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Chapter 1

Assessing the Vitality of Conservative Judaism in North America

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*Evidence from a Survey
of Synagogue Members*

Studying Conservative Judaism: Its Significance for American Jewry

For many years, pessimism and disappointment have characterized the feelings of many Conservative Jewish leaders toward their own movement. In 1948, in the midst of considerable expansion of Conservative synagogues, and on the brink of the biggest building boom of American Conservative congregations, Rabbi Morris Adler, speaking to the United Synagogue convention, offered the following assessment:

Multitudes of our people are untouched, uninformed, uncovenanted. They have not enough Judaism to live it, nor enough interest to reject it. They go on in routine indifference. Only now and then does some climactic circumstance briefly touch them and evoke a fitful response. Their personal lives are uninfluenced by the fact of their Jewishness. . . . There are others just equally inert, but on the side of Judaism. You find them crowding the membership rolls of our numerous organizations, synagogues and Zionist districts. . . . On the surface they are affiliated, but theirs is a frigid and uninspired affiliation. . . . Unimpassioned themselves, they communicate but little to their children. Theirs is a creed without a color, a faith without a fire. (Adler 1958: 280)

During much of the middle twentieth century, some of even the highest-ranking figures in the Conservative movement saw it as a necessary but unfortunate compromise with modern reality, an imitation of traditional Judaism amidst difficult circumstances. Louis Finkelstein, the renowned president and

later chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1940 to 1972, is reported to have called his own movement “a gimmick to get Jews back to real Judaism.” (His personal problems with Conservatism were apparent in his practice of arriving at Conservative synagogues “*up-gedavent*”—having already said his morning prayers—so as to circumvent the necessity of formally worshiping in congregations whose liturgical practices he must have regarded as religiously defective.)

The downbeat views of Conservative Judaism echo in the words of another intellectual closely attached to the movement. In his classic work on Conservative Judaism, sociologist Marshall Sklare had the following to say about “The Next Conservative Generation”:

The present-day Conservative elite . . . is no longer so confident that its formula will be attractive to the younger generation. There are two aspects to this crisis of confidence. One is the problem of Jewish continuity, the problem of whether the battle against assimilation can be won. . . . In addition . . . Conservatism in recent years has lost its older confidence of being in possession of a formula that can win the support of younger Jews. . . . Rather than having an assured constituency as before, Conservatism finds itself placed under the uncomfortable necessity of winning adherents to its cause, and having to do so without the undergirding of cultural compulsions. . . . The reason for Conservative pessimism resides in the disjunction between its cultural system and that of younger Conservative Jews. (Sklare 1972: 277, 278–279)

Today, the mood within major sectors of the contemporary Conservative movement remains cautious at best, chastened by the anxiety attached to the future of American Jewry at large. That anxiety has been fueled by reports of high and growing rates of intermarriage that emerged from the first analyses of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study (Kosmin et al. 1991). The publication of the preliminary findings marked something of a turning point in the self-perceptions of American Jewry. Communal leaders repeatedly expressed considerable anxiety over the prospects for the very “continuity” of the Jewish group in the United States. If intermarriage rates remain high, and if mixed married families remain distant from Jewish practice and affiliation, prospects for American Jews seem bleak indeed. Even if, as some have argued, the intermarriage rates are, in fact, not quite as high as the early analysts concluded (see Cohen 1994, as well as Kosmin et al. 1991 and Cohen 1995b), the rather downbeat projections are only softened, but not at all reversed. A high and growing intermarriage rate translates, it would seem, into both fewer Jews and less of what might be called Jewish activity ritual practice, institutional support, informal ties, and so forth.

Many believe the Conservative Jewish subsegment of North American Jewry

is hardly immune from these tendencies. Accordingly, if declines in numbers and in levels of Jewish activity (ritual practice, formal affiliation, informal ties) will characterize the Jewish population generally, then we would expect similar trends among Conservative Jewry in particular.

It is in this context that we turn to a close examination of Conservative Judaism in the United States and Canada toward the end of the twentieth century. This context is important not only because it generates pessimistic expectations regarding the vitality of Conservative Jewry. It is also important in that it lends an added significance to this investigation. Against the background of rising intermarriage and its threat to American Jewish continuity, the prospects for Conservative Judaism and Conservative Jewry become critical not only in its own right (which would be reason enough to examine the issues), but also critical for the future of American Jewry in general.

The pivotal position of Conservative Jewry is apparent when we consider simultaneously two very different groups: the Orthodox and the intermarried. Most observers would agree that Orthodoxy has reasonably succeeded in establishing itself in the face of the challenges of modernity. The number of Orthodox Jews and their proportion in the population increases as one moves from middle-aged to younger adult Jews to children. The norms of Orthodoxy have shifted in a traditionalist, more demanding direction, and younger Orthodox Jews often comply with the more stringent norms of Orthodoxy (Liebman 1979; Heilman and Cohen 1989; Soloveitchik 1994). Moreover, retention rates have increased: that is, the percentage of children of Orthodox parents who remain Orthodox in their adulthood has climbed decade by decade. If the American Jewish future is troubled, then from the point of view of sheer continuity, Orthodoxy is the least troubled (however, for a pessimistic assessment of Orthodoxy, see Heilman 1996).

In terms of sheer involvement in ritual practice, organizational affiliation, and informal ties to other Jews, the intermarried are situated at the other extreme from the Orthodox. Study after study has documented the low levels with which the intermarried undertake Jewish ritual observance, affiliate with Jewish institutions, and raise their children as Jews if only in name, let alone as practicing Jews (see, for example, Medding et al. 1992).

Between these two poles—the intermarried being more numerous than the Orthodox—lies what may be called the crucial middle of American Jewish identity, populated heavily by affiliated Conservative and Reform Jews. Sometimes referred to as the “moderately affiliated” (Cohen 1985), these Jews and their offspring, it can be argued, will determine the contours of American Jewry in the twenty-first century. Figure 1.1 displays the number of Jews by denomination and synagogue affiliation, using the data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (Kosmin et al. 1991).

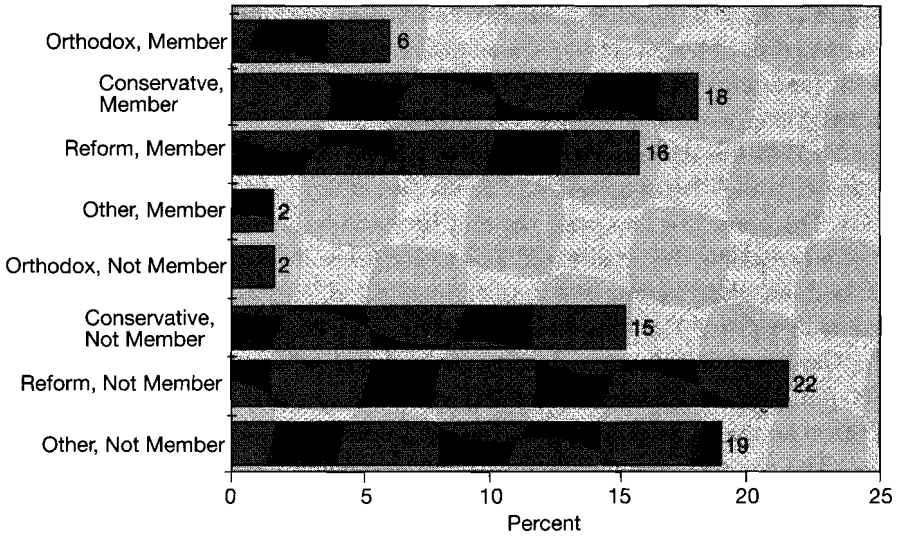


Figure 1.1. American Jewry by Denomination and Synagogue Membership

The population is divided into four denominational groups: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Other (including Reconstructionists and a large number of non-denominationally identified Jews). These, in turn, are divided into synagogue members and nonmembers. The more traditional the denomination, the more likely one is to report synagogue membership. In other words, of the self-identified Orthodox, the vast majority claimed synagogue membership; of the so-called Conservative Jews, a slim majority did so; among the self-declared Reform, a clear majority did not belong to a temple. All told, Orthodox synagogue members constitute about 6 percent of the U.S. Jewish population, as compared with about 18 percent for Conservative synagogue members, 16 percent for Reform members, and 2 percent for “other” members.

Figure 1.2 reports the average level on a total Jewish activity index for each of these groupings (again using data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Study). The index simply takes twenty items from the survey covering rituals, affiliation, friendship, and so forth, and computes a total ranging from zero for those who reported none of these to one hundred for those who reported all.¹

Two trends are clearly apparent. First, all synagogue members are far more active than nonmembers. Even members who are not denominationally affiliated outscore Orthodox Jews who are not members (46 versus 37 on the index). The second outstanding trend is that the level of activity among synagogue members, as well as among nonmembers, follows a denominational gradient from Orthodoxy to Conservative to Reform to “Other.”

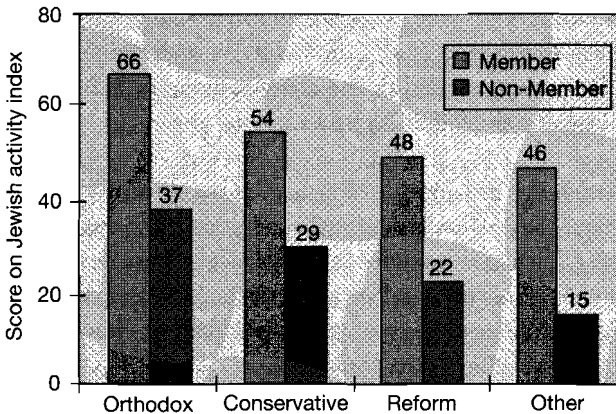


Figure 1.2. Jewish Activity by Denomination and Synagogue Membership

Clearly, Conservative synagogue members occupy a crucial and a central position on the “Jewish identity map” of American (and by extension North American) Jewry. Their number is three times that of Orthodox members; they slightly outnumber Reform synagogue members; and they constitute over two-fifths of all synagogue-affiliated Jews. Beyond their numerical strength, they are critical for another reason: their levels of Jewish involvement. Conservative synagogue members, as a group, are second in Jewish involvement only to their Orthodox counterparts (whom they clearly trail), and are more active than Reform temple members (whom they clearly lead).

All of this argues for their crucial importance for the future of American Judaism. Should Conservative Jews shrink numerically, or should their Jewish involvement decline precipitously, the most active American Jews would consist almost entirely of Orthodox synagogue members (now only 6 percent of all U.S. Jews). Hence, anything said about the strength, health, vitality, and prospects of synagogue-affiliated Conservative Jewry also can be said with modification for North American Jewry as a whole. A declining Conservative Jewry means a declining North American Jewry; a healthy Conservative Jewry virtually guarantees Jewish continuity in North America. The problem for us now is to define more precisely such terms as “strength,” “health,” and “vitality.”

Defining “Vitality”

Undoubtedly, the meaning of the term “vitality” (or “health” or “strength”) as applied to the Conservative Jewish movement in the United States can be the subject of a lengthy philosophic discourse. In this matter, this study’s horizons are limited by the available data. This essay primarily analyzes survey data of

members of North American Conservative synagogue members (although it also looks briefly at survey data of all U.S. Jews). As such, we are limited to quantitative indicators that are tied to the characteristics of individual Jews. In particular, we examine the following issues:

1. *Membership Size and Growth*: How many Jews are affiliated with Conservative synagogues? What has been the direction of change in the proportions affiliating, both as a fraction of the entire Jewish population and as a fraction of synagogue members in particular? Based upon the age contours of Conservative members, is membership likely to change dramatically in character or number in the coming years?
2. *Differentiation from Orthodoxy and Reform*: To what extent is Conservatism differentiated from Orthodoxy and Reform? The question takes on significance in light of the concerns of some Conservative leaders that Orthodoxy and Reform represent competition from the ideological right and left, respectively. Orthodoxy may draw off some of Conservatism's more traditional members, even as the Reform movement may encroach upon the Conservative constituency from the left. A Conservative movement that is more differentiated from its denominational counterparts figures to experience fewer losses to either side, although at the same time it may also pick up fewer erstwhile members of the Orthodox or Reform movements.

Observers have noted that more observant Conservative Jews are restrained from transferring over to the Orthodox in large part because of their (and the movement's) commitment to egalitarian treatment of women in Judaism, a feature almost unavailable in Orthodox synagogues. On the other side of the spectrum, owing to Reform's recent embrace of traditionalism, Reform leaders have argued that the two constituencies greatly overlap, and that many Conservative Jews ought to feel equally comfortable in Reform temples.

Accordingly, we would want to examine those issues or practices that distinguish the movements and assess the extent to which Conservative Jews are indeed different from their counterparts to the ideological left and right. To what extent is the Conservative constituency really more observant than the Reform constituency? To what extent are Conservative Jews, particularly the most observant, committed to egalitarianism?

3. *Ritual Observance and Synagogue Involvement*: The extent to which Conservative congregants practice key rituals and are active is at the core of the question of vitality. Beyond the question of current levels of such activities, we are interested in their direction of change. Accordingly, to provide some indication of likely future trends in terms of the Judaic "quality" of

Conservative congregants, we may compare younger with older Conservative Jews in terms of ritual practice and synagogue participation. In addition, we may compare current congregants with their parents (based on retrospective reports) to ascertain trends in ritual observance over generations, asking: to what extent are today's Conservative congregants more or less observant than their parents, and in what ways?

