



# CAMP WORKS

**THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF  
JEWISH OVERNIGHT CAMP**



**EVIDENCE FROM 26 U.S. JEWISH POPULATION  
STUDIES ON ADULT JEWISH ENGAGEMENT**





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# PREFACE

Jewish summer camp has long been associated with the North American Jewish community. The oldest camps are more than 100 years old, and in 2010, five brand-new camps joined the field.

Over the last century, camps closed and opened, and hundred of thousands of Jewish children and young adults have spent their summer days and nights embraced and shaped by the communities created within them. These camp alumni ended each summer with lifelong friendships, a commitment to Jewish community, and unforgettable memories.

Prior to the creation of the Foundation for Jewish Camp, there was no national organization dedicated solely to expanding the reach of Jewish overnight camp and deepening its impact. Robert and Elisa Spungen Bildner, young entrepreneurial philanthropists, established the Foundation for Jewish Camp in 1998 to fill that need. As the central address for nonprofit Jewish overnight camps in North America, the Foundation works with camps from all streams of Jewish belief and practice to strengthen their management and program, and with communities to increase and promote enrollment. Utilizing a variety of approaches and respecting the diversity of camps and movements, the Foundation works to ensure that each camp delivers the best possible Jewish camp experience for every child.

For many readers, the exciting findings contained in the coming pages won't be surprising; rather they will confirm one's own experience or those of friends or family members. For others, this new analysis will enable you to think about the varied ways Jewish summer camp can have a positive affect on the lives of your children and on the sustainability of your community. And for others, this report provides the reason they will choose to send their child to a nonprofit Jewish overnight camp,



encourage their synagogue and local federation to support area camps, contribute funds to ensure the vitality of the camp that shaped their lives, or support the national movement to strengthen nonprofit Jewish camps across North America.

This landmark report utilizes data collected by some of the premier Jewish social scientists of our time to whom we owe our thanks and appreciation. In particular, we wish to acknowledge Professor Steven M. Cohen who coordinated this analysis, leading the esteemed research team responsible for these new findings. The team includes Dr. Ron Miller, Dr. Ira Sheskin, and Dr. Berna Torr. Special thanks to Dr. Sheskin for his dedication to the mission of the Foundation, as well as to the field of Jewish summer camp. We are grateful to Dr. Adam Gamorian of the University of Wisconsin, for his very thorough, insightful, and helpful reviews of earlier versions of this report.

The leadership and staff of the Foundation for Jewish Camp are thrilled that at long last, this report and its critical findings are coming to light. Validating the efforts of a passionate and talented field of professionals as well as the commitment and support of lay leaders and donors, “Camp Works” helps all of us to fulfill our mission, to unify and galvanize the field of Jewish overnight camp, and to significantly increase the number of children participating in transformative summers at Jewish camp.

It is our hope that this affirmation of the successful track record of nonprofit Jewish overnight camps influencing the behaviors and practices of Jewish adults—years after they left their bunks—will prompt new and renewed advocacy on behalf of the more than 155 Jewish camps dotting the landscape of North American Jewish life. Together, we can increase the number of children engaging in positive Jewish experiences at camp, benefiting our community for generations to come.



**Jeremy J. Fingerman**  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
Foundation for Jewish Camp



**Skip Vichness**  
*Chair, Board of Directors*  
Foundation for Jewish Camp



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the efforts of the people without whom this project could not have succeeded:

A profound thanks to the Foundation for Jewish Camp Board of Directors, who have always believed what this study proves—that “Camp Works.” Their support of critical research like this has enabled the Foundation for Jewish Camp and the field to reach new heights.

We thank Rina Goldberg of the Foundation for Jewish Camp, who coordinated the many moving parts of this research, and ultimately brought it from concept to fruition. J.J. Goldberg contributed his unmatched writing talents, and Maggie Bar-Tura, Joelle Asaro Berman, Elisa Spungen Bildner, Allison Cohen, Jeremy J. Fingerman, Abby Knopp, Jill Myers Raizin, Eve Rudin, Skip Vichness, and Alicia Zimbalist shared their insights as readers and editors.

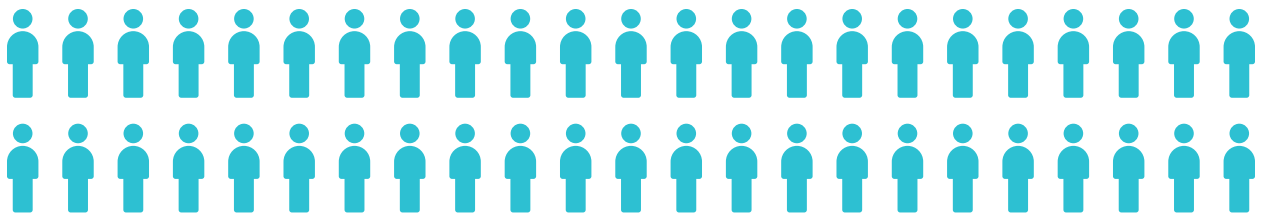
Lastly, we would like to thank the 155+ nonprofit Jewish overnight camps that enable our youth to experience unparalleled summers, immersed in Jewish life and community.

# INTRODUCTION

It is one of the most familiar rituals of the American summer: Across the country, buses pull up in front of crowds of parents waiting to welcome their children home from summer camp. Tens of thousands of smiling, suntanned children emerge from those buses every summer, bringing home new confidence, new social skills, and troves of new knowledge along with their sleeping bags and piles of dirty laundry. Among the participants in this annual ritual are thousands of Jewish children returning home from overnight camps sponsored by nonprofit Jewish organizations and agencies. And at the end of each summer, leaders of those Jewish organizations and agencies ask themselves: What Jewish rituals, skills, knowledge, and feelings did these children take home from camp?

The challenge of passing along Jewish connection and commitment to new generations has become the most important concern on the agenda of the American Jewish community. Extensive and varied research documents both areas of encouraging vitality as well as disturbing declines in several indicators of Jewish attachment of young Jews compared to their elders, albeit limited to the non-Orthodox. Some of the indicators in decline among those outside of Orthodoxy are: synagogue membership, attachment to Israel, donating to Jewish charities, organizational belonging, the number of Jewish friendships, and, most famously, in-marriage. The result of these trends, many scholars and community leaders say, will be a dwindling number of non-Orthodox Jews.

These concerns over what leaders in the 1990s called “Jewish continuity” have spurred numerous efforts to study the various models of both formal and informal Jewish education and measure their effectiveness in inculcating Jewish attachment and involvement (see, for example, Cohen 1995 and 2006, 2007a; Cohen and





Kotler-Berkowitz 2004; Himmelfarb 1974, 1979). Particular effort has been devoted to examining the impact of Jewish day schools (Cohen 1995; Cohen and Berkowitz 2004; Fuchs 1978) and youth trips to Israel (Cohen and Kaplowitz 2010; Kelner 2010; Saxe, et al., 2009), two modes that expose young people to important aspects of Jewish life within the framework of intense, all-encompassing Jewish environments. Both have been found to be effective in instilling a commitment to ongoing involvement in Jewish life.

