. Previous evaluations make clear that the 18-26 year-old participants are highly motivated learners. The winter 2003-04 cohort's ratings of how much they felt they learned are summarized in Table 4. The ratings were highly positive. Their responses indicate that the trip had the greatest informational and educational impact with regard to Jewish history. More than nine out of ten participants (91%) agreed ("slightly" or "strongly") that the trip contributed a lot to their learning of Jewish history. Other types of learning also received high ratings.

³³ Data collected from Jews and non-Jews at eight schools that are considered to be "Jewish destinations" (Sales et al., 2004) found that Jews still only comprised an average of 18 percent of the students.

³⁴ These discussions may have been spurred by the diversity of participants on each bus, who came from a variety of different Jewish backgrounds.

³⁵ These items were measured on a 4 point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much." Percentages correspond to those responding "very much."

Table 4: Learning Experiences During the Trip

	Percentage Choosing “Slightly Agree” and “Strongly Agree”
I learned a lot about Jewish history	91%
I learned a lot about myself	81%
I got a sense of where I'm going Jewishly	80%
I learned a lot about Judaism	78%
I learned a lot about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict	77%
I got in touch with who I really am	73%

Complaints about the trip were relatively infrequent (see Table 5). The most common complaint was that staff was reluctant to portray negative aspects of Israel (42% “strongly” or “slightly” agreed). Just over a quarter (28%) felt that there was too much preaching during the trip (28%) and that more information about history and sites would have been helpful (26%). Clearly, there is substantial interest in the current political situation, with a desire for a wide range of views. If anything, participants want more of what the program has to offer.

With respect to safety, an overwhelming majority (94%) reported that they always felt safe during the trip. At the same time, trip participants did not feel constrained by the security situation (33%) or felt only somewhat constrained (50%). *Taglit* officials regard safety as one of their principal responsibilities, and in the post 9/11 context, it seems clear that participants accept the precautions that are taken by organizers.

Table 5: Opinions of Trip Content

	Percentage Choosing “Slightly Agree” and “Strongly Agree”
Staff reluctant to say negative things about Israel	42%
There was too much preaching	28%
More information about sites/history would be helpful	26%
Current politics were talked about too much	13%
It was too religious	11%

Impact of the Trip

To determine if the trip had an effect on participants' attitudes and behaviors, specific questions were asked of both participants and non-participants on both the pre- and post-trip surveys. If participants and non-participants were the same before the trip, and if differences in responses to these questions across the two time periods are found among participants, but not among non-participants, then it can be safely assumed that the differences result from participation in the program.³⁶ For example, if those who went on trips were more positive about Israel and being Jewish after the trip than they were beforehand, and there was no change among non-participants, then it can be assumed that the trip caused the change.³⁷ To guard against artifactual findings, respondents served as their own controls. That is, the pre-trip responses of each person were compared with their own post-trip responses on each question.

It was pointed out earlier that participants were diverse. Some had little connection to Israel or Judaism, some were involved with Israel but were not religious, and some were both involved with Israel and were religious. To be effective, the trip had to work on several levels simultaneously. It had to change the minds of those who were indifferent, and maintain the enthusiasm of those who were already enthusiastic.

Two types of data analyses were performed to see if the trip had these effects. The first effect that was investigated was to see if the trip *converted* individuals; that is, changed responses from negative to positive. For example, those who were not positive about Israel and Jews *before* the trip ended up having positive feelings *after* the trip. To assess this effect, the percentage of those who changed from negative to positive among those who did not go was subtracted from the percentage of those who changed from negative to positive among those who went. The difference in percentage is the *conversion effect*.

The second effect that was investigated was to see if the trip *preserved* positive feelings. Did those who felt positively before the trip maintain their positive feelings after the trip? The concern here is to determine whether positive feelings erode over time. This second effect is important to assess because of the statistical tendency of more extreme positions to revert, over time, to the group average, known as "regression to the mean."³⁸ There is also the possibility that those who felt positively before the trip could change and have more negative feelings after the trip. To calculate this effect, the percentage that remained positive for

³⁶ See Appendix B for statistical details.

³⁷ Since, as noted earlier, those who *did not* go were potentially *more* interested in learning about Judaism prior to the trip than those who did go, if anything, the post-trip data represent a conservative estimate of the actual effects of the trip. Those who went expected less from the trip than those who did not go. Any biases that may exist in the data will thus be in the direction of the trip having less of an effect. Furthermore, there was a lower response rate, as might be expected, from those who did not go. One therefore would expect that non-participants who did respond were more favorably inclined towards *birthright israel* than those who did not. This would also tend to reduce the extent of differences between participants and non-participants, thus working against finding positive results.

³⁸ For a discussion of regression artifacts see Campbell and Kenny, 1999.

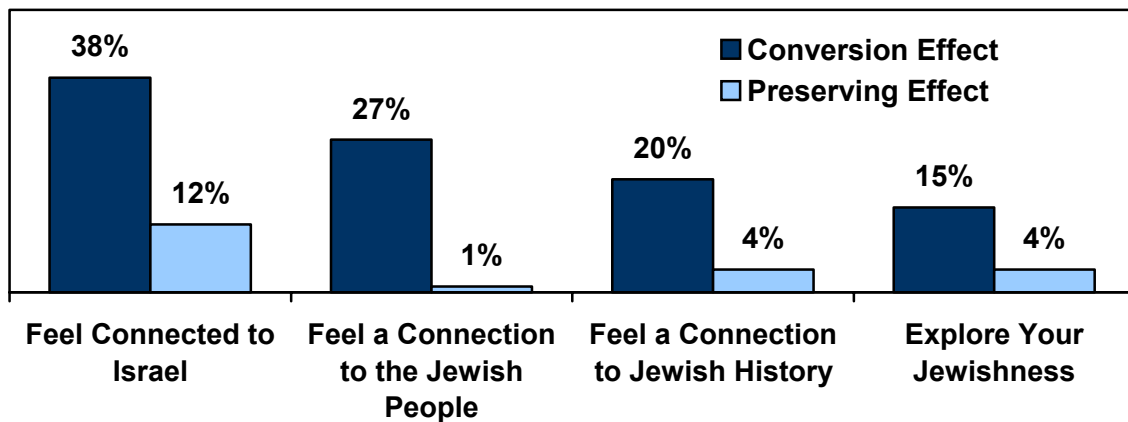
people who did not go was subtracted from the percentage that remained positive for those who went. The difference is called the *preserving effect* because it shows the degree to which people’s positive experiences were preserved.

To illustrate these effects, consider responses to the survey question: “To what extent do you feel a connection to Jewish history?” Responses were dichotomized into “very much” and the other three response categories (“not at all;” “a little;” “somewhat”). Before the trip, 45 percent of those who went on the trip felt very much connected to Jewish history and 44 percent of those who did not go felt very much connected to Jewish history. The two groups did not differ. After the trip, of those who went on the trip and said they felt very much connected to Jewish history on the pre-trip survey, 80 percent still felt very much connected, while 77 percent of those who did not go still felt that way. The difference between the two groups, 3 percent, is very modest, but indicates that there was no “regression to the mean.” Those who felt strongly before the trip felt strongly after the trip, whether or not they actually went on the trip. This is called a *preserving effect*.

Examining those who did not begin the trip with strong feelings and did not select “very much” on the pre-trip survey (55% of those who went and 56% of those who did not go), the story is different. For those who participated, 42 percent are now “converted” to feeling “very much” connected to Jewish history, as compared with only 22 percent of those who did not go. Subtracting 22 percent from 42 percent yields a 20 percent *conversion effect*. In the charts below, preserving and conversion effects are described for several key outcomes.

Figure 27 shows the effects on four questions related to feelings of connection to Israel and Judaism. The largest conversion effect, 38 percent, was found for the question concerning feelings of connection to Israel. There is a 27 percent conversion effect on feelings of connection to the Jewish people, a 20 percent conversion effect on feelings of connection to Jewish history, and a 15 percent conversion effect on feelings about exploring Jewishness.

Figure 27: Change Effects of the Trip on Feelings of Connection to Israel and Judaism



Also measured was the potential impact of *birthright israel* on life choices. As shown in Figure 28 participation generates positive conversion effects on several life choices that have to do with maintaining a Jewish life style, but has little effect on other life choices that one would not expect to change as a result of the trip. In particular, going on a trip increases participants' interest in being Jewish, marrying Jewishly and raising future children as Jews, but has little or no effect on such aspirations as being well off financially and being successful in business.

The selected way in which the experience of being a *birthright israel* participant affects relevant attitudes is reassuring (and suggests, among other things, that respondents took care in completing the survey). In terms of Jewish identity, a similar pattern emerges. Figure 29 displays effects for various elements of Jewish identity. The analyses indicate that the trip has conversion effects for the salience of caring for Israel, but it seems to have relatively small conversion effects with respect to other components of Jewish identity. Israel, not surprisingly, is once again the "winner." As with the life choices questions, these results "make sense" in the context of the program's goals and curriculum.

