

THE ALUMNI OF YOUNG JUDAEA: A LONG-TERM PORTRAIT OF JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This study provides strong inferential evidence that, over the years, Young Judaea has been, and continues to be, influential in producing alumni who are highly engaged in Jewish life and Israel.
- The apparent impact of Young Judaea participation in this study highly resembles results obtained in the last study, conducted in 1998.
- Similarly, the results apply to younger alumni as much as older alumni.



OVERVIEW: CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

HOW JEWISHLY ENGAGED ARE YOUNG JUDAEA ALUMNI?

The key question: To what extent are the alumni of Young Judaea programs involved in Jewish life, years and decades after having attended a Young Judaea camp or other program in North America, or having participated in Young Judaea's several Israel-based programs? To what extent do they:

- Maintain close ties with other Jews
- Engage in Jewish ritual observance
- Participate in Jewish community life
- Feel committed to being Jewish
- Maintain close ties with Israel

The Analytic Approach: To answer these questions, we will compare Young Judaea alumni with other adult Jews of similar Jewish backgrounds. That is, people ...

- whose parents are largely **inmarried**,
- were mostly **raised Conservative**,
- who all went to **Jewish summer camp**,
- almost always had **some Jewish schooling**, including a good number who **went to day school**.

By leveling the “playing field” (parents, upbringing, and Jewish education), we can measure and isolate the YJ impact.



CONTEXT: MAJOR CHALLENGES TO RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN THE US, AND CHALLENGES TO JEWISH LIFE AS WELL

Context matters – Jews are both a religion & an ethnicity

Recent research on Americans demonstrates:

- Religious identity is challenged. Religious “nones” are now American’s largest religious denomination. We see sharp declines among Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants.
- Ethnic identity is also challenged: From “twilight” to “darkness” in **European, Latin American and Asian American ethnicity: No ethnic group is maintaining its identity and cohesiveness, not even Mexican Americans.** (African-Americans are an exception.)
- The good news is that non-Orthodox American Jews are possibly the most “successful” liberal religious group and the most cohesive and institutionally vibrant national-origin ethnic group.
- That’s also the bad news. The larger society no longer supports ethnic and religious identities. Jewish exceptionalism in the past and present, does not guarantee Jewish continuity in the future.



MORE DISTURBING CONTEXT: DISTANCING FROM ISRAEL BY US JEWS

- Studies have pointed to growing detachment from Israel among American Jews and Israel, taking the form of “sitting on the sidelines” or neutrality, far more than opposition or antipathy.
- Detachment is more prevalent among liberals than conservatives, the less Jewishly engaged than the highly identified and younger vs. older Jews.
- Among the likely drivers of detachment: Declining engagement in Jewish life and more intermarriage, political polarization, specifically the disaffection of liberals with Israeli policies toward the Palestinians and religious issues.
- In Jewish communal quarters, the topic of Israel is often avoided rather than addressed in any way so as to avoid conflict or feelings of discomfort among community members

CONTEXT: FOR US JEWS, A SHRINKING “MIDDLE” – THE NON-ORTHODOX AND JEWISHLY ENGAGED

In line with American society, recent research on American Jews reports that:

- The “Jewish Middle” is shrinking: while Orthodox and episodically engaged Jews are growing, there is a sharp numerical decline in engaged Jews outside of Orthodoxy.
- Consistent with these trends, we’ve had long-term numerical decline in Conservative Jews since mid-century.

The *nechemtah*: Informal Jewish education works

- The literature on Jewish summer camps in general points to long-term impact.
- So too does the smaller literature specific to Young Judaea, as studies in 1993 and 1998 demonstrated.
- So too does the literature on Israel travel and study.
- Consistent with the wider finding: informal Jewish education generally “works.”



OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH

- We seek to present an overall portrait of Young Judaea program alumni – participation in YJ programs, socio-demographic characteristics, Jewish identity profile. Who are the alumni?
- We present the views of Young Judaea participation years later; subjective assessment of impact. How do they now feel about Young Judaea?
- We estimate apparent impact of YJ participation on Jewish identity: family, friends, ritual practice, communal engagement, commitment, Israel. Did YJ matter and how did it matter?
- We also check to see if younger alumni show as much and as many apparent effects as the sample overall.



