

Regional Differences Among American Jews

Bruce A. Phillips

Migration to the Western United States is among the most significant changes taking place among American Jews. The last half century has seen a dispersion of Jewish population throughout the United States away from its traditional concentration in the Northeast and the East North Central states. In the half century between 1937 and 1987, the proportion of Jews living in the Northeast dropped from over two-thirds (70%) to just over half (53%) (Kosmin, Ritterband and Scheckner, 1987). The East North Central region also lost Jewish population, falling from 13% to 9% of the Jewish population.

The Western United States has been a beneficiary of this migration. During the last fifty years, the Jewish population of the Pacific and Mountain States (Washington, Oregon, California, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, Nevada) grew from 5 to 17% of the Jewish population. It is possibly even higher because several western Jewish communities such as Orange County and San Diego, California, which have experienced considerable growth in the last decade, have not conducted Jewish population studies and could well be underestimating the size of their Jewish populations. Further, Los Angeles has not conducted a study since 1979 and it is very likely that the Jewish population estimate for the second largest Jewish community in the world is also too small. It is thus conceivable that between one-fifth and one quarter of American Jews will reside in the West by the end of the century.

The geographic dispersion of American Jewry has resulted in a greater number of significant Jewish population centers. Kosmin, Ritterband and Scheckner have calculated that in 1937, 90% of the American Jewish population was found in 17 metropolitan areas. By 1986, 30 metropolitan areas were needed to make up 90% of the American Jewish population (Kosmin, Ritterband and Scheckner, 1987). The western migration has produced new communities with significant Jewish populations. Houston, Dallas, San Diego and Orange county have populations that are as large or larger than such "Big Sixteen" Jewish communities as Cleveland, Detroit, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and Minneapolis.

Jewish regional concentration has been a persistent feature of American Jewry. What does this migration mean for American Jews? There are several structural reasons to assume that Jewish communities in the West will be less cohesive and will be Jewishly weaker than those in areas of historical Jewish settlement: Selective migration of more marginal Jews, a general environment which is religiously weak, and Jewish environment which is communally weak.

The leading students of American Jewish demography have consistently maintained that Jews with the weakest attachments to family and community are the most likely to migrate (Cohen, 1983; Goldstein, 1981, 1982).

Research about American religion in general has shown that the West is an "Unchurched Belt" (Stark and Bainbridge, 1985). Other research on American religion has indicated that migrants tend to adapt to the religious norms of their new region of residence (Stump, 1984). This would suggest that Jewish migration to the American West should result in a diminution of Jewish religious and communal attachments.

The Jewish environment in the West is structurally weaker than in the East and Midwest for three different and equally important reasons. First, the ports of disembarkation for Jewish immigrants were not in the West. There are no immigrant neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side in New York or Maxwell Street in Chicago or the North End of Boston to exert a continuing cultural influence over Jewish life, even if Jews no longer reside in those neighborhoods. Second, frontier Jews were accepted into the civic life of the western towns during the latter half of the 19th century. Unlike the East and Midwest where Jews were concentrated in immigrant neighborhoods, Jews played a prominent role in the emerging cities of the West as well as in the territorial and, later, state governments of the West (Rochlin, 1984; Libo and Howe, 1984). The early Jews thus put more of their efforts into building the general community than into creating an elaborate and complex Jewish communal infrastructure. Third, western Jewish communities have a significant proportion of recent migrants: half of the Jewish households in Phoenix and Denver and a quarter of the Jewish households in Los Angeles had arrived within the ten years previous to the study (Phillips, 1981; Phillips and Aron, 1983).

Jews in western communities must establish their Jewish ties anew, and rarely are there other Jews who know them from their previous communities who will solicit their involvement. When a Jew in Chicago, for example, moves to the suburbs or exurbs, it is likely that other Jews will also have made the same move. There will thus be Jews who know each other and may even have influenced each others' move. Because they know each other, they are in a position to solicit each others' involvement in Jewish communal life. When Jews move to western communities, on the other hand, the likelihood of a continuing reference group is greatly diminished.

