

Challenges and Psychological Adjustment of Religious American Adolescent Immigrants to Israel

ABSTRACT

In recent years a growing number of Americans have made the decision to immigrate to Israel. Immigration to Israel entails many challenges for a family. One segment of immigrants who are at particular risk for transition difficulties post-migration is adolescents. Considering the many biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes experienced by adolescents, including the identity formation process and its sensitivity to environmental changes, preliminary research and clinical evidence suggests that many adolescents respond to the immigration transition in negative ways. However, adolescent immigration in general is an understudied topic and is practically a non-existent subject of study in terms of the experience of American adolescents immigrating to Israel. In order to fill the existing gap in understanding how immigration to Israel impacts American adolescents, the current preliminary qualitative study investigated the immigration process and adjustment of recent US immigrant teens to Israel.

INTRODUCTION

IN RECENT YEARS A GROWING NUMBER OF AMERICANS HAVE MADE THE decision to immigrate to Israel. Based on data from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, assembled by Waxman¹ over the past decade, an average of close to 2,200 Americans per year have immigrated to Israel, or made *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) as it is commonly referred to. Since 1948 there have been times when *aliyah* from America far exceeded these numbers, such as during the late 60s and early 70s, when between 5,500 and 7,300

Americans made *aliyah* annually. However, that irregularity was driven by several unique historical circumstances. Namely, a combination of Jewish euphoria after the 1967 Six-Day-War coupled with sociocultural turmoil in the US coalesced to create this exceptional immigration anomaly.² In comparison to *aliyah* throughout the years, the present stream of US *olim* (immigrants to Israel) represents a growing phenomenon, comprising 1.5% of Israel's total Jewish population.³

Considering the increasing numbers of *olim* over the past few decades, an emergent area of interdisciplinary research has examined various aspects of the Israel immigration process and experience including studies on transition, immigration motivation, acculturation, transnationalism, and migration generation.

This article examines the challenges inherent in immigration, and the psychological adjustment to immigration, of religious American adolescent *olim*. This unique group is a growing segment of the immigrating population and has received less scientific attention.

FAMILY IMMIGRATION ADJUSTMENT

Aliyah entails many challenges for a family. First, many *olim* learn that their pre-immigration view of living in Israel diverges from the actual experience.⁴ On a more basic level, the stress of the transition for various family members, together with economic challenges often create many adjustment difficulties.⁵

More specifically, past research has examined the experience of *aliyah* of specific family members. Laura Sigad and Rivka Eisikovits reported on the adaptation of North American women who immigrated to Israel with their Israeli-born husbands and who subsequently became mothers in Israel.⁶ The women in the study highlighted several unique elements of their experience including identity issues, parenting style differences with their husband and other Israeli mothers, difficulties being away from their family of origin, disapproval of the move and pressure to move back to North America from their family of origin, the importance of support from husband's family and the overall mother community, and possessing a transnational orientation.

They also studied the experience of US grandparents of American-Israeli children living in Israel.⁷ Themes from the ethnographic interviews conducted with 12 grandparents included grandparent feelings of isolation from grandchildren, worry about security issues in Israel, behavioral

differences between Israeli and US children, and pride in grandchildren developing multi-national proficiencies. Their study has highlighted the features of transnationalism of both mothers and grandparents inherent in US immigration to Israel.

ADOLESCENT IMMIGRANTS

A segment of immigrants who are at particular risk for transition difficulties post-migration is adolescents. Considering the many biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes experienced by adolescents, including the identity formation process and its sensitivity to environmental changes, preliminary research and clinical evidence suggest that many adolescents respond to the immigration transition in negative ways.⁸ However, adolescent immigration in general is an understudied topic⁹ and is practically a non-existent subject of study in terms of the experience of American adolescent *olim*.

From the little research that is available on adolescent immigration in general it is becoming evident that there is much variability between adolescents in the way they respond to immigration.¹⁰ Based on Gary Becker's Intergenerational Transmission Theories, several empirical studies suggest that parental psychological, social, and economic means may impact the way adolescents transition post-immigration.¹¹ For example, John Berry et al. found that adolescents from families lacking connectedness and warmth were at particular risk for developing problems after immigration.¹² Furthermore, parental conflict has been shown to adversely impact adolescent immigrants. Conversely, immigration difficulties have been shown to be minimized with the presence of multiple protective factors such as positive self-esteem, optimism, affirming peer relationships, and parent-child warmth.¹³

