

Jewish Out-Marriage: A Global Perspective

Sergio DellaPergola

The Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
and The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute

The frequency, determinants, and consequences of marriages between Jews and non-Jews have long been a significant topic in social-scientific research and community discourse. Some observers consider the recent trends in Jewish family formation with great concern and a leading factor in the identity drift and quantitative erosion of Jewish population. Others view the same trends as an opportunity for Jewish community growth and enhancing mutual relations with the broader societal environment. Supporters of these different approaches often rely on sophisticated theory, concepts, and analysis. Interestingly, different conclusions are sometimes attained based on the same data.

As one looks into the matter, the current debate concerning out-marriage in the Jewish community seems to be unfolding in three main directions. The first concerns definitions, measurement techniques, and the ascertainment of facts. A second debate taking the move from the available evidence revolves around the role of out-marriage in relation to paradigms of Jewish assimilation and erosion, on the one hand, versus Jewish resilience and revival, on the other hand. A third debate of applied nature concerns the policy choices that the organized Jewish community should consider in dealing with the issue of out-marriage in order to minimize the costs and maximize the benefits—if any.

Typically, these issues are discussed in the localistic perspective of specific points in time and space. An assumption frequently met in these debates is that local situations are unique and the circumstances of a certain locale cannot be transferred to an appraisal of the circumstances in other locales. We rather argue that in view of several broad parallel trends that characterize the modern Jewish experience globally, a comparativistic approach is not only possible but necessary to better appreciate social and cultural changes among different Jewish populations. Such broader overviews may help in reaching conclusions of wider applicability within the Jewish community fold and of general social scientific interest beyond it.

The purpose of this overview is to examine some of the current trends in Jewish family formation and out-marriage frequencies in a broad comparative context, with some attention to the specific situations of local communities.

History

Marriage has consistently been central to the Jewish ethos, although some specific norms – not to mention actual marriage patterns—considerably varied over time and across geography. During the early formative periods, the ancient Hebrew tribes were small and geographically mobile, and may have frequently incorporated individuals from the proximate surrounding. The paradigm of in- and out-marriage is beautifully and forcefully illustrated in the Book of Genesis. In today’s analytic perspective—which is of course quite distant from the letter and the spirit of the original scene—we would argue that, of Abraham’s two women, one, Hagar, was not Jewish and had a non-Jewish son, Yishmael; one, Sarah, was Jewish and had a Jewish son, Yitzhak. Pushing the metaphor a little forward, we would conclude that at the very outset of Jewish society the rate of out-marriage was 50%, and Abraham’s second generation’s Jewish outcome was 50% as well. Incidentally, the statistical outcome would become entirely different if also considering Abraham’s third marital experience with Keturah.

In any case, rules for inclusion and exclusion into the early Jewish tribal framework—and later, peoplehood—and mechanisms for identity transmission from generation to generation clearly reflected the social order and power hierarchies of ancient civilizations. These rules were overwhelmingly male-centered and allowed for some amount of family interaction between people of different lineages even if this was not the preferred norm.

With the codification of Jewish identification in late antiquity and the transition from patrilineal to matrilineal identity transmission, Jewish society entered a long period of segregation from other religious and ethnic groups. Group segregation was at times self-imposed and often forcefully imposed by others. Recent studies of population genetics point to the overall common origins of many—though not all—contemporary Jewish communities which long lived in disparate continents and countries. Such prevailing common ancestry was not incompatible with marriage linkages to surrounding populations. However, in spite of significant geographical mobility of Jews all over history, there was limited marital interaction between Jews and others since late antiquity throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period. There also was limited

interaction between Jewish communities in separate parts of the world, such as Eastern Europe, Western Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Since the 19th century—and especially since the second half of the 20th—Jewish communities underwent multi-dimensional transformations which completely revolutionized their socioeconomic stratification and cultural identities. International migration, extensive urbanization, occupational mobility, secularization, and above all growing access to civil rights and participation in civil society were among the main agents of change. Generally, transitions went from old and well-established (traditional) patterns to newer and rapidly changing (modern) patterns, and from a highly segregated mode of life to more significant integration within other populations and cultures. To complete the picture, counter-streams reflecting searches for more traditional cultural and social behaviors and environments also periodically appeared, somewhat counteracting the main course of modernization.

One of the main consequences of general societal modernization and of the ensuing political emancipation of the Jews was the transition of Jewish identification from an original multi-layered and hardly distinguishable complex inclusive of religion, nationhood, culture, language, social norms and folklore, to a uni-dimensional definition primarily reflecting religious lines. This was the product of the French Revolution and later, much of Western European bestowing of citizenship upon the Jews in the framework of the emerging unified nation-state. In this context, religious difference could be allowed as one option for the citizens of the given hegemonic nation, while ethnic or national diversity could not be tolerated. However, with the general spreading of secularization and the diminishing perception and practice of religious rituals, Jewish identification tended for many to turn to a more ethnic-national definitional basis. For many others it lost relevance altogether. In 19th century Europe, the quest for integration into general society led at least 200,000 Jews to opt out of Judaism for other Christian denominations. Passages of Jews into Islam also occurred in North Africa and the Middle East, reflecting the inferior hierarchic status of Jewish (and Christian) population groups in predominantly Muslim societies.

These broad definitional and identificational transitions were accompanied by many other structural and cultural changes. With the initially selective—and later more universal—diffusion of modernization, acceptance of Jews or former Jews by the public at large tended to become less dependent on the *rites de passage* inherent in changing one's religious allegiance. Moving out of

and into Judaism tended to become an expression of individual freedom of choice in growingly open and pluralistic societies. Associating with non-Jews—through residential proximity, work relations, and family formation—became an increasingly acceptable and frequent option.

Since 1948, the composition of world Jewry has been crucially altered with the establishment of the state of Israel and the rapid growth of a large Jewish population which came to constitute a majority of Israel's total society. In contrast, Diaspora communities are typically comprised of relatively small Jewish minorities that are well-integrated in a non-Jewish societal context. Especially since the 1970s, the size of many Jewish communities around the world have tended to shrink as a consequence of comparatively low Jewish fertility, aging population compositions, and the prevalence of death rates over birth rates. Significant amounts of international migration also led to the rapid reduction of Jewish population size in many countries, especially where the political and socioeconomic status of Jews was less attractive.

From both a historical and a contemporary perspective, the Jews' majority status in Israel and their minority status in Diaspora contexts generated significantly different opportunities for Jewish identity expression and community life. With the progressive growth of Israel's Jewish population share out of the total of world Jewry, the low frequencies of out-marriage in Israel had a counterbalancing effect as against the leading global trend toward greater integration and out-marriage of Jews with non-Jews.