4. *Jewish Education*: Aside from asking whether they can read a siddur, the data we collected provide no direct evidence on how much congregants actually know about Judaism. We did, however, collect quite a large amount of information about the formal and informal Jewish educational experiences of Conservative synagogue members. To what extent, and in what ways, are younger congregants more or less learned than the older members whom they will inevitably replace with the passing of the years?
5. *Denominational Identity and Attachment*: To what extent have Conservative Jews developed a sense of attachment to their denomination as distinctive from Orthodoxy and Reform? The rise in Conservative denominational identity is, in fact, a relatively recent phenomenon, which some historians date to some years following the emergence of movement consciousness among Orthodox and Reform Jews. When the overwhelming majority of synagogue-affiliated Jews were Conservative Jews, as they were in the 1940s and 1950s, it made little sense for them to think of themselves as a distinct movement within American Judaism. For many intents and purposes, they were American Judaism. To what extent have Conservative Jews indeed developed a strong attachment to their own movement, accompanied by a rejection of Orthodoxy and Reform? Is that attachment, such as it may be, likely to deepen and widen with the maturation of currently younger Conservative Jewish adults?

Taking these criteria together, they amount to an operational definition of a vital Conservative movement. Such a movement is one which is substantial in size and growing larger, maintains strong differentiation from competing denominations, and is characterized by high and mounting rates of ritual observance, synagogue involvement, Jewish education, and ideological affirmation.

Beyond these criteria, one other issue is worthy of mention and examination. To forecast our findings a bit, we will see that rising rates of Jewish education and rising levels of intermarriage exert significant influence on the vitality of Conservative Judaism. Not surprisingly, their impacts are very different from one another. We need to examine the relative strength of these two contrary tendencies, as well as their interaction, to refine our understanding of the vitality of the movement or, more precisely, its prospects. In bald terms, to what extent has expanded Jewish educational participation by younger Conservative Jews

offset the clearly deleterious and growing impact of intermarriage? A healthy movement, then, is also one that can contend with the major forces affecting its character, which, in this case, include most prominently Jewish education and intermarriage.

A Survey of North American Conservative Synagogue Members

To address these complex questions, this essay relies upon a random sample social survey, with both advantages and limitations for the purposes of this study. In 1995, the Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism surveyed 1,617 members of 27 Conservative congregations in the United States and Canada. It addressed concerns pertinent to the study of Conservative Jews, their identity, and their relationship to their congregations. The study is the most comprehensive survey of Conservative congregants in North America to date.

To what extent is the Ratner Center sample representative of affiliated Conservative Jews? Comparisons of items found in both the Ratner and the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, (Kosmin et al. 1991; Goldstein 1992; Goldstein and Goldstein 1996) facilitate the identification of possible sample biases in the Ratner survey (see table 1.1). With respect to most Jewish identity characteristics, the Ratner Center survey is reasonably representative and unbiased. However, it departs from representativeness with respect to three issues.

First, the Ratner sample underrepresents Conservative congregants in certain major metropolitan areas. Within the United States, the New York region is represented by just one congregation (out of the twenty-two sampled across the country). In Canada, the random sampling procedures managed to pick all five congregations outside Toronto and Montreal, Canada's two largest Jewish population centers. The reasons for these departures from randomness are straightforward: we selected synagogues controlling for size and country, obtaining the appropriate balance between the United States and Canada, as well as among congregations that are small, medium, and large in size (under 400 units, 400–799 units, and 800 or more family units). However, we did not impose any further sampling constraints, and felt obligated to live with the luck of the draw.

Second, the sample overrepresents socially upscale congregants, that is, those with higher levels of education and income. We believe this feature derives from our primary reliance on a mail-back survey, rather than prohibitively costly telephone interviews (although, of the 1,617 respondents, 200 were, in the end, interviewed by telephone). Numerous methodological investigations have demonstrated that more highly educated individuals tend to return written survey instruments at a higher rate than others.

Finally, the sample underrepresents congregants under the age of thirty-five.

Table 1.1

Comparison of NJPS with Ratner Center Survey on Selected Variables

	<i>(respondents who belong to Conservative synagogues)</i>	
	NJPS	RATNER CENTER
Age		
65+	36	29
55-64	13	15
45-54	16	27
35-44	21	25
Less than 35	14	4
Sex		
Men	47	45
Women	53	55
Generation		
First (immigrant)	11	10
Second (child of immigrant(s))	47	40
Third (parents American-born)	34	41
Fourth (3-4 grandparents native)	9	9
Men's education		
Graduate school	30	57
BA	34	24
Less	36	20
Women's education		
Graduate school	19	40
BA	29	28
Less	52	32
Denomination raised (Jews only)		
Orthodox	34	26
Conservative	56	57
Reform	7	11
Other	3	6
Jewish education (main form)		
Day school	14	6
Part-time (2+ times a week)	48	49
Sunday	17	17
None or tutor only	21	28
Fasts Yom Kippur	87	79
Lights Sabbath Candles	35	56
Kosher Dishes	27	31
Spouse Jewish	92	95
Been to Israel		
Never	50	37
Once	27	28
Twice or more, or born there	23	36

We cannot be sure of the reasons for this bias. Perhaps the particular congregations we sampled have relatively few members who are so young. Perhaps younger members were underrepresented on the congregational lists that were, of necessity, about a year out of date by the time we processed them. Perhaps younger adults are busier or less interested in completing ten-page questionnaires, be it on their Conservative Jewish identity or on other matters.

Membership Size and Growth

Concerns about the numerical stability of the Conservative movement date back at least twenty years, if not more. Writing in 1979, Liebman and Shapiro concluded: “The Conservative movement of the 1970s resembled Orthodoxy of fifty years ago: an appearance of numerical strength but the absence of a strong infrastructure. Conservative Judaism as the mass movement of American Jews might be a peculiarly second generation American Jewish phenomenon” (1979: 1, 22, cited in Wertheimer 1987: 133). More recently, Wertheimer was equivocal about whether the movement has indeed attracted “sufficient numbers of third- and fourth-generation Jews” to replace the aging (and dying) members of their parents’ generation. On the one hand, he writes, “There is evidence that Conservative congregations are gradually attracting younger people.” On the other, the signs of rejuvenation of some congregations, he opines, “cannot entirely forestall the numerical decline of Conservative synagogues during the last decades of the twentieth century” (Wertheimer 1993: 134).

These concerns can be reduced to some very straightforward questions: How many Conservative Jews are there in the population? Do they seem poised for growth or decline? How do they compare to the Reform movement, the other major denominational choice of North American Jews? The answers to these critical questions are contained in the findings in the NJPS portrayed in figure 1.3.

We learn that, whatever the future may hold, the number of Conservative Jews affiliated with a congregation still exceeds their Reform counterparts. A total of 907,000 Jewish individuals are in families affiliated with Conservative synagogues as opposed to 834,000 affiliated with Reform temples. Of course, the sheer distribution by denomination offers only a static portrait of this phenomenon. For a sense of trends, of changes in denominational affiliation over time, we may turn to distributions by age.

Among the synagogue affiliated, the rate of Conservative affiliation has eroded fairly steadily over the years, dropping from 51 percent of those 65 and over, to 47 percent of those 55–64, 44 percent of those 45–54, and 38 percent of those 35–44. (This inference presumes that static age distributions in 1990 are a reflection of a dynamic process of affiliation choices over the previous 30–40 years.) The Conservative market share is somewhat higher among the 18–34 year olds (42 percent) and a little lower among those under 18 (37 percent). Clearly, the Conservative age distribution is “top-heavy” with a large number of congregants 65 and older (almost twice as many as in Reform temples). This datum suggests that as a result of anticipated mortality or migration to retirement areas, the movement may expect significant losses in dues-paying mem-

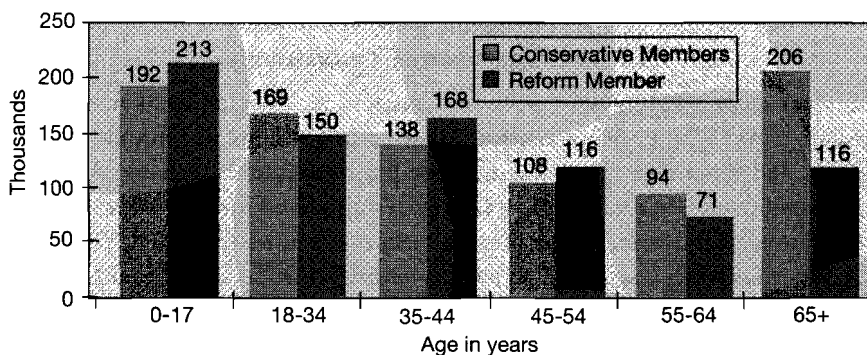


Figure 1.3. Conservative and Reform Jews by Age

bers in the next decade or so. Of course, some individual synagogues will grow significantly; but across the continent, the large number of Conservative elderly will translate into shrinkage in total North American levels of affiliation with Conservative synagogues, barring unforeseen countervailing tendencies.

These remarks notwithstanding, below age 65, the age pattern shows something of a reversal. Between the ages of 35 and 64, the Conservative movement is “bottom-heavy” with many more younger adults than relatively older adults. Of those 55–64 (born during the low-birthrate years of 1926–35), only 94,000 are Conservative synagogue members, as opposed to 138,000 members 35–44 years old (born during the postwar baby boom decade of 1946–55).

These patterns suggest two parallel trends in the near-term future for the Conservative movement: (1) a decline in absolute numbers of members, coupled with (2) a more youthful character to its membership, or, more precisely, a sharp decline in elderly members. From the vantage point of numbers of members alone, then, the Conservative movement cannot be seen as particularly “vital” or “healthy.” But sheer membership size alone is not the only criterion of health; North American Orthodoxy must be regarded as a very successful movement despite its small size (among synagogue-affiliated Jews, roughly a third of the Conservative or Reform memberships). The claim for the success of Orthodoxy is based on such issues as commitment, piety, knowledge, education, cohesiveness, and other such qualitative matters. How the Conservative movement is performing and how it will perform in these areas is the concern of the remainder of this study.

Differentiation from Reform: A More Observant Constituency

To what extent and in what ways are Conservative Jews different from their counterparts in other denominations, that is, congregants in Orthodox synagogues and Reform temples? The next section explores the extent and nature of commitment to egalitarianism, a vital issue that sets off the Conservative from the Orthodox movement. The present section examines the extent to which Conservative synagogues appeal to families who are ritually more committed than those found in Reform temples. Evidence of considerable overlap in terms of ritual practice would point to a future of greater competition with Reform. Evidence of differentiation would suggest that the Conservative movement has less to fear from an exodus to the Reform left, but also less to hope for by way of appealing to a more observant subgroup within Reform temples. (To be sure, the contours of observance are not the only factors that affect the extent to which the Reform-Conservative boundary is porous or sealed tight.)

The findings reported in table 1.2 and figure 1.4 derive from the 1990 NJPS.² They refer to synagogue members only, excluding those who say they identify with a particular denomination, but have not joined a temple or synagogue.³ The data point to some areas of overlap, where members of all three movements—the Orthodox data are provided for comparison purposes—are almost equally active. For other measures, we find a clear (and anticipated) gradient where Orthodox Jews are more active than the Conservative, and both are more active than Reform congregants. Sometimes, the true break is between the highly active Orthodox and Conservative members versus the less active Reform group; and in others the Orthodox are sharply differentiated from the much less active Conservative and Reform congregants.

Clearly practices vary in terms of the frequency with which they are observed. Practices can be divided into “easy,” “moderate,” and “hard” categories, in line with a descending order of frequency, from most to least frequently observed. The denominationally related patterns generally align with the popularity of the practices. The “easy” practices (attending a Passover seder of any sort, lighting Hanukkah candles, having at least some close friends who are Jewish, and some indicators of Jewish organizational affiliation) are performed by members of all three major denominations with roughly equally high frequencies. The “hard” practices (fasting on the Fast of Esther) sharply differentiate the Orthodox from the other two denominations. And the “moderate” practices (e.g., Shabbat candle lighting, kashrut, indicators of intensive organizational involvement, having mostly Jewish friends, High Holiday attendance, never having Christmas trees, celebrating Israel Independence Day) are those where we find an orderly denominational gradient, with rates among the Orthodox lead-

Table 1.2
Selected Jewish Identity Measures by Denomination

	<i>(Synagogue Members Only)</i>		
	ORTHODOX	CONSERVATIVE	REFORM
Has a Passover Seder	88	92	91
Lights Hanukkah candles	89	94	90
Attends High Holiday services	91	91	82
Does not have a Christmas tree	94	92	81
Fasts on Yom Kippur	92	87	70
Celebrates Purim	61	48	53
Lights candles on Friday night	71	38	28
Celebrates Yom Ha-Atzmaut	37	38	31
Buys kosher meat only	76	29	10
Has two sets of dishes	73	28	10
Is Shomer Shabbat	60	15	12
Observes the Fast of Esther	46	3	1
Donates at least \$100 to a Jewish charity	68	51	53
Belongs to a Jewish organization	52	52	49
Reads a Jewish newspaper	48	47	43
Has been to Israel	59	48	28
Donates at least \$100 to the UJA yearly	28	27	35
Does volunteer work for a Jewish organization	33	27	22
Belongs to two Jewish organizations	38	29	27
Donates at least \$500 to a Jewish charity yearly	43	22	19
Lives in a Jewish neighborhood	90	80	75
Some close friends are Jewish	92	92	89
Most friends are Jewish	79	64	48

SOURCE: NJPS

ing those among the Conservative members who in turn surpass their Reform counterparts.

