

DEVOTED, DISENGAGED, DISILLUSIONED:



The Forces
that Shape a
Relationship
with Israel

Executive Summary

Background

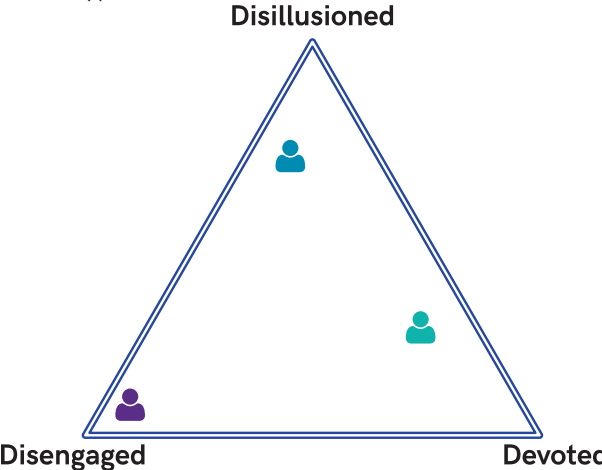
In 2010, The AVI CHAI Foundation funded a qualitative study to learn about the ways in which high school juniors thought and felt about Israel. Forty students participated in the study, recruited from four Jewish day schools — two Modern Orthodox schools and two community day schools.

Seven years after the conclusion of that initial study, the Foundation provided an opportunity to track down members of the original research sample. This new study aimed to learn to what extent these young people attribute their relationship with Israel to their day school education, and if and how they felt their day school education prepared them for life experiences after school, in relation to Israel.

The research team tracked down 22 of the original 40 participants, all of whom agreed to participate in in-person interviews. Seventeen of the interviewees were located in the United States; five had emigrated or returned to Israel. Each interview was about an hour long and followed a semi-structured protocol. The interviewers asked open-ended questions, posed sentences for completion, and read back to the participants statements they had made seven years previously, asking them to reflect on their earlier words.

Three Types

The 22 young adults we spoke with articulated a wide range of sentiments concerning Israel, varying in the degree of connection they felt to the country and in the specific content that colored their connection. We categorized participants into three types based on what they expressed and how they related to or dissociated from Israel. To aid appreciation of these categories, we have identified three extreme manifestations of these types — in sociological terms, “ideal types.”



DISENGAGED: Passive and Distant

At one pole are those who are detached from and possibly disinterested in Israel. They may have fond memories of visits with their schools or families, but those sentiments are distant; it’s as if they derive from a former life. The Disengaged are characterized by a lack of clarity about how they feel towards Israel and/or a lack of interest in trying to gain more clarity; there is a passivity and a degree of avoidance that distinguishes their relationship (or lack of relationship) with Israel. These people do not live in Israel and would not consider doing so.

DEVOTED: Active and Enthusiastic

At a different pole are those who advocate for and actively defend Israel, physically and ideologically. They may have made aliyah and served in the IDF, or they may be in the United States where they feel a fervent love for Israel and a desire to promote the country’s interests. These individuals self-identify as Zionist with no hesitation or qualification. They have family, personal, and ideological connections to Israel, and they feel a collective sense of duty to support the country. The Devoted tend to come from more religiously observant households, although not always, and may be the children of Israelis.

DISILLUSIONED: Connected and Frustrated

Located in relation to a third pole, the Disillusioned find themselves torn between their personal, ideological, and social connections to Israel and their frustration or anger with Israel’s politics and actions. They care deeply about Israel and may have had intimate experiences visiting the land and people. They are personally connected for a variety of reasons and are deeply concerned for Israel’s well-being. It is this concern, viewed through a political lens, that leads those in this group to criticize Israel for its governmental and military shortcomings. The Disillusioned express a complex definition of Zionism, highlighting the country’s flaws and problematic elements while appreciating the need for the country’s existence. These individuals express a degree of anger towards their high schools for how they taught about Israel. They express a broader critique of how American Jewish institutions represent and relate to Israel.

Growth without Change

One of the more striking elements of this research is finding just how little the study participants changed over a seven-year period. In addition to immediate visual and behavioral similarities, most participants did **not** substantively change in their stance towards Israel since high school. To put it succinctly, these

young people grew, but did not change. They attended different universities. They engaged in international travel. Some are now living in Israel. They broadened their horizons in dramatic ways. A number of them are now in romantic relationships with non-Jews. They have certainly not remained in some kind of day school bubble. And yet their views, even though significantly more nuanced, are largely the same as when they were in eleventh grade. In a sense, they have traveled further along paths on which they were already traveling when they were in school. Most of them have not moved on to a different path.

Exceptions to the Rule: Change Over Time

In our sample of 22 interviewees, there are three notable exceptions to the general pattern that participants' views remained consistent over the seven years between their two interviews. Each of these three individuals has developed a profoundly different relationship to Israel. In reviewing their stories, we asked ourselves what was it that contributed to such dramatic changes. In a larger sense, we want to know what are the experiences, thought processes, and ideas that prompted them to change, and what is it about the other members of our interview sample who encountered no less unsettling experiences but more or less maintained the same positions as before? How can we account for where people are today based on the push-and-pull of different forces in their lives?

Three Forces: The Social, Cultural/Ideological, and Political

In trying to answer these questions, we have **not** taken up personality-related categories, although they might be relevant. Our explanatory framework is more sociological than psychological. Within this frame, we homed in on three broad forces which, through their interplay, seem to have shaped our interviewees' relationships with Israel. How each of these individuals is impacted by these forces and how each of them integrates the push-and-pull exerted by these forces is what ultimately determines their relationship to Israel, at any given moment in time.

Social Connections

Social connections to Israel are grounded in personal friendships and family relationships with specific people. These connections are thickened by the experiences, and the memories of experiences, of times spent communicating with or in the same place as those people. Such relationships and their emotional accretions strongly shape how individuals feel about and relate to Israel. The most commonplace source of social connection to Israel is the experience of traveling in the country, but social connections might start from a distance, when communicating with family members one has not yet met, or through forming

virtual, long-distance relationships initiated at school. For some, their social associations to Israel are more shallow; they are less about experiences and more about the social fact of being connected in some way to people in Israel — *knowing someone in the country*. For many of our interviewees, the people they know in Israel are family. These family connections are the most powerful "social" driver of why an individual might care about Israel or feel a connection to the place. These connections mean that Israel is the land of one's family, almost inevitably a place for which one cares in a heightened fashion.

Cultural/Ideological Associations

Cultural/ideological associations to Israel are grounded in Jewish ideas, sentiments, and values that shape how someone relates to Israel through their identity as a Jew. Participants expressed a variety of ideas regarding how their religious practices and their feelings about Jewish nationhood affected how they connect to Israel. More religiously observant participants articulated traditional tropes about a divine connection to the Land and how it was intended for and gifted to the Jewish people. Less-religious participants spoke to the value of having a Jewish homeland where Jews could be safe and live their lives free of oppression. The notion of a safe haven or "a place to call our own" came up repeatedly in how these young adults related to Israel and the value they saw in having a Jewish state.

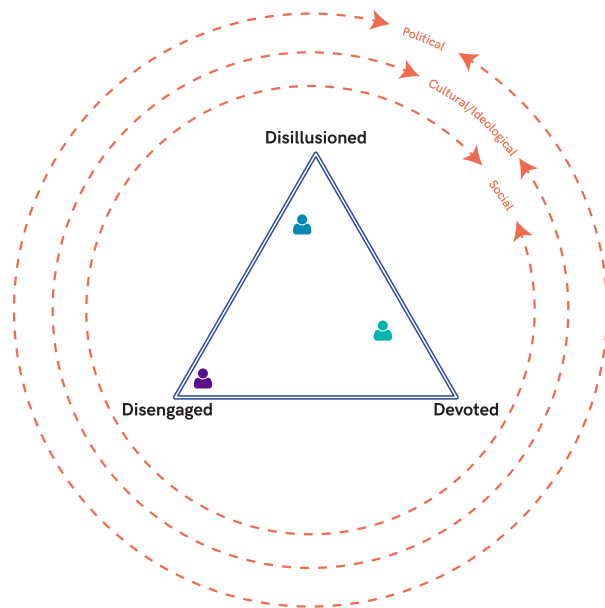
Political Concerns

A third force shapes these young people's relationship to Israel, one we characterize as political. Compared with the personal and cultural/ideological forces, this force seems the most unstable or unpredictable, in that it may be as likely to inspire or reassure as to confuse or frustrate. Much depends on the individual's perspective on Jewish power. Some interviewees celebrate Israeli political decisions, seeing them as furthering Jewish goals and priorities in their homeland; they are inspired by the fact that Jews can defend themselves. They view the history of Israel's founding as a positive and pivotal moment in Jewish history. Others view the same time period with ambivalence, even disappointment or shame, specifically because of how many Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and villages. They are troubled, and frequently angry, when Palestinians or Jews are harmed by the exercise of Jewish power.

Our participants responded either positively, or not at all, to social connections with Israel and/or to its cultural significance. Political concerns were the only active negative force at work on their relationships with Israel. Political concerns had the power to alter negatively how individuals related to Israel much more than did other forces.

Conceptualizing an Interaction of Forces

The three forces we've described interact to shape individuals' relationships to Israel. How individuals relate to Israel can be analyzed and explicated by identifying the relative weight and salience of these three forces to how they think and feel about the country and its people, as in the following figure.



Each person is more or less influenced by these three forces. If we can determine how salient each of these forces is to their relationship with Israel, and what the specific content of these forces is for them, then we can arrive at a textured understanding of why they relate to Israel in the way they do.

Where People are When These Forces Interact

While the relative strength and salience of these three forces helps explain many of the differences between how individuals relate to Israel at given moments in time, there are several additional factors at work that moderate or intensify the impact of those forces. One such factor is the power of place — where people are when they experience these forces. Some of the young people who had made aliyah encountered some of the most challenging aspects of Israel's current situation, especially in the context of their army service. And yet, while these experiences tempered their adolescent idealism, they did not fundamentally alter their relationship to Israel. This contrasts with those interviewees who learned about some of the same challenges — secondhand rather than by experiencing them for themselves — in a university context much less friendly to the complexities of Israel's situation and much less appreciative of its cultural significance.

From Black and White to Gray

As noted above, while most of the interviewees did not appear to change over time, they did grow. When asked, in 2017, if and how their thoughts and sentiments about Israel were different from when they were in high school, overwhelmingly, whatever their relationship to Israel, they expressed a similar idea: they now see Israel with more nuance and complexity. Whereas in high school their views on Israel were more straightforward, even black and white, today there are more shades of gray in how they see the country. Over the seven years of the study, many of the participants have traveled. They have met people from different backgrounds and come to see Israeli life first-hand. These experiences, along with the maturation associated with growing from a teenager to a young adult, account for how they have come to see Israel with more texture and sometimes differently, even if their relationship to it hasn't changed.