Recapitulating, we can conceive historical changes undergone by Jewish society in the course of modernization as operating along a two-dimensional representation of time and space (see Figure 1). On each axis, time can be described as flowing from "pre-modern" to "post-modern". Exact calendar years are not determined because the same processes may occur at quite different dates and paces in different geographical environments; dates are therefore ascertained on a case-by-case basis. On one axis, from bottom to top, we assume that all social structural variables related to the Jews' places of residence, educational levels, employment characteristics, and participation in civil life tend to move from group segregation, a comparatively lower status and often legal discrimination, toward higher socioeconomic status, more equal opportunities, and greater connectedness with members of other religious or ethnic groups. On another axis, from left to right, we assume that the Jews' beliefs, social norms, intellectual life and fundamental assumptions of personal identification tend to move from unique, particularistic, and

homogeneous, to patterns that are more diverse, more universalistic, and more frequently shared with others not associated with the Jewish group.

Figure 1 does not pretend to portray a clear causal direction in the process of social-structural and cultural change but simply illustrates an assumption of basic co-variation of these patterns over time. Different arrows aim at illustrating the specific characteristics of various communities in different places. At any given moment in time, some are more modern than others both culturally and structurally. But, while the actual timing and rhythm of social and cultural change may have been quite differentiated over history, a basic similarity of the respective experiences of different communities can be postulated in the course of time—namely the positioning of a relatively small Jewish minority vis-à-vis a society's majority. These changes, affecting both Jewish individuals and Jewish communities, tend to be significantly experienced locally but they often reflect the results of massive participation of Jews in international migration, other types of geographical mobility, and other changes in the broader societal context.

On the other hand, factors may intervene to counterbalance the prevailing modernization trends and help to restore a condition that prevailed at earlier points in time. This is graphically illustrated by the bold horizontal arrow in Figure 1. During the 20th century the most important factor that operated to reverse the flow of social time was the emergence of a Jewish majority in the State of Israel. This created a new opportunity for the establishment of a more coherent and cohesive form of Jewish culture, identity, and social networks, hence making the current Jewish experience more similar to one that had prevailed in much earlier periods during the course of Jewish history. At the same time, the social-structural characteristics of a Jewish population needed not to be pulled backward, as the emerging characteristics of Israeli society were those of a modern country largely comparable with the leading western societies. Although on a minor scale, some occurrences of the restoration of a more traditional, compact, and isolated Jewish cultural environment can also be detected among some contemporary Diaspora communities. In those instances, too, the availability of a relatively high standard of material and technological development allows for the choice and sustenance of a traditionalistic mode of community life becomes feasible.

It is immaterial whether these changes were predictable and unavoidable or not, and whether they occurred according to a linear or more complicated path. Their actual occurrence

determined deep and long-lasting consequences for world Jewry. Sometimes at a different timing and pace similar transformations emerged among other social and cultural groups as well. It should be noted, however, that at the turn of the 21st century, the increasing globalization of society created growing or even new opportunities for interaction among different social and cultural actors across and within distinct communities, in Israel and across the world. This further justifies the call for re-evaluating the recent and contemporary Jewish experience and the unfolding of out-marriage trends in particular through international comparisons within one integrated perspective.

Concepts

The discussion about out-marriage is often hindered by a lack of consistency in the concepts used. International comparisons, or even comparisons of the same population over time, tend sometimes to be misleading because of the casual use of terminology and sources. It seems therefore necessary to briefly review some of the main methodological issues involved, before proceeding with a broad description of actual trends.

Terminology

Inter-marriage is probably the broader and most inclusive term to describe a marriage in which the spouses belong to two different groups according to a classification of any sort. *Inter-faith* marriage is sometimes adopted but its limit is a focus on religious identities while often it is precisely the moving away from religious faith that may constitute a determinant of encounter among people of different backgrounds. *Inter-marriage* is indeed a more broadly used term but sometimes indifferent adoption of the same term for alternative descriptive purposes may create some confusion. It seems thus preferable to adopt a number of terminology distinctions that refer to different situations. Appropriate terminology may reflect whether observation is being carried out from a general and neutral perspective or from the more specific perspective of a given group. Since it is the latter perspective that informs the present chapter, we will use terminology accordingly.

We may refer to *in-marriage* when both partners were born in the same group—in this case, Jewish. *Out-marriage* generally applies to all cases when one of the partners was born in the given group and the other partner was born in a different group. *Conversionary in-marriage*

applies if the non-Jewish born partner converts to Judaism, which may occur before or after the marriage ceremony. *Conversionary out-marriage* applies if the Jewish-born partner converts to the group of the non-Jewish partner. *Mixed-marriage* applies to all cases in which each partner keeps to his/her original group identity.

Conversion produces the effect of unifying the group identification of both partners. Viewed neutrally, it does not matter which spouse adopted the group identity of which. However, from the perspective of a given group it is of course significant whether conversion occurs into the given group or outside it. Figure 2 describes these different definitions showing the relationship between (a) the original group identification of the spouses at birth—whether both Jewish or not; (b) the eventual occurrence of conversion of one of the partners—hence the emerging sameness or diversity of the spouses’ religion; and (c) the eventual outcome concerning the group composition of a couple—whether both Jewish or at least one non-Jewish. These distinctions bear important implications for measuring the frequency and social implications of out-marriage.

In more technical language it is customary to use the terms of *homogamy* (sameness of matching) versus *heterogamy* (otherness of matching). *Endogamy* and *exogamy*, respectively within vs. outside matching, indicate the same concepts in the sense of ideal normative expectations rather than in a descriptive sense.

Sources

From an empirical, social-scientific viewpoint, the assessment of out-marriage requires the existence of data on the number of marriages and the group identification of the marrying partners. Registrations of lifecycle events are also known as *vital statistics*. Information on current marriages may be obtained from the public registers of those countries or local authorities that include religion or ethnicity as one of the variables reported in a marriage record. In turn these data may come directly from the civilian authority in those countries where civil marriages are performed, and/or from a compilation of the records available.

Another source may be the records kept by Jewish communities—whether centrally or through a compilation of local pieces of information that may be much dispersed throughout all those entitled to perform a marriage. Marriages recorded by Jewish communities only refer to ceremonies performed with a Jewish ritual. Sometimes there may be access to records of

conversions to Judaism that were performed before a marriage. Unfortunately either source of marriage statistics is nowadays frequently unavailable.