A few quantitative studies report long-term impacts of Jewish camp upon several adult Jewish identity measures (Bubis and Marks 1975; Cohen 2000; Cohen and Kotler-Berkowitz 2004; Dorph 1976; Farago 1971; Keysar and Kosmin 2001, 2005; Himmelfarb 1989; Levine 1972; Weinberger 1971), but the results are far from uniform and the research is far from comprehensive. In his review of the four pieces of empirical research available at the time, Harold Himmelfarb (1989) offered these cautionary words:

There is no doubt that more definitive studies of Jewish summer camp experiences need to be conducted, but existing studies do lend a sobering skepticism to the many claims of their tremendous impact. The studies clearly show that Jewish overnight summer camps do have a positive impact on their campers. In fact, some of the studies found that they have their greatest impact on those who need it most—those from families that are low in Jewish identification. However, the studies also show that the impact of the camping experience fades over time. In retrospect, it seemed to several of these researchers that the lack of reinforcing experiences during the school year impeded the potential of camps to have an enduring impact. (1989: 393)



**70,000**

**KIDS ATTENDED JEWISH  
OVERNIGHT CAMP IN THE  
SUMMER OF 2010.**

At the same time, more recent qualitative studies seem to demonstrate that Jewish camps engender very positive feelings about being Jewish, and do so in a context of friends, leisure, adventure, and a totally immersive Jewish environment. In one such study, undertaken in the summer of 2000, researchers visited a number of Jewish camps to examine their programs and methods (Sales and Saxe 2002, 2003). “Limud by the Lake” described the overnight summer camp as “an ideal venue for informal Jewish education that gives children the experience of life in a Jewish community and teaches them about Judaism.” This research catalogued at length an array of techniques and tools that give camp its “unlimited potential to produce joyous and memorable learning.”

Another body of research examines the ways Jewish camp acts as an incubator for developing Jewish leadership. Several studies into the shaping of Jewish career choices show that one of the reasons most frequently cited by Jewish communal professionals to explain their career path is the childhood camp experience. The recent study of Jewish leaders sponsored by the AVI CHAI Foundation (Wertheimer 2010) found that 71% of young American Jewish leaders attended Jewish overnight camp and a recent survey of Jewish communal professionals (Cohen 2010) indicated consistent results, further testifying to the great extent to which Jewish leaders in various roles report high levels of Jewish camp attendance.

The “Jewish Educators Survey,” conducted in 2006 by the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA) studied professional teachers in Jewish schools, including both day and synagogue supplementary schools. The survey asked which childhood education program “was particularly influential on their decision to enter the field of Jewish education.” The most frequently cited experience was camp, named by more than 22% of respondents.



A similarly telling finding emerged in a study of professionals in the Jewish institutional field: “The Jewish Sector’s Workforce: Report of a Six-Community Study” (Kelner, et al. 2005). This study surveyed training, career motivation, benefits, and other work factors in a broad range of Jewish communal professions, from rabbis and teachers to fundraisers, administrators, and public-policy analysts. It found that the largest single gateway experience leading to Jewish professional service is “camp counselor”:

The majority (52%) of Jews working in our six Jewish communities started when they were in high school or college. Most of those who held jobs as teens were camp counselors (35% of all Jewish workers) and/or religious school teachers (27%) and/or youth group advisors (14%). Not many held internships (5%). We regard this finding as especially significant. *Camps, religious schools and youth groups are American Jewry’s primary gateway into Jewish sector work, providing Jewish communities with about half of their Jewish personnel.* (Emphasis in the original) (pp. 20–21).

But all of these relevant and important examples of discourse on the value and impact of Jewish camp stopped short of providing systemic or quantitative evidence that clearly demonstrates the impact of Jewish overnight camp on adult Jewish behavior. While many active Jews trace their involvement to camp experiences in childhood and young adulthood, one cannot identify a camp *impact* from this pattern for two reasons. First, individuals’ perceptions of past experiences are shaped, in part, by what happens to them subsequently. Second, generalizing from those who became active is suspect because it ignores all those who went to camp and did *not* become active, and because it misses those who became active without going to camp. Building upon the previous studies, this study takes the next step by exploring the long-term effectiveness of the overnight Jewish summer camp in instilling Jewish commitment. As this report will show, the childhood camp experience has a significant impact—in some respects a highly substantial impact—on adult Jewish practices and commitments.

# METHODS

At the heart of this study are analyses of the 2000–01 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS 2000–01) and 25 local Jewish population surveys. (See Appendix Table 1 on page 26 for a list of these studies.) The goal was to compare the Jewish attitudes and behaviors of adults who had attended Jewish camp as children with those of adults who did not attend camp as children. In other words, 20, 30, or 40 years after attending camp, do we find the marker of camp attendance on the ways that adult Jews think, feel, and act about being Jewish? We focused upon 13 different areas of adult behavior or attitude, chosen in part because of their repeated occurrence in these 26 studies, and in part because they constitute considerable diversity in measures of Jewish involvement. They include synagogue membership, attendance at a Passover Seder, donating to Jewish charities, feeling “very emotionally attached to Israel,” and others.

When studying the influence of any particular past experience on current behavior, factors other than the experience under examination may be partially or even wholly responsible for the differing outcomes. For example, in studying Jewish educational programs, such as camp, day school, or Israel travel, simply demonstrating that the alumni of a particular program show higher levels of adult Jewish engagement than non-alumni does not necessarily show that the program *caused* the higher level of engagement. A simple comparison of participants and non-participants leaves open the possibility that the participants are a self-selected group, drawn from a population that is predisposed to seeking Jewish enrichment for their children. Indeed, we know that many current Jewish campers derive from homes and backgrounds replete with other experiences and characteristics associated with long-term Jewish engagement.



A simple correlation between parental Jewish engagement and children’s Jewish camp attendance presents a challenge to researchers examining the relationship between Jewish camp attendance and adult Jewish involvement. Does Jewish camp appear to “work” *only* (or even primarily) because it is associated with other factors? Do Jewish campers exhibit higher levels of Jewish engagement in later life simply because their parents were highly engaged, or because they experienced more extensive and intensive Jewish educational experiences than did non-campers? Given all the Jewish socialization and educational resources accompanying Jewish campers, it is certainly no surprise that campers, years later, report higher levels of Jewish involvement than non-campers.