Methodology

Three Jewish communities in the West (Los Angeles, Denver, and Phoenix) are compared with two in the Midwest (Milwaukee and Chicago). These five were chosen because they all used an identical Random Digit Dialing sampling strategy

TABLE 1. COMMUNITIES USED IN THE STUDY

West			Midwest		
Community	Date	Jewish Population	Community	Date	Jewish Population
Los Angeles	1979	500,000	Chicago	1981	268,000
Denver	1981	45,000	Milwaukee	1983	20,000
Phoenix	1983	45,000			

(Phillips, 1984) covering the widest possible geographical area, including areas of low Jewish density where less normative Jews are more likely to reside. They were also conducted about the same time, between 1979 and 1983 (see Table 1).

In this paper I compare the West and Midwest along three dimensions of Jewish "normativeness": family structure and household composition, intermarriage, and formal affiliation with the Jewish community.

Family Structure and Household Composition

The normative Jewish family pattern is to be married and have or have had children (Cohen, 1982, 1983, 1989; Rosenthal, 1970). This is reflected in the age profile, pattern of household structure, and marital status patterns of each community (found in Tables 2, 3, and 4 respectively). In order to present the data in the most economical form, only the categories most relevant to "normativeness" are used in the analysis, and they thus do not add up to 100%. For example, the "household composition" variable used in the analysis had several categories, but only two (i.e. the most normative or most non-normative) are presented in Table 3. These are the conventional or most normative household, the married couple with

TABLE 2. PERCENT OF JEWS IN EACH AGE CATEGORY

Under 15		20-34		60 +	
Phoenix	23	Denver	34	Milwaukee	22
Milwaukee	20	Chicago	26	Chicago	17
Los Angeles	18	Los Angeles	24	Los Angeles	17
Denver	18	Phoenix	21	Denver	17
Chicago	17	Milwaukee	20	Phoenix	16

children; and the least conventional, the household headed by a single (never-married) person under 40.

No regional differences for household composition were found. With the exception of Denver, the large communities (Los Angeles and Chicago) have a higher percentage of households headed by a never-married person and the smaller communities have a higher percentage of "families" (i.e. married couples with children under the age of 18).

TABLE 3. SELECTED HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE (PERCENTAGES)

Never-married household head under 40		Married couple with child(ren) under 18	
Denver	26	Milwaukee	30
Los Angeles	19	Phoenix	29
Chicago	18	Chicago	27
Phoenix	16	Los Angeles	24
Milwaukee	11	Denver	24

Three age categories are used which overlap with the two household types: children under the age of 15 are found in families with children, and "young adults" aged 20-34 largely tend to be never-married.

Consistent with household composition, no pattern of regional difference was found for age. With the exception of Denver, the smaller communities have a higher percentage of children under 15, and the larger communities have a higher percentage of young adults.

The non-normative marital status categories are presented in Table 4 which shows the percentage of Jews who have never been married, and the percent who are divorced. Table 4 does not add up to 100% because not every marital status is relevant to the discussion of regional differences. For example, the percentage of widows and widowers is not relevant to the proposition that the West is less normative than other regions.

TABLE 4. MARITAL STATUS BY AGE (PERCENTAGES)

Percent of Jews never married			Percent of Jews separated/divorced			
Community	Under 30	30-39	Community	Under 30	30-39	40-49
Milwaukee	71	13	Los Angeles	7	13	14
Chicago	71	16	Phoenix	5	12	13
Los Angeles	59	16	Denver	3	11	21
Denver	58	16	Chicago	2	10	9
Phoenix	56	10	Milwaukee	1	10	8

There is a pattern of regional difference evident only for the never-married category under the age of 30, but it is the opposite of the predicted direction: the percent never married is higher in the two midwestern communities than in the three western ones.