Retrospective information on marital status may stem from general sources such as *population censuses* and *general social surveys* on condition that these sources investigate the religious or ethnic identity of the enumerated population. These sources of data are not designed specifically for the purpose of investigating out-marriage but may provide information on the religious or ethnic composition and other characteristics of married couples including the date of marriage.

Specialized Jewish population surveys may provide a richer array of variables on existing households, such as indicators and measures of the intensity of group affiliation and identification. Better insights can thus be obtained on the characteristics of married couples.

Whether by cumulating vital statistics over a period of time, or by disaggregating survey data by year of marriage, *time series* can be constructed which provide a sense of the variable frequency of out-marriage over time.

Each of these various sources has advantages and disadvantages regarding the definition of a Jewish population, the completeness and representativity of the covered population and the depth of information obtained on the couple's characteristics. Sources tend to be different in each country, when they exist at all, making it problematic to reach a satisfactory level of international comparability. It requires a considerable effort of data collection and data standardization to be able to present a broad synopsis of marriage and out-marriage trends.

Measurement

Several distinctions should be made in order to allow for a fair measurement of the frequency of out-marriage and an understanding of its social implications. A first distinction is between *individual* versus *couple* measurement. Figure 3 exemplifies in the simplest way that if there are three Jews, two married among themselves and one married to a non Jew, we have one Jew among three that out-married (33%), and at the same time we have one out-marriage out of two couples (50%). Measurement should be consistent for analytic purposes and these are both valid statistics but they are often mistakenly mixed up. Clearly, individual measurement always provides lower out-marriage frequencies than couple measurement because in both cases the

numerator is the same but the denominator is larger for the number of individuals and smaller for the number of couples.

Another important measurement distinction should be between *all existing couples or individuals* in a certain population, regardless of age, versus the younger *couples or individuals married in recent years*. The two measures provide, respectively, a sense of the cumulated versus current incidence of out-marriage in a population. Since over time, and in particular during the 20th century, the trend to out-marry has been on the increase, the latter rates of out-marriage tend to be significantly higher than the former. Again, the tendency to confuse cumulated vs. current measures has plagued the literature and the ensuing debate on intermarriage.

Finally, measurement may focus on the current or past marriages of people who were *born Jewish*, or of people who are *currently Jewish*, and the results may vary accordingly (see again Figure 2). According to one school of thought, measurement of out-marriage is important because it allows one to establish judgment about intergenerational trends in *group identity maintenance* or *drift*. By this view, the basis for measurement (providing 100% of relevant cases) should be all those who were born Jewish and who have ever married. Therefore those who are in conversionary out-marriages should be included in the data base even if they currently belong in homogeneous non-Jewish couples. Another school of thought chooses to focus on the current pool of households who have at least partial Jewish attachment. Therefore those Jews who converted out are excluded from the data base.

To sum up, there emerge three ways to designate the relevant populations, and to accordingly calculate out-marriage rates:

- (a) Marriages in which one of the spouses was not born Jewish out of all marriages with at least one spouse born Jewish;
- (b) Marriages in which at least one of the spouses is not currently Jewish out of all marriages with at least one spouse born Jewish;
- (c) Marriages in which one of the spouses is not currently Jewish out of all marriages with at least one spouse currently Jewish.

It can be assumed that the computed rate of out-marriage tends to become lower as one moves from option (a) to option (c).

This distinction was indeed at the center of an intense discussion about the results and interpretation of the 1990 and 2001 U.S. National Jewish Population Surveys (NJPS). The recent

rate of out-marriage for individuals who married in 1985-1990 resulted to be 56% when calculated according to mode (a), 52% according to mode (b), and 43% according to mode (c). Regarding those who married in 1995-2000, the rates were 58%, 54% and 47% respectively. This example shows how different research assumptions and goals may lead to different processing of the same data and to somewhat diverging analytic conclusions. At the same time, the data unmistakably point to the main thrust of a growing out-marriage trend among U.S. Jews, no matter how it is processed.

Trends

At the beginning of the 20th century, rates of Jewish out-marriage were generally low. In many countries with large Jewish communities, out-marriage still was nearly not-existent, portraying nearly complete socio-cultural segregation between Jews and the majority of society. Few exceptions appeared in highly acculturated and veteran communities such as Italy, Germany, or the Netherlands, or even more so in distant and relatively isolated outposts with small Jewish populations, such as Australia and New Zealand.

Over time, the frequency of out-marriage tended to increase but growing differentiation in the propensity to out-marry emerged across Jewish communities. Table 1 reports a classification of Jewish populations according to the frequency of recent individual out-marriages in each country around 1930, 1980, and 2000. The Jewish populations of different countries tend to converge at certain distinct levels of out-marriage. These variable levels reflect the respective circumstances of Jewish history in each country, the country's general levels of modernization, and the different types of legal provisions available in each country for allowing or not allowing the opportunity for marriage across religious lines. A steady trend appears outlining a move from lower to higher rates of out-marriage.

Around 1930, most Jews in the world (about 65%) lived in countries where the rate of out-marriage was below 5% of all currently marrying Jewish individuals. Of these, 25% lived in countries where the frequency of out-marriage did not reach 1%. These included most of the large communities in East Europe, most communities in the Middle East and North Africa, including Palestine, but also large and modern communities in the United States, the U.K., Latin America, and South Africa. Jewish communities with an out-marriage rate between 5% and 15%

included France, and other large communities in East Europe such as the Soviet Union. No country had a Jewish community experiencing an out-marriage rate of 35% or higher.

The Jewish world around 1980 reflects the deep transformations following the *Shoah* and the destruction of European Jewry, and the independence of Israel and its being a country with a significant Jewish population size. With its levels of out-marriage close to nil, Israel appears to have taken up the role of the ethnic core of the whole configuration that once pertained to the large communities in East Europe and the Muslim countries. The most significant finding is the rapid rise of U.S. Jewry among the countries with higher out-marriage rates. Indeed, the levels appear to be quite similar in the U.S. and in the USSR, despite the deep differences between the two communities in political and cultural environment. Some of the same communities that displayed the highest frequencies in an earlier past continued to be at the edge of out-marriage levels in the 1980s. However, Australia provides one example of a community with diminishing rates of out-marriage as the Jewish population considerably grew and the opportunities for in-marriage increased as well. Already by the 1980s, a majority (63%) of world Jewry lived in countries where the out-marriage rate was higher than the 35% threshold.

