

Brandeis University

Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies

JEWISH FUTURES PROJECT

The Impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel: 2010 Update

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The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, 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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Our gratitude notwithstanding, the authors take full responsibility for the design and conduct of the study.

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Executive Summary

This report examines the impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel on its alumni five to nine years after their visits to Israel. The data are derived from the second year of a longitudinal study of Jewish young adults. The broader study, of which this research is a part, examines the ways in which Jewish young adults make decisions about marriage and family, participate in the life of the Jewish community, and view the role of Israel in their lives. Findings from the broader study, including those not related to the impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel, will be explored in a separate report.

The first year of the study was conducted in 2009 with a sample of individuals who applied to Taglit-Birthright Israel in the years 2001-2004. In 2010, the original sample was contacted again for the second year of the study. In addition, the original sample was expanded to include a sample of individuals who applied to the program in 2005. Although not perfectly representative of young adult Jews, the Taglit applicant pool—now including more than 300,000 individuals—is remarkably diverse. These young people represent virtually every combination of secular and religious upbringing, as well as the geographic and socio-economic diversity of American Jewry.

The survey was a dual-mode telephone and Web survey. The survey instrument included questions about Jewish educational and family background; connection to Israel; involvement with Jewish organizations and activities; and dating, marriage, and children. The section of the survey pertaining to spouses and children included

detailed questions about the Jewish characteristics and choices of those with young families. To ensure a high response rate, the number of questions was kept to a minimum. Interviews were conducted with 1,677 eligible respondents. The overall response rate was 61.9 percent.

Survey analysis focused on non-Orthodox respondents and compared the responses of Taglit participants to a control group of individuals who applied to the program and did not participate. In parallel to the findings from the study's first year, strong evidence was found that the Taglit experience influences participants' Jewish identities and feelings about Israel:

- Participants were 46 percent more likely to feel very much connected to Israel than their counterparts who applied but did not go, and the Taglit effect was greatest among participants from relatively weaker Jewish backgrounds.
- Participants were 28 percent more likely to report feeling very confident in their ability to explain Israel's current situation than their counterparts who did not go.
- Participants were 51 percent more likely to marry a Jewish person. Taglit's influence on marital choice was related to age (impact was greatest among participants who went on trips at a younger age) but not to Jewish educational background (the effect was consistent across the spectrum of Jewish educational experience).
- Taglit's influence extended beyond participants to their spouses: Among respondents whose spouses were not

raised by Jews, participants' spouses were more than four times as likely to have converted to Judaism as the spouses of nonparticipants.

- Participants were 28 percent more likely to rate marrying a Jew as somewhat or very important.
- Participants with no children were 35 percent more likely to view raising their children as Jewish as very important. However, for those with children there was no evidence of behavioral differences with respect to the religion in which children are being raised, Jewish circumcision and naming ceremonies, and choice of Jewish day care or preschool.

The significant and substantial differences in attitudes and behavior indicate that the program has had substantial impact.

Additional consequences will undoubtedly unfold as our research respondents grow older and as their adult lives evolve. Along with tracking the attitudes and Jewish engagement of our panel, future studies will examine the impact of participation on others—spouses of Taglit participants and their children. The scale of the Taglit initiative suggests that it has the potential to transform, not just individuals, but the community at large. Understanding how and the extent to which this happens will be the focus of ongoing study.

Introduction

The U.S. Jewish community has been likened to an ice cube melting at room temperature, with the population presumed to be in decline and the distinctiveness of American Jews threatened by forces of assimilation (cf. Shay, 2007). Although the narrative of a shrinking Jewish community is a popular view, it reflects a long-standing fear about the impact of Jewish assimilation more than the current reality. In fact, the number of individuals in the United States who consider themselves Jewish is increasing, even as their distinctiveness is becoming blurred (Saxe, 2010). And, more importantly in terms of the future, the last two decades of American Jewish life have witnessed a transformation of the educational system, both formal and informal. The current generation of young adults (those 18-35) has had far more opportunities to gain Jewish education and become involved in Jewish life than earlier generations.

Taglit-Birthright Israel is an important part of this story. During its first ten years, Taglit sent more than 200,000 American Jewish young adults on educational tours of Israel. The present report examines Taglit's impact on participants five to nine years after their visits to Israel.

In several ways, this research adopts a novel approach. First, the data reported here are drawn from a longitudinal study that will continue for at least four more years. The longitudinal nature of the study enables us to understand the trajectories taken by young people from college through establishing adult lives. Second, although we will track attitudinal changes over time, our focal

interest is on decision making and behavior. In particular, we are interested in the ways in which Jewish young adults make decisions about marriage and family, participation in the life of the Jewish community, and the role of Israel in their lives. Our overarching goal is to develop a future-oriented understanding of how the next adult generation of American Jews makes meaningful decisions about their Jewish lives.

The report describes the second year of the longitudinal study. The sample population is comprised of Jewish young adults who applied to participate in Taglit-Birthright Israel, five to nine years ago. The first year of the study was conducted in 2009 with a sample of individuals who applied to Taglit in the years 2001-2004. In 2010, the original sample was contacted again for the second year of the study. In addition, the original sample was expanded to include a sample of individuals who applied to the program in 2005. Although not perfectly representative of young adult Jews, the Taglit applicant pool—which now includes more than 300,000 individuals—is remarkably diverse. These young people represent virtually every combination of secular and religious upbringing, as well as the geographic and socio-economic diversity of American Jewry.

The study is rooted in a social psychological theoretical tradition which views individual behavior as responsive to the experiences and attitudes of the group. As well, the study reflects a developmental perspective and attempts to describe the life course development of young adult Jews. Insofar as

some of our research participants took part in Taglit-Birthright Israel, and a comparison group applied to the program but did not participate, the study incorporates the principles of experimental design to provide a long-term assessment of the impact of an intensive Jewish educational experience.

Members of the millennial generation, who are the focus of the present research, have been heavily studied, and there are a host of competing views about how they will

influence social, cultural, and religious institutions (see, e.g., Howe & Strauss, 2000; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Winograd & Hais, 2009). Jewish millennials are a subset of this generation. While their development reflects the context of coming of age in the modern era, the present research is designed to assess distinctive aspects of their identities as Jews and their engagement with the Jewish community and Israel.

Methods

The population for this study is a sample of eligible applicants—both participants and nonparticipants—to Taglit in the winter rounds of 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005. The sampling frame is explained in detail in *Generation Birthright Israel: Technical Appendices* (Saxe et al., 2009, p. 10-11).¹

Wave 2 Sample

The Wave 2 sample was comprised of the original Wave 1 sample plus a sample from the 2005 trip cohort.

Original Sample. The Wave 1 sample was designed to represent nonparticipants and participants during Taglit’s early years (2001-2004), stratified to over-represent older participants (who are more likely to be married/have their own families at the time of the study). Cases were eligible for inclusion if they had a primary or secondary residence in the United States at the time of most recent application to the program; information on date of birth and sex, and contact information.

All 1,223 individuals who completed the Wave 1 survey and an additional 23

individuals who returned partial surveys were included in the Wave 2 sample. In addition, all eligible, non-refusal cases where no response was obtained in Wave 1 were included in the sample.²

2005 Cohort Sample. An additional sample of the winter 2005 cohort (n=700) was drawn in a manner comparable to the Wave 1 sample but with a slight modification to the stratification scheme. Whereas in Wave 1 participants were oversampled, the objective for the 2005 cohort was an achieved sample evenly divided between participants and nonparticipants. Because nonparticipants had responded at a lower rate than participants in 2009, an evenly distributed achieved sample was sought by including 400 nonparticipants and 300 participants.

