

SIDNEY GOLDSTEIN  
ALICE GOLDSTEIN

## *A Sociodemographic Overview*

AS A MAJOR DENOMINATION in American Jewish life, Conservative Judaism constitutes a critical dimension in any assessment of the vitality of American Judaism as a whole. Conservative Judaism evolved over a century ago in response to the need to integrate waves of Eastern European immigrants into American life while enabling them to maintain their sense of ethnic and religious identity.<sup>1</sup> Conservative Judaism was intended to preserve traditional Judaism but in a modified form, to parallel predominant styles of worship in the United States. The movement drew heavily from the Orthodox population, providing these new adherents to Conservative Judaism with a familiar context but without the insistence on stringent observance.

By 1950 Conservatism's "historic mission" to prevent the religious alienation of the Jews originating in Eastern Europe seemed to have been accomplished.<sup>2</sup> The next two decades saw unprecedented growth for the Conservative movement and its assumption of numerical primacy among the three major denominations. A key factor in the change was the dramatic population movement—Jewish and general—from cities to suburbs and the subsequent spurt of synagogue building in these new areas. At the same time the movement developed a series of auxiliary institutions, including the Ramah camps and some day schools, that strengthened the sense of Conservatism as a movement among the laity.

Nonetheless, many of the problems that plagued the movement at mid-century continued. The lack of congruence between official ideology and individual observance remained. And assimilation was posing an increasing threat to Jewish continuity in the United States generally, forcing leaders of the movement to question Conservatism's appeal to younger Jews. In the large metro-

politan centers a significant number of Jews identified themselves as “Conservative” but remained unaffiliated. In particular, the disruptive changes that swept American religious life in general in the 1980s did not leave American Jewry untouched,<sup>3</sup> making any predictions about the strength of a particular denomination particularly problematic.

The unprecedented freedom that America has offered Jews to determine the content and form of their religious practices and behavior has thus simultaneously helped to insure the movement’s success and created the context within which threats to its future can develop. Religious freedom for Jews in America has created a fluid, dynamic situation, both between and within denominations.

Since its inception, Conservative Judaism’s response to the larger surrounding society has led to changes in some of its religious positions, as well as in its organizational format. These have included incorporation of activities (like men’s clubs, youth organizations, social action groups) other than religious services. Its constituency has also changed, reflecting both general sociodemographic changes in the American population as a whole and the flow into and out of the denomination of selected segments of Jews. As we move into the twenty-first century, continued responsiveness to the changing context is essential if Conservatism is to retain its strength and numbers. A successful response must be based on a firm understanding of the current situation that includes an accurate demographic profile of Conservative Jews and an understanding of their religious practices and attitudes. This study is intended to provide such a basic understanding.

Using data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS-1990), supplemented by local community surveys undertaken in the 1980s, we provide a profile of persons who identify themselves as Conservative Jews in the United States. We delineate their sociodemographic composition, examine some of their religious/ritual behavior and beliefs, and assess the trends in movement into and out of Conservatism. The data thereby provide the basis for evaluating changes during the 1980s and for future planning and programming.

The NJPS-1990 data have the great advantage of including persons who are both affiliated and unaffiliated with synagogues/temples. Most studies of a particular denomination, including earlier studies of Conservative Judaism and other reports in this volume, have relied almost exclusively on information provided by synagogues or on respondents drawn from synagogue membership lists. With synagogue/temple affiliation rates among Jewish Americans at only 41 percent nationally,<sup>4</sup> the large unaffiliated segment of the population who identify themselves as adherents of a denomination is overlooked. Any comprehensive analysis of the members of a denomination must therefore include both those formally affiliated and those who identify with the movement but are unaffiliated.

