Millennial Children of Intermarriage:
Touchpoints and Trajectories of Jewish Engagement

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The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS), founded in 1980, is dedicated to providing independent, high-quality research on issues related to contemporary Jewish life.

The Cohen Center is also the home of the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI). Established in 2005, SSRI uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze socio-demographic data on the Jewish community.
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Executive Summary

Millennial generation children of intermarriage comprise about half of the young adult American Jewish population. They are the first cohort born after the intermarriage rate in America crossed the 50 percent threshold and, unlike earlier generations, the majority identify as Jewish. They are, however, less likely than children of inmarriage to identify as Jewish by religion, observe Jewish practices, and feel connected to Israel.

The present study is the first comprehensive assessment that examines the religious upbringing, college experiences, and current attitudes and practices of millennial generation children of intermarriage. Drawing on a survey and in-depth interviews, the study compares children of intermarriage and children of inmarriage. The findings identify the experiences and relationships most likely to result in robust Jewish attitudes and practices in adulthood.

The survey was administered in early 2015 to a large sample drawn from applicants to Birthright Israel during the period 2009-14. Birthright Israel receives more than 50,000 applicants a year from young adults who have one or two Jewish parents. An achieved sample of 2,654 respondents, ages 19-32, was obtained. Interviews were conducted in four cities with 27 children of intermarriage, ages 22-33.

Key Findings

- Children of intermarriage were less likely than children of inmarriage to have attended a Jewish day school or supplementary school, observed Jewish holidays, and participated in informal Jewish social and educational activities during their childhood or teen years.

- As a result, children of intermarriage were less likely during their college years to participate in a Jewish group (e.g., Hillel or Chabad) or take a Jewish or Israel-related course. Among applicants to Birthright Israel, they were less likely to go on a trip, and less likely to do so during their college years.

- Among the substantial number of children of intermarriage that did participate in Jewish activities during college—in particular Birthright Israel and campus-based Jewish groups—the impact was profound. At the time they completed the survey, they were much more likely to observe Jewish holidays and practices, feel connected to Israel and the Jewish people, have Jewish friends and partners, and believe that it is important to raise children Jewish.

- College Jewish experiences were, for most outcomes, more influential for children of intermarriage than children of inmarriage, nearly closing the gap on many measures of Jewish engagement.

Additional Findings

- Participation in Birthright Israel in college was especially influential on attitudes toward Israel, whereas participation in college groups was especially influential on Shabbat and holiday observance.

- Childhood Jewish experiences were especially influential in relation to identifying as Jewish, knowing how to read Hebrew, and believing that it is important to raise children Jewish.
Parental intermarriage had an indirect effect—flowing through its impact on childhood Jewish and Christian experiences—on most measures of adult Jewish engagement. It had a direct effect on a few outcomes, including religious identity, Jewish friendship networks, and the likelihood of having a Jewish partner.

Having close ties to Jewish grandparents had a direct effect on a variety of outcomes, including identifying as Jewish by religion, celebrating Jewish holidays, feeling a connection to Israel and the Jewish people, and wanting to marry someone Jewish.

Children of intermarriage who identify as Jewish reject the idea that their Jewish identity is diluted or inferior and view their multicultural background as enriching, enabling an appreciation of diverse cultures and practices.

Participation in Birthright Israel after age 22 had about the same impact as participation before age 22.

**Policy Implications**

Jewish identity development does not occur only during childhood and the teenage years but continues through college and beyond. Increasing participation of children of intermarriage in a broad range of Jewish educational and social experiences should be a top communal priority.

Special attention should focus on the college years, a developmental period when young adults become gatekeepers of their own experiences and keenly interested in the question of identity.

Although Jewish educational and social opportunities for college students have increased over the past decade, much work remains to be done to ensure that all students have access to Birthright Israel and high-quality Jewish educational and social experiences on college campuses.
Introduction

For the past quarter century, intermarriage has been a focus of concern and debate in the American Jewish community. Will the children of intermarried couples identify as Jewish in adulthood? Will they embrace Jewish practice, support the Jewish community, connect to Israel, and establish Jewish households? What, in the context of widespread intermarriage, can the Jewish community do to ensure its future vitality?

Research on Intermarriage

According to national surveys (see Phillips, 2013; Sasson et al., Under Review), the rate of intermarriage began increasing in the early 1960s, from below 15 percent, to nearly 30 percent by the 1970s, and to nearly 60 percent today. As the rates climbed, communal leaders expressed alarm, and scholars debated the demographic implications. Many commentators, including some scholars who study the Jewish community, described the high rate of intermarriage as a threat to the demographic continuity of American Jewry. Thus, for example, Fishman (2004), who conducted interviews with more than 100 intermarried and inmarried couples, reported that in the plurality, and perhaps the majority of intermarried homes, Jewish identity was diluted by the presence of multiple and ambiguous religious identities and the inclusion of Christian practice and celebration. Drawing on data from the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) of 2000-01, Phillips (2005) reported that only a minority of mixed-parentage respondents identified with Judaism, and predicted that there would be fewer practitioners of Judaism in the future.

Calling for “realism” in the debate over intermarriage, Wertheimer and Bayme (2005) argued that children of intermarriage receive much less exposure to Jewish schooling, Israel trips, camp, and youth group than their counterparts raised by two Jewish parents. They encouraged rabbis and Jewish communal leaders to promote endogamy and, when that fails, conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. Comparing patterns of religious observance, affiliation, and formal education in the NJPS 2000-01, Cohen (2006) identified an “identity chasm between inmarried and intermarried” that suggested the emergence of “two Jewries.” He advocated new communal investment in Jewish day schools, summer camps, and Israel trips as the most effective way to promote inmarriage, which he too regarded as a communal imperative.

In contrast, other scholars argued that the loss of Jewish identity among children of intermarriage was not inevitable. McGinity (2009) showed that during the last half of the 20th century, Jewish women who intermarried were very likely to create Jewish homes and raise their children to identify as Jewish. Drawing on 90 interviews with young adults raised in intermarried homes, Beck (2005) reported “substantial variations in current Jewish identities, experiences, and connections” and urged Jewish organizations to develop “initiatives to successfully re-ignite the dormant Jewish ‘sparks’ which continue to reside within many of these individuals” (p. 43).

Drawing on NJPS 2000-01 data, Chertok, Phillips, and Saxe (2008) showed that Jewish education was the key determinant of Jewish engagement. Children of intermarriage who were raised with Jewish educational and social experiences comparable to children of inmarriage exhibited similar levels of Jewish engagement in adulthood. And Goldscheider (2004) argued that, as a result of increasing
acceptance by the Jewish community, “more children raised in households in which one or more persons were not born Jewish have remained Jewish in a variety of ways as they formed their own families” (p. 24). According to these scholars, the Jewish community ought to adopt policies that increase the exposure of children of intermarriage to high-quality Jewish educational and social experiences.

The Jewish Continuity Agenda

Alongside the development of research literature on intermarriage, Jewish communal organizations launched a wide range of educational and outreach initiatives. Beginning in the 1990s, intervention during the childhood and teen years came to be seen as essential to foster and strengthen Jewish identity. Jewish formal and informal education options including day schools, summer camps, and Israel programs were improved and expanded, and new investments were made to expand and enhance outreach to intermarried families (Mayer, 1990; Sales, Samuel, & Boxer, 2011; Wertheimer, 2007). Initiatives in Jewish education were thought to strengthen Jewish identity and social networks thereby increasing the likelihood of endogamy. Similarly, such initiatives were thought to build Jewish identity and commitment among children of intermarriage so that in adulthood they would be more likely to identify as Jews. Taken as a whole, these responses addressed the concerns of those who stressed the need to encourage endogamy, as well as the concerns of others who stressed the importance of outreach to intermarried families.

Since the 2000s, new communal initiatives to foster and strengthen Jewish identity have increasingly focused on college students and young adults. On campuses, the options for exploring and engaging in Jewish activity increased and diversified. As a result of remarkable growth, Hillel and Chabad, Jewish and Israel studies courses, Jewish Greek life, Jewish study programs with participant stipends (e.g., Aish Campus and Meor), Jewish social justice and alternative break programs, and Jewish special interest groups exist on most of the campuses which host Jewish students. As Koren, Saxe, and Fleisch (in press) observe, “Jewish life is on the rise on college campuses, largely as a result of the Jewish community’s investment, a changing culture on campus, and a reinterpretation by student affairs professionals of the role of the academy as a place of religious and spiritual development.”

Israel experience programs for young adults have also experienced growth. Since 1999, Birthright Israel has enabled nearly 300,000 North American young adults to travel to Israel for ten-day educational experiences (Taglit-Birthright Israel, 2013). Like the expanding range of campus-based initiatives, Birthright Israel was established to encourage young adults to explore their Jewish identities and connect to Israel. The proportion of program applicants who are children of intermarriage increased from about 20 percent during the program’s earliest years to over 30 percent in recent years. Participation in other Israel educational programs also became more common, including long-term study programs offered as part of the Masa Israel framework.

Pew Survey of American Jews

The first national survey of its kind in more than a decade, the Pew Research Center’s 2013 study, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans” provided an extraordinary opportunity for taking stock. After decades of community mobilization, what had happened to intermarriage rates? What were the religious
and ethnic identities of the millennial children of intermarriage, the first generation to come of age after the rate of intermarriage crossed the 50 percent threshold?

The survey reported an intermarriage rate of 58 percent for the period 2005-13 and also for the period 2000-04. Thus, after decades of steady increase, the intermarriage rate appears to have stabilized. Nonetheless, among the non-Orthodox, about 70 percent of the recently married chose a non-Jewish spouse.

The Pew survey also documented substantial change regarding the upbringing and identities of children of intermarriage. Among millennials, born between 1981 and 1995, 54 percent were raised Jewish (by religion or ethnicity) and 47 percent attended some Jewish schooling or overnight camp (Sasson et al., Under Review). Now adults, 61 percent identified as Jewish, either by religion (29 percent) or ethnicity (32 percent). These rates of Jewish upbringing, education, and young adult Jewish identity far surpass those of previous, older generations of the offspring of intermarriages (Sasson, 2013, November 11; Saxe, Sasson, & Aronson, 2015). Indeed, partly as a result of the high rate at which millennial children of intermarriage identify as Jewish, half of all Jews in their generation are children of intermarriage.

However, alongside these developments, which are certainly welcome from the standpoint of Jewish demographic continuity, the Pew data also revealed persistent and troubling gaps. Despite recent gains, millennial children of intermarriage were much less likely than their peers raised by two Jewish parents to have received Jewish education in childhood and to participate in Jewish communal life as adults (Cohen, 2014; Sasson et al., Under Review).

What explains the persistence of these gaps and what if anything can be done about them? The Pew survey, because of its broad scope and purpose, did not include the range of questions or number of young adult respondents needed to answer these critical questions.