Beyond individual and family characteristics, other situational factors may also impact adolescent immigration transition. Nina Ahmed found that adolescents who emigrated from countries similar to the host country in economic, social, and political characteristics were more likely to do well after immigration.¹⁴ Furthermore, the ability to acculturate, or integrate into the cultural norms of the host country via new language proficiency, has also been shown to ease immigration transitions.¹⁵

Some studies have shown that acculturation has its limitations. An over-immersion in the host country's culture may prompt a disconnect between parents and their adolescents. High levels of adolescent acculturation may

create a “cultural gap” between adolescents and their less acculturated parents, triggering an increase in parent–child conflict.¹⁶ Hence, balancing acculturation with a firm link to the country of origin may produce the most adaptive outcomes of adolescents. Studies have shown that when adolescents retain proficiencies in their language of origin they are more likely to experience closeness with their parents than adolescents not proficient in their language of origin.¹⁷ The importance of balancing both past and present cultures can also be seen with the finding reported by Liu et al.¹⁸ that adolescent immigrants to the US proficient in English were more likely to succeed academically, whereas proficiencies in the adolescents’ language of origin was associated with more adaptive emotional outcomes. David Sam¹⁹ found that identity with the culture of origin was a strong predictor of psychological well-being among adolescent immigrants. Hence, retaining some sense of cultural diversity may be a strength for adolescent adaptability.

RELIGIOUS ADOLESCENT *ALIYAH*

Although a review of the limited research on this topic can provide a window into understanding some of the experiences of adolescent immigrants, the immense variability found in the way they respond to immigration²⁰ leaves many unanswered questions about American adolescents’ *aliyah* experience. The few studies on adolescent *olim* primarily focuses on immigrants from the FSU and Ethiopia²¹ pointing to various academic, social, and emotional difficulties experienced by teen immigrants.²²

However, the experience of American adolescent *olim* differs in considerable ways from the experience of other groups of adolescent immigrants in Israel.²³ First, US *aliyah* is usually driven by “pull” reasons, as opposed to “push” reasons, which is more common with *aliyah* from other countries.²⁴ Choosing to leave the relative comfort of an American life-style in favor of *aliyah* to Israel is driven by being pulled by the religious or cultural appeal of living in Israel. This active choice is in stark contrast to many other groups of *olim* who made *aliyah* in response to being pushed out of their country of origin for various geo-political, safety, or economic concerns.

Considering that “pull” reasons often entail religious factors, such as wanting to live in the Biblical homeland, it is important to assess the challenges and adjustment of religious American Adolescent *olim*. An additional unique dimension of American *aliyah* is the Americanization of Israel and throughout its society through language, commerce, and entertainment.

The use of English words in conversational Hebrew is rampant. Words such as mainstream, take-out, shopping, babysitter, and mail are just a small sample of the many words that have permeated common use. Shopping malls are inundated with American establishments such as McDonald's and Burger King serving American ice cream. American movies and television programs are extremely popular in Israel and American styles of clothing and music are seen in all segments of the population. Uzi Rebhun and Chaim Waxman noted, "Israelis often appear to be more American than Americans."²⁵ This immersion in American culture is enhanced further for American immigrants considering that they often choose to live in Anglo communities.²⁶ Hence, living in communities with large US immigrant populations, within a country that is highly Americanized, offers American *olim* the distinctive potential for both positive and negative consequences.

In the seminal work of Berry on acculturation, immigrants have been shown to utilize several integration strategies. In assimilation, immigrants embrace the new culture and relinquish ties with their culture of origin.²⁷ Separation occurs when immigrants detach from their new culture and retain a robust connection with their culture of origin. Immigrants who integrate are those who are able to combine elements of both their new culture and their culture of origin, resulting in a well-adjusted immigrating experience. Finally, marginalization is when immigrants reject both their new culture and their culture of origin.

Using Berry's model, the Americanization of Israel and its society is an important factor in examining the acculturation of US *olim*. The rampant influence, and high status, of American society throughout Israel may make it easier for them to integrate their sense of identity and develop a sense of transnationalism.²⁸

On the other hand, the Americanization of Israel may also feed a detachment from the new Israeli culture leading to a sense of separation. Paula Kahan et al. found that in comparison to teen *olim* from other countries, those from the US were more likely to have proficiencies in their mother tongue and less likely to have proficiencies in Hebrew.²⁹ The adverse consequences of transnationalism can also be seen in the ambivalence reported by US *olim* about staying in Israel. Between 40% and 60% of US *olim* eventually return to reside in the US.³⁰

