# THE IMPACT OF JEWISH IDENTIFICATION ON
## THE FERTILITY OF AMERICAN JEWS

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### Introduction

At a time when the level of fertility in the United States as a whole is particularly low, American Jewish fertility, which has been at low levels for most of this century, takes on added interest. Both structural and nonstructural explanations for low Jewish fertility have been offered, each explanation differing in its implication for other parts of the United States population. The structural explanation, the *characteristics* hypothesis, attributes low Jewish fertility to the Jews' particular concentration in the higher levels of education, income, and occupation, and their predominantly urban residence. That is, the social characteristics of the Jews are those typically associated with low fertility (Freedman, Whelpton, and Campbell, 1959; Petersen, 1975).

The non-structural explanation of low Jewish fertility, the *minority-group status* hypothesis, is socio-psychological. The feelings of insecurity and perception of discrimination concomitant with the minority position of the Jews in society are hypothesized to be partially responsible for the Jews' lower than average fertility levels. That is, in addition to the Jews's unique combination of structural characteristics that are associated with low fertility, the socio-psychological tensions associated with their marginal position in the larger society tend to depress group fertility levels further. This explanation for the low group fertility of the Jews has implications for the low group fertility of other ethnic and religious subgroups of the American population, with particular relevance to group prominence, continuity, and maintenance (Goldscheider and Uhlenberg, 1969).

Turning to within-group differences in Jewish fertility, it is clear that some variation exists and that structural factors alone can not account for the observed differences. Consequently, non-structural factors are increasingly sought by researchers to explain the variation of fertility among the U.S. Jewish subpopulation. The non-structural factor this study is concerned with is the impact of Jewish identification on within-group fertility variation. *Jewish identification* is an ambiguous term in common usage, and refers to both religious adherence and to identification with the Jewish people (Glazer, 1972). Accordingly, two aspects of Jewish identification will be considered - a religious factor and an ethnic factor.

One approach to studying the impact of Jewish identification on fertility has been to identify subgroups differing in religious commitment in order to explain differential fertility. On the basis of ide-

ology, it is logical to think that the most traditional religious sub-group would demonstrate the highest fertility, and the most secular group, the least. But previous research, using divisional preference to measure religious commitment, has found that the most traditional Jewish division, the Orthodox, has not consistently demonstrated higher fertility than the most secular division, the Reform (Goldscheider, 1965a; Lazerwitz, 1973a). It is, in fact, not clear whether an individual's divisional preference is actually reflective of traditional religious commitment, religious ideology or practice, or whether, in fact, divisional preference is more reflective of generation and social class. One objective of this study is to build on this research by testing the independent impact of religious divisional preference on fertility.

An alternate approach to studying the impact of Jewish identification on fertility deals with a more *ethnic* aspect of Jewish identification, and can be inferred indirectly from the minority status hypothesis. According to Goldscheider and Uhlenberg (1969: p. 372), "the quality of minority group cohesion and integration becomes a key axis of fertility within the minority group." That is, rather than focus on subgroups that differ in term of religious commitment, a measure of overall group integration and commitment can be sought. Thus, the aspect of Jewish identification more appropriate to the study of fertility might be a meausre of whether an individual is comfortable and secure in group membership as opposed to being less integrated and marginal to the group.

Minority group status comes into play here in that only the marginal members are affected by the group's minority status in relation to the larger society; the members who are strongly integrated into the group are, in a sense, insulated from the socio-psychological effects of minority status.[1] More specifically, within a low fertility group such as the Jews, the marginal members will be expected to have lower fertility than the more strongly integrated members.

Accordingly, the two major hypotheses to be tested in this analysis are that ethnic Jewish identification will have a positive independent impact on fertility, and that religious Jewish identification (as measured by divisional preference) will not have a systematic directional impact on fertility.

In addition, there is evidence within the United States population in general, that the psychological gap between having zero or one child is much stronger than the difference between having one, two, or three children (Pohlman, 1970). In other words, childlessness, whether voluntary or involuntary, should not be placed at the bottom of a broad continuum of parity, but should be treated as a special category. In the subsequent analysis of the effects of Jewish identification on fertility, special attention will be given to the role of childlessness in overall group fertility variation and to the special role childlessness plays in the interrelationship between Jewish identification and fertility.