To achieve an accurate measure of impact of Jewish camp in shaping Jewish identity, this study used a logistic regression analysis to statistically control for influences other than Jewish camp on adult Jewish behaviors, such as prior Jewish education and family background. This method allows comparisons of adult behaviors of former campers and non-campers whose Jewish background and upbringing had been similar before anyone boarded the camp bus. After the adjustment, to the extent possible, for other factors that might influence an adult’s Jewish identity, it may be assumed with some confidence that the remaining differences found between adult Jewish behaviors of campers and non-campers—expressed as predicted probabilities after logistic regression—actually reflect the direct influence of the camp experience.

# RESULTS

Table 1: Impact of Jewish Overnight Camp on Jewish Attitudes and Behaviors summarizes the “predicted probabilities” for campers and non-campers on a variety of adult Jewish identity outcomes, after statistically controlling for several parental and Jewish educational measures that may influence adult Jewish identity and behaviors. These potentially “confounding” variables include:

- Age
- Gender
- Whether one’s parents were in-married or intermarried
- Whether the person had any Jewish education
- Whether the person attended day school
- Denomination raised
- Observance of Shabbat as a teen
- Synagogue attendance as a teen
- Having mostly Jewish friends as a teen.

In other words, the table reports the “predicted” probability that camp alumni and non-alumni will score affirmatively on each Jewish identity outcome, assuming that both groups had the same configurations of characteristics with respect to age, gender, in-married parents, Jewish education, and Jewish engagement as a teenager.

Camp attendance was found to be associated with an increased likelihood of adult participation and identification in every one of the 13 areas probed. Camp increases the likelihood of an adult’s Jewish engagement by magnitudes ranging from 5% to 55%, depending on the type of engagement.

**AS ADULTS, CAMPERS  
ARE 21% MORE LIKELY TO  
FEEL THAT BEING JEWISH  
IS VERY IMPORTANT.**



**TABLE 1:**  
**Impact of Jewish Overnight Camp on Jewish Attitudes and Behaviors**

	Non-Camper	Camper	Impact
<b>HIGH IMPACT</b>			
Feel very emotionally attached to Israel	.19	.30	55%
Attend synagogue monthly or more	.20	.29	45%
Always/usually light Shabbat candles	.18	.24	37%
Donated to a Jewish federation in the past year	.22	.28	30%
<b>MODERATE IMPACT</b>			
Member of a synagogue	.44	.56	26%
Most/all closest friends are Jewish	.25	.31	25%
Donated to a Jewish charity in the past year	.49	.61	25%
Used a Jewish website in the past year	.44	.54	23%
Feel being Jewish is very important	.44	.53	21%
<b>LOW IMPACT</b>			
Did not have a Christmas tree	.76	.85	11%
Currently in-married	.67	.74	10%
Always/usually participate in a Seder	.82	.89	8%
Always/usually light Hanukkah candles	.72	.75	5%

**Source:** Authors from the 2000–01 National Jewish Population Survey.  
 See Appendix Tables 3–5 on pages 29–31 for more NJPS 2000–01 results and for similar results from the 25 local studies.

As an example, 19% of Jewish adults who did *not* attend Jewish overnight camp as children (“non-camper”) have a statistically “expected probability” of being “very emotionally attached to Israel,” after other relevant variables that might also be related to Israel attitudes have been controlled. In contrast, 30% of adults who did attend Jewish overnight camp as children (“camper”) express a high level of Israel attachment. As compared with 19%, the 30% figure is 55% higher. Translation: All other things being equal, Jewish camp attendance as a youngster raises the likelihood of feeling very attached to Israel as an adult by 55%.

The camp impact varies widely across the range of behaviors. The likelihood of lighting Hanukkah candles increases by a mere 5% among camp alumni, while the likelihood of feeling “very emotionally attached to Israel” increases by a remarkable 55%. The median gap between campers and non-campers in childhood across the 13 categories of adult measures is about 25%.

Particularly interesting is the distribution of the various behaviors along an arc from low to high in measuring the impact of the camp experience. Rather than falling evenly along the arc, the behaviors can be grouped in three clusters: those that reflect a relatively weak camp impact of about 10% or less; those that reflect a moderate impact of about 20% to 25%; and, those that reflect a relatively strong impact of 30% or more. Moreover, the three clusters can be identified by certain common characteristics, and an examination of the three will guide us in understanding where the camp experience is most effective. In no case is the camp effect negligible or statistically insignificant.

All of the factors in the “Moderate Impact” section of Table 1 are indicators of an active Jewish identity. The fact that they are affirmed by large percentages of respondents speaks to an underlying strength in Jewish life. That the camp experience increases the likelihood of their adoption by as much as one-fourth shows camp’s importance in Jewish identity formation.

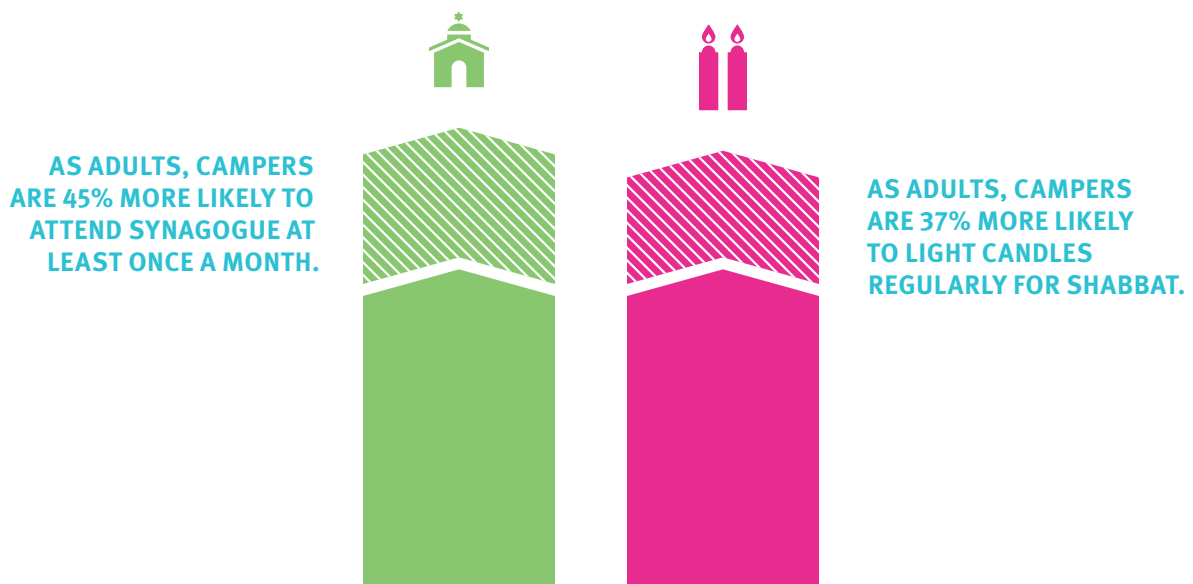




The impact of camp—with few exceptions—is most profound on those Jewish identity markers that are least common among today’s non-Orthodox Jewish adults. Conversely, practices that are the most widespread among American Jews are influenced least by camp experiences. Hanukkah and Passover, which are observed once per year, are among the few Jewish rituals that approach anything like universal currency among American Jews today. As Table 1 shows, Passover Seder attendance frequency is 82% and lighting Hanukkah candles frequency is 72% among non-campers. Camp attendance increases the likelihood of their enactment later in life, but only minimally. Thus, 89% of campers will participate in Passover Seders as adults compared to 82% of non-campers. Likewise, 75% of campers will light Hanukkah candles compared to 72% of non-campers.