Reflections on High School

Against the backdrop of such self-awareness, it is fascinating to see what the interviewees make of their high school education about Israel. Only one expressed a view that he had been duped by his school. Much more common were complaints about the blandness or shallowness of Israel education, or of its mindlessness. This last point translated into a recurring theme for our interviews: disappointment at a missed opportunity, at how their schools had failed them by not providing them with a sound education. This sentiment was much more prevalent than anger. This does not mean that interviewees weren't critical, but that their criticism was couched in a broader understanding of what their schools were trying to accomplish.

School in Relation to Other Institutions

The purpose of the 2010 study was to explore the extent to which different Jewish day schools contributed to their students' perspectives on Israel. It is striking that seven years later, very few indicated that their schools played a role in shaping their relationship to Israel today. Evidently, high schools face intense competition from family and friends whose contribution stands out more prominently in participants' perceptions about what was most formative in shaping their beliefs. Less surprisingly, time in Israel, whether on trips, gap years, or army service, also overshadowed what came before. Participants made clear that their families had a strong influence on their own views and feelings toward Israel, oftentimes in ways that stood out above their memories of high school's influence. When students did recall how their schools had been influential, it was their teachers and their extracurricular experiences that stood out most clearly, rather than classes or other kinds of formal instruction.

Puzzling over why our interviewees' school experiences don't figure more prominently in their assessment of what shaped their relationship to Israel, we wonder if we might have gained a better sense of schools' contribution to their lives if we had interviewed them sooner after graduation. Since graduating high school, they had participated in other powerful experiences

that overshadowed what came before. School may have been influential, but its influence is hard to discern from a distance when there are so many peak experiences blocking the view and when it is perceived as being childish or simplistic in comparison to what came after.

Conclusions and Implications

1. Our research leaves us with a strong sense of a group of individuals who feel their schools have failed them. While many acknowledge their schools' well-intentioned interest in portraying a sunny, upbeat picture of Israel, and of cultivating affection for the country, they are frustrated that they were rarely — if ever — offered something substantive that remotely corresponds to reality in Israel today. Schools have short-changed their students even while they meant well.
 2. Many of those who are most truly connected to Israel, and for whom Israel has deep significance in their lives — the Devoted — are no less familiar with Israel's flaws and challenges than those who express the most bitter criticism of the country, the Disillusioned. This finding suggests that schools should not be fearful of asking their students big questions about Israel, or of encouraging students to ask these kinds of questions themselves. Day school should be the safest possible context in which to explore such matters, much more so than any university campus.
 3. At the same time, if political concerns are not to overwhelm students, schools must also invest serious attention in cultivating meaningful social associations with Israel (real, interpersonal memories) as well as deep cultural connections with the country, especially connections that are not exclusively religious. The cultivation of meaningful social and cultural/ideological associations with Israel might then serve as the backdrop or complement to the exploration, in schooltime, of political issues that can undoubtedly be challenging.
 4. Starting this research, we did not expect to find so few members of the sample shifting in their relationship to Israel over a seven-year period. This finding begs an important question about what students learn and experience during middle school and the earlier years of high school. These years seem to set most students on a trajectory which they continue over many subsequent years. These years of early adolescence might be more critical than any others during students' day school careers.
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Background

In 2010, The AVI CHAI Foundation funded a qualitative study to learn about the ways in which high school juniors thought and felt about Israel. The Foundation was interested in exploring the ways in which a day school experience contributed to how these students related to Israel. To this end, the researchers spoke to students about what was and was not meaningful in the Israel education they experienced at school and how what they learned at school compared with what they learned from other sources of meaning in their lives. The study included 30-minute video-interviews with 40 high school juniors in four Jewish day schools across the United States. The schools were selected to represent different denominational models of day school education. They included a Modern Orthodox day school in the Midwest (“Kook”); a community day school on the West Coast (“Community”); a community day school on the East Coast (“Kehilati”); and a Modern Orthodox day school on the East Coast (“Soloveitchik”).¹

Seven years after the conclusion of this initial study, The AVI CHAI Foundation provided an opportunity to track down members of the original research sample. The Foundation was interested in learning how day school alumni think and feel about Israel a significant period after graduation, and what the behavioral expressions of their thoughts and feelings are. The Foundation engaged Rosov Consulting to conduct this research.

Current Study

These overarching interests were translated into the following specific research questions:

1. To what extent do these young people attribute their relationship with Israel to their day school education?
2. To what extent do these young people feel that their day school education prepared them for life experiences after school, especially in relation to Israel?
3. What do these young people perceive to be the relative contribution of their day school education to who they are today, as young Jews, compared with other formative experiences since they left school?

¹ School names and student names are all pseudonyms.

To answer these questions, we sought to interview as many participants from the original study as possible. Reconnecting with these individuals proved more challenging than anticipated for a variety of reasons. At the time of the original study, identities were well-concealed, making it difficult to reconnect with many of the original participants. Schools could identify photographs of their alumni and provided their names but lacked complete contact information. We sent personal messages, reached out via LinkedIn and Facebook, and ultimately relied on our team’s own personal connections and social networks to identify and connect with those concerned. The 22 people who responded to our inquiry indicated that they were willing to participate, and we conducted in-person interviews with all of them. The interviewees were interested in the research and excited to participate despite most of them not remembering their initial interviews.

The interviewees were located in Northern and Southern California, Arizona, Virginia, Washington D.C., Maryland, North Carolina, New York, Massachusetts, and Israel. Exhibit 1 displays the number interviewed from each school.

EXHIBIT 1: NUMBER OF STUDENTS INTERVIEWED IN 2010 AND 2017

School	# Interviewed 2010	# Interviewed 2017
Community	10	7
Kehilati	10	5
Kook	8	2
Soloveitchik	12	8
Total	40	22

The interviews were approximately one-hour long and were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol. They were conducted one-on-one by a team of three researchers. The interviewers asked open-ended questions, posed sentences for completion, and read back to the participants statements they had made seven years previously.

Once data gathering was complete, we used a grounded theory approach to analyze the information, forming codes and then conceptual categories that emerged through our review.² Rather than test an existing hypothesis, we focused instead on employing an inductive method to learn from the data themselves. We only went back to the original interview transcripts after a couple of sweeps

² Our team used a qualitative analysis software, NVivo, to code and analyze interview data. The software helped with identifying recurring themes and patterns across the various participants’ comments.

through our new dataset. We thus tried to analyze the new transcripts free of expectations about what a particular interviewee might say given his or her previous responses. As a further measure, we included a Rosov Consulting team member from outside the interview team in a round of analysis to help validate our findings and theories.

The Promise and Limitations of Qualitative Research

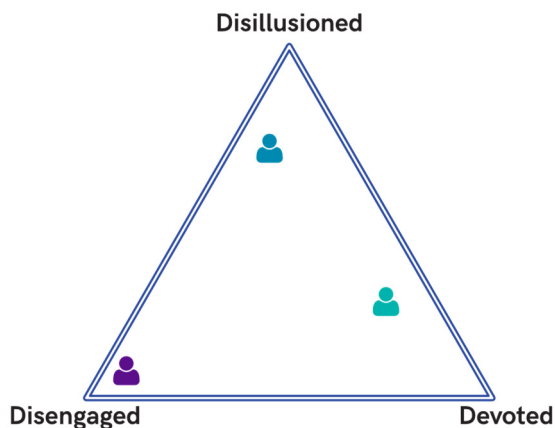
The participants in this study were all 11th grade Jewish day school students when they were originally interviewed. They are not therefore representative of young American Jews in general, the great majority of whom do not attend Jewish day schools. The personal trajectories of study participants may also not be representative of day school students as a whole, although the range of opinions they expressed when they were first interviewed are consistent with the views uncovered among more than a thousand 12th graders as part of a study conducted in 2013, a few years after this project was launched, also made possible by The AVI CHAI Foundation. In that study, published as *Hearts and Minds: Israel in North American Jewish Day Schools*, three broad populations of high school students were identified: about 30% were “hyper-engaged” activists, passionate about Israel and Jewish life; just under 50% were generally interested in Jewish life and quite well connected to Israel; and about 20% seemed detached from Israel and turned off by religion, although not all aspects of Jewishness.

While qualitative research of the kind conducted in this study is not suited to generating broad generalizations, it can enable deep insights. In making sense of the personal trajectories of a relatively small number of individuals (as they reflect on those trajectories in their own words), we have opened a window on people’s inner lives, on what is important to them, and on how they make sense of their life experiences. In this instance, it has been especially instructive returning to the same group of people after the passage of seven years and asking them to reflect on things they said when they were younger. Reflecting on their own earlier words helped them clarify (for us and for themselves) how much, in what ways, and why their thoughts and feelings had changed over time, if they did. As we have come to understand the trajectories of these 22 young people, we have been able to better understand what *might* account for the trajectories of others like them — and also not so much like them.

Relationships to Israel: Identifying Different Types

The 22 young adults we spoke with articulated a wide range of sentiments concerning Israel, varying in the degree of connection they felt to the country and in the specific content that colored their connection. We categorized participants into three types based on what they expressed and on how they related to or dissociated from Israel. These types do not sit along a continuum; they are located in relation to three poles (as in the exhibit below), what we label the Disengaged, the Devoted, and the Disillusioned. To aid appreciation of these categories, we have identified three extreme manifestations of these types — in sociological terms, “ideal types.” Although most participants’ positions are more ambiguous and less definitively located in relation to these categories, these three types constitute a useful interpretative device in helping make explicit the distinct factors that shape individuals’ connections to Israel.

EXHIBIT 2: IDEAL TYPES



DISENGAGED: Passive and Distant

At one pole are those who are detached from and possibly disinterested in Israel. They may have fond memories of visits with their schools or families, but those sentiments are distant; it’s as if they derive from a former life. The Disengaged are characterized by a lack of clarity about how they feel towards Israel and/or a lack of interest in trying to gain more clarity; there is a passivity and a degree of avoidance that distinguishes their relationship (or lack of relationship) with Israel. These people do not live in Israel and would not consider doing so.

Of all the participants in this study, few are more unequivocal about their relationship to Israel than Michelle, the paradigmatic Disengaged interviewee. An enthusiastic alumna of Habonim Dror

summer camp (an experience she still characterizes as “the best times of her life”) and a product of multiple years at Kehilati, Michelle has had almost no connection to Israel since she graduated high school. In 2010, at the time of her original interview, she said she felt the same connection to Israel as to Greenland in that, “*It’s a country that happens to be brought up by a lot of people that I know...*” In 2017, she commented that while she understood the historical tie between Judaism and Israel, she did not think Israel had special significance for Jews in America: “*...it’s just kind of a country that’s in the world.*” Michelle is not actively engaged in Jewish practices, although she made clear that she keeps up with her Hebrew “*for my own personal connection to my youth...Not because I want to be able to speak Hebrew when I go to Israel.*” Michelle characterizes her relationship to Israel in the following way:

I would want to say apathetic, but I know it’s not completely apathetic. My ears perk up when I hear the news about attacks or conflicts, or all of that kind of stuff. I would say I’m more in tune with that area of the news than the average person I work with, but that’s kind of as far as it goes. I do still have family in Israel who I occasionally will communicate with, but that’s just as family, it’s not “let’s talk about Israel”... Overall, it’s a very distant relationship. It’s more part of my life-past than my present.