The representativeness of the NJPS data also allows simultaneous comparisons

Table 2.1  
Denomination of Adults by Household Synagogue/Temple Membership

	Total Number	Percent of Jewish Population	Synagogue Members (%)	Non- members (%)
Conservative	1,588,000	35.0	47.0	28.3
Orthodox	275,000	6.1	10.7	3.4
Reform	1,722,000	38.0	35.3	39.4
Reconstructionist	60,000	1.3	2.0	0.9
"Just Jewish"	457,000	10.1	3.4	14.0
Other <sup>a</sup>	428,000	9.5	1.6	14.0
Total	4,530,000	100.0	100.0	100.0

<sup>a</sup> In this and subsequent tables in this chapter, those whose denominational identification was unknown are omitted from the tabulations.

Unless otherwise specified, data are for adults only.

of the Conservative population with those who identify with other denominations or with no denomination. In this way, we can determine the degree to which Conservative Jews are centrist or exceptional in the spectrum of American Jews in general. Most of the focus for this aspect of the analysis draws comparisons with Orthodox and Reform, but we also give attention, where possible, to Reconstructionism and to those who identify as "just Jewish" or "other."

At both the national and the community level, an overwhelming majority of adult Jews,<sup>5</sup> four in every five, identify themselves with one of the four religious denominations of American Judaism: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. Of these, an estimated 1,588,000 identified as Conservative, constituting 35 percent of the total adult Jewish population (table 2.1). They were surpassed slightly by adults who indicated they were Reform, 38 percent of the total. The Orthodox constituted 6 percent of Jewish adults, and Reconstructionists just over 1 percent. Almost 20 percent did not identify with a specific denomination, reporting instead that they were "Just Jewish" or something else. In addition to the 1.59 million Conservative adults, some 270,000 children under age eighteen live in households with Conservative affiliation.

While adult Conservative Jews constituted a slightly lower proportion of the total Jewish American population than the Reform, when the affiliated and nonaffiliated are considered separately, a different picture emerges. Among those who are affiliated with a synagogue/temple, 47 percent identify as Conservatives and only 35 percent are Reform. Conversely, among the nonaffiliated, a smaller percentage are Conservative than Reform: 28 percent compared with 39 percent. Thus, in considering the relative size of the various denominations, it is important to distinguish between members and nonmembers.

Within the Conservative population, socioeconomic variables differ among the various age segments and between those who are members of households with a synagogue/temple affiliation and those who have no such membership.<sup>6</sup> Regional patterns are also apparent, and switching into and out of Conservative Judaism is quite selective on a variety of characteristics and behaviors.

Several major themes emerge from our analysis:

1. Conservative Jewry generally occupies a centrist position between Orthodox and Reform on a wide array of characteristics.
2. Age (as a proxy for generation status) is an important differentiator of religious practices and strength of religious identification.
3. Respondents living in households with synagogue memberships are significantly different on many dimensions of socioeconomic characteristics and Jewish behavior from those in nonmember households.
4. Regional differences are strong, with Conservative Jews in the South and West generally showing lower levels of Jewish commitment than those in the Northeast and Midwest.
5. The inflow of persons not raised as Conservative Jews and the outflow of persons who were raised as Conservative Jews but who by 1990 identified with another denomination or no denomination at all have dramatically altered the sociodemographic and Jewish behavioral profile of Conservative Jewry.

The discussion that follows assesses each of these themes, highlights our major findings, and points to implications for future developments. Our discussion in this essay is based on extensive statistical analyses, but only key tables can be presented here because of space limitations. Some of the data discussed below will therefore not appear in the tables. These data, as well as other statistical materials, are available in a fuller monograph on Conservative Jewry using the NJPS data.<sup>7</sup>

### ***The Centrism of Conservative Jewry***

As Conservative Judaism has evolved, it has taken some positions on halakhic concerns that are less stringent than those held by the Orthodox. At the same time, it has maintained a much more traditional stance than Reform Judaism. Conservative Judaism is thus often considered to be a religion of the middle of the road and as such has appealed to persons of widely differing backgrounds and expectations. We anticipated, therefore, that persons identifying as Conservative Jews would show levels of religious identification and commitment that fall somewhere between those of the Orthodox and Reform. And indeed, the NJPS data confirm our assumption. Somewhat surprisingly, they show that