**Touchpoints and Trajectories**

This report presents the findings of new survey and interview research on millennial children of intermarriage. We set out to answer three broad questions:

1. How were the childhood and college experiences of children of intermarriage similar to and different from their counterparts who were raised by two Jewish parents?
2. What are the factors in the backgrounds of children of intermarriage that make them more or less involved in Jewish life as young adults?
3. What are the policy levers available to Jewish organizations to increase the likelihood that children of intermarriage will grow into committed Jewish adults?

The aim of the present report is not to settle debates among scholars or forecast the Jewish demographic future. Instead, our aim is to improve our understanding of millennial children of intermarriage, including how they were raised, and what experiences are associated with Jewish choices later in life. Indeed, rather than forecast the future, we aim to shape it by identifying policy choices that promise to increase the proportion of children of intermarriage who feel connected to and participate in the life of the Jewish community.
The report begins with a description of the study methodology. This is followed by discussion of the findings divided into three parts. Part One examines the religious upbringing of children of intermarriage, comparing their experiences to those of their counterparts who were raised in households with two Jewish parents. Our focus will be on five childhood touchpoints: religious identity, religious education, informal social and educational activities, holiday and religious observance, and adult role models.

Part Two examines critical touchpoints during the college years, in particular going on a Birthright Israel trip, participation in campus-based Jewish groups, and taking Jewish and Israel-themed courses. Our analysis will compare rates of participation in these activities among children of intermarriage and inmarriage and identify aspects of childhood religious upbringing associated with such participation.

Part Three examines the Jewish trajectories of study participants in young adulthood, at the time they completed our survey. We examine how childhood and college touchpoints interact to shape our study participants’ current religious attitudes and practices, including Jewish holiday and religious observance, feelings and attitudes about Israel and the Jewish people, religious and ethnic identity, and attitudes concerning marriage and children (Figure 1). The report concludes with a summary of the study’s main findings and discussion of their policy implications.
Method

This study examines data collected through interviews and a survey. During the first phase of research, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted to ascertain how millennial children of intermarriage think about and describe their backgrounds, identities, and interests. During the second phase, a survey of millennials—including children of inmarriage and intermarriage—investigated the associations between childhood and college touchpoints and subsequent trajectories of Jewish identity and engagement.

Phase I: Interviews

This phase of the study focused on interviewing young adults, ages 22-33 who grew up with intermarried parents. Twenty-seven interviews were conducted in four metropolitan areas, selected to include large and medium-sized Jewish communities. The target communities were Boston, Baltimore/DC, Seattle, and Cleveland. Within each metropolitan area, interview subjects were recruited informally, through advertisements at places where young adults gather (universities, coffee shops), the researchers’ personal networks, and programs for Jewish young adults in Seattle (JConnect), Cleveland (Moishe House), and Baltimore (Charm City Tribe). Senior members of the research team conducted the interviews either by phone or in person and interviewees received a $40 Amazon gift card as a token of appreciation. Interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed.

Phase II: Survey

The survey sample was designed to include young adults who were at the end of their undergraduate experience or older to make it possible to investigate the associations between college experiences and current trajectories of Jewish identity and engagement.

Using the Birthright Israel registration database, two stratified random samples of eligible applicants from North America were drawn. Individuals in the samples had applied to Birthright Israel between summer 2009 and winter 2013-14 and were between 19 and 32 years old (87 percent were 22 or older). Both Birthright Israel participants and applicants who did not ultimately go on a trip (hereafter, “nonparticipants”) were included. Samples were stratified by participation (i.e., participants versus nonparticipants) and by parental marriage type (i.e., children of inmarriage versus children of intermarriage) to ensure sufficient numbers from each group for analysis.

Both samples were contacted by email and invited to complete an online survey. Respondents were offered $20 Amazon gift cards as appreciation for their time. The larger sample (N=12,200) received follow-up reminders via email and achieved a response rate of 22 percent. The smaller sample (N=606) received follow-up reminders via both email and telephone and achieved a response rate of 32 percent. An analysis of nonresponse bias was conducted by comparing the larger sample to the smaller sample using data from the survey, and by comparing survey respondents to nonrespondents using data from the Birthright Israel registration database. There were almost no substantive differences between nonrespondents, respondents in the larger sample, and respondents in the smaller sample with respect to gender, age, or Jewish denomination, although more recent applicants were more likely to respond. The
methodology of the survey is described in greater detail in Technical Appendix A.

Who is a Child of Intermarriage?

The classification of study participants as children of intermarriage or inmarriage was done in several stages. First, the parents of each respondent were identified. Virtually all respondents (99 percent) lived with a mother and a father during childhood, although in 21 percent of cases the parents separated at some point before the respondent left home. Next, the Jewish status of each parent was determined using information about the grandparents’ identities, how the parents were raised, the parents’ current identities, and the dates of any formal conversions to Judaism. Finally, study participants were classified as children of intermarriage, children of inmarriage, or neither based on the status of their parents. For the 7 percent of cases where one parent converted to Judaism, the participant was classified as a child of intermarriage if the conversion happened before s/he turned 13 and as a child of inmarriage if the conversion happened after s/he turned 13. Based on this classification scheme, 51 percent of survey respondents were classified as children of inmarriage, 44 percent as children of intermarriage, and 5 percent as neither/insufficient data. All individuals interviewed in the first stage of the study were classified as children of intermarriage. Complete details of the classification of survey respondents is presented in Technical Appendix B.

How Representative is the Sample?

The sample for this study was drawn from applicants to Birthright Israel, and, although the program’s eligibility guidelines were broad and included children of intermarriage with non-Jewish mothers, applicants did need to indicate that they considered themselves to be Jewish in order to be considered for the program. In light of this potential source of bias in the frame, it is important to consider how well the sample represents the larger population of all children of intermarriage.

An analysis comparing millenial children of intermarriage in the current sample with their counterparts (both those who identified as Jews and those who did not) in the Pew study (2013) indicates that the two groups look similar on several background measures (Figure 2). Children of intermarriage in the study sample fell within the confidence intervals of the estimates from the Pew survey for gender of the Jewish parent and attendance at Jewish overnight camp. However, compared to the Pew data, children of intermarriage in the current sample were somewhat more likely to have attended Jewish supplementary school and to have had a bar or bat mitzvah.

Turning to the children of inmarriage (Figure 3), participants in the current study were more likely than their Pew (2013) counterparts to have received Jewish supplementary school education and less likely to have attended a Jewish day school or overnight camp. Children of inmarriage were about as likely as their Pew counterparts to have celebrated a bar or bat mitzvah. Thus, those with more intensive formal and informal Jewish education are underrepresented in our comparison group of children of inmarriage.
Figure 2. Jewish background of millennial children of intermarriage: CMJS sample\(^3\) and Pew

![Bar chart showing Jewish background of millennial children of intermarriage.]

Note: Error bars denote 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 3. Jewish background of millennial children of inmarriage: CMJS sample\(^4\) and Pew

![Bar chart showing Jewish background of millennial children of inmarriage.]

Note: Error bars denote 95 percent confidence intervals.
Part One: Childhood Touchpoints

How were the children of intermarriage in our study raised? What were they told about their religious identities? What religious education did they receive in formal and informal settings? Which holidays did they celebrate, and what rituals did they observe? This section draws on interviews and our survey to describe the religious upbringing of millennial children of intermarriage.5

Religious Identity

Children typically do not construct their religious or ethnic identity on their own. Instead, it is most often parents who start the process of identity formation by telling children in which group(s) they can claim membership and by providing language for thinking and talking about their identity. In other words, the first touchpoint for the development of religious identity is in the hands of parents.

The children of intermarriage we interviewed described their parents’ diverse approaches. Some reported that their parents determined their religious identity early in their lives or even before they were born:

**Before they had children they decided that they wanted to choose one religion to bring us up in, and my mom was more passionate about her religion, so they chose Judaism. We were pretty active in the Temple, so we went to Sunday school, Hebrew school, [and] were in the children’s choir. (Female, 31, mother Jewish)**

**At first they were going to raise me with no religion. The story goes that when my grandparents had me for a weekend when I was a few years old, my mom came and picked me up, and I was setting up the Christmas crèche scene, and my mom decided right then and there I was not going to be raised Christian. So we went to a Reform temple and that’s where I grew up. (Female, 22, mother Jewish)**

*They raised us Christian. We went to church pretty regularly, I would say most Sundays. It was a Christian church, Protestant...We’d talk about Judaism in so far as it related to Christianity, and the Old Testament versus the New Testament, and things like that, but that was about the limit of it. (Male, 29, mother Jewish)*

Other interviewees described parents as abstaining from a decision about their religious identity. Parents of these young adults often focused on the importance of core values found across religions such as “being a good person” and caring for others. For some parents, this reflected their own disconnection from religion:

*I don’t think that they had much of an idea of a religious identity because they didn’t really identify as religious. I think it was more important to each of them to have aspects of their religious culture in my life. (Male, 25, mother Jewish)*

For other parents, abstaining from a decision expressed a desire to expose their child to multiple religions and allow him or her to choose:

*They encouraged me to learn as much as I could about every religion that existed in both Eastern and Western cultures. They didn’t push me in any one direction but did instill a set of values. My mom had a set of very strong Christian values. They were about the teaching of Jesus in reference to ‘love your*
neighbor,’ essentially the Beatitudes. My father was a Ten Commandments person. (Male, 33, father Jewish)

My parents were very much about letting us do whatever we wanted to do. They never really told us ‘you need to believe this, you need to believe that.’ It was very much like ‘whatever you [do] we want you to know where you come from and we want you to know the family history.’ (Female, 23, father Jewish)

My parents are big hippies, and kind of ‘let the child go and become their own.’ (Female, 30, father Jewish)

Although less common, some interviewees recalled being raised as explicitly or implicitly both Jewish and another religion, typically Christian.

*I think they would say I was kind of identified as being like half Jewish and half Christian. I don’t think when I was young I realized that you kind of had to choose at some point what your own identity is.* (Male, 23, father Jewish)

*My parents were very clear with me that I was both Christian and Jewish. I never felt pressure to decide between them or even fully understood the conflict.* (Female, 29, father Jewish)

In our survey, children of intermarriage were asked an open-ended question about what their parents told them about their religious identity when they were growing up. A plurality (41 percent) were told that they were exclusively Jewish, and 17 percent were told that they were both Jewish and another religion. A sizeable proportion were told that their religious identity was their choice to make (18 percent) or were not raised in any religion (18 percent) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. What parents told children of intermarriage about their religious identity

100%

80%

60%

40%

20%

0%

Jewish only Nothing/No religion My choice Jewish and other religion Other religion only Parents disagreed

41% 18% 18% 17% 5% 2%
Religious Education

Survey respondents were asked about their childhood religious education and related lifecycle rituals. Fewer than half (44 percent) of the children of intermarriage received any formal Jewish education, with just 7 percent ever attending Jewish day school. By contrast, the vast majority of children of inmarriage (86 percent) received some formal Jewish education with 28 percent attending a day school (Figure 5). Even children of intermarriage who obtained some day school education received on average three years less than children of inmarriage.