DEVOTED: Active and Enthusiastic

At a different pole are those who advocate for and actively defend Israel, physically and ideologically. They may have made aliyah and served in the IDF, or they may be in the United States where they feel a fervent love for Israel and a desire to promote the country’s interests. These individuals self-identify as Zionist with no hesitation or qualification. They have family, personal, and ideological connections to Israel, and they feel a collective sense of duty to support the country. The Devoted tend to come from more religiously observant households, although not always, and may be the children of Israelis.

Robert is quintessentially Devoted. He was raised in a Modern Orthodox family and attended Soloveitchik. A most articulate individual, Robert stated that Israel’s actions:

Are overwhelmingly morally defensible and correct. I don’t see an overwhelming need for Israel to change its behavior in any particular way... I feel a very impulsive desire to defend Israel and

to make sure that it's not receiving any criticism that it doesn't deserve, which I think is really most criticism.

Robert's position was quite similar during his initial interview in 2010. He posited then that because of either antisemitism or the inability to look past the surface, people had the wrong ideas about Israel, citing misinformation about collective punishment and mistreatment of Arabs.

Explaining what it means to be a Zionist, he says:

I really do think that Zionism entails, like, a vigorous defense of Israel from enemies, internal and external, and a sense of the place — the role that Israel plays historically for the Jewish people, and that it's not something that should be taken lightly. That's something that should be — we should be really, really zealous about defending and making sure that we don't mess up even once, even a little bit.

DISILLUSIONED: Connected and Frustrated

Located in relation to a third pole, the Disillusioned find themselves torn between their personal, ideological, and social connections to Israel and their frustration or anger with Israel's politics and actions. They care deeply about Israel and may have had intimate experiences visiting the land and people. They are personally connected for a variety of reasons and are deeply concerned for Israel's well-being. It is this concern, viewed through a political lens, that leads those in this group to criticize Israel for its governmental and military shortcomings. The Disillusioned express a complex definition of Zionism, highlighting the country's flaws and problematic elements while appreciating the need for the country's existence. These individuals express a degree of anger towards their high schools for how they taught about Israel. They express a broader critique of how American Jewish institutions represent and relate to Israel.

Bradley is archetypally Disillusioned. He demonstrates both heart-felt love and profound pain in his relationship to Israel. Bradley was involved in an Israel-activist student group at Community. As a high school junior, he commented that what brings him closest to Israel is:

Just the idea of Israel...in that it's a Jewish homeland and its protection for Jews throughout the world, and it's something that we've never been able to have, and that I feel we should cherish it a lot.

He expressed his sense of responsibility to defend Israel and to keep himself informed. However, after graduating high school and after exploring a wide variety of political opinions, Bradley developed more “left-leaning” political ideas and started to criticize Israel and the way he was raised to be pro-Israel. He now expresses a sense of anger towards his high school and the broader network of institutions that raised him, claiming to have been given a one-sided and at times hypocritical perspective.

Once I realized that the moral and ethical and political foundations upon which...I was taught to advocate for Israel were so detached from the moral and political and ethical ways that I was taught to look at the world and deal with any other issue, how dare they have led me so astray as a young kid? How dare they have lied to me and say that I would have a chance at holding my own in any discussion out in the real world? How dare they imbue so much of what it means to be pro-Israel within the veneer of Islamophobia and “they’re always wrong and we’re always right,” right-wing propaganda, all of these things that were so baked into this one section of my education...

As indicated above, Michelle, Robert, and Bradley constitute quintessential types. No other interviewees can be classified as unequivocally as these three individuals. We present them in order to illustrate some of the most fundamental differences between members of our sample. Other interviewees are located at different points in relation to the poles on which these three stand out, but they exhibit perspectives or express attitudes that can be associated with more than one type. Michelle and Robert remained very consistent in their own positions over time — neither one changed their ideas very much. By contrast, Bradley’s views evolved significantly. He is one of very few people in the study who changed so much in this way.

Growth without Change

One of the more striking elements of this research has been discovering just how little the study participants changed over a seven-year period. In addition to immediate visual and behavioral similarities, as well as certain verbal tics, we found that most participants had **not** substantively changed in their stance towards Israel since high school. Jeremy — a Community student — demonstrates this point well. In 2010, he expressed himself in the following way:

I mean as far as the Occupation of Gaza and the West Bank goes, I think it's really too complicated of a situation to be ashamed of it as a whole, because I think there's a lot that just goes into it... I'm just displeased by, I guess, the lack of effort to really keep the peace process going.

My parents really provided the groundwork for me to be supportive of Israel and have that part of my views of Israel be intact. But I wish that like me, my parents were more concentrated on making decisions based on facts rather than based on 100% affinity towards Israel... I feel like I'm one of the Zionists that puts it all together and concludes that while there's some bad spots here and there, that it's still a good country.

In 2017, this is how he saw things:

The side that our school tried to promote was obviously a very pro-Israel side. I know my parents were certainly very approving of that... I remember one of the Gaza wars was happening and there was an assembly... It was, like, a half-hour, 45-minute presentation. Here's what's going on in Israel... This was the side of, like, Gaza is using human shields, Hamas is a terrorist organization.

Meanwhile, a lot of innocent people are getting killed and that was one of the few examples where I'm like, I don't think this situation is being fully represented. I'm only seeing the side of the conflict that I know my school would like to represent. I know there's another side to the story. I'm not saying that anyone is a bad guy, I'm not saying that the Israeli government ought to just be ripped for what's happening in Gaza, but I also do think that there is that aspect of the story that of course, you have lots of rockets coming into Israel from Gaza and I do believe Hamas is a terrorist organization, but the response is obviously very lopsided.

Both in 2010 and 2017, Jeremy explained that he forms ideas and opinions based on what he believes is a full assessment of the facts at hand. He values being presented with all sides of a given scenario before taking a position. At the same time, both in high school and as a young professional, now living on the other side of the country from his family's home, he makes clear that fundamentally he continues to be supportive of Israel: *"I don't think my views changed that radically."* His friendships with Muslims and Turks at college in Canada didn't radicalize his thinking. On the contrary, they may have moderated it.

Returning to a theme from his first interview, he says that this support comes from weighing the different opinions and facts that he has encountered. This may be true, but it does also seem that his generally positive stance in relation to Israel also has something to do with the “groundwork” laid by his own parents when he was younger, even while — in another marker of his consistency over time — he continues to distinguish the rigor of his own thinking from theirs.

Across the country, Jane — a Kehilati student — expressed her love of Israel as a high school student and, with a game plan already mapped out, discussed the possibility of joining the Israeli army or immersing herself in some other way in Israel after she finished in school.

Well, I really want to be more immersed in Israeli society. Like I'm planning on making aliyah. Both of my brothers were in the Israeli army, so my connection has grown from that. Myself, I'm toying with the idea of going into the army, maybe doing sherut leumi or seminary, so I definitely have a lot of different options...my brothers have been giving me a lot of advice, and I don't know if you've heard of Dover Tzahal, which is an army unit. Like I want to do media and Israel advocacy, that kind of stuff. Hopefully, I'll major in communications so that's very involved with that, or intelligence in the army. I feel like I won't feel Israeli until I go into the army.

She was true to her word: after graduation she “*followed her dream*” and joined the IDF.

[I served] For three years as an officer over there. When I got out, there was a lot of deliberation, but I ultimately decided to come back to the United States to get my degree... Ultimately, I want to move back...

I think I was a lot more of an idealist when I graduated high school... I grew up in this very Zionist household where I thought Israel could do no wrong. I went there, and I saw the reality on the ground. I mean, I was literally in the middle of settlers throwing rocks and Palestinians throwing slingshots and being in the middle and trying to mitigate between the two was not an easy task... So it was a reality check because you got to see both sides, but that being said, I still — I don't think — my views didn't change; I'm just more aware of the reality.

As a 24-year old, she admits that she was more of an idealist when she was younger. It seems that she is no longer of the view that Israel can

do no wrong, something she previously assumed. Seven years on, having completed her army service, on the ground, caught in the middle between settlers and Palestinians, she is aware of many of the issues that make life in Israel complicated and even challenging, and yet she still does not feel that her views have changed; she is still Devoted. After these intense life experiences, and after being exposed to what she refers to as “*both sides*,” she has not really modified her values or principles, although her understanding of the reality in Israel has grown more nuanced and informed.

At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the views of Amanda — a student at Community — have also not changed. When asked about her understanding of Zionism, on both occasions we spoke with her, seven years apart, she provided nearly identical responses, indicating a struggle with deciding whether or not she is a Zionist.

This is how she put things at her first interview:

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself a Zionist?

Amanda: No.

Interviewer: What is a Zionist?

Amanda: A Zionist for me is someone that is sort of...I associate the word "Zionist" with the word "settler." So, someone that believes that the whole land is theirs and that they're the only ones that have a right to that area. I think that what they do is important — Zionists — how they think is important, but I don't identify with that idea.

Interviewer: What is the idea that you don't identify with?

Amanda: That the land is only for Jews.

In her second interview, in 2017, she said the following:

Amanda: I personally never bought into the whole Zionist thing, let's put it that way, that I felt was pitched to us in school my whole life. And some people that I know did... I didn't really buy into that. I don't know if that's because I come from a not really religious background...

Interviewer: I want to ask you; do you consider yourself a Zionist?

Amanda: No.

Interviewer: The next question is how you define that...

Amanda: Yeah. I don't think I consider myself a Zionist. Though I have a hard time thinking in — like, if you were to ask me, what's the definition of a Zionist? I would think that it's like a person who believes that Israel should — that Israel should exist. So, I think that I — I think that Israel should exist, but I don't think of — that's so difficult. I don't know. I don't think I'm a Zionist...

I think that's a little bit — I think maybe also the connotation that it has in my mind these days is a lot more negative than it used to be. I don't think — you know — I don't believe — I think in my head, Zionists are people who live in settlements. So, I don't support that, and I don't think that that's any way to make peace in that part of the region, in that part of the world. So, I'm not a Zionist in that sense, but I do think that a Jewish homeland should exist. So, if that's what a Zionist is, then yeah.

In both conversations she first responds conclusively that she is not a Zionist, but when prompted to define the term, she eventually differentiates between “settlers” and believing in the need for a Jewish state, or at least a Jewish homeland. Once she removes the “settler” connotation from the term, she is more willing to identify with it. When we interviewed her at the age of 17, she was midway through her eleventh year of Jewish day school education. Over the following seven years, one year of which was in Spain, she spent very little time in Jewish settings; she well and truly left the Jewish bubble, being exposed to people and experiences quite different from those she had encountered during her high school years. Her horizons had expanded, and yet it is striking how little her thinking about what it means to be Zionist were changed. After seven years, her struggles with Zionism are tied up with the same issue, whether or not it connotes support for the “settlements.” She continues to be Disengaged.

It is remarkable, in fact, that most of the interviewees have not modified their stances on Israel, or their relationship to it, from when they were juniors in high school. To put it succinctly, they have grown, but they have not changed. These individuals have attended different universities. They have engaged in international travel. Some are now living in Israel. They have broadened their horizons in dramatic ways. A number of them are now in romantic relationships with non-Jews. They have certainly not remained in some kind of day school bubble. And yet their views, even though significantly more nuanced, are largely the same as when they were in the eleventh grade. In a sense, they have traveled further along paths on which they

were already travelling when they were in school. Most of them have not moved on to a different path.