Figure 28: Change Effects of the Trip on Life Style

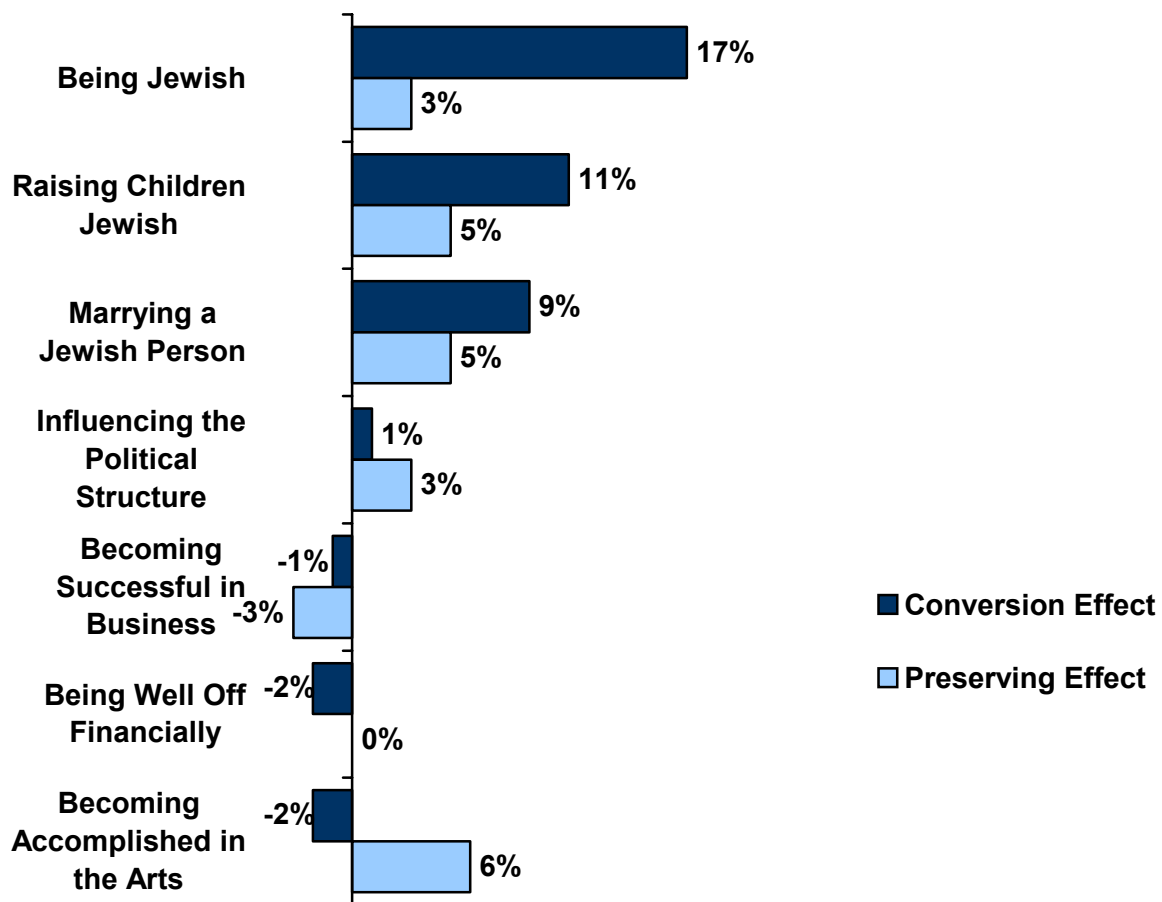
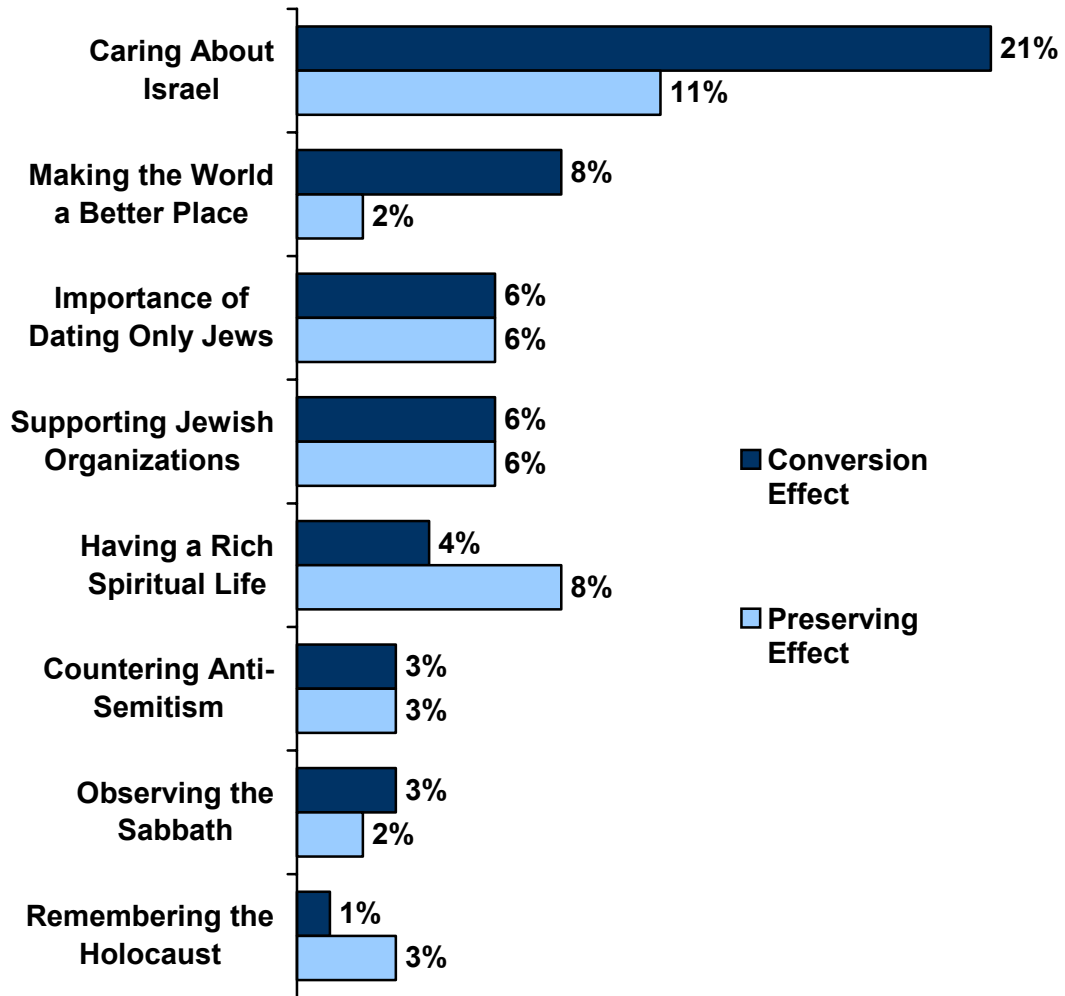


Figure 29: Change Effects of the Trip on Jewish Identity



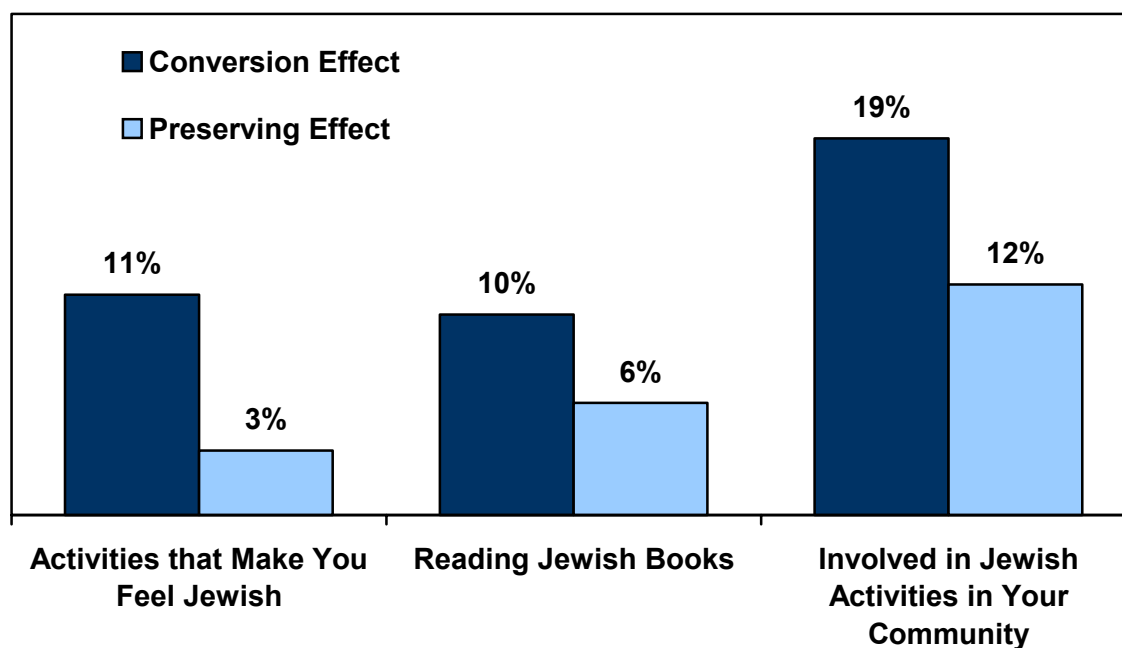
Jewish Activities After the Trips

Although the extent of attitude change among participants is an important indicator of the impact of the program, what participants actually do after the trip is perhaps even more important. In what ways did participants act differently after the trip as a result of their changed Jewish identities? Participants and non-participants were asked to respond to a number of questions regarding their Jewish activities. Unfortunately, at least from an evaluation perspective, because a third of the non-participants had decided by the time of the follow-up to register for the next round of trips, comparisons between the two groups became problematic since both had changed.³⁹

³⁹ The fact that a third of those originally classified as non-participants later became participants suggests that the remaining two-thirds, who chose not to go despite the opportunity, were less engaged. Thus any differences between this group and participants would tend to strengthen the argument that the trip has positive effects.

There were, nevertheless, some changes that appeared to be stronger for participants relative to non-participants. As displayed in Figure 30, the trip generated conversion effects for the frequency and time spent pursuing Jewish activities and subjects. There was a 19 percent conversion effect for involvement in Jewish activities in respondents' Jewish communities. The trip also worked to maintain involvement of those who went and were already engaged in these activities before the trip as seen in the 12 percent preserving effect for this measure. There were also conversion effects for spending time in activities that make you feel Jewish (11%) and reading Jewish books (10%). The preserving effects on these latter two variables were less pronounced.