These inimitable characteristics of immigration from the US necessitate a careful examination of how American teens adjust to moving to Israel. Furthermore, inquiries about US adolescent immigrant adjustment are particularly curious when considering the distinctive characteristics of religious adolescent immigrants. First, it would be interesting to assess how

immigration adjustment for religious adolescents may be impacted by the religious nature of the “pull” factors in the reasons for immigration to Israel. Second, both the adolescent developmental transition and the immigration process entail a reexamination of personal identity. The primary developmental task of the adolescent years is the construction of a unique sense of self that often includes an examination of how religious identities and beliefs are expressed and embraced.³¹ Identity ambiguities and reappraisals are also an integral part of the immigration process.³² Hence, the confluence of the adolescent developmental and immigration process, and the religious undercurrent involved in both facets of the transition, may produce a distinctive experience for US religious teenagers immigrating to Israel.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE

In order to fill this existing gap in understanding how *aliyah* impacts religious American adolescents, the current qualitative study investigated the immigration process and adjustment of recent immigrant teens.³³ The study group included 20 participants who immigrated to Israel from the US during the past two to five years. The participants included 4 fathers of teens, 7 mothers of teens, and 9 adolescents (5 male and 4 female) between the ages of 13 and 18. All had made *aliyah* with their entire immediate family, which included two married parents and between two and seven children. They resided in central Israel in cities with differing numbers of US *olim*.

The participants were recruited by research assistants through personal acquaintances using “snowball sampling” and were specifically targeted based on a predetermined criterion.³⁴ The predetermined criterion focused on selecting participants who emigrated from the US to Israel within the past five years and were Orthodox-Jewish. The five-year timeframe was predetermined in order to gauge both the immigration process and the short-term adaptation to the move. A predetermined criterion included a focus on adolescents from intact families, as issues of divorce and remarriage may cloud the current study’s focus on immigration adjustment. The precise immigration status of the study group and their status as belonging to the Orthodox community were confirmed based on a self-report prior to the interview.

PROCEDURE

The interviewer, the author of this report, underwent graduate training in qualitative techniques. The interviews were conducted anonymously except for asking about general demographic questions. Verbal consent was obtained before the interviews and the actual interviews were recorded. Participants were interviewed in a private setting (home or private area of a coffee shop) using questions as a guide for the inquiry. The length of the interviews was between 18 and 45 minutes. The questions were generated by reviewing other studies on immigration in general and by consulting with mental health professionals who work with adolescent immigrants in Israel. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. The interviewer followed the participants' responses with prompts in order to gain the most accurate and rich picture of the experiences under investigation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Results were analyzed using the phenomenological method.³⁵ The assumption of this method is that it is difficult for interviewers to remove their biases and personal beliefs from the data.³⁶ In order to minimize subjectivity, the interviewer discussed his expectations and assumptions about the possible findings with study consultants and attempted to dismiss them prior to the interviews.³⁷ Each interview was broken down into themes by the investigator who conducted the interview. Once the initial categorization of all responses was established, a second research assistant completed an additional categorization. Responses that were categorized differently by the two coders were discussed and settled. Subsequently, the investigators analyzed all the transcripts producing a hierarchy of common themes.

RESULTS

Although the narrative provided by the participants included a variety of ideas, several emerging themes were identified from the content of the interviews. The themes were (1) Reasons, Timing, and Process of the Move; (2) Family Impacting the Transition; (3) Social and Community Variables; (4) School, Academics, and Language; (5) Issues of Divergent Cultures; (6) Difficulties with Uncertain Causes; and (7) Change Over Time and Retrospection.

REASONS, TIMING, AND PROCESS OF THE MOVE

Participants reported two general types of reasons for why the family decided to move to Israel: "pull" reasons and "push" reasons. The majority of participants highlighted "pull" reasons, which are reasons based on the feeling of being pulled by the appeal of living in Israel. In most cases this reason was based on the religious and spiritual aspects of living in The Holy Land. In some cases this religious and spiritual dimension was noted by teens as an exciting aspect of moving to Israel, making the transition easier. For example, a 15-year-old female who has been in Israel for three years noted, "Learning about the Bible all these years and then coming to the place where it all happen was cool." Other "pull" reasons included Zionist reasons, such as the importance of Jews living in Israel, a sense that Jews are safer in Israel, the superior Jewish education in Israel, and having family in Israel.

A smaller number of participants noted "push" reasons, based on displeasure with their situation in America and feeling pushed out by the discontent. For example, some participants noted mental health issues of a family member and the desire to start fresh in Israel. Several parents pointed to specific issues faced by the teen in the family, such as learning or social issues, as the reason for the family deciding to move to Israel. For example, a father of a 14-year-old male who moved to Israel four years prior commented, "We were told that we should send him to a public school because of his learning disability. So we were afraid about it, we wanted him to have a religious surrounding; he is now in the right environment." Other "push" reasons included not being satisfied with the educational system in the US and dissatisfaction with life in America, including the fast-paced nature of daily activities and the uncertain economic situation. For example, a father of a 15-year-old female in Israel for four years said, "I worked on Wall Street and was concerned about what was going on in the big picture. I was worried that if things don't go well financially in the US things will get hard."