Divorce, however, does fit the predicted pattern: the percent divorced among all three age cohorts is higher in the West than in the Midwest.

To sum up only one regional difference was found: divorce is higher in the western communities. Los Angeles, Denver, and Phoenix were not found to be less "normative" than Milwaukee and Chicago.

On the other hand, a consistent pattern was found based on community size. Smaller communities have a more normative family structure than larger communities. With the exception of Denver, the larger communities have more single households, fewer families with children, the smaller communities have fewer single households, more families, and more children living in households.

With the exception of Denver, the smaller communities were found to have a more "normative" family pattern in terms of age, household composition and the marital status of Jewish individuals. Denver, however, has a family pattern more typical of the larger Jewish communities. This divergence from the size pattern observed above is best explained by differential migration (Phillips, 1989). Less normative Jews have migrated to Denver which is an unusually cosmopolitan area and has attracted a different group of migrants than has Phoenix, for example.

Intermarriage

Intermarriage is defined by both the religion of origin and the current religion of the spouse. Exogamy means that the spouse was not born Jewish. Mixed marriage means that the spouse was not born Jewish and is not Jewish now. Mixed marriages are a subset of exogamous marriages.

The two factors which affect and probably can be used to measure intermarriage are: propinquity, or the availability of other Jews as marriage partners; and endogamy norms, or the preference for marrying other Jews. Exogamous marriage is affected primarily by propinquity. While the choice of a partner from outside the Jewish group reflects both the desire to have a Jewish partner and the availability of potential Jewish partners in the population, the availability of other Jews will operate regardless of personal preference. Mixed marriage is mostly representative of the norm of endogamy, since the non-Jew by birth can later become a Jew through conversion.

Table 5 presents the exogamy and mixed marriage rates of individual Jews who are currently married. Only two age categories are used because these rates are so low after age 39 as not to be of interest.

TABLE 5. EXOGAMY AND MIXED MARRIAGE, BY COMMUNITY AND AGE (PERCENTAGES)

Community	Exogamy rates		Mixed-marriage rates	
	18-29	30-39	18-29	30-39
Denver	56	36	52	27
Phoenix	53	27	39	18
Milwaukee	45	26	28	20
Los Angeles	37	14	34	12
Chicago	32	27	29	27

There are no regional differences in the rate of exogamy. Exogamy is higher, however, in the smaller communities among Jews under the age of 30. This is the effect of propinquity, or the smaller number of Jews available as potential partners in communities with fewer Jews and lower Jewish density.

Region is predictive of mixed marriage among younger Jews. There are no regional differences in the rate of mixed marriage among Jews age 30 and older. But under the age of 30 mixed marriage is highest in the West and particularly high in Denver.

The exceptionally high rate of mixed marriage in Denver is consistent with the divergent family patterns already noted. Both exogamy and mixed marriage are highest under the age of 30, indicating that the increase in both rates is a recent phenomenon. It is among Jews under the age of 30 that communal differences based on either size or region are found. Under the age of 30 exogamy is higher in the smaller communities, and mixed marriage is higher in the Western communities.

The relationship between community size and region as they affect exogamy and mixed marriage is typified by Los Angeles and Milwaukee. In Milwaukee 45% of

married Jewish individuals under the age of 30 are married exogamously (i.e. to a spouse of non-Jewish origin), as compared to only 37% in Los Angeles. In Milwaukee 37% of those spouses of non-Jewish origin had converted to Judaism, as compared with only 8% in Los Angeles (computed from Table 5).

The rate of exogamy in Los Angeles is lower than in Milwaukee, but in Los Angeles very few non-Jews convert, so that the mixed marriage rate ends up higher in Los Angeles.

Affiliation

The three most used measures of affiliation are synagogue membership, membership in a secular Jewish organization, and giving to the local Jewish federation. Each involvement is of a different nature.