Around 2000, Jews in Israel were virtually alone with an out-marriage rate still below a 5%. Jews living in the Judea, Samaria and Gaza territories—represented here separately from the main portion of Israeli Jewish population—were probably the only sizeable group with less than 1% out-marriage. The out-marriage rate in the main part of Israel—within the pre-1967 “green line”—approached 5% and reflected the growing presence and social absorption of new immigrants, mostly from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) who lack a formal Jewish status. Many of these actually performed their marriage ceremonies abroad—mostly in Cyprus. Mexico was the largest Diaspora Jewish community with an out-marriage rate estimated at less than 15%. Communities in Australia, Canada, and Turkey had an out-marriage rate of 25% to 35%. A rather large share of world Jewry including France, the U.K., and the main Latin American countries experienced out-marriage rates between 35% and 45%. The Jewish community in the U.S., still the largest in the world, had moved to well above 50%; in 2001, as noted, out-marriage could be assessed at 54%. Out-marriage rates for Jews in the European parts of the FSU were above 65%, and in the Russian Republic above 75%.

Figure 4 provides a graphic overview of the preceding data. Reflecting these trends, a worldwide average *out-marriage rate* can be computed on the basis of the respective frequencies

in each country and the Jewish population weight of each country out of the world total. This average out-marriage rate passed from 5.1% around 1930 to 33.5% around 1980, and 30.6% around 2000. The more recent decline reflected Israel's growing share out of the total of world Jewry. The same average out-marriage rate computed for Jews in the Diaspora only, without Palestine/Israel, passed from 5.1% around 1930 to 46.5% around 1980, and 48.6% around 2000. This steady increase outlines the nearly irreversible trend toward social integration and acceptance of Jews among general society. On the other hand, it should be stressed that Israel's rising share and the Diaspora's parallel shrinking share of world Jewish population tend to produce a gradual reduction in Jewish out-marriage world average levels.

Correlates, Determinants, Consequences

When trying to review some of the determinants associated with out-marriage, factors should be considered that operate at the macrosocial level—reflective of the collective environments and its constraints—and the microsocial level—reflecting the individual characteristics of the persons concerned.

Basic framework

The contemporary debate about out-marriage takes place in a context of diminished centrality of the conventional nuclear family. As age of marriage tends to increase, the proportion of single individuals at older ages increases, too, and suggests the likely scenario of significant proportions of the adult population who will never become married. Higher percentages of existing couples than in the past are childless, shifting more of the significance of the family from reproduction and an extended family environment to individual tastes and gratification. In the context of more frequent dissolution of marriages, also the number of single parent households tends to rapidly increase. Growing alternatives to the conventional married couple are represented by living together without a legally binding ceremony, although in some countries and circumstances, acknowledged cohabitation does involve legal obligations and rights. Same sex unions have become a more prominent feature in society at the level of public discourse if not in actual behaviors.

The occurrence of marriage—and out-marriage in particular—is made up of three basic factors, each widely varying over time and across individuals and population groups:

(a) *Desirability* concerns the normative centrality of the act of marrying and the choice of a partner from within or from outside the group of origin. With regard to these normative aspects, the early sources of Jewish thought and communal behavior tend to be strongly and consistently favorable to widespread, young, and endogamic marriage. In past generations, out-marriage was considered deviant behavior unless conversion to Judaism could be expected of the non-Jewish partner. Negative attitudes toward out-marriage lessened over time as the process spread among the Jewish public. It may be postulated that, as attitudes toward marriage with non-Jewish spouses became more tolerant, out-marriage became less restrained and hence more frequent. By contrast, earlier negative attitudes of non-Jews toward marriage with Jews also tended to moderate over time: in fact, in some countries Jews were rated by non-Jews as highly desirable marriage partners.

(b) *Feasibility* concerns the economic means and resources available to form a new family, and more specifically, an in-marriage or an out-marriage. Over time, because of an array of determinants, the socioeconomic characteristics and status of Jews generally were different from those of others—one main manifestation of such difference being the far higher concentration of Jews in fewer branches of economic activity. In modern times, Jews often attain higher levels of educational attainment and a better than average occupational status, providing greater freedom of choice regarding the timing of marriage and the choice of partners. Because of their socioeconomic characteristics, Jews also are more attractive partners in the eyes of non-Jews. One related question concerns the relative cost of in-marriage versus out-marriage and how this may have varied over time. It has been submitted that a trade-off may have emerged between normative preference and its cost, rendering out-marriage more easily feasible (also bearing in mind the later average age at marriage among the out-married).

(c) *Availability* concerns the existence of appropriate marital partners, where age, sex, marital status and often social status and other personal characteristics determine the pool of relevant candidates to choose from within and from outside the group. It should be kept in mind that the Jews constitute a small minority of the total population nearly everywhere besides Israel. The likelihood of meeting a suitable non-Jewish partner is therefore enormously greater than that of meeting a Jewish partner. Moreover, the

generally small and dispersed character of Jewish communities often tends to make the location of marriage partners of adequate age, sex, and identificational group difficult to find locally. In the past, the intervention of intermediaries significantly helped to overcome these marriage market constraints. Later, the massive concentration of Jews in large urban communities transformed the rules and opportunities for family formation in general, and for spouse selection by identificational belonging in particular. Strong fluctuations in the Jewish birth rate and in the ensuing size of successive birth cohorts related to the *Shoah*, the post World War baby boom, and baby bust periodically created relative shortages of members of one sex (marriage squeezes). The imbalance of sexes occurred especially because of the widespread tendency of men to marry younger women—hence the belonging of grooms and brides to different birth cohorts.

When studying a particular group, such as the Jews, each of these main factors can be expected to operate in ways that partly conform with and partly differ from the majority of population or other sub-populations. It clearly appears that, historically, responses of Jews to in-marriage and out-marriage could not be expected to be monolithic but rather reflected internal cultural, socioeconomic, and demographic differentials. It also appears that the major determinants mentioned often produced conflicting pressures toward more or less marriage (in general), and more or less out-marriage. For example, occasionally, a strong normative propensity to marry endogamously associated with scarce choices of marriage partners within a given Jewish community may have ended up with low absolute frequencies of Jewish marriage. On the other hand, over a prolonged portion of modern history, a stronger propensity of Jewish males to out-marry left many Jewish women without a suitable in-marriage opportunity, ending up with the choice between permanent celibacy and out-marriage.

General societal models

The first factor in the development of out-marriage reflects the general social environment within which a given Jewish population operates, namely the prevailing mood of cultural conformity versus multiculturalism. As noted, Jewish history unfolded in a variety of different environments. At least in the past, ethnocentric (as opposed to pluralistic) societies could cope quite differently with issues of cultural and religious diversity, which in turn affected the amount of pressure to conform exerted on minorities including the Jews. Some societies that absorbed

large amounts of heterogeneous, international immigrants, as in the United States, were able to develop mechanisms of tolerance of social and cultural diversity. Within such pluralist mood—no matter how inconsistent regarding the attitude toward different population groups—Jewish communities enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy if not positive sanction. The long held assumption that American society divides into three subgroups—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish—contributed to an expectation that all three components should be present in the normal configuration of social space. Other societies developed a more centralized or ethnocentric model that left less space for diversified co-existence and more clearly projected a preference for assimilation within the local national norm.

