

Conservative Synagogues *and* Their Members



Highlights of the North American Survey of 1995 - 96
Jack Wertheimer, *Project Director and Editor*

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Jewish Theological Seminary of America
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Finally, as editor and compiler of this report, I thank the members of the research team for investing so much of themselves to insure the high quality of our work. The specific research projects undertaken by team members are detailed both in the preface and in a discussion of the study design. It needs to be added, however, that we have met often for days at a time over a two year period in order to learn from each other, critique each other's work, and find the means to integrate our findings. I am deeply appreciative of the investment each member of this project has made, and look forward to future collaboration to share the fruits of our collective study.

Jack Wertheimer

The Jewish Theological Seminary is the academic and spiritual center of Conservative Judaism worldwide.

The mission of the Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism is to preserve the historical records of the Conservative movement and foster research on Conservative Judaism, past and present.

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Preface

This publication has a two-fold purpose: to inform a wide readership interested in the condition of North American Jewry about the largest segment of synagogue-affiliated Jews in the United States and Canada; and to serve as a self-study document for the Conservative movement and its leaders. Conservative Jews constitute nearly half of all adult Jews who join congregations in the United States, according to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. By their sheer numbers, they are critical for an assessment of Jewish religious life in North America. Beyond their numbers, moreover, members of Conservative synagogues play a central — and disproportionate — role in the maintenance of the organized Jewish community and in its philanthropic endeavors. Trends within this population are, therefore, of great moment to the larger enterprise of North American Jewish life.

Through its integration of data from four separate surveys and additional first-hand observation of congregational life, this report places a wealth of new findings into the hands of policy makers. Our research on this project has been spurred by the strong support and valuable guidance of the rabbinic and lay leaders of the Conservative movement. We hope that as they deliberate over the future course of Conservative Judaism in North America, they will make use of the detailed findings in this report. Similarly, as synagogue boards devise plans for their individual congregations, they will find rich comparative information in this publication to situate themselves within the broader context of congregations within the Conservative movement.

The scope of research presented in this report has no precedent in surveys of any other Jewish religious group in North America — and few counterparts in research on other religious denomination. This report presents findings from five distinct, yet inter-related, research projects:

1. **The National Jewish Population Survey of 1990** that was prepared under the auspices of the Council of Jewish Federations has been reanalyzed by Sidney and Alice Goldstein in order to develop a profile of the entire population of Jews in the United States who identify themselves as Conservative Jews.

2. A **congregational survey** was conducted by Jack Wertheimer and Ariela Keysar in order to gather detailed information on the practices and programs of Conservative synagogues. Approximately half of the affiliates of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the umbrella organization of Conservative synagogues, participated in this survey (378 synagogues out of some 760 affiliates of the United Synagogue). The rabbis of those congregations completed a detailed questionnaire through mail and telephone interviews.

3. A **membership survey** was conducted by Steven M. Cohen and Paul Ritterband to elicit information about the characteristics and Jewish commitments of synagogue members. Over 1,700 questionnaires were completed by members of 27 randomly selected congregations in the United States and Canada.

4. A **survey of recent bar and bat mitzvah celebrants** was conducted by Barry A. Kosmin in order to learn about the Jewish identity and experiences of young people. Nearly 1,500 youngsters from all over North America who celebrated their bar or bat mitzvah during the Hebrew calendar year 5755 (1994-95), along with one parent of each celebrant, completed telephone interviews.

5. To complement quantitative data gathered through survey research, two separate **ethnographic studies** were conducted by Samuel C. Heilman and Riv- Ellen Prell. The former studied two congregations in the Northeast and the latter observed two congregations in the Midwest. Quotations sprinkled through these pages are drawn from their interviews.

Readers of this publication are urged to bear in mind that our research focused sharply on the segment of self-identified Conservative Jews currently affiliated with synagogues. These constitute half of all Jews who claim the Conservative label — and they are clearly the more engaged half. By studying synagogue members, we have not sought to obscure the fact that many self-identified Conservative Jews are minimally committed to Jewish life. Rather, we have sought to understand the half of the proverbial "glass" that is full. We considered the following questions:

- Who are the Jews in the pews and what brings them there?
- What is the nature of Conservative synagogue life in the closing years of the twentieth century?
- How diverse is this population and what boundaries does it maintain?
- And as we project ahead, what are the main trends among younger members and their children?

This report represents the first effort to disseminate our findings. We are presenting only highlights in this publication — findings that are particularly newsworthy and that lend themselves to straightforward reporting. Information requiring more complex analysis will appear in subsequent publications during the coming year. This process will culminate with the publication of an expansive analysis of our findings in a book co-authored by all the researchers.

Finally, a word of thanks to the more than 6, 000 Conservative Jews — rabbis and lay leaders, men and women, older members and recent bar and bat mitzvah celebrants — who gave freely of their time to respond to our questionnaires and participate in interviews. This report is about them — the members who support congregations and partake of their services and the leaders who shape synagogue programs and plan for their future.

How to Read This Report

This report is organized into two sections. The first part examines our findings from a **thematic perspective**. We have identified five major themes that are particularly noteworthy because they offer newsworthy information or unexpected findings. They shed light on some of the major patterns emerging within the contemporary Conservative synagogue. The second part is organized topically and presents a **profile** of Conservative Jews and their synagogues. This section has been organized as a compendium or almanac of information. Policy planners within congregations will find rich information here to situate their own synagogue within the larger landscape of Conservative congregational life. Similarly, leaders of the Conservative movement will find ample data in this section to inform policy discussions. The final page of this report, in fact, offers a series of questions for consideration as the Conservative movement plans for the future.

Throughout this report, the results of every component of our research have been integrated so that information about congregations, their members, young people, and the larger population of Conservative Jews may be considered together. Readers are advised to bear in mind that this research on Conservative synagogues and their members was undertaken between the summer of 1995 and the winter of 1996. These survey results, in turn, are set against national trends in American Jewish life captured by the National Jewish Population Survey of 1990. Our findings, therefore, should be conceived of as a snapshot taken at a particular moment in time — the first five years of the 1990s. Some individuals who were members of congregations during those years may have already let their membership lapse, whereas some nonaffiliated Conservative Jews in the interval may have joined a synagogue. Conservative synagogue life, in short, is not static.

The Population of Conservative Jews

Conservative Judaism is one of several Jewish religious movements in North America. During the middle decades of the twentieth century, the plurality of U.S. Jews claimed to be Conservative Jews. But by the closing decade of the century, matters have changed somewhat: more adult American Jews* now claim the Reform label (38%) than the Conservative one (36%). Lagging considerably behind are Jews who claim to be Orthodox (6%) and Reconstructionist (1%). In absolute numbers, this translates into approximately 1, 800, 000 Jews who identify themselves as Conservative Jews.

These figures merely reflect how many Jews identify with particular denominational labels. They do not shed light on any behavior beyond such a vague identification. Indeed, when we consider the actual number of Jews in the United States who are currently members of a synagogue, a somewhat different profile emerges. As of 1990, the year of the National Jewish Population Survey, 41 percent of adult Jews in entirely Jewish families were members of synagogues. Conservative Jews constitute 47 percent of these adult synagogue members in the United States. By contrast, the figure for Reform Jews is 36 percent and for Orthodox Jews, 11 percent.

The two sets of figures we have presented — the percentages who identify with a denomination and the percentages who are members of a congregation — vary quite dramatically because there is a big difference between how one identifies oneself and whether one actually joins a congregation. The disparity is greatest among self-identified Reform Jews, and is smallest among self-identified Orthodox Jews. Among Jews who claim the Conservative label, approximately one-half actually are members of synagogues. Part Two of this report, entitled "A Profile of Conservative Jews and Their Synagogues," includes a detailed comparison of self-identified Conservative Jews who are currently affiliated with a synagogue with those who are not synagogue-affiliated. This comparison offers an important context for understanding the sector of Conservative Jewry at the heart of this report — members of Conservative synagogues.

* Comparable data are unavailable on Canadian Jewry.

1. Affirming Conservative Judaism

Robert T. was not becoming more Jewish; as he saw it, he was becoming more affirmatively a Conservative Jew. This shift was not simply a matter of convenience or default; rather it was a deliberate move by him to the ideology of Conservative Judaism, positioned between what he viewed as the extremes of other Jewish denominations. He explained his attachment to Conservative Jewish ideology and outlook this way:

"It can be uncomfortable in the middle; but to me, it rings truer in its historical and intellectual honesty about what it is to be Jewish. I look at Reform, and I see them jettisoning for convenience' sake rituals and observances that are traditional, that are a way for people to participate and to connect spiritually with their Judaism. On the other hand, I look at Orthodoxy (in fact, I'm more comfortable in an Orthodox synagogue than I am in a Reform one) and I see a refusal in them to address the reality that Judaism, like anything else, has been an evolving, growing thing — something that lives....And so, the triumph of the Conservative movement dealing with an issue like egalitarianism is an intellectually honest process and something that rings truer to history as to what Jews truly have been."

During the middle decades of this century, as the Conservative movement and its congregations experienced their greatest spurt of growth, observers contended that most members of Conservative synagogues neither understood nor agreed with the ideology of the movement and probably joined Conservative synagogues "by default." Orthodoxy was too foreign and too old-fashioned, so the reasoning went, and Reform was too American and too

modern; but Conservatism was "just right." Though many also continued to regard Orthodoxy as the most authentic version of Judaism, it was just too demanding. And Reform certainly answered the needs of modern living; but it went too far in its accommodation to modern ways. Conservative Judaism represented the least problematic of the three major alternatives. It was, at best, a compromise.

Most members of Conservative synagogues today have developed a more positive and less apologetic

attitude toward their denominational choice. They are genuinely attracted to Conservatism; they unabashedly reject Orthodoxy and Reform; and, as a group, they demonstrate a clear affinity for several elements of the Conservative movement's ideology.

Attitudes Toward the Jewish Denominations

Chart 1 presents the responses of synagogue members to a series of questions about Conservative Judaism. The overwhelming majority reject claims that Conservative Judaism is too "wishy-washy," a charge that has often been hurled at the Conservative movement because it occupies a centrist position between the more sharply defined extremes of Reform and Orthodox ideology. Over two-thirds of members of Conservative synagogues also identify personally with the Conservative label.

Charts 2 and 3 report the responses of members to questions about the other major movements of Judaism. Large majorities reject the claims of these movements — either of greater authenticity, in the case of Orthodoxy, or of greater relevance, as the Reform movement asserts. Over 60 percent cannot presently conceive of identifying with the other movements, a response that further suggests a high level of satisfaction with Conservative Judaism. We may note that some dissatisfied individuals have voted "with their feet" by dropping their membership in congregations. Our respondents are current members who display a high level of identification with their movement and a low level of attraction to the other Jewish religious movements.

Chart 1

Attitudes Toward Conservative Judaism

Percentages

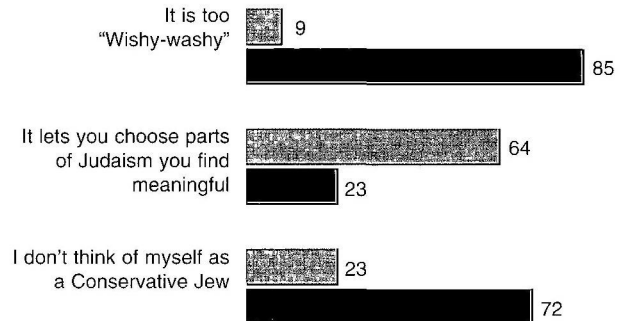


Chart 2

Attitudes Toward Orthodox Judaism

Percentages

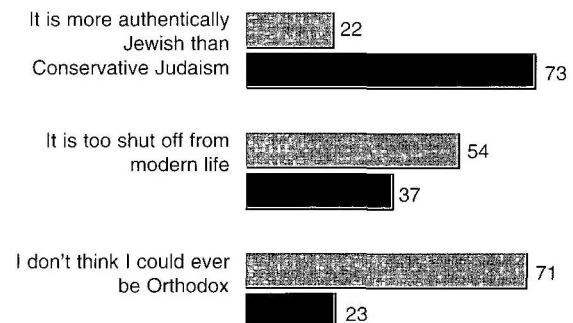
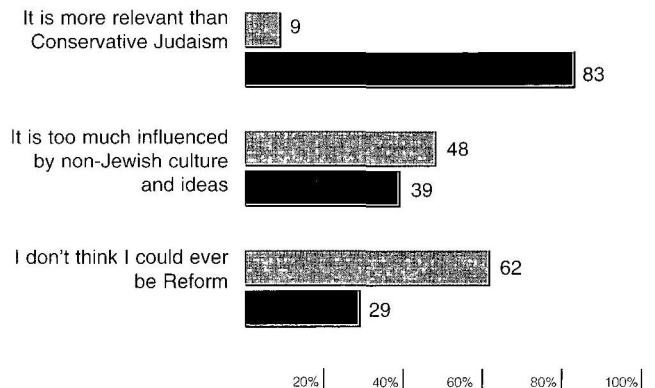


Chart 3

Attitudes Toward Reform Judaism

Percentages



Key: Agree Disagree

Source: Membership Survey

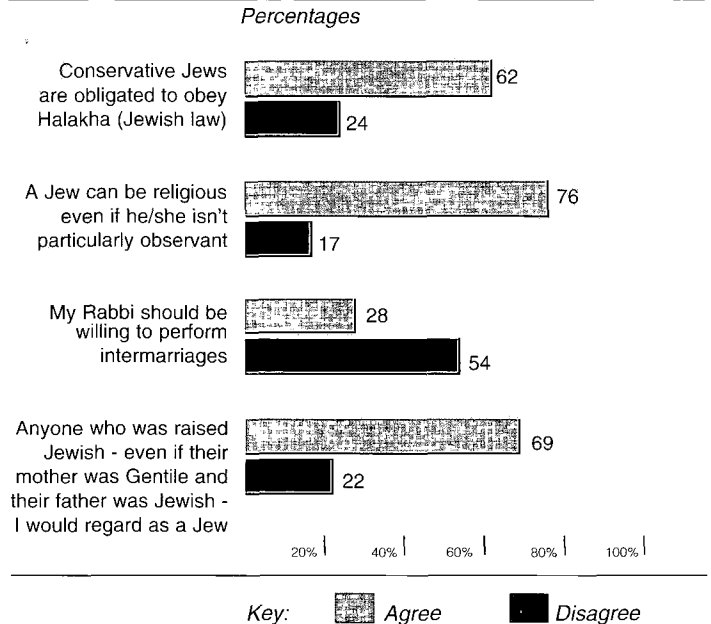
The Question of Ideology

When asked a series of questions that touch upon the religious commitments and practices of the Conservative movement, respondents are more equivocal. A tension exists between strong support for movement standards and a preference for allowing for individual needs. Thus, 62 percent of members affirm the obligation of Conservative Jews to obey Jewish religious law (halakha). But a slightly higher percentage (64%) also affirm that Conservative Judaism lets you choose the meaningful parts of Judaism (Chart 1). While this latter assertion suggests that most synagogue members find certain aspects of Judaism meaningful, it leaves unclear what these Jews do when they encounter aspects of Judaism that are not meaningful to them. Moreover, whereas slightly more than six out of ten people affirm halakha, three quarters agree that "a Jew can be religious even if he/she is not particularly observant." Another contradictory pattern of response can be traced when questions are posed about intermarriage: Only slightly more than one-quarter of respondents wanted their rabbi to officiate at interfaith weddings, but 69 percent considered as Jewish "anyone who was raised Jewish, even if his/her mother was Gentile and father was Jewish." This latter position has been formally rejected by the Conservative rabbinate.