Sample allocation was calculated using MINLP, a mixed-integer nonlinear programming solver (Fletcher & Leyffer, n.d) in an AMPL environment (Fourer, Gay, & Kernighan, 2009). The total number of cases included in the Wave 2 sample is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Wave 2 Original and New Samples

Sample source	Participants	Non- participants	Total
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
Wave 1 – complete or partial interview	923	323	1,246
Wave 1 – non-contact (eligible, living, non-refusal)	503	370	873
New 2005 cohort	300	400	700
Total	1,726	1,093	2,819

Survey instrument

The survey instrument included questions about Jewish educational and family background; connection to Israel; involvement with Jewish organizations and activities; and dating, marriage, and children. The section of the survey pertaining to spouses and children included detailed questions about the Jewish characteristics and choices of those with young families. To ensure a high response rate, the overall number of questions was kept to a minimum. Full telephone interviews averaged 12 minutes in length. Prior to the launch of the study, extensive cognitive testing was conducted, together with pilot tests of the instrument and the calling protocol. Most of the interview questions were close-ended, with an open-ended question asked at the end of the survey.

Protocol

The survey was a dual-mode telephone and Web survey. Most of the respondents participating in the survey for the second year completed the survey online (updated email addresses were collected at the end of the survey in Wave 1). However, because many email addresses—recorded in Taglit’s registration database five to nine years prior to our study—proved unreliable, most interviews with new respondents were conducted by telephone. Telephone calls were made at the Cohen Center by interviewers, most of whom were Brandeis University undergraduate and graduate students specifically trained for this study. The research team utilized email messages,

phone calling, data enhancement services, and extensive Internet searching to obtain up-to-date contact information for all potential respondents. Field operations began on June 10, 2010 and ceased on November 16, 2010.

Response Rates

Interviews were conducted with 1,677 eligible respondents.³ The response rate (AAPOR RR4⁴) was 69.3 percent for Taglit participants and 49.2 percent for nonparticipants. The overall response rate (weighted because participants were oversampled) was 61.9 percent. Relatively few individuals explicitly refused to take the survey, although the rate for nonparticipants (12.1 percent) was higher than for participants (4.2 percent). The cooperation rates were 93.1 percent for participants and 78.7 percent for nonparticipants. For individuals who completed the Wave 1 survey the re-survey rate was 86.7 percent. Tables of final dispositions and outcome rates are shown in Appendix A.

Nonrespondents were overwhelmingly individuals who could not be located due to a lack of valid contact information. Although multiple means were used to track down nonrespondents, no contact information could be found for a significant number of them.

Weighting. In addition to design weights developed to account for the differential probabilities of selection due to sample stratification, poststratification weights were created using registration system information on age, Jewish denomination,

year of application, and gender. These weights correct for differences between the distribution of known characteristics of the respondents and known characteristics of the sampling frame (see Appendix A).

Analysis

Regression models (binary and ordinal logistic) were used to identify factors that interact with or were associated with participation in Taglit. Estimates from regression models are reported for outcome measures influenced by such factors. In all other instances, weighted frequencies and cross-tabulations are reported (see Saxe et al., 2009, page 12 and endnote 11).

Respondents Raised Orthodox

Respondents who were raised Orthodox are excluded from the analyses discussed in this report. For the outcome measures we examined (e.g., connection to Israel, confidence in explaining the situation in Israel, marriage to Jewish spouse, desire to raise children Jewish), Taglit had no significant impact on the raised Orthodox group alone. However, Taglit's effect on the population as a whole was still significant when these individuals were included.⁵

Findings

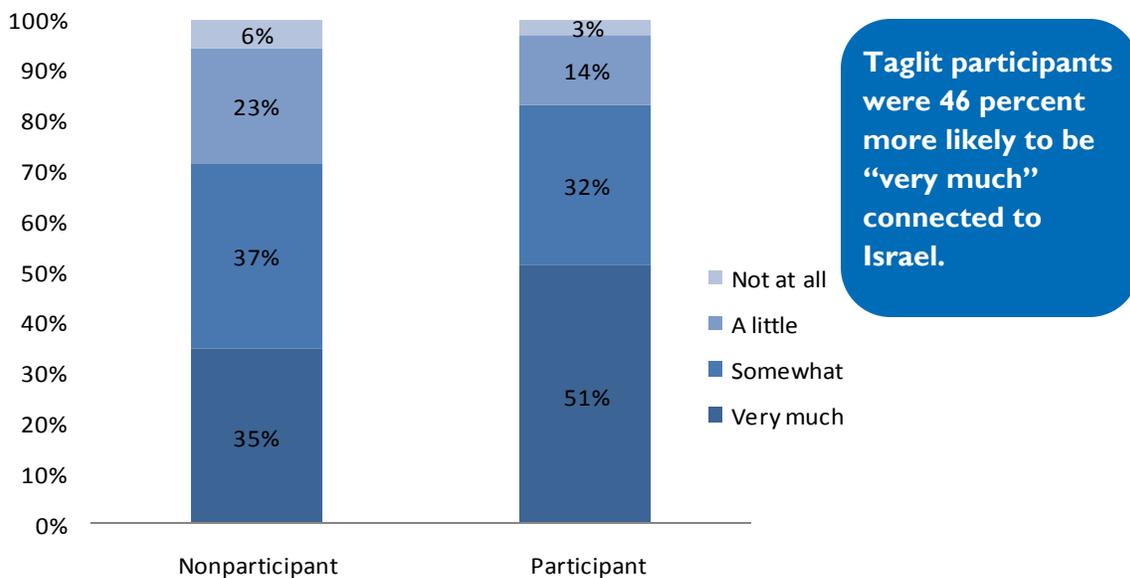
Relationship to Israel

Previous Taglit research has documented significant differences between participants and nonparticipants with respect to feelings and attitudes about Israel (Saxe et al., 2008, 2009). Current data from this study further confirm these trends across a number of measures.

Feeling Connected to Israel. Over half of Taglit participants reported feeling “very much” connected to Israel compared to just over one-third of nonparticipants (Figure 1). These findings are consistent with the first year of the longitudinal study and suggest that participants’ greater connection to Israel has not faded, even among Taglit alumni five to nine years removed from their trips to Israel.

The magnitude of Taglit’s impact on connection to Israel is not, however, the same for all respondents. Participants from diverse religious backgrounds were affected differently by the program. Respondents were asked if, during their high school years, anyone in their household regularly lit Shabbat candles, held or attended a Passover seder, celebrated Hanukkah, or kept kosher at home. The most frequently practiced ritual was celebrating Hanukkah (91 percent), followed by attending a Passover seder (84 percent), lighting Shabbat candles (37 percent), and keeping kosher at home (22 percent). These measures of ritual observance were ordered according to level of intensity, from least to greatest: (0) no ritual observance, (1) celebrating Hanukkah only, (2) holding or attending a Passover seder, (3) lighting Shabbat candles regularly,

Figure 1. Feeling Connected to Israel by Taglit Participation (Predicted Probabilities)



Note: “To what extent do you feel a connection to Israel?” Excludes those raised Orthodox.⁶

and (4) keeping kosher at home. Respondents were then grouped by the most intense ritual observed by their family.