We discuss below how to account for this lack of change. First, though, we turn to the case of the small number of students who do now seem to be in a different place in relation to Israel. These exceptions help crystalize some general rules about the rest of the sample.

Exceptions to the Rule: Change Over Time

In our sample of 22 interviewees, there are three notable exceptions to the general pattern that participants' views remained consistent over the seven years between their two interviews. One such exception is Bradley, who, as described above, moved from being conventionally, even passionately, pro-Israel when a high school junior to taking a more critical view of Israel's politics and policies by the end of high school, at college, and beyond. He has evidently reflected at length about that journey and what provoked it.

As he explains it, when he graduated from high school, he found himself in a much bigger pool of political opinions. That led to the development of political feelings further to the left, and an associated anger about the way he had been raised to be pro-Israel — *“a feeling that I had been duped and held back from any number of truths.”* It was especially painful because he was previously seen as (his persona had been) an accomplished advocate for Israel. As a consequence, he became suspicious of any pro-Israel standpoint, no matter how reasonable. His anger about having been lied to about *“being able to hold his own in any discussion”* fueled his move leftward.

At first, he resisted the different ways of thinking to which he was exposed out of a fear of where he might end up. He likens it to the fear of leaving an ultra-orthodox community. In time, he came to embrace a J Street position of, what he calls, *“I can love Israel and criticize it.”* He had been introduced to J Street, and Jeremy Ben Ami's first book (*The Case for J Street*), by his father who, interestingly, was *“going through the same kind of transition.”*

Today, he describes himself in the following terms:

I'm scared that I may not love Israel, or care for it, or advocate for it right now. I think that, maybe, that is the most important thing here. That you've got someone (who has, through a variety of personal family history and other cousins that were in the army and

a brother who was in the army and parents that lived in Israel and a grandparent that lived in Israel), you've got someone who has a real reason to love Israel and that person is struggling with how to deal with Israel.

Another participant, Dana — a graduate of Kehilati — traveled a different journey. She was involved in a Jewish youth group and studied in Israel for a semester during her high school senior year. Though she did not immediately identify as Zionist when we first spoke with her, she made clear that she supported Israel; she was mildly Devoted. At the time, she argued that Palestinians brought about much of their own suffering.

If someone came up to me and they're like — Are you a Zionist? — I would say probably not, but I guess if Zionists, I guess when we learn about it, it's like they want all Jews to move to Israel and I don't necessarily support that, although I support Israel. I don't think that everyone needs to move there, but I support it pretty much no matter what, even if I don't agree with everything they do...

I guess I don't really think Israel is so much in the wrong when it comes to this, because it's kind of like — as a metaphor — like if my sister misbehaves and my parents punish us both, like no ice cream, then I can't really get mad at my parents. I should get mad at my sister. And I feel like the Palestinians, as awful as it sounds, they kind of did it to themselves, some of them, and it's too bad that if all of them are being punished for a few of them, but I feel like Israel is reasonable in a lot of the things they do with drawing those lines that you can and can't cross.

Dana's views in 2017 are starkly less favorable towards Israel but also colored by ambiguity and lack of clarity. She still cares about the country and values it as a home for Jews, yet she is conflicted by how Israel treated and continues to treat Palestinians; she is overwhelmed by the narratives of those Palestinians who were forced to flee their homes. She does not know how to feel and does not have a clear position toward Israel but rather a series of overlapping and conflicting personal and political values. She does not try to reconcile these values. Instead — for the sake of her own peace of mind — she disengages and avoids conversations about Israel. In this sense, she exhibits some quintessentially Disengaged characteristics in that she is now distant and passive in how she relates to Israel. When faced with new perspectives about Israel, she rejects some of her previously-held high school beliefs, but she also retreats from the conversation.

Rather than engage in the difficult process of redefining her views and taking an intellectual or political stand, she is paralyzed by conflicting values and so chooses not to engage.

This is how she tells her story:

Once I sort of went to college, I realized how one-sided the information was that we were provided with [in high school]. I just felt like I — when I started hearing other sides of the story, I had no idea what people were talking about. I was really surprised, I was confused, and I really didn't know how to process it all. After reflecting and looking back at some of my assignments in high school, it sort of seemed like we were only getting one part of the picture... I think that part of the picture was pretty conservative and pro-Israel and looking at the Israel side.

Her disengagement from Israel today seems to be a particular psychological or personal reaction to the confusion she experienced in college when encountering narratives about Israel (“*there’s a whole bunch of Jewish people over there, and...they’re doing things that I don’t think are ethical or appropriate*”) that differed sharply from what she had learned in school (“*Israel is always right*”). Her disengagement is colored by a sense of guilt.

I think, sometimes I feel a little guilty for being so disengaged, because I had a really great experience when I went there. I loved the country. I fell in love with it. Then I came back and started feeling confused, and so now, I’m just sort of like, I don’t want any of those emotions, and I ignore it... It used to be important like that to me too, and it’s sort of like, is it right that I’m disengaging because I didn’t enjoy the process of engaging, because it wasn’t very pleasant?

The case of Zvi is completely different. He grew up in an Orthodox home and went to Soloveitchik for high school. As a junior, he was Disengaged. He seemed disinterested and fairly flippant about Israel — as if it was a thing everyone talks about for which he had neither time nor interest. He had traveled to Israel many times with his family, maybe 10 times by the time he was 17. It was something he found almost boring, “*It’s just like any other vacation. It’s not special that we’re there.*” His disinterest, or adolescent coolness, was palpable in his reflections on whether he considered himself a Zionist.

I am more not a Zionist because I'm not willing to become so involved in Israel and go there, be so proud of it, listen to news. Like I don't do that stuff. I should maybe... People encourage you to become more involved, and I think me and my friends are more [interested] in — like we're kind of self-involved and we're more [interested] in what's going on in our own lives and we're not like, we don't care as much as we should... I don't care enough to be a total Zionist.

After high school, Zvi went to spend a year in Israel in yeshiva; his father heavily influenced his decision to do so. The experience had a profound effect on him. Seven years after our initial interview, his demeanor had completely changed.

I feel that Israel is the Jewish state that has belonged to us since Biblical times. I believe it is a God-given land. I feel — Those are two practical explanations of why I want to go back, but something I can explain is I just feel more comfortable there, more natural. It feels more like my family and also my culture. I feel that everyone in America is a little too preppy and nice to their neighbors. In Israel, it's a little more insulting and, like, pushing your neighbors, but I'm attracted to that more. I feel like I fit in more to that. So, I feel more natural is the main reason. It's just it feels better for me. I love the fact that it's a Jewish state. I have a strong Jewish identity.

When we interviewed him a second time, Zvi had finished his four-year American college program and was heading back to Israel to join the army. When asked what led to this sharp difference in his relationship to Israel from when he was in high school, he explained that he loved being outdoors in Israel. He told us that he “*fell in love literally with the land*” and would go biking and hiking in the north and in Eilat. He also enjoyed meeting the people and connecting with them. Interestingly, it was not his experience in the yeshiva that influenced him but rather what happened outside of the *beit midrash*.

After graduating high school, these three young people — Bradley, Dana, and Zvi — found themselves located in contexts and encountering ideas that departed from the routine experiences and expressions of their high school years. We might say that as a result they were deeply unsettled. In Bradley's case, fueled by anger at his one-sided upbringing, he pursued what he considered to be more balanced information about Israel. He took steps to ensure he was up-to-date with Israeli politics and sought out more progressive positions

regarding Israeli affairs. By contrast, when Dana was confronted with personal and historical narratives of Israel as the oppressor, she found herself in a vortex of conflicting viewpoints. She shut down her relationship with Israel, so to speak, in order to avoid having to integrate her care for the country as a Jew and her disdain for some of its history and practices as a progressive individual. Having started on a path not so different from Bradley's, she and he were now headed in different directions. Zvi's story is different again. Having viewed Israel through the lens of adolescent cynicism during his high school years, he unearthed a sense of love for Israel when having a chance to discover the country for himself. He transitioned from a somewhat apathetic supporter of Israel to a believing Zionist, putting his body on the line for the Israel Defense Forces and planning to make his life in the country.

Seven years after we first interviewed them, each of these three individuals had developed a profoundly different relationship to Israel. In reviewing their stories, we have asked ourselves what was it that contributed to such dramatic changes. In a larger sense, we want to know what are the experiences, thought-processes, and ideas that prompted them to change, and what is it about the other members of our interview sample — in fact, the great majority of the sample — who encountered no less unsettling experiences but more or less maintained the same positions as before? How can we account for where people are today based on the push and pull of different forces in their lives?

Three Forces:

The Social, Cultural/Ideological, and Political

In trying to answer these questions, we have **not** taken up personality-related categories, although they might be relevant. We have not attempted to determine, for example, the extent to which some of these young people are either “dwellers” or “seekers,” comfortably anchored in a particular identity or engaged in the ongoing construction or reconstruction of who they are. We have tried instead to discern patterns in the mix of circumstances that have shaped their lives and provided the ground for their relationships with Israel. To put it differently, our explanatory framework is more sociological than psychological.

It will already be apparent that the interviewees varied in their family backgrounds and in their religious upbringings, in the extent to which they had family and friends in Israel, in the frequency and form of

their visits to Israel, and in their exposure to political narratives about Israel, whether in high school or during the years after. As we reviewed the set of 22 personal stories, we homed in on three broad forces which, through their interplay, seem to have shaped our interviewees' relationships with Israel. How each of these individuals is impacted by these forces and how each of them integrates the push-and-pull exerted by these forces is what ultimately determines their relationship to Israel, at any given moment in time.

Social Connections

Social connections to Israel are grounded in personal friendships and family relationships with specific people. These connections are thickened by the experiences, and the memories of experiences, of times spent communicating with or in the same place as those people. Such relationships and their emotional accretions strongly shape how individuals feel about and relate to Israel.

The most commonplace source of social connection to Israel is the experience of traveling in the country. Participants shared fond memories of traveling as young adults with family, school-mates, fellow program-participants, or friends more generally; but those social connections might also have started from a distance, when communicating with family members one has not yet met, or through forming virtual, long-distance relationships initiated at school. For some, the social experiences they remember included relaxing on the beach or enjoying the nightlife in Tel Aviv. For others, these memories included visiting family or touring with others. While these experiences played a role in contextualizing Israel — coming to see Israel as a particular kind of place at a particular moment in time — what made these experiences so significant and perhaps more lasting was the social associations at their heart. For yet others, their social associations to Israel are more shallow; they are less about experiences and more about the social fact of being connected in some way, and often in multiple ways, to people in Israel: friends who live there, classmates from school, family friends, family members or simply acquaintances they had met while traveling there. This means that they “know people in Israel,” and knowing these people, they might think about or be more concerned about the place than about other places in the world.