We may speculate on the reasons for these contradictory responses. Perhaps there is a gap between the support of respondents for a movement that draws clear boundaries and their inclination to exercise latitude in individual cases. Or they may draw a distinction between public religion and private practices. Or they may distinguish between establishing a legal principle and applying that principle to actual situations. Certainly, these responses confirm some of the ongoing tensions between leaders of the Conservative movement and the average

Chart 4

Conservative Ideology and Practices



Source: Membership Survey

The Question of Ideology (continued)

synagogue member, even as they illustrate the kind of flexibility that is appreciated and valued by members of Conservative synagogues. We may note in this connection the way that one synagogue member described his understanding of the virtues of Conservative congregations:

For Charles S., the Center Synagogue [the synagogue he attended] and Conservative Judaism were largely identical, so that much of what he had to say about the one, he could easily say about the other. What Charles saw in both was their capacity for "holding with an open hand." By that he meant that he believed his synagogue and the kind of Judaism it sustained provided people with a strong sense of being held to something concrete while allowing them a great deal of freedom to move away and interpret the nature of their attachments and commitments broadly. Put differently, it was a place where they could feel "comfortable" about the way they practiced (or did not practice) being Jewish, even if this did not quite square with the formal ideological or behavioral demands of the movement.

Most of the attitudes we have traced are more pronounced among younger rather than older Conservative synagogue members. We constructed an index that measured the total number of doctrinally correct answers with respect to Conservative ideology. These answers indicated identification with Conservatism, rejection of the other major denominations, and support for the official teachings of Conservative Judaism. With each successively younger age group, identification with Conservative teachings rises.

Denominational Morale and Coherence

The tendency of younger synagogue members to identify positively with Conservative Judaism undoubtedly affects the morale of the movement. So, too, does the perception of growth and decline within individual congregations. When asked their impression of how their own congregation has fared during the previous decade, over two-thirds of rabbis indicated that their membership had either remained stable or had grown. Moreover, a fifth reported a dramatic increase in membership. It is noteworthy that nearly one-third of congregations indicated a membership decline, but these were generally the smallest congregations. Middle-sized congregations (those with 400-799 membership units) and large synagogues (over 800 membership units) remained stable or increased in membership. We should note that data were unavailable to us on the **actual**, as compared to the **perceived**, membership figures. But perceptions affect morale.

This perception of growth may help explain an anomaly: even though the percentage of Jews who identify as Conservative has declined in recent decades, the large majority of congregations do not seem to be suffering a membership decline. The presence of new members and the increased identification of these members with the Conservative movement affect morale within congregations far more than national trends in denominational identification.

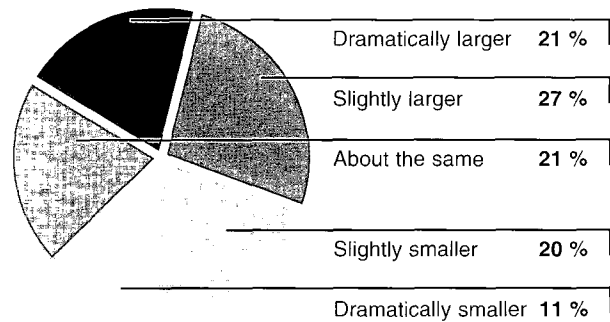
A second factor that affects morale is the movement toward a more uniform liturgical style within Conservative synagogues. Such uniformity is most evident in the selection of prayer books and Bible commentaries.

Chart 6 illustrates that the preponderant majority of Conservative synagogues employ a prayer book on Friday evenings and Shabbat mornings that have the official sanction of the Rabbinical Assembly (R.A.), the rabbinic organization of Conservative rabbis, and the United Synagogue, the congregational body of

Chart 5

Perceptions of Congregational Growth and Decline

As compared with ten years ago, the membership is:



Source: Congregational Survey

Denominational Morale and Coherence (continued)

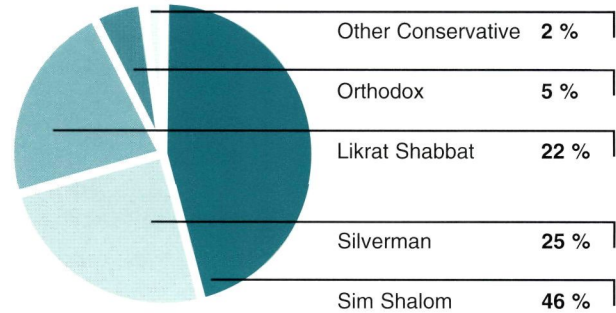
Conservative Judaism. These are the *Siddur Sim Shalom* (1985), compiled by a staff member of the R.A., Rabbi Jules Harlow, and an earlier siddur compiled by Rabbi Morris Silverman (1946). Several other prayer books compiled by Conservative rabbis, most notably the works compiled jointly by Rabbis Sidney Greenberg and Jonathan Levine, *Likrat Shabbat* (1973) and *Siddur Hadash* (1975) as well as Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser's prayer books (1957), are employed. Similarly, the High Holiday prayer books (*Mahzorim*) compiled by Rabbis Silverman (1939) and Harlow (1972) are employed by over four-fifths of congregations; and works by Rabbis Greenberg and Levine (1977) are used by virtually all the rest. The biblical text and commentary employed by all but a handful of congregations is the Hertz *Chumash* (1938). (Rabbi Joseph Hertz was the first rabbi ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary and was long associated with his alma mater, even after he became Chief Rabbi of Great Britain.) The Soncino Pentateuch, which offers excerpts in English from more traditional commentators, is available in a small number of congregations.

The commonalities in liturgical usages serve as a unifying force in a movement that encompasses disparate and even contradictory ideological positions. For one thing, Conservative Jews who move from one congregation to the next encounter very similar types of services and can immediately find their way around the common prayer books. For another, the choices of liturgical works hold symbolic significance: they offer modern translations yet maintain a strong fidelity to the traditional liturgy — hallmarks of Conservative ideology. Finally, members of Conservative congregations have come to expect that they will employ liturgical works produced by their own movement. Taken together, these factors make for a degree of coherence and unity; and they encourage an identification with the particular style of the Conservative synagogue.

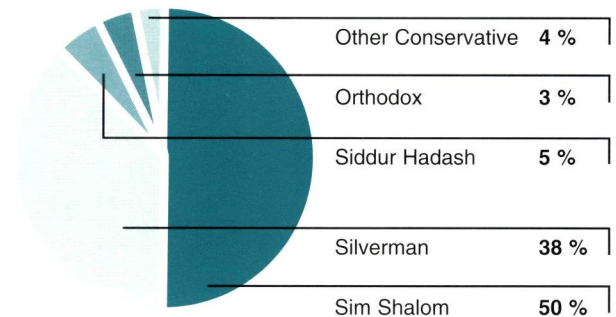
Chart 6

Liturgical Texts Used in Conservative Synagogues

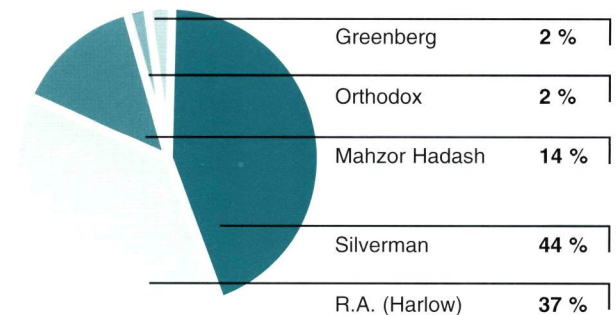
Friday Evening



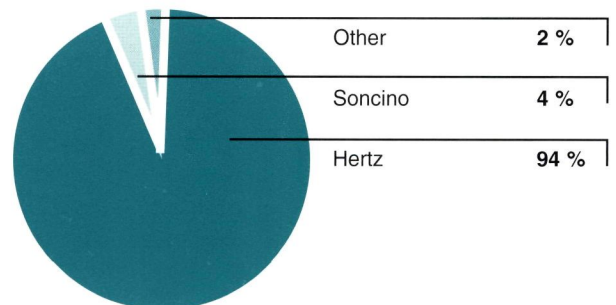
Shabbat Morning



Mahzor



Chumash



Source: Congregational Survey

2. The Triumph of Egalitarianism

Ruth M., an artist in her 40s and a mother of teenagers: *"One of the reasons I had the courage and the confidence to try to read Torah and Haftorah was that I had been observing many women Torah readers at Beth El. I was thrilled and very aware that they didn't race through it as fast [as men], and they are more musical about the way they approached it. Listening to one of the women Torah readers in the congregation was a definite incentive."*

Perhaps the most dramatic and visible changes in Conservative synagogues during the past quarter century have been the introduction of egalitarian practices in virtually every aspect of congregational life. Women have assumed new leadership roles on congregational boards and serve as rabbis, cantors, ritual directors, and administrators of educational programs. They also share responsibility with men for leading the religious service by reading Torah, chanting the Haftorah, delivering sermons, leading study sessions, and serving as prayer leaders. Bat mitzvah celebrants generally are treated no differently than their male counterparts.

The introduction of these egalitarian practices often prompted heated debates within congregations. These sometimes dragged on for years and, in some instances, provoked dissatisfied members to leave their congregations because the pace of change was either too fast or too slow. On the national level, battles over women's equality focused on the advisability of admitting women to the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary, a question that was resolved affirmatively in 1983. Since the early 1970s, local congregations debated similar questions concerning the expansion of women's roles. Our surveys indicate that, by the mid-1990s, most of these conflicts have been resolved in favor of women's equality.

Attitudes Toward Equal Rights for Women in the Synagogue

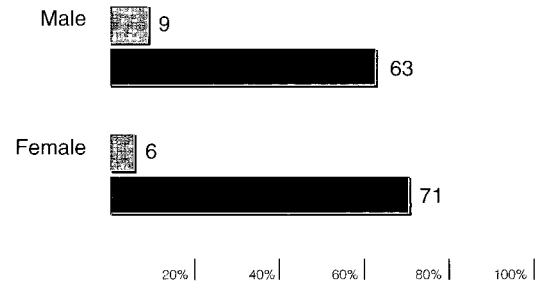
When synagogue members were asked about their attitudes regarding women's equality in the sanctuary, a remarkably high percentage expressed their acceptance of women's equal status in the synagogue. For example, 84 percent agreed that women should have the same rights as men have in the synagogue; and 70 percent were willing to hire a woman as a rabbi. Significantly, men and women answered in much the same way: 84 percent of men and 85 percent of women favored women's equality in the synagogue. The gender gap is greater when respondents were asked their attitudes about hiring a woman rabbi: 65 percent of the men were in favor as compared to 74 percent of the women.



On the basis of these two questions, we classified respondents as egalitarians (if they favored both equal rights and women rabbis) and as traditionalists (if they opposed equal rights for women and the hiring of a woman as their rabbi) (see chart 7). One might expect relatively more egalitarians and fewer traditionalists among women, younger people, and the less observant. Yet our analysis shows that broad support for egalitarianism cuts across all key population groups and characterizes even those who are considered more traditional (men, older people, the more observant).

Chart 7

Attitudes Toward Equal Rights by Gender

Percentages



Key:  Traditional  Egalitarian

Source: Membership Survey

Women's Participation in Synagogue Life

These changes in attitudes have led to new synagogue practices. In more than four out of five congregations in the Conservative movement, women share the same ritual honors as men and bat mitzvah celebrants are treated in the same way as b'nai mitzvah. Similarly large percentages of congregations report having elected a woman as president within the past fifteen years. From the perspective of Jewish religious law as understood by the Conservative rabbinate, these practices vary greatly in their halakhic ramifications. A woman who serves as the president of a congregation, for example, raises far fewer halakhic issues than do women leading the religious services or participating as one of the required ten in the prayer quorum. These complex question have been debated by Conservative rabbis since the middle of the 20th century.

Synagogue practices also reflect changes in the Jewish educational attainments of women. Within the population of members, younger women have received far higher levels of formal Jewish education than have older women. When we compare the educational attainments of men and women, among those 25 years and older, men were more likely than women to have received six or more years of Jewish education. (These differences were especially sharp among the oldest group.) But among younger members between the ages of 18-24, there are no differences in the Jewish education attained by women and men.

Table 1

Synagogue Policies Regarding Women's Participation

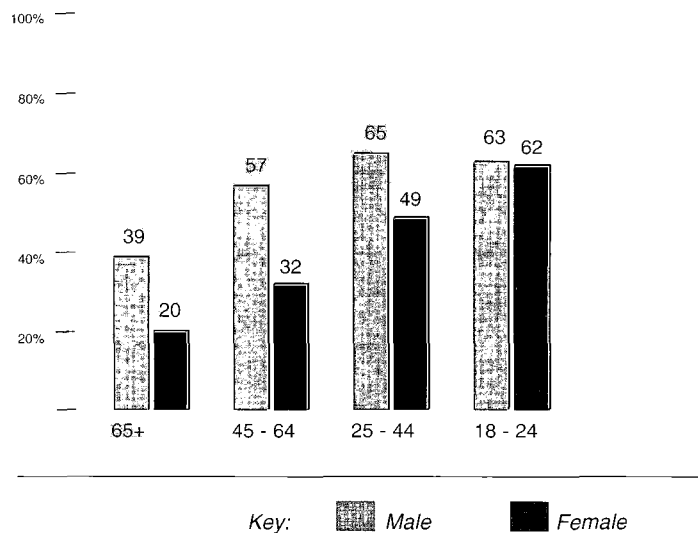
Women's Roles	% of Synagogues
Women are counted in the minyan	83%
Women may lead the services	78%
Women may read Torah in the synagogue	82%
Women may open and close the ark	93%
A woman has served as a president of the congregation during the past 15 years	79%
Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrants are treated the same way	80%

Source: Congregational Survey

Chart 8

Jewish Educational Attainments for Different Age Groups

(six or more years)



Key: Male Female
Numbers are expressed as percentages
Source: NJPS, 1990

Synagogue Policies for Bar and Bat Mitzvah Celebrants

Bar and bat mitzvah celebrants are increasingly treated equally. Boys and girls acquire similar skills during their bar and bat mitzvah training; and among the four-fifths of congregations that are egalitarian, the patterns of participation in the Torah service are virtually the same for boys and girls. Generally, the most demanding public performance required of bar and bat mitzvah celebrants is reading the entire Torah portion of the week (i.e., the whole *Sedra*); almost as demanding is the reading of some of the Torah portion, the concluding passages of the Torah (the *Maftir*), and the *Haftorah* (a section of the Hebrew Bible taken from post-Pentateuchal texts). Some bar and bat mitzvah celebrants read only the *Maftir* and *Haftorah*; and still others, just the latter. (Both the Torah portion and the Haftorah are chanted according to specific musical notations known as *trope*.) As Charts 9 and 10 make abundantly clear, the different assignments filled by b'nai mitzvah are not gender-based but stem from other considerations.