Several participants stressed the importance of timing the move well. For example, numerous participants commented that moving in the summer between 7th and 8th grades was particularly hard for teens because of missing eighth grade and graduation. This was in contrast to others who noted that coming for 7th or 9th grade made the move easier as it is a new educational beginning regardless of the move. One father remarked that his decision to move when he did was based on advice he received from his rabbi not to move to Israel with teens. One mother thought that the reason

her two children ended up moving back to the US when they graduated high school was because the family moved to Israel when the teens were too old already.

Participants described various ways in which the parents decided on moving to Israel and informing the children about the move. In some cases the family discussed the idea for years and then proceeded to go on a pilot trip to examine the possibility further. Other parents made the decision themselves and only then informed their children about the move.

The initial reaction of teens to the decision to move was impacted by several variables. First, past experiences of visiting Israel was reported as contributing to a positive reaction from teens to the move. Furthermore, discussing the idea with teens and having them join a pilot trip was also noted as easing the initial reaction. A father of a 14-year-old male in Israel for four years noted, "He was very against it initially so we took the family on a pilot trip. The pilot trip was very helpful; the move wasn't so scary anymore for him." An 18-year-old female who has been in Israel for five years and was not told about the move until the decision was made remembered, "I was very angry and very resentful no one gave me any choices."

Initial negative reactions to the move were often based on concern about the overall change, school issues, and not fitting into the new country. Other participants reported sadness over leaving behind their life, family, and friends. Several teens declared when they were told about the move that they were not going with the family to Israel. An 18-year-old female who has been in Israel for five years recalled, "I ran to my room crying and I cried for weeks . . . It was hard leaving friends that I finally was making in my school in the US, I also had to leave my family, they lived around the corner from us." For some teens the negative reaction to the news of the move was exacerbated due to pre-existing anxiety. Several parents reported that they "bribed" their children to make the move more palatable with promises of getting cable TV, new linen, or their own room once they settled in Israel.

Participants described the stress associated with the move including the tension invoked by packing, making the arrangements, and selling the house. Some also described the difficulties of having to say goodbye to the entire family who came to the airport. A 17-year-old female in Israel for five years said, "I am not very emotional so in the airport everyone were crying but not me, I did not process it, I thought we may come back."

FAMILY IMPACTING THE TRANSITION

Extended family dynamics impacted the move in various ways. Leaving family behind in the US and not having family in Israel was consistently

noted as a difficult aspect of moving to Israel. This difficulty was ameliorated somewhat by those whose family from the US came to visit Israel often. In contrast, participants with native or immigrant family already in Israel reported the transition being much easier due to having family support including the presence of cousins and extended family. Some teens noted that closeness with their siblings helped them adjust to the move.

Having the support and encouragement of family in the US about the decision to move was also reported as being beneficial. On the other hand, many parents noted that when their own parents disapproved of the move it created an elevated level of difficulties for all the family. A father of a 15-year-old female in Israel for three years recalled, "My parents thought we were crazy. Israel is where you go to visit not to live, it was very hard telling them about our decision and it was the hardest part of making *aliyah*."

In some cases the grandparents even expressed the displeasure to the teens, directly impacting the teen's attitude about the move. A father of a 14-year-old in Israel for four years lamented, "Our parents were very angry about it until today. Our parents on both sides said that we were stealing the kids away from them. My father put in a lot of guilt even with the kids. He would tell them that we can always come back that he would do anything if we came back." Conversely, one mother noted that although her parents had problems with the decision, they made sure to only express the dissatisfaction to her and her husband and were as positive as possible about the move when talking with the children.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY VARIABLES

Many participants felt supported by their community and neighbors during the first few days and weeks of their move. Participants noted how special it was for their family when neighbors were waiting outside for them when they arrived from the airport to their new community. A mother of a 17-year-old male and a 16-year-old female who has been in Israel for five years said, "When we arrived the neighborhood was all out in the street with signs and everything, it was nice." Several teens commented that neighborhood teens coming over and saying hello or inviting them over made the initial transition easier. Furthermore, attending youth group functions soon after arrival provided an opportunity for meeting new friends helping to make the beginning of school easier.