In contrast, some practices require more frequent activity, such as regular synagogue attendance or the weekly lighting of Shabbat candles. These are undertaken by a much smaller proportion of the population, typically among the most Jewishly engaged members—and these practices are much higher among campers than non-campers. The current study shows that the predicted probability of attending synagogue at least weekly is increased by 45% and Shabbat candle lighting rises by 37% for campers.

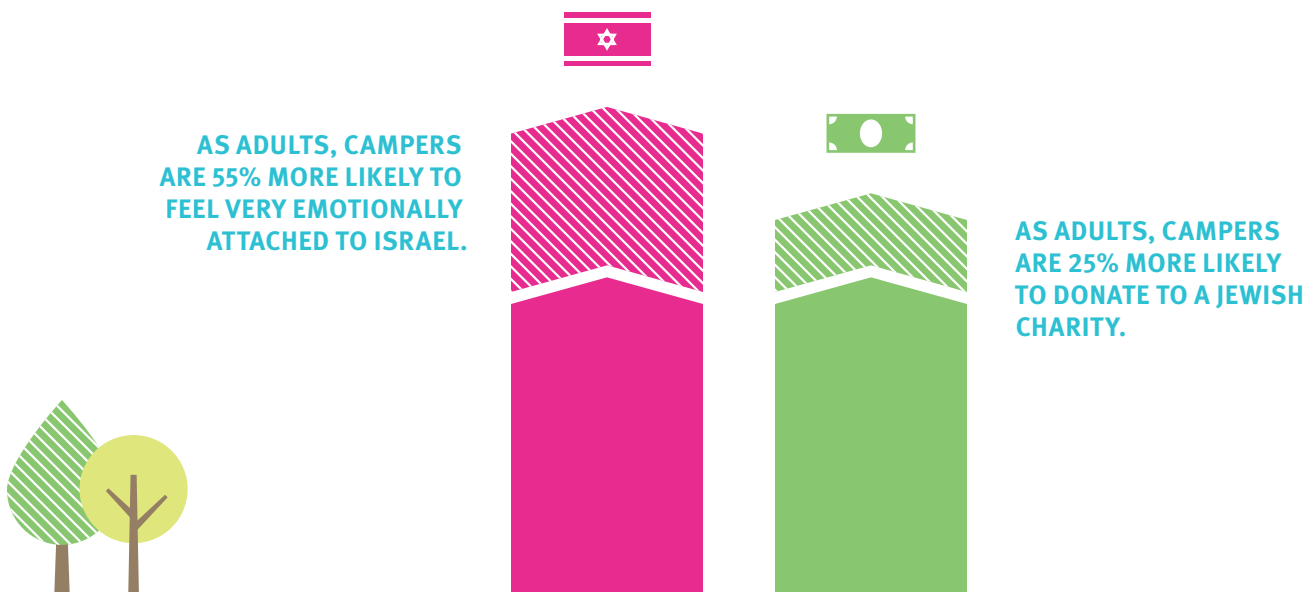
Of the four items appearing in the high-impact cluster, three—attachment to Israel, attend synagogue monthly or more, and donate to Jewish federations—provide clear evidence that camp develops a sense of belonging to a larger Jewish community.



The item on which camp has the greatest impact, strong emotional attachment to Israel (being not merely attached, but “very” attached), requires a pronounced sense of membership in a Jewish collective distinct from the American mainstream. This kind of commitment requires an abstract feeling of solidarity with a worldwide community beyond one’s immediate experience. Moreover, it requires a comfort level within this Jewish collective strong enough to allow the individual to identify with a foreign country despite a psychic cost—and perhaps even a threat, subconscious or conscious—of “otherness.” This reshaping of the individuals’ inner sense of self is surely among the most daunting types of socialization to achieve.

Most Jews feel some bond to Israel. However, intense emotional attachment to the Jewish state is largely confined, as Table 1 shows (and as numerous other studies confirm), to the more limited group of the highly engaged. Here, the impact of camp is most profound, and most telling: Camp attendance in childhood increases the likelihood of feeling very emotionally attached to Israel in adulthood by 55%.

The second item listed on the chart, attendance at synagogue at least once a month, hardly needs elaboration. Whatever else it may signify, synagogue attendance entails physical presence among other Jews. A desire to attend synagogue services on a regular basis implies a desire to be among Jews and to be part of a Jewish community in the most concrete sense.



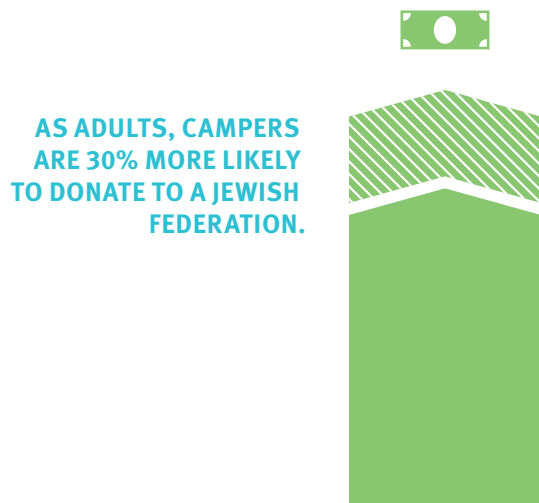
**AS ADULTS, CAMPERS ARE 55% MORE LIKELY TO FEEL VERY EMOTIONALLY ATTACHED TO ISRAEL.**

**AS ADULTS, CAMPERS ARE 25% MORE LIKELY TO DONATE TO A JEWISH CHARITY.**

The significance of donating to a Jewish federation requires further explanation. The Jewish federation, often known as the United Jewish Appeal, is a very unique type of Jewish charity. There are 157 Jewish federations in North America, each serving a specific metropolitan area or part thereof. Each federation can be explained as a local Jewish United Way, supporting a variety of Jewish community services ranging from nursing homes to religious schools, to immigrant and family-aid agencies. Federations also allocate funds to Jewish social service agencies in Israel and around the world through the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Every federation mobilizes donors, service providers, communal professionals, and others to plan for the future of the Jewish community and to allocate funds among various recipient agencies.