Chart 9

What B'nai and B'not Mitzvah Learn

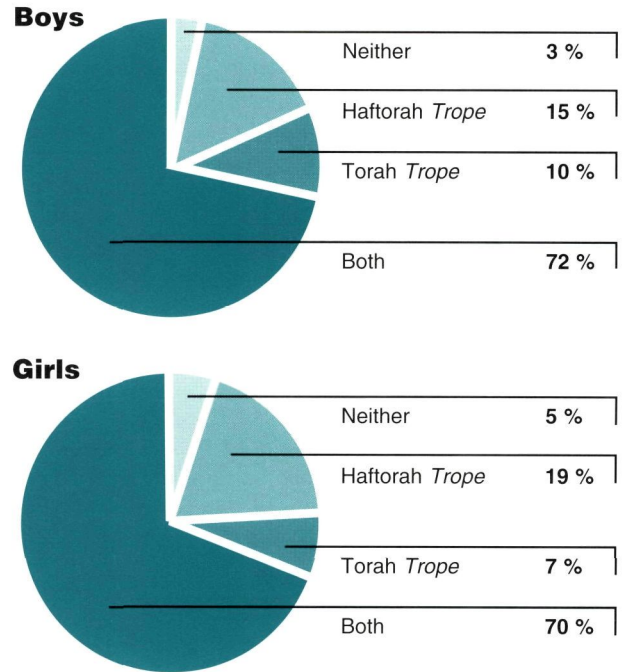
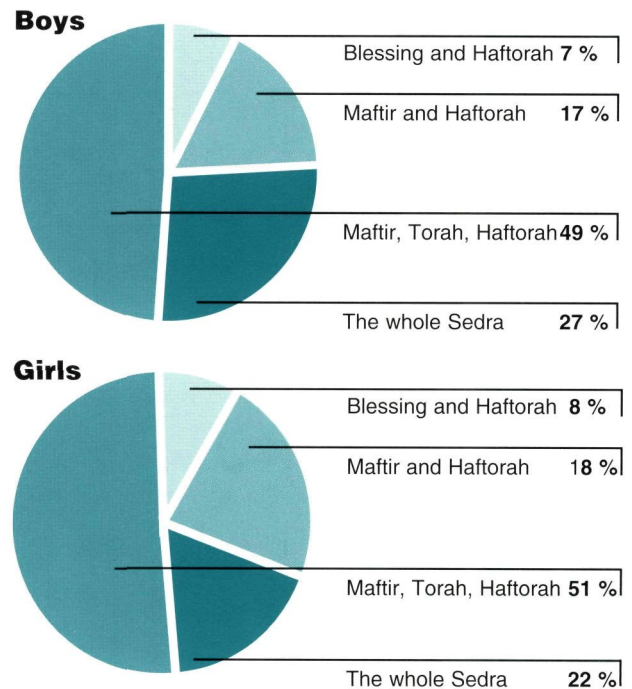


Chart 10

B'nai and B'not Mitzvah in the Torah Service



Source: Bar/Bar Mitzvah Survey

The Jewish Attitudes and Identification of B'nai and B'not Mitzvah

The b'not mitzvah (girls) have a consistently stronger pattern of Jewish identity and a stronger Jewish commitment than the b'nai mitzvah (boys). Boys and girls were compared on 11 items of Jewish identity across three dimensions: the importance of beliefs and feelings, Jewish observance, and peoplehood.

The largest differences in the attitudes of boys and girls appear when young people are asked about their sense of connection to other Jews (14 points) and feeling Jewish (11 points). On a number of other items, girls score higher than boys, but the gender differences are not as dramatic. For example, young people were asked about the importance they ascribe to believing in God and keeping a kosher home. Girls attached somewhat more importance than boys.

A Comparison of B'nai and B'not Mitzvah: The Importance Attached to Jewish Commitments by Recent B'nai and B'not Mitzvah

Chart 11 Jewish Beliefs and Attitudes

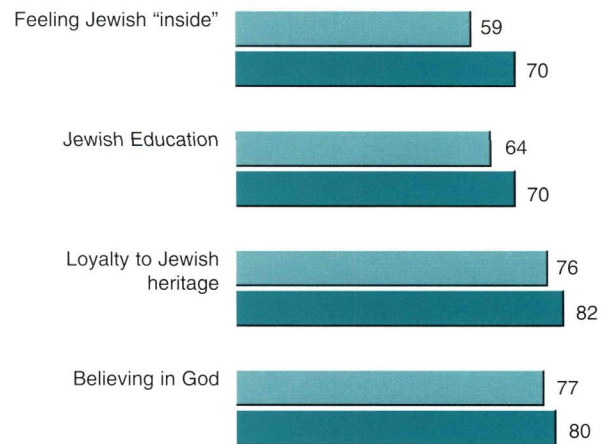


Chart 12 Attitudes Toward the Jewish Community and Peoplehood

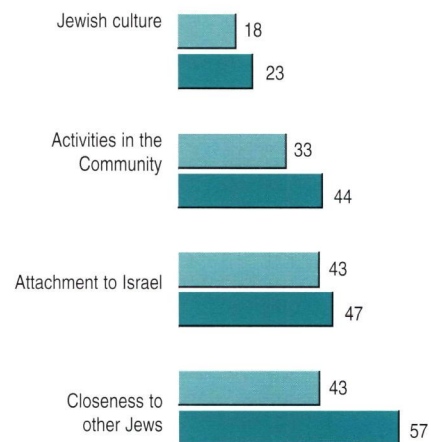
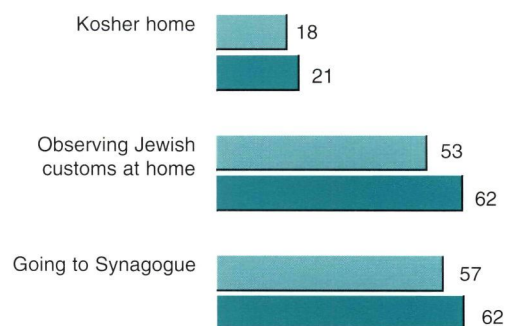


Chart 13 Attitudes Regarding Jewish Observance



Key: ■ Boys ■ Girls
Numbers are expressed as percentages

Source: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Survey

3. When Geography Makes a Difference

In recent decades, Jews in the United States and Canada dispersed from areas of dense concentration in a few key cities to other parts of their respective countries. This was especially the case in the United States, where Jews flocked to California and Florida in the immediate decades after World War II and more recently have moved from northern cities to the Sunbelt. Canadian Jews moved from Montreal to Toronto and even further west. As they relocated to these new areas, Conservative Jews established new congregations.

This geographic dispersal is significant because synagogue practices vary from one region to another. The most glaring differences may be discerned between Canadian and U.S. congregations. The former tend to retain more traditional liturgical forms and some of the more formal practices that characterized

Conservative synagogues of an earlier time. Even more dramatic are the differences between Canadian and U.S. congregations in the opportunities available to women as participants in the religious service: Canadian congregations, perhaps consistent with their greater traditionalism, are less likely to permit women to assume the same roles as men.

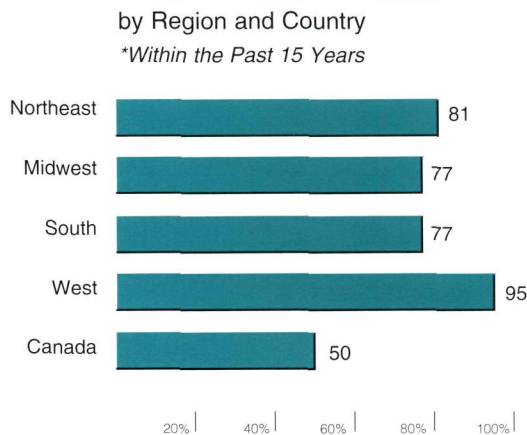
Within the United States, too, synagogue practices vary among regions. In the main, congregations in the Northeast and Midwest tend to be more traditional than those in the West. The further west Conservative Jews travel, the more receptive they seem to be to innovations. As the North American population shifts into the Sunbelt and, especially, the West, there is a strong likelihood that more congregations will introduce less traditional practices.

Regional Variations Regarding Women's Participation

The roles of women in synagogue life vary in a consistent pattern from one geographic locality to another. Quite consistently, Canadian congregations are the least likely to permit women liturgical roles, such as being counted in the minyan (prayer quorum) or reading Torah and leading the religious services. During the past fifteen years, half of the Canadian congregations in our sample elected a woman as their president, compared with more than three-quarters of Conservative synagogues in the United States.

Within the United States, more than nine out of ten congregations located in western states accord women equality in liturgical roles; and 95 percent have elected a woman as their president. In other regions, the participation of women is quite high, but variations may be discerned. For example, women in the South assume responsibility for the range of liturgical roles, but a smaller percentage of Southern congregations have elected a woman as president. By comparison, northeastern and midwestern congregations usually have lagged behind in their extension of equal opportunities to women.

Chart 17 A Woman Has Served as the President of the Congregation*
*Within the Past 15 Years



Regional and National Variations

The Percentage of Congregations that Permit the Following Practices:

Chart 14 Women Are Counted in the Minyan

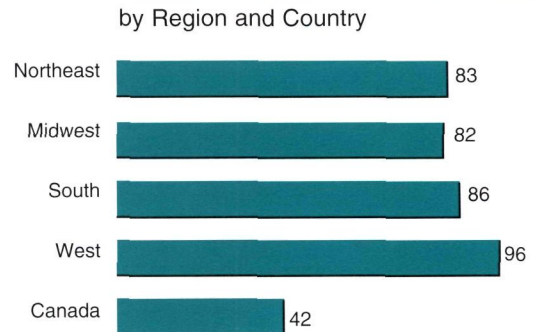


Chart 15 Women May Lead the Services

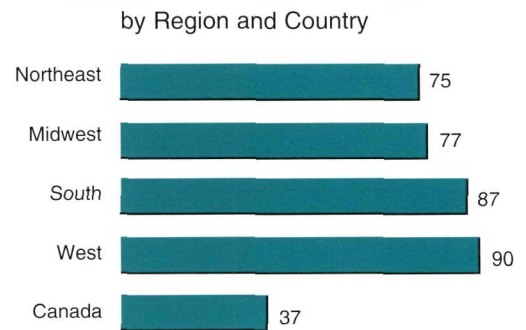
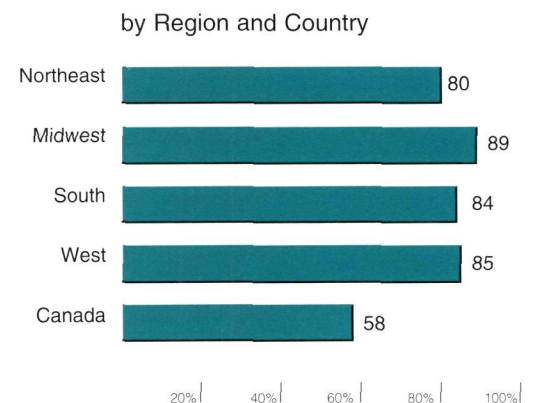


Chart 16 Women May Read the Torah



Source: Congregational Survey

Regional Variations in the Ritual Practices of Synagogues

Synagogue services also vary by region. We selected several congregational practices as measures of how traditional or innovative synagogues are. We looked at three issues:

1. Does a congregation read the entire Torah annually in the traditional manner, or does it read the Torah in an abbreviated form and complete the entire scroll according to a triennial cycle? The triennial cycle has precedents in earlier synagogue practices, but not among Ashkenazic Jews, the ancestors of most Conservative Jews.

2. Does a congregation permit the modern innovation of playing an organ or another musical instrument during Shabbat religious services? The introduction of organ music and other instrumentation in synagogue services, especially on the Sabbath and holidays when it had not been used in the past, reflects a program of adapting the synagogue service to the liturgical models of western civilization.

3. Does a congregation permit parties on the Sabbath at which musical instruments are played? This is still another departure from traditional practices and interpretations of Jewish law.

Charts 18-20 and Table 2 indicate that Canadian congregations are most likely to adhere to traditional practices. Conservative synagogues in the West are most likely to allow more innovative practices, and congregations in the Northeast and Midwest are slightly more likely to retain traditional practices.

Regional and National Variations

The Percentage of Congregations that Permit the Following Practices:

Chart 18 The Torah is Read on a Triennial Cycle

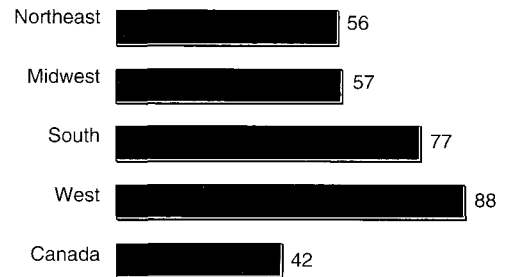
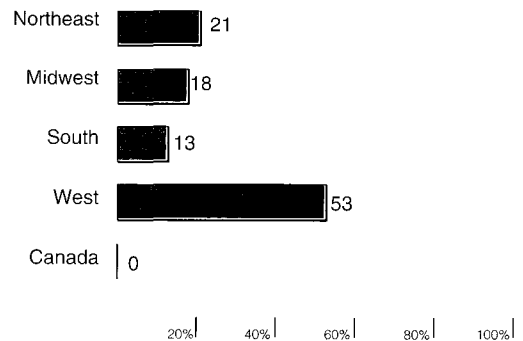


Chart 19 The Use of an Organ or other Musical Instrument during Shabbat Services



Chart 20 Parties with Musical Instrumentation Are Permitted on Shabbat



Source: Congregational Survey

Regional Variations in the Ritual Practices of Synagogues (continued)

Sometimes, seeming innovations also result in a return to more traditional behaviors. There has been a trend in recent decades to de-professionalize the leadership of prayers and especially Torah reading in order to encourage more lay participation. Interestingly, the more traditional Canadian congregations are least likely to have lay Torah readers and the more innovative western congregations are most likely to encourage lay participation. In some congregations, the use of lay Torah readers may be more a matter of practical necessity than ideology or a commitment to greater lay participation.

Table 2

A Lay Person is the Primary Torah Reader

Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Canada
25%	39%	27%	43%	21%

Source: Congregational Survey

Urban versus Suburban Congregations

Over half of all Conservative synagogues are located in a suburb of a large city; another 23 percent are in large cities; 19 percent are in small cities; and another seven percent are in rural areas. Suburban congregations tend to have the youngest membership; synagogues in large cities have an older membership. The largest congregations (800 or more membership units) are most apt to be found in large cities (38%), while suburban congregations are most likely to have 400-799 membership units (52%). Congregations in small cities or in rural areas are most likely to have 400 or fewer membership units.

