

I *The Research Findings*

COUNTING FOR SOMETHING The Why and Wherefore of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey

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In this article, the director of the 1990 NJPS describes the goals, design, interviewing process, and potential of the research project. From the outset, the expertise of academia was utilized, thereby involving many talented Jews who had been uninvolved in Jewish communal affairs. A monograph series covering 24 topics is in preparation, and the NJPS data are now available from the North American Jewish Data Bank.

I am particularly happy to have been asked to contribute the lead article to this special issue on the implications for Jewish communal service of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS). Those of us at the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) who were intimately involved from the conceptualization of the project during 1987, to the fieldwork operation of the NJPS during 1989 and 1990, and into the analysis and dissemination of the findings since the summer of 1990, believe it is vitally important that our colleagues in communal service understand the process, the goals, and the potential of this project.

Even for those of you who carefully worked your way through the *Highlights* publication (Kosmin et al., 1991), it is worthwhile to begin by outlining, in general terms, the research design of the NJPS, how it was constructed, and what the process involved.

This article is not the place for a technical discussion of sampling probability.

However, the issues and dilemmas we researchers initially faced with this project are illustrative of the social realities and dilemmas that we professionals in communal service face every day in our work. They include such basic questions as how wide should we throw the net? Is it worth trying to locate hard-to-reach Jews in remote geographical areas, along with the homeless, the institutionalized, or the communicatively disabled? Are we interested in ex-Jews and Gentiles living with Jews? Are we primarily interested in learning about individual people or about families and households? How do we introduce ourselves and explain our purposes? What methodology is most feasible—face-to-face interviews, mail surveys, or telephone interviews? What months of the year, days of the week, or time of day are most practical or convenient to call? What are our priority questions and topics? And above all, how do we present ourselves and persuade the powers that be to provide adequate re-

sources so that we can do a credible scientific and professional job and so complete the task successfully?

Obviously, the first task was to justify the exercise. Why do we need social research data on American Jews? The answer is clear. We operate one of the largest and most sophisticated range of voluntary social services in the world. The gross national product of the organized Jewish community, comprising both philanthropic contributions and payment for services, amounts to several billion dollars and exceeds the GNP of many countries represented at the United Nations (Kosmin, 1991). This requires that we initiate and develop assessment efforts as the basis for identifying problems, measuring needs, and making decisions about facilities, services, funding, communal relations, as well as social, religious, and educational activities.

Any enterprise today, particularly one developed on voluntary taxation, requires information on its market and clientele in order to operate successfully and to monitor and evaluate its progress. In the absence of official government-supplied data on the Jewish population as an ethnic or religious group from the U.S. Census, the organized Jewish community is forced either to rely on speculation and myths or to engage in its own data collection exercise.

This lacuna in our information base has been widely recognized since the 1960s, and the practical result of this realization was a host of local federation-sponsored demographic studies in over 50 separate communities. By the late 1960s some far-sighted individual leaders were becoming aware that the information age we were entering posed a real challenge to the operating style of many Jewish communal agencies, especially their reluctance to use statistical data and modern techniques in their social planning operations. The importance of a national perspective and the recognition of the numerous interactions between the national level and local communities reinforced the need for demographic, social, and economic data at both

levels and led directly to the CJF-sponsored national study in 1970-71. Yet, it is widely accepted that this first NJPS was not a wholehearted success. It was based upon face-to-face interviews and a very complex sampling methodology that relied on local federations' lists. It ran afoul of poor quality address lists, budget overrun, supervision problems, and eventually dissension among the academics in the research team. The principal investigators also tried to monopolize access to the information, and CJF unwisely tried to recoup some of its outlay by selling the data. The net result was that the impact, output, and dissemination of the 1970 NJPS findings were weak. It was hardly utilized by the community, and very little analysis emerged even in the social science journals.

The team responsible for the 1990 NJPS was determined to learn from history by putting in place a structure and process geared to avoid a repetition of the errors of 1970. We were aided in this task by the advances in computer technology and research techniques in the intervening two decades, which made the whole exercise cheaper even in terms of nominal dollars. Nevertheless, the project was only feasible because CJF had entered into a partnership with a major public research university and so acquired its own technical infrastructure and expertise in this field with the founding of the Mandel L. Berman Institute—North American Jewish Data Bank at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in 1986. From the outset, we of the Data Bank operated on the assumption that we had to put Jewish social science and public policy research back into the mainstream of American academia so that we could begin to draw upon and involve the vast number of talented Jews who were uninvolved and unaware of Jewish affairs and our communal enterprise. The initial goal was to "archive" machine-readable data on Jewish populations and encourage its dissemination and utilization to open up discussion of Jewish-related issues. My colleague at the Data

Bank, Paul Ritterband, suggested at the time that our motto should be the Aramaic phrase from the Pesach seder service—*"Kol dikhfin yaytay v'yakhol"*—Let all who are hungry (in this case for data) come and partake.

