

Defining Distancing

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*Matthew Ackerman's post "**The Silent Young Jewish Majority**" on Commentary's Contentions Blog argues against an "accepted point of Jewish communal debates in recent years that young American Jews are 'distancing' from Israel." The post prompted this response from BJPA Director Prof. Steven M. Cohen.*

As one of the leading progenitors of the "**Distancing Hypothesis**" (along with Prof. Ari Kelman, now of Stanford), I must say that we have been consistently misinterpreted in two respects. One misinterpretation entails the definition of "distancing," and the other entails its cause. We said very clearly that distancing is about growing apathy about or disengagement with Israel. It means not thinking about, talking about, or caring about Israel. It does NOT mean opposition to Israeli government policies or criticism of Israel's policies, both of which are signs of closeness and attachment, and not distancing and detachment.

Second, we stated that the prime mover in promoting distancing was intermarriage -- the Jewish children of the intermarried and the Jewish spouses of non-Jews are VERY distant from Israel. Hence, surveys of skewed samples of engaged Jews with high rates of inmarriage or in-married parents cannot serve as a test of the distancing hypothesis. Distancing occurs among Jews who are hardly visible in Jewish life. Not the ones who conduct surveys, write articles, and post comments.