The distinction between federations and other Jewish charities is crucial. Broadly speaking, Jewish charity includes a variety of causes reflecting a nearly limitless range of possible Jewish interests and values. After controlling for other potentially confounding variables, about half of non-campers have a predicted probability of having donated to a Jewish charity (in the year preceding the survey), compared to a predicted probability of 61% for Jewish campers. Thus, camp attendance increased the likelihood of adult participation in Jewish charitable giving by 25%.

Donation to a Jewish federation reflects a second quality in addition to charitable generosity: namely, a willingness to donate to a general community fund and to entrust the decisions on allocating that money to a committee of community representatives. In the individualistic, anti-institutional, and anti-tax atmosphere of America today, voluntary participation in such an institution is somewhat counter-cultural. Camp increases the likelihood of such participation by nearly one-third, with predicted probabilities of 22% for non-campers, 28% for campers, and a 30% impact.



# CONCLUSION

Notably, and reassuringly, the evidence that camp exerts a measurable impact upon adult Jewish involvement years later ranges across four data sets encompassing 26 Jewish population studies conducted between 2000 and 2008. The findings from the NJPS 2000–01 data set are the most conclusive, owing to its fuller complement of controls for childhood Jewish socialization and education. At the same time, the evidence from local studies comports with, augments, and supports the general results found in NJPS 2000–01.

Let's return to the opening question: What do children bring home with them from a stay at Jewish overnight camp? The analysis indicates that they bring, first of all, an increased inclination to practice Jewish behaviors in their lives, from Shabbat candle lighting to using Jewish websites, and to appreciate the value of Jewish charity. Secondly, they bring an increased inclination to value and seek out the experience of Jewish community, whether in the immediate sense of joining other Jews in prayer or in the more abstract sense of identifying with fellow Jews in Israel. These acquisitions will enrich the lives of campers now and in their adult future.

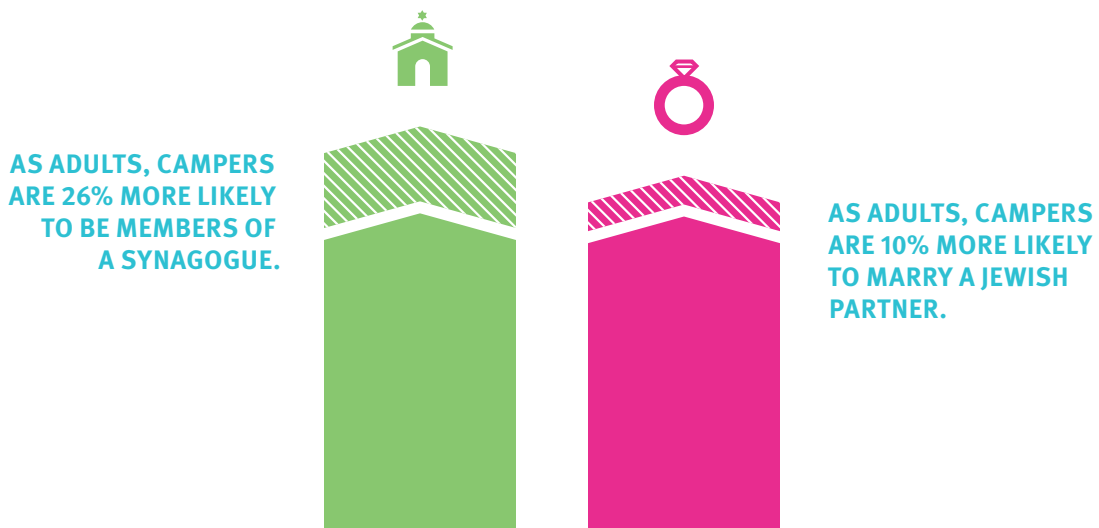


**AS ADULTS, CAMPERS ARE 25% MORE LIKELY TO REPORT THAT MOST OR ALL OF THEIR CLOSE FRIENDS ARE JEWISH.**



The impact of camp on Jewish community awareness should not come as a surprise. A summer at overnight camp can be many things, but above all it is an experience in living as part of a community. Campers and counselors live together for weeks, removed from outside influences, forming bonds of friendship and loyalty that will be, for most, unlike any they have experienced in the past. They grow together, learn about themselves, and acquire new skills of self-reliance and peer interdependence.

The bonding experience of camp not only builds a long-lasting taste and yearning for community; it also creates habits of Jewish practice. It makes Judaism part and parcel of life's most joyous moments. Moreover, those moments are experienced as integral parts of life in a beloved community.



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**Note:**

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# METHODOLOGY NOTES

## DATA SETS

The study employs the National Jewish Population Survey 2000–01 (NJPS 2000–01) as well as 25 local Jewish community surveys conducted between 2000 and 2008. NJPS 2000–01 (Kotler-Berkowitz, et al. 2003) was based on interviews with 4,523 Jewish respondents representing almost 2.9 million Jewish households nationally. The local studies include six studies by Ukeles Associates, Inc. (UAI) and 19 studies by Ira Sheskin. Appendix Table 1 on page 26 lists the Jewish communities studied by Ukeles and Sheskin, noting the number of interviews completed as well as the number of Jewish households, the total number of persons (including non-Jews) living in these Jewish households, and the number of Jews in each community, based upon the survey estimates. Combined, the Sheskin and Ukeles studies interviewed 27,771 respondents representing about 1.3 million Jewish households. Further details can be obtained in the published reports emanating from each survey (see References).

All surveys contained numerous and largely comparable measures of the respondents' current Jewish identity. There was less uniformity among the surveys in their treatment of respondents' Jewish background (childhood education and socialization). The NJPS asked in some detail about the Jewish practices in the homes in which the respondents were raised. The local surveys, conducted for different purposes, contained less detail in that area.

For the purposes of this study, respondents who were age 65 or over, or foreign-born, were excluded since they would have been raised in a time or place in which summer camp played a far smaller role in the culture of the Jewish community. Also excluded were respondents who were raised Jewish but currently do not identify as Jews, as well as those who are now Jewish but were not raised as Jews. The total number of eligible respondents included in the combined local community studies was 12,783.

## QUESTION WORDING

Full documentation of the question wording appears in each study report, but of special note are the questions used to determine whether the respondent attended overnight Jewish summer camp as a child:

### **NJPS 2000–01:**

*Did you attend a sleep away camp that had Jewish religious services or other Jewish content (before you were 25 years old)?*

### **UAI Studies:**

*As a child or teenager, did you ever attend an overnight camp with Jewish content?*

### **Sheskin Studies:**

*As a child, did you attend or work at a Jewish sleep away camp that held religious services or had significant Jewish content?*



Note the dichotomous (yes-no) formulation of the camp attendance questions. They simply distinguish respondents who ever attended (or, in NJPS 2000–01 and the Sheskin studies, attended or worked at) an overnight Jewish summer camp from those with no such experience. These questions do not measure duration of attendance, intensity of Jewish content at the camp, the age at which camp attendance occurred, or variations in personal camp experiences. Moreover, some unknown number of respondents answered the questions about Jewish camp attendance to include for-profit, Jewish-owned private camps that hold religious services or have significant Jewish content. These limitations in the number and refinement of measures probably exert a downward bias on the estimate of the magnitude of the long-range impact of attending Jewish camp upon adult Jewish identity outcomes. Thus, with respect to the limitations of the question wording, the results for camp impact must be seen as “conservative,” that is, understating the true impact of Jewish camping.