For many of our interviewees, the people they know in Israel are family: distant cousins or relatives, grandparents who have moved there or who originated there, siblings who had made aliyah or

parents who are Israeli. These family connections are the most powerful “social” driver of why an individual might care about Israel or feel a connection to the place. These connections mean that Israel is the land of one’s family, almost inevitably a place for which one cares in a heightened fashion. (We saw earlier that Michelle pays more attention to news about the country even while fundamentally disengaged because she has family in Israel, no matter how distant.)

For Ami — an alum of the Community school and someone who might be characterized as moderately Devoted — Israel possesses very little significance in religious or political terms. And yet, it is somewhere to which he is deeply connected because of social and cultural associations. He is the child of Israelis and grew up in the United States. He has many family members in Israel and loves visiting them every year. In political terms, there are both left-wing and right-wing members of his family; he says that he tries to maintain a moderate or middle-of-the-road stance. He shies away from extremes. Instead, he finds his connection to Israel through social connections, symbolized — one might say — by cake.

A few weeks of fun, a few weeks of cake. All my family is over there...in Israel it's just all my grandmas...and they're just like insane on making me cake...poppy seed cake, chocolate cake, cheesecake... I usually stick around Tel Aviv and I usually just hang out with family. Now, I have a lot of friends there, so we'll go out and go to the beach and fun stuff. Very casual, nothing very educational... I think the connection is primarily cultural. I wouldn't say religious, for example. Politics-wise, I'd consider myself relatively center. Mostly, I'd consider myself just cynical. I think there are a lot of politics in the way and a lot of politicians in the way of a lot of various issues around there.

Ami says that his connection is “*primarily cultural*” but that doesn’t seem right, at least not from this extract. It is not entirely clear why he uses that term. Instead, what looms large is the sense that he is connected to Israel first through family, and through repeated — nourishing — experiences with family, and secondarily through friends. He describes his experiences as “*pretty casual*,” but their significance seems to go deep. These are the kind of social associations that give Israel meaning, as a place.

To summarize, when we asked participants in this study to describe their relationships to Israel, they often replied by noting the people

they knew who lived there or those they would go to visit there. In this way, it became clear that, if for no other reason, Israel mattered to a number of interviewees because it was where their family and friends were and where they had formed meaningful memories with those people. These relationships, and the emotional associations that had built up around them, constitute a meaningful source of connection to Israel and represent one significant sociological contributor that determines Israel's place in their lives.

Cultural/Ideological Associations

Cultural/ideological associations to Israel are grounded in Jewish ideas, sentiments, and values that shape how someone relates to Israel through their identity as a Jew. Participants expressed a variety of ideas regarding how their religious practices and their feelings about Jewish nationhood affected how they connect to Israel. More religiously observant participants articulated traditional tropes about a divine connection to the Land and how it was intended for and gifted to the Jewish people. They expressed a collective sense of peoplehood, related intrinsically to the land of Israel, as prescribed by the Torah and emphasized throughout Jewish law and history.

Yoav, a graduate of Soloveitchik who made aliyah and is unquestionably Devoted, weaves many of these concepts together and conveys how they have practical, everyday meaning for him.

Israel is not...just a country. I mean, to most people, it's not just a country. It's really — it's a home for the Jewish people. And it was — not only that, it was a home that we were given and that's, like, the biggest part about it. We were given this land. And that's what it is. You know what I mean?

Like, when you pray for it, you believe, like, that's — God is saying this is for you, live here, fight for it, defend it, build it. Not only — like, make this the country, make this the place that people want to come visit, people want to see. Lead it. Like, have this country being a face for other people — for other countries. Very much something I still believe in 100 percent. That's why I still do milu'im after three years of torture.

Less-religious participants spoke to the value of having a Jewish homeland where Jews could be safe and live their lives free of oppression. The notion of a safe haven or “a place to call our own” came up repeatedly in how these young adults related to Israel and the value they saw in having a Jewish state. They recognized the historical

need for such a home and appealed to a sense of national identity to explain why Israel matters to them and ought to exist.

Mike, an alum of Kehilati, makes clear how powerful such concepts can be even when feeling contempt for the current Israeli government and “*the way they treat minorities, the way they treat Israeli Arabs, the way they treat the Palestinian people.*” Having lambasted the government, he continues:

People are quick to forget that the Jews need a place that they can retreat to. [That's] not to say other people don't deserve that, too, but I firmly believe in the need for a Jewish state with the Right of Return.

What's important about the way Mike talks about these things is that he does not only see Israel's importance in strictly political terms, even while referencing the Law of Return. There is a strong cultural undercurrent to his thinking, and this in turn is tightly bound up with his own identity, how he thinks of himself as a Jew. Somewhat disillusioned, he is nevertheless Devoted.

I think that my Judaism is directly tied to it [Israel]. I think that I wouldn't be as interested in being Jewish if I didn't have Israel to see it physically. I think that I'm more interested in many ways in Israel than I am in Judaism. I think that, you know, one...feeds into the other and makes it all whole. I don't think I'd be a Zionist if I wasn't Jewish...

To me, Israel is a necessary part of the Jewish people to survive in their current form... I think it represents a critical component of what being Jewish in the 21st century means and hopefully in the 22nd century.

These sentiments feed on and feed into a sense of Jewish identity and pride. The connection to Israel they express draws on historical narratives of Israel as a nation. Indeed, nearly all of the participants who did *not* identify as Zionist or who struggled to identify as Zionist, *did* still recognize the value of these same narratives and of the reasonableness of there being a place that Jews can call home. This connection is based on a cultural concept of peoplehood or belonging — a notion of “*Jewishness*” that extends beyond individual or familial relations to something larger, to a collective expression of what it means to be Jewish.

Political Concerns

A third force shapes these young people's relationship to Israel, one we characterize as political. Compared with the personal and cultural/ideological forces we have described, this force seems the most unstable or unpredictable, in that it may be as likely to inspire or reassure as to confuse or frustrate. Much depends on the individual's perspective on Jewish power or on how they view the larger context in which Jewish power is exercised. Some interviewees celebrate Israeli political decisions, seeing them as furthering Jewish goals and priorities in their homeland; they are inspired by the fact that Jews can defend themselves. They view the history of Israel's founding as a positive and pivotal moment in Jewish history. Others view the same time period with ambivalence, even disappointment or shame, specifically because of how many Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and villages. They are troubled, and frequently angry, when Palestinians or Jews are harmed by the exercise of Jewish power. They are deeply critical of the present Israeli government for its treatment of the Palestinians or, more moderately, for its inability, in the words of one interviewee, *"To address Israel's challenges boldly."*

The different dynamics associated with political concerns of this kind are seen starkly when comparing the perspectives of two interviewees, former schoolmates at Kehilati, Jane and Dana (both of whom we described earlier). After graduating high school and a period of acclimation in Israel, Jane served in the IDF. When we interviewed her, she was back at university in the US.

First of all, being a soldier of the country, you realize how expensive things are. Just being a citizen in the country, there's a huge gap between the rich and the poor. There are a lot of social problems in Israel that people talk about over there... When you're living there, you realize the country is far from perfect. I mean, people are living in poverty. Holocaust survivors are living in poverty... There are a lot of issues with education. In short, there are a lot of social issues. So, when you see the country that you love, and you grew up admiring, how sometimes it treats its citizens it's a little bit hard... I've seen the conflict pretty much at its worst and I think that's something that I would have never imagined as a high school student because, in my eyes, Israel could do no wrong. But because I've seen those hardships and lived through them, I love Israel even more and I have a greater appreciation for the country.

Dana had not been back to Israel since a semester program there at the end of high school, one she described as “magical.” We’ve seen already that, when in college, she found it hard to reconcile what she had been told about Israel at school with what she was learning from her professors and friends in college. Here’s how she describes one of her first experiences:

My first class that I took in college, one of them was a Middle East seminar, and we were reading these books, and one of them was from a Palestinian’s perspective and I just remember that I was kind of shocked. It was hard to swallow at first. Then I started thinking about the different sides and stories... I realized how one-sided the information was that we were provided with [in high school]. I just felt like — when I started hearing other sides of the story — I had no idea what people were talking about. I was really surprised, I was confused, and I really didn’t know how to process it all.

What’s ironic, and perhaps paradoxical, is that Jane may have directly experienced more challenging features of life in Israel than did Dana. Dana was hearing about such things second-hand from activists on campus or from her professors. And yet their reactions to these experiences were profoundly different.

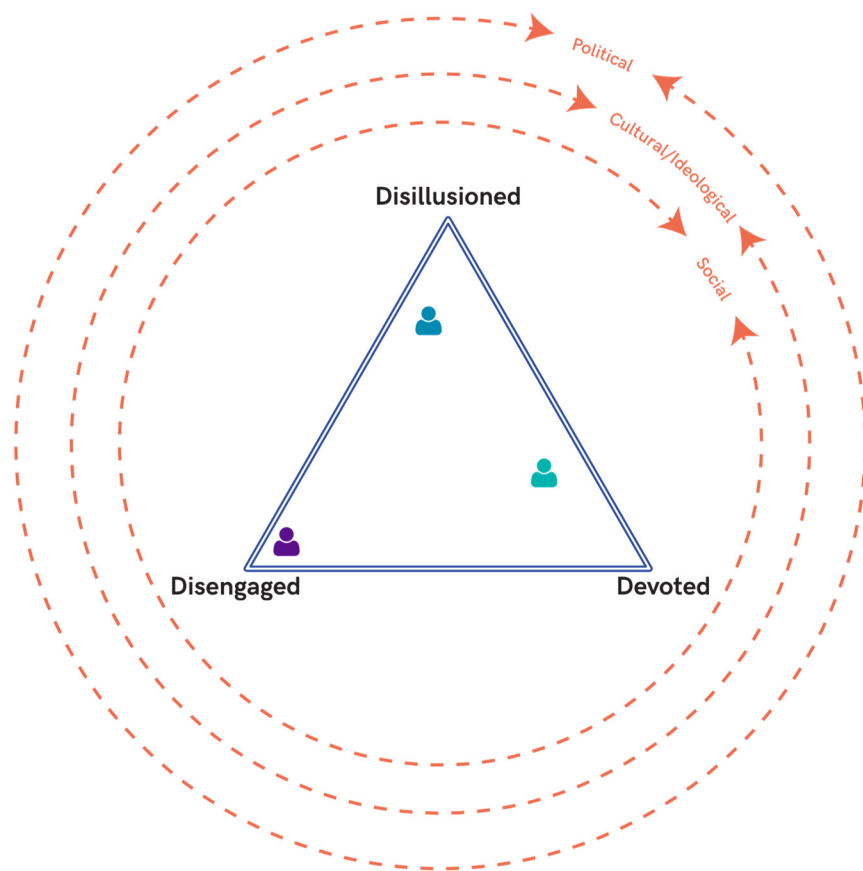
Before probing why these two young women reacted so differently, it’s worth highlighting one additional contrast between the outcomes set in motion by the three forces we have identified. It is far more likely that an individual will be negatively inclined towards Israel because of a political concern than because of a social association or cultural issue. We can theorize about negative social associations: imagine, for example, that someone had a falling out with an Israeli friend or family member or perhaps had a bad visit to Israel. When it comes to cultural/ideological associations, an individual might take issue with the Jewish value of chosenness and even the notion of peoplehood out of an aversion to tribalism. They might see claims of God’s promise of the Land of Israel to Jews as a form of colonialist appropriation. However, our participants responded either positively, or not at all, to social connections with Israel and/or to its cultural significance. Political concerns were the only active negative force at work on their relationships with Israel. This point cannot be overstated: Political concerns had the power to alter negatively how individuals related to Israel much more than did other forces. And, as we will discuss below, this finding foreshadows a course of action to

be taken by day school educators regarding how they structure their Israel education efforts.