Only a small portion of children of intermarriage received formal schooling in another religious tradition; however, 8 percent attended a full-time parochial school and 17 percent had some kind of formal Christian education. For a small group of our respondents, Christian and Jewish schooling were not mutually exclusive: Four percent of children of intermarriage attended both Christian and Jewish educational programs at some point during childhood.

In interviews, several respondents who attended a Jewish supplementary school described feeling part of the congregational mainstream:

I think there were a lot of people even in my religious school classes that were from mixed marriages...so I don’t think it was really a strange thing. (Male, 29, mother Jewish)

I had a lot of friends that were in the same situation as me, coming from either a mixed family, or coming from a Jewish family, but like, not the most religious of people. (Female, 23, father Jewish)
In interviews, young adults whose intermarried parents did not make a clear decision about their religious identity often reported a haphazard set of educational experiences. For example, they might have begun religious education late or attended supplementary school in some years but not others. They were also more likely to report having attended both Jewish and Christian educational programs.

\[\text{So we attended Lutheran, or Christian of some sort, Sunday school, and our synagogue didn’t have a formal religious school, but we had a Hebrew tutor. We had religious education from both sides. (Female, 30, mother Jewish)}\]

\[\text{I was in Hebrew school until about second grade. I had a bad experience with the Hebrew teacher there, and I didn’t want to go back. From then on I went to [Christian] Sunday school with my mother. And then in high school I did a little bit of both. (Female, 24, father Jewish)}\]

Religious education is typically punctuated with milestone events. Among survey respondents, 39 percent of children of intermarriage celebrated a bar or bat mitzvah, compared to 84 percent of the children of inmarriage. Christian milestone events, including baptism, first communion, and confirmation, were celebrated by 14 percent of the children of intermarriage.

In interviews, children of intermarriage who received little or no formal Jewish education often recalled disappointment at being excluded from the milestone event of a bar or bat mitzvah. Some recalled realizing that their Jewish peers were planning their bar or bat mitzvah and being told, often by parents, that it was too late for them to enter the educational process. Their sense of regret and loss was palpable, and a few noted feeling less authentically Jewish than peers who celebrated a bar or bat mitzvah.

\[\text{All my friends were having their bar mitzvahs when I was thirteen and I wanted one. My mom said ‘well, you need to start Hebrew School and then you won’t have one for a while,’ and it was a sad thing to learn. (Female, 30, father Jewish)}\]

\[\text{In middle school, when all my friends were getting bar and bat mitzvahed, I would get the invitations. The fourth bar mitzvah that I went to, a buddy of mine asked me ‘when is your bar mitzvah?’ And I said ‘I’m not getting bar mitzvahed.’ That was around the first time that I felt I was a little cast aside by my friends because I had always claimed to be part of that group. I felt as if they were looking at me like I was a fraud. That kind of hurt. (Male, 24, father Jewish)}\]

\[\text{I’ve kind of missed out on the whole bar mitzvah thing. Everybody I’ve ever known has had one and I didn’t. I feel more Jewish than anything else, and I want to be a part of the community, but I don’t know anything. I can’t sing the songs, I can’t say the prayers, I can’t do any of it. (Male, 25, mother Jewish)}\]

**Informal Educational and Social Activities**

Survey respondents were asked about participation in informal educational and social activities including day camp, overnight camp, and youth groups. They were also asked about their Jewish friendship network during high school.
The children of intermarriage in our sample were much less likely to have participated in Jewish informal activities compared to children of inmarriage (Figure 6). For example, 17 percent attended overnight camp, and 18 percent attended day camp, compared to 46 and 43 percent, respectively, among children of inmarriage. However, children of intermarriage were more likely to have participated in Jewish than Christian activities: Eleven percent attended a Christian overnight camp or a Bible camp, and five percent participated in a Christian youth group in high school.

The lower rates of participation of children of intermarriage in Jewish camps and youth groups, compared to children of inmarriage, are reflected in their smaller Jewish social networks during high school: Eight percent of children of intermarriage report that all or most of their close friends in high school were Jewish, compared to 31 percent of children of inmarriage. The fact that even many children of inmarried parents have mostly non-Jewish friends makes informal Jewish activities that create social bonds especially important (Kadushin et al., 2000).

A few of our interview subjects discussed memorable experiences with summer camps and youth groups, and one explained why she chose not to attend:

_In high school I was in BBYO and I held office in my chapter two times. They’re positive, fun, friend-making. Even to this day I think of Judaism more culturally than religiously and [BBYO] was a big part of it._

(Female, 31, mother Jewish)

_When I decided that I wanted to go to summer camp, I actually decided that I didn’t want to go to Jewish summer camp, because I wanted to go to a camp in which there were many different ethnicities and peoples represented, so I chose not to do that._

(Female, 25, father Jewish)

Figure 6. Informal educational and social activities while growing up (Jewish and Christian)
Millennial Children of Intermarriage

**Holiday and Religious Observance**

Survey respondents were asked about family religious observance, including celebration of holidays and attendance at worship services. In terms of Jewish practice, celebrating Hanukkah was almost universal among both children of intermarriage and children of inmarriage. Attending a Passover seder was very common in both groups as well (Figure 7). Although less than half of either group recalled regular attendance at religious services, someone in their household lighting Shabbat candles, having a Shabbat meal, or keeping kosher, children of intermarriage were less likely than children of inmarriage to have observed each ritual. The differences between the two groups were particularly pronounced on types of observance that are more integrated into weekly and daily family life such as Shabbat and keeping kosher.

Similarly, among our interviewees, recollections of Hanukkah and Passover observance was nearly universal, with fewer commenting on other forms of Jewish religious practice:

*We lit the candles on the menorah, and my dad would tell stories about his Nana giving him five dollars for Hanukkah, and finding the afikoman and all of that. But really it wasn’t too much at home, it was more of those family dinners where we would laugh.* (Female, 30, father Jewish)

*I remember sitting at the Passover table and reading the book and feeling like ‘these were my people.’ For some reason… it felt right to me.* (Female, 24, father Jewish)

*[On Friday nights] we would usually have dinner and then go to Temple… We always had big Passover seders and big Hanukkah parties with my mom’s family. And we also did Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, obviously. And those are really nice memories.* (Female, 33, mother Jewish)

A substantial proportion of the children of intermarriage participated in Christian religious rituals and celebrations while growing up (Figure 8). The vast majority (86 percent) celebrated Christmas with a special meal or by decorating their home. Roughly half report

---

**Figure 7. Jewish holiday and rituals observed during childhood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ritual</th>
<th>Children of Inmarriage</th>
<th>Children of Intermarriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hanukkah</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seder</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- monthly</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shabbat candles</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shabbat meal</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosher</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that they attended Christian religious services at least a few times a year, and approximately half said that they or someone they lived with had a special Easter meal or gave up an activity or food for Lent. Note that these behaviors were not entirely absent among children of inmarriage: Fully 18 percent of children of inmarriage also did something to celebrate Christmas while growing up. Many of our interviewees described the celebration of both Jewish and Christian holidays as integral to their family traditions. For some this was a point of pride and fond remembrance. Home observance of holidays from multiple faith traditions did not seem to confuse these children of intermarriage.

*Our Christmas day tradition was to sit around the Christmas tree in the morning, open presents, have good family time, and then go to Chinese food and a movie with all the other Jews.* (Female, 29, father Jewish)

*My parents have a living room and a family room, and one was like the Hanukkah room, like crazy Hanukkah decorations, and the other one was a Christmas room. And even though my mom was emphatic that it was for my dad, it was for all of us. We loved it.* (Female, 31, mother Jewish)

*I never actually felt confused about it. I was always of the sense that these are my mom’s holidays, these are my dad’s holidays. The rest of the kids in my Hebrew school don’t celebrate them, but I get to because I’m lucky.* (Female, 22, mother Jewish)

Some described cultural traditions reflecting the ethnic or national heritage of their Christian parent. For example, self-described “Jewegians” (Jewish Norwegians), and “Jutherans” (Jewish Lutherans) talked about their family traditions of Scandinavian Christmas and we also heard about Scottish and Italian home Christmas celebrations.

*We have a Swedish Christmas festival every year. So we have some traditional Swedish dishes that we do, some Swedish songs even that we sometimes sing, but it’s, yeah, it’s more just a kind of a celebration…Having the Swedish element to it made it a little bit unique. It wasn’t just an American, kind of vanilla, Christmas celebration. It was like a Swedish celebration too.* (Male, 26, mother Jewish)

Figure 8. Christian holiday celebration during childhood

![Graph showing Christian holiday celebration during childhood](image)
It was just a big family dinner, and there was more Scottish tradition than Christmas. We would eat a big turkey and [relative] would wear his kilt, and we ate black pudding. It’s plum pudding, but the thing I loved about it is there were little coins hidden inside that you could find. (Female, 28, father Jewish)

For the most part, interviewees recalled holiday celebrations—including both Jewish and Christian festivals—as “desacralized” family events without religious content. As young adults, our interviewees recalled these events as special not on religious grounds but because they provided an occasion for the gathering of extended family. Some indicated that celebration of the major Christian holidays felt much more like an American tradition rather than tied to religion.

We did Christmas and Easter. But, it was just more like ‘that’s just what you do, because you’re American.’ It never factored in as anything religious, to my parents or to me. (Female, 33, mother Jewish)

Christmas is the one time, or the two times, that my brothers and my parents and I are all together. So that will always remain important. I don’t think I see holidays, beyond like a reason to bring family and friends together, as having a particular important role in my spiritual identity or my belief system… I see them more as excuses to come together and break bread with people I care about. (Male, 23, father Jewish)

Adult Role Models

Survey respondents were asked open-ended questions about who had the greatest influence on their religious identities when they were growing up, and in what ways. Parents and especially mothers were the most mentioned adult influence (Figure 9). Children of intermarriage were significantly more likely to mention their mothers and less likely to mention both parents. Grandparents were mentioned by about one-fifth of children of inmarriage and intermarriage. By contrast, clergy, teachers, and advisers were rarely mentioned by either group. Children of intermarriage were even less likely to mention these adult influences and more likely to claim that no one influenced their religious identities.

When asked how these adults influenced their Jewish identity, most respondents cited ongoing patterns of interaction that cumulatively shaped their thinking. These included informal discussions and role-modeling about religion, spirituality, culture, heritage, and ethical behavior (Figure 10). Smaller proportions of both groups cited shared experiences that occurred in the home, such as celebration of holidays and Shabbat or observance of religious traditions or rituals, outside the home, such as synagogue or church involvement, religious education or lifecycle events. Children of intermarriage were more likely to mention role modeling forms of influence and less likely to mention specific experiences inside or outside of the home, perhaps because they had fewer such religious experiences. Finally, a small proportion of respondents—three percent overall—said that an adult served as a counter-example or cautionary tale of how not to be.