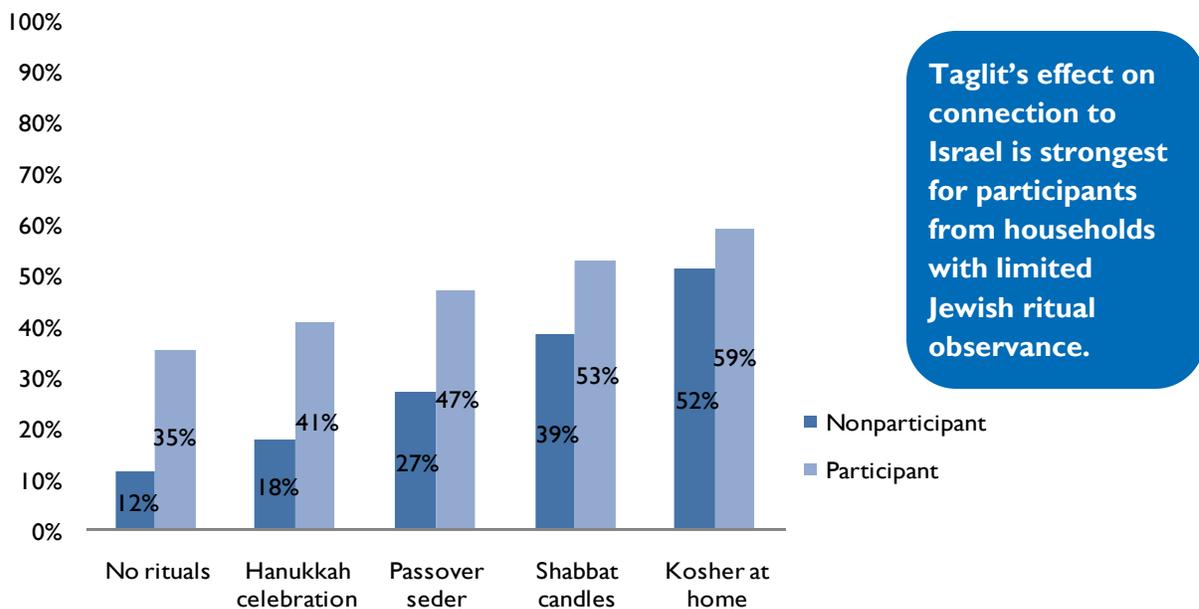
Taglit's impact on connection to Israel was strongest among participants with weaker Jewish backgrounds (Figure 2). Participants who reported no ritual practices in their home during high school were almost three times as likely to feel "very much" connected to Israel compared to nonparticipants from similar backgrounds. Participants whose ritual observance included only celebrating Hanukkah were slightly more than twice as likely as comparable nonparticipants to report feeling "very much" connected. In contrast, among respondents whose observance included the more regular rituals of lighting Shabbat

candles or keeping kosher, differences between Taglit participants and nonparticipants narrowed but did not disappear.

Confidence in Explaining Israel's Situation.

In addition to feeling more connected to Israel than nonparticipants, Taglit participants were more likely to indicate greater confidence in their ability to explain "the current situation in Israel" (Figure 3). Although Taglit's impact is slightly smaller than reported in the first year of the study (Saxe et al., 2009), participants were 28 percent more likely than nonparticipants to feel "very confident" in their ability to explain the current situation. Since the context for this question is constantly changing, the observed dip in confidence

Figure 2. Feeling "Very Much" Connected to Israel by Taglit Participation and High School Ritual Practice (Predicted Probabilities)



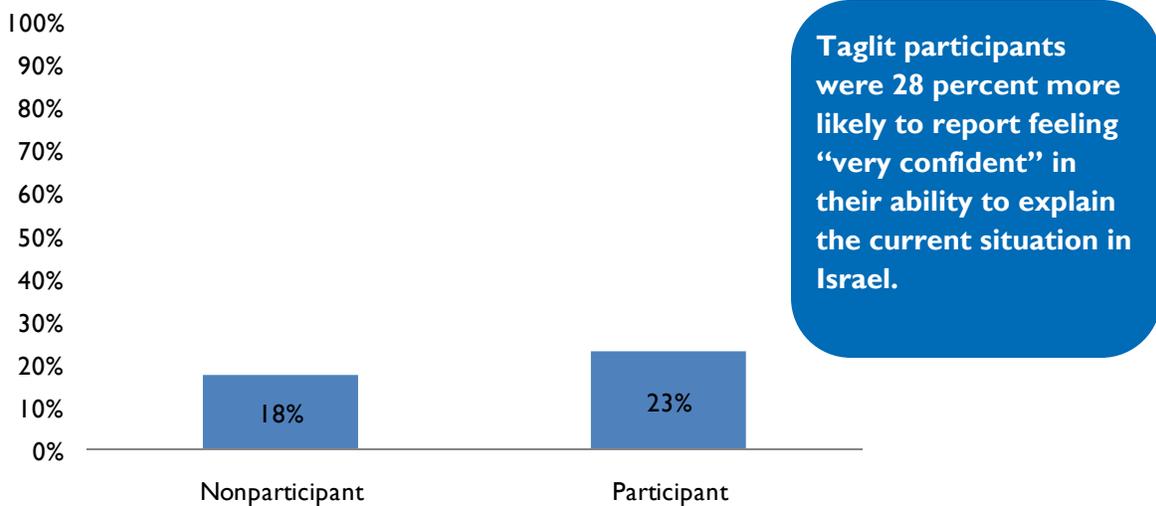
Note: "To what extent do you feel a connection to Israel?" Excludes those raised Orthodox.⁷

may be related to current events, such as the suspension of peace talks with the Palestinian Authority or the much-debated May 2010 flotilla incident.

Views of Israeli Politics. To further investigate Taglit’s influence on attitudes toward Israel, the survey asked respondents’ views on contentious issues related to the future of the West Bank and Jerusalem.⁹ Respondents were asked: “As part of a permanent settlement with the Palestinians, should Israel be willing to dismantle Jewish settlements in the West Bank?” and “In the framework of a permanent peace with the Palestinians, should Israel be willing to compromise on the status of Jerusalem as a united city under Israeli jurisdiction?” Taglit participation had no impact on participants’ opinions regarding dismantling

settlements or the future of Jerusalem. Excluding those respondents who had no opinion, approximately one-third of both participants and nonparticipants responded that Israel should dismantle “None of the Jewish settlements,” half responded “Some of the Jewish settlements,” and the rest responded “All of the Jewish settlements” in the West Bank. Again excluding respondents with no opinion, approximately one-third of participants and nonparticipants believed that Israel should be willing to compromise on the status of Jerusalem. As shown in Figure 4, however, participants were 12 percent more likely than nonparticipants to *have an opinion* on the Jerusalem question, rather than responding “Don’t know.” At the same time, Taglit participation had no effect on having an opinion on whether Israel should be willing

Figure 3. “Very Much” Confident in Ability to Explain Situation in Israel by Taglit Participation (Estimated Proportions)