To develop the 1990 NJPS research design, CJF established the National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Jewish Population Studies, the membership of which comprised academic experts and federation planners. It thus assembled the collective wisdom and experience of the community in this field of endeavor to produce an acceptable, relevant, and usable questionnaire of 128 questions in the main section and three additional modules of questions directly related to philanthropy, Jewish identity, and social service needs. The Advisory Committee's chairman was Sidney Goldstein of Brown University, a demographer with an international reputation; the vice chairman was Joe Waksberg, a former associate director of the U.S. Bureau of the Census and one of the fathers of telephone interviewing. Another volunteer recruited by CJF was Danny Levine of the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academy of Sciences. Before any phase of the survey began, the full questionnaire went through a pretest to determine understandability, proper arrangement of questions, and the length of time involved.

The advisory committee considered several alternative methodologies and, after lengthy deliberation, decided that telephone interviewing was the only feasible approach for a representative national sample. An understanding of the interviewing process is crucial to understanding our system of analysis. There were three waves of interviews; every household was interviewed twice, and most were interviewed three times over a period from April 1989 to August 1990. The NJPS was not a one-shot study, but in effect a panel was created over a long period that was then interviewed in a restricted time slot during the late spring and summer of 1990. Before

beginning the interviewing, both the ICR Survey Research Group of Media, Pennsylvania, and representatives from CJF instructed the pool of professionally trained interviewers on the unique aspects of this survey, such as the meaning and pronunciation of Jewish holidays and specific Hebrew words. Throughout the implementation of the survey, the interviewing staff was continually monitored for its accuracy, pronunciation, and overall efficiency.

In the first stage of the survey, a screening interview was completed with a random digit-dialed (RDD) sample of 126,000 households. We thus spoke with one in every 800 households across the United States from Maine to Oregon. It should be noted that, although every household in the continental United States was randomly selected, we depended on listed households for Alaska and Hawaii residents, due to prohibitive costs for RDD inclusion there. Each household was screened by asking up to seven questions. A randomly chosen adult respondent reported on his or her own qualifications in terms of four questions:

1. What is your religion?
2. Do you consider yourself Jewish?
3. Were you raised Jewish?
4. Do/did you have a Jewish parent?

The respondent then answered whether anyone else in the household considered him or herself to be Jewish, was raised Jewish, or had a Jewish parent.

We thus immediately identified four types of households. In the first type, consisting of over 120,000 households, no member qualified on any of the seven questions. In the second type only the respondent qualified, in the third type the respondent and somebody else qualified, and in the fourth type, the adult respondent did not qualify (i.e., he or she was a Gentile) but somebody else living in the household did. At the same time as these screening questions were asked, we also collected information on 19 other respon-

dent or household sociodemographic variables. Thus, even at this first stage there was already a large data base for analysis. Sidney Goldstein (Goldstein & Kosmin, in press) and I used this screening data for a paper that we presented at the 1991 Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America. In the paper we compared the profiles of different Jewish subpopulations created by the four points of qualification for over 3,000 qualified respondents. We also reported on the qualified respondents' answers to the religious questions, i.e., how many gave their religion as Jewish; how many answered no religion, agnostic or humanist; and how many gave another religion, such as Catholic, Baptist, Buddhist, or Mormon. This paper was very well received by our professional colleagues and somehow was reported in *The Wall Street Journal* during March 1991. This early media interest in our findings should have warned us of what was to come.

About a month after the Stage 1 screening interview, 2,100 qualified households were recontacted for data verification, and a full household roster was administered. The Jewish qualification of each person, name, age, sex, etc. was ascertained. This Stage 2 interview was carried out to enable us to select and interview a randomly selected Jewish adult in the final stage. A considerable amount of data was collected about the household, including its migration plans. Our main purpose was to be able to follow movers and identify changes within the household over the time gap between interviews. Efforts were also made to persuade the household to join the panel and agree to a full in-depth interview in the summer of 1990.

As you can see, we knew a great deal about the households and their size and structure, who was Jewish, and who was Gentile before the final round of 2,500 Stage 3 interviews, which were focused on Jewish topics. We utilized the latest computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system whereby the ICR Survey Research

group's interview could follow particular question sequences with particular subpopulations, e.g., a divorced person or household with an elderly person, as well as one of the three modules relating to philanthropy, Jewish identity, and service needs. The CATI System thus allowed the interviewer to view on the computer prompter each question in proper order that applied to the particular household. In addition, the interviewers had the household data from a previous stage available to them so they could immediately see if there were discrepancies between the answers at various stages. This feature obviously enhanced our quality control.