Survey respondents were also asked specifically about their relationships to grandparents. We report an analysis of their responses in a special sidebar on pages 36-37.

In summary, although most children of intermarriage in this study were raised Jewish, in some fashion, they typically had fewer Jewish socialization experiences than their
Figure 9. Person who had the greatest influence on religious identity when growing up

- Mom **: 30% (Children of inmarriage), 36% (Children of intermarriage)
- Dad: 23% (Children of inmarriage), 23% (Children of intermarriage)
- Grandparent(s): 19% (Children of inmarriage), 20% (Children of intermarriage)
- Both parents ***: 14% (Children of inmarriage), 6% (Children of intermarriage)
- Rabbis, teachers, advisers **: 4% (Children of inmarriage), 2% (Children of intermarriage)
- Authors, philosophers, etc.: 1% (Children of inmarriage), 1% (Children of intermarriage)
- Other: 6% (Children of inmarriage), 6% (Children of intermarriage)
- No one ***: 6% (Children of inmarriage), 10% (Children of intermarriage)

Figure 10. How adult role models influenced religious identity

- Conversation/Modeling ***: 61% (Children of inmarriage), 74% (Children of intermarriage)
- Home ***: 26% (Children of inmarriage), 19% (Children of intermarriage)
- Outside ***: 31% (Children of inmarriage), 23% (Children of intermarriage)
- Counter-example: 2% (Children of inmarriage), 2% (Children of intermarriage)
- Unintelligible: 5% (Children of inmarriage), 5% (Children of intermarriage)

Figures 9 & 10 Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive.

*** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05
counterparts who were raised in two Jewish parent households. On the whole, they were less likely to attend Jewish day or supplementary school, go to a Jewish summer camp or participate in a Jewish youth group.

Nonetheless, children of intermarriage were more likely to have had Jewish than Christian educational and social experiences, since rates of participation in Sunday School, Bible camp, Christian youth groups, and the like, were especially low.

At home, children of intermarriage tended to celebrate Hanukkah, Passover, and Christmas. These celebrations emphasized family and tradition rather than religious purpose and meaning. Compared to counterparts from inmarried backgrounds, the children of intermarriage were less likely to have attended Jewish worship services or regularly observe Shabbat. For all of our respondents, mothers proved to be critical shapers of religious identity, a pattern that helps to explain why children of intermarriage raised by Jewish mothers had more Jewish socialization experiences.

**Jewish Mothers**

The religion of the mother in an intermarried home exerts a strong influence on childhood experiences. Fifty-three percent of children of intermarriage who responded to our survey had a Jewish mother, while 47 percent had a non-Jewish mother. As a group, those with a Jewish mother had more Jewish experiences during childhood—more formal Jewish education, informal Jewish social opportunities, and Jewish ritual practices. For example, 51 percent of those whose mother was Jewish had some formal Jewish education, compared to 37 percent of those whose mother was not Jewish. Those whose mother was not Jewish had more Christian experiences during childhood as well. One explanation for this finding is that gender role differences in parenting cast mothers, compared to fathers, as the implementers of religious upbringing. Research on the experience of intermarried Jewish fathers also suggests that they, as compared with intermarried Jewish mothers, experience a greater sense of offense that their families are not fully accepted by the larger Jewish community, and this sentiment may result in their children being more estranged from communal institutions (McGinity, 2014).

In an open-ended question about role models, children of intermarriage described the role of their mothers in carrying out the religious agenda in the household:

*She just led the family agenda/activities/meals.* (Female, 30, mother Jewish)

*It’s complicated. My mother is Christian, but she was in charge of the household so she was the one who drove us to Hebrew school and made sure I studied for my bat mitzvah. We also decorated the Christmas tree with her and decorated Easter eggs with her.* (Female, 27, father Jewish)

*She was in charge of putting on any religious holiday celebrations, both Jewish and Christian—that was important to me as a kid.* (Female, 28, mother Jewish)
Jordan and Taylor

The remainder of the report examines how these childhood touchpoints interact with experiences during the college years to shape Jewish trajectories in young adulthood. In order to simplify the story as we consider an expanding number of contingencies, we must limit the number of childhood patterns we actively consider. In most of the analyses that follow, we hold measures of childhood upbringing at the levels characteristic of a “typical” child of intermarriage and a “typical” child of inmarriage.

For illustrative purposes, we will call the typical child of intermarriage Taylor. Taylor’s childhood background—average among children of intermarriage in this study—includes celebration of Hanukkah and Passover, celebration of Christmas and occasional attendance at Christian worship services, no formal Jewish education, and no informal Jewish activities such as camp or youth group.

Taylor will be compared to Jordan, our typical child of inmarriage. Jordan’s background—average among children of inmarriage in this study—includes celebration of Hanukkah, Passover and monthly attendance at Jewish worship services, minimal Christian experiences, Jewish supplementary school, and some experience of Jewish camp and youth group (Figure 11). For details about the statistical construction of Jordan and Taylor, see Technical Appendix C.

Notice that Taylor and Jordan are not gendered identities. In the current study, as in previous research (e.g., Fishman & Parmer, 2008), female respondents often scored higher on measures of Jewish attitudes and behaviors. However, because gender differences affect children of intermarriage and children of inmarriage equally, we do not treat gender as a category of analysis. In the sections that follow, although we will occasionally use a female pronoun for ease of communication, Taylor and Jordan should be viewed as gender neutral. In Part Two, we follow Taylor and Jordan to the college campus.

Figure 11. Jordan and Taylor: Typical children of inmarriage and intermarriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Typical child of inmarriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Jewish supplementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some informal Jewish activities (such as camp and youth group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Celebrated Hanukkah and Passover and attended Jewish religious services monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Minimal Christian experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taylor</th>
<th>Typical child of intermarriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No formal Jewish education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No informal childhood Jewish activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Celebrated Hanukkah and Passover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Celebrated Christmas and occasionally attended Christian religious services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part Two: College Touchpoints

For many young adults, college is the first time that they live independently and at a distance from family. This period represents their entrance into the developmental stage of “emerging adulthood” characterized by exploration of personal identity, values, and lifestyles (Arnett, 2004). College campuses become a “liminal space” where the boundaries of personal identity are loosened and open to re-examination (Szakolczai, 2009). This section of the report examines the Jewish touchpoints during the college years including participation in Birthright Israel, participation in Jewish groups on campus, and enrollment in college courses specifically focused on Israel, Jewish studies, or Hebrew language.

Childhood Jewish experiences are important predictors of participation in Jewish activities during the college years. To illustrate this relationship, we developed multivariate statistical models that examine how four measures of religious upbringing—Jewish education, Jewish holiday and religious observance, Jewish informal activities, and Christian experiences—are related to participation in college Jewish activities. The details of the statistical analyses are presented in Technical Appendix C. Below, we begin by discussing participation in Birthright Israel. We then continue with a discussion of college groups and courses, illustrating our findings with predictions for Taylor, our typical child of intermarriage, and Jordan, our typical child of inmarriage.

Birthright Israel

In its 15 years of operation, Birthright Israel has sent roughly 75,000 North American children of intermarriage on a ten-day educational tour of Israel. During its early years, about 20 percent of North American applicants to Birthright Israel were children of intermarriage. In recent years, the proportion has increased and, at present, more than 30 percent of the applicants are children of intermarriage.

Despite this increase, children of intermarriage remain underrepresented compared to their counterparts raised by inmarried parents. Furthermore, even among applicants to Birthright Israel from 2009 to 2014, children of intermarriage were less likely to actually go on a trip (65 percent, compared to 72 percent of children of inmarriage), and less likely to do so during college (29 percent compared to 41 percent of children of inmarriage; see Figure 12). Notably, these figures are for young adults who ever applied to the program. The level of participation for all eligible young adults, including those who never applied, would be much lower.

In interviews, study participants described the personal significance of the Israel tour experience. For many, the encounter with a broad spectrum of Israeli and diaspora Jewry was especially meaningful:

*It was nice to hear the stories [of the other trip participants]. Some of them were raised very Jewish, had bar mitzvahs, had bat mitzvahs, and, so the point of me bringing up Israel and my Birthright trip is I was bat mitzvahed there! Our counselor…was a rabbi and we did naming ceremonies, we had bar mitzvahs, it was amazing.* (Female, 30, father Jewish)

*I interacted with Iraqi Jews and Yemeni Jews…the people I know are Ashkenazi…. The first thing they say when you get off the plane is ‘welcome home.’ And I was sort of
chuckling at that...But actually I left there feeling like ‘this is so comfortable, these are my people.’ (Female, 24, father Jewish)

When I got to college, I did Birthright, and I really had a great experience, and I think it was eye-opening to see Jews from other parts of the world, the soldiers was [sic] kind of a cool experience, and then I became more involved with Judaism after that. I’d gone a couple times for Shabbos in freshman and sophomore year, before Birthright, but after that I tried to go every week when I could. (Male, 26, mother Jewish)

Because our study sample was drawn from Birthright applicants, we cannot analyze the childhood experiences associated with a decision to apply to the program. However, in the discussion below, we demonstrate that participation in Birthright Israel during college is associated with involvement with Jewish groups on campus and taking college courses on Jewish subjects.

### Jewish Groups

Survey respondents were asked how active they were in Jewish groups, such as Hillel and Chabad, during college. The response categories extended from “not at all” to “very much.” As shown in Figure 13, Taylor, a typical child of intermarriage, has a 32 percent probability of participating in Jewish groups during college “a little” or more if she does not go on Birthright Israel trip and a 51 percent probability of participating if she does go on a trip. Jordan, a typical child of inmarriage, has a 59 percent probability of participating in Jewish groups “a little” or more if she does not go on Birthright Israel trip and a 76 percent probability of participating if she does go on a trip.

In addition to Birthright Israel participation, Taylor and Jordan's backgrounds obviously make a difference, but how? In our statistical model, childhood Jewish education, informal Jewish activities, and Jewish holiday and family...
observance are all significant, positive predictors of participation in college Jewish groups.\textsuperscript{10} Christian experiences are not a significant predictor—meaning Christian experiences in childhood did not reduce the likelihood of participating in college Jewish groups. Similarly, parental intermarriage was not a significant predictor—meaning that the disparity between Taylor and Jordan is explained by their disparate experiences with Jewish education, informal Jewish activities, and holiday and family observance and not by the religious identity of their parents.