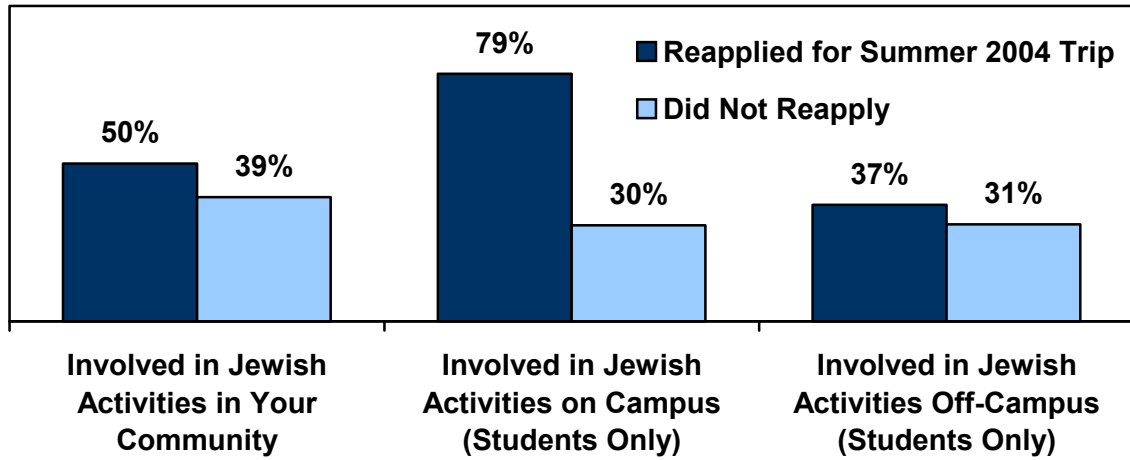
Figure 30: Change Effects for Jewish Activities After the Trip



As mentioned, changes were found on these activities *both* for those who went and for those who did not go. This is another example of how registering for the trip appears to have an effect on engagement in Jewish activities.⁴⁰ This is consistent with the finding presented earlier that those who did not go were more interested in learning about Judaism than those who did go (see Table 2). And it is consistent with the finding that logistics – the availability of a trip at a convenient time – was the key differentiator between participants and non-participants. It is difficult, however, to know the specific effects of interest in the program. As noted above, by the time of the post-trip survey (approximately three months after the trip), registration was already underway for the next round of trips. Figure 31 shows that non-participants who registered in the winter and reapplied for the summer are more likely to be involved in Jewish activities on campus and are more involved off-campus than those who did not reapply. Such activities may be directly connected to anticipating participation in a *birthright israel* trip, but may also reflect prospective applicants' high level of interest in issues related to Israel and the Jewish community.

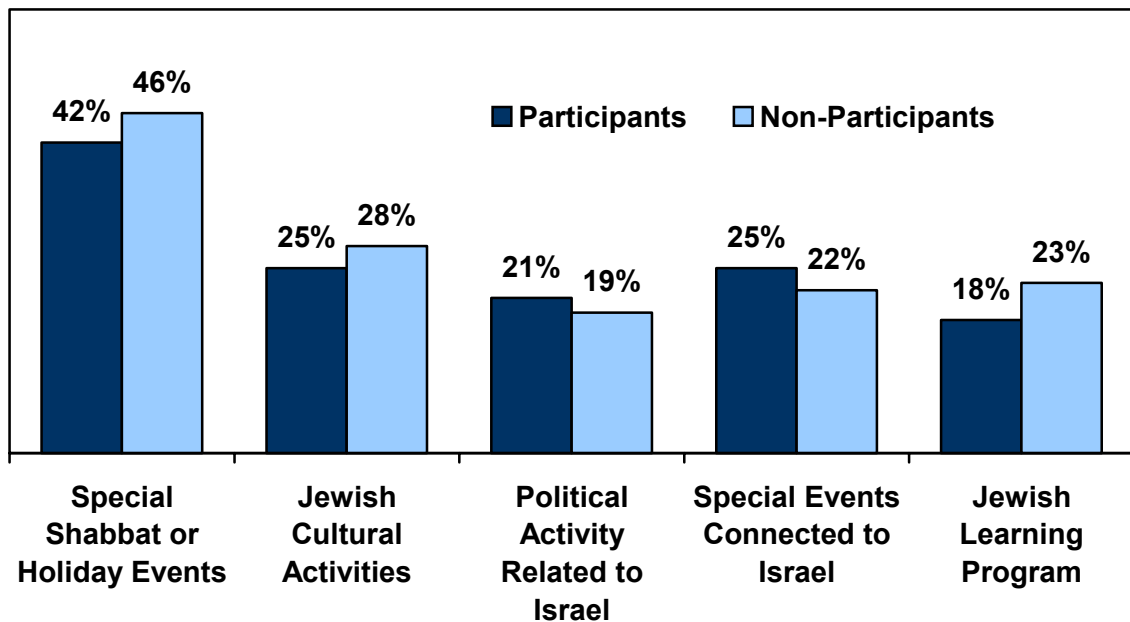
⁴⁰ See page 18 for a parallel situation in the long-term follow-up study.

Figure 31: Jewish Engagement of Non-Participants After the Trip



There are small differences between those who went and those who did not go in reports of participation in specific Jewish activities. Participants are more likely to participate in social events and in political activities connected to Israel. As shown in Figure 32, non-participants are actually slightly more engaged in the other activities. Such findings appear to be an artifact of the registration schedule and reflect the fact that the winter 2004 cohort included many who wanted to participate but were unable to participate for logistic reasons. Data obtained through a separate study of college students indicate that *birthright israel* alumni, compared to other students, are far more likely to participate in Jewish activities.⁴¹

Figure 32: Participation in Jewish Activities After the Trip



⁴¹ See Sales et al., 2004.

Jewish Study

In recent years, there has been a great deal of attention paid to the involvement of Jewish college students in the academic study of Judaism and Jewish history.⁴² Findings of this survey suggest that, even within three months of the trip, there is an increase in the academic study of Jewish subjects. Both before and after the trip participants were asked if they took any college level courses specifically focusing on Jewish subjects such as Jewish history, the Holocaust, or Hebrew. Twelve percent of trip participants who had not taken any Jewish subject courses beforehand reported that since their return they have taken such courses. Only 6 percent of those who did not go reported this change, indicating that the trip has had a 6 percent conversion effect. The trip has also maintained interest in Jewish studies. One-third (33%) of participants who took Jewish subject courses before the trip continued to take Jewish study courses after their return compared to 23 percent of those who did not participate (a 10% preserving effect). Even these small positive effects are a bit surprising, since student participants returned at the beginning of their semester and were surveyed during that same semester.

Other Jewish Activities

Although participation in *birthright israel* leads to significantly more positive attitudes and increases the salience of a person's Jewish identity, the trips seem to have had little effect on traditional Jewish practice. There were no significant changes in attendance at services or in the practice of *kashrut*. There were also no changes in traditional Shabbat observance. However, the survey data did indicate that there were changes in behaviors connected with Shabbat. Specifically, twenty percent of participants who before the trip did nothing special on Shabbat reported that after their return they did start to do something special (e.g., have a Friday night meal). The corresponding figure for those who did not go is 14 percent (a 6% conversion effect).

By design, the trips are intentionally non-religious, although each does include opportunities for participants to *daven* (engage in prayer) and to experience Shabbat. One Shabbat weekend is spent in Jerusalem. Participants, many of whom have never experienced Shabbat, are exposed to it in a positive way, and some return home with a desire to continue the experience. However, despite the finding that there was a slight increase in Shabbat activities in the short-term, the long-term data did not indicate that religious change occurred. This is to be expected since there is no religious focus for almost all of the trips.⁴³

⁴² For a detailed discussion of Jewish studies programs on college campuses, see Sales, et al., 2004.

⁴³ See pages 25-26 in this report for a discussion of the long-term effects of the trip on religious behavior. It should be noted that a few Orthodox trip organizers did offer trips with a religious focus.

Post-Trip Activities

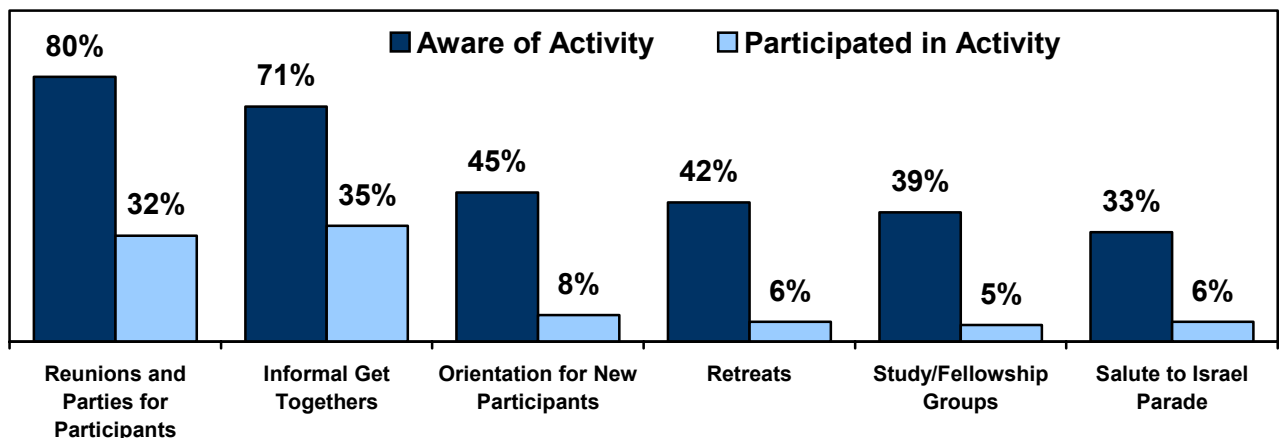
In order for participants to become involved in post-trip activities, they have to first learn about them. Several questions on the survey dealt with communication issues. As shown in Figure 33, virtually all respondents received alumni emails from *birthright israel*. Slightly more than half (53%) read these emails. Email in contrast with newsletters, seems to be the most effective way to communicate with *birthright israel* participants.⁴⁴

Figure 33: Communication with Participants



Figure 34 shows awareness of and participation in various post-trip activities for *birthright israel* participants. The vast majority was aware of reunions and informal get-togethers (80% and 71% respectively) but only around a third actually participated (32% and 35% respectively). Analysis of the degree of participation in post-trip activities shows that almost half participated in at least one activity, 21 percent participated in one activity, and 28 percent participated in two activities or more.

Figure 34: Awareness of and Participation in Post-Trip Activities



⁴⁴ Respondents were contacted via email, so it is not surprising to find such high percentages receiving email from *birthright israel*. The survey did not reach participants who had obsolete or incorrect email addresses. It is reasonable to conclude that this group is hard to reach for *birthright israel* alumni purposes as well.