In terms of ritual observance,⁴ Conservative Jews are clearly unlike Reform Jews. In ten of the twenty-three items in table 1.2, the Conservative congregants' rates exceed those of the Reform congregants by five percentage points or more. The former lead the latter on all but three of the measures, and differ considerably on just under half the measures. These data are consistent with the classic observation that Conservative Jews are situated somewhere between Reform and Orthodox Jews. However, they lend no support to the impression that Conservative and Reform Jews hardly differ at all. In fact, using the very crude tools of

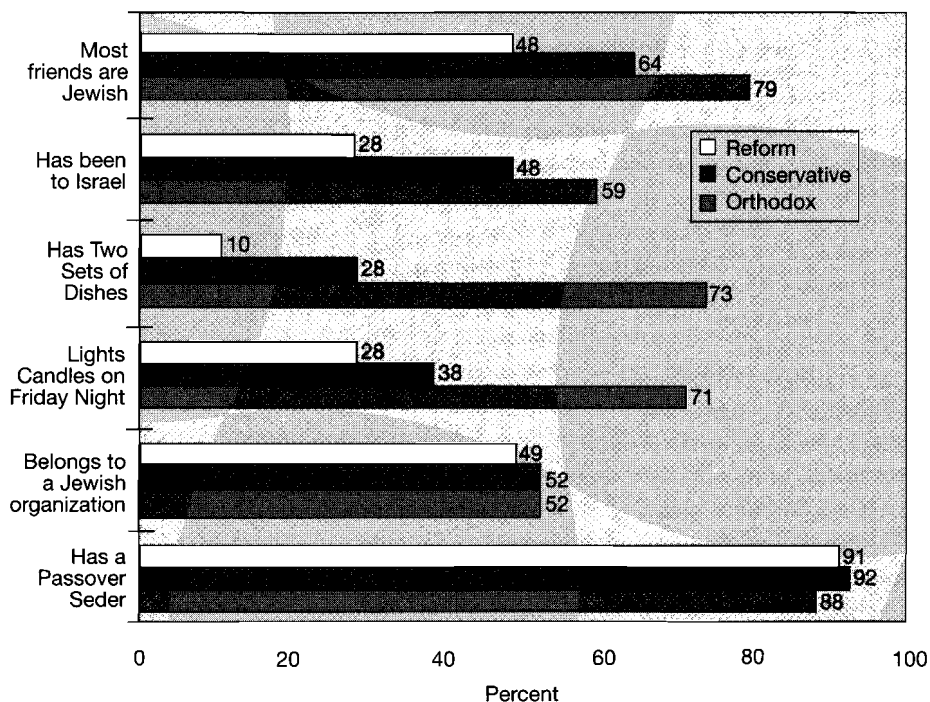


Figure 1.4. Selected Jewish Identity by Denomination (Synagogue Members Only)

comparison here, it may be said that, on the whole, across several measures of Jewish involvement, *Conservative Jews are almost as different from Reform Jews as they are from their Orthodox counterparts.*

Given these implicit cultural boundaries between the denominations, they suggest that many (though certainly not all) Conservative Jews would find Reform congregations unappealing owing to their relatively lower levels of observance. The same may be said for Orthodox Jews with respect to most Conservative congregations. To be sure, these data present only a very limited and narrow portrait of the cultural variations that set off one denomination from another. But even with this limitation, they do establish that Conservatism is, for better or worse, distinctive both from Reform to its ideological left, and, as we shall see in even greater depth in the next section, from Orthodoxy to its right.

Differentiation from Orthodoxy: The “Women’s Issue”

Over the years, and particularly during the first half of the twentieth century, little distinguished many Conservative congregations from many nominally Or-

thodox congregations. As opposed to Reform temples of the time, both sorts of congregations prayed in Hebrew, uttering almost the same words, using essentially the same melodies; male congregants wore kippot and tallitot; rabbis affirmed the centrality of Shabbat, kashrut, and halakha; and congregants surreptitiously violated rabbinic teachings, even as they rhetorically affirmed their sacred validity. Conservative scholars enjoyed a measure of respect from some Orthodox counterparts, and the Jewish Theological Seminary trained a significant number of students from Orthodox homes. In fact, in most respects, Conservatism could be seen as a modernized version of Orthodoxy, where differences were, in some eyes, arguably more aesthetic than fundamental.

With all this said, one critical difference separated most Conservative from most Orthodox synagogues, as early as the 1920s (Sarna 1987: 380). Conservative synagogues allowed for mixed seating, in contravention of the traditional separation of men and women in worship, with women often relegated to a peripheral section of the sanctuary. In the early 1980s, the gulf between Orthodoxy and Conservatism around the treatment of women widened even further as the Conservative movement accepted women for rabbinical training and for cantorial school. In the period leading up to that decision, many congregations had begun counting women in the minyan and permitted them to assume major liturgical roles that traditionally had been reserved for men.

Certainly by the 1980s, the largely egalitarian stance of the Conservative movement served to mark a clear boundary with the Orthodox. In the past, most differences between the two could be chalked up to Conservative concessions to the demands of modernity. In contrast, the egalitarian stance constituted the first major distinction with Orthodoxy where Conservative leaders could point to a clear difference of principle, rather than a surrender to the pressures of a religiously lax constituency.

Although we have no survey data on the position of Orthodox Jews regarding the participation of women in religious leadership and liturgical roles, we can be sure that Orthodoxy almost universally retains traditional prohibitions against women functioning in such a fashion, even as a few institutions struggle to expand women's roles in Orthodoxy. In contrast, Conservative leaders have proudly claimed that the treatment of women constitutes a distinctive difference between their movement and Orthodoxy.

Liebman and Shapiro (1979) were more equivocal over whether the innovations in the treatment of women were so healthy for the movement. Their study of Conservative congregants found that the most traditional and the most active congregants were among the staunchest opponents of egalitarianism. Has the situation changed since then? Widespread support of egalitarianism among Conservative congregants may help distinguish the movement from Orthodoxy;

but if more observant congregants are unhappy with egalitarianism, then the movement may also be paying a price in the diminished enthusiasm of its potentially most committed members.

The two key questions to be examined, then, are (1) What is the extent of support for egalitarian treatment of men and women, and (2) To what extent is that support confined to the more liberal sectors of the movement?

With regard to "Jewish religious services," an overwhelming majority of respondents (85 percent) agreed that "women should have the same rights as men." We also asked about the more controversial issue of women serving as rabbis. Here, as many as 71 percent would not object to having a woman as a rabbi of their congregation, while just 15 percent would object (14 percent were unsure).

Clearly, the congregants widely support the move to egalitarian treatment of women in Conservative Judaism. But who exactly are the supporters or opponents of this tendency? Are the more traditional less supportive, as Liebman and Shapiro found almost two decades ago? Does the support come more from younger people or from women?

To examine these questions, we constructed an index of egalitarianism out of the two questionnaire items noted above. An "egalitarian" was defined as someone who agreed with equal treatment of men and women and had no objections to a woman serving as a rabbi in his or her congregation. "Traditionalists" were defined as those who provided neither egalitarian answer (we assumed that those who answered unsure, in this pro-egalitarian social context, were in fact indicating traditionalist sentiments).

Women are only slightly more egalitarian-minded than men (71 percent of the women versus 63 percent of the men qualified as egalitarian). Perhaps surprisingly, women's participation in Conservative congregations is not an issue that sharply divides male from female congregants. We also find scarcely any relationship with age. From age 35 and older, attitudes on women's participation are uniformly and overwhelmingly favorable, ranging from a split between egalitarians and traditionalists of 72 percent to 13 percent among those 35-44, and 63 percent to 14 percent of those 65 and over. However, those below age 35 take a somewhat less one-sided position, where just 53 percent are egalitarian versus 19 percent who are traditionalist. Although the egalitarians still outnumber the traditionalists by a wide margin, the balance between the two groups is nowhere as lopsided as that among those 35 and over. These results testify to the unusual nature of the few congregants under 35, who, unlike almost all their age-peers, have officially joined Conservative congregations.

Finally, the original results found by Liebman and Shapiro (1979) are repeated almost two decades later, as more observant and more active members are less enthusiastic about women's participation than their less involved counterparts. With respect to an index of ritual practice, those least active report

Table 1.3
Attitudes Toward Women's Participation by Ritual Observance

	Ritual Observance			
	VERY LOW	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
Egalitarian	72	71	62	55
Mixed	19	19	22	19
Traditionalist	9	10	16	26
Total	100	100	100	100

egalitarian attitudes somewhat more often than the most ritually active (72 percent versus 55 percent). Smaller differences, although in the same direction, characterize infrequent versus frequent attenders at synagogue services. Clearly, the more observant and the more active are somewhat more reserved about the distinctive Conservative position regarding women's participation, although it must be emphasized that majorities of even the most observant group of Conservative congregants still favor egalitarian positions.

In any event, the broad endorsement of egalitarianism does help set the Conservative movement apart from Orthodoxy, even if those whose practices mark them as closer to Orthodoxy may share some sympathies with Orthodoxy's more traditional stance.

A "Mapping" of Jewish Activity in the Home and Synagogue

Jews may partake of a variety of activities at home and in the synagogue that, to varying extents, express their piety, communal involvement, and cultural proficiency. They may practice rituals, attend services, perform a number of liturgical functions available to lay people, socialize with fellow congregants, partake of a variety of synagogue activities, assume congregational leadership, and make charitable financial contributions. Given that not everybody is equally active, and not everybody is active in the various areas to the same relative extent, the question arises as to the extent to which active congregants are "specialists" or "generalists." Specialists are those who choose to be especially active in only one or two areas, to the exclusion of all else. Generalists are those who essentially are equally active in all possible areas of Jewish involvement, at home and in the synagogue. Before examining the extent to which Conservative congregants conform to movement norms by participating in Jewish life at home and in the synagogue—a topic to which we shall turn shortly—we would do well to examine how the alternative dimensions of Jewish activity are related.

The Ratner Center survey asked respondents about a very large number and a diverse collection of practices, activities, and affiliations. The empirical clustering

of certain items is evidence of an underlying factor or dimension. Thus, to illustrate, the analysis demonstrated that Yom Kippur fasting, having kosher dishes, lighting Shabbat candles, and building a Sukkah are more related to one another than they are to the two dozen or so other activities about which the respondents were questioned. This pattern suggests that these items stand for some larger concept, such as “ritual observance” (the choice of what to call such a cluster is a judgment call). Thus, the relationships among the numerous diverse activities included in the questionnaire are themselves of some intrinsic interest in that they help define the major dimensions of Jewish activity in the Conservative home and synagogue. In point of fact, the analysis isolated seven key dimensions of Jewish activity, each of which embraces one or more activities, as follows:

1. *Ritual Observance*: fasting on Yom Kippur, kosher dishes, Shabbat candle-lighting, and building a Sukkah.
2. *Synagogue Attendance*: a single item that moderately correlated with a large number of items from other dimensions.
3. *Liturgical Activity*: chanting the haftarah, chanting from the torah, leading the service, and giving a *d'var torah*.⁵
4. *Informal Associations*: attendance at congregants' life-cycle celebrations, having friends in the congregation, having Shabbat dinner with congregants.
5. *Synagogue Activities*: participation at lectures, classes, social action programs, family programs, men's club, sisterhood, social activities, and family Shabbat services.
6. *Leadership Activities*: serving on the board; attending board and committee meetings.
7. *Charitable Donations*: Contributing financially to the synagogue, and to other Jewish causes.

As table 1.4 reports, all dimensions but charitable donations are moderately to substantially correlated with one another. That is, one sort of activity leads to another: the more ritually active attend services more often; the frequent worshippers more often undertake liturgical activities (obviously, one can hardly give a *d'var torah* unless one attends services); all these activities are also related to having informal ties to other congregants (the ritually observant invite each other to their homes for dinner; those who regularly attend services make friends with other congregants; and so forth); those who participate in a variety of synagogue activities come to serve in leadership capacities in the congregation; and so on. Sociologists call this phenomenon “the more, the more.” The rabbis had a more elegant formulation: “*mitzvah goreret mitzvah*,” or performing one commandment brings (literally, drags) another.

Table 1.4
Correlations Among Jewish Identity Scales

	Rituals	Attends Services	Liturgy	Informal Ties	Synagogue Activities	Leader	Donor	Total Index ^a
Home Rituals	1.00	0.41	0.25	0.34	0.31	0.19	0.15	0.62
Attends Services		1.00	0.35	0.46	0.45	0.33	0.12	0.74
Liturgy			1.00	0.31	0.24	0.23	0.12	0.58
Informal Ties				1.00	0.55	0.36	0.21	0.74
Synagogue Activities					1.00	0.49	0.08	0.75
Leadership						1.00	0.13	0.64
Donor							1.00	0.19
Total Index								1.00

a The total index comprises the first six scales. Since the "donor" scale bore much weaker relationships with the other six indices, it was excluded from the Total Index.