Table 2.2  
Interdenominational Comparisons: Selected Socioeconomic Characteristics

	Conservative	Orthodox	Reform	Reconstructionist
<i>Education (age 25 and over)</i>				
High School or Less	32.4	42.5	14.6	11.2
Some College	19.7	12.4	25.7	5.5
College Degree	25.0	25.2	31.5	23.3
Graduate School	24.9	19.9	28.1	60.0
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Occupation (of those in labor force)</i>				
Males:				
Professional	42.2	47.3	39.1	*
Manager	18.3	9.8	18.8	*
Clerical/Sales	25.1	21.0	31.1	*
Blue Collar	14.4	21.8	10.9	*
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	*
Females:				
Professional	37.1	51.5	49.7	*
Manager	17.5	10.0	13.5	*
Clerical/Sales	36.5	33.8	29.5	*
Blue Collar	8.9	4.7	7.2	*
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	*
<i>Five-Year Migration Status</i>				
Non-migrant	78.9	88.2	74.9	70.4
Intrastate	9.7	5.0	11.0	5.2
Interstate:				
Within Region	4.5	1.3	4.3	9.3
Between Regions	6.6	2.5	9.0	12.5
International	0.3	3.0	0.8	2.7
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

\* = fewer than ten unweighted cases.

Conservative Jews also have sociodemographic characteristics that in many respects lie between the other two major denominations.

#### SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Illustrative of their centrist position, the educational achievement of Conservative Jews is higher than that of the Orthodox but lower than that of the Reform (table 2.2). Similarly, the percentage of Conservatives in midlevel occupations (managers and clerical/sales) is higher than that of the Orthodox but lower than for the Reform; conversely, the Orthodox have a higher proportion of blue-collar workers and professionals, and Reform have lower percentages of each.

Even the level of geographic mobility of the three groups, as measured by migration in the five years preceding the survey, follows a similar pattern: Reform are the most mobile and Orthodox the least; Conservatives fall between the two but tend to be more like the Reform than the Orthodox. This differen-

Table 2.3  
Denominational Comparisons: Age Distributions

	Conservative	Orthodox	Reform	Reconstructionist
0-5	6.7	11.7	9.1	12.3
6-17	13.8	19.8	14.9	18.7
18-24	5.0	6.0	3.6	1.7
25-44	32.5	24.2	41.0	43.3
45-64	17.5	10.5	17.6	22.4
65 and over	24.5	27.8	13.8	1.6
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Median Age	40.1	35.3	35.9	33.0

NOTE: Children under age 18 were assigned the denomination of the household; adults' denominational identification refers to their reported current denomination.

tial pattern of mobility suggests that the need of Orthodox Jews for specific facilities and services (such as kosher butchers, mikvahs, and day schools) plays a larger role in determining where they live than is true for Conservative Jews. For the latter, other considerations, like economic opportunities or lifestyle amenities, may be more important determinants of residential location.

Age distribution is the one important area where the centrist position does not characterize Conservative Jews (table 2.3).<sup>8</sup> Not only is the median age of Conservative Jews (forty years) older than that of the Orthodox and Reform (about thirty-five years), but the configurations of the age distribution within each denomination also differ sharply. Conservative Jews have a dearth of children under age eighteen compared with the other two denominations, and they have more persons age forty-five and over. A combination of low Conservative fertility, the strong attraction of the movement in the past to persons raised Orthodox (see below) who are now in the older age categories, and its lesser attraction to families with young children have together created a situation that has serious implications for future Conservative vitality.