Conceptualizing an Interaction of Forces

The three forces we've described interact to shape individuals' relationships to Israel. To put it differently, how individuals relate to Israel can be analyzed and explicated by identifying the relative weight and salience of these three forces to how they think and feel about the country and its people, as seen in Exhibit 3.

EXHIBIT 3: THREE FORCES



While, in the long-run, we don't rule out the possibility of developing numerical measures to assess such interactions, at the moment we propose this notion of interacting forces in conceptual terms: it is a helpful way to begin making sense of the different trajectories we have observed in interviewees' relationships to Israel over a seven-year period. Each person is more or less influenced by these three forces. If we can determine how salient each of these forces is to their

relationship with Israel, and what the specific content of these forces is for them, then we can arrive at a textured understanding of why they relate to Israel in the way they do.

To return to the three members of our sample whose relationships to Israel changed most during the years between our interviews, their trajectories are a lot more understandable when viewed through these conceptual lenses:

BRADLEY: Classified as paradigmatically Devoted in 2010 and Disillusioned in 2017, Bradley has been exposed to and become immersed in harsh criticism of Israel's politics. Despite quite strong social connections with Israel (formed over many visits to the country with family and reinforced by his brother serving in the IDF) alongside moderate cultural/ideological associations, his relationship with Israel today is conflicted because of his political stance. To repeat his own words, quoted earlier: *"You've got someone who has a real reason to love Israel and that person is struggling with how to deal with Israel."* Bradley's social relationships created a reason to love the country; the deepening political concerns of his post-high school years have resulted in struggle.

ZVI: Classified as Disengaged in 2010 and Devoted in 2017, Zvi was one of the only interviewees from a Modern Orthodox school who did not define himself as a Zionist when a junior. Today, on the cusp of making aliyah, he enthusiastically thinks of himself as one. Asked in his interview to account for why he had changed, he says of his childhood years, "I hadn't had an experience in Israel." This is a remarkable comment from someone who had been to Israel at least 10 times by the time we first interviewed him. This remark affirms an important part of our thesis: visiting Israel is not synonymous with developing social or cultural connections with the country. It wasn't until his gap year in Israel that he acquired both social connections with strong role models, and a sense of the land's ideological significance, as experienced in early morning biking expeditions. These experiences changed his trajectory. Politics never entered what he described as his *"four amot,"* his personal space.

DANA: Classified as moderately Devoted in 2010, Dana was unquestionably Disengaged in 2017. Since returning from Israel at the end of high school, her social connection with Israel was minimal; she had not been back to the country. Her cultural association with Israel may have been even thinner, summed up by her observation, *"I feel*

perfectly comfortable being Jewish without being Zionist, and without engaging with that piece of my identity.” At the same time, as we have described, she has been exposed to a set of political narratives about Israel that profoundly unsettled her. She captures this process well in her own words:

The more I listened, the more I heard... I think that, in combination with the campus overall and the climate there, and then my class just all, sort of, got the ball rolling down a different side of the hill.

The metaphor she uses to depict what happened is evocative and is consistent with our thesis of interacting forces. With limited resistance provided by cultural or social forces, the corrosive force of political concerns pushed her “*down a different side of the hill.*”

Location, Location, Location: Where People are When These Forces Interact

While the relative strength and salience of these three forces help explain many of the differences between how individuals relate to Israel at given moments in time, there are several additional factors at work that moderate or intensify the impact of those forces. As we noted earlier, it is likely that personality is one such factor: some people are psychologically more adaptable than others; they’re more willing to explore new ideas and try on new identities. While it is likely, then, that personality influences how individuals process and respond to the three forces, we just don’t have sufficiently reliable data to be able to make such claims about our 22 interviewees.³

We can, however, attest with confidence to the influence of one more factor: the power of place. Social-psychologists have long argued for a notion of the situated self, that how people act and how they think — really, who they are — is shaped by where they are and with whom at a given moment. Our interviewees were more than able to call attention to the contexts through which they had passed that influenced the ways in which they experienced the interplay between social, cultural, and political forces.

³ Of course, there may be any number of other reasons why people end up where they do. Intellectual development can result in people being drawn toward or away from complexity and conflict. Their loyalty to certain values or political positions may derive from the specifics of their moral development. Their general political orientation on a left-right spectrum is surely relevant, too.

We already called attention to the different reactions of Jane and Dana when exposed to facets of Israel's past and present that contradicted Israel's image as "doing no wrong" from their high school days. We have seen the extent to which the political concerns Dana encountered overwhelmed her weak social and cultural associations with Israel. Yet, Dana herself acknowledges that these concerns were so powerful in large part because of where she encountered them, and her social needs at the time.

I had some very, very liberal friends in college... Israel would come up when we were just hanging out, because you know, we'd talk about political things and news stories and I would not typically engage in those conversations. I would just sort of listen and take in what they had to say, because it was a very new perspective to me... I think it would come up in that setting. Sometimes that was scary, because they were new friends. I was in college, I was like, I need friends. So, I would just stay — like, I don't want to tell them that I have this completely different view, but then the more I listened, the more I heard.

Jane encountered perhaps even more challenging realities, but this encounter played out in a very different context, during the course of her army service in Israel, as we noted earlier:

I saw the reality on the ground. I mean, I was literally in the middle of settlers throwing rocks and Palestinians throwing slingshots and being in the middle and trying to mitigate between the two was not an easy task, especially since people looked at me as the Zionist American that came over. So, it was a reality check because you got to see both sides, but that being said, I still — I don't think my — my views didn't change; I'm just more aware of the reality.

As she says at a number of points in the interview, she is less idealistic now than when she was in high school. She's more moderate. But fundamentally her views haven't changed; as we noted above, she still loves Israel. She is without doubt Devoted. And this constancy does not seem to be because she's an inflexible individual or somehow resistant to change (after all she left her suburban home to volunteer for a high-stress military role). The critical factor is that she was seeing such things from a position of throwing in her lot with Israel. She's a "citizen," as she puts it, and that's a very different place to stand, say, from where the critics of Israel, she has now encountered in college in the US, are

positioned. Context is a critical anchoring factor in her relationship to Israel. It played a large role in unsettling Dana.

Jane's situation is very much like that of another young woman, Davida, who also served in the IDF after graduation. Davida was raised in Israel and attended high school in the US while her father worked there. She returned to Israel a year after her family, following the end of her high school education. When we interviewed her in 2010, she had been quick to defend Israel against some of her more critical high school peers at Community. When we spoke to her in 2017, she did not shy away from listing Israel's challenges. Through her service in the Israeli army, she had encountered a variety of troubling experiences. For someone in a different social context, these experiences might have swayed her views in a radically different direction. However, Davida's home is Israel, and it is from this position that she views her experiences and defines both her relationship to the country and her criticisms of it.

I live here. That's first of all...my family is here, and I have a life here... I don't always agree with Israel, a lot of things that — like, I'm not a fan of Netanyahu, not a fan of a lot of the politics... Here it's easier, I think, to be more vocal about what I feel is really happening here. I also think the army — I said I was in the West Bank for my two years... I was near Ramallah and it was very hard for me. A lot of the surrounding people who were with me on the same job were very right-wing and very, like, "death to Arabs" and stuff, and I tend to be a very humane person... It's very hard...I'm never going to be embarrassed about living here or apologize to someone for living here. That's not my thing...my instinct is that Israel is important and there's a reason for why it's important. I think that's enough in order to stand up for it even if that means disagreeing with some of the things it does.

For Davida, Israel is much more than a political issue. It is family, friends, and home all wrapped up together, and it is these values and commitments that moderate her criticisms and complaints. Her social associations and cultural connections, in this context, mitigate how potentially corrosive political forces influence her relationship to Israel.

Jane and Davida have processed their thoughts and feelings about Israel in an unusually immersive context, their army service in Israel. The case of Jackie is less extreme, but in some ways more instructive, because it plays out across the kinds of contexts that many day school alumni

experience during the years after graduation. Jackie is also an unusually self-aware and articulate individual. It's helpful to dwell on her case.

Jackie grew up in a Modern Orthodox home and in an environment that was traditionally pro-Israel. She graduated from Soloveitchik and went to seminary in Israel and then Harvard University. When asked in 2017 to "describe the nature of [her] relationship to Israel today," she responded: "*I wish I had a great, philosophical answer for you. I guess I do to some extent, but, first and foremost, Israel for me is the people.*" She reports that her sister made aliyah and is married to an Israeli. Another sister, in the US, is also married to an Israeli. Her own boyfriend is from Israel. She has deep, intimate social associations with the country.

She then goes on to identify a second no less powerful force: "In the big picture, I definitely talk about it now in terms of a homeland, like a place where my culture is the majority culture. I think that, for me, is the biggest thing. I always say it like that."

This second point is a theme to which she returned many times in her 2017 interview. To offer another example:

I feel like I have a much better sense of the need for Israel now... it's just majority culture, and I'm just sick of being the minority here. Like, I'm sick of it. It's so important to me. It's just, like, it will never not be a struggle. So that's why I would move there out of America. I understand now why I would.

Few other interviewees articulate such a clear appreciation of how their relationships to Israel are grounded both in social associations and in cultural connections whose significance is tied up with how they think of themselves as Jews. (Her reflections on the comfort of being at home in a majority Jewish culture echo those influentially outlined in Shlomo Avineri's classic, *The Making of Modern Zionism*.) At the same time, Jackie is far from politically naïve. She is more than capable of articulating what, for many, makes Israel problematic. Again, she expresses these things with great clarity:

It's the most complicated place. I always say that... It's the craziest place ever. The politics are insane. There are now corruption scandals all over the place... Israel is crazy complicated; really negative sides to it. Obviously, the conflict there — I mean, I can say it now. I don't think I could seven years ago. Yes, Israel is an occupied nation. I just don't understand how things have not been

worked out there, and how the Palestinians feel trapped, and the Palestinian Authority and the checkpoint situation. I just can't imagine there isn't a better solution and how badly we screwed up in letting it get this bad.

When asked what prompted or influenced her to think this way about Israel, she responds:

I want to say, oh, it's my secular college campus, but Harvard's pretty pro-Israel and I never really had too many problems with that. It was more like... my fellow Jews at Hillel; a lot of people spoke like that. I was friends with a more liberal crowd. It's kind of what you talk about. Open Hillel started one of the years I was there, which is a big deal. It's kind of just a huge issue and really a breaking point for Hillel... The girl who started it, Rachel, and another girl, I think I was able to speak with them and hear their opinions a lot, more about what they felt about the conflict there. It just made sense to me on some levels, so I think that definitely influenced me a lot. I think that at [my day school] and my whole Jewish education, which lasted many years, I had really never heard so many negative things about Israel.