The same logic that argues that the most traditional religious members should have the highest fertility also suggests that the most traditional members should be the least likely to be childless. Although structural factors may be stronger than normative non-structural factors in determining the number of children born to a family, it is hypothesized that the normative injunction against childlessness will be strongest for the most religiously traditional. Thus, childlessness is hypothesized to be inversely related to divisional preference. Similarly, the members most integrated into the group are hypothesized to be least likely to be childless. Marginal group members, on the other hand, are most likely to have no children. Consequently, it is hypothesized that ethnic Jewish identification will also be inversely related to childlessness.

Examining cohorts of women with completed fertility, the impact of ethnic and religious Jewish group identification on fertility will be assessed, controlling for childbearing cohort (Great Depression and pre-World War II versus post-war *baby boom*), generation, and socio-economic status. In order to give special attention to the role of childlessness in the relationship between Jewish identification and fertility, fertility will be measured in three ways: the average number of children even born to all women, the average number of children born to mothers only, and the percent childless.

## Data and Methods

There have been few opportunities to analyze within-group Jewish fertility differentials. National fertility surveys have only included small numbers of Jews, preventing indepth within-group exploration, and while local Jewish community studies have provided larger samples, it is questionable whether they are representative of the national Jewish community (Whelpton, Campbell and Pattersen, 1966; Westoff, Potter and Sagi, 1963; Westoff and Ryder, 1977; Goldstein, 1976; Goldscheider, 1968; Goldstein, 1971).

A recent opportunity has arisen to explore Jewish fertility differentials on a national basis. The National Jewish Population Study (NJPS), 1970-1971, offers a large representative sample of the national Jewish population. A complex multistage probability sample was used to overcome the basic difficulty of sampling a group that constitutes only a small proportion of the total United States population. In the New York metropolitan area, standard area probability sampling methods were used, while in the rest of the country, area probability sampling was coupled with list sampling. The survey yielded a net national sample of 5,790 housing units containing one or more Jews. Adjusting for disproportionate sample design features, the sample was weighted to 15,145 housing units, estimated to be a weighted survey sampling fraction of one housing unit in 131. After applying the weighting system, the final data base of NJPS contains 13,096 housing

respondents.[2]

For this analysis, a subfile of NJPS[3] containing fertility records for ever-married women was used. The population is further restricted to women, aged 40-64 in 1970-1971, in order to base the assessment on completed fertility. In all, 2181 weighted cases were available with these criteria.[4]

Fertility, the dependent variable, was measured in the survey by the number of children ever born to each woman. This number was derived from the personal responses of each woman and also a computer count of children ever born based on other family-related questions. Table 1 presents averages of the three dimensions of fertility studied in this paper.

Table 1. Three Dimensions of Fertility, by Jewish Identification Index and Divisional Preference

|  | Average number of children ever born, total women | Average number of children ever born, mothers only | Proportion childless | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jewish identification index |  |  |  |  |
| Low | 1.77 | 2.11 | .16 | 526 |
| Medium | 2.07 | 2.29 | .09 | 704 |
| High | 2.31 | 2.48 | .07 | 945 |
| Divisional preference |  |  |  |  |
| Orthodox | 1.91 | 2.17 | .12 | 244 |
| Conservative | 2.22 | 2.41 | .08 | 999 |
| Reform | 2.14 | 2.36 | .10 | 607 |
| Nonaffiliated | 1.81 | 2.18 | .17 | 325 |

The major independent variable, Jewish identification, will be measured in two ways, on ethnic and religious bases. Ethnic identification will be measured by each individual's degree of group integration. This will be based on an index of the voluntary secondary group structures in which an individual participates. According to Goldscheider (1973), "membership in Jewish (structures) provides an important mechanism by which individuals identify themselves with the Jewish community and interact with other Jews." Moreover, while outside forces might determine, at least in part, an individual's links to Jewish places of work or Jewish residential areas, participation in the voluntary activities of the Jewish community remains within the realm of personal choice. The four equally-weighted voluntary activities included in the index are: belonging to a synagogue, attending a synagogue, belonging to

Jewish clubs and organizations, giving money to Jewish charities.[5]

Religious Jewish identification will be measured by divisional pre-ference. Each woman was asked to self-identify herself as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or Other (including the Non-Affiliated).