THE SURVEY OF YOUNG JUDAEA ALUMNI



THE RESPONDENTS: ALMOST 2,000 YOUNG JUDAEA ALUMNI, HIGHLY DIVERSE IN NUMEROUS WAYS

- We fielded the survey June 18, 2017 – October 18, 2017
- We sent 10,968 invitations to lists maintained by Young Judaea and affiliated camps
- A total of 1,939 eligible respondents completed the survey
- The questionnaire covered:
 - Young Judaea participation – which programs, how long
 - Positive and negative views of Young Judaea
 - Socio-demographics – age, sex, family, country, education
 - Jewish upbringing – parents' inmarriage, denomination, schooling, camps, youth groups
 - Current Jewish engagement – spouse Jewish, friends Jewish, ritual observance, communal affiliation, commitment, Israel ... Several questions were taken verbatim from the 2013 Pew survey to allow for comparisons



WHO ARE THE ALUMNI?
WE FIND MANY FEATURES
OF DIVERSITY IN THIS SAMPLE
OF NEARLY 2,000
YOUNG JUDAEA PROGRAM ALUMNI

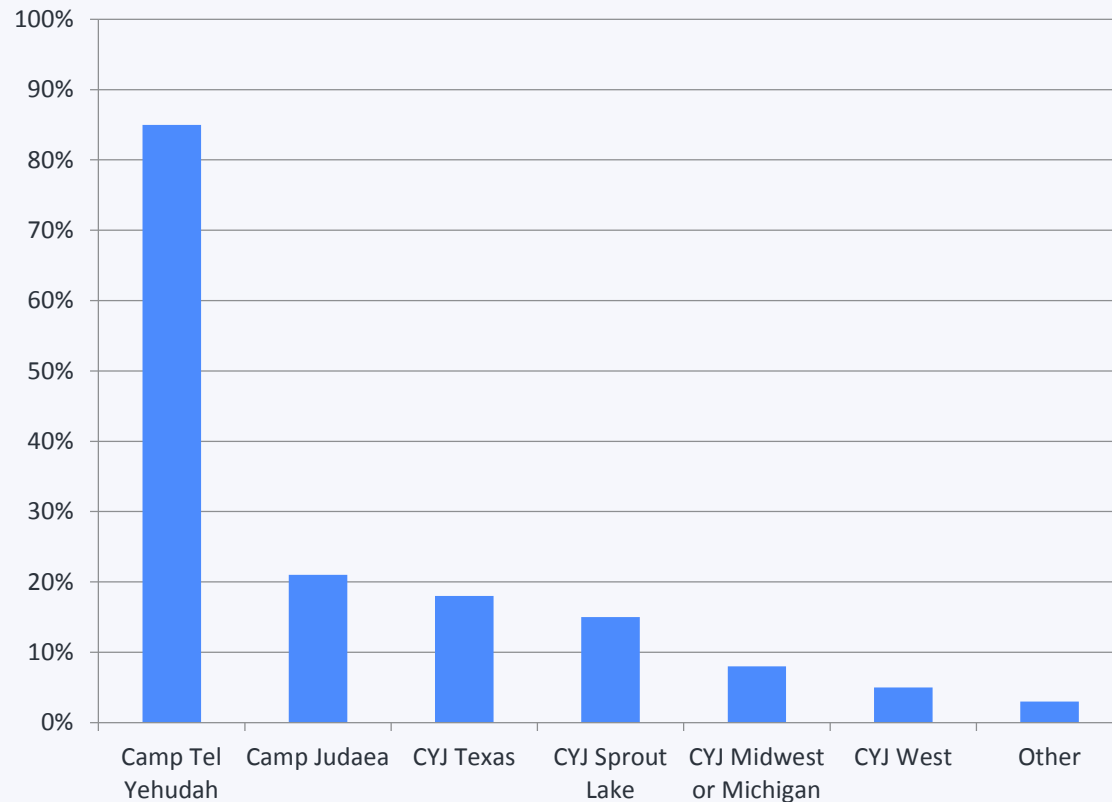


THEY PARTICIPATED IN A WIDE VARIETY OF YJ PROGRAMS: CAMPERS, STAFF MEMBERS, LOCAL ACTIVITIES, YEAR COURSE, & MORE

Local activities	61%
Summer camp, as a camper	67%
Summer camp, as staff	52%
Summer programs in Israel, incl. Machon, Discovery, Amirim	28%
Young Judaea Year Course	46%*
Junior Year program in Israel	3%
Hamagshimim	14%
WUJS Institute	8%
A staff member for Young Judaea, other than at camp	17%
Other	12%



ALUMNI ATTENDED A WIDE VARIETY OF YOUNG JUDAEA CAMPS



Camp Tel Yehudah	85%
Camp Judaea	21%
CYJ Texas	18%
CYJ Sprout Lake	15%
CYJ Midwest or Michigan	8%
CYJ West	5%
Other	3%