## MEASURES AND VARIABLES

All three sets of surveys asked, in addition to age, gender, place of birth (U.S. or foreign) and camp attendance, whether respondents had received any formal Jewish education and whether they had attended a Jewish day school. The NJPS and Ukeles surveys also asked if the respondent had one or two Jewish parents, a significant factor in predicting adult Jewish identity.

NJPS 2000–01 asked several additional questions that allowed for more detailed control of the analysis: the denomination (specifically, Orthodox/Conservative/Reform etc.) in which the respondent was raised, whether Shabbat candles were lit in their home as a child, and whether, as a teenager, the respondent had mostly Jewish friends and attended synagogue at least once per month.

## ANALYTIC APPROACH

The comprehensive set of background questions in NJPS 2000–01 meant that the analysis of impact could more carefully control for confounding variables, so that the family and home backgrounds of campers and non-campers were more closely matched. The local surveys, containing less background information, are less capable of statistically controlling for the non-camp factors that might strengthen an adult Jewish identity. As a result, these analyses yield a less precise matching between campers’ and non-campers’ backgrounds and a slight exaggeration of camp’s impact on later Jewish identity. The NJPS 2000–01 data yield a more accurate—and more modest—reading of camp’s impact.

The NJPS interviews were first analyzed controlling for all available background and education factors, resulting in closely matched sets of campers and non-campers for comparison to yield the truest possible reflection of the camp effect.

The NJPS interviews were then analyzed two more times, first controlling only for the background questions posed in the UAI surveys, and then again with the Sheskin surveys' questions. The re-tabulated NJPS findings, following the second and third analyses, should have yielded a picture of the camp effect that was exaggerated in a way that resembled the results of the two local survey batches. If the NJPS results resembled the local surveys it could then be assumed that the local results offer further validation of the overall pattern of findings. In the end, the NJPS results did indeed resemble the local surveys.

The UAI and Sheskin survey sets covered different local communities, each with their own distinctive characteristics. The communities studied in Sheskin's 19 surveys include a disproportionate number of traditional communities in the Northeast and Midwest with relatively lower rates of intermarriage and higher rates of synagogue attendance. Among Ukeles' six surveys, one was New York, which was considered separately because of its unique nature; the other five included three Sun Belt communities with relatively low rates of Jewish engagement. Allowing for those deviations, the findings of the local surveys closely resembled the parallel NJPS findings, yielding considerable confidence in the results. In particular, the local analyses underscore the generalizability of the inferences drawn from the NJPS.

## STATISTICAL METHODS

Logistic regression, the mode of multivariate statistical analysis used in this study, is a form of regression appropriate for predicting dichotomous (two-value) outcome values when one also has dichotomous independent variables. A "predicted probability" represents an estimate of the likelihood that a camper or a non-camper will exhibit a given adult Jewish identity outcome (e.g., synagogue membership), once the impact of other correlative factors (e.g., having attended day school) has been statistically controlled.

The predicted probabilities for each Jewish identity outcome were calculated for an average person by applying the logistic regression coefficients to the average value for each variable (that is, they represent the effect of all the variables in the model for an average person).

Two sets of predicted probabilities were generated: (1) one for an average respondent who attended camp and (2) one for an average respondent who did not attend camp. The predicted probabilities for each outcome (such as synagogue membership) by differential camp attendance take into account the characteristics of the sample, including (for the local studies) age, gender, the number of Jewish parents (one or two), any Jewish education (supplementary school and day school vs. no Jewish education), and Jewish day school attendance. For NJPS 2000–01, we were also able to include controls for denomination in which the respondent was raised (Orthodox or Conservative vs. all others), whether the respondent attended synagogue services monthly as a teenager, lived in a home where Shabbat candles were always or usually lit, or had mostly (or all) Jewish friends as a teenager. The Sheskin studies do not include the number of Jewish parents.



## **GREATER IMPACT AMONG YOUNGER RESPONDENTS**

Attendance at Jewish camp has increased over the years, such that younger adults are more likely to have attended camp in their childhood and teen years than are older adults. With the growth in Jewish camp participation, one might argue that camp exerted stronger effects among today's older adults. After all, they (or their parents) made a choice of Jewish camping that was rather exceptional for their time. Alternatively, one could argue the exact opposite: Younger adults should exhibit a greater impact of Jewish camp upon Jewish identity outcomes in later years. The rationale for this claim is that as the camp experience spread, camps became more normative; and as the years elapsed, they became more proficient in delivering Jewish educational impact.

To explore the possibility of differential effects by age, we re-ran our analyses using the NJPS data set for three age groups: adults age 18–24 (an age when most conventional Jewish identity indicators may not be all that age-appropriate), adults age 25–49, and adults age 50–64. We focused particularly upon the difference in impact measures for the latter two age groups.

We find that among adults age 25–49, for the most part, measures of impact of camp experience—controlling for all the other Jewish education and socialization measures—generally exceeded those for the sample as whole. In addition, impact measures for adults age 25–49 generally surpassed comparable measures for adults age 50–64.

## **FINAL NOTE**

Random measurement error inherent to the survey research process (misunderstanding of questions, for example) tends to attenuate correlations and exert downward pressure on the estimates of impact. Moreover, we need to recall that the measure of Jewish camp participation available makes only one unrefined distinction—between those who ever went to Jewish camp and those who never experienced a Jewish camp. Presumably, a more refined measure of camp participation would produce results even more powerful than reported in this study.