In reality, changes did occur over time. Several persons qualified themselves, then disqualified themselves, and then finally requalified. Often, the point of qualification changed. Agnostics became Jews by Religion, and Religious Jews became Scientologists during the course of the NJPS. People died and were born, households split and merged. Dale Kulp, ICR's statistician, and Joe Waksberg worked these factors into their calculations about population size and numbers of households. Concerning the possibility that those who either dropped out of the survey process or refused to participate were in some way different from full participants, ICR conducted several tests. First, ICR staff were highly successful in converting refusals into participants, and in a test this group had no significant sociodemographic differences from the fully cooperative sample. Second, those who participated in Stage 1 but later dropped out or eventually refused to participate also bore no significant difference from the interviewed sample.

Overall, 18% of the Stage 1 households were eventually disqualified. Our own careful case-by-case quality control at the Data Bank after we received the data from ICR led us to disqualify an additional 64 Stage 3 interviews because we had evidence that the household was not the same as the one that was screened earlier or it had changed and lost its qualified person. We

made certain that in every case a "qualified person" was the respondent, except in two cases where a Gentile answered for a Jewish minor in the household. This process of locating qualifying households was reported to our professional peers at the American Association of Public Opinion Research last year (Kosmin et al., 1990).

So what does this three-stage interviewing process imply? First, we had a much greater body of knowledge at our disposal on which to base our inclusionary or exclusionary decisions as to who was a Jew and who was a Gentile than in any previous survey. We created the six Jewish identity constructs used in the *Highlights* (Kosmin et al., 1991b) on the basis of this prior information, as well as the answers in the full Stage 3 interview. These created variables were attached to the data sets covering 2,441 households and over 6,500 individuals—representing 3.2 million households and 8.2 million persons nationally—that we distributed in 1991 to our Monograph writers (see below). These variables consisted of our assessment of the Jewishness of each individual and household, although we recognize that there are other ways of analyzing the data and we do not seek to impose our framework on anybody else.

Many outsiders have remarked to me that they have been impressed by how the Jewish voluntary sector through the federation movement could bring together the intellectual, financial, and infrastructural resources to undertake what is by any standards a major social research undertaking. Moreover, the way that this data were collected, reported, and disseminated has undoubtedly increased their respect for the confidence, maturity, and progressive outlook of the field of Jewish communal service. Such observers are well aware that the NJPS is the creation of an intelligentsia comprised of academics and communal professionals who operate within the parameters of liberal Western academic social-scientific scholarship. In practice, this means that, in keeping with current opinion polling standards, we tried to keep our questions

unbiased or value neutral, and respondents were provided with the opportunity to give candid answers, rather than normative ones. Self-reports of Jewish identity were accepted, and we stressed to both our interviewers and our respondents our desire to seek the truth, rather than what they thought we wished to hear. It was logical that we had a moral imperative to continue on this track when we have reported the findings. The lay and professional leadership of CJF were committed to academic freedom and full reporting of the results. Their approach, combined with the high technical standards and statistical validity of the survey, as well as the international reputations of those serving on the Technical Advisory Committee, convinced the general media of the importance and legitimacy of the project. The reward was more publicity and acceptance in high-status media outlets than any other community project has ever received. The NJPS has produced Cable News Network (CNN) factoids and three major stories in the *Los Angeles Times*, as well as other numerous television, radio, magazine, and newspaper articles.

Early on, we decided that, in keeping with the pluralistic nature of the community, it would be a mistake to create an official or establishment report covering all aspects of the survey findings. Instead, we closely followed the practice of the U.S. Bureau of the Census by providing a short, largely factual report and then sponsoring a multi-author monograph series on specific topics. We publicly invited whosoever desired and was technically qualified to bid on a topic for a Monograph Series to be published, at no cost to the community by the State University of New York Press. The series editors are Sidney Goldstein and myself. So far, 24 individuals or teams of authors have volunteered to write a volume on such topics as Jewish identity, occupational patterns, women, the elderly, Sephardim, mobility, geography, education, Jewish education, children and adolescents, denominations, intermarriage, fertility,

household structure, social stratification, philanthropy, and comparisons with international data, as well as 1970 NJPS data. The authors cover a range of disciplines, as well as political and religious outlooks. The incentives we provided to our volunteers was a head start or a temporary monopoly in the form of immediate access to the NJPS data. Early in 1991, they were each provided with a computer tape of the NJPS data files and full documentation. In addition, in keeping with the overall model of the U.S. Census, we have made the NJPS available as a public use file on request to whomever wishes to gain access to it at the beginning of 1992.