The decision regarding choosing the right community to settle in was a consistent theme found in the interviews. Many parents chose to move to a largely Anglo community in order to ease the transition for their children. However, some parents thought that, although living with Anglos assisted

with the initial transition, it prevented their children from integrating into Israeli culture. On the other hand, although families moving to a more Israeli area appreciated the way their children integrated into Israeli culture, they did note the social difficulties linked with being seen as an outsider. One mother reported that her daughter was very cautious socially and did not have many friends in the beginning. This difficult balance can be seen in the words of a mother of a 17-year-old male and a 16-year-old female who has been in Israel for five years and moved to a more Israeli area, "Our kids are more integrated than other *olim* because we came here, but it came at an expense. My kids were seen as outsiders. We are always going to be a bit different." Several teens who moved to more Israeli areas reported that attending youth groups and hanging out with Israeli teens helped in social integration with Israelis. Ultimately, a majority of both parent and teen participants believed that having a strong friend network early was infinitely important for adjustment.

SCHOOL, ACADEMICS, AND LANGUAGE

Similar to the decision regarding choosing the right community to settle in, the choice of school for the teens was also a consistent theme found in the interviews. The choice of either placing teens in a majority Israeli school or in a school catering to the Anglo community entailed academic and social ramifications.

Academically, many participants described school difficulties experienced initially by the teens regardless of what type of school attended. Predictably, the greatest challenge of school was associated with language difficulties, necessitating students to work much harder at school than in the past. An 18-year-old female who has been in Israel for five years recalled "For homework I sat by my computer Google translating every word." These academic difficulties were often subject-specific. Religious subjects were often noted as being easier than secular subjects such as math and science. A 16-year-old female in Israel for four years said "Just the terms in math and science in Hebrew I did not know. In America if I did not get something in math I would just pick up the book and learn it, here I just did not understand the book." These difficulties resulted in lower grades than previously and was upsetting to several teens including some who noted that the academic difficulties made them want to go back to the US.

Many schools offered academic assistance to help teens deal with the school difficulties. School friends were also noted as being very helpful. One consistent comment from the majority of participants was that the Hebrew language instructional programs, referred to as *ulpan*, were not

very effective. In fact several participants noted that being taken out of class for *ulpan* was counterproductive since it just made schoolwork harder due to missing class. In some instances for students in majority Israeli schools, the accommodations for immigrants were seen as too lax. Several teens commented about how the school had no expectations for them and they felt that the good grades they received were not deserved. Students entering school with a strong Hebrew background reported fewer academic difficulties than those with limited exposure to Hebrew. Families working on Hebrew skills in the lead up to the move, either via instructional support or family home conversations, had teens adjust more easily to school. A mother of a 15-year-old female in Israel two years recalled "The Hebrew made such a big difference; she was self-confident and was able to transition seamlessly into school because of it."

The differences between the experiences of those enrolling in majority Israeli schools or enrolling in more Anglo schools was seen more starkly when examining the social experience of school. Those in schools with large numbers of US immigrant students reported better social integration and friendships. An additional advantage to being with other immigrants was seeing peers' successful adjustment and knowing that things will get better. However, even for the teens in a majority Anglo school, some social difficulties were evident. One teen noted some social issues initially with cliques and being pulled by various peer groups. Another teen commented about being new in the school and tested by peers. Although enrolling in a school with a considerable US immigrant population was noted as being very helpful in terms of social integration, several participants in Anglo communities were concerned that due to the lack of integration into Israeli society the transition into college may be difficult.

The social experience for teens in majority Israeli schools was considerably different from those enrolled in Anglo schools. Many of them noted social problems in school. A 13-year-old male in Israel for three years said "I had a friend who went to an Israeli school and he left after three days." Teens reported trying to seek out the few US immigrants in the school to befriend. Although the Israelis were excited about the new immigrants and were very nice to them, an 18-year-old female in Israel for five years in a majority Israeli school noted uneasiness with the heightened attention, saying, "There was too much attention on me and they were all coming up to me testing out their broken English." Other concerns with being in an Israeli school included cultural differences and some teasing. A mother of a 17-year-old male in Israel for five years commented "Physical space differences between Israeli and American kids made him think that kids

were aggressive when they were just being themselves.” She also noted that her son felt teased in school, “He did not like when the Israeli kids made comments about him being an American. They called him an ‘Americakee’ (derogatory term for US immigrants). Actually, school shows often depicted Americans with funny accents; I had to call the school about that.”

Due to the academic and social challenges several participants reported that they needed to reevaluate their school choice after the first year in Israel. Some teens moved to different schools based on information learned about the system during the first year. The new school chosen was often based on it being smaller and more American, resulting in better academic and social outcomes.