Although six of the dimensions were correlated with each other, they all bore only weak relationships with making charitable donations.⁶ Apparently, this is the one area in which we can speak of specialists: those who are the most financially generous are not necessarily the most active or connected with the congregation; and those who are the most active in a variety of ways have only a slightly greater tendency than others to donate to the congregation and other Jewish causes.

For some observers, the finding that synagogue leadership activity is correlated with ritual practice and liturgical activities may strike them as somewhat counterintuitive. While it may make perfect sense that the ritually active attend services more, a widely held image of Conservative synagogue board members argues in the other direction. According to this image, board members are recruited or drawn to service for reasons connected with their recognized leadership capacities that entail higher (secular) education, higher social status, and greater wealth. If so, then one would not expect board members to be especially active in terms of ritual practice at home, attendance at services, and possibly other matters. How do, in fact, the congregations' board members (past and present)⁷ differ from others?

Board members are indeed far more active in all areas of Jewish home and congregational life than those who have never served on the board (see figure 1.5). The differences are generally so large that twice as many board members are highly active in a given area than others. Ritual observance is the least dramatic difference, where 19 percent of board members are highly observant as compared with 13 percent for others. The results here not only demonstrate the higher levels of activity in all areas by board members; they also strengthen the point made earlier about the relationships between conceptually distinct dimensions of Jewish activity. Those who score high in one area tend to score higher

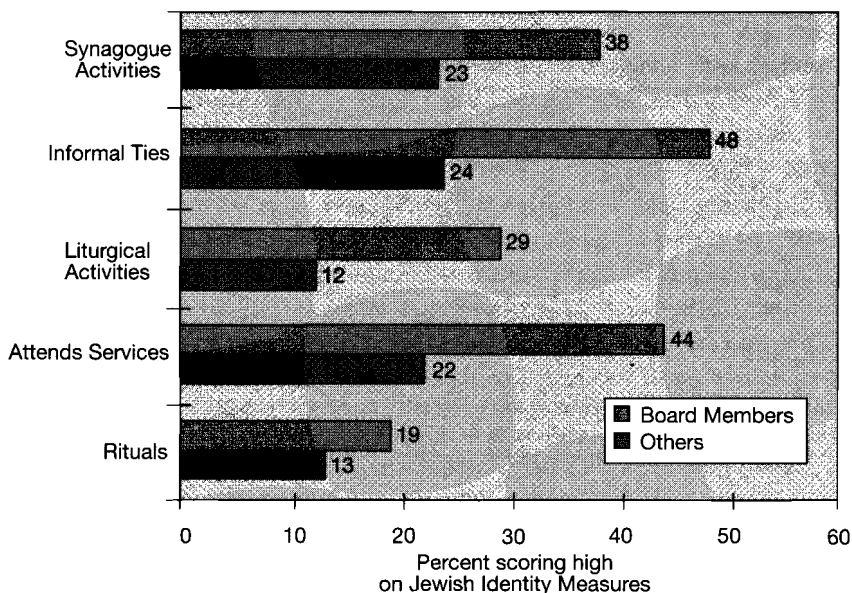


Figure 1.5. Jewish Identity Measures for Board Members and Others

in other areas, even if the areas are seemingly as remote as serving as a board member and practicing rituals.

The extent to which the six dimensions of Jewish activity are correlated suggests that it is analytically and conceptually reasonable to construct a single measure of Jewish activity at home and in the synagogue based upon the six dimensions with moderate intercorrelations. For each of the dimensions, the analysis focuses on the percent below the percent scoring high in any given dimension, an arbitrary cut-off point generally representing the most active sixth to third of the respondents. To examine overall involvement in Jewish activities, the analysis uses a summary index that combines all six intercorrelated indices of Jewish activity. This summary measure refers to the percent who scored high on at least three of the six dimensions.

Age-Related Differences in Jewish Activity

The best available evidence we have with which to forecast the near-term trends in the Conservative movement is found in the differences between younger and older adults. The logic here is that, inevitably, younger adults come to replace older cohorts. As a result, the entire population will come to more closely resemble today's younger adults, and depart from the characteristics of the older

generation. Indeed, the logic of cohort replacement has special relevance here. The expectation that North American Jews are experiencing increasing assimilation (whatever that might mean), and that, by extension, the Conservative movement is experiencing similar tendencies, carries with it the idea that cohort replacement is the main engine of change. That is, assimilation is thought to affect younger adults, with higher rates of intermarriage, than older adults. Over time, as the younger adults age, their lower levels of Jewish involvement ought to bring about overall declines in the aggregate level of Jewish involvement in the entire population including the Conservative movement—or so proponents of the assimilation perspective would argue.

Of course, there is nothing at all foolproof with this reasoning. The unfolding of events over time can produce changes in the entire population that are distinct from cohort replacement. For example, the increased interest in Israel after 1967 and the more recent decline in the 1990s of political activity as an expression of Jewish engagement are phenomena that affected all Jews, and not primarily younger or older Jews. These important and profound changes transpired by ways other than cohort replacement.

Still, other problems complicate the use of age-related variations as a predictor of future trends. In particular, interpreting differences between older and younger adults is not entirely straightforward. Individuals of different ages may differ not merely because some were born to a different time than the others; rather, life-cycle factors (in this case, the presence of school-age children) may explain age-related variations. In other words, younger people may be more (or less) active not because they are intrinsically different than older people and can be expected to maintain their levels of activity as they age. Rather, they may be more or less involved because of their particular stage in life. The very youngest adults may be uninvolved because many are starting careers or families, or because they have recently arrived in their communities. Other relatively young adults may be active in part because of the presence of school-age or bar mitzvah-age children at home. And, to be fair, these are only some of the most outstanding reasons to be cautious about predicting the future on the basis of the distinctive characteristics of the younger adults. All this is to say that old-young comparisons from data collected at one point in time offer clues as to future trends, but the clues are far from clear or decisive.

With these cautionary notes in mind, we can proceed to examine the Jewish identity patterns of Conservative congregants. How do younger congregants differ from their older counterparts with respect to Jewish activity in the home and the synagogue?

Table 1.5 presents levels of Jewish activity for the six dimensions and for the summary measure described above for the five age groups, ranging from those under 35 to those 65 and over. Several findings are noteworthy and all merit

Table 1.5
Jewish Identity Indices (Percent "Highly Involved") by Age

	65+	55-64	45-54	34-44	LT35
Rituals	12	10	14	23	15
Attends Services	36	18	27	31	15
Liturgical Activities	17	15	18	19	13
Informal Ties	33	23	31	35	23
Synagogue Activities	32	21	22	34	15
Leadership	15	14	21	24	8
"Elite" (High on 3+ of the above)	29	17	27	30	15

explanation. First, the youngest congregants (those under 35) are, on most measures, among the least active in congregational activity. Aside from the small number of cases that represent this group ($N = 53$, or 3.3 percent of the total sample), several considerations argue against taking any results presented here for the under-35 cohort with a great degree of seriousness. These young people especially lag in the areas of synagogue attendance and serving in leadership capacities in the synagogue, and they lag the least with respect to ritual observance and liturgical leadership. The youngest congregants consist of a large number of singles, married couples without children, and couples with pre-school children. They are a highly select group, representing only a small fraction of their age-cohort, something of an "advance guard" who will undoubtedly be joined in Conservative congregations by their age-peers when they build their families.

As for now, the sharp contrast between their very low congregational involvement and their nearly average ritual activity suggests that young adults, who have only recently joined their congregations, need time to fully integrate into them. Possible explanations for this phenomenon also include the recency of their affiliation with a congregation, as well as the pressures of career-building and parenting very young children. Their levels of ritual practice and liturgical activity do suggest, however, that this group may be both capable and interested in taking on more congregational activity once they are thoroughly acclimated to their new congregations.

Those over 65 represent quite a different pattern, but one that also reflects their life circumstance. When compared with those slightly their junior (those ages 55-64), the oldest members differ little with respect to home ritual practice, liturgical activity, and leadership activity. However, they are far more likely to attend services, maintain friendships within the congregation, and attend all manner of synagogue activities. Upon reflection, the reasons behind these variations become apparent. Those over 65 are more often retired or semi-retired and

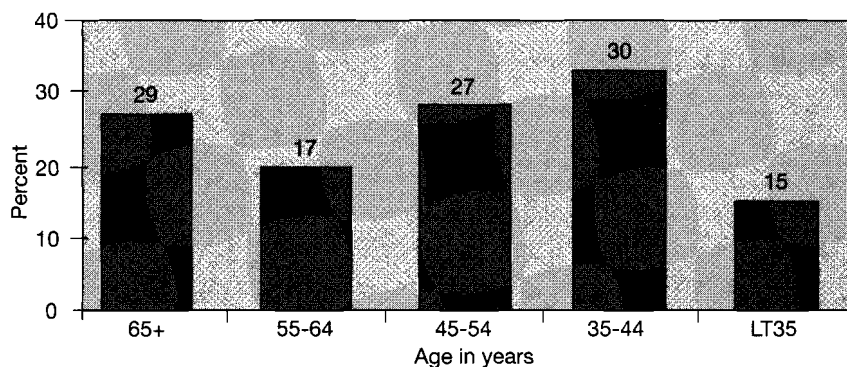


Figure 1.6. Jewish Identity (Percent High on 3 or More of 6 Measures of Jewish Identity) by Age

have the time and the interest to socialize (be it through prayer, friendship, or synagogue programs) with other congregants. Life-cycle factors, it appears, heavily tilt participation in the congregation toward the upper end of the age spectrum.

The thirty-year age range (from 35 to 64) constitutes the critical testing ground for any theories about cohort-based changes in Jewish identity (see figure 1.6). Within this age spectrum, special life-cycle circumstances are less prevalent. Unlike the youngest congregants, those 35–64 are not particularly exceptional for having joined a synagogue; the vast majority of Conservative Jews their age have done so. Unlike the oldest congregants, they do not enjoy the free time occasioned by retirement.

In this critical age range, a rather remarkable pattern may be noted. On every measure, for every comparison (between those 35–44 and 45–54, as well as between 45–54 and 55–64) younger people are more Jewishly active than older people. The results are uniform across all measures and all age comparisons. In sum: *Within the 35–64 year old age range, in all respects, younger congregants are more Jewishly active in home and synagogue than are older congregants.*

Do these patterns point to cohort differences, those that can be expected to last over the years and bring with them more active, more committed congregants? Or do they reflect family life-cycle effects such that the higher levels of activity of the younger members of this age range will dissipate once their children mature and leave home?

Activity levels rise through the early stages of family-building, peaking among married couples with teenage children at home. With the departure of children (producing “empty nest” homes), Jewish activity plummets. In light of the concentration of teen-agers among homes headed by parents 35–44 and 45–54, one wonders whether the age-related patterns reported above are really

Table 1.6
Measures of Jewish Identity among Selected Age Groups and Stage of Family Life Cycle

Family Life Cycle: AGE (YEARS)	Parents of Teenagers		Empty Nest	
	35–44	45–54	45–54	55–65
Rituals	22	16	13	9
Attends Services	30	35	23	16
Liturgical Activities	19	19	15	15
Informal Ties	43	41	26	21
Synagogue Activities	35	27	18	19
Leadership	31	30	18	11

attributable to family configurations. In other words, do relatively younger adults participate more in Jewish life in the home and synagogue primarily because they are impelled to do so by virtue of being active Jewish parents, with school-age children and teen-agers at home?

To address this question, table 1.6 presents Jewish activity levels for two pairs of age groups with the same family configurations, respectively. We may compare parents of teen-agers 35–44 with those 45–54, and we may compare empty nest couples of ages 45–54 with those 55–64. In so doing, we examine differences between age groups while holding constant their family status.

The differences between age groups are small, certainly smaller than when we failed to control for family life cycle. Yet the younger age groups do retain an edge over their comparable older counterparts. Among parents of teenage children, those age 35–44 generally outscore those age 45–54; in empty nest households (married couples, no youngsters present), those 45–54 outscore those 55–64 on almost all measures of Jewish involvement. In other words, family life cycle does account for a substantial portion of the age-related differences in Jewish activity. That said, the age-linked differences remain after controlling for family life cycle and are, indeed, genuine: *younger Conservative Jewish adults are indeed more Jewishly active than their older counterparts, even when taking family life stage and the presence of children into account.*

Perhaps these differences can be explained in terms of upbringing. Perhaps younger Conservative congregants are more active in the home and synagogue today because their parents were more active when the respondents were children. Figure 1.7 presents levels of parental ritual observance (as reported by the respondents) against the respondents' own levels, using indices of ritual observance incorporating identical practices. These indices represent the average proportion (percent) who perform five selected practices (fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting Shabbat candles, kosher dishes at home, eating only kosher meat, and building a sukkah).