Later in the interview, Jackie shared how much she had been impacted by a weekend with Encounter in Bethlehem, a program she participated in at her own initiative during her gap year in Israel after high school:

That weekend at Encounter. It's such a small time compared to 18 years of Jewish education, but — yeah, that weekend was super powerful for me, just, like, hearing Palestinian narratives on the other side in the West Bank. I just hadn't heard that before. It was really powerful for me. Not in that it changed my opinions necessarily of thinking that for right now I think we do need checkpoints for Palestinians who are terrorists... Is that Israel's fault? I don't know. But you just hear real suffering. I think, finally, understanding, like, okay, Israelis see themselves as victims; Palestinians see themselves as victims. I don't think I ever heard that. Now, the conflict makes more sense to me. It made more sense. Okay. This is why we don't have peace. I don't know. It was very powerful for me.

Part of the reason why her time on Encounter seems to have been so powerful was because of how far it departed from the Israel education

she experienced at school, one she described as positive but “*incredibly bland.*” She provides an example:

I was a sophomore. I had no idea what a two-state solution meant... I am deeply saddened by it that none of us knew enough, despite talking about Israel all the time and having it being a part of the lexicon. Not being really educated about it.

We dwell on Jackie’s case because of how different her trajectory is from Bradley, another smart student who had mixed in similar circles at college and who had participated in similar experiences in Israel. Unlike Bradley, however, Jackie is less angry about her day school education than disappointed; she sees it more as a missed opportunity than actively disingenuous. And today when asked if she thinks of herself as a Zionist, she unequivocally answers in the following manner:

Sure, yes, I’m a Zionist. I think Israel should exist and, like, it needs to exist... I almost want to say it just to say, “like, oh, I’m not scared of firebrand liberals.” I can say I’m a Zionist and not be scared, but it definitely has a lot of meaning. I feel that encoded in that is, like, “you don’t care at all about the lives of Palestinians who are suffering.”

So, what explains how Jackie ended up where she is — Devoted despite expressing disillusionment with aspects of Israel? We suggest that what accounts for her trajectory is first the deep grounding of her relationships to the country in social relationships and in a profound appreciation of its cultural significance for her as Jew. At the same time, she is, and has been, positioned within social networks that ultimately have a positive orientation to Israel, during college, after college, and in her personal life. Both her commitments and her context mean that she has integrated a strong critique of Israel’s politics and its relationship with the Palestinians within an overall positive relationship to the country. We are tempted to suggest that Jackie’s story might serve as a model for thinking about what might constitute effective, positive Israel education in day schools and beyond (about which we say more below).

One last example helps affirm the influence of context on how people integrate the different forces to which they’re exposed. We already introduced Michelle as someone who is a paradigmatically Disengaged in her relationship to Israel. Despite 12 years of day school education

and multiple summers at Habonim Dror summer camp during her youth, she has minimal-to-no connection to Israel today. Michelle is an outlier in many ways: An alumna of Kehilati, she did not go to college. She began work straight after high school in a town about 50 miles from where she was raised. She has lived in the same place since, without a Jewish social network. She does not participate in Jewish communal life and has not engaged with Israel-related issues since leaving high school, although some of her friends on Facebook and her extended family are deeply connected. Michelle reflected on having held a “*minority opinion*” in her high school and how being in a less Jewish social context has helped her feel more confident about the views she was already expressing when she was younger.

It was hard while being in that community to feel that way about Israel because everybody doesn't feel that way. So, you feel like you're in the opposition, even though you're not. That's why I feel like it's very easy for me to feel these things today, because I'm not surrounded by that propaganda anymore. I obviously have the same thoughts and opinions, but I think I'm probably more confident in them, especially now that I have maintained the same thoughts throughout the years.

While some of her peers were reinforcing, refining, or changing their views in college, Michelle's social context was starkly different. She did not spend her post-high school years in an academic or intellectual environment but rather was working, without Jewish friends or community nearby. Her views on Israel seem to have been set from a relatively early age, and there has been nothing in the environment where she has led her life since that has shifted the balance of forces that might shape her relationship to Israel. Her commitments are strongly aligned with her context.

From Black and White to Gray

The lack of movement in Michelle's relationship to Israel is another phenomenon that sets her apart from almost all of those we interviewed. As noted above, while most of the interviewees did not appear to change over time, they did grow. When asked, in 2017, if and how their thoughts and sentiments about Israel were different from when they were in high school, overwhelmingly, whatever their relationship to Israel, they expressed a similar idea: they now see Israel with more nuance and complexity. Whereas in high school their views on Israel were more straightforward, even black and white, today there are more shades of gray in how they see the country.

Over the seven years of the study, many of the participants have traveled. They have met people from different backgrounds and come to see Israeli life first-hand. These experiences, along with the maturation associated with growing from a teenager to a young adult, account for how they have come to see Israel with more texture and sometimes differently, even if their relationship to it hasn't changed.

One participant closer to the Disengaged pole, Amanda from Community, highlights how some of her views developed as she matured, yet her overall perspective on Israel has remained the same. She came to recognize that Israel was more complex than she had previously understood (or had been taught to understand) though the substance of her relationship has remained constant.

I think, since high school, I've gained more of a worldly perspective about the politics and the country itself, but it's still important to me as a place... Worldly might not be the right word, but yes. Like a more whole. Not so one-sided... It hasn't really changed, how important Israel is in my life, because I still — on a personal level, I still do have personal connections to the place, but I've definitely gotten less sold on the idea that it should be blindly supported, because it should exist, or whatever... But personally, my opinion didn't change, because I still found meaning in the country, even after I was like, oh this place is a lot more complicated than I ever understood when I was younger.

Jordana, a young woman who had attended Soloveitchik and eventually made aliyah, spoke in similar terms. Both in 2010 and 2017, we characterized her as Devoted, however, in our most recent conversation with her, she articulated the ways in which her thinking *has* changed:

I think when you're younger, you see a much more idealistic, perfect picture version of what Israel is... As you get older, as you're in the army, as you're in school and you've gone through all the bureaucracy that Israeli society has to offer, you realize that it's not as simple, as clear cut and as perfect as most people think it is. That does not mean that I still don't view it as my home and it doesn't mean that I don't think it's the country that we need to live in, but I do think that it's not as clear-cut as everyone makes it out to be, especially when you're younger... I definitely think that had I not had the passion and the black-and-whiteness that I had when I was 17, 18, I don't think I would have made aliyah. I think that

having that blind passion is definitely a reason that I'm here. Since being here, again, for the most part of course I resonate with everything I said, but [now] I've seen the downsides of living here and I've seen, as they say, "Yisrael shel matah."

Another participant, Mordechai, also Devoted, now living in Israel, described this maturation and the change in his views:

So, for me, and if you ask anyone I went to high school with, they would tell you I was, like, the guy, who's, you know, I was talking about it all the time. I'm, like, the second high school's over, I'm there. And I — and it was kind of, like, now that I, like, look back on that, I guess it was a little bit nebulous... I don't really think I had a good grasp of what Israel was or — it was very black and white to me, I guess.

This pattern is an important reminder that teenagers typically tend to develop more nuanced and complex ideas as they mature. Developing one's views on Israel to incorporate more shades of gray seems to be a natural step in each person's intellectual growth. More important still, it is striking that most interviewees were themselves aware of how their own thinking had changed, how they had moved from a “*black and white*” picture of Israel to a consideration of several perspectives.

Reflections on High School

Against the backdrop of such self-awareness, it is fascinating to see what the interviewees make of their high school education about Israel. Some had been quite critical of it when juniors — on the one hand characterizing it as brainwashing and on the other hand as too wishy-washy. We were curious what they thought of it with the benefit of perspective.

We have already noted Bradley's anger, the sense of being “*duped*” by having not been taught about problematic aspects of Israel's past and present. How he articulates these things is consistent with those who, under the banner of the organization IfNotNow, critique the Jewish education of their youth. Among our interviewees, this view was in fact something of an exception. Much more common was Jackie's previously quoted complaint about the blandness or shallowness of her Israel education, or what Robert called its mindlessness.

Noah, an alum of Community, expressed this perspective well, clarifying what is and what isn't the primary problem:

I definitely noticed, when I got to college, that I didn't carry the anger that...other Jewish people that I met...felt, you know, particularly on the left, felt about their indoctrination in high school. I didn't feel that I was lied to or indoctrinated about it. I just felt it wasn't one of the focuses of my education... Now, that I feel that politics and issues in Israel are — and Israeli society is — such a key piece of what it means to be Jewish today, I do feel like it's a lack. I'm disappointed that my high school didn't have a more robust education about it...

This last point was a frequently recurring theme for our interviews: disappointment at a missed opportunity, at how their schools had failed them by not providing them with a sound education. This sentiment was much more prevalent than anger. This does not mean that they weren't critical, but that their criticism was couched in a broader set of understandings. As Noah expressed it later in the interview, *"There's something not so horrible about high school being somewhat of a bubble. Everything else can come later when students become adults and enter the politics more."* With perspective, some of our interviewees seemed more able to acknowledge what their schools were trying to accomplish.

Most interesting in this respect is Mike. As a junior at Kehilati, he likened his day school education to *"being plugged into a propaganda machine."* Seven years later, we probed to see if he still thought of it in these terms. The following, lengthy, extract makes clear that the answer is no longer so simple.

[My school] was sort of an echo chamber in many ways about Israel. I think that, as we got older, we became challenged more in addressing a worldview. There was a class called Arab-Israeli Conflict that basically dug into reading scholarly articles from both sides. So, things like that, but that wasn't up until, like, 11th, 12th grade. Classes like [this] came few and far between at the later ages. As you sort of became an adult and became more willing to come up with your own [ideas]; but, you know, everywhere Israel was just sort of propagandized in some ways.

You know, I get why we did all these things and, in some ways, I appreciate it because it taught me a lot about Israel. It gave me a connection to Judaism that was real and alive, as opposed to just some books. And so, I liked that, and it really kept me engaged and I could celebrate it with people who were like me. You know, it was great, but at the same time, it was pretty propaganda-ish. But, at

the same time, sometimes all school is. Like, if you learned Christopher Columbus discovered the New World in 1492, I could [imagine a] Native American person who's like, no they didn't; they just stole — they stole the country from people my ancestors, that sort of thing. I just didn't have, like, a Palestinian in the classroom with me to argue their side. Maybe, like, earlier on they could have tried to introduce the other perspective. But aside from that, there wasn't much I would change.

Mike, and others like him, convey a strong sense that just as they no longer think about Israel in black and white, they no longer think about their day school experience as either all good or all bad. They see how challenging the work of education is.