In more recent years, some of the latter societies, including France, also had to face the impact of large-scale international migration, but because they lacked a previous tradition of pluralism, they faced internal tensions. In broader terms, the question relates to the competing models of assimilation and gradual weakening if not disappearing of ethno-religious identities, versus cultural group resilience, revivalism, and even militancy. Out-marriage trends in general—and within Jewish society in particular—were significantly influenced by these different types of societal configurations and especially by the normative acceptance or rejection of community efforts to enhance in-group marriages.

Evidently, the emergence in Israel of a society holding a very large Jewish majority was a major departure from the classic historical model of Jews as a minority, and created a totally different societal set of opportunities for Jewish life. Both the socioeconomic and cultural contexts of Israeli life stand out as markedly different from any other in the Jewish Diaspora. At least until the large immigration from the FSU, the issue of out-marriage in the Israeli context long was a manifestation of extreme social marginality—perhaps not unlike its role among other Jewish communities before the 20th century.

Jewish community models

The internal mode of operation of Jewish life at the community level is another important factor in determining patterns of Jewish social interaction and family formation. A critical factor is the absolute size of a Jewish population and their share of a country's total population. The bigger the size of a community and the higher its share of total society, the higher are the chances for inside social interaction. Moreover, from the point of view of institutional build-up, some

communities function in a dense Jewish institutional environment while others barely have any viable Jewish community infrastructure. Some Jewish communities are more centralized while some others are organizationally more fragmented. In some countries, Jewish institutions reach out to a comprehensive and solid share of the total Jewish population while in others they relate to a scantier and more dispersed constituency. The amount of participation in Jewish community life may be significantly different across countries, from compulsory in a few cases of minor quantitative import, to completely voluntaristic.

The prevalence within the Jewish community of voluntaristic activism versus the reliance on services provided by the public authority—be it general or community-specific—tends to reflect more general patterns in society regarding civic participation. These patterns also reflect the specific history of local Jewish communities and may translate into more or less intensive interaction within them. The more cohesive a community, other things being equal, the higher the likelihood of stronger internal interaction and the chances for in-marriage.

Characteristics of spouses

Personal characteristics of marriage candidates within a given Jewish population may in turn significantly affect the likelihood of in-marriage versus out-marriage.

Gender. Jewish women in the past had lower rates of out-marriage than Jewish men, due probably to the more limited set of opportunities they had: less education, less participation in the labor force, and a more limited and confined leisure life. However, through the emancipation of women and their achieving of growingly higher levels of education and more competitive jobs, marriage differentials narrowed very significantly. By the 1980s and 1990s, the gender gap was disappearing and the previously lower out-marriage rates of Jewish women tended to converge to the higher rates of men.

Age. The structure of the marriage market—that is, how many available relevant mates there are in a given population—may sometimes be unbalanced, to the point that people may be left with the alternative not to marry at all or to out-marry. Out-marriage tends to occur at a later age than in the case of in-marriage. This seems to hint at a persisting priority for in-group search of marital

partners, followed by a shift toward a broader pool of other marital opportunities as a second-best alternative.

Cohabitation. The recently available evidence points to extremely high rates of non-Jewish partners among Jewish adults who cohabit without being married. To the extent that cohabitation has become an increasingly diffused lifecycle stage toward marriage, the composition of cohabiting couples tends to suggest a future increase in out-marriage. On the other hand, in some cases, cohabitation may be an alternative to out-marriage, especially among those who perceive that their family environment would not easily accept their choice. This is still another factor for postponing an out-marriage that may eventually take place at a higher age.

Residence. Size and density of a Jewish community can be importantly related to marriage opportunities. The relation of out-marriage to place of residence reflects both the cause and the consequence. A higher Jewish residential density is quite obviously related to a higher chance to find a Jewish marriage partner in one's own proximate space. On the other hand, in the case of out-marriage the chances that the new household will move to relatively low-density Jewish neighborhoods are higher than in the case of in-marriage. Internet and distance connections may have an impact on these relations in the future. Physical proximity may have become less important a factor in spouse selection than it used to be, although it is difficult to assume that virtual communication can fully substitute face to face interaction. It is a matter of interest, though, that the emergence of internet dating data-banks—including some that are exclusively devoted to the service of a Jewish constituency—might eventually have an impact on the rules of family formation.

Socioeconomic characteristics. In the past, out-marriage was strongly related to upward social mobility, and was more frequent among the better-educated, wealthier, and more socially mobile. More recent data suggest that, on the contrary, out-marriage seems to be more frequently related to lower education and lower social class—which indeed is not very frequent among Jews. It seems plausible that the high cost of Jewish community services may cause some people to become marginalized vis-à-vis the opportunities of Jewish education, leisure, and culture. Those

unattached people will consequently live mostly in a non-Jewish context and have greater opportunities to interact with non-Jewish peers.

Jewish identification. Personal Jewish identification is probably the most important predictor of in- versus out-marriage. Out-marriage is more frequent among people who do not feel a powerful need to be connected with a Jewish community and a Jewish lifestyle. In turn, the strength of Jewish identification reflects early socialization experiences and the pool of opportunities that may arise somewhat later in life. There exists good evidence that Jewishness of the parental home is probably the most powerful factor in determining a person's Jewish profile over the rest of the life course, including a choice of spouse inside the Jewish community. A second determinant appears to be the amount and quality of formal Jewish education received. Patterns of Jewish socialization that begin very early in life appear to have a crucial effect on subsequent patterns of affiliation, social networks, and the ensuing opportunities and preferences for marital choice. Jewish behavioral patterns of the out-married tend to be consistently weaker than those of the in-married, although some traits of Jewishness may persist among the most assimilated among out-married Jews, and even among the non-Jewish partners in out-marriages.

Sameness and otherness. The dialectics of in-marriage vs. out-marriage in terms of religion or ethnic identity is often also associated with other elements of uniformity or assortment among the partners. Couples that are heterogeneous in terms of group identification tend also to be more different than in-marriages in terms of other aspects of their socio-demographic profile, such as place of residence, education, occupation, or age. This reflects the different distribution of such characteristics among Jews and non-Jews and the different likelihood to find a person with given personal traits in a Jewish or non-Jewish context. The presence of multiple heterogeneities, however, seems to contradict the expectation that diminished relevance of religious-ethnic identification among out-married couples would be compensated by greater affinity on other social or cultural grounds.