#### JEWISH PRACTICES AND BEHAVIOR

On every indicator of Jewish practices and behavior we have examined, the Conservatives exhibit a level below that of the Orthodox and above that of the Reform.<sup>9</sup> Those who identified as "Just Jewish" or "Other" have consistently lower levels of Jewish practices and behavior than those with denominational identification. The pattern for the three major denominations is consistent for variables ranging from Jewish education to ritual practices, from intermarriage to community involvement, although the differences put Conservatives closer to the Orthodox in some instances and closer to the Reform in others (table 2.4). The varying levels of Jewish education illustrate the mixed pattern of differences among the denominations. The Orthodox have by far the highest levels of Jewish

Table 2.4  
Denominational Comparisons: Selected Aspects of Jewish Practices and Behavior

	Conservative	Orthodox	Reform	Reconstructionist
<i>Index of Jewish Education<sup>a</sup></i>				
None	23.0	15.0	28.0	11.2
Low	11.8	10.1	19.4	16.4
Medium	31.3	22.7	35.2	25.5
High	33.9	52.3	17.4	46.9
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Synagogue Attendance</i>				
Never	14.2	8.6	19.7	11.1
Often <sup>b</sup>	29.3	53.7	16.8	57.0
<i>Selected Ritual Practices<sup>c</sup></i>				
Sabbath Candles	23.2	51.4	10.1	22.6
Kashrut	14.7	60.1	2.1	8.8
Fast on Yom Kippur	70.2	85.1	51.7	81.9
Attend Seder	73.7	72.5	69.5	80.6
Hanukkah Candles	72.8	77.1	65.8	70.4
<i>Community Involvement</i>				
Belong to Jewish Organization	39.2	43.4	28.2	30.7
Engage in Jewish Voluntarism	23.7	32.9	16.2	35.0
Contribute to Jewish Causes	63.0	72.3	49.9	67.6
Been to Israel	36.7	53.3	23.0	39.3
<i>Percent in a</i>				
Mixed Marriage	20.9	7.0	37.5	50.9

<sup>a</sup> None = No Jewish education.  
Low = 1-2 years of any type school.  
Medium = 3 or more years of Sunday school or 3-5 years of supplementary or day school.  
High = 6 or more years of supplementary or day school.

<sup>b</sup> Once a month or more.

<sup>c</sup> Percent of respondents answering "Always" or "Usually."

education (over half had six or more years of day school or supplementary schooling). This was true, however, of only 34 percent of the Conservative, placing them midway between Orthodox and Reform (17 percent) in the percentage who had a high level of Jewish education. The percentages reporting no Jewish education among the Conservative and Reform were, however, quite similar (23 percent and 28 percent) and higher than among the Orthodox.

These mixed patterns characterize other aspects of Jewish behavior and practices. On the one hand, for example, the percentage of Conservative Jews belonging to a Jewish organization is closer to that of the Orthodox than to that of the Reform. On the other hand, the 15 percent of Conservatives who keep the laws of kashrut is much closer to the 2 percent of the Reform who do so than to the 60 percent of the Orthodox reporting kashrut observance. Since

maintenance of kashrut is a central tenet of Conservative Judaism, the great deviation here, as in the observance of lighting Shabbat candles, points to the diversity of belief and divergence from the stated Conservative norm in much of the religious behavior of those who identify with the denomination. Our findings highlight the inclusiveness of Conservative Judaism, which encompasses adherents with widely differing levels of religious observance.

Perhaps the most discussed statistics to emerge from NJPS-1990 have been those related to intermarriage, in particular the high level of intermarriage in 1985–90. Here, too, our data indicate a centrist position for Conservative Jews. Whereas overall some 21 percent of Conservative respondents reported that they were married to a non-Jew, this was true of 38 percent of the Reform and only 7 percent of the Orthodox. When we focus on the most recent marriages—those that occurred between 1985 and 1990—a similar pattern emerges, although the levels are much higher: Just under half of the marriages involving a Conservative Jewish respondent are mixed, compared with about one-fourth of the Orthodox and almost three-fourths of the Reform. This pattern is directly related to attitudes toward intermarriage; a much larger proportion of Conservative Jews are opposed to it than is true among Reform, with the Orthodox most strongly opposed of all.