Respondents are classified into two birth cohorts; the 1905-1920 cohort, who gave birth to children during the depression and pre-war period, (henceforth called the *depression cohort*), and the 1921-1930 cohort, who gave birth to children during the post-war *baby boom* period. The crucial aspect of birth cohort as presented here is the common fertility experience of the groups, and not the fact of age *per se*.[6]

The other socioeconomic and control variables are quite straight-forward. Three classifications of generational status are used: for-eign born (first generation), native born children of the foreign born (second generation), and natives born to natives (third generation). Education is measured by the maximum number of school years completed by each woman, and income by the family income at the time of the survey[7].

The technique of analysis is dummy variable multiple regression. Three measures of fertility will first be regressed on ethnic identifi-cation and the control variables, next, on religious identification and the control variables. In Table 2, the unstandardized regression coef-ficients are presented to facilitate the interpretation of the change each independent variable effects on fertility. (For example, in the upper panel of Table 2, column 1, a difference of seven-tenths of a child is demonstrated for the lowest income category to the highest -- derived by multiplying .070 by 10 categories.)

## Findings

The upper panel in Table 2 shows the results of a regression of the Jewish identification index and the four other independent variables on three measures of fertility. A dummy variable was created for child-bearing cohort to compensate for its nonlinear relationship to fertility. Consequently, the impact on fertility of being in the baby boom cohort is assessed relative to the impact of being in the depression cohort. For example, other factors being equal, being part of the baby boom co-hort means having one-half of a child more than being part of the de-pression cohort (see Table 2, upper panel, column 1).

All in all, as hypothesized, ethnic identification demonstrates a significant impact on fertility after controlling for childbearing co-hort, generation, and socioeconomic status. Those scoring lowest on the Jewish identification index have significantly few children than high scorers, on the average; the lowest identifiers have almost six-tenths of a child fewer than the highest identifiers. Moreover, as hypothesiz-ed, much of the impact of ethnic identification on the average family

Table 2. Regression of 3 Dimensions of Fertility on all Independent Variables Using the Jewish Identification Index and Divisional Preference. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients (b's)

| | Average number of children ever born, total women | Average number of children ever born, mothers only | Percent childless |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Jewish identification index** | | | |
| Baby boom cohort | .514 [a] | .353 [a] | -.087 [a] |
| Generation (3 categories) | .027 | -.005 [c] | -.016 |
| Education (5 categories) | -.057 [a] | -.045 [b] | .009 |
| Income (10 categories) | .070 [a] | .042 [a] | -.016 [a] |
| Jewish identification index (40 categories) | .015 [a] | .012 [a] | -.002 [a] |
| Intercept | 1.29 | 1.76 | .29 |
| $R^2$ | .139 | .091 | .064 |
| F | 68.56 | 38.35 | 28.90 |
| | | | |
| **Divisional preference** | | | |
| Baby boom cohort | .501 [a] | .338 [a] | -.086 [a] |
| Generation (3 categories) | .016 | -.026 | -.019 [b] |
| Education (5 categories) | -.023 | -.021 | .002 |
| Income (10 categories) | .091 [a] | .056 [a] | -.019 [a] |
| Divisional preference [d] | | | |
| Orthodox | .168 [a] | .035 [a] | -.064 [a] |
| Conservative | .189 [a] | .114 [a] | -.039 [a] |
| Non-Affiliated | -.206 | -.103 [c] | .050 [a] |
| Intercept | 1.25 | 1.88 | .265 |
| $R^2$ | .131 | .077 | .070 |
| F | 45.73 | 22.65 | 22.89 |

(a)    $p < .001$
(b)    $.001 < p < .01$
(c)    $.01 < p < .05$
(d) Assessed relative to the fertility of the Reform.

size is due to its strong ability to differentiate between the childless and those bearing children. While middle-level and high identifiers do not differ significantly in their percent childless, low identifiers are more than six percent more likely to be childless than either the middle-level or high-level identifiers (data not presented here). When the childless are excluded from the sample, the impact of ethnic Jewish identification on family size is reduced. But yet, the Jewish identification index is the strongest determinant of the average number of children born to mothers, effecting a difference of more than one-half of a child per woman.