In light of these age and size differences, we might expect to find substantial variations in their programs for children and families. In fact, suburban and large urban congregations offer remarkably similar programs for toddlers and young children. Both urban and suburban congregations, for example, sponsor Friday

evening and Shabbat meals in much the same proportion. Similar programs are less likely to be offered in congregations in rural areas.

More substantial differences appear in religious services. Congregations in large cities are more likely to have daily morning prayers (*minyanim*) (79%) than are those in suburban areas (66%). Congregations in large cities are also more likely to have Friday evening services at sundown (63%) than are suburban congregations (52%). And, conversely, the latter are more likely to provide late Friday evening services (71%), compared with only 50% of the urban congregations.

There are no statistically significant differences between urban and suburban congregations regarding rates of synagogue attendance and the roles accorded to women in the synagogue service.

4. The Younger Generation — Jewish Knowledge and Activities

I. Ron G., a corporate lawyer in his late 40s, whose children are of college age: *"Our kids are stronger than we are, either more observant or more religious. They learned pride in services where I never learned to daven. Ramah was a primary influence on them."*

Pam G., his wife, a teacher in her late 40s: *"Our son [now 22 years old] to this day says he would rather come home for the seders than for Thanksgiving because he says that there is so much more meaning for him in the seder than in Thanksgiving." She continues: "Our children had their Jewishness in so many different areas of their life — at home, Talmud Torah, during the summers at Ramah. It was a place where it was okay to be Jewish, to be smart, to have talent. They were accepted for who they were and [learned that] Jewish feelings were okay. The synagogue got them learning for their bar mitzvah [celebrations]; it got them involved in teaching and their scholarship for Ramah came from Beth El. Each year they returned to teach in the Saturday morning program, and they felt important and that they were giving back to the synagogue."*

II. Gary P., a lawyer in his mid-30s, divorced and remarried, a convert to Judaism: *"Since I joined the shul, I keep a kosher home and I try to think of keeping more commandments. One things I like also about the Conservative approach is the notion of the ladder of mitzvot. You can start at a certain level and gradually work your way up. It doesn't have to be either/or. You can strive for an ideal, but you're not going to get there overnight. You can take one step for now and think about the next step later."*

There is a widespread perception in the Jewish community of North America that with the passage of generations, the quality of Jewish life necessarily diminishes; and younger Jews are apt to have less of a Jewish education and

commitment than their elders. Among members of Conservative synagogues, generally, the opposite is true.

Educational Backgrounds

Decade after decade, each succeeding group (or cohort) of Conservative Jews has acquired more Jewish education than its older cohorts. Whether in terms of Jewish schooling, or USY participation, or attendance at Ramah Camps, or trips to Israel, or Jewish studies classes at the university, or participation in Hillel activities, younger Conservative Jews have enjoyed higher levels of Jewish education than those in older age groups. Presumably, they are, therefore, more Jewishly knowledgeable as well. Charts 21 through 26 demonstrate that with each successive age cohort, higher percentages of members have attended Jewish educational programs. Some of this upward trend is clearly due to the unavailability or unaffordability of some programs when older members were of school and college age. Nonetheless, the trajectory is quite dramatic for younger Jews educated during the past few decades — especially as compared to the totality of the American Jewish community.

A few words of clarification about the programs included in these charts: Hebrew schools refer to supplementary school education provided in either a congregational or communal setting after public school hours. USY is the youth movement of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism; and LTF, the Leadership Training Fellowship, was an elite youth program to nurture future leaders of the Conservative movement. The latter was disbanded in the 1980s. The eight Ramah summer camps in North America (a new one is scheduled to open in the South in 1997) are officially under the auspices of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Chart 21

Jewish Education: Attended Jewish or Hebrew School

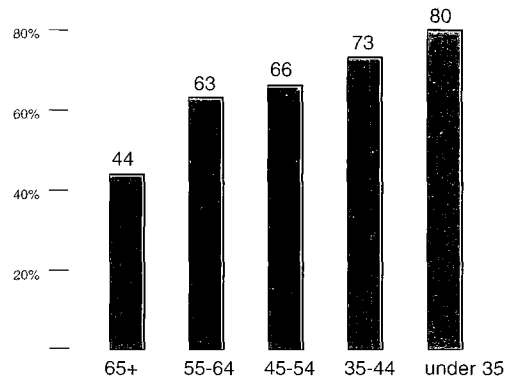
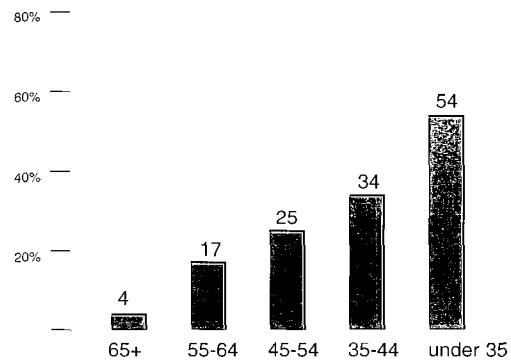


Chart 22

Participated in USY or LTF



Numbers are expressed as percentages
 Source: Membership Survey

Chart 23 Attended Camp Ramah

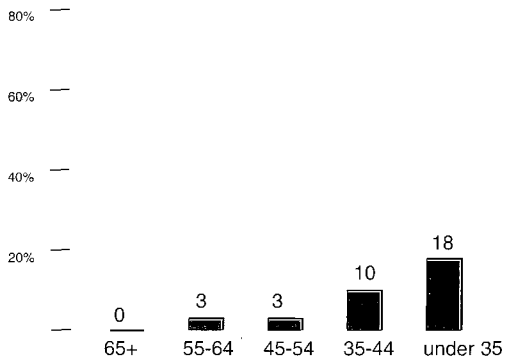


Chart 25 Participated in a Jewish Campus Group

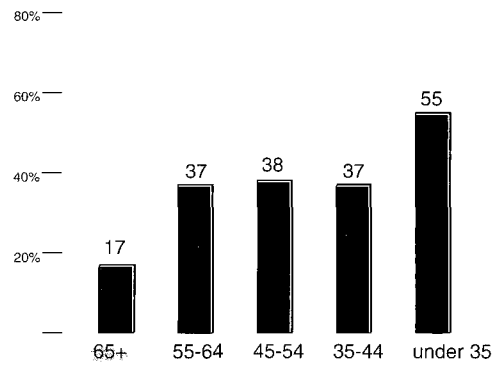


Chart 24 Visited Israel Before Age 22

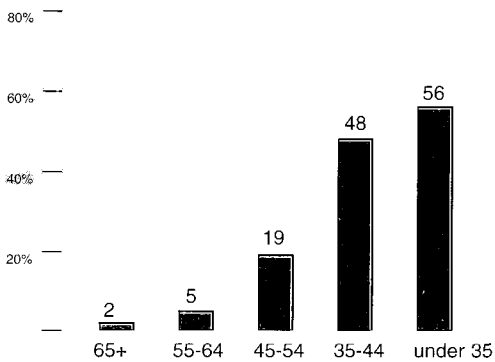
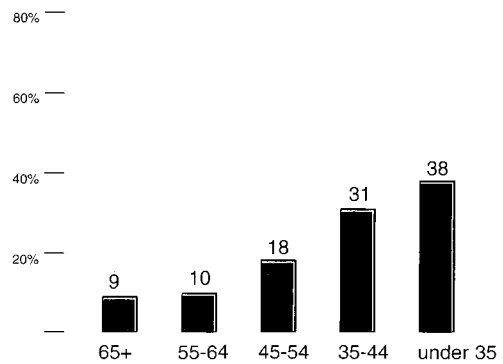


Chart 26 Took Courses in Jewish Studies at College



Numbers are expressed as percentages
Source: Membership Survey

Jewish Activities

Not only are younger Conservative Jews more educated in Jewish matters than the older ones, but they also seem to be more active in Jewish life. We examined several areas of Jewish activity, and present just two —

- monthly synagogue attendance,
- and a composite index bringing together several types of synagogue activities.

Here a somewhat more complex and less straightforward pattern emerges. In both measures, members over 65 years of age, despite their weaker levels of formal Jewish education, surpassed the 55 to 64 year old age cohort. Perhaps more members of the older population were raised in exclusively Jewish neighborhoods and were educated Jewishly by their families or perhaps older members have more time available to participate.

The pattern of increased levels of Jewish activity, then, rises with each younger age cohort — except for the youngest, the under-35 population. In fact, there is a dramatic decline by the under 35 age group as compared to the 35-44 year olds. The decline in Jewish activities among this youngest age group is especially noteworthy since this group also had the most exposure to Jewish educational programs. In light of this group's small size within our sample, it is not clear what, if anything, its patterns of behavior portend for the future. But the patterns for the three age cohorts in the middle of the spectrum, members between the ages of 35 and 64, suggest that as levels of Jewish education rise, so, too, do levels of Jewish activity.

Chart 27

Attends Synagogue Services At least Once a Month

Percentages

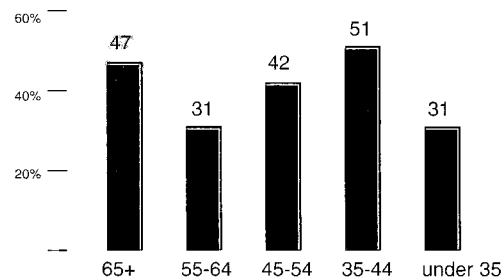
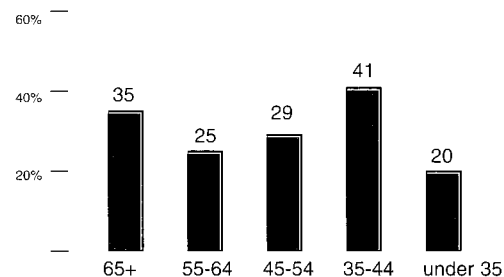


Chart 28

Highly Active in Synagogue Programs

Percentages



Source: Membership Survey

The Impact of Jewish Education

Our survey of bar and bat mitzvah celebrants allows us to measure the correlation between exposure to certain forms of Jewish education and the Jewish identification and attitudes of young people. These data are all the more important because we also have a relatively homogeneous sample in terms of the number of years of Jewish education (91 percent attended for five or more years). We created a Jewish educational continuum based upon the intensity of the form of schooling. The students were distributed across three categories:

- those who were currently in day school (i.e., in the seventh or eighth grade), totaling nine percent of the sample;
- those who had attended day school in the past, comprising 33 percent of the sample; and
- those who had never attended a day school and whose education had been confined to the synagogue supplementary religious school, comprising 58 percent of the sample.

In their attitudes toward rituals, the tendency to endorse expected Conservative norms was directly related to the intensity of Jewish education they had received. When asked about the importance they attach to living in a kosher home, those with the most intensive Jewish education were most receptive to a kosher home; those with less Jewish education were less receptive, and those with the least intensive Jewish education were the least receptive (see Chart 29).

In contrast, young people's educational experiences are not significantly correlated with religious beliefs, as the data on belief in God demonstrate. A comparison of Charts 29 and 30 indicates that there is far less variation among products of different types of Jewish schooling concerning the importance they attach to belief in God.

The Impact of Jewish Schooling

Chart 29

Importance Attached to Living in a Kosher Home

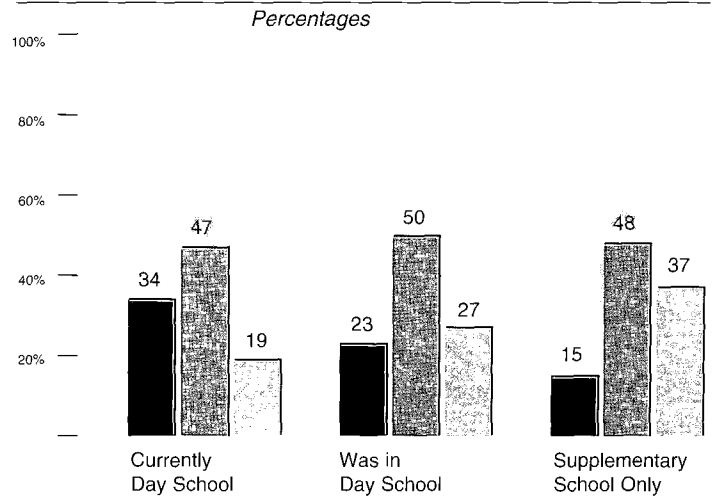
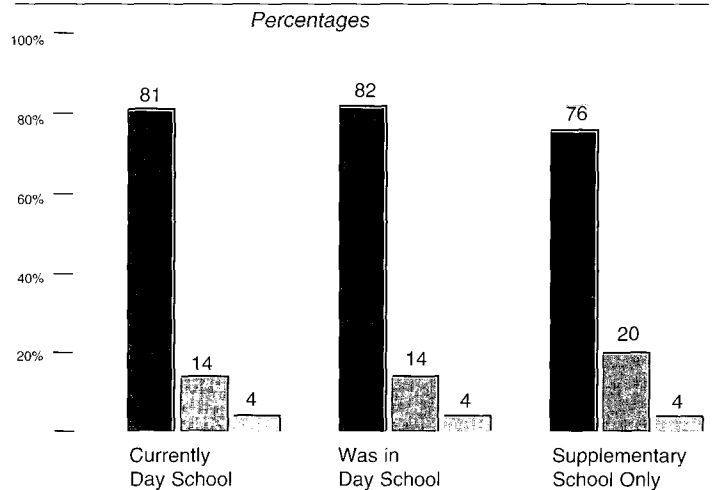


Chart 30

Importance of Believing in God



Key: Very important Somewhat important Not at all important

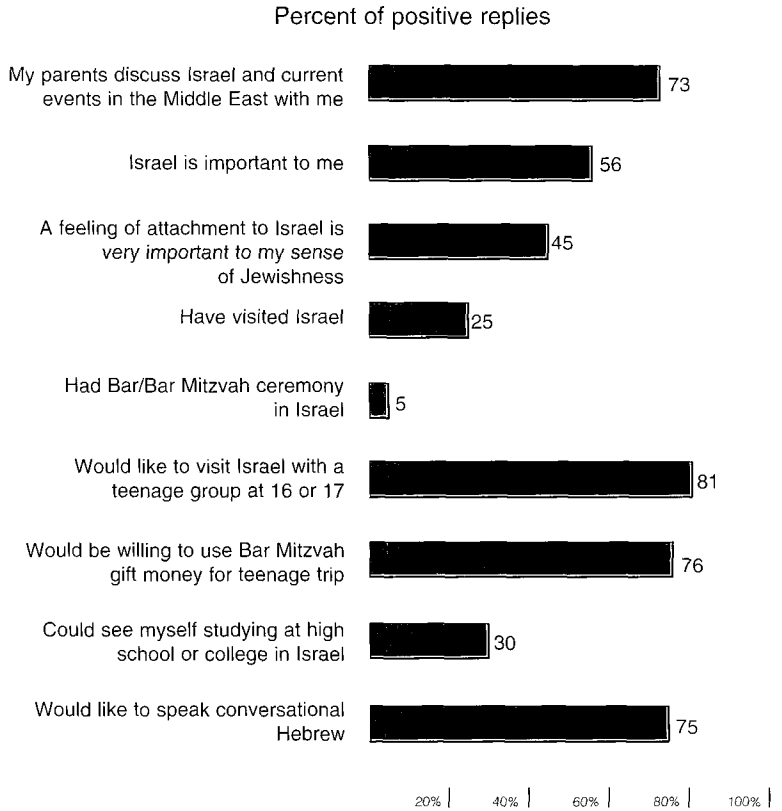
Source: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Survey

How Closely Do B'nai and B'not Mitzvah Relate to Israel?