OUR SAMPLE INCLUDES THE MOST RECENTLY INVOLVED ALUMNI AS WELL AS THOSE FROM DECADES AGO

Year first involved in any Young Judaea program

Before 1975	32%
1975-2004	48%
2005-2017	21%

Year last involved in any Young Judaea program

Before 1984	37%
1985-2004	30%
2005-2017	33%



WE HAVE CAMPERS WHO WENT A FEW YEARS, AS WELL AS FORMER STAFF MEMBERS WHO SERVED FOR 1-5+ YEARS

Years as a camper:

0	34%
1-2	20%
3-4	17%
5 or more	29%
Total	100%

Years as a staffer:

0	49%
1	13%
2	12%
3-4	10%
5 or more	12%
Total	100%

BY WAY OF SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND ... GENDER, EDUCATION ...

More women (63%) than men (37%) A median age of 52:

18-29	14%
30-49	34%
50-59	31%
60+	21%

As a group, they're highly educated:

Professional or graduate degree	54%
B.A., B.S. or undergraduate degree	40%
High school diploma or less	6%

MARITAL STATUS (MOSTLY MARRIED), POLITICAL IDENTITY (MOSTLY LIBERAL)

Most are married:

Married	65%
Living with a partner	5%
Divorced or separated	5%
Widowed	3%
Never been married	23%

Most are liberal, comparable to American Jews and the overall Pew comparison sub-sample.

(US only): In general, would you describe your political views as:

Very conservative	2%
Conservative	8%
Moderate	25%
Liberal	42%
Very liberal	20%
Not sure	3%

MOST ARE IN THE US, BUT 12% NOW LIVE IN ISRAEL

In what country do you live most of the year?

United States	84%
Canada	1%
Israel	12%
Elsewhere	3%



ALMOST ALL HAVE BEEN TO ISRAEL, AS MANY AS 90% FOR REPEAT VISITS, AND MOST HAVE LIVED THERE, BE IT IN THE PAST OR NOW.

Have you ever been to Israel, or not?

Yes, I now live in Israel	12%
Yes, I have lived in Israel for 6 months or more	42%
Yes, I have visited 3 times or more	28%
Yes, visited twice	8%
Yes, once	7%
Never	3%

In the 1998 study, 92% of alumni had been to Israel and 71% twice or more. In 2017, 97% have been to Israel and 90% twice or more.



INITIAL EVIDENCE OF IMPACT: SOCIAL NETWORKS & TESTIMONIES



EVIDENCE OF IMPACT: MOST HAVE YJ FRIENDS, ALMOST A QUARTER “IN-MARRIED” WITH OTHER YOUNG JUDAEANS

How many of your close friends are people you know from your involvement with Young Judaea?

All of them	1%
Most of them	13%
Some of them	46%
Total some or more =	60%

[If married] Did your spouse ever attend or work at Young Judaea camp or program?

Yes	24%
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VERBATIM COMMENTS

- “While I was already connected to Judaism and Israel, Camp Judaea was a place where I could explore my relationship with both, and be **inspired by the pluralistic community** because it pushed me to ask questions and think more critically about my identity.”
- “At a time in high school when you need support of friends, **Young Judaea gave me that support and leadership skills**. I felt connected and part of something bigger than myself.”
- “Attending WUJS was a **formative part of my adult experience**, living and working in another country and making new friends. I am still close with many from my time in Israel and return to visit when I can.”
- “I don't have complaints about my experience, but **wish there was more of a movement now for my kids** to be involved beyond camp / conventions.”



SELF-REPORTED IMPACT, ESPECIALLY HIGH ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL, & JEWISH IDENTITY.

To what extent did your Young Judaea experience influence you in each of the following areas?

	To a great extent	Somewhat	Very little	Not at all
My relationship with Israel	64%	25%	6%	6%
How I define my Jewish identity	50%	33%	9%	8%
How I see the world	40%	42%	11%	7%
Involvement in social activism	28%	40%	18%	14%
Who I socialize with	24%	37%	19%	20%
Political views	22%	47%	18%	14%
Career choice	16%	22%	23%	39%
Where I live	15%	19%	21%	44%
Area of academic study	13%	21%	23%	43%



THE CRITICAL COMPARISONS:

THE 2017 US-BASED YOUNG JUDAEANS VS.