Synagogue membership is initiated by the individual, usually when the first child is of age for receiving Jewish education (between five and ten). Synagogue membership is expensive: running anywhere from \$500 to over \$2,000 per year depending on dues, religious school fees, and additional assessments such as a building fund.

Federation affiliation is the opposite of synagogue membership. Unlike the synagogue, a Jew does not typically come forth to give to the Federation. Instead, it is the Federation that finds individual Jews and solicits payments from them. The minimum cost of entry to the Federation rolls is also much lower than synagogue membership.

Jewish organization membership is problematic in two ways. First, many volunteer organizations such as Hadassah, Anti-Defamation League, National Council of Jewish Women, the American Jewish Congress, and The American Jewish Committee are national organizations. Membership may consist only of sending a check to the national office. The questionnaires do not go beyond asking about the names of Jewish organizations, and include no information as to whether the respondent or other household member is active in a local chapter of the organization. Finally, even a nominal national membership may not be current.

Table 6 presents the percentage of Jewish households in each community which hold membership in any of the three types. There is only one regional pattern: synagogue affiliation is more common in the Midwest. Federation giving, on the other hand, is higher in the smaller communities. No regional or community size pattern was found for Jewish organizational membership.

TABLE 6. RATES OF AFFILIATION (PERCENTAGES)

Community	Synagogue membership	Jewish organization membership	Federation giving
Milwaukee	60	53	56
Chicago	44	37	15
Denver	39	38	25
Phoenix	33	35	39
Los Angeles	26	27	14

Since other factors such as family composition and household structure are known to be associated with affiliation in general and synagogue membership in particular, these factors must also be taken into consideration.

Mixed-married households are known to have much lower rates of involvement in Jewish life than in-married, and this is true for each community. There is no regional pattern discernible, however, for any of the affiliations within either of the intermarriage categories. There are inter-communal differences, but they are explained by neither size nor region (Table 7).

TABLE 7. AFFILIATION CONTROLLING FOR INTERMARRIAGE, BY COMMUNITY (PERCENTAGES)

Community	Synagogue membership	Jewish organization membership	Federation giving
In-married			
Denver	70	65	46
Milwaukee	64	59	65
Chicago	58	50	22
Phoenix	48	49	55
Los Angeles	39	37	25
Mixed-married			
Denver	10	14	13
Milwaukee	25	15	10
Chicago	11	6	1
Phoenix	11	13	19
Los Angeles	8	11	1

S.M. Cohen (1982) has convincingly shown that affiliation is related to stage in the life cycle. Three types of households are conspicuous with regard to affiliation (either positively or negatively). Never-married household heads under 40 are the least likely to be affiliated. In-married couples under 40 without children in the household are more likely to be affiliated. In-married couples with children in the household are the most likely to be affiliated. Affiliation has also been shown to be strongly related to mixed marriage (Phillips, 1986, pp. 151-156). To eliminate the effect of differences in household structure and mixed marriage rates among the five communities, communal affiliation rates are compared controlling for household structure and mixed marriage.

Here again, neither region nor community size was related to Jewish organizational membership, given its ambiguous nature.

Neither do region or community size account for the differential synagogue membership rates among the five individual communities with one exception: synagogue membership is higher in the Midwest among the young single households.

Only community size is related to Federation giving. This is because it is the Federation which makes the initial approach. The rates of Federation giving are much lower in Chicago and Los Angeles than in the smaller communities because it is more difficult to find and approach such large numbers of Jews (Table 8).

TABLE 8. AFFILIATION CONTROLLING FOR HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE AND INTERMARRIAGE (PERCENTAGES)

Community	Non-married under 40	In-married couple under 40 no children	In-married couple with child(ren) in household
Synagogue membership			
Milwaukee	29	44	81
Denver	18	32	76
Chicago	30	33	60
Phoenix	13	18	59
Los Angeles	15	11	52
Jewish organization membership			
Milwaukee	27	56	63
Denver	22	56	54
Chicago	16	33	47
Phoenix	12	29	37
Los Angeles	7	3	39
Federation giving			
Milwaukee	18	44	66
Denver	6	26	33
Chicago	3	14	17
Phoenix	11	23	58
Los Angeles	1	2	26

Conclusion

Contrary to expectation, western Jewish communities are not consistently less normative. The similarities between the West and Midwest are more salient than the differences. The few regional differences that were found, however, have important long range implications for Jewish communities in the West.