B'nai and b'not mitzvah identify strongly with Israel and its culture. Our sample population of Conservative teenagers has more positive feelings toward Israel than were found among American Jews in general by the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. Perhaps, this results from the role parents play in reinforcing such feelings. It is more common today, for example, for families to visit Israel. In addition, the emphasis placed by curricula in Jewish schools upon Israel also may foster a positive identification. We should note, as well, the remarkably high degree of interest in conversational Hebrew.

Chart 31

How B'nai and B'not Mitzvah Relate to Israel



Source: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Survey

The Impact of Bar and Bat Mitzvah Training

Preparation for a bar or bat mitzvah in itself serves as an important educational experience. Even though parents almost uniformly report that their children had to work hard to train for their bar or bat mitzvah celebration, the parents of the class of 5755 (1994-95) overwhelmingly (93%) reported satisfaction with the instruction their child received. Parents also expressed enthusiasm and support for Jewish education when asked to compare their own knowledge of Judaism at age

13 with that of their child; 65% of parents thought the younger generation knew more. In addition, 78% of the parents wanted their daughters as well as their sons to continue their Jewish education after their bar or bat mitzvah.

5. The Partnership Between Family and Synagogue

I. Marian Y., a 60s political activist and a retired Jewish professional, married with adult children: *"If someone were to ask me what was the most important thing you ever did in raising your children, I would say that we didn't just drop our daughter off for school on Shabbat. We were there. Once we got hooked into the Saturday service, the Friday service seemed more irrelevant."*

II. Claire M., a woman in her 30s, whose husband is a convert to Judaism: *"In my concept of Conservative Judaism, the temple is not just a service, though that's important and it's there for you when you need it. But in different stages of your life, you need it in different ways. When you want your kids to be bar mitzvah, it becomes important; when you lose someone, it becomes important; and when you make friends there, it becomes important on a day-to-day basis because you want to be with your friends. But, to me, the center of Conservative Judaism is not the temple. The center of Conservative Judaism — and I have spent a long time thinking about it — is the home and the family. And if you define the synagogue as the amount of attending services, you misunderstand the role it actually plays in Conservative Judaism. It's something the family comes to because there's learning there; there are other people and it makes the family part of a community. The family comes first, but you reinforce it [via the temple]."*

Our study provides powerful evidence that the motivation for attending synagogue services stems from childhood exposure to such services. Those parents who attend services regularly with their children convey the importance of religion to their children.

Our study suggests that there is a division of labor between the home environment and educational programs. The

home works on motivation, and the school and educational camp work on skills. Jewish schools, camps, and youth groups have a small effect over the short term in motivating service attendance; for the long haul, the home is the preeminent institution spurring such attendance in later years. Both the home and the school are vital; they play different yet complementary roles.

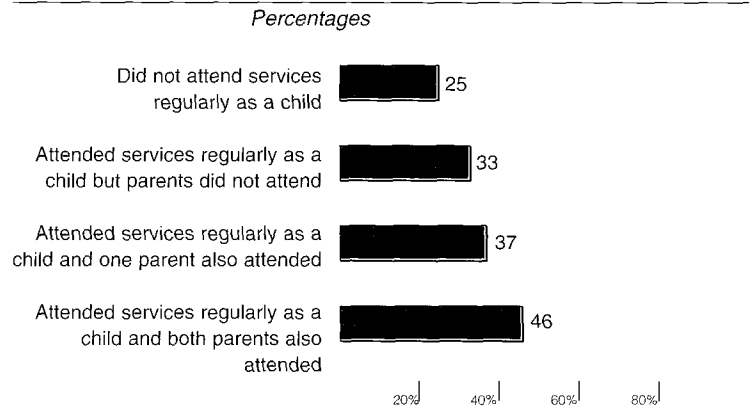
The Making of Regular Synagogue Attenders - From Childhood to Adulthood

We asked synagogue members how frequently they attended synagogue services currently and how often and under what circumstances they attended during their childhood. The responses indicated a clear relationship between their attendance with parents in the past and their own attendance patterns as adults. One-quarter of those members who did not attend synagogue with any regularity in childhood attend regularly now, a figure that jumps to 46 percent of those who attended with both parents in childhood. Similarly, during their college years, a time of life when many Jews avoid organized Jewish activities, those who had attended synagogue regularly with their parents during their childhood were most likely to maintain that practice, whereas those who did not attend with their parents when they were children also were unlikely to attend during their college years. (We should note that regular attendance is here defined as twice a month or more.)

Early synagogue attendance also correlates with Jewish identification in adulthood. Those individuals who attended synagogue with their parents during their childhood currently ascribe greater importance to their Jewishness and religion than do individuals whose parents did not bring them to synagogue. When we read across each row of Table 3, the percentages who engage in Jewish activities rise in accordance with their childhood experience with synagogue attendance. Similarly, individuals who attended synagogue with both their parents are far more likely to consider religion important than those who did not attend synagogue services in their childhood.

Chart 32

Current Regular Attenders



Source: Membership Survey

Table 3

Service Attendance With Parents and Later Jewish Identification

	Did Not Attend as a Child	Attended Alone as a Child	Attended With One Parent as a Child	Attended With Both Parents as a Child
Percent Took Jewish Studies Courses	14%	22%	27%	31%
Percent Participated in Hillel	26%	37%	50%	53%
Percent Believe that Being Jewish is Very Important	76%	80%	83%	84%
Percent Believe That Religion is Very Important	38%	45%	51%	54%

Source: Membership Survey

The Making of Regular Synagogue Attenders – From Childhood to Adulthood (continued)

We also sought to understand the relationship between regular service attendance as adults and earlier Jewish educational experiences. First, we compiled data on the formal education of all synagogue members. In Table 4 when we **read across each row**, it is evident that more intensive forms of Jewish education are more likely to lead to service attendance and the attainment of synagogue skills. Exposure to a Sunday school education plays only a marginal role.

Second, we examined informal Jewish educational settings, such as the youth movements of Conservative Judaism (United Synagogue Youth or the Leadership Training Fellowship) and Camp Ramah. In Table 5 we have two separate categories, those who did and did not attend Ramah camps and those who did and did not join youth movements. When we **read across each row**, the data suggest that educational experiences play a role in transmitting synagogue skills. Synagogue members who experienced more intensive levels of informal Jewish education as well as exposure to Camp Ramah are the most likely to read Torah and even lead the services. But these intensive educational experiences do not necessarily translate into regular adult synagogue attendance. The parental model they saw as children was a far more powerful influence.

Table 4

Formal Jewish Schooling and Synagogue Participation

	Received No Jewish Education	Sunday School	Supplementary School	Day School
Attended Services Regularly in College	14%	14%	20%	28%
Attends Services Regularly Now	27%	24%	31%	31%
Currently Read Torah	6%	5%	8%	15%
Currently Lead Services	4%	3%	8%	15%

Source: Membership Survey

Table 5

Informal Conservative Education and Synagogue Participation

	Did not Attend Ramah	Attended Ramah	Was not in USY or LTF	Was in USY or LTF
Attended Services Regularly in College	16%	37%	14%	28%
Attends Services Regularly Now	29%	29%	29%	29%
Currently Read Torah	7%	22%	7%	10%
Currently Lead Services	6%	14%	5%	8%

Source: Membership Survey

1. A Comparison of U.S. Members and Nonmembers

The Population of Conservative Jews

The data in this section are based on a reanalysis of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS). Readers should note that data from the NJPS refer to individuals who belong to a household in which someone is a synagogue member; not necessarily to individuals who are themselves synagogue members.

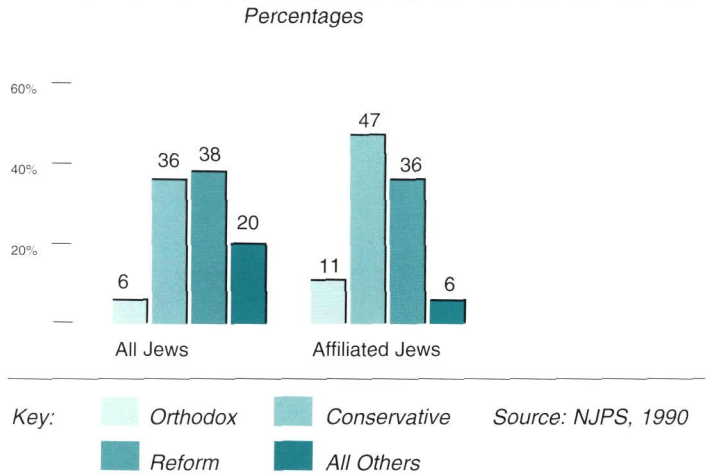
In order to situate members of Conservative synagogues, the group at the center of this study, into a broader context, we begin this profile with a comparison of synagogue members with nonmembers. A comparison of the two types of Conservative-identified Jews is especially important because membership is not static: Some current members may soon drop their membership and some nonmembers may join congregations. The comparison is also important in order to determine how to understand Jews who identify with the Conservative label

but do not actively join a congregation.

Among Jews in the United States, some 1.8 million adults and children, or about one in three Jews, identify themselves as Conservative. Of these, half are affiliated with synagogues. Conservative Jews number just slightly below those who identify as Reform, but they have a much higher rate of affiliation with a synagogue. In fact, Conservative Jews constitute the largest group of synagogue members in the United States. Synagogue members differ from

Chart 33

Total Jewish Population and Synagogue Members in the U.S.



nonmembers both in their socio-demographic characteristics and in the Jewish content of their lives. Members tend to be married and living in households with children under the age 18, while nonmembers are more concentrated among the young and the single or divorced.

Synagogues generally draw their members from intact families and are less likely to draw them from individuals who are not in traditional family configurations. It is, therefore, possible that as younger nonmembers move into other stages of their life cycle, they may very well change their membership status as well.

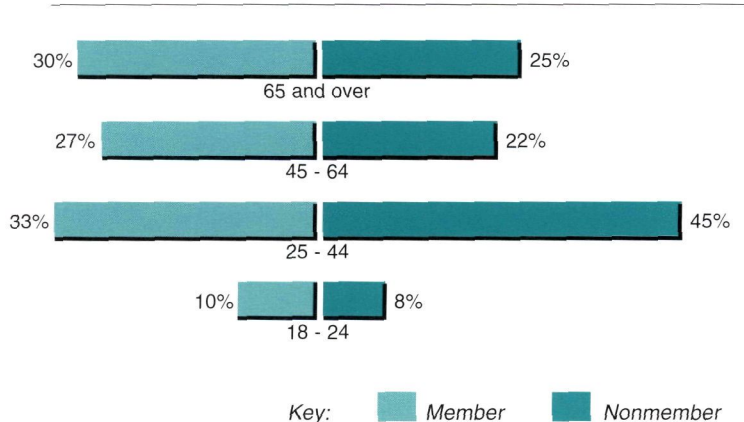
Life Cycle

Adult members are quite evenly distributed among the age groups 25-44, 45-64, and 65 and over, with just under one-third in each category. By contrast, only 10 percent are age 18-24; but this latter group spans far fewer years, a fact that may well account for its relatively small size. Nonmembers are much more

heavily concentrated in the baby boom generation (ages 25-44) and, therefore, are younger on average than members.

Chart 34

The Age Profile of Members and Nonmembers



Life Cycle (continued)

Consistent with our findings about the correlation between stable marriage structures and membership, over twice as many single persons under age 45 are not synagogue members as are members. Among couples living without children at home there is also a high rate of non-affiliation with a synagogue. Membership is clearly associated with having children in the household. Almost half of the members are parents living with children, compared to only one in three of the nonmembers.

Geography

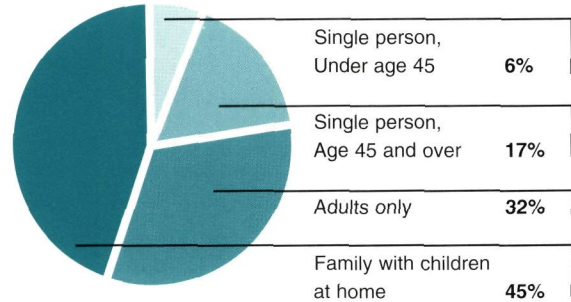
Conservative Jews live in all regions of the United States, but members and nonmembers are distributed somewhat differently around the country. Just over half of all adult Conservative members live in the Northeast region of the United States; one in five live in the South; and 12% and 15% live in the Midwest and West, respectively. By contrast, adult Conservative Jews who are not affiliated with a synagogue are much more likely to live in the West and South; together, these two regions account for over half of all self-identified Conservative Jews who are not synagogue members. The

Northeast and Midwest encompass relatively fewer nonmembers.

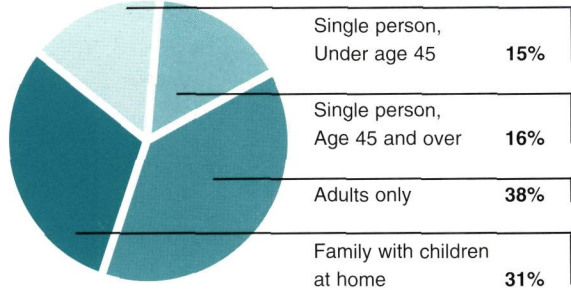
Chart 35

The Life Cycle Patterns of Members and Nonmembers

Members



Nonmembers

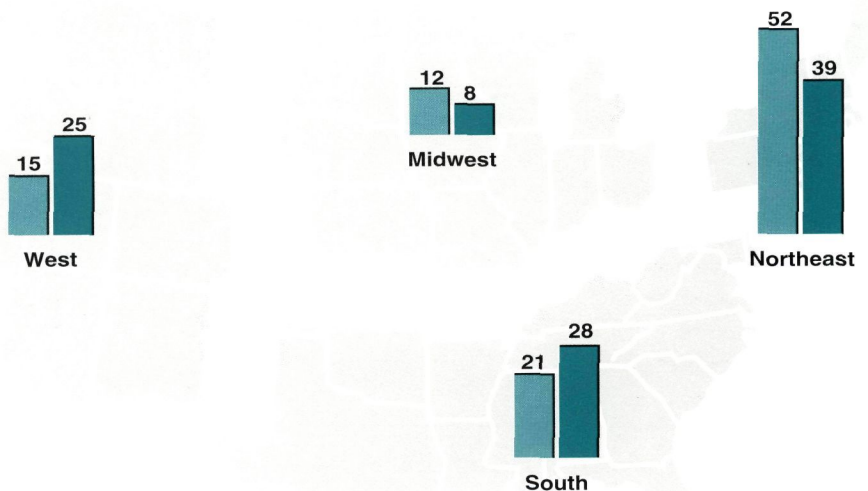


Source: NJPS, 1990

Chart 36

Regional Distribution of the Members and Nonmembers

Percentages



Key: ■ Member ■ Nonmember

Source: NJPS, 1990

Mobility

Migration has been responsible for the dispersion of American Jews throughout the country and, especially, the growth of Jewish communities in the South and West. Conservative Jews have fully participated in this movement. In the year 1990, only a small proportion of Conservative Jews still lived in the community in which they had been born. Nonmembers, however, were much more likely than

members to have moved longer distances. Whereas only three in ten members had moved from one region to another, over four in ten nonmembers had done so. Our data do not permit us to determine the relationship between mobility and nonaffiliation: Is a lack of affiliation conducive to migration or does it result from the dislocation caused by geographic mobility?