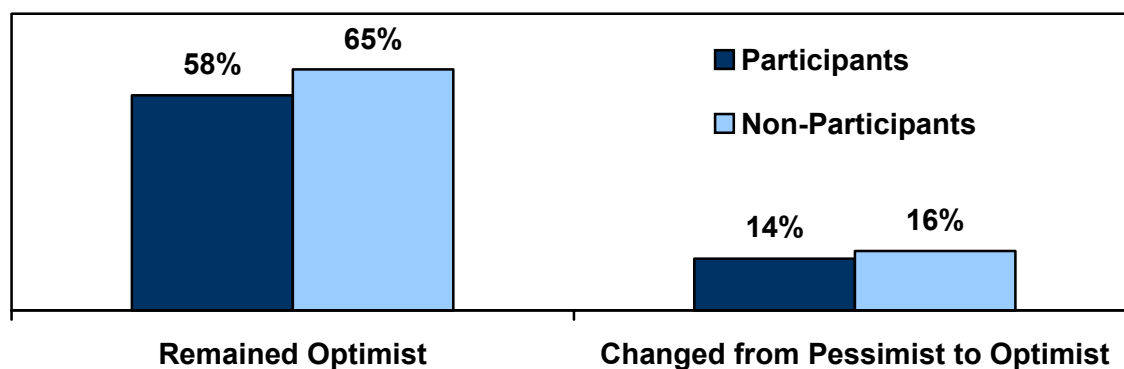
Views of the Israeli Security Situation and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

There is no question that Israel has become a focal political issue for many young Jewish adults, particularly those on college campuses. Regardless of the strength of one's Jewish identity or level of engagement, it is difficult to avoid discussion of Israel's security situation and its relationship to the ongoing violence in the Middle East.⁴⁵ A number of efforts have been undertaken to aid Jewish students in their ability to speak out on behalf of Israel. Given this context, the evaluation survey asked several questions about respondents' ability to discuss Israel.

One sharp difference that results from participation in *birthright israel* is that participants feel much more confident than non-participants in their knowledge of Israel. Seventy percent of the participants felt at least "somewhat confident" about their ability to give a good explanation of the current situation in Israel, as compared with 57 percent of the non-participants. Participants were somewhat more confident than non-participants (27% of participants felt very confident compared with 21% of those who did not go).

Both before and after the trip, the majority of respondents (regardless of trip participation) reported thinking that it was unlikely that Israel and Palestinians can develop a lasting peace (69%). Time, however, seems to have had a "pessimistic" effect on participants. As shown in Figure 35, more than half (58%) of those who went on the trip and initially thought that lasting peace was at least somewhat likely maintained this opinion. Almost two-thirds (65%) of those who were not on the trip remained optimistic about the peace process. Thus, the trip appears to have had a negative effect (-7%) on maintaining positive views towards peace. Although it is possible that events between the time of the pre- and post-surveys affected these results, neither time nor the trip seem to have changed pessimists to optimists. Only 14 percent of the participants who initially thought that peace was unlikely changed their minds. Among those who did not go on the trip, 16 percent are pessimists who became optimists. The trip itself had a marginal negative effect (-2%) on this change.

Figure 35: Attitudes Towards the Peace Process



⁴⁵ See, for example, Bard, 2004.

Returning to Israel

Virtually all of the trip participants (93%) reported that there is at least some likelihood that they will return to Israel in the next two years. Figure 36 shows that two out of every five (39%) reported that it is extremely likely that they will visit Israel again in the next couple of years, and one-third (33%) said it is somewhat likely. A fifth (21%) reported that it was only a little likely. The main obstacle to returning to Israel is financial. About half (51%) reported that their personal financial situation makes it very difficult for them to return to Israel.⁴⁶ The financial barriers are clear from responses to a survey question that asked how much they would be willing to pay to go on another trip. Table 6 indicates that over one-fourth (28%) said that they really want to go, but cannot afford it all, while an additional 41 percent said they would be able to pay about \$400.

Figure 36: Likelihood of Returning to Israel

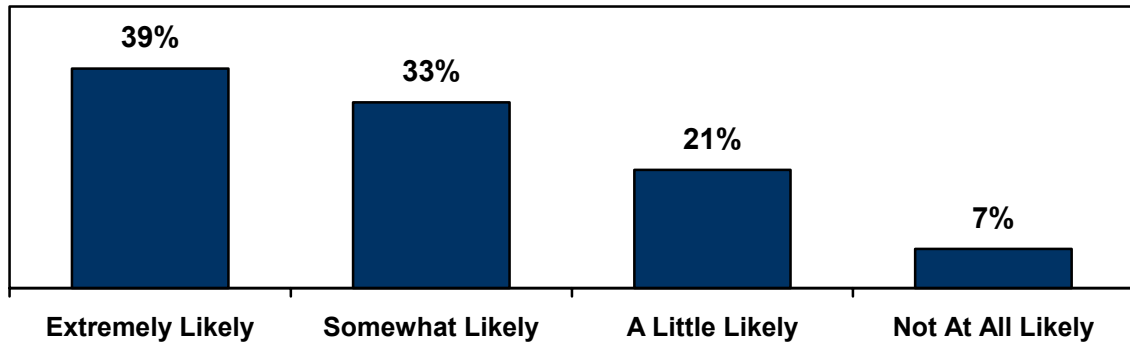


Table 6: Amount Participants are Able to Pay to Go on Another Trip

	Percentage
Nothing - I don't want to go	5%
Nothing - I really do want to go but can't afford it	28%
About 400 dollars	41%
500 to 1,000 dollars	22%
More than 1,000 dollars	5%

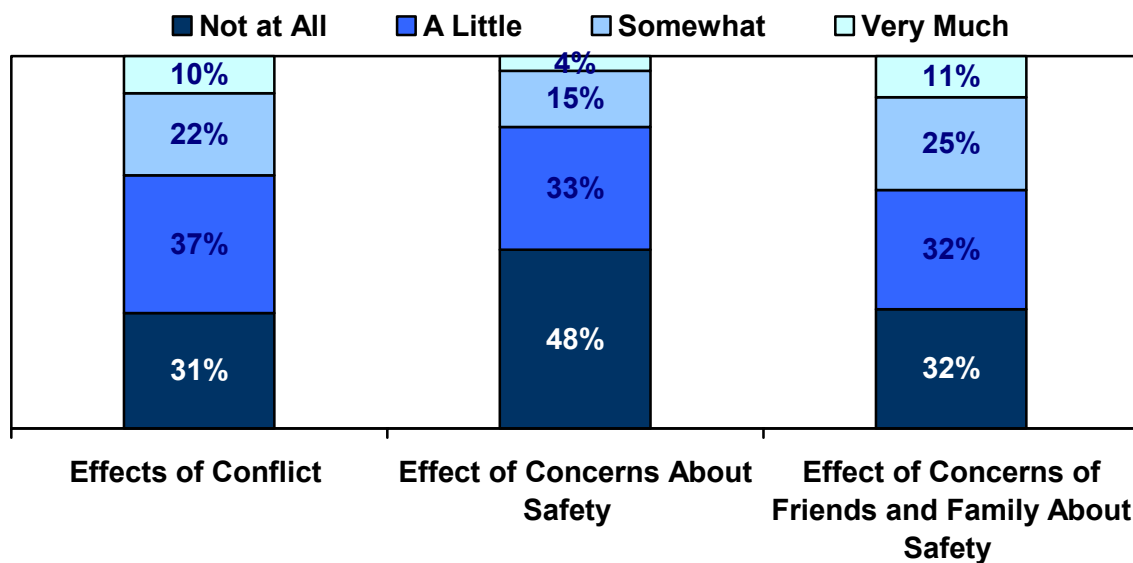
Although the prominence of the perceived threat posed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict appears to be lower than on previous trips, it is still a major consideration for planning to

⁴⁶ Compare these percentages representing intentions with the actual rate of return of past cohorts shown in Figures 2 and 3 of this report. For past cohorts, among the more observant, between 25 percent and 33 percent returned to Israel, while among the less observant, the range is from 15 percent to 22 percent. In addition, 60 percent of past cohorts indicated that finances were a barrier to returning.

visit Israel. As shown in Figure 37, fewer than a third (31%) reported that the conflict would have no effect on the likelihood of their returning to Israel in the future. Three out of five (59%) indicated that the conflict would have at least some effect on their decision, and 10 percent reported that a decision to return to Israel would be “very much” affected by the current conflict. Figure 37 also shows a similar pattern in the responses to the effect of safety issues on returning to Israel. Although just over half (52%) reported that their concerns over safety would play at least some role in their decision to return, only a very small percentage of this group, 4%, felt that concerns over safety would affect their decision “very much.”

Slightly more salient to participants are others’ concerns about safety. Figure 37 shows that two-thirds (68%) reported that concerns about safety expressed by their family and friends would make it at least a little difficult to return to Israel. Once again, however, only a relatively small percentage (11%) felt that this would affect their decision very much.

Figure 37: Effects of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on the Decision to Return to Israel



Affiliation with Jewish Organizations

One of the changes in *birthright israel* as it has matured since its launch in 1999 is that there is an increased emphasis on both post-trip activities and participants’ links to their community. As part of the winter 2003-04 surveys, a number of questions were asked to assess the degree to which participants were involved in synagogue life, their local Federations, and other Jewish organizations. Given that many of the participants (in particular, those who are college students) are supported by parents, the questions asked about participants’ involvement, as well as the involvement of their parents.

One finding (see Figure 38) is that nearly two-thirds of participants’ parents are dues paying synagogue members (62%). Figure 44 shows that virtually all of those who reported that their parents were members also reported that they were members (59% of those who went and 54% of those who did not go). The finding is especially noteworthy given that the

affiliation rate of participants and their parents is substantially higher than for the general Jewish population. According to NJPS 2000-01 data, the household rate of synagogue membership is between 32 percent and 43 percent. Although nearly one-third of participants come from families with no denominational affiliation, the data suggest that the program is primarily reaching a population of young people from families who have connections to the Jewish community. They are presumably motivated to find connections to their Jewish identity.