Note: “If someone asked you about the current situation in Israel, how confident do you feel in your ability to give a good explanation?” Excludes those raised Orthodox.⁸

to dismantle Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

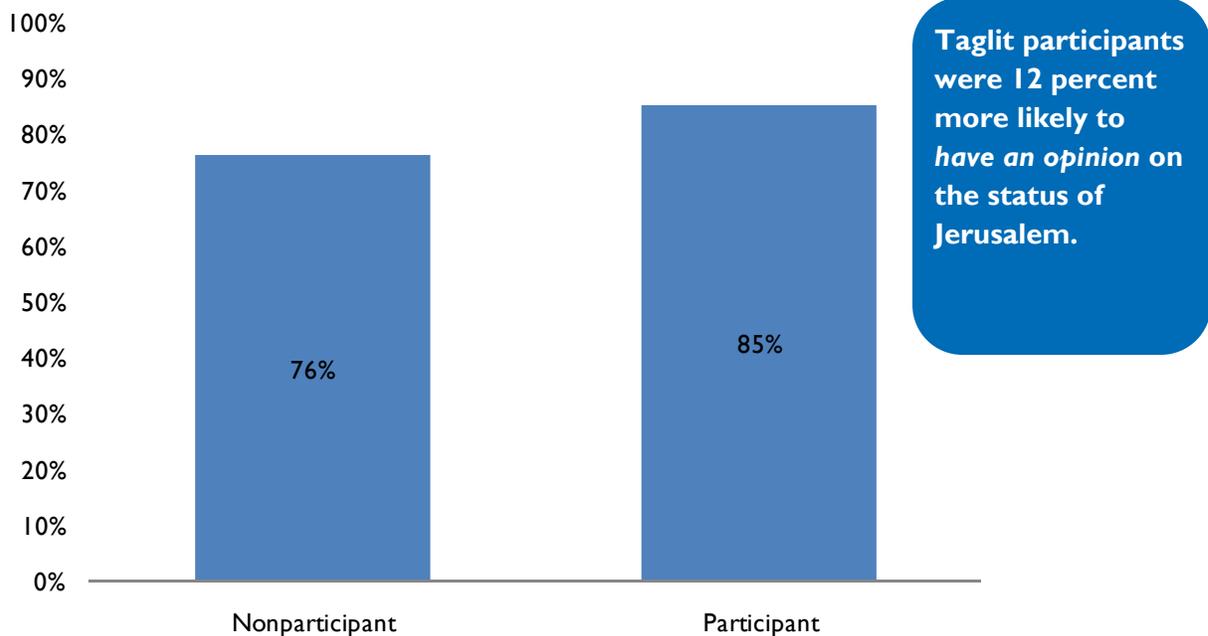
Marriage and Children

One of the important aims of the longitudinal study is to observe the choices made by Taglit alumni as increasing numbers of them marry and start families. Young adults' decisions about whom to marry, what type of wedding ceremony to conduct, and how to raise and educate children are indicators of their commitment

to remain part of the Jewish collective. In Wave 1, Taglit was observed to have a significant impact on participants' behaviors and attitudes regarding marriage and parenting (Saxe et al., 2009). The Wave 2 survey further explores this phenomenon.

*Relationship Status.*¹¹ Participants and nonparticipants above the age of 30 reported equal rates of marriage. However, among applicants below the age of 30, participants were less likely to be married than

Figure 4. Having an Opinion on the Status of Jerusalem by Taglit Participation (Predicted Probabilities)



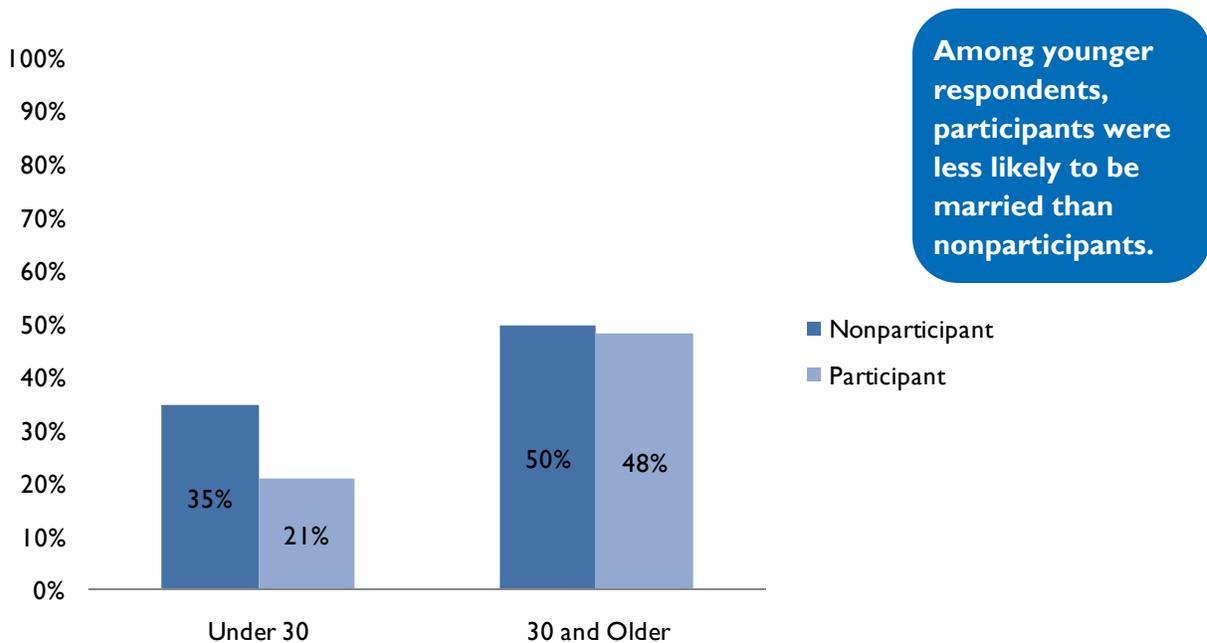
Note: "In the framework of a permanent peace with the Palestinians, should Israel be willing to compromise on the status of Jerusalem as a united city under Israeli jurisdiction?" Excludes those raised Orthodox.¹⁰

nonparticipants: 21 percent of participants compared with 35 percent of nonparticipants (Figure 5). These figures are in line with those found in the initial year of data collection (Saxe et al., 2009). There are several possible explanations for this difference, as we discuss below (see p. 17).

Choice of Spouse. Among married respondents, Taglit participants were 51 percent more likely than nonparticipants to be married to a Jew (Figure 6). This figure represents a significant Taglit impact on choice of spouse and is consistent with the figure reported in the first year of the study (Saxe et al., 2009).

Notably, over 25 percent of married participants and eight percent of married nonparticipants were married to Taglit alumni, indicating a potentially extensive impact of the Taglit experience far beyond the alumni pool. Insofar as choices regarding family and children (such as enrolling a child in Jewish education or becoming members of a synagogue) are made by both spouses, a non-trivial percentage of the nonparticipant sample will be making these choices together with a Taglit participant. Future analyses that aim to compare Taglit participants and nonparticipants on these measures may underestimate Taglit’s effect due to the influence of participant spouses on nonparticipant respondents.