Table 6

The Geographic Mobility of Conservative Members and Nonmembers

	Non-Migrant	Migrant to Another Region
Member	15%	29%
Nonmember	15%	43%

Source: NJPS 1990

Socioeconomic Status

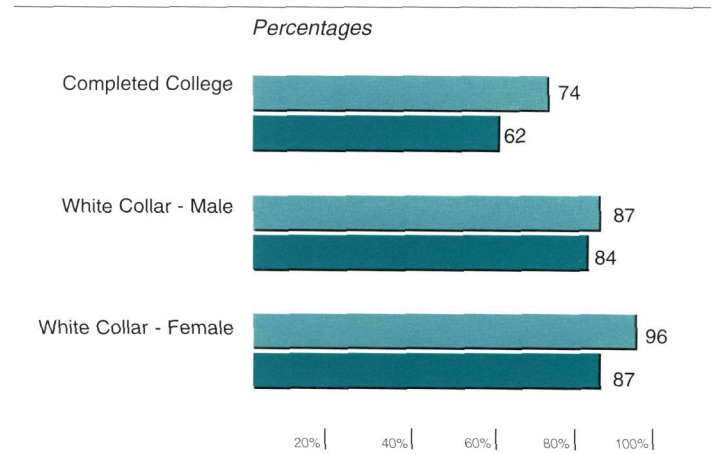
Like Jewish Americans in general, Conservative Jews are highly educated. Well over half of all Conservative Jews have completed college, and the level is especially high among those in the 25-44 age category.

occupations than do nonmembers. Overall, members thus have achieved a somewhat higher socioeconomic status than nonmembers.

Synagogue members have acquired more education than nonmembers: Almost three-quarters of members report that they had completed college, compared to about six in ten nonmembers. Similarly, while Conservative Jews, and especially women, generally are concentrated in white-collar occupations, a higher percentage of members report white-collar

Chart 37

The Socioeconomic Status of Members and Nonmembers



Key: ■ Member ■ Non-member

Source: NJPS 1990

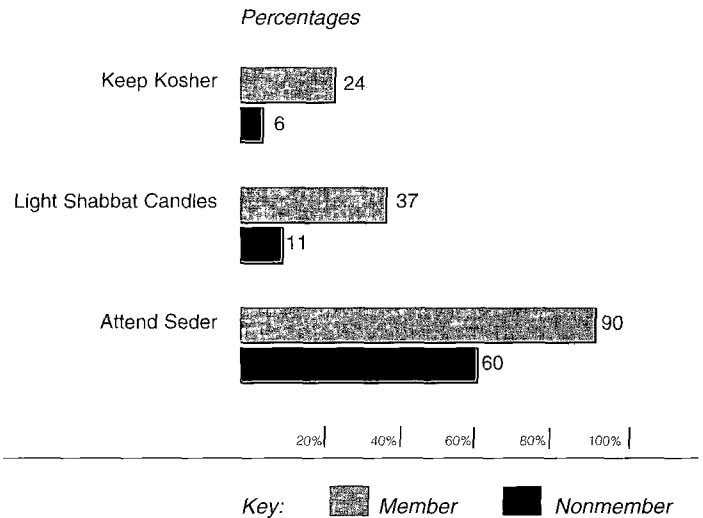
Ritual Practices

The clearest and strongest differences between members and nonmembers appear, not surprisingly, in comparisons of various dimensions of ritual practices and Jewish education. For all three ritual practices considered here, members show much greater levels of observance than nonmembers. While a very small minority of nonmembers keep kosher, this was true of almost one-quarter of the members. The differences between the two groups is even greater when we consider how many light Shabbat candles: Members are three times as likely to observe this ritual as nonmembers. Finally, even

the very popular ritual of attending a Passover seder is observed less by nonmembers than by members: Nine out of ten members report attending a seder, but only 60 percent of the nonmembers do. These three rituals do not, of course, encompass the entire spectrum of Jewish religious life, but they capture some of the more readily quantifiable characteristics of Jewish religious observance, and accordingly appear with regularity in survey research on American Jews. Since Judaism stresses behavior over belief, it is important to measure what Jews are actively doing.

Chart 38

Jewish Practices of Members and Nonmembers



Source: NJPS 1990

Intermarriage

- The large majority of members are married to born Jews. Nonmembers, by contrast, have a higher rate of intermarriage.
- 38% of nonmembers are intermarried compared with only 6% of members.

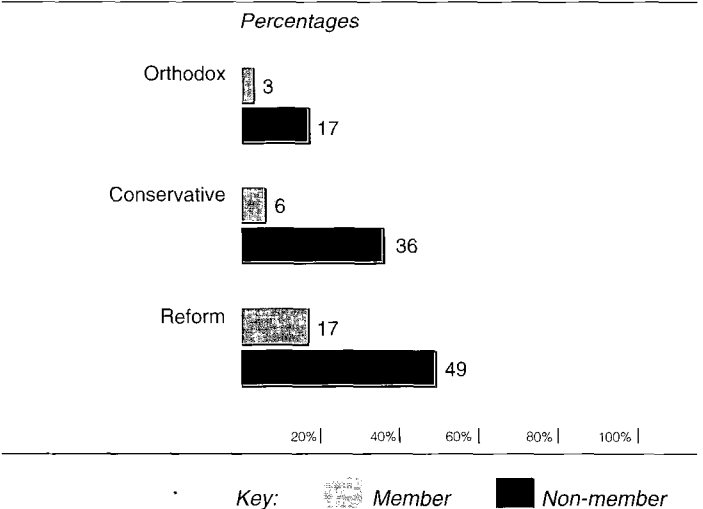
Intermarriage is often understood as a measure of assimilation; and, therefore, high levels of mixed marriage are considered inimical to the continued vitality of American Judaism. When intermarriage is measured as the percentage of respondents who are married to persons claiming to be not Jewish (at the time of the survey), the

level of intermarriage of Conservative Jews falls between that of self-identified Orthodox and Reform Jews. Sharp differences also characterize members and nonmembers within each

continued

Chart 39

Intermarriage Patterns Among Jewish Denominations



Source: NJPS 1990

Intermarriage (continued)

denomination, with nonmembers much more likely to be intermarried than the affiliated. Over one-third of Conservative nonmembers are intermarried, compared to

only 6 percent of the affiliated. These differences are similar to those characterizing the Orthodox population, although the Conservative levels of

intermarriage are higher. The relative differences between Reform members and nonmembers are not as great (see Chart 39).

Jewish Education

The importance of an education is greatly stressed in Jewish religious teachings. Jews need to develop a working knowledge of Hebrew for liturgical and religious purposes and the sacred texts of the Jewish tradition are demanding. It is, therefore, noteworthy that members and nonmembers differ sharply in their levels of Jewish education. Members acquired far more Jewish education than did nonmembers; and many fewer members report that they had no Jewish education in childhood than is true among nonmembers. Some 45 percent of members had six or more years of Jewish education, compared to only about 25 percent of nonmembers.

Furthermore, the percentage of Conservative Jews with greater exposure to Jewish education increases from the

oldest to the youngest members. Twice as many in the 18 to 24 age group as the 65 and older age group have had six or more years of Jewish education. The differences are even more pronounced among nonmembers: four times as many in the 18 to 24 age group as in the 65 and over age group reported larger amounts of Jewish education. The reverse pattern is true for members reporting no Jewish education: only 3 percent of members age 18-24 received none compared to one-quarter of the elderly members. Among nonmembers, the percentage reporting no Jewish education has remained quite steady over time: After dropping from almost half of the elderly to only about one-fourth of those ages 45-64, the percentage of nonmembers below age 45 with no Jewish education has remained steady at one-fourth.

Chart 40

Received No Jewish Education

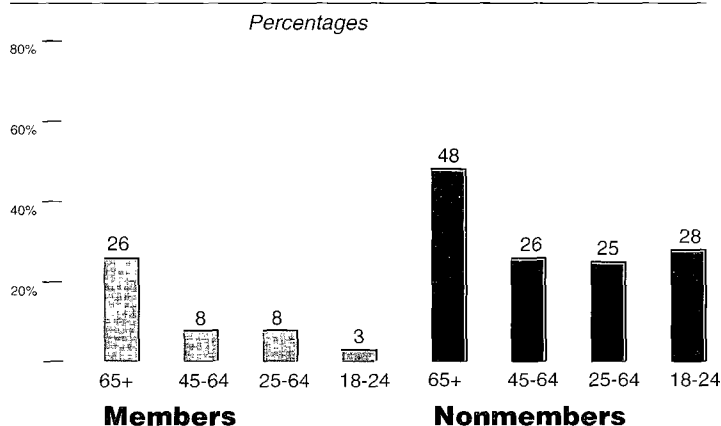
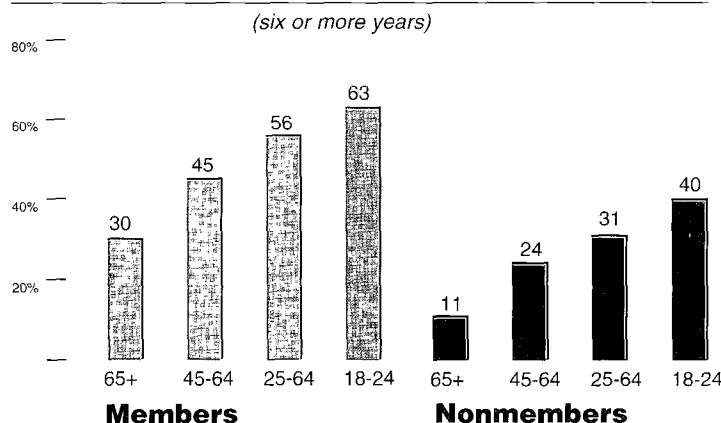


Chart 41

Received a High Exposure to Jewish Education



Denominational Switching

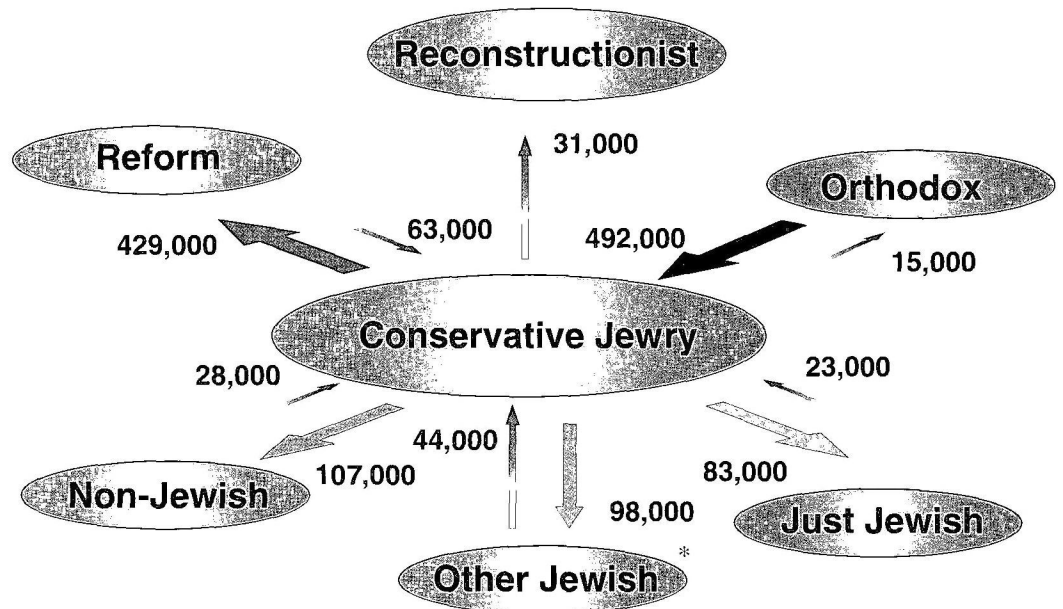
There is a great deal of fluidity in the denominational identification of American Jews, as is evident from a comparison of the denomination in which individuals were raised with their current denomination. In 1990, an estimated 1.59 million adults claimed a current identification as Conservative Jews. Some 920,000 of them reported that they had been raised Conservative, and about 650,000 said that they had not been raised as Conservative. Another 760,000 indicated that they had been raised as Conservative but now identified with another denomination or none at all. Thus, almost as many persons who were raised as non-Conservative have come to identify with the Conservative label as have persons who were raised Conservative but no longer identify with the movement. The result has been a net loss of about 110,000 persons for Conservative Judaism.

The denominational switching has generally moved from the more to the less traditional movements. The vast majority of the gains to Conservative Jewry have come from the once

Orthodox population, whereas the largest losses by the Conservative movement have been to the Reform movement. The shifts have had a profound impact on the profile of Conservative Jewry at the end of the twentieth century. Because much of the switch from Orthodoxy occurred several decades ago while the switch to Reform is more recent, the current Conservative population includes a disproportionate number of older persons.

Chart 42

Denominational Flows Into and Out of Conservative Judaism



* including "none"

Source: NJPS 1990

More important for the cohesion and vitality of the movement, the result of switching has been to create a Conservative population that has relatively lower levels of intermarriage and higher levels of Jewish education and ritual observance. Since any sizeable influx from the Orthodox is unlikely in the future, Conservative Jewry will be increasingly dependent on its own population for continued vitality and growth.

2. Synagogue Members and Their Children

Attendance at Services

We now turn to the specific characteristics of affiliated Conservative Jews--those who were members of congregations during the period of our research.

Overall, less than a third of synagogue members attend

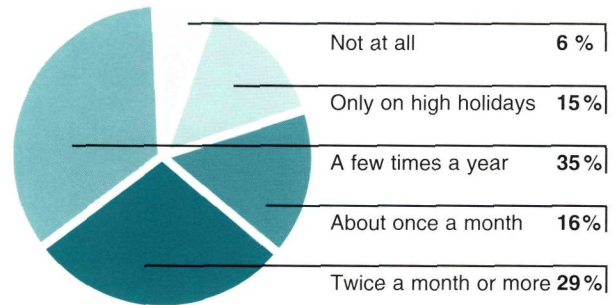
religious services twice a month or more; and less than half of the members attend once a month or more often. A small fraction of the membership does not attend religious services at all.