ISSUES OF DIVERGENT CULTURES

A consistent theme relating to cultural differences between the US and Israel and its impact on teens related to religious group categorization. As suggested by numerous participants, Jewish religious schools in the US permit a broader spectrum of religious ideology among its student body. In contrast, the religious school system in Israel is more fragmented and heterogeneity of ideology is not common in Israeli schools. Hence, several parents reported that the need to commit to a more narrow ideology in order to place teens in the appropriate school created some conflict. Placing teens in a school more religious or less religious than the family has been accustomed to practice often resulted in religious conflict with children. For example, a father of a 16-year-old female in Israel for four years explained

Due to the need to define yourself a bit more here we made a choice to send her to a more Religious-Zionist school which created some conflict with us about dress code. She does not see it as a conflict, we do. We were always more Zionistic even in the US but in the US you can be whatever you want and it does not matter. So we were able to think a bit differently but still send her to a more religious school. Here things are different so we decided to go to the Religious-Zionist. So she goes along with the ways things are in school which is a bit more open than we are comfortable with. It's a constant struggle with her.

A father of a 16-year-old male in Israel for four years said “We were in a regular religious school in America, but here we placed him in a Religious-Zionist school. So he became anti-Ultra-Orthodox. It is amongst his friends. He would say not nice things about other groups that were disturbing to me.” On the other side of the religious spectrum, one teen

commented that his older sister had a hard time in a more narrowly defined Ultra-Orthodox school resulting in fights with parents over dress code.

An additional way in which cultural differences between the US and Israel impacted teens was the more freedom offered to teens in Israel. Many participants noted that their children loved the newfound freedom and that the independence was very good for them. A mother of a 15-year-old female in Israel for three years described how it took some time for her and her daughter to reach a sense of balance with the new independence, "In the beginning she was apprehensive about going out alone but then she would disappear for hours. It took us time to find the right balance." Considering the independence of Israeli teens some parents appreciated the fact that they lived in a smaller city with limited options for problematic activities.

DIFFICULTIES WITH UNCERTAIN CAUSES

Several parents described considerable difficulties experienced by their teens that developed after the move including diagnoses of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), mood disorders, Learning Disabilities (LD), and disturbed eating patterns. In some of the cases the diagnosis was determined many years prior and was retriggered after the move to Israel, such as in a case of anxieties activated by the change and learning issues aggravated by the natural academic difficulties of a new country and school.

In one case a teen started limiting food intake and exercising excessively after the move, resulting in some medical issues. However, the cause of the problem was not clear, as the father of the 16-year-old in Israel for four years elucidated "I think it was multifactorial, I am not sure why it happened. Was it the stress of the move? If I was not dieting would that have changed things? I am not sure."

Fewer clinical problems that seemed to be retriggered after the move included past social issues resulting in difficulties developing friendships as well as standard teen-parent conflict, resulting in conflict with parents over bedtimes, music, and phone issues. A mother of a 17-year-old male in Israel for two years explained "Teenagers have issues, they all go through some rebellion, I don't think this was something to do with the *aliyah*."

CHANGE OVER TIME AND RETROSPECTION

The overwhelming majority of the parent and teen participants reported that overall the first year was hard but that things got better with time. As a mother of a 15-year-old female in Israel for three years said "I would never want to do that first year again." A father of a 14-year-old in Israel for four

years commented "He is past the point of wanting to go back to the US, he is at the point of talking about what he is going to do after high school in Israel." Often the improvement was driven by engaging in the normal routine of life, developing closer friendships, and language competencies. Others noted a growing sense of pride in being in Israel and a growing appreciation for the religious and spiritual connection to the land and its people.

When asked to comment on the entire process and the final analysis of their more, several overarching themes were presented by both the parents and the teens. First, making *aliyah* together with other families was noted as being beneficial for adjustment. Having other friends going through the process together created a support network for the teens.

However, some parents conveyed an ongoing difficulty and struggle with their teen relating to the Americanization of their child. Several participants noted that their teen was very American and materialistic, which made the transition difficult over time. In some cases parents and family inadvertently contributed to this predicament. A father of a 15-year old female explained the tension with his daughter wanting everything American and expressing the desire to go back to the US after graduation

The image is that everything is pink there. She started thinking that way, we even did that. We would order stuff from the US, which was a big mistake on my part. Anyone you speak to everyone is going to American so it makes America the place to be. Even with family it's like that. My mother would come here and would say I can't wait to go back. She thought that you can get anything you want in the US.