THE PEW 2013 PORTRAIT OF JEWISH
AMERICAN SURVEY RESPONDENTS



WE DREW 2 COMPARISON GROUPS FROM THE PEW 2013 STUDY:

Group 1: **All Jewish adults.** (*Easy to grasp.*)

Group 2: (*A little harder to explain*): **An adjusted sample.** They are weighted to match the YJ US alumni in terms of parents' inmarriage, denomination raised, and Jewish schooling. And ...

- They were **raised in the Jewish religion** (as were almost all YJ alumni), mostly in Conservative households
- They were **not raised Haredi**
- They now **identify as Jewish by religion** (JBR), excluding Jews of no religion (JNR), who are 22% of US Jews today – the so-called “no religion” respondents score very low on Jewish identity indicators
- They went to an overnight **Jewish summer camp**

In other words, we made sure they closely approximated YJ alumni in terms of their Jewish upbringing – parents, denomination, and schooling.



MORE DETAILS: FOR THE ADJUSTED COMPARISON GROUP FROM THE PEW 2013 STUDY

BOTH the YJ alumni and the adjusted Pew comparison sub-sample have the following characteristics:

- Both **parents** were Jewish (86%) / One parent Jewish (14%)
- **Denomination raised:** Orthodox (7%), Conservative (66%), Reform (17%), Other (10%)
- **Jewish schooling:** Day school (21%), Supplementary school (73%), none (6%)

AS COMPARED WITH BOTH PEW SAMPLES (TOTAL & ADJUSTED), YOUNG JUDAEANS REPORT MUCH MORE IN-MARRIAGE AND MANY, MANY MORE JEWISH FRIENDS

Young Judaeans report far higher inmarriage than do all US Jewish adults, & somewhat higher than in the comparison sample adjusted for Jewish family upbringing, schooling, & overnight Jewish camp.

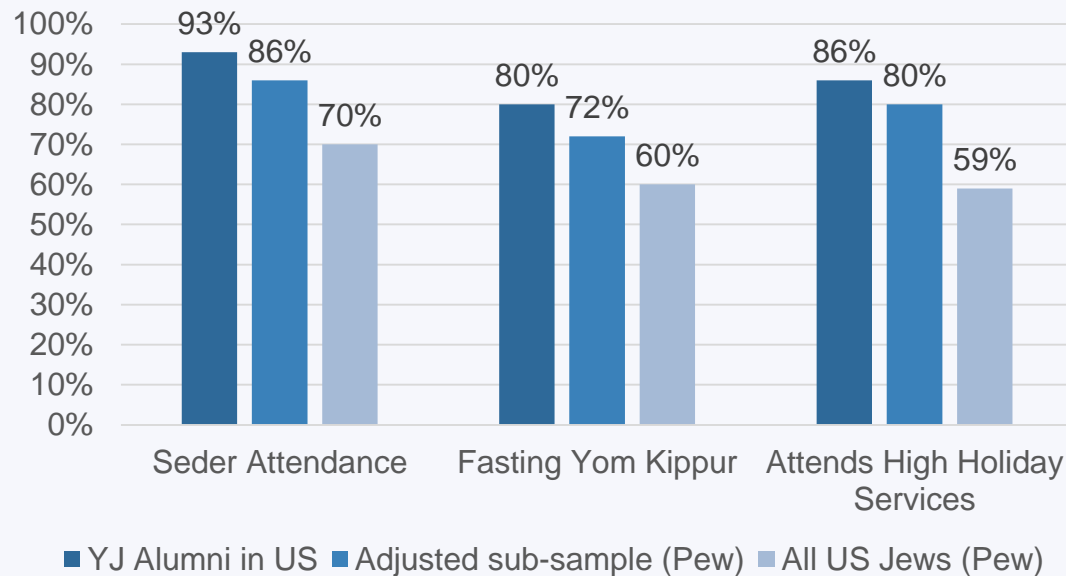
Having mostly Jewish friends shows an even larger lead for YJ alumni.

	YJ alumni	Adjusted sub-sample (Pew)	All US Jews (Pew)
Inmarried	90%	70%	58%
Most friends Jewish	68%	38%	32%



COMPARED TO THE PEW GROUPS, MORE YOUNG JUDAEA ALUMNI OBSERVE PASSOVER & HIGH HOLIDAYS

Young Judaea alumni report that they undertake three key markers of holiday observance decidedly more than the US average, and even somewhat more than the comparison sub-sample of former Jewish summer campers with comparable parental & school background.