The range of denominational differences is somewhat narrower for variables related to involvement in the formal structure of the Jewish community. Nonetheless, the level of membership in Jewish organizations, voluntarism for Jewish causes, and household giving to Jewish charities among Conservative Jews is consistently intermediary between that of Orthodox and Reform Jews. The same pattern characterizes visiting Israel and the importance attached to living in a Jewish milieu (i.e., having Jewish friends and living in a neighborhood that is heavily Jewish).

One additional interesting insight provided by these data on denominational differences is the exceptionalism of Reconstructionist Jews, who constitute less than 2 percent of the adult Jewish population in the United States. The movement, a relative newcomer on the denominational scene, began to grow only in the 1980s; because their numbers are still very small, the patterns can be suggestive only. Since many Reconstructionists come from Conservative backgrounds, however, their profile may be an important portent of future trends.

On many indicators Reconstructionists are more involved and more strongly Jewishly identified than their Conservative counterparts. For example, compared with Conservatives, they have somewhat higher levels of Jewish education, attend synagogue more regularly, and have higher levels of voluntarism and Jewish organizational membership. Like the Conservatives from whose ranks many of them came, Reconstructionists occupy an intermediary position between Reform and Orthodox, but they tend to be closer to the Orthodox than are the



Conservatives. Since so many of them were raised as Conservative, this finding suggests that persons switching into Reconstructionism are selective of the more Jewishly identified and committed. Their leaving the Conservative ranks may thereby serve to weaken Conservative Judaism somewhat.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF AGE

Previous studies of Jewish identification and commitment have pointed to the importance of generational status.<sup>10</sup> Strength of identity, as measured by a variety of indicators of behavior and attitude, diminished directly with distance from the immigrant generation. Since the immigrants had largely arrived in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, this implied that younger persons were generally less observant and less involved in the Jewish community than older cohorts.

Another concern related specifically to age is the stance of the baby-boom generation. This exceptionally large cohort has had a profound effect on American institutions, from schools to political parties, and on the role of religion as well.<sup>11</sup> As they move into the later adult years and into retirement, they can again be expected to alter demands for services and affect the climate of opinion on a large number of important issues.

Cognizant of these concerns about generation status and age, one segment of our analysis focuses on age differentials within the Conservative population. Sample size has necessitated broad age categories for most analyses (18–44, 45–64, 65 and over),<sup>12</sup> but even within this constraint, real differences emerge between groups. The youngest group is indeed further removed from immigrant origins than the two older ones; only half of those under age forty-five have all foreign-born grandparents, and 15 percent have all U.S.-born grandparents—indicating that they are at least third-generation Americans. This contrasts with over 80 percent of those age forty-five and older with all foreign-born grandparents and no more than 2 to 4 percent with all U.S.-born grandparents. The youngest group can thus be regarded as a much more American generation. Persons in this age cohort differ from the older groups in both their socio-demographic characteristics and their Jewish practices and involvement.

#### AGE DIFFERENCES IN SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Among Conservative Jews, age is directly related to level of secular education, with the 25–44 age group clearly being the most educated (table 2.5).<sup>13</sup> Over one-third of younger persons have had postgraduate education, compared with fewer than one in ten of the elderly. Nonetheless, the younger males are no more likely to hold high white-collar positions than are those in the middle age group, and in fact are more likely to be found among clerical/sales and blue-collar workers. About one-quarter of the men ages 25–44 are clerical/sales workers. Women

Table 2.5

Age Differentials for Selected Socioeconomic Characteristics of Conservative Jews