In a variation of this experience, a mother of a 19-year-old female who moved to Israel three years prior described how she would infuse too much America talk at home emphasizing US educational standards. "I did not want to compromise on a top US education so I insisted that they read the classics." Her daughter, in fact, ended up going back to the US after high school. In an extension of this pull one parent described how going back to visit America and then coming back was very hard. An additional ongoing problem noted by some participants is the financial hardship of life in Israel.

Practically all parent and teen participants expressed no regrets about moving to Israel. One parent did note that if she had many teens she would probably not move to Israel. With just one to focus on she was able to focus on her and what she needed.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The present study has both research and applied goals. From a research perspective the study added to our limited understanding of how adolescents respond to the immigration experience. Of particular interest was the unique experience of US teen *olim* in Israel, a topic of scarce research. Although preliminary in nature the study confirmed some of the existing work on teen immigration. However, more significantly, the findings of the study highlight some extremely distinctive experiences of the teen *aliyah*.

First, the variability between adolescents in the way they respond to immigration reported in previous work on adolescent immigration in general³⁸ can be seen in the current study as well. The vastly different educational and social outcomes of the current sample point to the importance of appreciating the heterogeneity of adolescent immigration outcomes. The significance of protective factors, such as intimate family and peer relationships, in mitigating some of the adjustment difficulties of immigration suggested by past research,³⁹ can be seen in the present study as well in the way family and friend support was noted as being an important element of successful teen adjustment. An additional similarity between the present findings and past work on immigration pertains to the importance of developing proficiency in the host country's language. As the majority of the participants in the current study noted, the value of learning Hebrew in preparation or upon arrival in Israel cannot be overstated for academics and social adjustment.

However, more importantly, the present study sheds light on some of the exceptional dynamics experienced by US teen immigrants to Israel providing a framework for future quantitative studies on this topic. Similar to Waxman's assertion that immigration to Israel is often motivated by "pull" reasons, the majority of the current participants highlighted the appeal of moving to Israel for religious and spiritual reasons.⁴⁰ However, some participants noted "push" reasons such as dissatisfaction with the educational, economic, and lifestyle conditions in the US. Furthermore, the importance of timing the move to avoid disrupting finishing middle school and the significance of including teens in the move decision process are both additional themes found in the interviews. The way long-term teen adjustment is impacted by the reason for the move, the timing of the move, and the decision-making process are important issues to be answered by future work.

Beyond the importance of family support in the lead-up and post-immigration adjustment, an interesting theme emanating from the current

data is the way grandparents react to the move and the exposure grandchildren have to the grandparent discontent. American grandparents with grandchildren living in Israel find the geographic and emotional alienation difficult.⁴¹ Grandparents have also been found to be comforted by the transnationalism of their grandchildren. However, in an additional contribution to our understanding of the impact of transnationalism on families, the present findings highlight the tension that may be created by US grandparental influence in the lives of adolescents.

An additional unique dynamic noted by the participants is the importance of choosing the correct community and school for both short- and long-term adjustment and integration. Future quantitative and longitudinal work in the area should assess how the advantages of short-term social integration found in teens enrolled in majority Anglo schools impacts their long-term social, educational, and economic integration.

In a variation of the "cultural gap" found in other studies between immigrant adolescents and their less acculturated parents,⁴² the current study highlighted a distinct way in which cultural differences between US and Israeli Jewish schools in acceptance of religious diversity impacts religious conflict between parents and children. More distinct acculturation of adolescent immigrants in Israel, including the prescription to a more narrow religious ideology, was reported as a source of contention between teens and their parents.

An additional important focus for future research is the interconnection between past underlying mental health issues, immigration stressors, and immigration adjustment. In the current sample several teens experiencing considerable immigration difficulties were diagnosed in the past and were experiencing a reactivation of symptomology as a result of the changes.

Finally, the difficulty reported by several parents with the materialism of their teen and its associated desire to move back to the US highlights a negative consequence of the Americanization of Israel described by Rebhun and Waxman.⁴³ This tension is driven in part by the growing trend towards transnationalism noted in several recent studies on immigration.⁴⁴ Immigrant families often maintain connections with their country of origin, via cultural, economic, and familial ties. Research on transnationalism, and its impact on families, is in its infancy.⁴⁵ The present report adds to this emergent area of inquiry by highlighting family dynamic and adjustment dimensions to this phenomenon that may create tension between parents and adolescents. Future work should examine this phenomenon more broadly and assess how moving to Anglo as opposed to more Israeli areas impacts this occurrence.