Despite the strong, positive relationship between childhood Jewish experiences and participation in college Jewish groups, individuals without childhood Jewish experiences do find their way to Hillel, Chabad, and other groups. Without going on Birthright Israel, Taylor has a one-in-three probability of being involved in Jewish campus organizations (Figure 13). But even without any Jewish education, informal Jewish activities or Jewish holiday and family observances in childhood, or participation in Birthright Israel, a child of intermarriage has a better than one-in-five (22 percent) probability of being involved in a college Jewish group.\textsuperscript{11}

Furthermore, interviews with young adult children of intermarriage suggested that when they did find their way to Jewish campus organizations, their experiences were positive and in some cases transformative. The welcome they experienced allowed them to reconsider their Jewish identity and expand their knowledge and practice.

My first year in college I was brought to a Hillel service by a friend, by a classmate, and immediately bonded with it. And so the sense of the religious Jewish identity that I’d been lacking was really born when I was seventeen.

(Male, 33, father Jewish)

\textbf{Figure 13. Probability of being active “a little” or more in Jewish groups as undergraduates}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure13.png}
\caption{Probability of being active “a little” or more in Jewish groups as undergraduates}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Note:} Predictive margins from a logistic regression model of participation in college Jewish groups on parental intermarriage, childhood experiences, and Birthright Israel participation during college. See Table 2 in Technical Appendix D.
Everyone just flooded this little tiny Chabad House. So, that’s kind of when I started picking things up more and feeling more connected, but in a sense, at the same time, I felt distant. Because, okay, I’m in this super Orthodox, Hasidic home, and they don’t consider me Jewish, yet they were still very open and welcoming to me. (Female, 24, father Jewish)

Some friends of mine that I met through a class were like ‘come to Hillel with us.’ And I was like ‘No, I can’t; they won’t accept me there’ and my friend said ‘they will accept you.’ Between Birthright and actually going to Hillel and not being turned away and not having anyone question me about it, it just felt interesting and comfortable. I’m allowed to learn about this part of my heritage that I didn’t think I was allowed to. (Female, 29, father Jewish)

Unfortunately, due to their limited participation in formal Jewish education, many young adult children of intermarriage have sparse knowledge of Judaism. In interviews, these young adults often reported having Jewish cultural facility but no knowledge of Jewish religion. For these individuals it was daunting to enter Jewish campus organizations where they expected to feel ignorant and incompetent.

Part of the reason I probably didn’t participate in college is that I assumed that you needed to be, like, Jewish Jewish. And I identified as Jewish, but I wasn’t, like, fall-on Jewish. I couldn’t recite all the Hebrew. I couldn’t do everything. (Female, 29, mother Jewish)

I think it can be a little bit isolating, especially a lot of the people who do go to Hillel and are involved in Jewish stuff went to day school, went to Ramah, did a year in Israel, and that’s really foreign to me. (Male, 26, mother Jewish)

I always felt as though I didn’t quite know what was going on compared to everyone else, cause I hadn’t gone through Hebrew school. (Female, 23, father Jewish)

College Courses

Survey respondents were asked if they took college courses in Jewish studies, Israel, or Hebrew language. As shown in Figure 14, Taylor, a typical child of intermarriage, has a 23 percent probability of taking a course if she does not go on Birthright Israel and a 30 percent probability of taking a course if she does go on the program. Jordan, a typical child of inmarriage, has a 33 percent probability of taking a course if she does not go on Birthright Israel and a 41 percent probability of taking a course if she does go on the program.

In our statistical model, Jewish holiday and family observance and informal Jewish activities are related to taking courses; childhood Jewish education, parental intermarriage, and Christian experiences are not. As with participation in college Jewish groups, the disparity between Taylor and Jordan is fully attributable to their disparate levels of Jewish socializing experiences during childhood.
Without going on Birthright Israel, Taylor has a nearly one-in-four probability of taking a Jewish-focused college course as an undergraduate (Figure 14). Furthermore, even individuals without any Jewish experiences growing up do sometimes take courses in Jewish studies, Israel, or Hebrew language. Without any Jewish education, informal Jewish activities or Jewish holiday and family observances in childhood, a child of intermarriage has almost a one-in-five (19 percent) probability of taking a course.\textsuperscript{13}

The interviews did not explicitly touch upon college courses, and few interviewees introduced the topic on their own. However, in response to an open-ended survey question about experiences since high school that influenced Jewish identity, a number of respondents commented on college courses:

\textit{One of my professors at my undergraduate university was also a rabbi. I took a number of classes from him, and it was incredibly influential to think of Judaism from the position of an academic and a scholar rather than as a believer.} (Female, 24, father Jewish)

\textit{I had a professor in college for Jewish studies that I had over multiple classes. He was very much an atheist but knew the Jewish culture extremely well. He allowed me to understand that it is ok to be secular and Jewish at the same time.} (Male, 29, mother Jewish)

In summary, this part of the report examined the association between various aspects of religious upbringing and participation in Jewish activities during the college years. We learned that childhood Jewish experiences—including informal activities and holiday observance—are important predictors of participation in college groups and enrollment in Jewish and Israel-related courses; so too is participation in Birthright Israel during the college years.

\textbf{Figure 14. Probability of any undergraduate course on Israel, Jewish studies, or Hebrew}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure14.png}
\caption{Probability of any undergraduate course on Israel, Jewish studies, or Hebrew.}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Note:} Predictive margins from a logistic regression model of taking an undergraduate course on Israel, Jewish studies, or Hebrew on parental intermarriage, childhood experiences, and Birthright Israel participation during college. See Table 3 in Technical Appendix D.
Importantly, we also noted that Christian experiences and parental intermarriage were, in and of themselves, unrelated to these choices. In general, children of intermarriage in our study were less involved in campus-based Jewish activities because of Jewish experiential deficits in childhood—and because they are less likely to participate in Birthright Israel during college.

Although the likelihood of participation in Jewish activities during college increases with the strength of Jewish upbringing and Birthright Israel participation, college is also a time when some children of intermarriage have their first organized Jewish experiences. As we have seen, in interviews and open-ended survey questions, children of intermarriage often commented on the importance of these experiences for the development of their current attitudes and practices, a topic to which we turn in Part Three.

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**Matrilineal Definitions of Jewish Identity**

In 1983, the Reform movement created a new path for children of intermarriage with its acceptance of Jewish identity through patrilineal descent. The new policy held that a child with only one Jewish parent, and that Jewish parent being the father, could be considered Jewish provided that the child’s Jewish identity “be established through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people” (CCAR, 1983). Unfortunately, while this approach has undoubtedly attracted more intermarried families to Jewish life, it has simultaneously created divisions within the Jewish community over the definition of who is a Jew (Bayme, 2002).

In interviews, children of intermarriage described being offended by references to matrilineal heritage as necessary for Jewish identity. In many cases it was peers with two Jewish parents who challenged children of intermarriage regarding their authenticity as Jews. Even some children of intermarriage with a Jewish mother reacted to this as an exclusionary boundary that has little to do with their experience of Jewish identity and living.

*My mother’s not Jewish, and that’s it! I’ve always taken great offense to that. Because Judaism is first and foremost a religion, and no one can tell anyone else what their religion is. I’m Jewish because I was born into part of a Jewish family. And, and that’s it. It’s upsetting to me for anyone to say otherwise.* (Female, 30, father Jewish)

*I never like when people are like ‘Oh, well, it’s the RIGHT parent,’ cause my mother is Jewish. In my mind, like, if you want to consider yourself Jewish, you should be considered Jewish. We are a small people. And so we should not be an exclusive club. We should welcome whoever wants to be in our club. So I get offended by that. There is no ‘right side’ to have Jewish.* (Female, 30, mother Jewish)

*He [friend] handed me a pamphlet for the campus Hillel and said ‘please come to services and convert.’ I looked at him, I said ‘I’m not asking you to understand, I’m asking you to respect it because I’ve made my peace with who I am. I don’t need you to tell me what I need to do.’* (Male, 24, father Jewish)
Part Three: Trajectories

What Jewish rituals and practices do study participants observe, and what are their attitudes toward Israel and the Jewish people? How do they identify themselves, religiously and ethnically, and what are their attitudes about marriage and children? In this part of the report we examine our respondents’ practices, attitudes, and identities in young adulthood, at the time they participated in our study.

In the previous section, we learned that childhood Jewish experiences were important predictors of participation in Jewish activities during the college years. Such experiences are also associated with most of our respondents’ current attitudes and practices. However, among the strongest predictors of our respondents’ current Jewish trajectories were their experiences during the college years. Below, we examine the association between three kinds of college experiences—participation in Jewish groups, taking Jewish and Israel-related courses, and going on a Birthright Israel trip—and various current measures of Jewish engagement.

To isolate as best we can the unique contributions of each of these college experiences, we continue to follow Taylor and Jordan, holding measures of childhood upbringing at the levels characteristic of a typical child of intermarriage and a typical child of inmarriage. This approach enables us to see how childhood background interacts with college experience to shape Jewish trajectories.

Finally, we hasten to add a qualification concerning the limits of our research method. The analyses that follow isolate the statistical relationship between particular experiences and the outcomes that interest us. The method cannot definitively tell us whether such experiences would have identical effects on individuals who did not seek them out. We take up this question of correlation versus causation in the Discussion and Policy Implications section of the report.

Jewish Ritual and Practice

Survey respondents were asked about Jewish religious practices in their current lives. Figure 15 shows the likelihood of Taylor and Jordan celebrating Jewish holidays under various scenarios.

Participation in college groups and going on a Birthright Israel trip are each associated with substantially greater likelihood of holiday observance. For example, with no college experiences, Taylor has a 44 percent likelihood of having celebrated Rosh Hashanah in the year prior to the survey; with participation in a college groups only, the likelihood climbs to 64 percent.

When participation in college groups and a Birthright Israel trip are combined—and a Jewish or Israel-themed course is added to the mix—the statistical effect is even stronger. Under this scenario of maximum college experience, the likelihood of Taylor celebrating Rosh Hashanah goes to 83 percent, nearly as high as Jordan with similar college experiences (95 percent).

In relation to Passover and Rosh Hashanah, participation in college activities has about the same effect on Taylor and Jordan. In relation to Purim, however, Birthright Israel interacts with parental intermarriage, meaning that the impact is greater for Taylor than for Jordan.
Attendance at religious services (Figure 16) and having a special meal for Shabbat (Figure 17) follow a similar pattern. The likelihood of observance of these Jewish practices goes up for both Taylor and Jordan with each of the college experiences. Overall, the effect of participation in college groups is slightly larger than participation in Birthright Israel when these activities are experienced separately; but the greatest effect is observed when these college activities are combined (and a course is added).

In relation to Shabbat observance (Figure 17), the effect of participation in college groups is greater for Taylor than for Jordan. For example, the likelihood of Taylor sometimes observing Shabbat with a special meal increases from 32 percent with no college experiences to 58 percent with participation in college groups, nearly drawing even to Jordan with participation in college groups (61 percent), and surpassing Jordan without (46 percent).