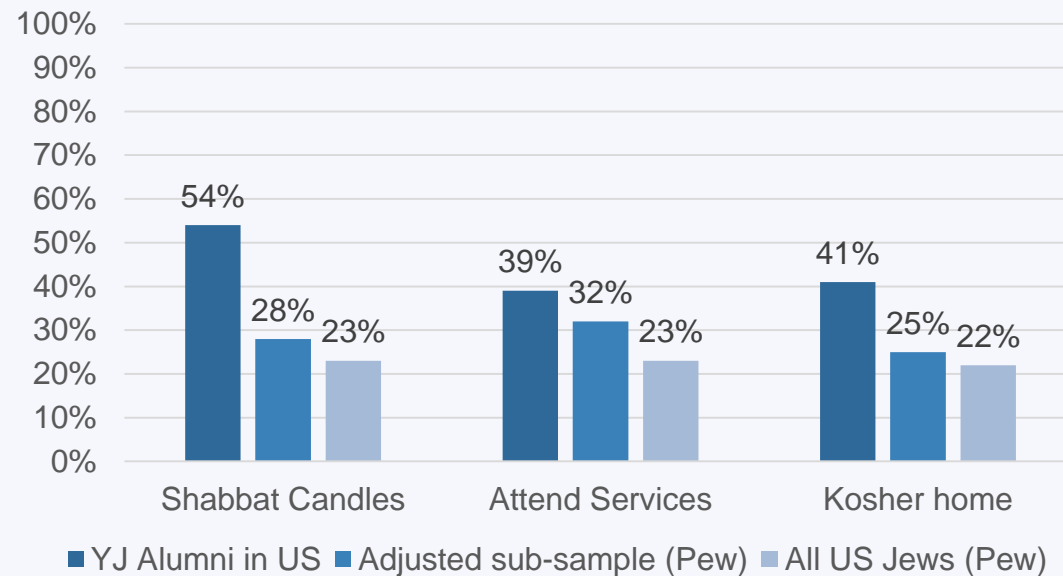


Holiday observance	YJ Alumni	Adjusted sub-sample (Pew)	All US Jews (Pew)
Attended Seder Last Year	93%	86%	70%
Fasted Last Yom Kippur	80%	72%	60%
Attends High Holiday services	86%	80%	59%



FOR THE MORE “DEMANDING” RITUALS, THE APPARENT YOUNG JUDAEA ADVANTAGE OVER THE PEW GROUPS IS EVEN GREATER

Rates of lighting Shabbat candles, attending monthly services, & keeping kosher homes are all about twice the US average. Moreover, YJ alumni show large leads over other Jewish camp alumni, with comparable parental & school backgrounds.

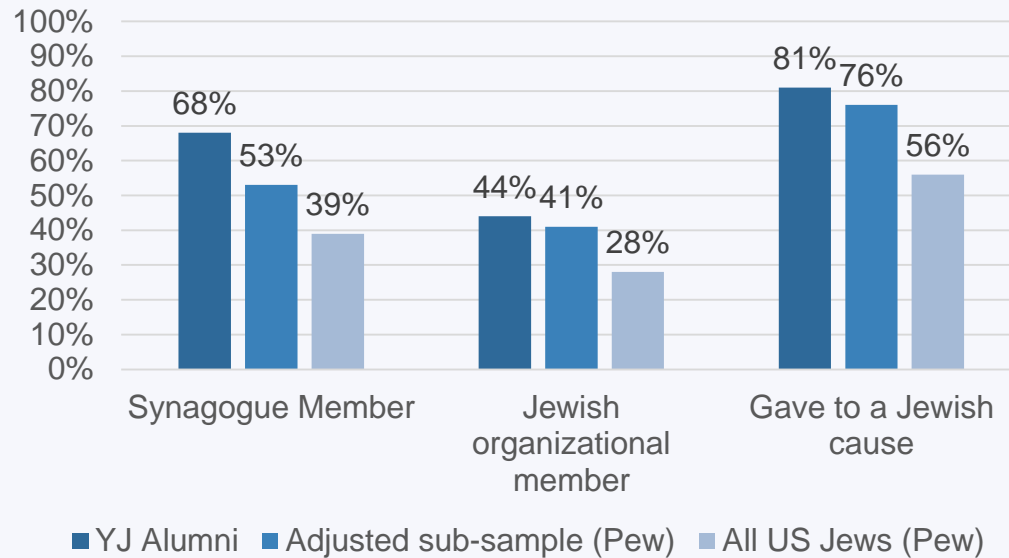


Action	YJ Alumni	Adjusted sub-sample (Pew)	All US Jews (Pew)
Someone in household lights Shabbat candles	54%	28%	23%
Attend religious services monthly or more	39%	32%	23%
Kosher home (as they define it)	41%	25%	22%



RATES OF AFFILIATING WITH SYNAGOGUES, JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS & CHARITIES ARE ALSO SOMEWHAT HIGHER THAN EX-CAMPERS WITH SIMILAR JEWISH UPBRINGING AS YJ ALUMNI.