Of course, as with any research analysis, some caution will be necessary when reading the monographs. We shall act as a *Va'ad Ha Kasbrut* and maintain standards within the Monograph Series, but I would caution you—read the small print or insist on seeing it! Most of you are aware from your encounter with statistics classes that definitions of units of analysis, such as whom you regard as Jewish and at what point in time, now or at birth, can all affect the findings. Moreover, important statistics, such as intermarriage rates, are not only affected by definitions about Jewishness but also about marriage. Is analysis restricted only to legal marriage and then just to first, not subsequent marriages? If any of these variables is altered, even before one introduces controls, such as sex and age, differing and possibly confusing but still accurate rates of intermarriage can be produced. I would warn all my colleagues that the NJPS data are more difficult to work with than most survey data since they involve a complex weighting system of eight possible household and population individual weights. Undoubtedly, you will be seeing a great deal of fascinating analysis emerge from the NJPS data in the years ahead, and a wealth of immensely rich material has already emerged from such conferences as the CJF-Wilstein Institute at the Sidney Hollander Colloquium of August 1991 in Los Angeles. Nevertheless, you would be

wise to check first with the *Highlights* (Kosmin et al., 1991b) figures or directly with us at the Data Bank before you accept counter-intuitive results at their face value.

How do you and your agency gain access to the NJPS data or the growing numbers of reports arising from it? The data are now available for public noncommercial use from the Data Bank. It would be wise to have in place a mainframe computer and a sophisticated computer-literate staff member if you wish to do some in-house analysis. Your alternative option is to develop a working relationship with one of the Monograph Authors working within your area of professional interest or on a particular demographic or client group, such as women or the elderly. A full list of monograph writers is readily available from the CJF Research Department, as is a comprehensive list of the various reports and publications that have emerged to date.

However, NJPS has its limitations. It is a national sample survey that makes no claim to offer precise statistics for statistical units below the level of U.S. Census Region. Nor does it purport to offer accurate figures on small subpopulations of clients. It does not aim and cannot be expected to replace the need for local community studies nor detailed research focused on particular subjects or client groups. The NJPS is purely a baseline study and a national overview.

Therefore, what should we learn from an overall national perspective from the NJPS findings? The NJPS revealed contemporary American Jewry to be a diverse population—a pluralistic group and a multi-textured fabric of somewhere between 4.4 and 8.2 million people, depending upon one's definition of the population. It shattered the simplistic and comforting old world view in which there were clear distinctions between Jews and Gentiles (*l'havdil*) whereby lifestyles and loyalties were fixed over time and space. Instead, in the United States today, we are faced by a complex new reality and a new social paradigm in which boundaries are fluid.

There still remains a measurably distinct core of recognizable Jews, but there is also a large penumbra of population that is Jewish for some purposes at particular times. In terms of behaviors, intense Jewish commitment shades off into a void. Clear differentiation of Jews from others has become more difficult to accomplish on both the theoretical and practical levels since a lot of Jews look like and live like Gentiles. A realistic analysis should reflect these shadings of Jewishness. Social analysis must reflect reality and real-life situations. One can no longer divide American Jews into Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform and claim that that tells the whole story.

The major demographic finding, in addition to rapidly rising rates of co-habitation of Jews and Gentiles, is that half of all today's Jewish adults are baby boomers. The full impact of this fact has yet to be absorbed in communal circles. For instance, it means that half of the adult population was born after 1950. They were mostly children, or were not born, during the 1967 Six-Day War, with all that implies for Jewish identity and Israel ties. Moreover, they live in a world where Burundi and Belarus are internationally recognized states with flags, radio stations, and tanks, so that they are not so amazed at "the miracle" of the existence of a Jewish State.

The NJPS also reveals that Jews are more likely to live alone than are other groups and are less likely to live in households with children. They are geographically mobile and are dispersing rapidly. This presages our long-term demographic problem, even though in the short term we are currently going through a baby boomlet in which there are 150 toddlers for every 100 high-school students. Yet, of even more concern to our familiar ways of doing business is the fact that American Jews increasingly see being Jewish in individualistic and personal terms, rather than as a

family attribute or community tie. When being Jewish is a personal voluntary identity, one no longer has a captive market of inevitably involved lifelong citizens. Dealing with this new generation of Jewish consumers is the challenge facing Jewish communal service in the years ahead. Undoubtedly, the NJPS has probably only validated your prior intuition, observation, and judgment regarding the trends, but if it has whetted your appetite to learn more about your clients in order to understand them and service them better, then it has achieved its goal.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of my colleagues at the Council of Jewish Federations—Carmi Schwartz, Donald Feldstein, and Jeffrey Schneckner—to the development of the research structure and process of the NJPS.

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