Marital stability. Out-marriages tend to be more vulnerable to instability than in-marriages. The reasons may be complex, including such factors as the already mentioned lesser homogeneity by a variety of other socio-demographic characteristics, or a diversity of norms and attitudes

concerning important lifetime transitions such as raising and providing a cultural identity to children. A couple's assortment in re-marriages often tends to be the opposite than in first marriages. In-married couples who split often out-marry in subsequent marriages. Out-marriages are not infrequently succeeded by in-marriages.

Acceptance. A circular relation emerges between frequencies of out-marriage and its social acceptance. Behavioral patterns that become more frequent tend to become socially more acceptable, and patterns that are more socially acceptable tend to become more frequent. The development of positive (or at least non-negative) attitudes to out-marriage has tended to precede the actual frequency of out-marriage among the same community.

Implications

The significance of marriage patterns and of in- or out-marriage in particular extends far beyond the personal choices of the partners involved and tends to affect the whole chain of group continuity in the longer term. In the following we briefly review some of the main issues involved in Jewish intergenerational continuity and in community interactions that directly or indirectly stem from the ongoing marriage patterns.

Conversion

One primary correlate of out-marriage is its possible direct effect on population size and composition through passages of individuals from one group to another. In religious terms, conversion has been the instrument for accessing Judaism since the most distant past. Historically, the balance of conversions to and from Judaism were strikingly negative, also due to the aversion of normative Judaism toward proselytism. In the more recent past, a more proactive attitude lead to much larger numbers of converts especially through the Conservative and Reform movements. Yet recent survey data continue to show a rather similar balance between cases of accession and secession in the U.S. In some Latin American communities such as Mexico and Venezuela the conversions balance tended to be in favor of the Jewish community.

The progress of secularization, though, makes it difficult for many non-Jewish members in Jewish households to access Judaism on religious grounds. This is also the case for the majority of non-Jewish immigrants from the FSU to Israel since the 1990s. An admission

procedure does not exist for those who would consider joining the Jewish collective on ethnic grounds. In fact, recent U.S. surveys point to quite a few who define themselves Jewish without having undergone any formal *rite de passage*. These individuals would normally be included in the standard definition of a “core” Jewish population. One result is a gradual divergence of the empirical and normative grounds of Jewish identification and population counts.

Identity transmission

Out-marriage may significantly affect the pace of intergenerational reproduction of a population. Theoretically, if one half of the children of out-marriages are affiliated with one side and one half is affiliated with the other, there is no demographic gain or loss to either side. In reality, according to the vast majority of research evidence available, the Jewish side has received less than half of all the children of out-marriages. During the 1990s, less than 20% of the children of out-marriages were affiliated with the Jewish side both in the U.S. and in the Russian Republic. In 2001, the proportion Jewish children among all children of out-marriages had increased to about one third, perhaps reflecting the increased investments of resources in Jewish formal and informal education in the U.S. Only in relatively small communities in Latin America such as Mexico or Venezuela was there a clear indication that a majority of the children of out-marriages were identified with the Jewish parent. This was the outcome of the conversion to Judaism of the vast majority of the non-Jewish spouses.

In the U.S., Canada, and other English speaking countries, the mother is the dominant parent in transmitting a group identity to the children of out-marriages. If the mother is Jewish, the child tends more often to be identified as Jewish, and if the mother is not Jewish, the child tends to be non-Jewish. This, incidentally, conforms to the Jewish *Halakhah*. In other societies, such as Latin American or Southern and Eastern European countries, the father appears to be the dominant parent in the allocation of a child’s public identity and presentation of self, and children of out-marriages mostly follow the father’s identity. Here we have an interesting case of dependency of Jewish community patterns not on the inherent culture of the group (which would be predominantly matrilineal) but rather on norms widespread in society at large.

The question of intergenerational reproduction is sharpened when looking at the marriage choices of the second and third generations of the descendants of out-marriages. While the evidence is not massive, it points to a spectacular increase in the rate of out-marriage among the

children of out-marriage, even if they have grown up as Jews. Possibly because the model gauged from their parents is quite obviously one of legitimacy, children may normally imitate their parents' choices and out-marry themselves. The children's social networks, too, tend to be more open to siblings and relatives of different backgrounds. Out-marriage in effect becomes strikingly predominant in the second generation of children of out-marriages, even if they were themselves raised as Jews. Very little research exists concerning the marriage choices of grandchildren of out-marriages but the evidence is one of a chain-reaction effect in which each generation reinforces the trends present in the previous one. The results for Jewish population size and composition tend to consist in a critical erosion of the effectiveness of younger generations.

Corporate consequences

Beyond the significance of individual experiences and changing community profiles, broader implications of out-marriage affect the Jewish collective globally. What out-marriage does to the Jewish people needs to be considered in terms of the major actors and processes at the corporate level. Examples include the nature of Israel-Diaspora relations, the development and maintenance of consensus on core Jewish values, polarization between sectors and factions within the Jewish polity, and even cleavages on Jewish theological principles. Inasmuch as it is perceived as contradictory to prevailing Jewish norms, out-marriage is a factor of internal tension and stress besides being widely perceived as a symptom of erosion on population size and composition. In addition, different strategies to cope with the expanding phenomenon by different Jewish leaders and movements have sometimes resulted in tensions and in mutual denials of the other party's wisdom or even legitimacy.

The question of out-marriage and of the identificational composition of members of the respective households also impinges upon into the question of "Who is a Jew?" as interpreted by the Israeli legal system in the framework of the Law of Return. This feeds tensions between the Israeli Rabbinate, Ministry of Interiors, and Government, and at least segments of the Jewish community leadership in the Diaspora. Typical in this sense is the controversy about the attribution of Jewish identification according to a matrilineal principle only, or also according to patrilineal ascendant. In turn, in the framework of discussions about eligibility for the same Law of Return, Israel's Supreme Court recently took a more active role in addressing conversion rules by different Jewish denominations and the recognition of Jewishness of the converts—many of

which were the formerly non-Jewish partners of other Jews. The more recent decisions that have ruled in favor of the applicants have attracted strong opposition by the religious establishment inside Israel. Diverging attitudes inherent in out-marriage trends therefore enhance polarization within the Jewish community and polity.