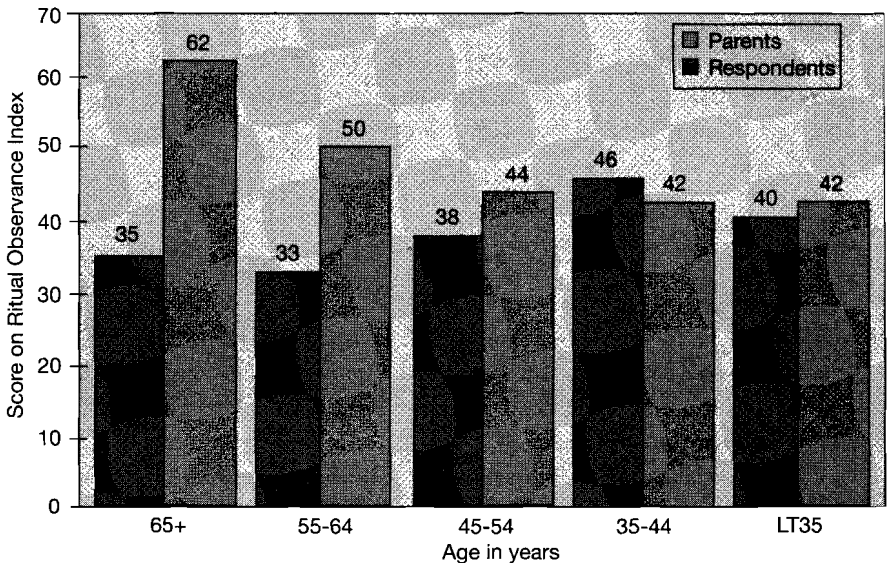


Figure 1.7. Ritual Observances Index for Respondents and Their Parents

Several trends emerge quite clearly. As we have seen before in other ways, for those between 35 and 64, younger respondents are more observant than older respondents. At the same time, younger respondents *do not* report more observant parents. Quite the contrary is the case. Parental observance levels are *lower* among younger respondents and, correspondingly, *higher* among older respondents. As a result, in terms of ritual observance, older respondents fall far short of their parents' levels, and younger respondents tend to equal or surpass those of their respective parents. For example, respondents 65 and older report having experienced a large drop (from a 62 percent level for their parents to 35 percent among themselves). In contrast, those age 35–44 report a slight rise (from 42 percent for their parents to 46 percent for themselves).

The history of Jews' adaptation to modernity has been marked by consistent intergenerational declines in ritual practice (Cohen 1983, 1988). Conservative Jews age 45 and older behave in a manner consistent with this generalization, just as their own levels of observance trail those levels they report for their parents when the respondents themselves were children. However, those between the ages of 35 and 44 are reversing this pattern, as they surpass their parents in the frequency of ritual practice.

The higher level of Jewish activity on the part of younger Conservative congregants is not entirely happenstance. This pattern does not, as we have seen, derive from increased levels of parental religiosity. The opposite is the case: *younger Conservative congregants are more ritually active than older congregants*

despite having been raised by less observant parents. If parents are not to be credited with driving this move toward higher levels of activity, then the answer may lie elsewhere, specifically in the age-related patterns of Jewish education and socialization, and in the selection process occasioned by higher rates of intermarriage.

Age-Related Trends in Jewish Education and Socialization

The increases in observance and other Jewish activities are not the only significant differences in Jewish identity associated with age. In point of fact, the Jewish educational background and socialization of Conservative congregants have been changing even more dramatically than have the patterns of observance, affiliation, and synagogue involvement.

Most fundamental has been the change in the denominational background, as revealed in questions about the way in which the respondents were reared (see figure 1.8). As we move from older to younger congregants, the denominational patterns of their childhood shift dramatically from Orthodoxy to Conservatism. Among those over 65, significantly more were raised by Orthodox than by Conservative parents; of those between 45 and 54, those with Conservative origins outnumber those reared by Orthodox parents by more than three to one. Of those under 45, few come from Orthodox backgrounds, as roughly two-thirds of all congregants were raised in Conservative homes.

Among Conservative congregants, the growth in Conservative upbringing, and the commensurate decline in Orthodox roots, are but two signs of increasing denominationalism, characteristic of North American Jewish life generally. As compared with, for example, thirty years ago, denominational boundaries are less permeable; accordingly, the denominational loci for socializing and education are more numerous and widespread (more movement camps, youth groups, Israel trips, and so on). Retention rates for Orthodox families (the percent of adults who were raised Orthodox and who stay Orthodox) have increased dramatically over the years (Heilman and Cohen 1989). The results here point in the same direction for the Conservative movement.

The shift in the denominational background of Conservative congregants has clear consequences, as we shall soon see. Over the years, the Conservative movement has experienced a clear shift in its self-image, one visible in the pronouncements of its leaders, and perhaps a little less obvious among the membership. Once the Conservative movement saw itself as a less demanding, more Americanized version of Orthodoxy; in fact, many of its rabbis were Orthodox in mentality and had come to Conservatism after giving up hope of finding satisfying employment in the Orthodox community. However, over the decades, Conservative rabbis, educators, lay leaders, and laity saw their movement as pro-

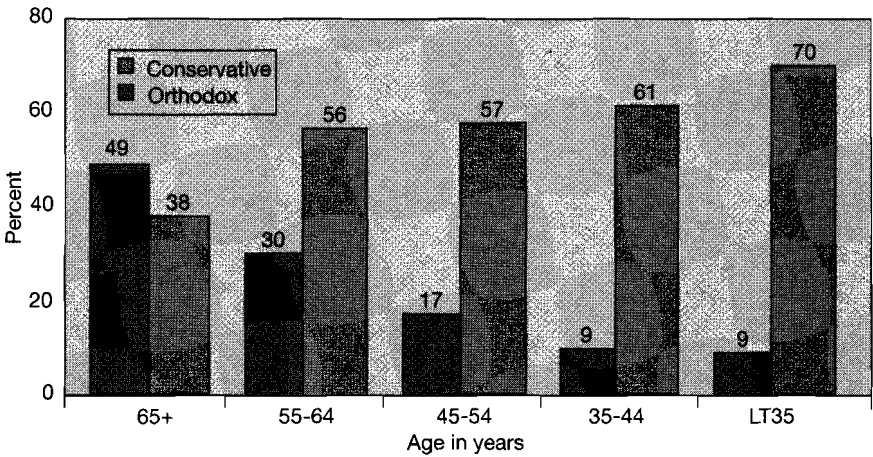


Figure 1.8. Conservative Synagogue Members Raised as Conservative or as Orthodox

viding a legitimate alternative to Orthodoxy, and not merely a toned-down imitation of the “real thing.” The shift in denominational background from “fallen Orthodox” to “Conservative from birth” noted above probably helped provoke and resulted from the shifting denominational stance of Conservative leaders.

Not only has the denominational background of Conservative congregants been changing. So too has the intensity of their Jewish education and the extent to which they are exposed to specifically Conservative instruments of Jewish education. Figure 1.9 portrays utilization of several forms of Jewish education taking place during adolescence. It clearly indicates that younger congregants more widely participated in Camp Ramah, Israel travel (presumably, often under Conservative auspices), and USY (the Conservative youth group). Whereas of those age 45 and over, no more than 3 percent ever attended a Ramah Camp (the first opened in 1947), of those 35–44, fully 9 percent had been to Ramah, and among those who have apparently joined synagogues relatively early in their lives (those under 35), twice as many (18 percent) are Ramah alumni.

We asked respondents whether they had traveled to Israel before the age of 22. Illustrative of these results are the vast differences in Israel travel as a youth for two groups just twenty years apart in age. Of those 55–64, just 5 percent had been to Israel as youngsters; of those 35–44, the figure climbs tenfold to 49 percent.

Complementing these changes in Israel travel and Ramah participation are equally dramatic changes in USY participation. The levels rise from 4 percent of those 65 and over, to 17 percent of those 55–64, to twice as many (34 percent) of those 35–44, and a majority (54 percent) of the youngest (and earliest-joining) congregants under the age of 35.

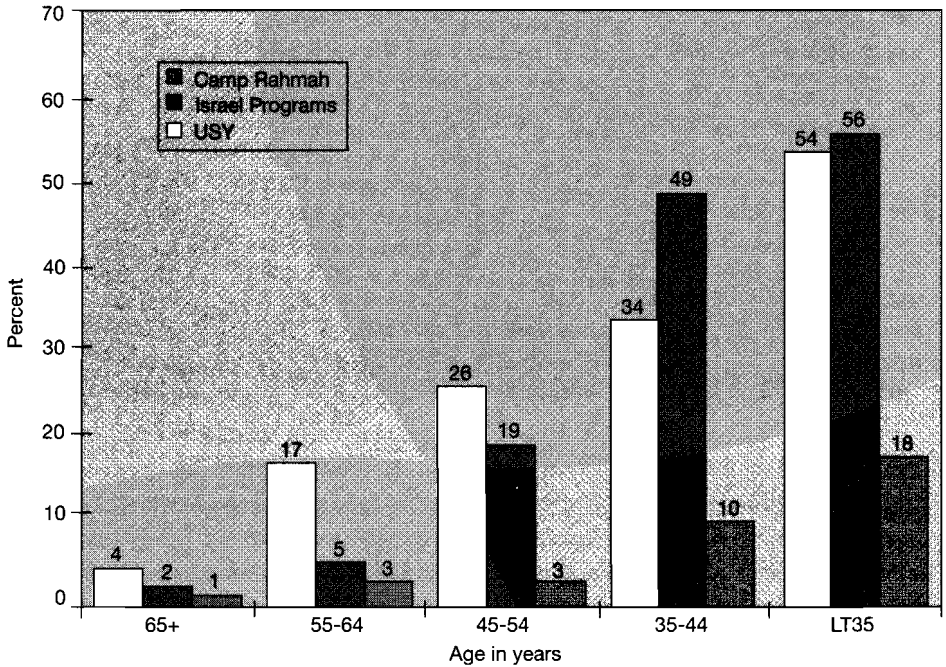


Figure 1.9. Participation in USY, Israel Programs, and Camp Ramah

These results reflect two parallel tendencies: increased opportunity and increased consumption. That is, over the years, these various forms of Jewish education have become more widely available and affordable for Conservative families. At the same time, such families have become increasingly predisposed to make use of these educational instrumentalities.

Similar patterns may be observed with respect to Jewish educational and socialization opportunities during the undergraduate years (figure 1.10). Participation in Hillel activities on college campuses was more than twice as high among those 35–64 years old as among those 65 and over, in part because many of the oldest congregants never attended university. A more steady rise, from decade to decade, can be seen with respect to participation in Jewish studies classes. One comparison is particularly noteworthy. Of those 55–64, about 90 percent of whom attended university (usually in the 1950s), just 10 percent recall having taken a course in Jewish studies of any sort. A mere twenty years later, this figure more than triples. As many as 31 percent of those 35–44 took a university course of some sort in Judaica, reflecting in part greater interest in these matters, as well as the greater accessibility of such courses (Ritterband and Wechsler 1994).

When taken together, these results point to a Conservative laity that is in-

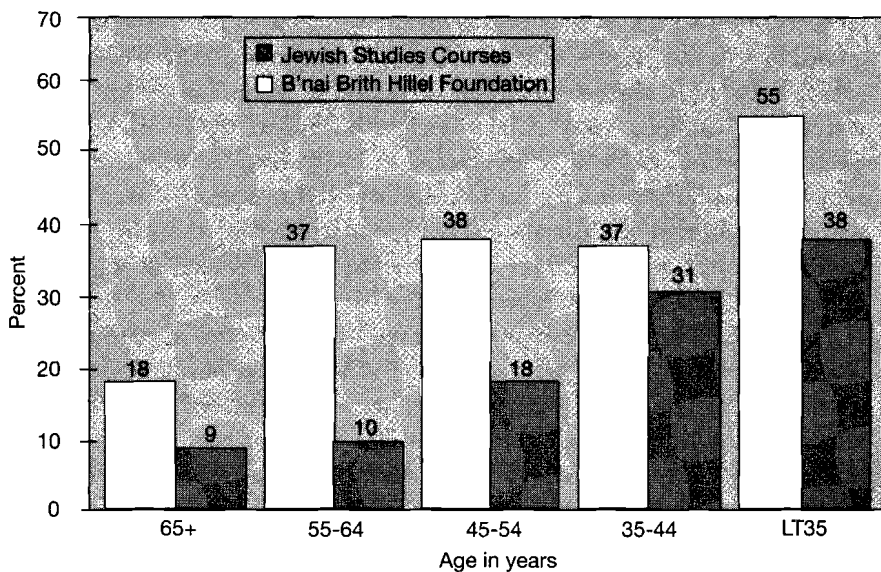


Figure 1.10. College-Age Jewish Activities by Age

creasingly learned in Jewish matters, and increasingly exposed to Conservative upbringing, education, and socialization. We cannot be sure of all the consequences of these patterns. We do know that younger congregants are more active in all sorts of home and synagogue activities. We suspect that they are more skilled and knowledgeable in Judaic matters. And we shall find that younger Conservative Jews also depart from the older age cohorts in a variety of ways that bear upon their understanding of themselves as Jews and as adherents of Conservative Judaism.