Figure 5. Percent Married by Age and Taglit Participation (Estimated Proportions)

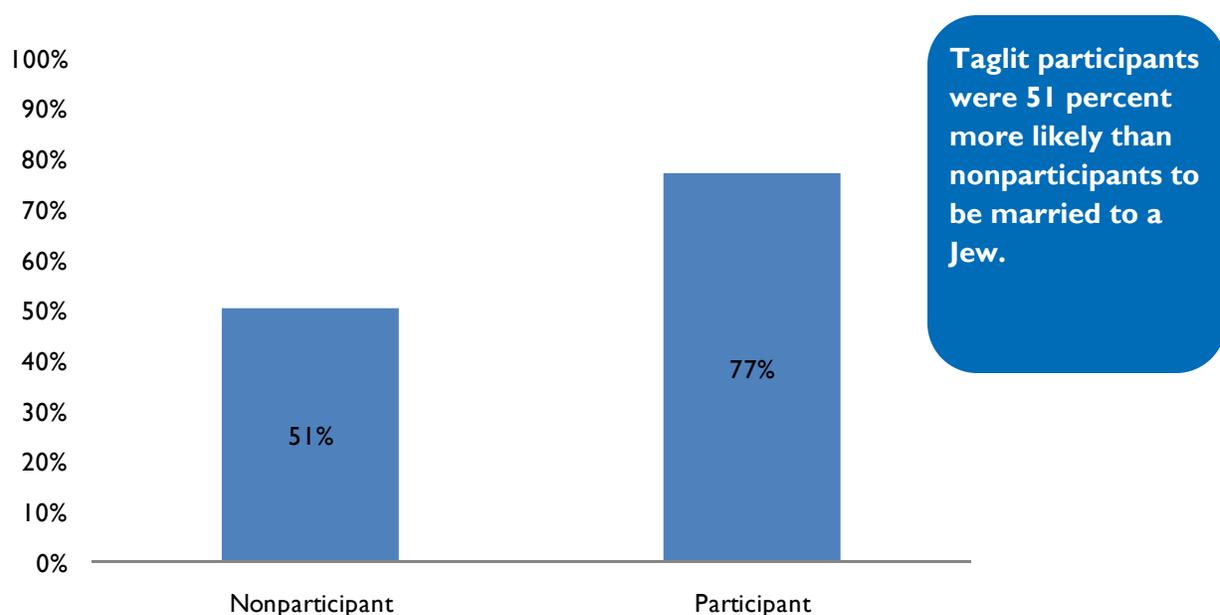


Note: Excludes those raised Orthodox.¹²

Figure 6 describes the probability of inmarriage of Taglit applicants who applied for the trip at age 22 (which is the average application age for married applicants). However, the data reveal that the trip had a greater impact on choice of spouse for those who went on the trip at an earlier age. Participants who went on the trip at a younger age, specifically during the college years (ages 18-21), were 89 percent more likely than nonparticipants who applied at that age to have a Jewish spouse. The difference between participants and nonparticipants in relation to inmarriage decreased as the age at the time of application increased. Participants who went

at the upper age limit of the program (25 or older) were no more likely to have a Jewish spouse than nonparticipants who applied to the program at the same age (Figure 7). This finding may reflect the fact that those on a Taglit trip during college are just beginning to form their adult social networks. An all-Jewish intensive peer program may have a greater chance of shaping choices regarding social circles and friendships among those whose social circles are still in flux. The program may have comparatively less impact on those whose social networks have already stabilized.

Figure 6. Inmarriage by Taglit Participation (Predicted Probabilities)

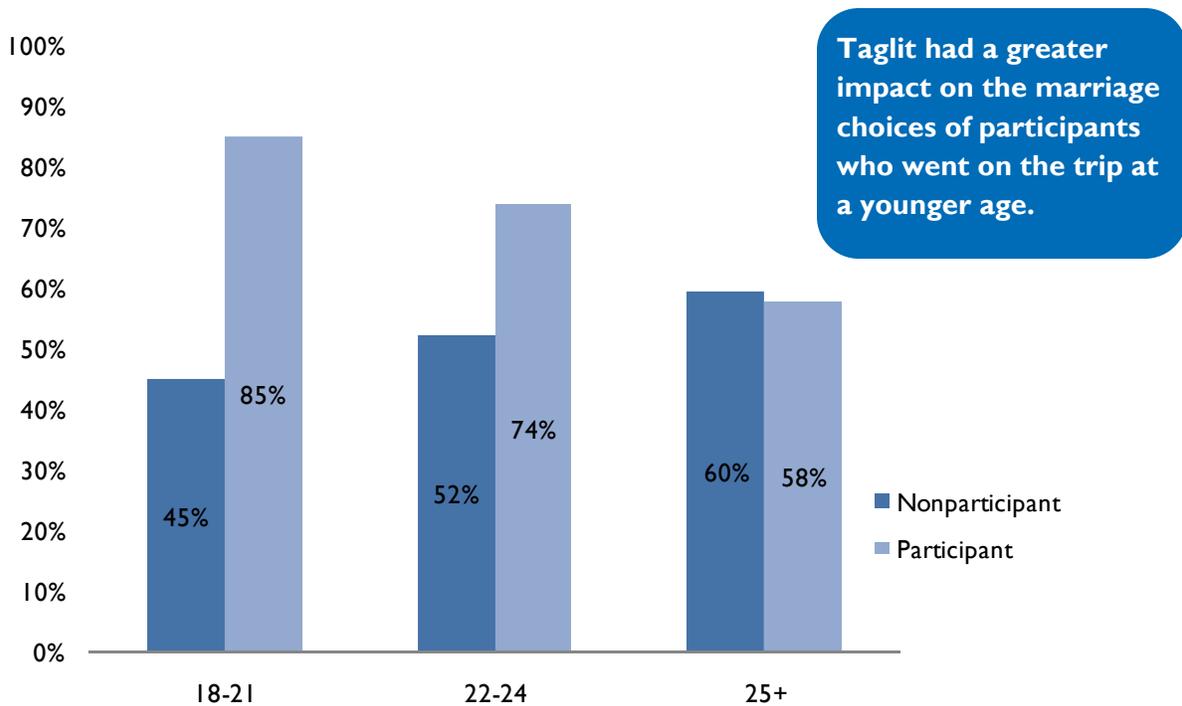


Note: Excludes those raised Orthodox.¹³

While Taglit’s effect on choice of spouse is different for those who applied to the trip at different ages, Taglit’s effect on inmarriage does not differ according to level/hours of Jewish education but instead remains constant (Figure 8).¹⁵ A large difference between participants and nonparticipants persisted even when the comparison was extended to those respondents with over 4000 hours of Jewish education, a figure more than twice the average amount of Jewish education received by respondents raised Conservative.

Analysis of Wave 1 responses indicated a stronger Taglit effect on the marital choices of respondents with intermarried parents, but cautioned that the finding, although statistically significant, was based on “extremely small cell sizes” (Saxe et al., 2009, p. 27). A more robust analysis utilizing the larger sample of married respondents from the Wave 2 survey did not observe this trend. Taglit did not have a differential impact on participants with intermarried parents. Nor was the effect on inmarriage different for those with varying

Figure 7. Inmarriage by Taglit Participation and Age at Time of Application (Predicted Probabilities)