CONCLUSIONS AND APPLIED RECOMMENDATIONS

Although preliminary in nature, the current findings can inform applied work with adolescents in the lead-up to immigration and post-immigration. Many variables need to be considered when approaching the issue of successful immigration for adolescents. These issues include individual, family, and community pre- and post-immigration dynamics in addition to the interaction between these multifaceted variables. However, the current study can begin shifting the Israel immigration discourse away from risk models and the insistence that immigration should not be attempted with teens, towards a more positive and systematic model that emphasizes the process of successful teen immigration.

During the lead-up to immigration parents should consider emphasizing the "pull" of Israel with their teens including the religious, spiritual, Biblical, and Zionist connections to the land. This can be done via family discussions, family activities, and visiting Israel. One family noted the effectiveness of traveling around Israel on a vacation using the chronology of Jewish history as the guide for the travel itinerary as a means of connecting their children to the land. Involving the teens in the discussions about the decision to move, including having them join a pilot trip, may also be an effective way of minimizing initial objection to the move. Furthermore, although the true impact of the timing of the move on long-term adjustment necessitates further quantitative work, several participants in the study noted that a particularly difficult time to move for teens is between 7th and 8th grades.

Multiple aspects of family support can also be employed to enhance the immigration experience. First, it is important to explain to grandparents their crucial role in their grandchildren's adjustment to the move. When grandchildren sense that their family back in the US is supportive of the move their adjustment appears to be more positive. Relatedly, grandparents who are displeased with their children's decision to move to Israel must be implored to keep those objections away from their grandchildren. Having family in Israel is an additional variable that can ease immigration turmoil. For those without known immediate family in Israel, efforts can be made to locate more distant family and actively develop relationships with them before and after the move. Furthermore, immigrating together with friends may also be beneficial for adjustment.

Upon arrival, introducing teens to peers before the beginning of the school year, via the neighborhood or youth group functions, can help in making the transition into the new school year easier. Although further

quantitative work would assist in drawing conclusions about this question, our study seems to suggest that moving to a largely Anglo community and enrolling in a school with a large Anglo student body eases the social transition for teens. The manner in which living in a community with many Anglos impacts long-term integration into society remains to be tested. Furthermore, the importance of language proficiency cannot be overstated. Considering that the large majority of teens claimed that *ulpan* did not enhance their language abilities, those considering moving to Israel should emphasize learning Hebrew ideally even before the move via tutoring or using Hebrew at home. Ultimately, a command of Hebrew is advantageous for successful academic transition. Additionally, the development of close friendships early in the adjustment process enhances social integration. The choice of community and school should also be viewed in the context of the unique cultural differences between the US and Israel in religious group categorization. A parental desire to subscribe to a more Zionist or Ultra-Orthodox system than the family was accustomed to in the US may trigger conflict with teens.

Parents, and particularly professionals, should monitor closely the way the move may be impacting teens with pre-existing learning or mental health problems. It is also important to distinguish between normal developmental issues that teens may be experiencing, necessitating little intervention, and more clinical problems that require more extensive treatment. As the overwhelming majority of the parent and teen participants reported, although things were hard in the beginning they got better with time.

Finally, once settled in Israel, overemphasizing the greatness of the materialism of America may have unintended consequences for the teens leading them to question living in Israel. Even subtle things like insisting on having US appliances or US products at home may inadvertently send mixed message to teens. Monitoring the messages at home, and those received from family back in the US, about America can help insure that the "pull" reasons that brought the family to Israel in the first place continue to inspire daily life.

This study points to several immigration protective factors that can inform future research in the area and educate families and professionals about the conditions necessary to enhance the likelihood of successful immigration to Israel for teenagers.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

ADOLESCENT QUESTIONS:

“When, and from where, did you move to Israel? Describe how the moving process went. What was the lead-up to the move like? When were you told about it? How were you told? What was your reaction when you were told? Were you excited about the move? Why or why not? What were some difficult parts of moving to Israel? How did you deal with these difficult parts? What were some pleasant parts of moving to Israel? Do you think your experience of moving to Israel was the same or different than the experience that other teens had when they moved to Israel? In what way? How are things for you now? Have things gotten better or worse since your move? What changed? Is there anything else you can tell me about your experience moving to Israel?”

PARENT QUESTIONS:

“When, and from where, did you move to Israel? Describe how the moving process went for you and your children. What was the lead-up to the move like? When did you tell your children? How did you tell them? What was the reaction of your children when you told them? Were they excited about the move? Why or why not? What were some difficult parts of moving to Israel for you and your children? How did you and your children deal with these difficult parts? What were some pleasant parts of moving to Israel for you and your children? Do you think your experience of moving to Israel was the same or different than the experience that other families had when they moved to Israel? In what way? How are things for you now? Have things gotten better or worse since your move? What changed? Is there anything else you can tell me about your experience moving to Israel?”

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