Finally, the differences between Taylor and Jordan in relation to the measures of Jewish ritual observance just discussed were, in most cases, linked to their disparate Jewish and Christian experiences growing up rather than their parents’ intermarriage status. Only in relation to Rosh Hashanah observance did having intermarried parents make a difference above and beyond differences in upbringing.
Figure 16. Probability of attending Jewish religious services

Note: Predictive margins from a multinomial logistic regression model of attendance at Jewish religious services on parental intermarriage, childhood experiences, and college Jewish experiences. See Table 7 in Technical Appendix D.

Figure 17. Probability of having a special meal on Shabbat

Note: Predictive margins from an ordered logistic regression model of having a special meal on Shabbat on parental intermarriage, childhood experiences, and college Jewish experiences. See Table 8 in Technical Appendix D.
Millennial Children of Intermarriage

Israel

Survey respondents were asked a number of questions about Israel. Beginning with feelings of connection, participation in a Birthright Israel trip has an enormous impact, especially on children of intermarriage. Indeed, because Birthright Israel participation interacts with parental intermarriage, the substantial gap that exists between Taylor and Jordan without college experiences disappears when they both go on a Birthright Israel trip.

As above, Birthright Israel together with participation in a course and college groups generate the biggest change in connection to Israel. Under this scenario, both Taylor and Jordan have a three-in-four likelihood of feeling either very or somewhat connected to Israel (Figure 18).

Survey respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about Israel. The series included statements with positive and negative valence (“Israel upholds the social and economic rights of all of its citizens”; “Israel is guilty of violating the human rights of the Palestinian people”). Five of these statements were combined into a single scale measuring a general favorable orientation toward Israel, with values ranging from zero to five (Figure 19).

Across the various scenarios, college experiences increased the likelihood of a favorable impression of Israel. Taylor with all three college experience is more likely to have positive impressions of Israel than Jordan without. However, when compared to the previous measure of feeling connected to Israel, the effect of college experiences on Israel favorability seems quite modest. This finding is consistent with a broader literature (e.g., Cohen & Kelman, 2007; Sasson et al., 2014) that finds emotional connection to Israel to be only loosely linked to views on contentious political issues.

Figure 18. Probability of connection to Israel

Note: Predictive margins from an ordered logistic regression model of connection to Israel on parental intermarriage, childhood Jewish experiences, and college experiences. See Table 9 in Technical Appendix D.
Respondents were asked how much they would understand if asked to read a text in Hebrew (Figure 20). Unsurprisingly, participation in either a college group or a Birthright Israel trip is associated with only a modest increase in the likelihood of Hebrew comprehension, however measured. Taylor, with either of these experiences under her belt, is still much less likely than Jordan with no college experiences to recognize Hebrew letters. Even when all three college experiences are combined, Taylor does not catch up to Jordan. Thus, in the case of Hebrew comprehension, the lasting impact of formal Jewish education—and its absence—is fully evident.

Figure 19. Predicted favorability toward Israel

![Figure 19](image)

Note: Predictive margins from a linear regression model of the Israel favorability index on parental intermarriage, childhood Jewish experiences, and college experiences. See Table 10 in Technical Appendix D.

Figure 20. Probability of Hebrew comprehension

![Figure 20](image)

Note: Predictive margins from a multinomial logistic regression model of Hebrew comprehension on parental intermarriage, childhood Jewish experiences, and college experiences. See Table 11 in Technical Appendix D.
Grandparents

Survey respondents were asked how close they were to their grandparents while growing up. For children of intermarriage, being “very close” to Jewish grandparents while growing up had a positive impact on many Jewish attitudes and behaviors in young adulthood, including but not limited to: celebrating Rosh Hashanah and Passover, attending Jewish religious services, feeling connected to Israel, identifying as Jewish by religion, and believing it is important to marry someone Jewish, and raise Jewish children. This positive relationship between closeness to Jewish grandparents and Jewish attitudes and behaviors in young adulthood persisted even when controlling for childhood and college experiences and for the gender of the Jewish parent.15

However, children of intermarriage—especially when the father was the Jewish parent—were less likely than their counterparts with two Jewish parents to have had a close relationship to Jewish grandparents while growing up. Overall, it was more common to be "very close" to maternal grandparents than to paternal grandparents, and it was also more common to be "very close" to Jewish grandparents than to non-Jewish grandparents. These two phenomena working together led to large differences by parental marriage status. Children of inmarriage were more likely than children of intermarriage to be close to at least one set of grandparents, and thus more likely to be close to at least one set of Jewish grandparents. Similarly, children of intermarriage whose mothers were Jewish were more likely than children of intermarriage whose fathers were Jewish to be close to at least one set of grandparents, and more likely to be close to at least one set of Jewish grandparents (Figure 21). Thus, some of the disparity in Jewish outcomes stemming from the gender of the Jewish parent is due to differences in the quality of closeness to grandparents, as mediated by mothers and fathers.

In interviews, children of intermarriage explained their relationship with their Jewish grandparents:

*My grandma was the real matriarch of my father’s side of the family and she brought the whole family together…and she would cook for…all the major high holidays, so we were at Grandma and Grandpa’s house a lot in the fall.* (Female, 30, father Jewish)

*I came to understand what Judaism meant through phone calls with my grandmother. That happened typically once every three months or so.* (Male, 33, father Jewish)

*When I was at my grandparents’ [home], on my dad’s side [Jewish] we would go to services on Fridays.* (Female, 28, father Jewish)

*It was really, really important for my grandmother [Jewish] that we be raised Jewish. It was just something that she felt very strongly about.* (Male, 26, mother Jewish)

*My extended family on both sides were more actively religious than my nuclear family so when grandma came over there was more of a Jewish feel to it.* (Male, 25, mother Jewish)
Figure 21. Closeness to grandparents

Children of intermarriage

- Very close to both sets of grandparents: 33%
- Very close to one set of grandparents: 37%
- Not very close to any grandparents: 30%

Children of intermarriage, Mother Jewish

- Very close to both sets of grandparents: 20%
- Very close to one set of grandparents: 44%
- Not very close to any grandparents: 35%
- Very close to non-Jewish grandparents: 8%
- Very close to Jewish grandparents: 36%

Children of intermarriage, Father Jewish

- Very close to both sets of grandparents: 23%
- Very close to one set of grandparents: 41%
- Not very close to any grandparents: 36%
- Very close to non-Jewish grandparents: 19%
- Very close to Jewish grandparents: 17%
Jewish Peoplehood

Survey respondents were asked a variety of questions about Jewish social connections. Beginning with attitudes, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with three statements: “I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people,” “It’s important for me to have friends with whom I can share the experience of being Jewish,” and “I feel a responsibility to take care of Jews wherever they live.” These statements were combined into a single scale measuring strength of Jewish peoplehood sentiment, with values ranging from zero to five.16

For both Taylor and Jordan, predicted scale scores are significantly lower in the scenario without college Jewish experiences (Figure 22). With all three college experiences, Taylor’s scores are higher than Jordan’s with either one or no college experiences.

Furthermore, there was a significant interaction between Birthright Israel participation and parental intermarriage, meaning that the impact of Birthright Israel participation on sense of Jewish peoplehood was larger for Taylor than for Jordan.

On a more personal level, respondents were asked whether their close friends and romantic partners were Jewish. In contrast to many other measures, substantial differences between Taylor and Jordan persisted across all scenarios. While the probability that half or more of their close friends are Jewish is higher for both in scenarios with college Jewish experiences than the scenario without, Jordan without college Jewish experiences is about as likely as Taylor with all three college experiences to have half or more of her close friends be Jewish (Figure 23). Parental intermarriage has a direct effect on the proportion of friends who are Jewish, even

Figure 22. Predicted sense of Jewish peoplehood

![Bar chart showing predicted sense of Jewish peoplehood for Jordan and Taylor across different scenarios.](chart)

Note: Predictive margins from a linear regression model of the Jewish peoplehood index on parental intermarriage, childhood Jewish experiences, and college experiences. See Table 12 in Technical Appendix D.
after accounting for childhood Jewish and Christian experiences.

Survey respondents were asked if they have a significant other and if that person is Jewish. There was a significant interaction between Birthright Israel participation and parental intermarriage on having a Jewish partner, meaning that participation in Birthright Israel increased the likelihood of having a Jewish partner for Taylor more than it did for Jordan (Figure 24).

Notably, college Jewish experiences appears to be associated with both an increase in the probability of having a Jewish partner and a

Figure 23. Probability that half or more of close friends are Jewish

![Bar chart showing the probability that half or more of close friends are Jewish for Jordan and Taylor with different parental intermarriage and college Jewish experiences categories]

Note: Predictive margins from a multinomial logistic regression model of proportion of close friends Jewish on parental intermarriage, childhood experiences, and college Jewish experiences. See Table 13 in Technical Appendix D.

Figure 24. Probability of having a Jewish partner

![Bar chart showing the probability of having a Jewish partner for Jordan and Taylor with different parental intermarriage and college Jewish experiences categories]

Note: Predictive margins from a multinomial logistic regression model of Jewish partner on parental intermarriage, childhood experiences, and college Jewish experiences. See Table 14 in Technical Appendix D.
decrease in the probability of having a non-Jewish partner, such that those with college Jewish experiences are more likely to be single. This may be because young adults seeking a Jewish partner confront a smaller dating pool (see Saxe et al., 2011, p. 17).

**Religious and Ethnic Identity**

All of the children of intermarriage in our study applied to participate in Birthright Israel and, as part of the application process, indicated that they identified as Jewish. However, as noted in the discussion of the study sample, their Jewish background characteristics were similar to the broader population of children of intermarriage, a population that includes both Jews and non-Jews. Moreover, at the time of the survey, many did not identify Judaism as their religion and some did not identify as Jewish aside from religion.

In this section, we examine how experiences during the college years are related to the current religious and ethnic identities of study participants. Respondents were asked, “What is your religion, if any?” and were then offered the opportunity to indicate any other religion(s) with which they also identified. They were then asked whether they considered themselves Jewish or partially Jewish aside from religion. Respondents who answered “Jewish” to the question about religion were classified as Jewish by religion. Respondents who indicated no religion but identified “aside from religion” as Jewish were classified as Jews of no religion (or Jews by ethnicity). Respondents who mentioned more than one religion were classified as either Jewish primary or Jewish secondary. Finally, respondents who indicated only a religion other than Judaism were classified as not Jewish.

As indicated in Figure 25, Taylor was much more likely to identify as Jewish by religion under scenarios in which she participates in campus-based Jewish activities. With no Jewish activities during the college years, Taylor had just a 20 percent likelihood of identifying as Jewish by religion at the time she completed the survey. With participation in college groups the probability increased to 38 percent; with participation on a Birthright Israel trip, to 35 percent.