Jewish community responses and policies

Facing these trends and challenges, the debate about what might be the most adequate response to out-marriage finds Jewish communities worldwide quite divided. A first distinction concerns the general attitude of communities toward the trends outlined above. Three corporate reactions call for attention because they point to a problematic attitude towards the data coupled with a lack of action in their regards. These reactions are: dismissal, euphoria, and fatalism:

- (a) **Dismissal** is the attitude of those who deny the significance of a data-based reading of the situation, or who find the data difficult to follow and therefore irrelevant to them, or view the data as impossible and incompatible with their expectations and therefore inherently wrong. The problem is thus apparently removed at least in the short term.
- (b) **Euphoria** is the reaction of those who see in out-marriage a powerful instrument to enlist the non-Jewish partners into Judaism. Many of these also assume that such incorporation has actually occurred.
- (c) **Fatalism** is the posture of those who recognize the rising trend of out-marriage and the significant identificational stress which accompanies it, but believe nothing can be done on the matter.

However, once recognized that out-marriage—whatever its final outcome for Jewish identification and demography—is a relevant issue for Jewish community response, a major policy alternative emerges regarding the most appropriate ways of coping with the issues. This tends to pit the proponents of in-reach against those who support out-reach:

- (a) **Out-reach** aims at incorporating within the Jewish community not only the non-Jewish spouses and children of out-marriage but also the usually rather estranged Jewish side of it by offering them a friendly approach to Jewish community membership and meaningful terms of reference for actual participation.
- (b) **In-reach** stresses the need to prevent out-marriage by strengthening the Jewish identification of the pool of people who already belong.

It is evident in any case that to tackle the growing incidence of out-marriage in an open and forthcoming society as experienced by most contemporary Jews one needs to develop a strategy that will meaningfully incorporate and accompany the Jewish individual, his or her extended family, and the broader community throughout the whole spectrum of the lifecycle. The build-up of cumulative opportunities blending intellectual and experiential valence may offer a response to the powerful existing drive away from Jewish awareness, self-esteem and identification that usually seems to precede out-marriage and represents a frequent outcome.

Unquestionably, the diffusion of out-marriage across Jewish populations globally and the conflicting attitudes towards its nature and consequences constitute fundamental issues for Jewish policy making and one of the major challenges World Jewry faces at the beginning of the 21st century.

FIGURE 1. ILLUSTRATION OF SOCIAL CHANGE PROCESSES AMONG WORLD JEWISH COMMUNITIES

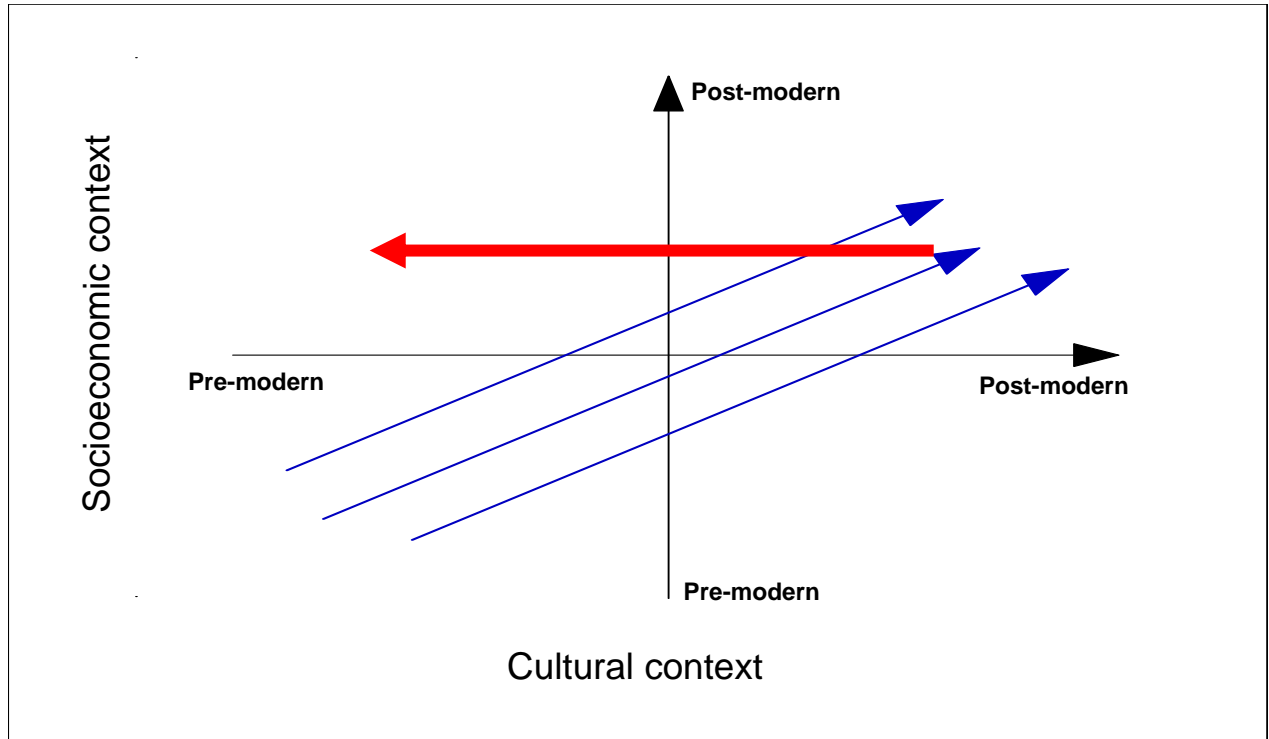
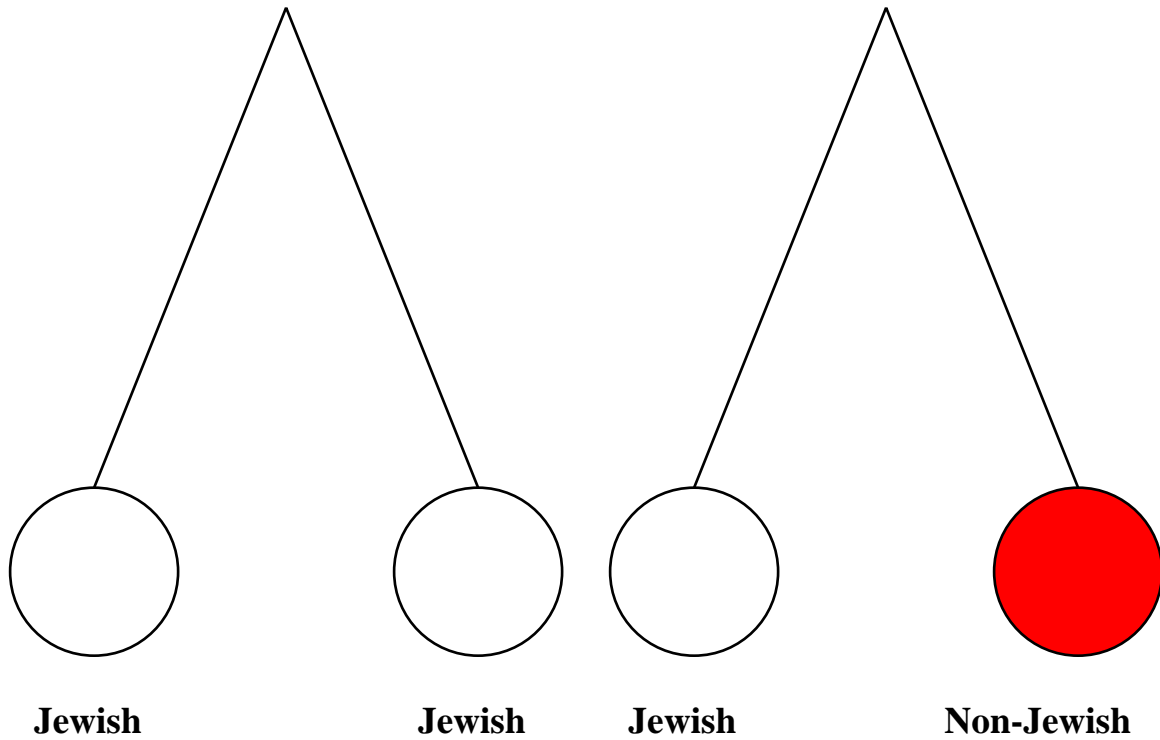