Figure 38: Parents' Membership in Jewish Organizations

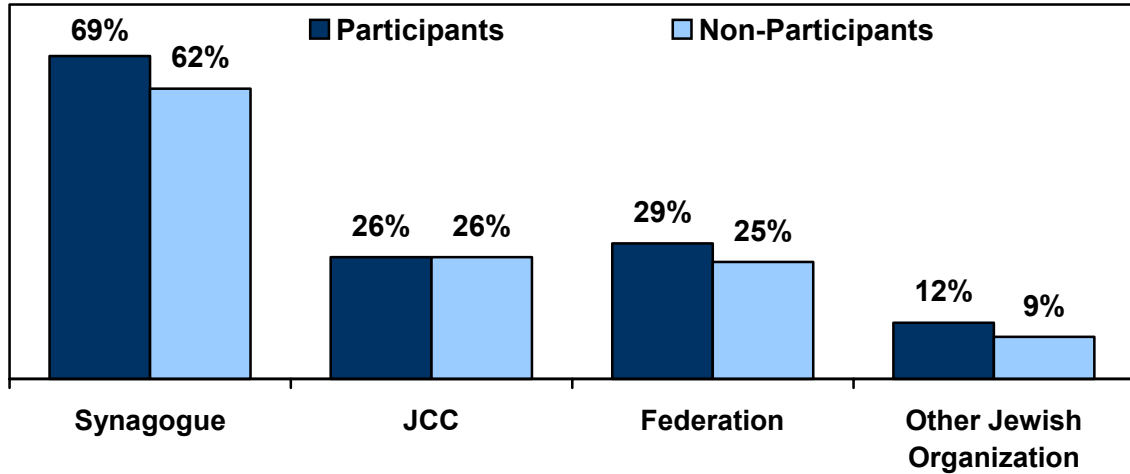
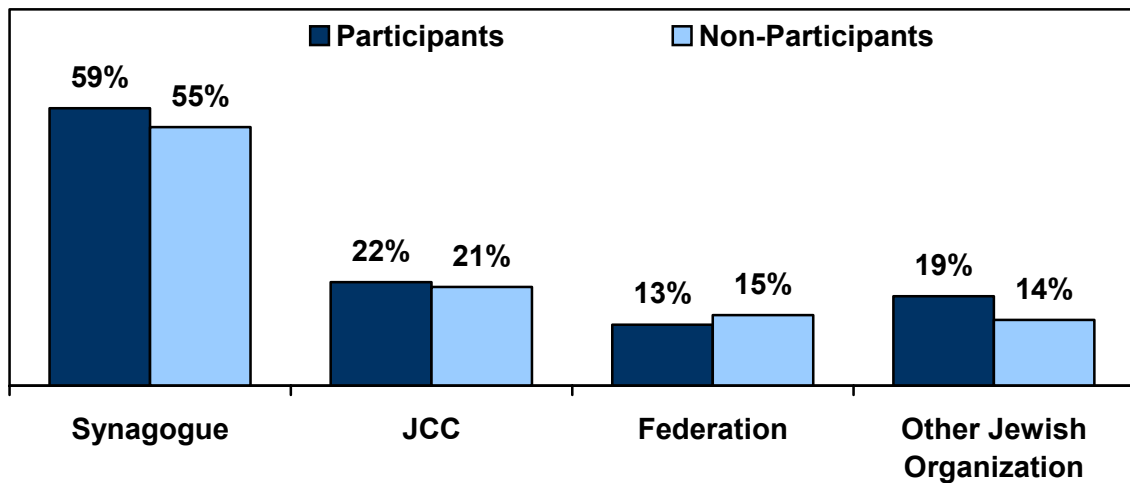


Figure 39: Participants' Membership in Jewish Organizations



The additional measures of engagement with the Jewish community are actually more similar to NJPS 2000-01 findings for the population as a whole (Kotler-Berkowitz et al., 2003). Thus, the rate of giving to a Federation (nearly 30% for parents of participants and 25% for non-participants) reflects national averages. These findings provide further support for the

view that *birthright israel* engages a diverse group of North American Jewry at various levels of existing engagement with the community. Perhaps the key question is how the trip functions differently for those who are affiliated/engaged and for those who have little or no connection.

Summarizing the Impact of the Winter 2003-04 Trip

For previous trips, concern about security was the major determinant of whether applicants actually decided to go, but for this trip, logistics – whether applicants could fit the trip into their schedules – was the major determinant. One out of every three applicants who did not go in the winter applied for the summer.

Consistent with the extremely positive evaluations of previous trips, winter 2003-04 participants saw the trips as highly educational, meaningful, and fun. Participants indicated their most significant learning experience was expanding their knowledge of Jewish history and the most appreciated activities were visiting sites holy to Judaism and visiting ancient historical sites. Complaints about the trip were relatively minor and focused on participants wanting more information (including “negative” information) and more opportunities to learn about Israel.

Two types of change were examined, “conversion” effects and “preserving” effects. Conversion effects refer to the degree to which participants were changed by the trip, exhibiting positive attitudes and behaviors afterward that were not present beforehand. Preserving effects refer to the degree to which positive attitudes and behaviors existing prior to the trip were still present afterward.

The strongest conversion effect was on feelings of ethnic connection – to Israel, to the Jewish people, and to Jewish history. There were also strong positive changes regarding attitudes about caring for Israel. In addition, there were several changes in lifestyle choices – participants felt more positive about being Jewish and were slightly more inclined to express positive feelings about the importance of dating only Jews, marrying a Jewish person and raising future children as Jews. Regarding preserving effects, there was no erosion of feeling among those who had positive attitudes before the trip.

Participants, in comparison with non-participants, were much more confident in their ability to explain the situation in Israel. Participants indicated more of an inclination to participate in activities that made them feel Jewish, to engage in Jewish activities in their local community, and to read Jewish books. The most popular activities among alumni were those that reinforced peer bonding (reunions and get-togethers). The trip had minor effects on the importance of observing the Sabbath and supporting Jewish organizations.

Perhaps the most significant finding was that more than nine out of ten participants reported that there is at least some likelihood that they would return to Israel in the next two years.

Conclusions

It is now nearly five years since the launch of *birthright israel* – one of the largest attempts ever made to educate Diaspora Jews about their heritage. Although Jewish life has changed across eras, *birthright israel* was developed at a unique point in Jewish history. It is 56 years since the establishment of the State of Israel and, while peace remains an un-fulfilled promise, a Jewish democratic state flourishes in the historic homeland of the Jewish people. At the same time, Diaspora Jews – particularly those in North America – have prospered and become fully integrated members of their communities. Young Jews raised in an affluent era, with little direct experience with antisemitism and the issues that led to the Holocaust and Israel’s founding, are not as invested in Israel and the Jewish people as were their counterparts in earlier generations. The research findings show that *birthright israel* has sparked their imagination and spirit. The evaluation continues to document the ways in which *birthright israel* touches the minds and souls of participants and brings about long-lasting changes.

The studies described in this report underscore the continued success of the program in providing meaningful experiences in Israel for young Jews assumed to be disconnected and even cynical. As it turned out, this group constituted only a portion of those who participated, since many who chose to go were already engaged. Although it is now taken for granted that the participants will have very positive experiences, the data make clear that the program has overcome considerable challenges. Perhaps the most important ongoing challenge is the diversity of participants. The characteristics of participants continue to change, affected by the security situation in Israel and around the world, as well as a host of other factors. Current participants seem to be extremely diverse – ranging from those who have substantial knowledge and existing involvement in Jewish institutions, to those with very little education and involvement. It is a testament to the underlying program design that the organizers of *birthright israel* have been able to bridge the needs of these diverse groups. To interpret the evaluation findings, this diversity needs to be noted.

Because those participating come from such widely disparate backgrounds, the program needs to have two distinct goals. It needs to “convert” those who are not connected to the community, and to “preserve” the attitudes of those who are. Hence the approach this study has taken to analyzing change in participants as a result of the trip – the data have been analyzed with respect to two types of changes, “conversion” effects and “preserving” effects.

How the program evolves to serve different constituencies will be an important focus for future work. Although some differentiation already results because each trip provider has a somewhat different orientation, *Taglit* standards require that programs have a core of common elements. One question that will be important to assess in the future is the degree to which heterogeneous groups (e.g., groups that include a mix of participants across denominations) have different experiences than those that are more homogeneous.

A careful examination of the impact of the trip, based on an evaluation of its long-term effects as well as the effects on the most recent cohort, supports the positive findings of earlier reports. As a relatively brief educational intervention, *birthright israel* is an anomaly –

unlike other educational interventions of comparable duration, its impact is sustained over time.

Not surprisingly, the strongest findings relate to views of Israel. What seems apparent is that *birthright israel*, although it only provides brief exposure to Israel, transforms participants' attitudes by providing them with a structured educational experience. The program appears to create a link for them with Israel that does not deteriorate over time. Although it may be too soon to know whether *ahavat Yisrael* becomes an essential element of participants' core Jewish identity, the short-term importance of this impact should be clear. Israel is facing a very difficult set of issues and the ability of *birthright israel* alumni to explain Israel to others might, even if there were no other effects, be worth the investment in the program. It is profoundly convincing when a participant can tell a friend "I was there."

One element of participants' response to the program should be noted. In what can be interpreted as a call for even more serious education, participants wanted to know more about the Palestinian-Israel conflict. Some felt that staff were reluctant to say negative things about Israel. Although there are practical considerations that limit what can be accomplished in ten days, providing more information of this nature to participants can only serve to meet the goals of the program by helping participants to more readily engage in discussions when questions about Israel's policies and standing are raised. When participants return from a trip and speak with friends about their experiences, their friends are going to be interested in hearing about what Israel was like. They are not likely to ask about issues of Jewish identity. It is the political realities that young adults are continuously exposed to in the media that capture their interest.

Ultimately, the success of the program can only be truly determined after a number of years, when participants are parents and are raising the next generation of Jews. However, the parallel findings between the long and short-term studies suggest that the program is highly likely to have a lasting impact. The effects, however, are far stronger for attitudes toward Judaism and Israel in general, than for specific attitudes toward religion and engagement in religious practices. The program does not transform the religious beliefs and behavior of participants. Then again, such a transformation is not a program goal. A reasonable aspiration is that participants will return encouraged to learn more. Ample evidence exists that such reaching out for learning does take place when participants return to school.

The developers of *birthright israel* believed that there was a large group of young Jews who had lost their connection to the Jewish community and would – in the absence of a program such as *birthright israel* – be lost to the Jewish people. As a result of changing Jewish demographics in the Diaspora, the world political situation, and the security situation in Israel in particular, *birthright israel* participants have included a far broader group of young adult Jews than was initially envisioned. Although the diversity of the participants creates a challenge for *birthright israel*, it also presents an opportunity. The challenge is to find ways to provide a meaningful educational experience for all of those who wish to go, regardless of where they might be on their individual Jewish journey. The opportunity for *birthright israel* is to foster an atmosphere of pluralism that reinforces the value of being part of the Jewish people and inspires participants to think and act more Jewishly upon returning home.

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Appendix A

Methodological Notes on Study 1: Long-Term Follow-Up

Analysis of the long-term follow-up survey is based on responses to three surveys completed at three different time periods, so that change could be tracked over time. Beginning in 2001, all applicants to the winter trips were asked to complete surveys before their trip, and participants were then asked to complete surveys shortly after their trips. In the winter of 1999-2000, no pre-trip surveys were administered to those who went on the launch trip, and post-trip surveys were conducted after a year's time.

Non-participants were also asked to complete a second survey in the same timeframe as participants. Responses of both groups were compared across the two time periods so that changes in attitudes and behaviors that might be attributable to the trip could be tracked. All survey responses were carefully archived over the years so that a comprehensive long-term study could be conducted at the appropriate time.