Note: Excludes those raised Orthodox.¹⁴

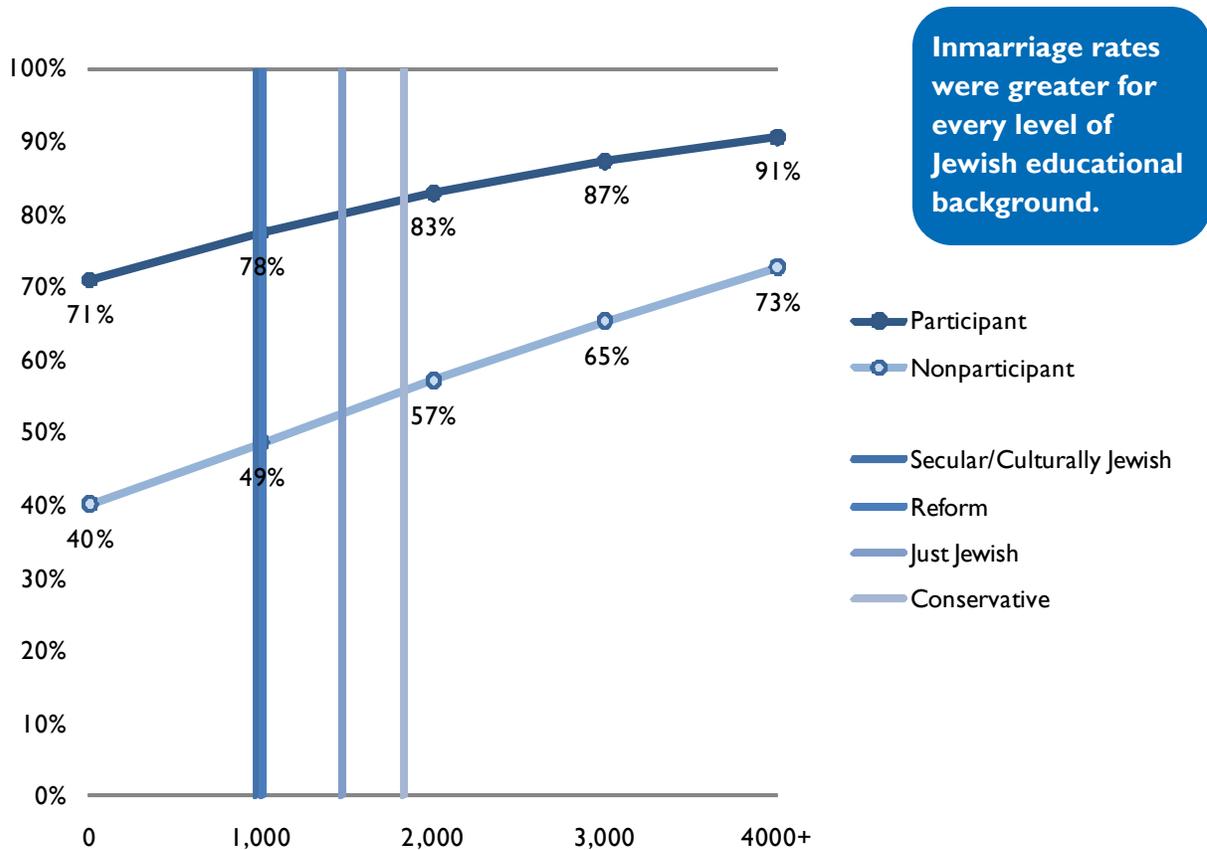
levels of ritual practice in the home during high school.

Analysis of the Wave 2 survey's larger sample of married respondents confirmed prior indications of a higher rate of conversion among spouses of participants relative to nonparticipants (Saxe et al., 2009, p. 28). Among respondents whose spouses

were not raised by Jews, participants' spouses were significantly more likely to have formally converted to Judaism at the time of the survey (Figure 9).

The higher conversion rate among spouses of Taglit participants may be related to the comparatively low marriage rates of participants under the age of 30 discussed

Figure 8. Inmarriage by Taglit Participation and Hours of Jewish Education (Predicted Probabilities)



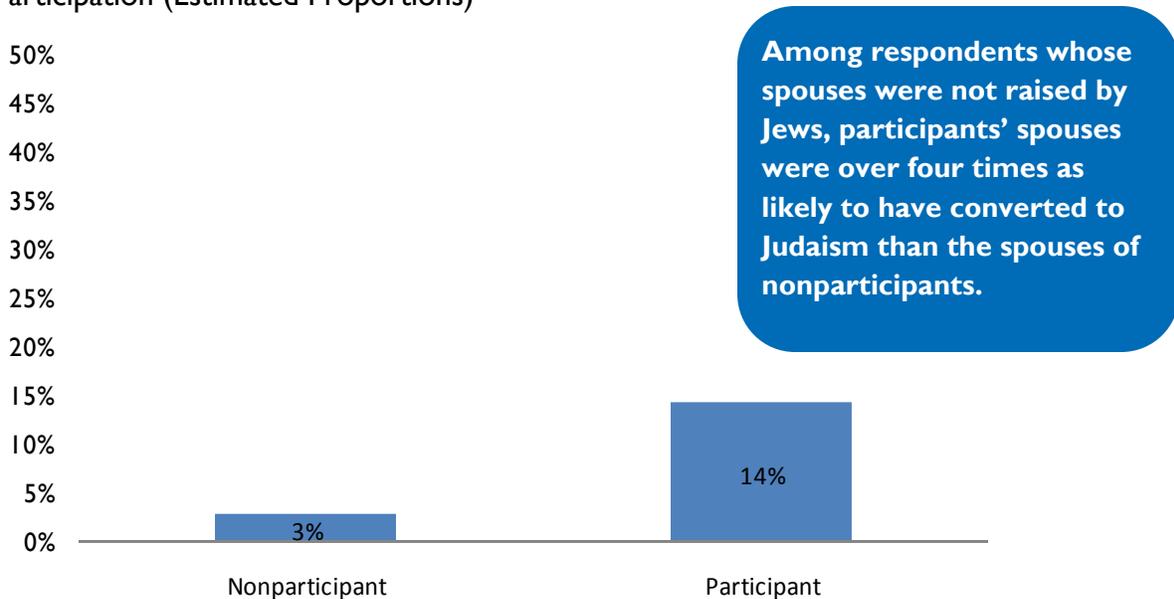
Note: Vertical lines denote mean hours of Jewish education for respondents raised in each denomination Excludes those raised Orthodox.¹⁶

earlier (see also, Saxe et al., 2009, p. 28). When responding to the question “How important is it to you to marry someone Jewish?” unmarried Taglit participants were more likely than unmarried nonparticipants to want to marry a Jew (Figure 10). It is therefore possible that participants spend a longer time searching for a suitable partner and place more value on a non-Jewish partner’s willingness to convert to Judaism.¹⁸

Compared to Wave 1, the estimated proportion of participants indicating that marrying a Jewish person is “very important” decreased (from 51 percent to 38 percent) and the proportion indicating “somewhat important” increased (from 21

percent to 30 percent). There are two possible reasons for these differences. First, applicants to Taglit in 2005 were, on the whole, from less Jewishly engaged backgrounds than in previous years. The addition of a sample of 2005 applicants to the study in 2010 had the effect of lowering the overall level of importance respondents attached to marrying a Jewish person. Second, respondents who answered the question during both Wave 1 and Wave 2 were somewhat less likely to believe at the time of the second survey that marrying a Jew was very important (10 percent were *more likely* whereas 19 percent were *less likely* to regard marrying a Jew as very important). Among respondents who remained single, therefore, there is some

Figure 9. Spouses Raised by Non-Jews Who Formally Converted to Judaism by Taglit Participation (Estimated Proportions)