The lower panel in Table 2 shows the regression of religious Jewish identification on the three measures of fertility. In this regression, a dummy variable is created to measure the impact of Orthodox and Conservative divisional preferences on fertility relative to the fertility of the Reform. The fertility of the Non-Affiliated is also assessed relative to that of the Reform. Thus, the differences in fertility between the Orthodox, Conservative and Non-Affiliated can not be assessed directly; rather, all fertility differences between divisional preferences are comparable only with respect to the fertility of the Reform women.

Column one shows that the differences between Orthodox, Conservative and Non-Affiliated fertility relative to Reform fertility are significant when controlling for childbearing cohort, generation and socioeconomic status. Yet the direction and strength of their differences are not in accordance with the traditional religious continuum. The Conservative Jews have the highest average number of children ever born while the Orthodox run a close second, and the Non-Affiliated have the lowest fertility of all. Interestingly, the positive effect of Orthodoxy on fertility is almost entirely due to its strong negative relationship to childlessness; the Orthodox are least likely to be childless. Being Conservative, on the other hand, has only a moderate negative effect on childlessness, but a strong positive effect on the average number of children born to mothers in comparison to the fertility of the Reform. The Non-Affiliated demonstrate a high proportion of childlessness and a low average family size of mothers.

Two observations can be drawn from Table 2. First, if we are assuming that divisional preference is a proxy for strength of religious commitment, there is no consistent relationship between religious commitment and fertility. In a fertility continuum the Conservative and Orthodox are at the top, the Reform in the middle, and the Non-Affiliated at the bottom. However, if the childless are omitted from the sample, the Conservatives clearly demonstrate the highest average number of children compared to the Reform, and the Non-Affiliated the least. But the Orthodox, who are considered the most tradionally religious subgroup, are indistinguishable from the Reform, the least traditionally religious subgroup. In conclusion, divisional preference

does have an independent impact on fertility. Yet, assuming that divisional preference is a measure of religious commitment does not provide a conceptually interpretable measure of fertility differences.

## Discussion

This analysis has shown that ethnic Jewish identification, measured by an individual's involvement with the group, is directly related to the average number of children ever born to all women, and to the average number of children born to mothers. The Jewish identification index is worth six-tenths of a child in the average number of children born to all women, and one-half of a child to those women bearing children.

Religious Jewish identification, as measured by divisional preference, on the other hand, does not have a systemtatic directional impact on the fertility of all women or on the fertility of mothers. Contrary to the prediction based on the traditional religious continuum, from which it would be expected that the Orthodox have the highest fertility, the continuum of standardized fertility levels shown in this analysis is Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, and Non-Affiliated.

Although the total contribution of Jewish identification to fertility variation is not large, the R squared change produced by the Jewish identification index is larger than the contribution of divisional preference. Moreover, when only the fertility of mothers is considered, divisional preference has no statistically significant impact on fertility variation, while the Jewish identification index retains its ability to explain the variation in average number of children born to mothers.

The second point emerging from the multivariate analysis is that the relationship between Jewish identification and average family size is strongly influenced by the relationship between Jewish identification and childlessness. When the childless are omitted from the sample, the impact of the Jewish identification index on average family size is reduced slightly, and the impact of divisional preference reduced greatly.