To determine whether *birthright israel* has had lasting effects, data needed to be obtained from participants and non-participants a third time several years after the trip to learn about their current feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. The logic was to utilize individual respondents as their own "controls" and observe what the *same* people said on the pre-trip survey (Time 1), the post-trip survey (Time 2), and on the third, follow-up survey (Time 3).

The following terminology was adopted to describe the different data collection periods:

- **Time 1** refers to data collected between registration and when the trips actually took place. Data collected at this time period includes both background information from the registration database and responses to the pre-trip survey. Because participants and non-participants on the launch trip in 2000 were not surveyed before the trip, comparisons using Time 1 data can be made only for those who applied in 2001 and 2002. Prior to the trip, there were *no* statistically significant differences between participants and non-participants on *any* of the variables studied. Thus, those who went on the trip and those who did not go were equivalent. Any subsequent differences between them must be attributed to something that happened later, presumably the trip.
- **Time 2** refers to responses to post-trip surveys. Those who applied for the 2000 winter trip were surveyed one year after the trip.⁴⁷ Those who applied for the winter trips of 2001 and 2002 were surveyed several months after the trip took place.
- **Time 3** refers to responses to the follow-up survey administered between November 2003 and April 2004. Depending upon the year of the trip, this represents a period of two, three or four years after the trips took place. Length of time since the trip could not be taken into consideration because trips were not combined in the analysis (see below).

⁴⁷ See Footnote 5. Those who went on the winter 2000 trip were also surveyed several months after the trip, but the data could not be used for the follow-up study.

Because the goal was to compare responses across three time periods, participants and non-participants who had previously completed both pre-trip and post-trip surveys needed to be identified. The anticipated difficulties in tracking down respondents made it necessary to select a sample, rather than try and survey the entire eligible population. A random sample of this group was selected and was asked to complete a third survey. Three cohorts were sampled:

- Participants and non-participants from the original launch in the winter of 1999-2000 who completed surveys one year later in the spring of 2001 (subsequently referred to as the 2000 cohort)
- Participants and non-participants from the winter 2000-01 trips who completed pre-trip and post-trip questionnaires (2001 cohort)
- Participants and non-participants from the winter 2001-02 trips who completed pre-trip and post-trip questionnaires (2002 cohort)

The sample selected for the long-term evaluation is described in table A1:

Table A1: Original Sample

Cohort	Participant		Non-Participant		Cohort Total	%
	N	%	N	%	N	
2000	556	84.3%	103	15.6%	659*	100%
2001	275	54.9%	226	45.1%	501	100%
2002	281	51.2%	268	48.8%	549	100%
Total	1,112	65.1%	597	34.9%	1,709	100%

*2 cases with missing data from the 2000 cohort not included

After administration of the survey had begun, it became apparent that a number of respondents who did not initially go on the trip reported on their follow-up survey that they did in fact go on a later trip. This meant they could no longer be considered as non-participants for purposes of the evaluation. It was decided that if survey data were available for an individual in this category from both pre- and post-trip surveys of the trip they actually participated in, the individual would be dropped from the non-participant sample and added to the sample of the trip they subsequently participated in. If no post-trip data were available, the record would remain in the original sample and comparison would only be available for Time1 and Time 3. This method was employed for all samples, as long as the trip they participated in took place no later than winter 2001-2002. Participants in later trips were dropped from the evaluation. In all, 50 cases were dropped from analysis.

A search for each person selected for the sample was conducted in the database, and records were compared with survey responses to determine actual participation in the trip. Because many non-respondents attended later trips the number of “true” non-participants, especially

for the 2000 cohort decreased considerably. These small numbers essentially reduce the statistical power of the analysis. A total of 17 percent of the original non-participant sample were found to have subsequently gone on a later trip.

Actual participation in the trip by the sample selected for the long-term evaluation is summarized in Table A2:

Table A2: Original Sample Showing Actual Participation

Cohort	Originally Classified as Participant		Originally Classified as Non-Participant				Cohort Total	%
			Went on a Subsequent Trip		Did Not Go on a Subsequent Trip			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2000	556	84.3%	19	2.9%	84	12.7%	659*	100%
2001	275	54.9%	33	6.6%	193	38.5%	501	100%
2002	281	51.2%	52	9.5%	216	39.3%	549	100%
Total	1,112	65.1%	104	6.1%	493	28.8%	1,709	100%

*2 cases with missing data from the 2000 cohort not included

Survey Administration and Phone Follow-Up

As with previous *birthright israel* surveys, the follow-up survey was a web-based survey sent to the last known email address in the birthright database. The sample was sent invitations to the survey on December 1, 2003. Four reminders were sent at approximately four-day intervals, excluding Saturdays or holidays. Half of the sample was offered a chance to win one of ten \$100 Amazon.com gift certificates upon completion of the survey. The rest were offered a \$10 Amazon.com gift certificate upon completion of the survey.

In the beginning of February 2004, after the survey had been open for almost 3 months, it was evident that many of the emails sent to respondents had bounced, indicating that the invitation to participate in the survey had never reached a significant portion of the sample. Thus, unlike the short term follow-up surveys, the administration of this long-term survey proved difficult. College students, who comprise the vast majority of those who apply to the program, invariably relocate and change e-mail addresses after graduation. As time passed, more and more of the contact information recorded at the time of registration became obsolete. Another factor affecting the ability to contact those sampled was the quality of the information recorded in the registration database. After the first administration of the launch trip survey it became clear that the database used for registration was inadequate for purposes of follow-up research and continued contact with applicants. Although the registration

database improved dramatically over the years with respect to collecting and archiving information about applicants, some information about applicants to the first trips, in particular information about non-participants, remained incomplete. The 2000 cohort sample was the most likely to have permanent bounce messages. Over a third of non-respondents in this sample (33%) had permanent bounce messages compared to 22 percent in the 2001 cohort sample and 17 percent in the 2002 cohort sample.

Phone follow-up for those who did not respond to the survey took place between February 9 and March 23, 2004. Using database information, those selected for the sample or their parents were called in an effort to obtain updated email and contact information. The survey remained open until April 17, 2004. Calls were made during the evening hours. Callers identified themselves as calling from Brandeis University and told respondents that they were calling for the *birthright israel* survey project. This intensive phone follow-up during the spring of 2004 substantially improved the ability to obtain new contact information and increased the number of responses to the survey.

Table A3 shows the response rate for each cohort following extensive attempts to locate people. Note that the response rate is higher for later cohorts. The major jump between 2001 and 2002 for non-participants reflects improvements in the database archives. The response rate for 2000 is low because of the longer time elapsed since their data was first collected and, as mentioned previously, because of the poor quality of the database records for this group.

Table A3: Response Rate by Cohort

		2000		2001		2002		Total	
Participants	Responded	212	37%	173	56%	219	64%	604	49%
	Didn't Respond	363	63%	135	44%	121	36%	619	51%
	Total Surveyed	575		308		340		1223	
Non-Participants	Responded	28	33%	51	26%	121	56%	200	40%
	Didn't Respond	56	67%	142	74%	97	44%	295	60%
	Total Surveyed	84		193		218		495	

After data from each cohort was analyzed, it was found that the 2002 cohort differed from the 2000 and 2001 cohorts. For the 2000 and the 2001 cohorts, there were no significant differences between participants and non-participants with respect to gender, Jewish denomination, or religious observance. For both cohorts, participants were slightly older than non-participants, averaging 3.5 months.

However, the 2002 cohort was somewhat different. Those who went on a trip in 2002 were more likely to be Orthodox than those who did not go (21% compared with 8%, respectively) and accordingly, were more observant (34% were highly observant compared with 22% of

those who did not go). Participants were also more likely to be male (55% compared with 45%) and slightly older (an average difference of 2 months). These differences complicate the analysis strategy (see below).

Ideally, analyses would have treated respondents from all cohorts as one homogeneous group comparing participants to non-participants and looking at the effects of the trip as a function of time. Unfortunately, cohorts proved to be heterogeneous both in terms of respondents' characteristics and in terms of their inclination to take a particular stand regarding Israel and the Jewish people. In the text of this report, it was noted how the mix of participants changed from trip to trip depending upon their perceptions of safety at the time of registration. These were directly related to terrorism incidents in Israel and media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When Israel was viewed as less safe, more men went than women, and observant Jews were more likely to go than nonobservant Jews. Thus, differences were not only seen within the 2002 cohort, but also between the 2002 and the other two cohorts. As a result of the escalating violence in the region, the 2002 cohort as a whole is markedly different from the other two cohorts. Members of the 2002 cohort are more likely to be Orthodox (15% compared with 5% in both the 2000 and 2001 cohorts) and more observant (28% were highly observant compared with 17% in both cohorts). They are also considerably older than those in the 2000 and 2001 cohorts with an average age difference of 10 and 8 months, respectively. Levels of identification with Israel and the Jewish people are, not surprisingly, higher in this cohort for both participants and non-participants.

These differences between and within cohorts guide the analytic strategies, but also make them more complex. Each cohort needed to be analyzed separately. Since this approach results in a smaller N, there is a consequent reduction in the statistical power of the analyses, making it harder to detect change. This is especially problematic for the 2000 and 2001 cohorts, which were smaller to begin with.

After differences were analyzed by cohort, cohorts were combined as a further check on the findings. Although this strategy in itself produces biases due to the over-representation of the 2002 cohort, it is useful in that it increases statistical power, thus helping to detect differences between participants and non-participants that were present in all cohorts, yet not statistically significant for a specific cohort. In addition, several tests were conducted to determine whether particular variables could control for the differences. Jewish religious observance at the time of registration (or for the 2000 cohort, at the time of the one year follow-up) was one such variable and was used as a surrogate to assess the level of attachment to the Jewish people prior to the trip.

Jewish observance at Time 1, shortly after registration, is an effective surrogate for identification with the Jewish people. It is correlated with measures of identification with the Jewish people, with Israel, an interest in learning, and most of the other measures in the survey. It is also related to participation in 2002 since, as noted, it is more observant than the 2000 and 2001 cohorts.