Young Judaea alumni report undertaking key markers of communal affiliation far more than the US average, and a little more than the comparison sub-sample.



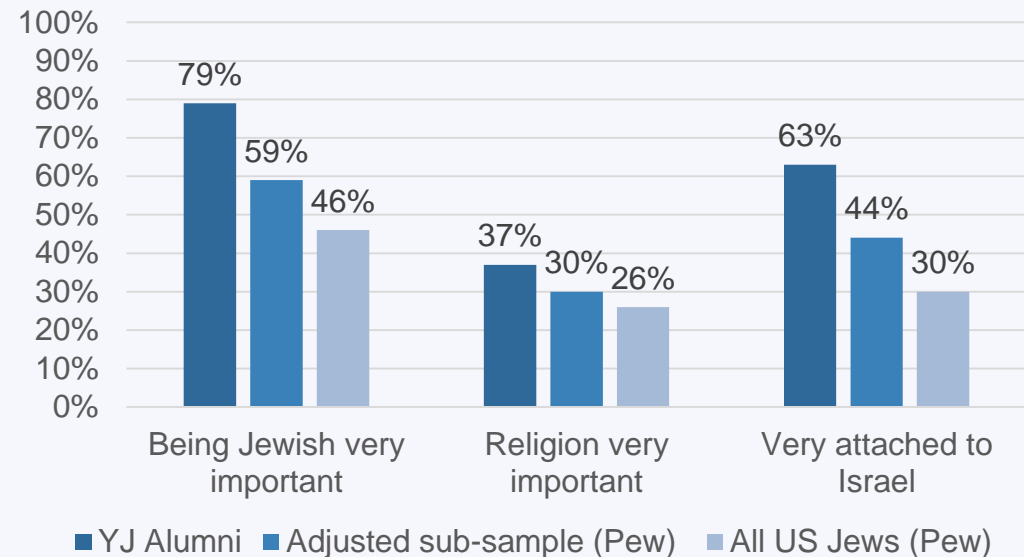
	YJ Alumni	Adjusted sub-sample (Pew)	All US Jews (Pew)
Synagogue member	68%	53%	39%
Member of Jewish organization	44%	41%	28%
Gave to a Jewish cause in 2016	81%	76%	56%



FEELINGS ABOUT BEING JEWISH, RELIGION, AND ISRAEL

Young Judaea alumni report far higher levels of attachment to being Jewish, religion and Israel than among US Jews generally, average, and even substantially more than the comparison sub-sample.

	YJ Alumni	Adjusted sub-sample (Pew)	All US Jews (Pew)
Feels being Jewish is very important	79%	59%	46%
Feels religion is very important	37%	30%	26%
Feels very attached to Israel	63%*	44%	30%