Previous studies of the impact of Jewish religious identification on fertility have not separated out the childless from the mothers. This, perhaps, explains Goldscheider's (1965a) finding that divisional preference did not have an independent impact on fertility. This study shows, on the contrary, that divisional preference does have a systematic impact on childlessness in accordance with the traditional religious continuum, although it does not have a systematic directional impact on average family size.[8]

Although this study is not mainly concerned with the impact of the other four independent variables (other than Jewish identification) on fertility, several important findings have emerged and are worth summarizing at this point. Both childbearing cohort and income are positively

related to fertility and negatively related to childlessness. Although the total contribution of the five factors to the explanation of fertility variation is not large, income is the most important predictor of total fertility variation. However, when the childless are omitted from the analysis, it is the Jewish identification index, and not income, which best differentiates the fertility of mothers. As documented by DellaPergola (1980), the NJPS data firmly demonstrate that Jewish women were swept up in the general U.S. post-war fertility increase. In addition, a high degree of childlessness was a major factor in the overall low fertility of the depression childbearing cohort.

Other things being equal, generation has virtually no independent impact on fertility. Data not presented here do indicate, however, that generation has a slightly stronger impact on the percent childless than on the average family size of mothers. Education, too, has only a weak (negative) impact on average family size. In contrast to generation, education has little or no effect on remaining childless but a slight impact on the number of children born to mothers.

In conclusion, supporting the initial hypotheses of this paper, the Jewish identification index has a positive consistent relationship to average family size, whether or not the childless are included in the sample. Divisional preference, on the other hand affects average family size predominantly through its negative impact on childlessness. The consistency of the relationship between the Jewish identification index and average family size suggest that, for purposes of the study of fertility, an index of participation in the voluntary structural activities of the Jewish community is a more appropriate operationalization of Jewish identification than divisional preferences.

Results form this study indicate that the ethnic factor had more bearing on Jewish fertility than the religious factor. The major implication of this study, then, for other ethnic and religious subgroups of the population is that ethnicity may be more important than religious identification for determining group behavior at both the between-group and within-group levels of analysis. Specifically, for Jewish communities concerned with low Jewish fertility, this study indicates that keeping individuals involved with community activities might be one way to discourage childlessness and very small family sizes. Moreover, this study indicates that in a population where a substantial amount of childlessness is assumed to be voluntary, it is imperative to consider two sets of fertility determinants -- one that attempts to explain the decision to remain childless or to bear children, and one that explains the variation in average family size among families with children.

## Notes

1. Marcum and Fischer, 1980, make a similar argument.

2. For extensive discussion of methodological aspects of NJPS, including the sample and survey design, see Lazerwitz (1973b, 1974, 1978) and Massarik (1973, 1977).

3. This subfile was created by Sergio DellaPergola at Brown University in 1979.

4. Twenty-nine cases of the original unweighted NJPS sample carried weights over 10, their average weight being 42.3. Although high weights were initially applied to these cases to compensate for possible undercoverage of certain compositional aspects of the national Jewish population, it is the author's opinion that the inflated importance of these cases to the final weighted sample is unjustifiable. The heavily weighted cases were part of a younger, more assimilated, segment of the national Jewish community. But while the fringe population is undercovered, the remaining cases carrying weights of 10 or less can be used with some confidence as representative of the more noticeable and findable elements of the Jewish population. For a more extensive discussion of the NJPS weights, see Cheskis (1980).

5. A composite scale of these four variables is used to create a new variable that represents the common underlying dimension. The index ranges in score from a low of zero to a high of forty. For more comprehensive documentation, see Cheskis, 1980, pp. 64-68.

6. The 1915-1920 birth cohort of women began bearing their children at the tail end of the Great Depression. However, their fertility experience and social characteristics were quite similar to those of women bearing children during the depression, thus warranting their combination into a single fertility cohort.

7. A high non-response rate was recorded for the question pertaining to family income. The non-responders came from the older and less educated part of the total population, but they did not differ significantly from responders on such basic issues as fertility and Jewish identification. Due to the importance of socioeconomic status (and income, particularly) to the analysis of fertility differentials, the non-responders were omitted from the sample.

8. See Cheskis (1980), pp. 52-53, for a discussion of an alternative approach to the study of the relationship between childlessness and Jewish identification which suggests that the state of being childless affects Jewish identification, and not vice versa.

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