# APPENDIX TABLES

**APPENDIX TABLE 1:**

**Sample Sizes and Jewish Populations of Jewish Community Studies Used in this Analysis**

	STUDY YEAR	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS	PERSONS IN HOUSEHOLDS*	NUMBER OF JEWS**
Total, All Communities		27,771	1,332,050	3,274,943	2,765,000
<b>UKELES ASSOCIATES</b>					
Cincinnati, OH	2008	912	12,500	33,000	27,000
Denver/Boulder, CO	2007	1,399	47,500	117,200	83,900
Pittsburgh, PA	2002	1,313	20,900	54,200	42,200
Phoenix, AZ	2002	793	44,000	106,900	82,900
San Diego, CA	2003	1,080	46,000	118,000	89,000
New York, NY	2002	4,533	643,000	1,667,000	1,412,000
<b>IRA M. SHESKIN</b>					
Atlantic County, NJ	2004	624	10,000	23,143	20,400
Bergen County, NJ	2001	1,003	28,400	78,000	71,700
Detroit, MI	2005	1,274	30,000	78,000	72,000
Hartford, CT	2000	763	14,800	36,900	32,800
Jacksonville, FL	2002	601	6,700	16,200	13,000
Las Vegas, NV	2005	1,197	42,000	89,000	67,500
Lehigh Valley, PA	2007	537	4,000	9,800	8,050



	STUDY YEAR	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS	PERSONS IN HOUSEHOLDS*	NUMBER OF JEWS**
Miami, FL	2004	1,808	54,000	121,300	113,300
Middlesex County, NJ	2008	1,076	24,000	56,600	52,040
Minneapolis, MN	2004	746	13,850	35,300	29,300
Rhode Island	2002	829	9,550	23,000	18,750
San Antonio, TX	2007	675	4,500	11,200	9,170
Sarasota, FL	2001	616	8,800	17,500	15,500
South Palm Beach, FL	2005	1,511	73,000	136,800	131,300
St. Paul, MN	2004	494	5,150	13,400	10,940
Tidewater, VA	2001	628	5,400	13,800	10,950
Washington, DC	2003	1,201	110,000	267,800	215,600
West Palm Beach, FL	2005	1,534	69,000	137,300	124,250
Westport, CT	2000	624	5,000	13,600	11,450

1. For a detailed description of the geographic extent of each community, consult the community study reports available at [www.jewishdatabank.org](http://www.jewishdatabank.org). All study areas correspond to the local Jewish federation's service area. In no case is the study area defined by the legal limits of the community name appearing in this table. Study areas range in size from the better part of a county to multi-county areas.

2. Population data are for the Year of Study, except where otherwise indicated. Current population estimates may differ. (See Ira M. Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky. "Jewish Population of the United States, 2008," American Jewish Year Book 2008, Volume 108 (David Singer and Lawrence Grossman, editors) (New York: The American Jewish Committee) (2008) pp. 151–222.)

\* Includes non-Jews living in households with Jews, mostly non-Jewish spouses and children not being raised as Jews.

\*\* Includes number of Jews in institutions without their own telephone numbers where available.

**APPENDIX TABLE 2:  
Sample Sizes and Jewish Households in the Four Data Sets Used in this Analysis**

<b>FULL SAMPLE</b>	<b>GREATER NY 2002</b>	<b>UAI 5-CITIES 2002-08</b>	<b>SHESKIN 19-CITIES 2000-08</b>	<b>NJPS 2000-01</b>
Number of interviews	4,533	5,496	17,741	4,523
Number of households	643,000	170,800	518,150	2,882,000
<b>ANALYTIC SAMPLE*</b>				
Number of interviews	2,091	2,711	7,981	2,512
Number of households	293,000	87,580	231,681	1,388,331
Percentage of interviews meeting analytic sample	46%	49%	45%	56%

\* The Analytic Sample includes only interviews in which the respondent is under age 65, was born or raised Jewish, and was American born.





**APPENDIX TABLE 3:**

**Relationships of Jewish Camp Attendance to Selected Adult Jewish Identity Outcomes in Four Data Sets, Encompassing 26 Jewish Population Studies (Crosstabulation Analysis)**

	NJPS 2000-01		GREATER NY 2002		UAI 5-CITIES 2002-08		SHESKIN 19-CITIES 2000-08	
	Non-Camper	Camper	Non-Camper	Camper	Non-Camper	Camper	Non-Camper	Camper
Currently in-married	62%	78%	71%	88%	47%	64%	68%	79%
Currently in-married (non-Orthodox)	61%	72%	68%	80%	48%	63%	67%	76%
Member of a synagogue	40%	60%	39%	60%	30%	41%	37%	51%
Attend synagogue monthly or more	20%	38%	22%	42%	19%	24%	19%	30%
Feel being Jewish is very important	39%	58%	49%	71%	48%	69%		
Feel very emotionally attached to Israel*	19%	38%					21%	28%
Most/all closest friends are Jewish	26%	42%						
Did not have a Christmas tree**	69%	84%					74%	82%
Donated to a Jewish charity in the past year	45%	64%	51%	72%	42%	58%	57%	70%
Donated to a Jewish federation in the past year	22%	32%	21%	30%	22%	31%	34%	43%
Used a Jewish website in the past year	41%	56%	41%	60%	41%	59%	51%	63%
Always/usually light Shabbat candles	18%	34%	20%	42%	16%	20%	18%	28%
Always/usually light Hanukkah candles**	66%	77%	76%	88%	68%	78%	76%	86%
Always/usually participate in a Seder**	73%	89%	79%	92%	58%	77%	72%	86%

Shows the percentage of respondents exhibiting each behavior for respondents under age 65, who were born or raised as Jews, and who were born in the United States.

\* In Sheskin 19-Cities, this variable is worded as “extremely attached.”

\*\* In NJPS 2000-01, this variable is worded as “in the past year.”

**APPENDIX TABLE 4:  
Impact Of Jewish Camp on Selected Adult Jewish Identity Outcomes in NJPS Using Three Different Models (Logistic Regression Analysis)**

	NJPS-FULL MODEL			NJPS-UAI MODEL			NJPS-SHESKIN MODEL		
	Non-Camper	Camper	Impact	Non-Camper	Camper	Impact	Non-Camper	Camper	Impact
Currently in-married	.67	.74	10%	.64	.74	16%	.64	.76	19%
Member of a synagogue	.44	.56	26%	.42	.56	32%	.42	.56	34%
Attend synagogue monthly or more	.20	.29	45%	.20	.31	57%	.20	.32	60%
Feel being Jewish is very important	.44	.53	21%	.42	.54	30%	.41	.55	33%
Feel very emotionally attached to Israel	.19	.30	55%	.19	.32	67%	.19	.34	73%
Most/all closest friends are Jewish	.25	.31	25%	.25	.35	37%	.26	.38	46%
Did not have a Christmas tree*	.76	.85	11%	.74	.84	14%	.72	.85	17%
Donated to a Jewish charity in the past year	.49	.61	25%	.47	.61	29%	.47	.62	32%
Donated to a Jewish federation in the past year	.22	.28	30%	.20	.28	40%	.20	.30	46%
Used a Jewish website in the past year	.44	.54	23%	.42	.54	29%	.42	.54	29%
Always/usually light Shabbat candles	.18	.24	37%	.19	.28	49%	.19	.28	51%
Always/usually light Hanukkah candles	.72	.75	5%	.69	.75	8%	.69	.75	10%
Always/usually participate in a Seder*	.82	.89	8%	.79	.88	12%	.78	.89	14%

Statistical significance: 0.01 level 0.05 level 0.10 level

1. The **Non-Camper** and **Camper** columns show the predicted probabilities for an average person based on the logistic regression equations. The full model includes controls for age, gender, number of Jewish parents, any Jewish education, Jewish day school attendance, denomination raised, observance of Shabbat as a teen, synagogue attendance as a teen, and having mostly Jewish friends as a teen. The UAI model contains controls for only the variables available in the Greater NY and UAI 5-Cities studies: age, gender, number of Jewish parents, any Jewish education, and Jewish day school attendance. The Sheskin model contains controls for only the variables available in the Sheskin studies: age, gender, any Jewish education, and Jewish day school attendance.