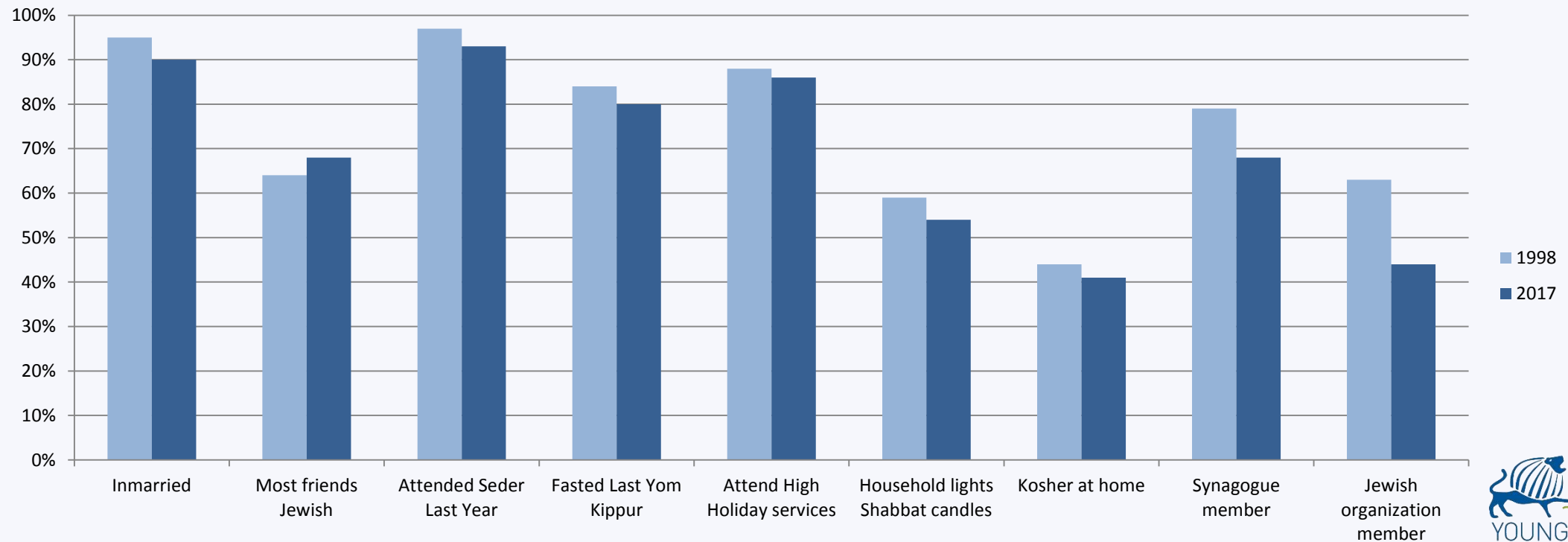
*An additional 29% are “somewhat attached,” and only 7% are not attached. Not included in these calculations are the 12% who are now living in Israel, implying that around ¼ are either “very attached” to Israel or living there now. Given the low rates of aliyah outside of Orthodoxy, we can presume that hardly any of those with characteristics of the Pew comparison respondents are now living in Israel.

COMPARISONS WITH THE 1998 STUDY



YJ ALUMNI IN 2017 HIGHLY RESEMBLED THOSE FROM THE 1998 STUDY

YJ alumni in 2017 highly resembled those from the 1998 study. We find equivalence in all major indicators of Jewish engagement, with the exception of synagogue membership and Jewish organizational belonging.



CHILDREN OF US-BASED YOUNG JUDAEA ALUMNI



SOME 42% CHOSE DAY SCHOOLS FOR THEIR CHILDREN, TWICE AS MANY AS THE 21% OF THE US-BASED YJ ALUMNI WHO THEMSELVES WENT TO DAY SCHOOL IN THEIR YOUTH.

What is the main source of Jewish schooling your oldest child has received/will receive until the age of 13?

Day school	42%
Hebrew or religious school that met more than once a week	42%
Hebrew or religious school that met once a week	10%
Other	4%
None	2%

HIGH RATES OF INFORMAL JEWISH EDUCATION AMONG THE CHILDREN

Almost 50% have sent/will send their children to YJ camp, and 75% to some Jewish camp, about twice the national average.

Most (78%) teens have/will travel to Israel, more than 3X the national average.

Rates of inmarriage far exceed the national average for the recently married non-Orthodox (71% vs. 28%)

[If children, US only] By the time your oldest child was/will be age 19, which of the following experiences did/will he/she have had?

Attend a Young Judaea camp	44%
Attend another overnight Jewish summer camp with Jewish content	40%
Either YJ camp or another Jewish content camp	78%
Gone to Israel with a group of peers, age 14-18	56%
Gone to Israel in another framework	52%
Gone to Israel	78%

[If child is married] Is he/she married to someone who is now Jewish? Yes 71%



THE YOUNGER ALUMNI



THE YOUNG ADULT YJ ALUMNI ALSO DISPLAY THE APPARENT YJ EFFECT: HIGHER INMARRIAGE, JEWISH FRIENDS, SHABBAT CANDLE-LIGHTING, & ATTACHMENT TO BEING JEWISH & TO ISRAEL THAN THE YOUNG, EX-CAMPER PEW SUB-SAMPLE, WITH SIMILAR PARENTS, DENOMINATION & JEWISH SCHOOLING

	YJ Alumni, age 25-39	Adjusted sub-sample age 25-39 (Pew)
Inmarried	87	68
Most close friends Jewish	59	35
Attended Seder last year	96	87
Fasted Yom Kippur last year	77	76
High Holiday services attend	85	89
Shabbat Candles usually lit	48	36
Monthly religious services attend	29	27
Kosher home as self-defined	34	28
Synagogue member	47	41
Jewish organization member	32	38
Give Jewish cause in 2016	71	69
Consider being Jewish very important	74	47
Consider religion very important	30	24
Very emotionally attached to Israel	58	42



METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS



IN TERMS OF JEWISH & ISRAEL ENGAGEMENT, WE MAY HAVE AN “UPWARD” BIAS IN THE SAMPLE, FOR AT LEAST TWO REASONS...