An Emerging Conservative Affirmation

For many years, Orthodoxy and Reform seemed more denominationally conscious than Conservatism. One reason is that the former two movements were both small minorities within American Jewry. Conservative Jews made up a very large majority of Jews affiliated with synagogues and, as such, Conservative Judaism could conceive of itself as American Judaism and not just a movement thereof. Secondly, Orthodoxy and Reform, each in their own way, represent the ideological extremes on the modernity-tradition continuum, while Conservatism sits squarely in the middle. Those in the extremes are more likely to develop a partisan consciousness than are centrists. Another reason for the more advanced movement consciousness in Orthodox and Reform circles may be connected with the ideologies of the movements. Both Orthodoxy and Reform have

a history of Jewish separatism. Both, in their not-too-distant pasts, have discerned a need to separate themselves from the larger Jewish community. Conservative rabbis, in contrast, starting with Solomon Schechter at the turn of the century, emphasized "Catholic Israel" (Clal Yisrael or the unity of the Jewish people) as a central tenet of Conservative Jewish philosophy. The commitment to the wider Jewish community on the part of Conservative Jewish leaders is seen in their striking prominence in Federation and UJA circles; among the laity, it is evident in a greater emphasis on Jewish community and unity than among Reform or Orthodox rank-and-file (Cohen 1991).

However, several factors over the last few decades have worked to promote a stronger sense of denominational distinctiveness, allegiance, and ideological *affirmation* among Conservative Jews. One has been the growing sense of partisanship among Orthodox and Reform Jews. The Orthodox have seen themselves as increasingly self-sufficient and the non-Orthodox as increasingly deficient in terms of learning, piety, and commitment. As a result, the Orthodox have become more sectarian in their approach, more fundamentalist in their belief, and more rigorous in their practice. At the same time, the Reform movement has experienced significant numerical growth, while adopting a more traditional approach to liturgy and customs, and a more modernist stance toward matters of personal status (such as intermarriage, patrilineal status, and homosexuality; Wertheimer 1993). The result here, too, is a new denominational stridency, though of a different form from Orthodoxy.

In addition, the educational institutions associated with Conservatism that grew appreciably during the middle of the twentieth century have by now had a chance to exert a long-term impact upon the accumulated tens of thousands of alumni who have passed through them. United Synagogue Youth, Camp Ramah, and Conservative synagogues (which are, after all, educational institutions) have now had several decades in which to work their changes on the currently mature generation of Conservative adults. In addition, the other expanded opportunities for Jewish education which may not be directly associated with the Conservative movement may work to fortify a denominational identity that was more explicitly forged at an earlier time by Conservative educational instruments.

If this view of an emerging denominational consciousness in Conservative Judaism is accurate, then we would expect to see evidence in the attitudes of Conservative synagogue members. In particular, we would expect younger members to express what we may call a "Conservative ideological affirmation" more often and more passionately than older members who matured in a less denominationally oriented period in American Jewish history.

To test this prediction, this analysis conceives of Conservative ideological affirmation as consisting of the following components:

1. Identification with Conservatism rather than Orthodoxy or Reform.
2. More positive images of Conservatism than of Orthodoxy or Reform.
3. In contrast with Orthodoxy, support for the equal participation of women in the rabbinate and liturgical life.
4. In contrast with Reform, rejection of rabbinic officiation at intermarriages and of patrilineal descent as a basis for Jewish identification.
5. Support for a variety of other positions consistent with the teachings of Conservative Judaism, as embodied in such catch-phrases as “tradition-and-change” or “dynamic halakha.” In other words, we should find evidence of some dualities, or commitment to principles in tension that, when taken together, amount to a centrist position on the modernity-tradition continuum.

Indeed, as table 1.7 details, most Conservative respondents endorsed these sorts of positions, albeit with some notable exceptions. Thus, they clearly identify as Conservative Jews and reject Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism. A large majority reject the respective central claims of Orthodoxy (to being more authentic) and Reform (to being more relevant). In fact, the sample readily endorses views critical of these two movements (the Orthodox are too shut off, and the Reform are too much influenced by the surrounding culture), while rejecting a frequent criticism of Conservatism (that it is too wishy-washy). They balance a commitment to halakha with a commitment to voluntarism and personalism (as embodied in one of our questionnaire items that read, “Conservative Judaism lets you choose those parts of Judaism you find meaningful”).

At variance with Conservative teaching, an overwhelming majority agree that “a Jew can be religious without being observant.” This item is one of only two in the list of seventeen questions where a majority departed from what may be considered the views of elite members of the Conservative movement. The other departure came in response to the question on patrilineality, where a more than three-to-one majority would accept as Jewish someone whose lineage does not meet the halakhic definition of who is a Jew, as understood by both Conservative and Orthodox rabbis. Interestingly, both questions tap a sense of American individualism, personalism, and voluntarism, themes that run contrary to halakhic Judaism, as traditionally understood.

With respect to personal status issues that divide Conservatism from Reform, the sample leans one way on one issue, and in the opposite direction on the other. Consistent with the Conservative position, a majority oppose their rabbis officiating at intermarriages. But as noted above, in a rejection of Conservative teaching, a majority would also accept a claim to Jewish identity on the part of a “patrilineal Jew” (someone born of a non-Jewish mother, but a Jewish father, and raised as a Jew).

Table 1.7

Conservative Affirmation Items

Do you agree or do you disagree with each of the following statements? "Not Sure" responses are excluded from this table.

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
DENOMINAL IDENTIFICATION		
I don't think I could ever be Orthodox	71	22
I don't think I could ever be Reform	26	28
I don't really think of myself as a Conservative Jew	23	72
DENOMINATIONAL ATTITUDES		
Orthodoxy is "more authentically Jewish" than Conservative Judaism	21	73
Reform is "more relevant" than Conservatism	9	83
Orthodoxy is too shut off from modern life	55	36
Reform is too much influenced by non-Jewish culture and ideas	47	38
Conservative Judaism is too "wishy-washy"	9	86
Conservative Judaism lets you choose those parts of Judaism you find meaningful	65	22
Conservative Jews are obligated to obey halakhah (Jewish law)	63	23
Jews who don't ride on Shabbat should join Orthodox rather than Conservative congregations	10	83
OTHER ATTITUDES		
A Jew can be religious even if he or she isn't particularly observant	78	17
My being Jewish doesn't make me any different from other Americans	35	61
I don't find synagogue prayers especially moving or meaningful	33	61
In terms of Jewish religious services, women should have the same rights as men	85	10
My rabbi should be willing to perform intermarriages	28	54
Anyone who was raised Jewish—even if their mother was Gentile and their father was Jewish—I would regard personally as a Jew	69	21

How are we to understand these questions? What attitudinal substructure lies beneath the answers to these seventeen questions? One approach would be to regard them as indicators of a left-right or modern-traditional continuum. But in fact, an analysis of how the items cluster empirically suggests not one dimension embedded in the seventeen attitudes, but two. Interestingly, the two dimensions do distinguish "left" from "right," but the two dimensions themselves are not closely related to one another as one might expect if they were measuring the same concept. Rather, one dimension differentiates Conservative from Reform ideology, containing items that are critical of Reform Judaism and its positions, including the questions on intermarriage and patrilineal descent. The other dimension distinguishes Conservative from Orthodox affiliations, containing items that are critical of Orthodoxy, including the question on women's religious rights. In other words, the two dimensions measure one's position on the boundaries separating Conservatism from its counterpart movements to its right and its left. Those who prefer Conservative positions to those of the

Reform movement do not necessarily prefer Orthodox attitudes to those of the Conservative movement (as a simple left-right understanding of these seventeen attitudes would suggest). Rather, in many cases, Conservative preference vis-à-vis Reform Judaism is empirically coupled with Conservative preference vis-à-vis Orthodoxy.

In fact, both dimensions bear a similar relationship with age. That is, younger people express more sympathy for Conservatism over Reform, as well as more sympathy for Conservatism over Orthodoxy.

For the purpose of measuring an overall commitment to Conservatism, the analysis used an index that scores items in accord with what may be called conventional Conservative teaching. For those items that distinguish Conservatism from Reform, this implies items scored in a traditional direction. But for those distinguishing Conservatism from Orthodoxy, this implies scoring items in the less traditional direction. The table above lists in boldface the responses that contributed to higher scores on the index. All of this is to say that the Conservative Affirmation Scale measures commitment to the middle of the spectrum rather than to either extreme.

As figure 1.11 demonstrates, age is strongly and inversely related to the level of Conservative affirmation. That is, younger Conservative congregants are far more likely to affirm Conservative ideological principles than older congregants, and the level of ideological affirmation rises with almost every descent of age.

This datum provides a third leg of the tripod distinguishing younger from older Conservative congregants. We have seen that they are more Jewishly active at home and in the synagogue. We have seen that they have more often experienced more intensive forms of Jewish education. We now see that they have dramatically different views of Conservatism as against other denominations.

The Search for Explanations: Intermarriage and Jewish Education

Two seemingly contradictory phenomena seem to be operating at the same time. On the one hand, the Conservative movement membership seems to be poised to shrink in size, if not in absolute numbers, then relative to the other movements. Although still the leading denomination in terms of affiliated synagogue members, the Conservative movement currently (i.e., as of 1990) holds only a small lead over the Reform movement, and with many more elderly members, the Conservative movement is likely to decline in size. The shrinkage of Conservative membership has been forestalled by the maturation of the baby-boom generation. But with the further maturation of that generation, smaller numbers of Jews (and, therefore, of Conservative Jews) are following in their wake. As the Conservative market share shrinks, as the overall size of the Jewish birth

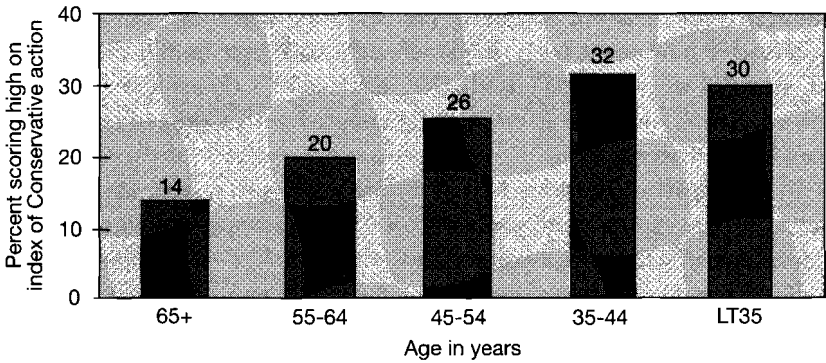


Figure 1.11. Conservative Affirmation by Age

cohort shrinks as well, and as the elderly meet their inevitable mortality, the Conservative movement will experience unavoidable declines in numbers of members.

At the same time, the Jewish “quality”—an admittedly ambiguous concept of younger Conservative members—generally surpasses that of the older members. They are more observant, more active in the synagogue, more Jewishly educated, and more committed to Conservative Judaism. Are these isolated phenomena, or are the two seemingly contradictory tendencies of decline in quantity and increase in quality somehow connected?

One key explanation linking the two phenomena lies with intermarriage. We asked respondents to report on whether their oldest children were married, and if so, whether they were married to Jews. We found a large discrepancy between the high rates of intermarriage reported by older respondents with reference to their young adult children and the far lower rate of intermarriage among Conservative congregants who are just as old as these grown children. For example, relying on reports of the older respondents, we learn that of their children ages 35–54 who had married, 28 percent had married non-Jews. Among Conservative congregants 35–44, just 7 percent had intermarried.

The contrast between these two figures implies that the vast majority of Conservative-raised young adults who have intermarried have failed to join Conservative synagogues. A small number may have joined Reform temples, and based on previous research on the mixed married (e.g., Medding et al. 1992) we can surmise that most probably joined no congregation whatsoever. We can also surmise that the intermarried, especially those who have failed to join Conservative synagogues, maintain lower than average levels of Jewish activity. We do know, from the data on their parents (and consistent with the research literature), that intermarried young Jewish adults come from weaker Jewish homes

and had weaker Jewish socialization. In fact, the evidence here, even though restricted to Conservative synagogue members, shows similar patterns. Inter-marriage is less likely among those whose parents were more Jewishly active and those who as children participated in such educational experiences as USY, Camp Ramah, or day schools.

Apparently about three out of four intermarried young people with Conservative movement upbringing leave the movement (or never join) as adults. However, the intermarried tend to derive from weaker Jewish homes and have undergone less intensive Jewish education. As a result of the departure of this selected group, the Conservative movement is left with more committed, better socialized, and more highly educated Jews. The selective impact of intermarriage, certainly, is part of the explanation for the changes in the character of Conservative Jews now underway.

Beyond intermarriage, the increased levels of Jewish education (formal and informal) among younger Conservative Jews have undoubtedly exerted an impact as well. To discern the extent of that impact, the analysis examined the cumulative effect of several forms of Jewish education upon the summary index of Jewish identity. The Jewish education index counted the occurrence of the following forms of Jewish education: Hebrew school or day school; attending services monthly as a child; USY; Ramah; visiting Israel before the age of 22; participating in Hillel; and taking at least one Jewish studies course as an undergraduate.

Figure 1.12 displays the impact of the number of Jewish educational experiences before the age of 22 upon adult Jewish identity, *after* the effects of the following confounding variables have been removed statistically: parents' ritual observance; parents' religious service attendance; denomination raised; age; and current family life cycle stage.