Members were asked to rate the importance of a variety of considerations in their decision to attend synagogue services. The most important reasons cited are to find spiritual nourishment and to relate to God. Other major considerations cited by respondents were the desire

to set an example for their children and their appreciation of the rabbi.

Chart 43

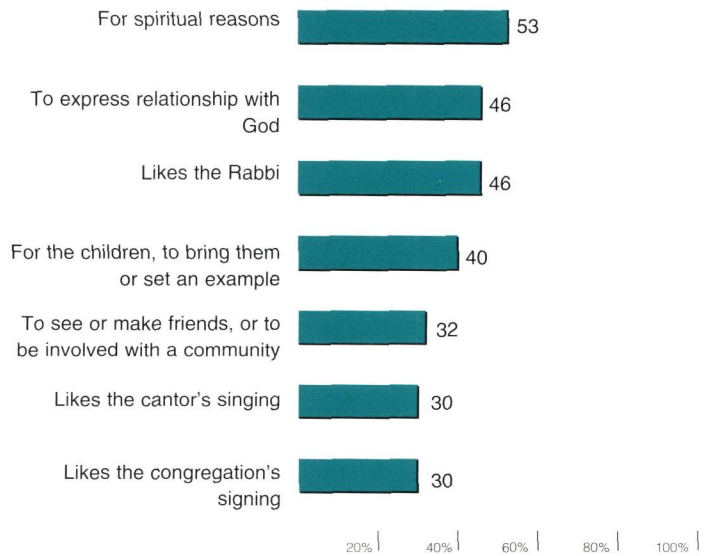
Attendance at Synagogue Religious Services



Source: Membership Survey

Chart 44

Reasons for Attending Services



Numbers are expressed as percentages
Source: Membership Survey

The Impact of an Impending Bar and Bat Mitzvah on Synagogue Attendance

- Almost half of bar and bat mitzvah parents attended synagogue services twice a month or more during the bar or bat mitzvah year.
- Almost 40% of the parents attended services twice a month or more during the year before the bar or bat mitzvah of their child.
- The vast majority of bar and bat mitzvah parents (80%) attended the synagogue for an ordinary Shabbat service with their child during the bar or bat mitzvah year.

Attitudes and Beliefs

An overwhelming majority (80%) of synagogue members say that being Jewish is very important in their lives; however, less than half of the members say that religion is

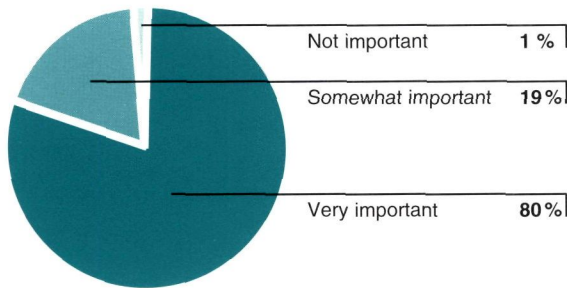
very important in their lives. Most synagogue members (81%) believe (either definitely or probably) that there is a God. However, less than half of the members

(45%) believe that God will reward them for their good deeds or answer their prayers. These attitudes are important because they set the tone for Jewish ritual practices. They

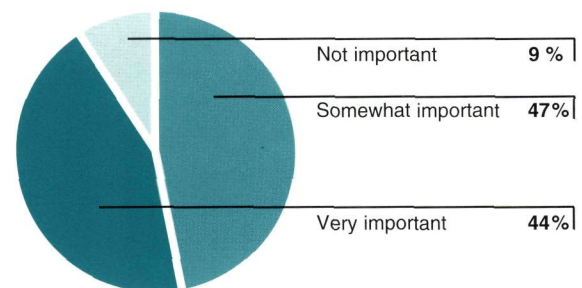
also may account for the relatively low involvement of some members in synagogue activities and their low levels of attendance at religious services.

Chart 45 Importance of Judaism and Religion in One's Life

Being Jewish



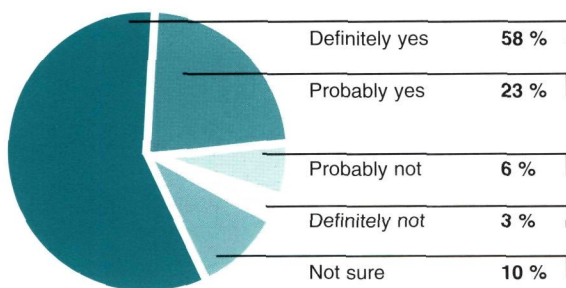
Religion



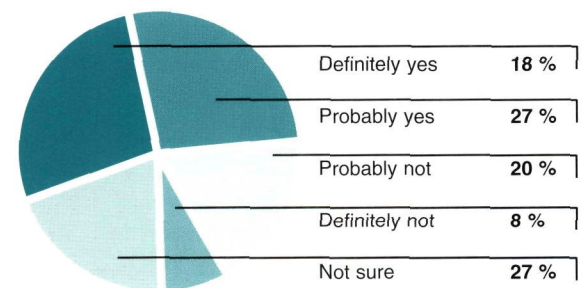
Source: Membership Survey

Chart 46 Belief in God Among Adult Members

There is a God



God will reward you for your good deeds



Source: Membership Survey

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Experience

The Assessment of Young People

The coming-of-age ceremony of bar and bat mitzvah has withstood the general erosion of tradition among North American Jews during the twentieth century. Approximately 17,000-18,000 bar and bat mitzvah celebrations are held annually in Conservative synagogues.

- Despite the fact that almost half of the youngsters we interviewed had to give up sports and social activities to accommodate their training, 99% of the students stated that their bar or bat mitzvah was worth the time it took.
- Ninety percent of the b'nai and b'not mitzvah cited the ceremony as the most important part of the event.
- Fifty-eight percent of the youngsters used the occasion to make a donation to a charity.

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Experience (continued)

The Impact on Families

- Fifty-one percent of parents report that the bar or bat mitzvah dominated their family life during the bar/bat mitzvah year.
- Despite the time and economic pressures, 97% of the parents felt that the bar or bat mitzvah was worth the time and trouble involved.

The Role of the Home Environment in Support of Jewish Education

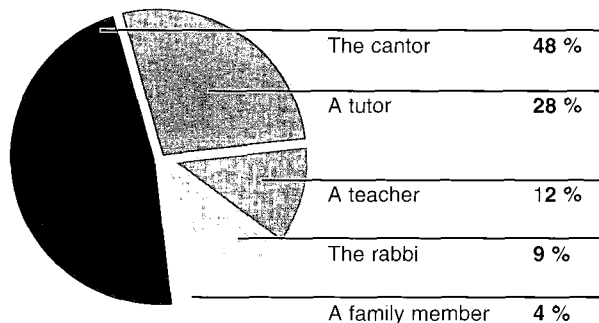
- Sixty-five percent of the parents thought that the younger generation had more knowledge of Judaism at age 13 than they had acquired at the same age.
- Seventy-eight percent of the parents wanted their children to continue their Jewish education.
- Among the students, 69% reported a desire to continue their Jewish education beyond the bar or bat mitzvah to Hebrew high school.
- Ninety-one percent of the bar and bat mitzvah students had five or more years of Jewish education.
- Parents were almost unanimous (95%) in wishing their children to be better educated in Jewish content than themselves.

Most synagogue religious schools insist that training for the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony be done outside the regular school curriculum, usually with the cantor, rabbi or a tutor. Many synagogues also impose synagogue attendance requirements. The median requirement at most congregations we surveyed was a minimum of two years of Shabbat attendance, usually at a junior congregation service, and a minimum of 24 services a year. Many synagogues have additional requirements and programs, and there is a trend toward raising the hurdle for students and families. For example, many synagogues now demand student involvement in Mitzvah or *Tzedakkah* programs where they learn to perform good deeds. Other congregations require project work and

attendance at Shabbat retreats. The new trend toward family education is also very evident and some synagogues have introduced a lengthy series of parent-child-rabbi sessions. These types of programs involve day school as well as supplementary school students. As a result of these initiatives 42 percent of the rabbis report increased teaching and work with children in recent years. The requirements in reality also place demands on parents; 42 percent of the parents reported that they "participated more than usual in the activities of the synagogue" during the bar mitzvah year. Most did not seem to resent this mandatory involvement, and 83 percent of the more involved parents said they would "continue to be actively involved."

Chart 47

Who Trains the B'nai and B'not Mitzvah?

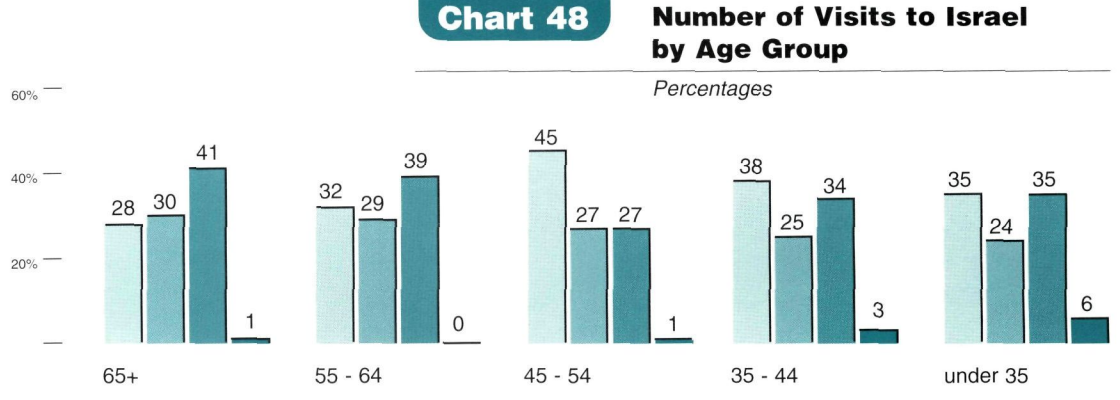


Source: Bar/Bar Mitzvah Survey

Israel

Members under age 45 are more likely than older members to have visited Israel before the age of 22. The higher percentage among younger members is probably due to the availability of organized youth tours to Israel and to the increase in family travel to Israel over the past 20 years.

The frequency of visits to Israel reflects attachment, but it also requires financial means and



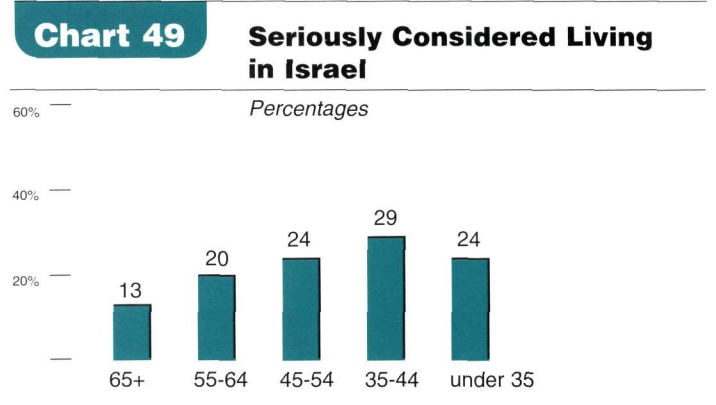
leisure time to afford international travel. Older and more established members can afford the cost

of travel and they also had more years than younger people to make trips to Israel.

Key:
■ Never
■ Once
■ Twice +
■ Born in Israel

Source: Membership Survey

With regard to fulfilling the Zionist commitment to live in Israel, almost 30% of the members in the 35-44 age group have seriously considered living in Israel, compared to only 13% of the 65 and over age group.



Source: Membership Survey

Intermarriage

Interfaith Families in the Synagogue

- Few interfaith couples join Conservative synagogues. In 77% of the synagogues, interfaith couples comprise less than 5% of the membership. In only 11% of the synagogues do interfaith families comprise more than a tenth of the membership.

The Effect of Intermarriage on How Children Are Raised

Among the b'nai mitzvah in our sample who live with both parents, 83% come from endogamous Jewish families in which both parents are Jews by birth; by contrast, 13% of the children live in a home where one parent has converted to Judaism. Only 5% are being

raised in an interfaith family where one parent does not identify as a Jew. Surprisingly, children growing up in interfaith families that join synagogues were more likely to receive a day school education than those raised in families where

both parents are currently Jewish.

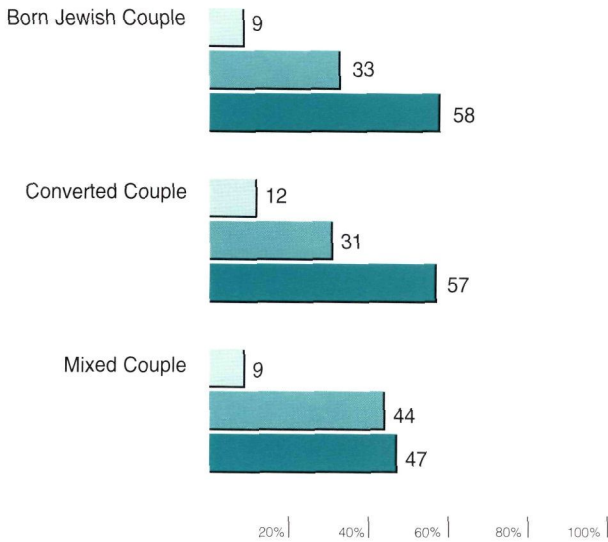
However, when it came to the issue of kosher catering of the bar or bat mitzvah celebration, there was a slight tendency for the born-Jewish couple to pay greater attention to kashrut.

continued

Intermarriage (continued)

Chart 50 The Jewish Education of Children and the Religion of Their Parents

Percentages

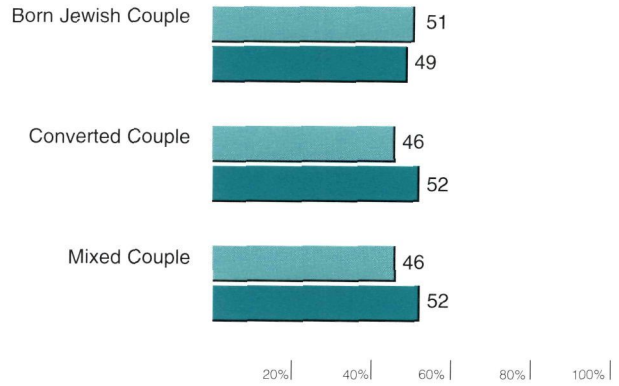


Key: ■ Currently in Day School ■ Was in Day School ■ Supplementary School

Source: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Survey

Chart 51 Was the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Reception Kosher?