- **List Bias:** The National Young Judaea office and several Young Judaea camps supplied the list for the survey invitations. One problem: those on the list may be the more connected to Jewish life, especially among older alumni, who may selectively stay in touch with Young Judaea.
- **Response Bias:** Of those invited, those with greater feelings of loyalty to Young Judaea were possibly more likely to answer. Although those with strong negative feelings may also be so inclined.

The result: This sample seeks to represent the universe of Young Judaea program alumni, but may contain an unmeasurable over-representation of Young Judaea loyalists. At the same time, we may have heard from a disproportionate number of “dissatisfied customers.”



THE YOUNG ADULT YJ ALUMNI ALSO DISPLAY THE APPARENT YJ EFFECT: HIGHER INMARRIAGE, JEWISH FRIENDS, SHABBAT CANDLE-LIGHTING, & ATTACHMENT TO BEING JEWISH & TO ISRAEL THAN THE YOUNG, EX-CAMPER PEW SUB-SAMPLE, WITH SIMILAR PARENTS, DENOMINATION & JEWISH SCHOOLING

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CONCLUSIONS

SOME RE-ASSURANCE – STRONG SIMILARITIES WITH THE 1998 STUDY

Respondents in 1998 & 2017 display small differences for in-marriage, friends, & ritual observance, with lower affiliation with congregations and organizations in 2017. We can cautiously infer that the apparent impact of Young Judaea in 2017 is as strong as was evident in 1998. If there's impact, it has remained roughly stable.

	1998	2017
Inmarried	95%	90%
Most friends Jewish	64%	68%
Attended Seder last year	97%	93%
Fasted Yom Kippur last year	84%	80%
Attend High Holiday services	88%	86%
Household lights Shabbat candles	59%	54%
Kosher at home as self-defined	44%	41%
Synagogue member	79%	68%
Jewish organization member	63%	44%

YOUNG JUDAEA ALUMNI EXHIBIT COMPARATIVELY HIGH RATES OF JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

- Young Judaea alumni, years after the Young Judaea experience, **show high levels of Jewish engagement**, as evidenced by Jewish friends and spouses, ritual observance, communal involvement, subjective identity, and Israel attachment.
- Their rates of **Jewish involvement exceed** those of adults in the statistically adjusted comparison group. The comparison group consists of Pew 2013 survey respondents who are largely the children of inmarried Conservative parents, and who went to a Jewish camp. The comparisons of YJ alumni with the country at large (the full Pew sample of all Jewish adults) show even larger gaps than with the adjusted sample.
- Young Judaea alumni are **highly connected** with each other, and with Young Judaea itself. They have numerous Young Judaea friends, spouses and children. They express warm feelings about Young Judaea and its impact, decades later.
- The younger generation (25-39) also displays higher levels of Jewish engagement than a comparable Pew sub-sample. The most substantial gaps are found for marriage and friends, as well as attachment to being Jewish, religion, and Israel.



WE CAN INFER THAT YOUNG JUDAEA HAS BEEN CRITICAL TO BUILDING A COMMITTED AND CONNECTED CORE OF JEWS IN NORTH AMERICA AND ISRAEL

Methodologically, we are limited:

- **No longitudinal surveys:** Definitively assessing the impact of Young Judaea is possible only by way of “before and after” survey evidence – but we have a single, retrospective survey.
- **No randomized experiment:** Nor can we conduct a controlled experiment where we randomly assign some youngsters to the treatment group (attending Young Judaea) and others to the control group (no Young Judaea).

But, we do have...

- **Strong inferential evidence** that, over the years, Young Judaea has been extraordinarily influential in creating a connected alumni community of individuals who are highly engaged in Jewish life.



WE CAN INFER THAT YOUNG JUDAEA HAS BEEN CRITICAL TO BUILDING A COMMITTED AND CONNECTED CORE OF JEWS IN NORTH AMERICA AND ISRAEL

- The Young Judaea endeavor may hold instructive lessons not only for Young Judaea and American Judaism.
- Its apparent success bodes well for other endeavors in American Jewry that are marked by intensive Jewish commitment and connection along with long-term education and ideological passion. In short, Young Judaea's achievements may (and should) encourage support for a variety of similarly constructed attempts to produce intensive Jewish environments, be they at Young Judaea or under other auspices.