Obviously, even after extracting the influence of parental Jewish identity, age, and family life cycle, we see that Jewish education in its many varieties does indeed exert a long-term influence on adult Jewish identity.⁹ The entries indicate the percent who would be expected to demonstrate high levels of Jewish involvement (scoring "high" on at least three of the six dimensions of Jewish identity) for each level of education, assuming that those with that level of education had the same type of parents, age, and family life-cycle status as all the other levels. These findings, demonstrating the effectiveness of Jewish education, are not at all surprising; a rather lengthy research literature points in the same direction (e.g., Goldstein and Fishman 1993; Fishman and Goldstein 1993; Cohen 1988, 1995a).

North American Jews in general and Conservative Jews in particular have been losing what may be called the elements of an "organic," geographically concentrated, and socially embedded community that could naturally socialize young

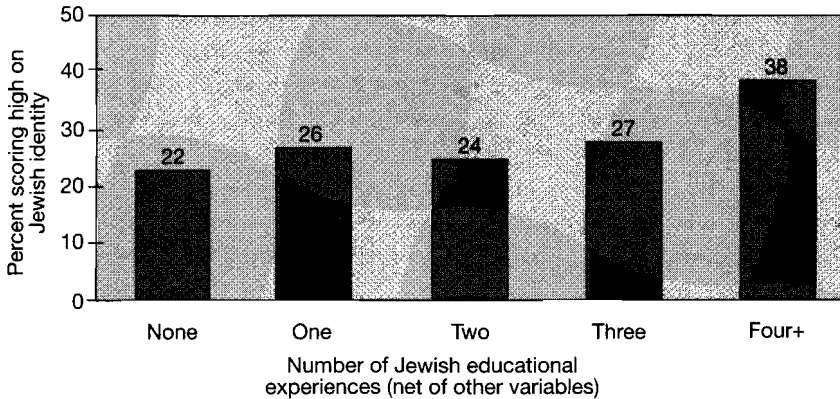


Figure 1.12. Jewish Identity by Number of Jewish Educational Experiences (MCA analysis)

Jews. Partly in response to this degeneration, they are turning increasingly to intentional instruments of Jewish education and socialization. Schools, synagogue participation, camps, youth groups, Israel trips, university study, extracurricular activities on campus, and more all serve to elevate adult Jewish involvement. With all their deficiencies and unevenness, these are generally effective tools of education and socialization. Clearly, they work for some and not for others, and some instruments or particular programs work better (or worse) than others. Taken all together, they serve to partially counter the adverse impact of intermarriage and of the forces that intermarriage represents.

With respect to numbers of members in the Conservative movement, Jewish education and intermarriage work in opposite directions. Jewish education increases Conservative movement retention rates, and intermarriage is a key factor in leading children of the movement to affiliate (if at all) elsewhere. However, with respect to those who remain affiliated, quality, education, and intermarriage paradoxically operate in the same direction: they both help enrich the quality of those who choose Conservative congregational affiliation. Jewish education enhances the skills, networks, and commitment of emerging Conservative Jews; and intermarriage is the vehicle utilized by the generally less committed and less involved to exit the movement, leaving behind a higher proportion of more committed and educated Jews.

We do not know the extent to which the opposing forces of Jewish education and intermarriage will prevail. But we can predict, with reasonable certainty, the consequences of these trends for the intermediate term. Among North American Jews generally and Conservative Jews in particular, intermarriage will continue to confirm and/or provoke the effective departure of large numbers of Jews from conventional, active Jewish life. At the same time, those who in-marry, and especially those who do so in a society in which many other Jews out-marry,

are demonstrating evidence of an above-average involvement in Jewish social networks and, often, of a relatively more committed pattern of Jewish living as well. Aware of the rising intermarriage rates and concerned about their own families' chances for continuing as identifiable and committed Jews, these more active families (generally in-married and almost by definition synagogue members) have been turning to more intensive forms of Jewish education both for themselves and for their children. It may be presumed they will continue increasingly to do so.

What all this means for the Conservative movement is that its congregations will abide a growing number, albeit still a minority, of relatively observant, active, and learned Jews. This active core will grow partly in spite of and partly because of the growth in intermarriage, and its attendant shrinkage in the pool of potential members of Conservative synagogues among the younger generation.

Conclusion: Policy Implications

What are the appropriate policy responses to these trends? Which trends demand attention and which may be safely ignored? In the simplest of terms, the movement is shrinking in numbers and improving in quality. Ideally, movement leaders would want growth in both numbers and quality, but the ideal is not always attainable.

In fact, a case can be made that policies aimed at increasing numbers in the short term will also dilute quality. One way of increasing numbers would be to lower the formal and informal demands placed upon Conservative congregation members. "Demands" come in a variety of ways. They may be officially stated or informally conveyed. They entail such diverse issues as dues, volunteer time, observance, learning, years of Jewish schooling (or days per week) for one's children, and (to take a minor but telling example) observing kashrut at Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations. In the hope of recruiting new members, or retaining potentially disgruntled current members, some congregations and rabbis might be tempted to lower demands. Such a policy aims at maximizing numbers, albeit, arguably, at the expense of quality.

In the long run, which policy will ultimately produce a healthier movement: one with higher "standards" or one with lower "barriers"? (Of course, one Jew's standards are another Jew's barriers.) The correct answer, if there is a correct answer, may differ in different congregations. If there is a preferred policy direction, its formulation may be informed by a recent line of research in the sociology of American religion highlighted by an article entitled "Why Strict Churches Are Strong" by Laurence Iannaccone (1994).

Applying the tools of rational economic theory, Iannaccone analyzes the changes in numerical and qualitative strength of the major American churches

over several decades. His conclusion is that churches can err by being too strict and too demanding of their congregants and, as a result, devolve into a small sect of highly committed adherents. At the other extreme—that exemplified by many liberal Protestant churches over the years—churches can err by demanding too little in the way of separation from the larger society and involvement in the community of the church. These low-demand institutions demoralize the most committed by abiding a large number of “free-riders,” those who get the benefits of church membership without putting much of themselves into the community. The key to success is to strike the proper balance, to demand enough but not too much, to turn away (or turn off) some, but obviously not all.

It would seem that the Conservative movement is facing the same sorts of decisions faced by American churches for many years. Fortunately, the current numerical size of the movement (even the likely size after some anticipated shrinkage) is large enough for Conservative institutions to risk short-term numerical shrinkage if more demanding policies are instituted.

To elaborate, the current Conservative congregational membership is still so large that even if only a significant minority adopts a reasonably committed style of Conservative Jewish life, the movement will retain, if not enhance, its ability to significantly influence the contours of North American Jewry, and indeed, Jewish history more generally. In this regard, the Orthodox present an instructive model. With just 6 percent of American Jewry (according to the 1990 NJPS), the affiliated Orthodox population—capitalizing upon high levels of commitment, learning, and activity—certainly has exerted a dramatic cultural, spiritual, and political influence on North American and even world Jewry. Moreover, Orthodoxy’s achievements have come in the face of two trends: a decline in the number of Jews who identify as Orthodox (a decline that is about to reverse itself) and an increase in the passion, commitment, involvement, and education of the small numbers who have been thoroughly socialized to an Orthodox way of life.

All told, Conservative congregations embrace a constituency currently three times the size of the Orthodox. As we have seen, prospects are bright for the emergence of an even more active and learned laity. If so, then Conservative Jewry stands poised to sustain and expand its contribution to Jewish life, even as it weathers a shrinking membership base. The key will be to maintain an emphasis on improving the quality of members, by way of increased education and retaining high formal and informal demands.

Such an eventuality, though, will require that Conservative leaders both lay and rabbinic work to nurture, mobilize, preserve, and expand the emerging younger cohorts of committed, educated, and potentially highly active Conservative Jews. The alternative is policies aimed primarily at slowing numerical decline, policies that put the Conservative movement in direct competition with

Reform Judaism. Such policies would lower demands (for ritual observance, learning, children's education, dues, commitment, conversion by non-Jewish spouses) in a well-intentioned but ultimately ineffective and inauthentic attempt to expand the membership base. In the long run, such policies may actually weaken the congregations rather than enlarging them. Instead, the movement would do well to consider sharpening and exploiting what may be Conservative Judaism's qualitative edge: an emerging group of highly educated and highly committed young Jewish adults.

Appendix: Questionnaire

Conservative Jews of North America: A Survey of Synagogue Members

1. Referring to Jewish religious denominations, were you raised

52	Conservative
26	Orthodox
9	Reform
0	Reconstructionist
6	Something else Jewish
6	Not Jewish (if you weren't raised Jewish, go to q. 7 on the next page)

2. When you were growing up, for how many years (if any) did you participate in each of the following sorts of Jewish education? (If none, enter "0".)

	Number of Years
	One year or more:
a. Full-time Jewish school	11
b. Part-time Jewish school that met more than once a week	55
c. Sunday School or other one-day-a-week program	38

3. When you were 11 or 12 years old, how often did you attend synagogue services? And how often did your mother and father attend?

	You	Mother	Father
NOT AT ALL OR ONLY ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS (E.G., A WEDDING)	10	16	14
ONLY ON HIGH HOLIDAYS (ROSH HASHANAH, YOM KIPPUR)	24	31	29
A FEW TIMES A YEAR	21	25	22
ABOUT ONCE A MONTH	11	11	10
TWICE A MONTH OR MORE	34	17	25

4. Did you ever . . .

	Yes
a. attend Camp Ramah?	4
b. attend another overnight camp with kosher food or Shabbat services?	35
c. participate in USY or LTF?	20
d. participate in another Jewish youth group?	48
e. visit Israel before the age of 22?	20

- | | | |
|----|---|----|
| 5. | When you were in college or university, did you . . . | |
| | a. take any courses in Jewish Studies? | 18 |
| | b. take part in any activities of a Jewish campus group like Hillel? | 32 |
| | c. take part in activities of a Conservative Jewish campus group? | 5 |
| | d. attend Shabbat services at least once a month? | 17 |
| 6. | When you were 11 or 12 years old, did one or both of your parents . . . | |
| | a. usually light Shabbat candles? | 68 |
| | b. use separate dishes for meat and dairy? | 52 |
| | c. have their own Succah? | 10 |
| | d. refrain from eating meat in non-kosher restaurants? | 33 |
| | e. fast on Yom Kippur? | 88 |

Now, we have some questions about you and your congregation.

- | | | |
|-----|--|--------------|
| 7. | For how many years have you been a member of your current congregation? | |
| | LESS THAN ONE YEAR | 1 |
| | ONE YEAR | 3 |
| | TWO YEARS | 5 |
| | THREE TO FIVE YEARS | 14 |
| | SIX TO NINE YEARS | 17 |
| | TEN TO NINETEEN YEARS | 23 |
| | TWENTY OR MORE YEARS | 39 |
| 8. | Five years from now, how likely is it that you will continue to be a member of your current congregation? | |
| | VERY LIKELY | 73 |
| | SOMEWHAT LIKELY | 19 |
| | NOT LIKELY | 8 |
| 9. | Have you served on the board of your current congregation? | |
| | Yes | 31 |
| | No | 69 |
| 10. | During the last 12 months, how often (if at all) have you attended the following programs sponsored by <i>your</i> congregation? | |
| | | Once or more |
| | Synagogue Board meeting | 26 |
| | Synagogue committee meeting | 36 |
| | Lecture or other cultural activity | 67 |
| | Class in Jewish Studies | 31 |
| | "Social action" program | 36 |

Men's Club, Sisterhood, or Couples Club activity	49
Family program	54
Social activity at the synagogue	71
Celebration such as a baby-naming, bris, bar/bat Mitzvah, or wedding of congregants or their family members	81
A family Shabbat service	65

11. Among the people you consider your closest friends, how many would you say are members of your congregation?

NONE	18
A FEW	32
SOME	23
MOST	20
ALL OR ALMOST ALL	7

12. In the past year, about how often did you have a Shabbat meal with friends *who are members of your congregation*, either at your house or theirs?

MORE THAN ONCE A MONTH	4
ABOUT ONCE A MONTH	7
LESS OFTEN	36
NEVER	53

13. Thinking back to when you first joined this congregation, how important were each of the following reasons in your decision to join?

	Very important
It was geographically close	46
It was affordable	24
It was Conservative (rather than Orthodox or Reform)	71
My spouse wanted to join this congregation	49
My (or my spouse's) parents were members	24
Friends were members	29
Liked the community, the congregants	46
For the pre-school or nursery	25
For the religious school	51
For the youth program	30
So that my child(ren) could have a bar/bat Mitzvah	56
Liked the rabbi	49
Liked the cantor	34
Liked the style of worship	56
Liked the policy regarding the participation of women in religious services	43

The next group of questions concerns your participation in religious services.