When asked what their schools could have done differently, those who were Devoted to some degree indicated that their schools could have done more to teach Hebrew and knowledge of Israel. They wanted their schools to be more proactive in their approach to celebrating and supporting Israel. Those closer to being Disengaged or Disillusioned felt their schools should have offered a more balanced perspective — learning more about Arab and Palestinian narratives to “even out” the Israeli narratives they felt over-exposed to. Here’s the view of Jeremy, another Community alum:

Offer more perspectives. They could teach the same exact subjects, I don't really care about that, but to teach it more comprehensively, to represent other perspectives and other sides. I have no particular criticism of the Jewish curriculum, the Jewish study side. But I think when it comes to Israel, they shouldn't — by no means be shy about their love for Israel. I mean, it's a Jewish school. I think I'd like to see Jewish schools be generally pro-Israel. I'd be a little concerned if they were very anti-Israel... But I think being very open to dialogue and being open to not just creating mouthpieces for the Zionist movement, and Israeli policies, but actually striving to create genuine scholars who can sit down and — like us, talk about Israel for hours and hours and hours, without getting riled up about the other side. Or being super defensive and being able to have a civil conversation about whatever topic of Israel that comes up.

If after all of that, all of those perspectives that are taught, you still very much believe, you know, the pro-Israel side, that's great. I think you should be able to defend that more soundly, because you have seen the other side. It'll make you a more enjoyable person to talk to overall, because maybe, having seen the other

side, you're not going to be offended by hearing those other opinions later on.

Jeremy identifies himself as Zionist and “pro-Israel” and, at the same time, advocates for an open marketplace of ideas. Other students with less conviction about Israel also desired more balanced or evenly-weighted presentation of information about Israel.

School in Relation to Other Institutions

The purpose of the 2010 study was to explore the extent to which different Jewish day schools contributed to their students’ perspectives on Israel. It is striking that after speaking with 22 individuals, seven years later, very few indicated that their schools played a role in shaping their relationship to Israel today. Evidently, high schools face intense competition from family and friends whose contribution stands out more prominently in participants’ perceptions about who and what was most formative in shaping their beliefs. Less surprisingly, time in Israel, whether on trips, gap years, or army service, also overshadowed what came before.

Participants made clear that their families had a strong influence on their own views and feelings toward Israel, oftentimes in ways that stood out above their memories of high school’s influence. Noah attended Community and is a kind of Disillusioned Devotee though without a deep sense of anger towards his upbringing.

When I was in college I had two major voices in my head. One was my mom’s, who’s a very — pretty right-wing when it comes to Israeli issues. So, in some sense...most of my Israel education came from my family fighting, not from school. Because it was not talked about in school. But my dad’s side is very left-wing on every issue, and my mom’s side is more right-wing. They fought a lot about Zionism and Israel, and that was always part of growing up. People getting up in the middle of Passover, and getting out, you know, leaving the Seder and yelling at each other. I mean, that was always part of it.

Similarly, Jane — a graduate of Kehilati — described how her brothers’ connection to Israel and his army service not only influenced her to follow suit but played a formative role in her own identity development:

When I think back, I think of certain teachers that I had that I'm actually still in touch with today and they were the ones that really deeply influenced me... Then my family is probably even bigger than that. I would've probably never moved to Israel had my brothers not been in the military because that instilled in me a direct connection to the army and to the Israelis, not just as a Jew being a Zionist but as a Jew feeling the need to give back to Israel and my family for being supportive and for taking me to Israel.

We wonder, also, whether Bradley would have developed such a critical stance towards Israel and his own Jewish education if his father hadn't also been following a similar path of reassessing his relationship with Israel.

When students did recall how their schools had been influential, it was their teachers and their extracurricular experiences that stood out most clearly, rather than classes or other kinds of formal instruction. Jody attended Community and is somewhat Disengaged; she attended Jewish day school for many years as a child yet is not active or engaged in her relationship to Israel. She is more passive and disconnected.

***Interviewer:** What about the teachers you mentioned?*

***Jody:** They just were awesome people that brought a different perspective to the table that a lot of other people don't. I mean, it's one thing to have opinions on Israel and what's going on and how you feel about the country, and then another to speak to someone and be around people who have actually experienced it. Yeah, I think, also, there's just so many stereotypes about how Israeli people act...and then meeting people that were totally not that way.*

David attended Kook and has remained Devoted throughout these past years. When considering his school's approach to Israel education, the first examples that came to mind regarded experiences and educators:

Encouraging people to go to the Israel Day parade and having our own Yom Yerushalayim parade every year and really putting a very strong emphasis, within the official school structure, of Zionism and Israel. Bringing in shlichim and having the Bnei Akiva shlichim teaching...and having the bnot sherut's office in the school. I think all those things played a strong role in it. Those are the teachers themselves and the things that they talked about.

Puzzling over why our interviewees' school experiences don't figure more prominently in their assessment of what shaped their relationship to Israel, we wonder if we might have gained a better sense of schools' contribution to their lives if we had interviewed them sooner after graduation. Since graduating high school they had participated in other powerful experiences that overshadowed what came before. School may have been influential, but its influence is hard to discern from a distance when there are so many peak experiences blocking the view and when it is perceived as being childish or simplistic in comparison to what came after.

And yet, as Jackie pointed out, returning to our sample after they had completed college rather than while they were still on campus may still have been a good idea, better than trying to track them down during their college years.

I mean, I think this is such a good moment to catch people, this post-college thing, because I think, for four years, you can be like, well, I'm partying and doing the American thing. You get out and you're, like, who am I? Where am I? What communities do I want to be part of? Which I think, the discussion of Israel, definitely, for me, it informs things. Because, to me, you talk about Israel, you talk about religious Judaism or traditional Judaism. So, I don't know.

Among the Amish, there is a concept of Rumspringa, a time-out from the strict practices of their upbringing when anything is allowed. Some go so far off the rails during this moratorium period that they never return to the straight and narrow. Most however do come back, voluntarily, to the ways of their forebears. By seeking out our interviewees at a moment when their lives had started to settle down, whether in Israel or the United States, after the conclusion of their undergraduate education, we may have gained a better sense of the long-term outcomes of their day school experience than when they were in college, their Rumspringa moment, even while — paradoxically — these young people may have been less able to discern the impact of that education for themselves.

Conclusions and Implications

Good intentions are not enough

Having the opportunity to revisit this sample of 22 young people seven years after we first spoke with them promises important insights for day school education. We are left with a strong sense of a group of individuals who feel that their schools have failed them, even

absent the adolescent bombast that colored much of their talk when we first interviewed them. While many acknowledge their schools' well-intentioned interest in portraying a sunny, upbeat picture of Israel, and of cultivating affection for the country, they are frustrated that their schools rarely if ever offered something substantive that remotely corresponded to reality in Israel today. Their complaint is not that they weren't taught how to advocate for Israel (that's a criticism expressed by very few) or that they were actively misled (again the critique of a small minority); it is that they were left ignorant of basic aspects of Israel's reality. The most immediate and evident conclusion from this study is that the schools have shortchanged their students even while they have meant well. They have deprived their students of a serious education about Israel.

What's different about the Devoted

More profoundly, what is most striking is that today many of those who are most truly connected to Israel, and for whom Israel has deep significance in their lives — our Devoted — are no less familiar with Israel's flaws and challenges than those who express the most bitter criticism of the country, the Disillusioned. The Devoted are not Pollyannas. They differ, instead, in three profound ways: first, in the depth and breadth of their personal associations with Israel; second, in their appreciation of Israel's cultural (frequently religious) significance; and third, in the contexts wherein they were exposed to political concerns about Israel.

Ask big questions

This finding suggests a promising new framework for thinking about Israel education in day schools and beyond. By definition, day schools should be safe social places in which to become familiar with political concerns about Israel. If those concerns are explored honestly and authentically, and not just as debating points to be dismissed in an Israel Advocacy session, students will appreciate the opportunity to learn about the world outside the day school bubble. An important take-away, then, is that schools should not be fearful of asking their students big questions about Israel, or of encouraging students to ask these kinds of questions themselves. Day school should be the safest possible context in which to explore such matters, much more so than any university campus.

Hug seriously

At the same time, if political concerns are not to overwhelm students, schools must also invest serious attention in cultivating meaningful

social associations with Israel (real, interpersonal memories) as well as deep cultural connections with the country, especially connections that are not exclusively religious. What this means is not trivial. For the last decade, many Israel educators have adopted the mantra, first coined by the Makom team at The Jewish Agency for Israel, of both “hugging and wrestling” with Israel. The data here show that while one might have thought that hugging was the easier piece of this equation to operationalize, that exercise — of nurturing love for Israel — too often is shallow and banal. It takes real thought to cultivate social relationships and cultural associations that are not superficial, sentimental, or glib. Schools need to consider what might produce deep social connections for their students that goes beyond formulaic twinning exercises, and what indeed are the sources of meaningful cultural associations with the State and the Land of Israel. Those cultural associations might derive from the Hebrew classroom, the Tanakh curriculum, or the arts, for example; they surely should not be limited to courses on the history of Israel. Israel studies classes don’t typically provide opportunities for young people to make deep sense of who they are, even while they can help students become better informed. There are surely other elements and opportunities within the day school experience that do lend themselves more effectively to such outcomes.

An integrated effort

These efforts — the cultivation of meaningful social and cultural/ideological associations with Israel — might then serve as the backdrop or complement to the exploration, in schooltime, of political issues that can undoubtedly be challenging, not least because they are often out of sync with the liberal ethos of American Jewry. Evidently, the schools attended by this sample of young people have fallen short with respect to investing in this kind of integrative work, the work of weaving the social and cultural together with the political. They have avoided the latter and not gone deeply enough with the former. They have left their alumni — in most cases — to integrate these forces for themselves, and often by themselves.

Give more attention to middle school

Starting this research, we did not expect to find so few members of the sample shifting in their relationship to Israel between the junior grade of high school and when we caught up with them seven years later. As we have noted more than once, these young people had grown and matured (they certainly have a more nuanced view of the world), but most had not changed. They continued to occupy the

same categorial sector — Devoted, Disillusioned, or Disengaged — in which we had first found them, even while some had moved in the direction of other sectors. This finding begs an important question about what students learn and experience during middle school and the earlier years of high school. These years seem to set most students on a trajectory which they continue over many subsequent years. These years of early adolescence might be more critical than any others during students' day school careers. This is a proposition that needs to be examined more fully.

Get clear about goals

We hope that by sketching out three “ideal types” we have created a resource for educators to talk about the goals they have for their students, and where they think their students are currently located in relation to those goals. A challenge in this research was that we lacked a clear enough sense of what the goals of day school Israel education are. Of course, there is no reason why schools should share the same goals, but they do at least need to explicitly state and operationalize some goals. Knowing what such goals are would then make it possible to determine how successful schools have been. We hope that schools will use our research to ask themselves to what extent their students are Devoted, Disillusioned and/or Disengaged, and ultimately where in relation to these types they want their students to be situated by the time they graduate. This framework can be a useful diagnostic and also a kind of compass.

Provide young people with the education they deserve

Finally, it's possible to reach a conclusion from this study that there is little need to change the ways that day schools approach Israel education. Having found that the great majority of students continue to relate to Israel as young adults more or less as they did when they were at school (they may have grown but they haven't changed!), then it's best not to try to mend what isn't broken. But it is clear that such a response would be shortsighted and dishonest. Schools are supposed to educate. Day school students have a right to be well informed about Israel before they leave this special space. The thoughtful, often inspirational, young people with whom we spoke indicate that they deserved better.

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