The rates of mixed marriage are higher in the West for Jews under the age of 30; they are particularly high in one Western community (Denver). Since this trend is concentrated among the youngest cohort of adults (20-29) the full impact in Western communities may not be felt until this cohort begins to have children. While increasing mixed marriage will affect all of American Jewry, it will have a particularly critical impact in the West.

The rate of divorce is higher in the West, which will create a somewhat larger population of older singles (and possibly single parent families and/or blended families).

Synagogue affiliation among young singles is twice as high in the Midwest as in the West. This may affect affiliation later on if the present inclination not to affiliate continues throughout later stages of the life cycle.

The relative deviance of Western Jewish communities discussed in the literature has yet to emerge, which suggests that migration in and of itself does not significantly contribute to a loss of Jewish cohesion. On the other hand, some potentially important differences are evident which could create important regional disparities in the next century, at least in those cosmopolitan communities such as Denver which seem to attract migrants from more traditional communities such as Phoenix.

How many Jewish communities are emerging in the West such as Denver versus how many like Phoenix will be known only with time and additional research.

References

- Cohen, S.M. (1982). "The American Jewish Family Today", *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 82. pp. 136-184.
- Cohen, S.M. (1983). *American Modernity and Jewish Identity*. Tavistock Publishers, New York.
- Cohen, S.M. (1989). *Alternative Families in the Jewish Community: Singles, Single Parents, Childless Couples and Mixed-Marrieds*. The William Petschek National Jewish Family Center of the American Jewish Committee, New York.
- Goldstein, S. (1981). "The Jews in the United States, Perspectives from Demography", *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 81. pp. 3-59.
- Goldstein, S. (1982). "Population Movement and Redistribution Among American Jews", *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 24. pp. 5-23.
- Kosmin, B., Ritterband, P. and Scheckner, J. (1987). "Jewish Population in the United States, 1986". *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 87. pp. 164-191.
- Libo, K., and Howe, I. (1984). *We Lived There Too: In Their Own Words and Pictures—Pioneer Jews and the Westward Movement of America*. St. Martins, New York.
- Phillips, B.A. (1981). *The Denver Jewish Population Study*. Allied Jewish Federation, Denver.
- Phillips, B.A. (1984). "Sampling Strategies in Jewish Community Studies", in: Cohen, S.M., Woocher, J.J. and Phillips, B.A. (eds.). *Perspectives in Jewish Population Research*. Westview, Boulder, Col. pp 67-79.
- Phillips, B.A. (1986). "Los Angeles Jewry: A Demographic Portrait", *American Jewish Year Book*. Vol. 86. pp. 126-195.
- Phillips, B.A. (1989). "Factors Associated with Intermarriage in the Western United States", in: Schmelz, U.O. and DellaPergola, S. (eds.). *Papers In Jewish Demography 1985*. Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Jewish Population Studies, no. 22. pp. 111-132.
- Phillips, B.A. and Aron, W.S. (1983). *The Greater Phoenix Jewish Population Study*. The Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix.
- Rochlin, H. and Rochlin, F. (1984). *Pioneer Jews, A New Life in the Far West*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.
- Rosenthal, G. (1970). "Introduction", in: Rosenthal, G.A. (ed.). *The Jewish Family in a Changing World*. Thomas Yoseloff, Cranbury, New Jersey.
- Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W.S. (1985). *The Future of Religion*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Stump, R.W. (1984). "Regional Migration and Religious Commitment in the United States". *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 23, no. 3. pp. 292-310.