Note: Excludes those raised Orthodox.¹⁷

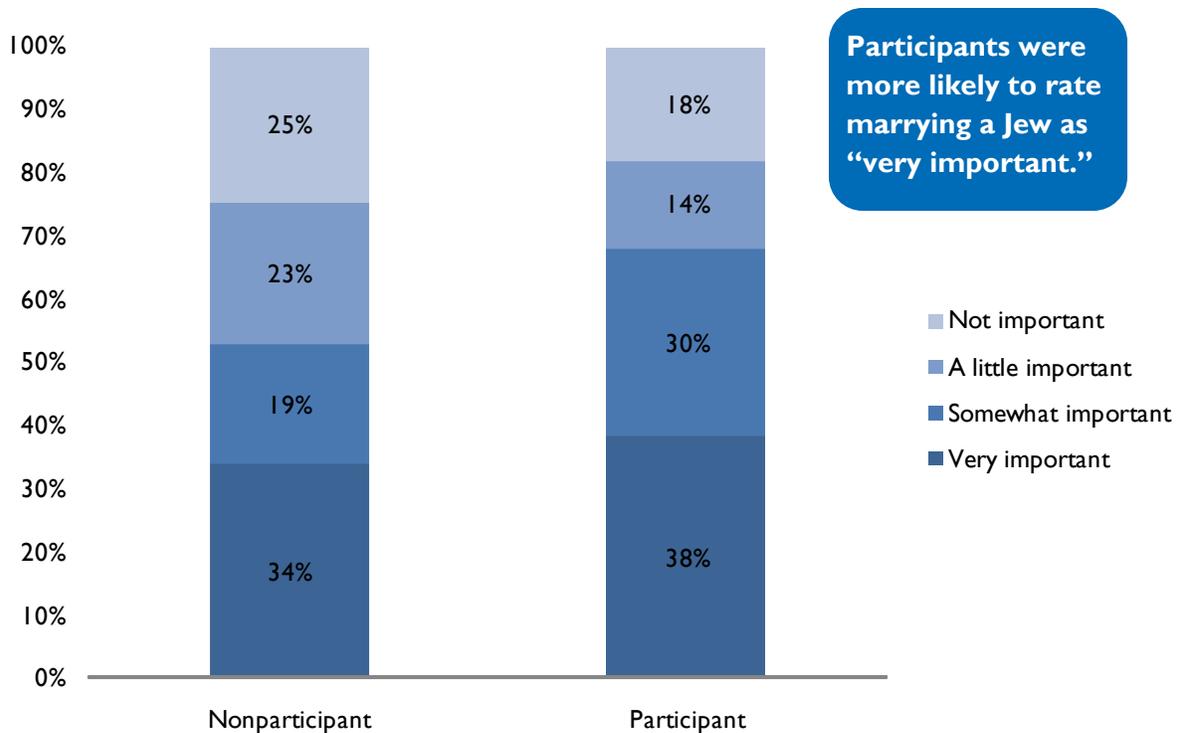
evidence of decreasing commitment to marrying a Jewish person over time.

Raising Children. Decisions about how to raise children face all parents—whether they are unmarried or intermarried. Taglit applicants from 2001 to 2005 are now beginning to make these decisions. As with spouse selection, decisions to embrace particular Jewish rituals and child-rearing activities, such as naming ceremonies and

Jewish education, indicate the continued Jewish identity of today’s Jewish young adults. In addition, these choices will greatly influence the Jewish identity of the next generation of Jews.

As the sample population of the current study ages and as individuals from subsequent cohorts are added to the sample, there are more survey respondents with children. This allows for a more detailed

Figure 10. Importance of Marrying a Jew by Taglit Participation (Estimated Proportions for Unmarried Respondents)



Note: “How important is it to you to marry someone Jewish?” Excludes those raised Orthodox.¹⁹

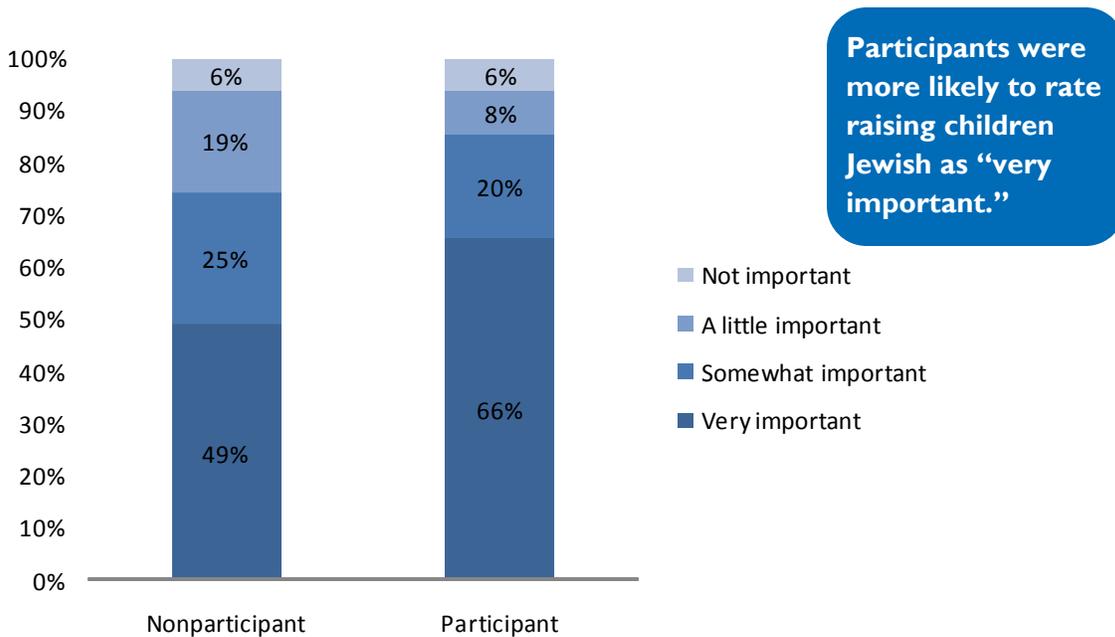
examination of the initial parenting decision made by Taglit applicants. Of respondents to the current survey, 14 percent of Taglit participants had at least one child, compared to 25 percent of nonparticipants. This difference was due almost entirely to number of years married (nonparticipants, on average, had been married longer than participants).

Of all respondents with at least one child, 88 percent reported that their oldest child was below age five. For now, then, what can be explored are early childhood parenting decisions for the limited number of panel members who already have children. To this point, no behavioral differences were

observed between participants and nonparticipants in relation to raising children as Jewish or conducting Jewish circumcision and naming ceremonies. Similarly, no Taglit effects were found regarding the proportion of respondents enrolling their young children in Jewish daycare, nursery school, or pre-school.

Taglit did, however, influence the beliefs of participants regarding the importance of raising their children Jewish. Among all childless respondents to the current survey, participants were 35 percent more likely than nonparticipants to view raising their children Jewish as “very important” (Figure 11). This is in line with the 30 percent

Figure 11. Importance of Raising Children Jewish by Taglit Participation (Estimated Proportions for Childless Respondents)



Note: “Thinking about the future, how important is it to you to raise your children Jewish?” Excludes those raised Orthodox.²⁰

increased likelihood observed in Wave 1 (Saxe et al., 2009). When prompted to describe a decision influenced by their Taglit experience, participants often cited decisions related to marriage and raising children, such as “I was in a long-term relationship that ended because he would not agree to raise any children that we had together in the Jewish faith,” and “I am more committed to trying to marry and raise my kids Jewish, whereas before I didn’t expect to do either.” Additionally, some participants linked the importance of marrying and raising Jews with visiting Israel, commenting, for example: “I want to take my fiancé and future children to Israel.” As the proportion of panel members with children increases, it will be important to track whether these attitudinal differences translate into differences in Jewish parenting behavior.