For these reasons, observance is used as a “control” for almost all of the analyses of long-term effects. To create a Jewish observance score, three questions were used for which responses were available from all cohorts on the pre-trip survey:

- Whether the respondent kept kashrut at home
- Whether the respondent fasted on Yom Kippur
- Whether the respondent lit Chanukah candles

Responses to these questions were summed, creating a Guttman-like scale. A person received a score of 1 if they only lit Chanukah candles. A person received a score of 2 if they lit Chanukah candles and fasted on Yom Kippur (everyone who fasted on Yom Kippur also lit Chanukah candles). A person received a score of 3 if they did all three (everyone who kept kashrut at home also fasted on Yom Kippur and lit Chanukah candles). Since very few scored 0, those falling in this category were combined with those who scored 1 (see Table A4).

Table A4: Distribution of Jewish Observance Scores

Assigned Score	Type of Observance	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	Did nothing or lit Chanukah candles	194	25.6%	25.6%
2	Fasted on Yom Kippur and lit Chanukah candles	390	51.5%	77.0%
3	Kept kashrut at home, fasted on Yom Kippur, and lit Chanukah candles	174	23.0%	100%
Total		758*	100%	

* Of the 804 respondents, data regarding Jewish observance was available from 758

The adjustment was performed using logistic regression predicting a dependent variable according to whether a person participated in a *birthright israel* trip and the level of their observance. The statistical program Stata, was used to perform these adjustments. The adjustment showed the predicted values at the mean or average observance score. For example, here is how the question about feeling connected with Israel at Time 3 was adjusted for level of observance.

Table A5: Logistic Regression of Observance and Going on the Trip on Feeling Connected to Israel at Time 3

Logistic regression		Number of observations = 672			
LR chi2(2) =	39.50	Prob > chi2 =		0.0000	
Log likelihood =	-445.08227	Pseudo R2 =		0.0425	
	Odds Ratio	Standard Error	z	P>z	[95% Confidence Interval]
Participation in Trip	1.975	.3643	3.69	0.000	[1.376 - 2.835]
Observance Level	1.770	.2074	4.87	0.000	[1.407 - 2.227]

Table A6: Adjustment Of Percent Feel Connected To Israel According To Observance At Time 1

	Probability	[95% Confidence Interval]
Non-Participant	.344	[.277 - .418]
Participant	.516	[.471 - .561]

For all cohorts combined, both going on the trip and the observance score are significantly related to feeling connected with Israel at Time 1. The significance levels indicated in Table A5 come from this regression. In this case, going on the trip, taking observance into account, is significant at better than .0001. Table A6 shows the logits converted to percentages, taking observance into account. Thirty four percent of non-participants feel connected with Israel as compared with 52 percent of participants. Lower and upper confidence limits are also shown for each percentage. The corresponding figures in the text of this report show percentages but not the confidence limits.

For some analyses, note is taken if change is due to preserving the levels of a given dependent variable from the level they were at the previous time, or whether the change is caused by converting those who were less favorable at the previous time period to a more favorable position at the current time. This analysis is done by comparing the predicted current level for those who were favorable at the previous time as compared with those who were not favorable, for both participants and for non-participants. The example below illustrates the computations.

Table A7: Logistic Regression of Observance, Going on the Trip and Feeling Connected to Israel at Time 1 on Feeling Connected to Israel at Time 2

Logistic regression		Number of obs = 408			
LR chi2(3) = 131.79		Prob > chi2 = 0.0000			
Log likelihood = -210.87648		Pseudo R2 = 0.2381			
	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P>z	[95% Confidence Interval]
Connection to Israel at Time 1	13.801	4.294	8.44	0.000	[7.50 - 25.397]
Participation in Trip	3.700	.988	4.90	0.000	[2.193 - 6.245]
Observance Level	1.212	.220	1.06	0.288	[.850 - 1.729]

Table A8: Adjustment of Percentage That Feel Connected to Israel at Time 2 According to Observance at Time 1, and Feeling Connected to Israel at Time 1 and Going on the Trip

Time Period	Group	Probability	[95% Confidence Interval]
Time 1 to Time 2	Non-Participant	.214	[.145 .304]
	Participant	.502	[.428 .577]
		<i>Difference .29</i>	
Time 2 to Time 3	Non-Participant	.790	[.685 .867]
	Participant	.933	[.885 .962]
		<i>Difference .14</i>	

In Table A7 one sees that observance and going on the trip are strongly related to feeling connected to Israel several months after the trip (Time 2), holding constant feelings about being connected to Israel at Time 1. The first panel in Table A8 examines the predicted percentages at Time 2, given the average level of observance, for those who did not feel connected at Time 1. The difference due to having gone on the trip is 29 percent. One can call this a conversion effect, since those who were not favorable were converted to a favorable position. The second panel of Table A8 examines the same situation but for those who were favorable to begin with. Ninety-three percent of those initially favorable who went on the trip remained so, as compared with 79 percent of those who did not. The preserving effect of the trip is 14 percent. In most cases (though not for this one), the conversion effects and the preserving effects are about the same magnitude. When there are interesting discrepancies, they are mentioned in the main text of the report but the computations that led to the conclusion are not displayed.

Appendix B

Methodological Notes on Study 2: Winter 2003-04 Analyses

Analyses of the Winter 2003-04 Cohort highlighted in this report are based on both pre- and post-trip surveys. The pre-trip survey was fielded initially in November 2003 and remained open through the end of December. Survey invitations were sent to 13,425 people who were active registrants for the trip and, at the time, were considered eligible for the trip. 7,766 responded to the pre-trip survey.

The post-trip survey conducted in March and April of 2004 was sent to 13,350 of those who received the pre-trip survey. 75 people who were contacted for the pre-trip survey requested to be removed from the survey list and were not contacted again for the post-trip survey. 6,097 people responded to the post-trip survey. 130 people who were contacted for the post-trip survey asked to be removed from the survey list.

Response rates differ for those who went and those who did not go on the trip. Almost three-quarters (72%) of those who went on the trip completed a survey before going, and more than half (56%) completed one after returning. Response rates for those who did not go on the trip were 42 percent and 34 percent, respectively. The overall response rate was 58 percent for the pre-trip survey and 45 percent for the post-trip survey.⁴⁸

Table B1: Sample and Response Rates

	Pre-Trip	Post-Trip
Sample	13,425	13,350
Respondents	7,766	6,097
Response rates		
Went	72%	56%
Did not go	42%	34%
Overall	58%	45%

One methodological feature of the study is that information on non-respondents could be obtained from the registration database. To determine if there was any non-response bias, respondents and non-respondents were compared on a number of characteristics including age, gender, country of origin, denomination, and trip organizer. Comparisons were done separately for those who went and for those who did not go. For those who went, there were more women among respondents (55% compared with 44% among non-respondents), more who identified with the Reform Movement (26% compared with 18%), and fewer Orthodox (12% compared with 20%). There were more respondents who participated through Hillel than non-respondents (35% compared to 23%). For those who did not go – there are more

⁴⁸ Response rates are not corrected to account for people who could not be reached because their e-mail address was no longer valid.

women respondents than non-respondents (60% compared to 47%). There are more Canadians among respondents than among non-respondents (23% compared to 18%) and more people who identify as Conservative (30% compared to 25%).

Based on non-response rates, the sample was weighted by gender, year of birth (extremes collapsed to avoid overly small cell sizes), country (USA/Canada), and trip organizer. Iterative proportional fitting was used, but the results indicated that overall design effects were small – around 1.14 – and the differences between weighted and unweighted data are negligible. Most of the data presented in this report are unweighted, except where there are noticeable differences. For the sake of consistency, however, the statistical significance of change is calculated using the weighted data and the survey modules of Stata 8. These procedures use weighted data and take into account the design effects.

The design of the evaluation is that of a "pseudo experiment." Although those who participated in *birthright israel* trips were not randomly selected from the pool of registrants eligible to go on the trip, the pre-trip survey indicates that those who went differed from those who did not go almost entirely on the issue of convenience and logistics. In fact, a third of those who were not able to go on the winter trips have registered for summer trips. In almost every respect, there are no significant differences between the attitudes and behaviors before the trip of those who went on it and those who were not able to go. Thus, if there are statistically significant differences post-trip between those who went and those who did not, the presumption is that the trip is responsible for the differences.

To ensure that there are not spurious effects, each person is used as their own "control." The *same* person's responses are measured before and after the trip. Measurements of change in the report generally utilize simple percentage differences. Given that many of the applicants were favorable to Israel and to Judaism *before* going on the trip (a central reason why they registered in the first place), *birthright israel* has a special challenge. Not only does it need to convince the less favorable to change their views and their behaviors, but it needs to make sure that favorability does not erode over time.

The percentage differences between those who went on the trip and those who did not are therefore *decomposed* into two effects. One effect is "converting" the less than favorable into a favorable stance. The other effect is a "preserving effect" in which those who were positive to begin with remain positive after the trip. There are, therefore, two separate analyses that add up to the overall effect. One analysis is for people who were *not* favorable before the trip; the other is for those who were favorable to begin with. First, the percent who changed from less than very positive at Time 1 (before the trips) to very positive at Time 2 (after the trips) were calculated. Participants were compared with non-participants. The differences between the percent who changed if they went on the trip and the percent who changed if they did not go on the trip is the "conversion effect."

The second analysis is for those who felt positive at Time 1. The difference in favorability at Time 2 between participants and non-participants is the "preserving effect." This is a test for a lack of erosion, or what is often seen as a statistical artifact, "regression to the mean." In fact, there is always "error" in the measurement of responses even from the same people over

time. The assumption of this analysis is that the "errors" for those who went and those who did not are equal and uncorrelated with whether or not people went on a trip. By subtracting the differences between those who went and those who did not, and doing this separately for those favorable and unfavorable at Time 1, any errors are effectively cancelled out.

As discussed in the main body of the report regarding feelings of connection to Jewish history, there is an *overall* difference in favorability between those who went and those who did not at Time 2 of 13 percentage points (not shown in Figure 32). This effect was decomposed into conversion and preserving effects. By controlling for a person's score at Time 1, one can assess the impact of the trip, as well as control for possible errors in measurement. Thus, for example, for those who did *not* feel positively about their connection with Jewish history, there is a 20 percent difference between those who went and those who did not in the proportion of those who now feel positively about the connection with Jewish history. For those who *did* feel positively before the trip, there is but a four percent difference in current feelings between those who went and those who did not. The trip's effect for this variable was therefore almost entirely a "conversion" effect. There was little room for positive change for those who felt very positive to begin with, although it is possible that feelings could have become negative.