	25-44	45-64	65 and over
<i>Education</i>			
High School or Less	13.9	29.9	53.5
Some College	18.8	18.3	23.4
College Degree	29.5	23.3	14.5
Graduate School	37.8	28.5	8.5
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Occupation (of those in labor force)</i>			
<i>Males:</i>			
Professional	42.0	42.8	39.1
Manager	18.1	24.3	2.3
Clerical/Sales	24.2	19.5	52.0
Blue Collar	15.7	13.5	6.6
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Females:</i>			
Professional	48.5	25.7	22.4
Manager	15.4	30.9	—
Clerical/Sales	26.8	37.1	71.1
Blue Collar	9.3	6.3	6.6
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Five-Year Migration Status</i>			
Non-migrant	64.5	91.2	92.0
Intrastate	16.6	3.6	3.6
<i>Interstate:</i>			
Within Region	7.3	1.9	1.3
Between Regions	11.1	3.3	3.1
International	0.6	—	—
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0

ages 25-44 much more clearly reflect their high educational achievements. These women are heavily concentrated among professionals, with very few in the blue-collar group. This is in sharp contrast to older women, who are much more likely to be managers and clerical/sales workers.

Particularly notable among younger men and women, compared with those ages 45-64, is the low percentage reported as managers—positions that often require on-the-job experience. The situation may therefore change as these persons move through the life cycle. It is also clearly related to the national economic situation and to job opportunities.

Almost one-quarter of the 18-44 age group are not married.<sup>14</sup> And the younger married, in sharp contrast to older respondents, are most likely to be living in households with children under age fifteen. Among Conservative Jews who are married, those married in the 1980s were much more likely to be intermarried than those who married earlier: almost half of the more recent marriages were mixed, compared to just over one in ten of the earlier ones. Concomitantly,

attitudes supportive of intermarriage are inversely related to age: older persons are much less likely to be supportive than younger ones, except that more of the very youngest group (ages 18–24) of respondents are opposed to intermarriage than those ages 25–44. Whether these younger persons represent a backlash against the more assimilationist attitudes of the somewhat older age cohort, possibly as a result of better formal and informal Jewish education, needs to be assessed.

Studies around the world have documented that migration is associated with those ages at which persons are obtaining higher education, entering the labor force, and entering the family-formation stage of the life cycle. It is not surprising, therefore, that Conservative Jews ages 25–44 also have heightened levels of five-year migration. One-third of the youngest group had moved in the five years preceding the survey, compared with less than one in ten adults age 45 and over; moreover, about 10 percent of younger persons had moved between regions. Younger persons are thus moving more often and longer distances, away from the influence of family and their institutions of socialization (such as synagogues and schools) at stages in the life cycle that are particularly critical to their formation of ties to a given community and set of institutions. Since this group is also the most likely to have families with young children, moving may be especially disruptive of their children's Jewish education.<sup>15</sup>

#### AGE DIFFERENCES IN JEWISH IDENTIFICATIONAL VARIABLES

The youngest group of Conservative respondents is distinctive in having not only very high levels of secular education but also relatively higher levels of Jewish education (table 2.6). More score high on the Index of Jewish Education (42 percent) than either of the older groups. The elderly have notably low levels, due in large part to the lack of women's Jewish education in the past. The higher levels of Jewish education among younger Conservatives do not, however, always translate directly into higher levels of synagogue attendance, ritual observance, or involvement in the Jewish community. Only about one-quarter of younger persons reported that they often attended synagogue, compared with one-third or more of the older groups. Those ages 25–44 also have generally lower levels of ritual observance than do the older groups.

In a few instances, however, the very youngest group (ages 18–24) seems to have turned this trend around; their levels of observance for some ritual practices are often as high as those of the older groups. For example, whereas fewer than 10 percent of Conservative Jews ages 25–44 observe kashrut, the one in five who does of those in the 18–24 age group matches the level of older respondents. Somewhat more of the younger respondents also attend seders and light Hanukkah candles in comparison with the next age cohort, but fewer light Shabbat candles and fast on Yom Kippur. Since some of these younger respon-

Table 2.6  
Age Differentials in Jewish Practices and Behaviors of Conservative Jews