Although each type of college Jewish experience is independently associated with an increased likelihood of Taylor identifying as Jewish by religion, the combined relationship is especially strong. Taylor with experience in college groups, Birthright Israel, and college courses has a 58 percent likelihood of identifying as Jewish by religion and a combined 79 percent likelihood of identifying as Jewish by religion or ethnicity.

Under all scenarios, children of inmarriage are highly likely to identify as Jewish by religion. There is little room for upward movement. Thus, as children of intermarriage accumulate Jewish experiences during the college years, the gap in Jewish identification shrinks. It does not altogether disappear, however, due to the enduring effects of childhood upbringing and an independent effect of parental marriage type.

In interviews, we learned that children of intermarriage often think about their ethnic and religious identities differently than children of inmarriage, even when endowed with a variety of Jewish experiences. A sidebar (page 42) describes the significance of multiculturalism in the identities of many children of intermarriage.
Figure 25. Probability of identifying as Jewish

Note: Predictive margins from a multinomial logistic regression model of Jewish identity on parental intermarriage, childhood experiences, and college Jewish experiences. See Table 15 in Technical Appendix D.
**Children of Intermarriage as Multicultural**

The survey asked respondents to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement “I think of myself as multicultural.” Children of intermarriage were significantly more likely than children of inmarriage to agree or agree strongly with this statement (52 percent compared to 40 percent). Similarly, our interviewees often described themselves as very comfortable with diversity. Through their own home rituals and those of their extended family, they gained appreciation for cultural difference and the experience of switching from one “cultural frame” to another. Their baseline perspective is to see culturally different groups as more similar than different. Our interviewees often described their multicultural background as rich, valuable, and a source of strength.

> I guess I like having a foot in both worlds, or in lots of different worlds. I think I sort of pride myself on being able to understand all sorts of people. And I think that’s a good thing in this world, you know? It makes me a little more open minded, but I think open-mindedness is not a value that’s always accepted or appreciated. (Female, 33, mother Jewish)

> At [college] there was a Muslim-Jewish dialogue group that I was involved in...Because I came from an interfaith background myself, I saw the value and I just thought it was really interesting to learn about other people’s faiths. (Male, 26, mother Jewish)

> I always say I am bi-heritage Jewish and very proud of it. (Female, 23, father Jewish)

Perhaps as a result of their multicultural sensibilities, our interviewees often reported being repelled by statements they regard as ethnocentric—as implying the superiority of a particular national, cultural, or religious group.

> I remember getting emails, lots of pro-Israel emails and things about how many awards Jewish people have won compared to Muslim people. Some of that struck me as off-putting. (Male, 23, father Jewish)

> I think that an appreciation for modern non-Jewish or less religious culture and other people out there can actually help us grow and be better Jews, but if you’re not open to that, if you’re scared of it, I don’t really want to be part of that, you know, that mentality. (Female, 33, mother Jewish)
Marriage and Children

Survey respondents were asked how important it was to them to marry someone Jewish and to raise their children Jewish. In the case of marriage—as in the case of friendship networks—differences between Taylor and Jordan persist across the various scenarios. Having college Jewish experiences is associated with believing it is important to marry someone Jewish. However, childhood Jewish experiences and parental intermarriage exercise an enduring effect, such that Jordan without any college Jewish experiences is about as likely as Taylor with all three college experiences to believe it’s important to marry someone Jewish (Figure 26).

The survey findings amplify a prominent theme in our interviews. Most of our interviewees were unmarried. When asked about future spouses, few seemed to view being Jewish as a critical characteristic. They see themselves as proof that inmarriage is not a necessary ingredient for having a Jewish home or raising children as Jews.

I don’t really see it as much of an issue because here I am, and I completely identify as Jewish. (Female, 29, mother Jewish)

I think there’s an assumption that if you identify as Jewish you obviously want to marry a Jew. I’m going to marry whoever I marry! Doesn’t really matter to me so much, like, what their religion is. I’m currently very seriously dating someone who is not Jewish. I brought him to Passover this past year, and that’s something I’ve made pretty clear to him, if we’re together, and if we ever have children, Passover is going to happen. Shabbat probably would happen, and things like that, because those are traditions that I do want to honor. (Female, 29, mother Jewish)

Figure 26. Probability of thinking it is important to marry someone Jewish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jordan - typical child of inmarriage</th>
<th>Taylor - typical child of intermarriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No college Jewish experience</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Only</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthright Only</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group + Course + Birthright</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Predictive margins from an ordered logistic regression model of importance of marrying someone Jewish on parental intermarriage, childhood experiences, and college Jewish experiences. See Table 16 in Technical Appendix D.
I feel like whoever I choose to date...and marry is going to be accepting of where I'm coming from, and open to it, regardless of if they have the same belief systems or not, and I would like to have the same for whatever their belief systems are...It's not on my list of things 'to marry a Jewish man' or someone of any specific belief system, but that individual needs to be accepting and okay with exposing our future hypothetical kids to my opinions and my beliefs and my heritage. (Female, 23, father Jewish)

College experiences have a large impact on respondents’ views on the importance of raising children Jewish. This is most evident in the comparison of Taylor with all three college experiences (69 percent very or somewhat important) and Jordan with none (64 percent very or somewhat important). However, upbringing also matters a great deal, such that Taylor with either Birthright Israel or college group experience is still less likely than Jordan with no college experiences to view this as important (Figure 27). Parental intermarriage has no direct effect above and beyond its impact on upbringing. Finally, there is a significant interaction between Birthright Israel participation and parental intermarriage on the importance of raising Jewish children, meaning that the impact of Birthright Israel was larger for Taylor than Jordan on this measure.

As we have seen, many interviewees expressed their commitment to raising children Jewish—or in some instances, children with exposure to Jewish traditions—regardless of whether they marry someone who is Jewish. As well, interviewees often discussed the importance of giving their children multicultural experiences such as they had in their own childhood, and to sharing in cultural/religious traditions that their spouse will bring into their future family.

Figure 27. Probability of thinking it is important to raise children Jewish

![Graph showing the probability of thinking it is important to raise children Jewish](image)

Note: Predictive margins from an ordered logistic regression model of importance of raising children Jewish on parental intermarriage, childhood experiences, and college Jewish experiences. See Table 17 in Technical Appendix D.
I think one of the biggest things that I want in raising my children is for them to know the world and see the world for all the many people and ways of thinking that it holds. Coming from an interfaith family, it’s right there in front of you. You don’t have to look out to the outside world to see that. (Female, 30, mother Jewish)

In summary, in this section we examined how childhood experiences interact with experiences during the college years to shape Jewish trajectories in young adulthood. We learned that college experiences have strong independent effects on many measures of young adult Jewish attitudes and behaviors, often narrowing the differences between children of intermarriage and children of inmarriage. In relation to religious observance, participation in college Jewish groups was especially significant; in relation to attitudes about Israel, Birthright Israel participation was key. Religious identity and attitudes about marriage and raising children were also associated with college Jewish experiences; in relation to these forms of Jewish engagement, however, we observed the enduring significance of childhood background. In the next section, we discuss the study’s findings and reflect upon their policy significance.

**Birthright Israel after College**

What about children of intermarriage who went on a Birthright Israel trip after college? For a few of the outcomes we measured—for example, attending Jewish religious services, having a special meal on Shabbat and having a Jewish partner—the impact of Birthright Israel was stronger for those who went before turning 22 compared to those who went after. However, on most outcomes, Birthright Israel had about the same effect on older as younger participants.20
Discussion and Policy Implications

The landmark 2013 Pew Research Center survey of Jewish Americans found that children of intermarriage in the millennial generation are more likely than their older counterparts to have been raised Jewish, and to be Jewish in young adulthood (Saxe, Sasson, & Aronson, 2014). Nonetheless, as confirmed by the current study, many children of intermarriage have weak Jewish educational backgrounds. They are less likely than peers with two Jewish parents to have attended a Jewish day school or supplementary school, observed Jewish holidays, and participated in informal Jewish social and educational activities during their childhood or teen years. As a result, they were less likely during their college years to participate in a Jewish group (e.g., Hillel, Chabad) or take a Jewish or Israel-related course.

Yet, among children of intermarriage who had those experiences during college—and, among those who participated in Birthright Israel—the impact years later is profound. We illustrated this effect by creating statistical portraits of Taylor, a typical child of intermarried parents, and Jordan, a typical child of inmarried parents. Taylor had little childhood experience with formal or informal Jewish education but did celebrate Hanukkah and Passover, as well as Christmas. Jordan attended Jewish supplementary school, experienced some camp and youth group activities, observed major Jewish holidays, and attended religious services at least sometimes.

Analyzing Taylor and Jordan’s levels of Jewish engagement at the time they completed our survey, the influence of college Jewish experiences—in particular, participation in Birthright Israel and campus-based Jewish groups such as Hillel or Chabad—is plainly evident. With college Jewish experiences, both Taylor and Jordan were more likely to identify as Jewish, observe Jewish holidays and practices, feel connected to Israel and the Jewish people, have Jewish friends and partners, and believe that it is important to raise children Jewish. College experiences were especially influential for children of intermarriage, shrinking the gap between Taylor and Jordan in relation to many forms of Jewish engagement.

Within the overall pattern, we detected more nuanced lines of influence. Unsurprisingly, the Birthright Israel experience proved especially influential on respondents’ overall feelings and attitudes toward Israel. Participation in a college Jewish group was especially significant in relation to religious observance, especially the frequency of celebrating Shabbat. Childhood Jewish experiences—Jewish education, informal activities, and home ritual—were especially influential in relation to identifying as Jewish, knowing how to read Hebrew, and believing that it is important to raise children Jewish.

For most of the Jewish engagement outcomes we assessed, the impact of parental intermarriage was indirect; it flowed through the impact on Jewish experiences in childhood. Parental intermarriage did, however, have a direct impact on several outcomes, including Jewish identity, Rosh Hashanah observance, and having Jewish friends and a Jewish partner.

Another notable finding is that relationships with grandparents have an independent effect and are associated with several outcomes. Children of intermarriage were less likely to have close ties to Jewish grandparents than their counterparts who had two sets. They were, however, more likely to have ties to
their Jewish than non-Jewish grandparents, and such ties predict a whole variety of attitudes and behaviors in young adulthood, including identifying as Jewish by religion, celebrating Jewish holidays, feeling a connection to Israel and the Jewish people, and wanting to marry someone Jewish. This positive relationship between closeness to Jewish grandparents and Jewish attitudes and behaviors in young adulthood persisted even when controlling for childhood and college experiences and for the gender of the Jewish parent.

The study also revealed that children of intermarriage who identify as Jewish feel strongly that their experiences as children of intermarriage have value. They reject the idea that their Jewish identity is diluted or inferior. Instead, they view their multicultural background as enriching, enabling an appreciation of diverse cultures and practices. At the same time, they often recognize large gaps in their Jewish educational and experiential backgrounds, which many lament and seek to rectify.