FIGURE 2. EXAMPLES OF DEFINITION OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF MARRIAGE

Group identification of spouses at birth	Group identification of spouses after marriage		
	Same	Different	
Same	Two spouses born Jewish: In-marriage		
Different	One Spouse born Jewish: Out-marriage		
	Non-Jewish conversion to Jewish: Conversionary in-marriage	Jewish conversion to non-Jewish: Conversionary out-marriage	No conversion: Mixed marriage
Eventual outcome	Two spouses Jewish	At least one spouse non-Jewish	
		None Jewish	One Jewish

FIGURE 3. ILLUSTRATION OF INDIVIDUAL AND COUPLE OUT-MARRIAGE MEASURES



Jewish individuals out-married: $1 / 3 = 33\%$

Jewish couples out-married: $1 / 2 = 50\%$

TABLE 1. WORLD JEWISH POPULATION DISTRIBUTION, BY FREQUENCY OF CURRENT OUT-MARRIAGES, 1930s, 1980s, 2000s

% Jews now marrying non-Jews ^a	1930s			1980s			2000s		
	Country ^b	Jewish pop.		Country ^b	Jewish pop.		Country ^b	Jewish pop.	
		N 000	%		N 000	%		N 000	%
	Total	16,500	100.0	Total	12,979	100.0	Total	12,950	100.0
0-0.9%	Poland ¹ , Lithuania ¹ , Greece ² , Palestine ² , Iran ⁴ , Yemen ⁴ , Ethiopia ⁴	4,130	25.0	Israel ¹	3,659	28.2	West Bank-Gaza (Judea, Samaria and Gaza) ¹	215	1.7
1-4.9%	Latvia ¹ , Canada ¹ , United States ² , Latin America ⁴ , United Kingdom ⁴ , Spain-Portugal ⁴ , Other Asia ⁴ , Maghreb ² , Egypt ¹ , Libya ⁴ , Southern Africa ⁴	6,600	40.0	Mexico ¹ , Africa not else stated ⁴	57	0.5	Israel ¹ , Yemen ⁴	4,879	37.7
5-14.9%	Switzerland ¹ , France ² , Austria ¹ , Luxembourg ¹ , Hungary ¹ , Romania ² , Czechoslovakia ¹ , USSR ¹ , Estonia ¹ , Belgium ⁴ , Bulgaria ⁴ , Yugoslavia ⁴	5,340	32.4	North Africa ⁴ , Asia (besides Israel) ⁴	46	0.3	Mexico ¹ , Gibraltar ⁴ , China ⁴ , Iran ⁴ , Syria ⁴ , North Africa ⁴	60	0.4
15-24.9%	Italy ¹ , Germany ¹ , Netherlands ¹	385	2.3	Southern Africa ³	120	0.9	Bahamas ⁴ , Costa Rica ⁴ , Guatemala ² , Venezuela ¹ , India ³ , Japan ⁴ , Singapore ⁴ , South Africa ³	101	0.8
25-34.9%	Australia ² , New Zealand ⁴ , Scandinavia ³	45	0.3	Canada ¹ , Australia ³ , New Zealand ⁴ , United Kingdom ⁴ , Brazil ² , Other Latin America ³ , Europe not else stated ⁴	936	7.2	Canada ¹ , Chile ² , Latin America not else stated ⁴ , Turkey ² , Africa not else stated ⁴ , Australia ¹ , New Zealand ³	535	4.1
35-44.9%				Argentina ³ , Italy ² , France ² , Belgium ⁴	818	6.3	Argentina ³ , Brazil ² , Uruguay ² , France ¹ , United Kingdom ¹ , West Europe not else stated ³	1,176	9.1
45-54.9%				United States ² , USSR ² , Austria ¹ , Switzerland ¹ , Netherlands ³	7,186	55.4	United States ¹ , Italy ² , Netherlands ¹ , Switzerland ¹ , Asian FSU ³	5,400	41.7
55-74.9%				Scandinavia ³ , West Germany ¹ , Eastern Europe (besides USSR) ⁴	156	1.2	Austria ¹ , Germany ¹ , East Europe (besides FSU) ³	194	1.5
75% +				Cuba ²	1	0.0	European FSU ² , Cuba ³	390	3.0

a Not Jewish at time of marriage. Out-marriage figures are countrywide or regional estimates. This table ignores variation in out-marriage frequencies within countries.

b Data quality rated as follows: 1 Recent and reliable data; 2 Partial or less recent data of sufficient quality; 3 Rather outdated or incomplete data; 4 Conjectural.

Source: adapted from DellaPergola (1972; 1976; 1983; 1989), Linfield (1942), Schmelz and DellaPergola (1990), DellaPergola (1995; 2003), and respective references.

FIGURE 4. WORLD JEWISH POPULATION DISTRIBUTION, BY OUT-MARRIAGE FREQUENCIES IN COUNTRIES OF RESIDENCE – 1930s, 1980s, 2000s