14. During the last year, in your congregation, have you
- | | |
|---|----|
| accepted an aliya to the torah? | 52 |
| chanted the haftarah? | 9 |
| chanted the torah reading? | 8 |
| led services (as the cantor)? | 6 |
| given the <i>d'var torah</i> or sermon? | 6 |
15. How often do you attend Jewish religious services? And (if married) how often does your spouse attend?
- | | You | Spouse |
|---|-----|--------|
| NOT AT ALL OR ONLY ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS (E.G., A WEDDING) | 6 | 9 |
| ONLY ON HIGH HOLIDAYS (ROSH HASHANAH, YOM KIPPUR) | 16 | 18 |
| A FEW TIMES A YEAR | 35 | 36 |
| ABOUT ONCE A MONTH | 15 | 15 |
| TWICE A MONTH OR MORE | 29 | 23 |
16. How important is each of the following reasons for why you attend services?
- | | Very important |
|--|----------------|
| My spouse wants me to attend religious services | 12 |
| For my children—to bring them or set an example | 40 |
| To prepare my child for his/her bar/bat Mitzvah | 28 |
| To see or make friends, or to be involved with a community | 32 |
| To express my relationship with God | 45 |
| For spiritual reasons | 52 |
| I like the chance to play a leadership role in the service | 4 |
| I like the sermons or the discussions | 28 |
| I like the rabbi | 44 |
| I like the cantor's singing | 30 |
| I like the congregation's singing | 29 |
17. Would you attend Shabbat services more frequently if . . .
- | | |
|---|----|
| the services were shorter | 28 |
| the services were more meaningful | 39 |
| the sermons were better | 28 |
| the services were more spiritual | 24 |
| you felt more competent with your prayer skills | 27 |

you felt closer to God	27
your family would want to go more often	49
more of your friends would go	29
people were friendlier	20
child-care were available	9

Now we would like to learn something about your participation in other Jewish activities.

18. Among the people you consider your closest friends, how many are Jewish?
- | | |
|-------------------|----|
| NONE | 2 |
| A FEW | 9 |
| SOME | 18 |
| MOST | 44 |
| ALL OR ALMOST ALL | 27 |
19. Do you personally fast on Yom Kippur?
- | | | | |
|-----|----|----|----|
| YES | 79 | NO | 21 |
|-----|----|----|----|
20. Does your household usually light Shabbat candles?
- | | | | |
|-----|----|----|----|
| YES | 56 | NO | 44 |
|-----|----|----|----|
21. Does your home use separate dishes for meat and dairy?
- | | | | |
|-----|----|----|----|
| YES | 30 | NO | 70 |
|-----|----|----|----|
22. Do you refrain from eating meat in non-kosher restaurants?
- | | | | |
|-----|----|----|----|
| YES | 15 | NO | 85 |
|-----|----|----|----|
23. Does your household usually have its own Sukkah?
- | | | | |
|-----|----|----|----|
| YES | 12 | NO | 88 |
|-----|----|----|----|
24. Are you able to read the prayer book in Hebrew (not necessarily understanding the prayers)?
- | | | | |
|-----|----|----|----|
| YES | 74 | NO | 26 |
|-----|----|----|----|
25. Have you ever seriously considered living in Israel?
- | | | | |
|-----|----|----|----|
| YES | 22 | NO | 78 |
|-----|----|----|----|
26. About how often do you engage in the study of a Jewish text (e.g., bible or Talmud) in a class or group? (Do not count Shabbat services.)
- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| MORE THAN ONCE A MONTH | 8 |
|------------------------|---|

ABOUT ONCE A MONTH	5
LESS OFTEN	26
NEVER	61

27. How many times have you been to Israel?

NEVER	36
ONCE	27
TWICE OR MORE	35
I WAS BORN IN ISRAEL	2

28. During 1994, about how much did your household give in voluntary contributions to your current congregation? (Please do not include dues, tuition, or any mandatory contributions.)

\$0	9
\$1-99	22
\$100-499	44
\$500-999	16
\$1,000-1,999	9
\$2,000+	1

29. In 1994, about how much did your household contribute to other Jewish charities or causes (aside from the synagogue)?

\$0	5
\$1-99	18
\$100-499	35
\$500-999	14
\$1,000-1,999	11
\$2,000+	18

30. And, in 1994, about how much did your household contribute to charities or causes which are *not* under Jewish auspices?

\$0	5
\$1-99	25
\$100-499	38
\$500-999	14
\$1,000-1,999	8
\$2,000+	10

31. How old is your oldest child?

Median = 24 years old

32. Did this child ever . . .

	YES	NO
attend a full-time jewish school (day school)	28	72
attend Camp Ramah?	14	86
participate in USY?	41	59

33. This child is:

NOT MARRIED	65
MARRIED TO A JEW	24
MARRIED TO A NON-JEW	11

Now, we have several questions about your beliefs and attitudes.

34. Do you agree or do you disagree with each of the following statements?

	Agree	Disagree
A Jew can be religious even if he or she isn't particularly observant	78	13
My being Jewish doesn't make me any different from other Americans	35	61
I don't find synagogue prayers especially moving or meaningful	33	61
In terms of Jewish religious services, women should have the same rights as men	85	10
Orthodoxy is "more authentically Jewish" than Conservative Judaism	21	73
Conservative Judaism is too "wishy-washy"	9	85
Reform is "more relevant" than Conservatism	9	83
Orthodoxy is too shut off from modern life	55	36
Reform is too much influenced by non-Jewish culture and ideas	47	38
Conservative Judaism lets you choose those parts of Judaism you find meaningful	65	22
I don't think I could ever be Orthodox	71	22
I don't think I could ever be Reform	62	28
I don't really think of myself as a Conservative Jew	23	72
Conservative Jews are obligated to obey halakha (Jewish law)	63	27
Members of my congregation are friendly to newcomers	75	16
I feel included in the life of my congregation	69	26

There's a group of people in my congregation with whom I feel very close	66	27
My rabbi should be willing to perform inter-marriages	28	54
Jews who don't ride on Shabbat should join Orthodox rather than Conservative congregations	10	83
Anyone who was raised Jewish—even if their mother was Gentile and their father was Jewish—I would regard personally as a Jew	69	21

35. How important would you say that being Jewish is in your life?

VERY IMPORTANT	78
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	20
NOT IMPORTANT	1
NOT SURE	1

36. How important would you say religion is in your own life?

VERY IMPORTANT	42
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	47
NOT IMPORTANT	9
NOT SURE	2

37. Do you believe that . . .

	Definitely yes	Probably yes	Probably not	Definitely not	Not sure
a. there is a God	57	23	6	3	11
b. God will reward you for your good deeds	18	27	20	9	27
c. God answers your prayers	16	26	19	10	29

38. In thinking about your ideal rabbi, how important would you rate each of the following roles?

	Very important
a. Public speaker	70
b. Teacher (of adults)	79
c. Scholar	64
d. Pastor to the sick, bereaved	76
e. Counselor	67
f. Representative of Jews to the larger community	76
g. Administrator	15

h. Initiator of activities and programs			47
i. Model of religious piety			51
39. Would you object to having a woman as a rabbi of your congregation?			
YES (I WOULD OBJECT)			15
NO (I WOULD NOT)			71
NOT SURE			14
40. During each of the following periods or events in your life, did your involvement in Jewish life increase, decrease, or stay about the same?			
			Stayed
	Increased	Decreased	the Same
a. During your teen years	31	24	45
b. During your college years	14	46	41
c. When you first married	44	14	42
d. Birth of your first child	57	3	40
e. When your first child reached school-age	71	1	28
f. Bar or bat mitzvah of your child	73	1	27
g. Trip(s) to Israel as an adult	46	1	54
h. Death of a loved one	46	3	51

Finally, some basic background questions:

41. Are you:			
	Male	45	Female 55
42. Your age:			
	Median = 52 years old		
43. Are you:			
MARRIED			79
NEVER MARRIED			4
DIVORCED OR SEPARATED			5
WIDOWED			11
44. How many children do you have?			
NONE			8
ONE			11
TWO			47

THREE		26
FOUR+		8
45. How old is the youngest? MEDIAN = 20 years old	YES	NO
46. Were you born in the United States or Canada?	89	11
47. Were BOTH your parents born in the United States or Canada?	47	53
48. Were at least three of your grandparents born in the United States or Canada?	10	90
49. Were you raised as a Jew?	94	6
50. Was your spouse raised as a Jew?	86	14
51. Is your spouse now Jewish?	86	14
52. Your zip code		
53. For about how many years have you lived in the same town or neighborhood? Median = 21 years		
54. Your highest educational degree:		
HIGH SCHOOL		10
SOME COLLEGE		16
BACHELOR'S DEGREE		24
PROFESSIONAL OR GRADUATE SCHOOL		49
55. Your spouse's highest educational degree:		
HIGH SCHOOL		14
SOME COLLEGE		16
BACHELOR'S DEGREE		24
PROFESSIONAL OR GRADUATE SCHOOL		46

56. Do you work outside the home?		
NO		29
YES, PART-TIME		20
FULL-TIME		51
57. Does your spouse work outside the home?		
NO		29
YES, PART-TIME		16
FULL-TIME		55
58. Are you (or your spouse) employed by a Jewish communal agency?		
	YES 6	NO 94
59. In 1994, your total family income was approximately:		
Under \$30,000		11
\$30,000–\$49,999		13
\$50,000–\$74,999		18
\$75,000–\$99,999		18
\$100,000–\$150,000		20
OVER \$150,000		21

Notes

1. The items included the following: attending High Holiday services, fasting on Yom Kippur, lighting Shabbat candles, maintaining two sets of dishes for meat and dairy, eating only kosher meat, celebrating Purim, celebrating Israel Independence Day, never having a tree on Christmas, belonging to a synagogue, belonging to a Jewish organization, belonging to two or more Jewish organizations, volunteering at least three hours a month for a Jewish cause, having been to Israel, having mostly Jewish friends, having some Jewish friends, living in a neighborhood that is at least "a little Jewish," reading a Jewish periodical, contributing at least \$100 to Jewish charities, contributing at least \$500, and contributing at least \$100 to the local UJA or Federation campaign.
2. The data are weighted in this table using two sets of weights. One set is the "household weights" developed by the NJPS data collection company to take into account number of telephone lines, demographic variations in response rates, and other concerns (Waksberg 1996). The second set of weights takes into account the number of Jews per household. In other words, the findings reported refer to the percent of individual Jews who live in a certain denomination's households who perform a certain practice (e.g., attend a Passover seder). Homes with fewer Jews, such as single-person households or mixed-married homes, perform fewer rituals than those with many Jews, such as those where both spouses are Jewish and with many Jewish children. Therefore, the percent of Jewish *individuals* who observe certain practices, or who are resident in homes where the specified practices are observed (e.g., Shabbat candles are lit), as reported in the table, is generally *greater* than the percent of Jewish *households* observing the same practices. To take a concrete illustration, 35 percent of Conservative households usually light Shabbat candles. In contrast, as reported in the table below, 38 percent of individual Jews living in Conservative households are in homes where Shabbat candles are usually lit.
3. As demonstrated earlier, synagogue members are far more observant than nonmembers, even across denominations. The gaps between the two movements among members only are smaller than that between all Conservative- and Reform-identifying individuals. Hence, for the purposes at hand, examining the differentiation between Conservative and Reform constituencies, the restriction to synagogue members provides a "conservative" portrait, with smaller rather than larger gaps. The decision here to exclude nonmembers from these calculations partially derives from the focus of this study, which is the Conservative synagogue member. In addition, whereas denominational affiliation may be meaningful for a member of a synagogue of that denomination, the meaning of denomination to nonmembers is elusive. When respondents who belong to no synagogue say they identify as Conservative or Reform, is that response a reflection of their upbringing, their earlier affiliation, their expectation, or their aspiration? Alternatively, are such answers an offhand abbreviation for intensity of Jewish commitment, drawing upon the public image of the denominations arrayed on a continuum from most intensive to least intensive? Moreover, when presenting findings for the public on particular denominations, does it make sense to conflate data from those who belong to the denomination's congregations with those from nonmembers who claim to identify with the denomination? However ambiguous is the meaning of denominational attachment for members, it is even more ambiguous in the case of nonmembers.
4. The entries in the table refer to the percent who answered "always" or "usually" with respect to the performance of the specified ritual practices.
5. Each of these activities was reported by only 6–9 percent of the sample, and, truth be told, correlations among them were rather weak. Normally, one would demand moderate correlations among items combined into a single index, on the assumption that correlations indicate the measurement of a common underlying factor and

that the indicators come from the same domain or pool of items. However, in a few instances that are theoretically justifiable, one can conceive of items as representing alternative ways of representing the same underlying concept, and such is the case here with liturgical activities.

6. The analysis examined alternative measures of charitable activity, including alternate combinations of the questions on donating to the congregation and to other Jewish causes, as well as extracting the influence of income. None of the indices bore markedly stronger relationships with the other six dimensions of Jewish activity.
7. Just under a third of the respondents said that they "had served on the board of [their] current congregation." We cannot distinguish current from former board members.
8. Preliminary analyses used two alternative ways of presenting the data on Jewish activity: z-scores (standard deviation units above or below the means), and percentages (the proportion scoring high in any given dimension). The results are substantively the same whichever method is used. Z-scores are more precise and more appealing to the statistically oriented reader. Percentages are more readily comprehended by the lay reader and are utilized throughout this study.
9. The sampling design of this study operates to minimize the apparent impact of Jewish education upon adult Jewish identity. Recall that we sampled only Conservative synagogue members, excluding everyone else. As a result, we have missed those on the Jewish identity extremes: the Orthodox and the intermarried, to say nothing of the nonaffiliated and Reform Jews. As a result, we have narrowed the possible outcomes of Jewish socialization to a small portion of the Jewish identity spectrum.

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