Overall, we learned that religious and ethnic identity continues to develop throughout the life-course. There are multiple pathways to establishing or re-establishing Jewish identity and engagement. Among our respondents raised by intermarried parents, some were raised exclusively Jewish from birth. In other cases, respondents became involved in Jewish life around the age they started preparation for their bar and bat mitzvah, while still others had their first significant Jewish experience during their college years. For many of these individuals, the college years proved crucial, serving to consolidate childhood Jewish experiences among those who had them, and establish new identities and modes of conduct among those who had little exposure to Jewish education or socialization during childhood.

**Correlation or Causation?**

The study developed statistical models to examine relationships between childhood and college experiences and measures of later Jewish engagement. This approach has enabled us to examine the unique contributions of various experiences by holding all other experiences and background characteristics constant. But one factor that statistical modeling cannot hold constant is personal motivation unrelated to experiences and characteristics. The models cannot tell us, therefore, whether policy interventions can increase the number of individuals who choose particular experiences, or whether those experiences will have the same effect on individuals who did not choose them under existing circumstances.

The example of Birthright Israel, however, should reassure us on both counts. Since its launch in 1999, the program has steadily increased the number of participants from North America. The program has grown from 8-12,000 annually in the early years, to nearly 35,000 in recent years (Taglit-Birthright Israel, 2013). As the program has grown in size, the share of participants who are children of intermarriage has steadily increased; so, too, has the overall share of Jewish young adults that has ever visited Israel (Pew Research Center, 2013). Thus, Birthright Israel demonstrates that a Jewish educational intervention can provide an experience, on a massive scale, to people who otherwise might not have sought it out.

Moreover, the present study compares Birthright Israel participants and nonparticipants, all of whom applied to the program. Thus, in contrast to college groups and courses, in the case of Birthright Israel, the problem of selection bias related to the motivation to participate is negligible.
More than a decade of evaluation research on Birthright Israel demonstrates its impact on participants (Saxe & Chazan, 2008; Saxe et al., 2014). As the program grew in size and came to include ever more participants with weak Jewish educational backgrounds, its effect—the difference between participants and nonparticipants on measures of Jewish attitudes and behaviors—has remained about the same (Saxe et al., 2008; Shain, Saxe, Hecht, Wright, & Sasson, 2015). If anything, evaluation studies have shown—and the present research reinforces the finding—that Birthright Israel is in some instances more influential among participants with especially weak Jewish backgrounds.

In recent decades, Hillel and Chabad have become active on ever more campuses, and the number of Israel advocacy organizations, representing a diversity of viewpoints, has increased (Koren, Saxe, & Fleisch, In press). Jewish studies and, especially, Israel-related courses have multiplied (Koren and Fishman, 2015; Koren, Saxe, & Fleisch, In press). The data do not exist to explore how the influence of these college experiences may have changed as participation increased. The present study, however, has documented a substantial effect among study participants who attended college up to a decade apart. This is reassuring and adds to our confidence that the introduction of high-quality programs can drive-up the number of children of intermarriage who have Jewish experiences and that these experiences will in turn shape their Jewish trajectories.

**Toward a Policy Agenda**

During the past two decades, Jewish organizations have made substantial new investments in educational initiatives for children, teenagers, and young adults. The participation of intermarried parents and their children has increased, but most children from intermarried households still receive little or no formal Jewish education and have few Jewish experiences at home or with their peers. Parents are gatekeepers for religious education, and intermarried parents must weigh a variety of considerations—including their individual beliefs and commitments, and those of their extended families and communities—when making decisions about what’s best for their children. Consequently, although high-quality programs that welcome children of all types of families are no doubt important, the capacity of Jewish organizations to dramatically alter the status quo regarding the childhood religious socialization of children of intermarriage may be limited.

The central conclusion of the present study is that identity development continues throughout emerging adulthood. Furthermore, the developmental stage that begins when children leave home to attend college has, for the millennial generation, become extended and increasingly important. To be sure, childhood is important, but the clear implication of the present study is that there should be an increased emphasis on emerging adulthood, a period when children of intermarriage become their own gatekeepers, and explore what Jewish identity means to them.

From our analyses, we draw several specific policy-relevant conclusions:

1. The present study shows that Birthright Israel is a critical intervention. It has demonstrable effects for both Taylor, our typical child of intermarriage, and Jordan, our typical child of inmarriage, but its impact is particularly profound for Taylor. Currently, less than 20 percent of college students are able to take advantage of
Birthright Israel (up to 30 percent, through age 26). Increasing the level of participation so that at least half of all young adults have had a peer educational experience in Israel would likely be a “game changer” with respect to its impact on American Jewish life.

2. The study also shows that participation in college groups and, to a lesser extent, enrollment in Jewish and Israel-related courses, makes a difference. When these Jewish activities are combined with a Birthright Israel trip during the college years the effects are even more pronounced. What participating in college Jewish life and going on a Birthright Israel trip have in common is the experience of being part of a Jewish group. This is, perhaps, one of the elements of Jewish life that many children of intermarriage do not experience while growing up. The quality and diversity of campus-based Jewish organizations is variable and Jewish communal policy should do more to ensure that college students have ample opportunities to learn about and experience Jewish life. Research on the quality and range of offerings on major college campuses, and the strategies that maximize participation, could aid these efforts.

3. The findings of the present study suggest that post-college opportunities for Jewish education and engagement are also important. Although Birthright Israel is available through age 26 and continues to have a strong impact with older individuals, particularly for children of intermarriage, a broad range of opportunities needs to be available to young adults.

4. Difficulties aside, reaching more intermarried families with formal and informal educational opportunities for their children should be a priority. As we have seen, such experiences launch children on a pathway to Jewish involvement in college and beyond. Particular attention should be given to the bar and bat mitzvah dilemma. As we learned, many children of intermarriage discover their desire to celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah only when they notice their friends doing the same. There is a need for alternative forms of preparation and qualification for this important Jewish milestone. For all childhood experiences, Jewish grandparents should be viewed as a critical resource, and programs should be designed to leverage their influence.

5. Finally, initiatives for all life stages should be crafted and implemented in ways that reflect the sensibilities of contemporary children of intermarriage. Young adult children of intermarriage often view their mixed heritage as an asset that enables them to negotiate an increasingly multicultural society. They react negatively to perceived ethnocentrism on the part of the Jewish community. Many are also hurt or dismayed by casual comments that dismiss the Jewish status of persons whose mothers are not Jewish. To be sure, Jewish organizations will continue to adopt different approaches on the question of patrilineal descent according to their religious beliefs. All Jewish organizations, however, can encourage awareness of the strong feelings of Jewish identity and authenticity felt by many individuals who claim Jewish status according to paternity alone.
Conclusion

Children of intermarriage in the millennial generation are far more likely to identify as Jewish compared to the children of intermarriages in previous generations. As a result, the proportion of American Jews who are the children of intermarriage has increased in the millennial generation to roughly half, and it is likely to increase further in the generation that follows. Intermarriage and the tendency of the children of intermarriage to identify as Jewish in such large numbers are reshaping the contours of American Jewish life.

The widespread predictions that intermarriage would rapidly reduce the size of the American Jewish population have thus far proved wrong. However, the present study has shown that most millennial generation children of intermarriage received little Jewish education during childhood and were unlikely to be involved in Jewish activities during the college years. As a consequence, in young adulthood most express attitudes and report behaviors that suggest modest ties to Judaism and the Jewish community.

But this study has also shown that when children of intermarriage participate in Jewish activities during the college years, their ties to Judaism and the Jewish community strengthen. Indeed, when our “Taylors” had a variety of Jewish experiences during college, they developed along Jewish trajectories similar (if not identical) to our “Jordans.”

Why does participation in Birthright Israel and campus-based activities such as Hillel and Chabad have such substantial effects? These programs and interventions reach college students and other young adults at a time when they are deciding for themselves who they want to be and how they want to live their lives. For millennial children of intermarriage in particular, the stage of life that begins with college appears to open wide the gate for exploration of new ways to think about and enact Jewish identity. With exposure to programs that create Jewish community among peers and enable even young people with very sparse Jewish backgrounds to experience Jewish life, children of intermarriage learn that being Jewish is a framework of meaning rooted in memory, action, and connections to other people and to community.

Our findings are a challenge to the Jewish community to continue expansion of opportunities for children of intermarriage, to learn about and experience Jewish life at all stages of their lives, including during the critical years of college and young adulthood.
Notes

1. The few respondents who did not live with both a mother and a father lived with single parents (N=23), with same-sex parents (N=2), or in other situations such as guardianship (N=9).

2. In a few cases (N=2) a stepparent was considered a parent at the respondent’s request.

3. Limited to survey participants currently residing in the United States (92 percent).

4. Limited to survey participants currently residing in the United States (92 percent).

5. The non-Jewish parents of children of intermarriage were overwhelmingly Christian (89 percent), or else atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular. Only 1 percent (N=16) were a religion other than Christian (e.g., Muslim, Buddhist). This report therefore focuses on Jewish and Christian behaviors only.

6. Based on the 79 percent of children of intermarriage who answered this question.

7. Virtually all survey respondents (99 percent) lived with both a mother and a father during childhood (see “Who is a Child of Intermarriage?” on page 10). The handful of respondents who did not live with both a mother and a father are excluded from this analysis.

8. For example, in the current study, female respondents were more likely to attend religious services, feel connected to Israel, and believe it’s important to marry someone Jewish, among other differences.

9. In addition, among applicants to Birthright Israel from summer 2009 to winter 2013-14, those with more Christian experiences in their backgrounds and those with Jewish day school education were both less likely to participate. All reports of the impact of Birthright Israel in this report remain after controlling for all these differences between participants and nonparticipants (see Table 1 in Technical Appendix D).

10. See Table 2 in Technical Appendix D.

11. Predictive margin with all childhood Jewish experiences and Birthright Israel participation held at the minimum values.

12. See Table 3 in Technical Appendix D.

13. Predictive margin with all childhood Jewish experiences and Birthright Israel participation held at the minimum values.

14. The scale represents the mean of five items (α=0.78): Israel is a world center of high-tech innovation; Israel is part of God’s plan for the Jewish people; Israel is under constant threat from hostile neighbors who seek its destruction; Israel is guilty of violating the human rights of the Palestinian people [reversed]; Israel upholds the social and political equality of all its citizens.

15. The details of these analyses are available from the authors upon request.

16. The scale represents the mean of the three items (α=0.87).

17. Chi-Square with 2 degrees of freedom significant at p<.001.

18. Excludes respondents who did not plan on getting married (N=21).

19. Excludes respondents who did not plan on raising children (N=60).

20. The details of these analyses are available from the authors upon request.
References


The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University is a multi-disciplinary research institute dedicated to the study of American Jewry and issues related to contemporary Jewish life.

The Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI), hosted at CMJS, uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze socio-demographic data on the Jewish community.