Synagogue Life

Analysis of Wave 1 responses indicated that Taglit participants were more likely than nonparticipants to belong to a synagogue, temple, minyan, havurah or other Jewish congregation, albeit noting that the finding was only marginally statistically significant (Saxe et al., 2009, p. 23). Further analysis of Wave 2 data collected in 2010 revealed that Taglit participants were no more likely than nonparticipants to belong to a synagogue or other type of Jewish congregation. Similarly, analysis of first-year data indicated that Taglit participants were no more likely than nonparticipants to attend religious services monthly or more (Saxe et al., 2009, p. 23). Once again, in Wave 2, a relationship between Taglit participation and religious service attendance was not found.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study assessed the long-term impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel. Using data from an ongoing investigation of the development and expression of Jewish identity among applicants to the program in its early years (2001-2005), this report described comparisons between individuals who participated in Taglit and similar others who did not. Respondents interviewed in this study applied to Taglit five to nine years ago and most were initially surveyed as part of this project in 2009; thus, the present investigation is the second wave of the long-term follow-up. This report specifically examines attitudes toward Israel and decision making regarding marriage and children.

In parallel to the findings from Wave 1, strong evidence was found that the Taglit experience influences participants' attitudes about Israel even many years after the trips. Participants were much more likely to feel connected to Israel than their counterparts who applied but did not go, and the Taglit effect was greatest among respondents from relatively weaker Jewish backgrounds. Participants were also more confident in their ability to explain Israel's current situation. Taglit did not influence participants' opinions regarding the contentious issues of West Bank settlements and the future of Jerusalem. Insofar as Taglit aims to be politically neutral, this last finding may be especially significant. In context, it means that Taglit succeeds in fostering attachment to Israel without promoting a particular viewpoint regarding contentious political issues.

Even more dramatically, and again in line

with the findings from Wave 1, Taglit also influenced participants' decision making regarding marriage and children.

Participants were 51 percent more likely to marry a Jewish person and 35 percent more likely to view raising Jewish children as "very important." Taglit's influence on marital choice was related to age (the impact was greatest among respondents who went on trips at a younger age) but not to Jewish educational background (the effect was consistent across the full spectrum of Jewish educational experience). Unmarried participants were more likely to view marrying a Jewish person as very important or somewhat important. Finally, Taglit's influence extended beyond participants to their spouses: The spouses of participants who were not raised Jewish were more likely to convert.

Our research respondents, millennials who we have labeled "Generation Birthright Israel," are in their late twenties and early thirties. They are marrying and, in some cases, beginning to have children. To date, although participants attach greater importance to raising Jewish children, there is no evidence of behavioral differences with respect to practices we asked about. Participants and nonparticipants were equally likely to be raising their children as Jews. They were also equally likely to welcome their children with Jewish circumcision and naming ceremonies and to enroll them in Jewish day care or preschool.

Evidence from the present study makes clear that, in terms of attitudes as well as behavior, participation in Taglit-Birthright Israel alters the trajectory of Jewish

identification and engagement. The significant and substantial differences in attitudes and behavior indicate that the program has had substantial impact. Additional consequences will undoubtedly unfold as our research respondents age and as their adult lives evolve. Along with tracking the attitudes and Jewish engagement of our panel, key to future

studies will be to understand the impact of participation on others—spouses of Taglit participants and their children. The scale of Taglit suggests that it has the potential to transform, not just individuals, but the community at large. Understanding how, and the extent to which this happens, will be the focus of ongoing study.

Notes

¹ Further explanation of the methodology can be found in *Jewish Futures Project, The Impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel: 2010, Technical Appendices A, B, C, D*. <http://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/researchareas/taglit-longitudinal.html>

² In most cases, the reason for non-response in Wave 1 was lack of current and valid contact information. To increase the likelihood of contacting non-respondents, additional contact information was sought using Accurint, a Lexis-Nexis search engine.

³ Some cases were found to be ineligible for the study, either because they were discovered to have been ineligible for Taglit or because they went on a Taglit trip in a round that was not in the scope of the study. Thirty-nine such cases were found in the 2001-2004 cohorts and 25 in the 2005 cohort. All of these cases were removed from the sample and not included in any analyses.

⁴ Response rates for this study were calculated using the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) standard definitions. The response rate is defined as the number of complete interviews with reporting units divided by the number of eligible reporting units in the sample. Response Rate (RR) 3 estimates what proportion of cases of unknown eligibility is actually eligible and includes them in the denominator. Response Rate 4 allocates cases of unknown eligibility as in RR3, but also includes partial interviews (AAPOR, 2000).

⁵ Seventeen percent of respondents to the present study were raised Orthodox (see Table B1 in Appendix B). The relatively high rate of Orthodox respondents is due to the fact that Taglit attracted more Orthodox applicants during 2001-2003 (in the aftermath of 9/11 and during the Intifada) than their proportion in the Jewish population. During 2001-2003, 20 percent of applicants were Orthodox. In 2004 and 2005, Orthodox applicants were 14 percent of the applicant pool, closer to their expected rate in the overall Jewish population.

This group presents unique challenges in measuring the effect of Taglit. In some outcome measures, analysis of Taglit's effect on the raised Orthodox group is mathematically impossible due to the negligible number of such respondents who gave certain responses. For example, there were only three raised Orthodox respondents who reported being married to a non-Jew. This lack of variance makes an analysis of Taglit's effect on intermarriage for this population impossible. In other areas, measuring the effect of Taglit for this population is problematic due to the extremely high baseline levels of Jewish engagement for this group. Virtually all raised Orthodox respondents scored in the highest category for measures of Jewish engagement discussed in this report, even if they had not participated in Taglit. Thus, for this population, there is little theoretical possibility of change on these measures.

⁶ Estimates from ordinal logistic regression. Coefficient for Taglit participation significant at $p \leq .001$. See Table B2 and Table B3 in Appendix B.

⁷ Estimates from ordinal logistic regression. Coefficient for Taglit participation significant at $p \leq .001$. See Table B4 in Appendix B.

⁸ See Table B5 in Appendix B.

⁹ Question wording was taken from the annual surveys of the American Jewish Committee.

¹⁰ Estimates from logistic regression. Coefficient for Taglit participation significant at $p \leq .01$. See Table B6 and Table B7 in Appendix B.

¹¹ Among those not raised Orthodox, 19 participants (0.8 percent) and 16 nonparticipants (3.3 percent) were already married at the time of their application to Taglit. These individuals were excluded from all analyses of the impact of Taglit on marriage.

¹² See Table B8 in Appendix B.

¹³ Estimates from logistic regression. Coefficient for Taglit participation significant at $p < .01$. See Table B9 and Table B10 in Appendix B.

¹⁴ Estimates from logistic regression. Coefficient for Taglit participation significant at $p \leq .001$. See Table B11 in Appendix B.

¹⁵ Average hours of Jewish education were calculated based on an analysis of supplementary schools in the Greater Boston area in the 2008-09 school years (retrieved November 8, 2010, from <https://www.jdata.com/>). One year of supplementary school was estimated to equal 100 hours of instruction and one year of day school to equal to 600 hours of Jewish education. These estimates are lower than those of Himmelfarb (1984), but were deemed more accurately representative of Jewish supplementary education in the 1980s and 1990s, when respondents would have been in grades 1-12.

¹⁶ Estimates from logistic regression. Coefficient for Taglit participation significant at $p < .01$. See Table B12 and Table B13 in Appendix B.

¹⁷ See Table B14 in Appendix B.

¹⁸ Another possible explanation for the disparate marriage rates among respondents under the age of 30 is that married individuals, or those who are engaged or about to become engaged, are more likely to remain nonparticipants, potentially due to less flexible schedules (and therefore declining a trip and/or not re-applying). This is supported by the finding that over three percent of nonparticipants were married at the time of application to Taglit, compared to less than one percent of participants.

¹⁹ See Table B15 in Appendix B.

²⁰ See Table B16 in Appendix B.

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