The percentage difference approach used to graph the effects does not take account of statistical significance, the weighted data, nor the effect of possible effects due to the large variation in the background of those who went on the trip. It might be expected, for example, that applicants more connected with their Jewish background to begin with would have a different reaction to the trip than those less connected. As an overall proxy for connectedness with Jewish background, a scale of observance was used. An index was constructed by adding up the number of observances before the trip: whether registrants traveled on Shabbat, kept kosher at home, went to services at least a few times a year, fasted on Yom Kippur, and participated in candle lighting on Chanukah. The items vary in their extent of "frumness" from not traveling on Shabbat to lighting candles on Chanukah and more or less form a "Guttman" scale ranging from 0 to 5, with this distribution for weighted data:

Table B2: Distribution of Jewish Observance Index

Index of Observance (Prior to Trip)	Number of Observations	Estimated Proportion	Standard Error
0 – Least Observant	407	6%	.3%
1	1135	16%	.4%
2	1925	26%	.5%
3	2111	27%	.5%
4	919	13%	.4%
5 – Most Observant	851	12%	.4%

A regression model was developed in which feelings of connection to Jewish history after the trip in the spring was predicted by three models. The first equation included the feelings of connection score before the trip and whether the respondent went on the trip. The second

equations included the score before the trip, whether the respondent went on the trip, *and* the observance score. The third equation included the score before the trip, whether the respondent went on the trip, the observance score, *and* an interaction term for going on the trip and observance that tested for whether the effects of the trip varied according to the extent that the participant was observant. The result of these three equations is shown below.

Table B3: Model for Predicting Feelings of Connection to Jewish History After the Trip Using Jewish Observance Score

	Odds Ratios Feelings of Connection to Jewish History After the Trip		
	Equation (1)	Equation (2)	Equation (3)
Pre-Trip Feelings of Connection to Jewish History	7.705** (6.654-8.922)	6.454** (5.537-7.523)	6.506** (5.580-7.587)
Went on Trip	1.908** (1.641-2.218)	1.879** (1.609-2.193)	2.580** (1.831-3.637)
Jewish Observance Score Pre-Trip		1.266** (1.194-1.342)	1.367** (1.231-1.517)
Interaction of Trip and Observance			0.88 (0.780-1.001)
Observations	4565	4395	4395
Log pseudo-likelihood	-2523.04	-2396.16	-2393.69
Pseudo R 2	0.17	0.18	0.18

95% confidence intervals in parentheses

* significant at 5% ** significant at 1%

The table shows odds ratios: the odds of someone who felt positively about their connection with Jewish history at Time 1 (in equation 1) feeling positive at Time 2, are almost 8 times greater than for someone who did not feel positively at Time 1. This is the control for the respondents' opinions at Time 1, and it is obviously the most important factor – people tend to be consistent. Importantly, note also in equation 1 that the odds of someone who went on the trip feeling positive are almost twice that of someone who did not, controlling for their feelings at Time 1. Both coefficients are statistically significant. In equation 2 the observance variable is added, and for each interval in the scale – moving from 0 to 1 and from 1 to 2, and so on, the odds are about 1.3 times the previous score, so that the odds for a score of 5 as compared with 0 in feeling positive about a connection with Jewish history are about 5 times 1.3 or about 6.3 times those with a score of 0. One would expect this significant result.

Regarding equation 3, although the interaction between observance and going on the trip in terms of the effect on feeling a connection with Jewish history is not statistically significant, its point effect is less than 1. It means that observant respondents who went on the trip were *less* likely to change. But this has an effect on the overall coefficient for going on the trip which is now an odds ratio of 2.6. Once the fact that observant respondents are somewhat

less likely to change is taken into account, the effect of the trip is seen as *greater* than it was before this interaction was taken into account. Included in the table is the negative log likelihood and the pseudo R^2 . Both are "pseudo" because the log likelihood is an approximation (a "Taylor Series" adjustment is used for the weights), and the R^2 because this is not an ordinary least squares but a logit regression. One can see that while the second equation is a statistical improvement on the first, the third is not an improvement on the second. Nonetheless, it offers interesting and important information.

Finally, regarding conversion and preserving effects, the percentages according to the results of equation 3 are adjusted in the preceding table, solving the equations for the mean value of the scores. To interpret, examine the percent favorable at Time 2 for those favorable and unfavorable at Time 1, and for those who went on the trip and those who did not.

Table B4: Model for Predicting Conversion and Preserving Effects for Feelings of Connection to Jewish History

	Feelings of Connection to Jewish History After the Trip			
	Went on Trip	Estimated Proportion	95% Confidence Interval	Effect Size
Conversion Effect	No	26%	23% - 29%	15%
	Yes	41%	39% - 44%	
Preserving Effect	No	70%	66% - 73%	12%
	Yes	82%	80% - 84%	

Based on Table B3

Variables left as is: Mean values of Jewish observance score, interaction of trip and observance

These results are somewhat different from those reported in Figure 32 because observance variables have been taken into account. The conversion effect here is somewhat smaller (15% as compared with 20% in Figure 32), but the preserving effect is greater (12% as compared with 4% in Figure 32). There was less room for the observant individual to change if they were positive, and not much room for a preserving effect. Taking observance into account gives us a somewhat greater preserving effect. By and large, however, the differences between the regression models and the simple presentation of differences (presented in the charts in the main report) are not very great.

Another example shows the interaction between observance and going on the trip. In Table B5 the effect of going on the trip is shown in relationship to feeling very much connected to Israel (the analysis depicted in the main body of the report in Figure 32). This was done in several steps: the first step was to "predict" using a logistic regression, who felt positive after the trip in terms of their views at Time 1 (before the trip) and then, whether or not they went on the trip. The key number in Table A5 below, is the Odds Ratio for "Went on Trip." The Odds Ratio in Equation 1 is 4.438, which means that those who went on the trip are over 4 times as likely to feel very much connected to Israel at Time 2 than those who did not go, taking into account what their feelings were at Time 1 before the trips. It is statistically significant. Then, Equation 2 introduces level of observance. The Odds Ratio of going on the trip hardly changes and the amount of variance accounted for does not change much either, but of course those who are more observant are more likely to feel connected to Israel.

Finally, Equation 3 introduces an "interaction" between observance and going on the trip. The purpose is to see whether the *degree of change* in feelings is dependent on observance and whether this impacts on the overall effect of the trip. It does, to some extent, since the Odds Ratio is below 1 and is statistically significant. This means that the more observant are somewhat *less* affected by the trip. The preserving effect for the observant is less; they are already at the top of their degree of connectedness and therefore can only go down. The Odds Ratio for the trip, however, is now higher, although the overall amount of variance accounted for is not any greater than in equation 2.

Next, the estimated percentages of respondents who felt very much connected to Israel were calculated, using the results of equation 3. As before, the Odds Ratios was converted into percentages under two conditions: first, that people were not very much connected to Israel at Time 1, and second, that they were indeed very connected at Time 2. In addition, the percentage point differences between those who went on the trips and those who did not were examined. These differences are equivalent to the conversion and preserving effects shown in Figure 27 in the body of the report. For comparison, Figure 27 reports a conversion effect of 38 percent, while the statistics here report 34 percent, well within the confidence limits; Figure 27 reports a lower preserving effect of 12 percent as compared with the estimated figure in Table B6 of 19 percent. The confidence limits suggest that the lower figure should be 15 percent. Thus, the earlier analyses slightly underestimate the preserving effects of the trip because they average out the lack of preserving effects among the more observant.

Table B5: Model for Predicting Feelings of Connection to Israel After the Trip Using Jewish Observance Score

	Odds Ratios		
	Feelings of Connection to Israel After the Trip		
	Equation (1)	Equation (2)	Equation (3)
Pre-Trip Feelings of Connection to Israel	12.202** (10.026-14.849)	10.632** (8.653-13.065)	10.676** (8.693 – 13.113)
Went on Trip	4.438** (3.749-5.254)	4.379** (3.686-5.203)	6.274** (4.331-9.088)
Jewish Observance Score Pre-Trip		1.290** (1.213-1.372)	1.410** (1.260-1.578)
Interaction of Trip and Observance			0.869* (0.761-.992)
Observations	4566	4397	4397
Log pseudo-likelihood	-2308.58	-2176.92	-2174.14
Pseudo R2	.23	.25	.25

95% confidence intervals in parentheses

* significant at 5%; ** significant at 1%

Table B6: Model for Predicting Conversion and Preserving Effects for Feelings of Connection to Israel

	Feelings of Connection to Israel After the Trip			
	Went on Trip	Estimated Proportion	95% Confidence Interval	Effect Size
Conversion Effect	No	20%	18% - 23%	34%
	Yes	54%	52% - 57%	
Preserving Effect	No	73%	70% - 77%	19%
	Yes	93%	91% - 94%	

Based on Table B5

Variables left as is: Mean values of Jewish observance score,
interaction of trip and observance

Appendix C

Survey Instrument

Several versions of the survey instrument were used in each of the studies. For the sake of comparison, common items were used whenever possible. To gather data from the many different types of individuals who applied for a *birthright israel* program at different time periods, changes were made to make items relevant to respondents. Thus, there were several variations for both participants and non-participants, and for students and non-students. There were also variations depending upon the timing of the survey (i.e., pre-trip, post-trip, follow-up).

Surveys were administered via the Internet. Survey software allowed respondents to “click” their responses on their computer screen. Depending upon responses to key “branching” questions, respondents were presented with different screens.

For a “live” demonstration of the post-trip survey administered to the 2003-04 cohort, go to: www.cmjs.org/birthright

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The mission of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies is to conduct scholarly work that can enhance understanding of the Jewish community. The Center is a multi-disciplinary research institute and an integral part of Brandeis University's distinguished programs in Jewish studies and communal service. Research conducted at the Center focuses on studies of American Jewry and Jewish institutions and is widely disseminated.

The Center's faculty and student staff include psychologists, sociologists, and scholars trained in Jewish studies. They share a common interest in Jewish identity, culture, family life, religious expression and Israel-Diaspora relations. They are committed to academically rigorous research that contributes to a deeper understanding of modern Jewish life and the role of religion and ethnicity in modern society. "Leading edge" research done at the Center provides policy-makers and Jewish community leaders with timely analyses of current problems.

Recent studies conducted by the Center have been done in synagogues, schools, summer camps and Israel, and have dealt with a cross-section of American Jewry. A signature feature of the Cohen Center is its use of innovative research methods to answer complex questions. Research is designed and conducted by teams that combine a rich mix of skills, experience and perspectives. Findings are disseminated in academic journals, books, conferences, meetings of Jewish organizations and in the Jewish media.