Percentages



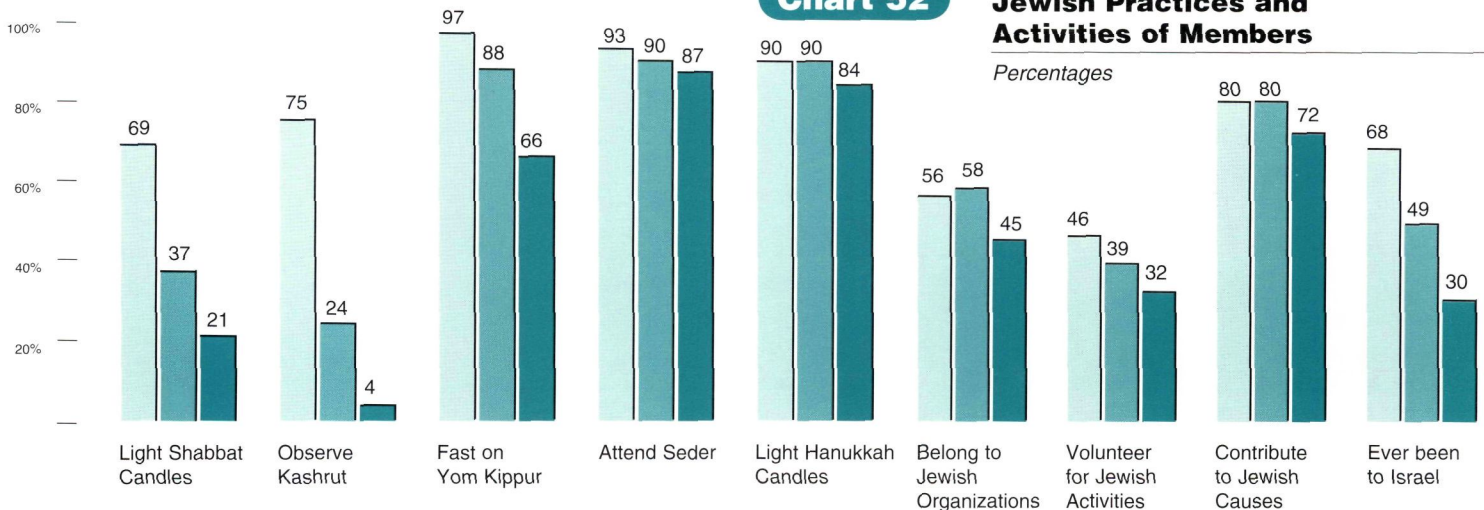
Key: ■ Kosher Family ■ Non-kosher Family

Source: Bar/Bat Mitzvah Survey

A Denominational Comparison

Chart 52 Jewish Practices and Activities of Members

Percentages



Key: ■ Orthodox ■ Conservative ■ Reform

Source: NJPS, 1990

Members of Conservative synagogues are centrally situated within the spectrum of American Jewish life. The centrism of Conservative Jewry is perhaps most

apparent when we examine the Jewish behavior and identity of synagogue members. For almost every measure we use, the Orthodox show the highest

levels of observance and involvement, followed by Conservative and then Reform Jews.

3. Conservative Synagogues

A Profile

In 1995, slightly more than 760 congregations were affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

The size of synagogues varies a great deal. There are small synagogues with a very few membership units, and there are large synagogues with as many as 2,700 membership units. Congregations define membership units in many different ways: they count individuals, married couples, entire families, and

households, as well as variations of these when they enumerate membership units. Overall, 20% of the synagogues have fewer than 200 membership units.

Almost half (48%) of the synagogues have 200-599 membership units; 20% have 600-999 membership units; and 11% have over 1,000 member units.

Overall about half of United Synagogue congregations in the U.S. are in the Northeast; one-fifth are in the South;

15% in the Midwest; 15% in the West. There are 36 United Synagogue congregations in Canada.

Over half (54%) of Conservative congregations are located in the suburbs of large metropolitan areas; 19% are in large urban areas; 20% are in small cities and 7% are in rural areas.

Congregations offer varying types of physical facilities. The overwhelming majority (95%) of Conservative congregations

have religious schools and classrooms in the synagogue. Ninety-three percent of congregations have a library. Only a small fraction of the congregations have recreational facilities such as a gym (15%) or a pool (less than 4%). A small proportion (28%) of the synagogues have a caterer on the premises. These congregations tend to be larger (they have over 600 membership units), and to be located in suburban areas.

Religious Services

Congregations differ in the religious services they provide. Synagogues with older membership populations are more likely to maintain a daily minyan. Smaller congregations, those with fewer than 400 membership units, are most likely to have a late Friday evening service. Moreover, most (79%) of the congregations with 60-100%

older members have late Friday evening service. The larger the congregation, the more likely it is to have Friday evening services at sundown.

Table 7

Congregational Religious Services

Religious Services	% Yes
Friday Evening Service at Sundown	48
Late Friday Evening Service	66
A daily morning minyan	56
Shacharit 1-3 times a week	32
Maariv daily service	51
Shabbat Learner's Service	37
Alternative Shabbat Morning Services	24

Source: Congregational Survey

Attendance

According to the estimates of rabbis, in about 42% of the synagogues, ten percent or less of the membership attends **Shabbat morning services** regularly. Only 22% of Conservative rabbis claim that more than two out of ten of their members attend

Shabbat morning services with regularity, and 35% of rabbis claim that somewhere between 11-20 percent of their congregational membership attends regularly. Rabbis estimate the following rates of attendance when a **Jewish festival day**

(other than the High Holidays) falls on a weekday: In 66% of synagogues fewer than one out of ten members attends; only 11% claim that more than two out of ten congregants attend such festival services.

Personnel

The Rabbi

- The preponderant majority (79%) of rabbis serving in Conservative synagogues were ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.
- Twelve percent were ordained at the Hebrew Union College--Jewish Institute of Religion (Reform) and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.
- Fewer than 10% were ordained at Yeshiva University or other Orthodox seminaries.
- Twenty-two percent of currently active pulpit rabbis were ordained between 1944-65, 41% between 1966-80, and 37% between 1981-95.
- Only 4% of the congregations do not employ rabbis.

The Characteristics of Congregational Personnel

At present, only a few Conservative congregations employ females as senior rabbis, but female rabbis are employed as associate or assistant rabbis in 16 percent of congregations that have such positions.

Larger congregations are most likely to employ an associate or assistant rabbi; 69 percent of the associate or assistant rabbis are in synagogues with 1,000 or more membership units.

The employment of a paid cantor is also associated with the size of the synagogue.

While most (80%) of the small synagogues (those with less than 200 members) do not employ cantors, all the large synagogues, those with 1,000 or more membership units, employ cantors.

Not surprisingly, both youth directors and nursery school directors are most likely to be employed in congregations with young families. They are also more likely to be employed in the larger synagogues, those with 400 or more membership units.

Table 8

Congregational Personnel and Their Gender

Personnel	% Yes	% of those that are Females
Rabbi	96	4
Associate/Assistant Rabbi	11	16
Cantor	64	10
Ritual Director	18	8
Education Director	76	70
Executive Director	45	56
Youth Director	49	61
Program Director	8	67
Nursery School Director	45	96

Source: Congregational Survey

Educational and Religious Programs

Synagogues provide a variety of programs for infants, toddlers, b'nai and b'not mitzvah, and adolescents, as well as serving as a social gathering place for the whole family. Among the educational programs commonly offered are courses introducing students to Judaism, programs for interfaith couples, conversion courses and adult education courses. The types of programs in a particular synagogue are correlated with the age of its members.

Synagogues with a young membership (50-90% of the members are 25-49 years old) are more likely to offer programs for young children--Shabbat programs for toddlers, Shabbat Junior Congregation, and USY meetings. It is hard to tell if the demands of these families create the programs, or if families join synagogues that cater to young families.

Table 9
Synagogue Programs
(Percent offering programs)

Program	Young Membership	Old Membership	Overall
Shabbat Program for toddlers	78	50	69
Shabbat Junior Congregation	85	66	79
USY meetings	80	52	71
An adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah Program	80	58	71
Friday evening meals in the synagogue	86	76	84
A synagogue retreat	30	20	26
A sitdown luncheon on Shabbat	57	63	61
An introduction course to Judaism	61	53	58
Adult Education classes	98	95	97
A conversion course	53	42	49
A program for interfaith couples	21	21	21

Source: Congregational Survey

The Study Design

The North American Study of Conservative Synagogues and Their Members is based upon three new surveys, the reanalysis of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, and ethnographic research. The three new surveys utilized mailing lists provided by the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the congregational arm of the Conservative movement. Not every Conservative synagogue is currently a member of the United Synagogue, but the majority are. Those that are not are difficult to trace. The sampling procedure throughout the project was multi-staged. First, congregations were stratified according to their distribution in the following categories of size: congregations with 800 or more membership units; congregations with 400 - 799 membership units; and synagogues with less than 400 memberships. Samples were then constructed and surveyed as follows:

The 1995-96 Conservative Congregational Survey

The 762 Conservative synagogues in United States and Canada were stratified into the three size groups. One hundred twenty rabbis (or other synagogue representatives) were interviewed over the telephone, representing a proportionate sample from each of these three groups. The interviews were conducted from July until December 1995. The second stage of this study involved mailing 300 revised questionnaires in February 1996 to an additional sample of synagogues. And the third stage consisted of mailing 169 questionnaires in May 1996 particularly to the small synagogues in order to insure their proportional representation. Ultimately, the telephone interviews and mailings yielded **378** completed questionnaires from U.S. and Canadian congregations. Jack Wertheimer and Ariela Keysar designed the questionnaire, supervised the gathering of data, and analyzed the findings for this survey.

The 1995 Conservative Membership Survey

The Membership Survey was designed to insure that any member of a Conservative congregation would have an equal chance to be included in the random sample. Twenty-two congregation in the United States and five in Canada were randomly selected solely on the basis of their proportional membership size. A sample of 100 congregants was then randomly drawn from each congregation. These members were sent a questionnaire in the fall of 1995. In all, 2,200 questionnaires were mailed to members in the United States and 500 to Canadian members. A total of 1,187 were completed and returned by members in the United States and 230 from Canada. In order to increase the response rate, 200 telephone interviews were conducted with members of the original U.S. sample who had not responded to the mailed questionnaire. Overall 1,617 Conservative synagogue members participated in the survey. Steven M. Cohen and Paul Ritterband designed the questionnaire, supervised the gathering of data, and analyzed the findings for this survey.

The 1995 Bar/Bat Mitzvah Survey

A telephone survey was carried out in the Fall of 1995 with a bar or bat mitzvah child and his or her parent. Overall, 115 synagogues of varying sizes cooperated by supplying names, addresses, and telephone numbers of children and parents of the bar and bat mitzvah class of 5755 (September 1994 - September 1995). In total 1,467 families throughout the United States and Canada participated in this survey. The parents of b'nai mitzvah were first informed of the survey by mail. Telephone interviewers then

called to obtain parental permission to interview children. After obtaining parental consent, an interview was scheduled with the bar or bat mitzvah child. Following this, an interview was conducted with one parent, as well. This procedure minimized bias and the potential influence of the parent on the child's responses. Barry A. Kosmin designed the questionnaire, supervised the gathering of data, and analyzed the findings for this survey,

All telephone interviews and mailings for the Membership and Bar/Bar Mitzvah Surveys were conducted by Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas, Inc., a market and opinion research firm. The Congregational Survey employed staff members of the Ratner Center for telephone interviews.

The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey

In order to contextualize findings about Conservative synagogue members, Sidney and Alice Goldstein engaged in a major project to reanalyze the **1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS)**, as well as a dozen local surveys conducted in the past decade.

The 1990 NJPS was a telephone survey based on random digit dialing (RDD) of a representative national sample of 125,813 U.S. households. Following a screening process, 2,444 qualified Jewish households were interviewed. Data were collected on demographic characteristics as well as on the Jewish content of the household and its members. NJPS provides rich data on the Jewish population across all religious denominations and on unaffiliated Jews.

Two ethnographers, Samuel C. Heilman and Riv-Ellen Prell, have each engaged in first-hand observation of Conservative synagogue life. Their direct encounter with Conservative synagogues and their members informed the thinking of the research team, and, in turn, was informed by the survey research. Each ethnographer spent nine months closely studying two congregations, the former in the Northeast and the latter in the Midwest of the United States. These ethnographic reports have yielded the quotations that appear throughout this Highlights report. Their complete studies will constitute a major portion of a book analyzing this entire research project. That book will also include a comparative analysis by Nancy T. Ammerman, a member of the research team, that will situate Conservative synagogues and their members within the landscape of contemporary American religious life.

Questions for Policy Discussion

1. This study has focused sharply on members of Conservative synagogues. And yet, as is apparent from the opening section of Part Two (The Profile), half of all Jews in the United States who identify themselves as Conservative are not currently members of synagogues. Overall, nonmembers are considerably less engaged in other Jewish activities, as well. Should congregations and the Conservative movement strive to get nonmembers to join congregations? Are they the most likely recruits for new members or are they only marginally Conservative and, therefore, not likely to identify strongly with Conservative synagogues? Alternatively, should recruitment efforts focus on members of Reform temples whose patterns of Jewish behavior are similar to those of Conservative synagogue members?
2. There are significant variations in synagogue practices from one region to the another. Canadian congregations are far more apt to retain traditional synagogue practices: They do not permit the playing of musical instruments on the Sabbath, they retain the complete Torah reading, and they are less likely to accord equal participation to women in the religious service. By contrast, congregations in the western region of the United States tend to the opposite practices. How can the movement overcome these regional distinctions? Should it even try to seek uniformity?
3. The overwhelming majority of individuals who join Conservative synagogues belong to family units containing children and two married parents. What, if anything, can and should Conservative congregations do to recruit individuals who do not conform to this model?
4. Members of Conservative synagogues join congregations at different stages in their lives. For many, the time of entry is related to the need to enroll a child in a pre-school or religious school program. Others join at moments of personal stress or inspiration. Still others join when they have more discretionary time. There is also a great deal of variation in the personal religious commitments of synagogue members. Should such diversity be encouraged and viewed as a virtue of Conservative synagogues or should the movement strive to impart a more coherent set of expectations to its members?
5. Our study contains much evidence that more intensive forms of Jewish education translate into the acquisition of skills and stronger levels of Jewish identification. Education, however, is not the key factor accounting for synagogue attendance; the role of parents in bringing children to the synagogue is far more important as a factor in adult attendance. How can synagogues and schools convey this message to parents? And does it conflict with the growing conviction in the Jewish community that intensified Jewish education alone offers the best solution?
6. Our surveys indicate that only small numbers of interfaith families affiliate with Conservative synagogues. And those that do join generally maintain high levels of Jewish commitment. As rates of intermarriage rise, should the Conservative movement work harder to attract interfaith families; or should it conclude that its current levels of expectations attract the more committed interfaith families and discourage the less committed? To what extent do efforts at recruiting interfaith families need to take into account the possibility that the character of Conservative synagogue life may be significantly altered through the addition of many interfaith families?
7. More generally, our findings suggest that levels of commitment to Jewish life, identification with the Conservative movement, and education among synagogue members and their children are all rising even as the percentage of American Jews who identify themselves as Conservative is declining. The Conservative movement is apparently narrowing but intensifying its appeal. It is no longer a "default" option for Jews who are less committed to traditional religious practices and only vaguely identified with the Conservative movement. Has the movement established barriers that are too high, thereby discouraging some from joining? Or should the Conservative movement continue its current course and cut its losses of more marginal Jews? To what extent have marginal members strengthened or weakened the committed?

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