2. The **Impact** column, for example, is interpreted as follows: Respondents in the NJPS-SHESKIN MODEL who attended or worked at a Jewish sleep away camp as a child are 34% more likely to currently belong to a synagogue than are respondents who did not attend sleep away camp as a child.

\* In NJPS 2000-01, these variables are worded “in the past year.”



**APPENDIX TABLE 5:**

**Impact Of Jewish Camp on Selected Adult Jewish Identity Outcomes in Three Data Sets Comprising 25 Local Jewish Community Studies (Logistic Regression Analysis)**

	GREATER NY 2002			UAI 5-CITIES 2002-08			SHESKIN 19-CITIES 2000-08		
	Non-Camper	Camper	Impact	Non-Camper	Camper	Impact	Non-Camper	Camper	Impact
Currently in-married	.75	.87	17%	.50	.62	25%	.83	.84	2%*
Member of a synagogue	.44	.53	21%	.38	.43	13%	.35	.45	29%
Attend synagogue monthly or more	.24	.35	48%	.21	.25	16%	.19	.27	43%
Feel being Jewish is very important	.56	.67	20%	.54	.67	24%			
Feel very emotionally attached to Israel							.21	.27	32%
Did not have a Christmas tree							.14	.12	-9%
Donated to a Jewish charity in the past year	.55	.70	27%	.50	.58	17%	.67	.74	11%
Donated to a Jewish federation in the past year	.18	.29	62%	.26	.32	25%	.46	.51	10%
Used a Jewish website in the past year	.44	.56	29%	.48	.58	21%	.37	.53	44%
Always/usually light Shabbat candles	.23	.31	39%	.18	.21	19%	.21	.26	25%
Always/usually light Hanukkah candles	.82	.87	6%	.73	.77	6%	.74	.82	10%
Always/usually participate in a Seder	.84	.92	9%	.67	.76	13%	.77	.86	12%

Statistical significance: **0.01 level** **0.05 level** \*not significant at 0.10 level

1. The **Non-Camper** and **Camper** columns show the predicted probabilities for an average person based on the logistic regression equations. The UAI 5-Cities model contains controls for variables available in the Greater NY and UAI 5-Cities studies: age, gender, number of Jewish parents, any Jewish education, and Jewish day school attendance. The Sheskin 19-Cities model contains controls for only the variables available in the Sheskin studies: age, gender, any Jewish education, and Jewish day school attendance.
2. The **Impact** column, for example, is interpreted as follows: Respondents in the Sheskin 19-Cities Dataset who attended or worked at a Jewish sleep away camp as a child are 29% more likely to currently belong to a synagogue than are respondents who did not attend sleep away camp as a child.

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A sociologist of American Jewry, Steven M. Cohen is a research professor of Jewish social policy at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, director of the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU Wagner, and the director of research for Synagogue 3000.

In 1992, he made *aliyah* (moved to Israel) and taught for 14 years at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Previously, he taught at Queens College, with visiting appointments at Yale, Brandeis, and Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS).

With Arnold Eisen, he wrote *The Jew Within*, and with Charles Liebman he wrote *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experiences*. His earlier books include *American Modernity & Jewish Identity* and *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* With Isa Aron, Lawrence A. Hoffman, and Ari Y. Kelman, he is a co-author of the forthcoming book, *Sacred Strategies: Becoming a Visionary Congregation*. His current research interests focus on the patterns of Jewish engagement among American Jews age under the age of 40.

He has been named twice by the *Forward* newspaper to the “Forward Fifty” (in 2003 and 2010), and is the 2010 recipient of the Marshall Sklare Award by the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry. In 2011, he was appointed Senior Counselor to the Chancellor of JTS, and received a Doctor of Hebrew Letters (honoris causa) from The Spertus Institute of Chicago, Illinois.

## RON MILLER

Ron Miller is associate director of the North American Jewish Data Bank. After 25 years of teaching research methods and computer data analysis programs, Ron retired as associate professor of sociology at Brooklyn College, CUNY. He earned his Ph.D. from New York University in 1971 in sociology, an M.A. in history from the University of Michigan in 1964, and a B.A. from Brooklyn College in 1963.

He serves as vice president of research for Ukeles Associates Inc. where he has been project survey director for several Jewish population studies conducted by Ukeles Associates, including Cincinnati 2008, Denver 2007, Atlanta 2006, North Metro Atlanta 2004, San Diego 2003, New York 2002, Phoenix 2002, Pittsburgh 2002, Baltimore 1999, Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley 1998, Denver 1997, and Philadelphia 1996. He is currently working on studies in Greater Baltimore and Chicago.



## **IRA M. SHESKIN**

Ira M. Sheskin is the director of the Jewish Demography Project of the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies at the University of Miami, a professor of geography and regional studies at the same institution, and the faculty computing resource consultant.

He has completed 41 major Jewish community studies for Jewish federations throughout the country. He has also been a consultant to numerous synagogues, Jewish day schools, Jewish agencies, and Jewish Community Centers across the U.S. In total, he has completed over 110 studies for over 80 Jewish organizations and commercial entities.

Sheskin was a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee of United Jewish Communities (now the Jewish Federations of North America) from 1988 to 2003. This committee completed both the 1990 and 2000–01 National Jewish Population Surveys. He also serves on the board of the North American Jewish Data Bank.

His publications include *Survey Research for Geographers*. His latest book, *How Jewish Communities Differ*, compares the results of 45 Jewish community studies. He is the author of numerous articles on Jewish demography, including the annual article on Jewish demography in the *American Jewish Year Book*.

## **BERNA TORR**

Berna Torr is an assistant professor of sociology at California State University of Fullerton (CSUF). She earned her Ph.D. in sociology in 2005 from Brown University, where she was also a fellow in the Population Studies and Training Program. She earned an M.A. in sociology from Brown University in 2002 and a B.S. in rural sociology from Cornell University in 1996.

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## OUR VISION

Summers at Jewish overnight camp turn Jewish youth into spirited and engaged Jewish adults, laying the groundwork for strong Jewish communities. The Foundation for Jewish Camp aspires to elevate the field of Jewish camp, conferring proper recognition and granting appropriate support to expand its impact across our community, so that camp can be a critical element of every Jewish young person's education.

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