	18-44	45-64	65 and over	
<i>Index of Jewish Education<sup>a</sup></i>				
None	17.7	17.2	36.6	
Low	10.0	14.5	18.2	
Medium	29.9	33.9	30.3	
High	42.4	34.4	20.3	
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	
<i>Synagogue Attendance</i>				
Never	15.2	6.3	18.5	
Often <sup>b</sup>	24.7	32.6	33.5	
<i>Community Involvement</i>				
Belong to Jewish Organization	30.7	44.5	48.4	
Engage in Jewish Voluntarism	21.3	27.4	24.0	
Contribute to Jewish Causes	49.5	73.1	77.5	
Been to Israel	30.6	36.3	46.0	
<i>Jewish Milieu<sup>c</sup></i>				
Low	34.5	23.1	20.5	
Medium	42.1	40.0	29.5	
High	24.3	36.8	50.0	
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	
	18-24	25-44	45-64	65 and over
<i>Selected Ritual Practices<sup>d</sup></i>				
Sabbath Candles	17.0	19.0	27.0	26.8
Kashrut	19.0	9.2	18.0	18.0
Fast on Yom Kippur	63.7	70.4	72.4	69.9
Attend Seder	81.4	71.7	82.7	68.2
Hanukkah Candles	73.1	70.9	80.0	69.5

<sup>a</sup> None = No Jewish Education.

Low = 1-2 years of any type school.

Medium = 3 or more years of Sunday school or 3-5 years of supplementary or day school.

High = 6 or more years of supplementary or day school.

<sup>b</sup> Once a month or more.

<sup>c</sup> Based on responses to questions about number of Jewish friends, Jewish diversity of neighborhood, and importance of living in a Jewish neighborhood.

<sup>d</sup> Percent of respondents answering "Always" or "Usually."

dents are adult children living with their parents, the reported levels of household ritual practices may, in fact, reflect the practices of the older generation. For those who have their own households, however, these patterns may augur a heightened level of ritual observance. Such behavior would be consistent with their higher levels of Jewish education and youth group/camp experiences.

The younger group thus has a very mixed pattern, more observant in some instances and less in others, and with many having high levels of nonobservance.

Younger people appear to be choosing their ritual practices to meet certain life-style or family needs, rather than following all of them as part of an overarching set of beliefs. Whether exposure to a more intensive Jewish education in the Solomon Schechter day schools will have a strong impact on this pattern remains to be seen, as the growing number of Conservative day school graduates move into the family-formation stage and set up their own households.

Especially notable is the sharply lower level of community involvement of younger Conservative Jews. The percentages who belong to Jewish organizations, volunteer for Jewish activities, and contribute to Jewish causes are all lower among those ages 18–44 than among the two older cohorts. Whereas almost half of those 65 and over belong to at least one Jewish organization, only one in three younger Conservative Jews do so. Of particular concern may be the low level of giving: only half report contributions to Jewish causes, compared with about three-quarters of the older groups. These patterns are quite likely related to life-cycle stage, in which case they may change as careers develop and family situations are altered. They may also reflect perceptions by some younger Conservative Jews that the formal institutional structure of the Jewish community is the domain of older, well-established Jews and that it has little room or tolerance for younger persons.

These patterns are echoed in two other measures of Jewish identity: having been to Israel and the importance of Jewish milieu. In both instances younger Conservative Jews (ages 18–44) score lower than their older counterparts. Only one in three has ever been to Israel (despite the proliferation of youth programs in Israel for American teens), and only about one-quarter score high on the Jewish Milieu Index. By contrast, almost half of the elderly have been to Israel, and half score high on Jewish milieu.

Conservative Jews who are under 45 are clearly different from older respondents. Although more Jewishly educated, they seem to be quite selective about what they choose to observe and how they choose to identify with the Jewish community. They are much less connected to the formal institutional structure than older Conservative Jews. Whether this pattern will change as these younger persons grow older warrants careful follow-up. The direction of change, if there is any, will have a significant effect on the strength of Conservative Judaism.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF SYNAGOGUE MEMBERSHIP

The information on denominational identification in NJPS-1990 relies solely on the respondents' own perception and reporting. As we have seen, nominal Conservative identification does not mean behavior that is in full accord with Conservative doctrine. Jews identifying themselves as Conservative cover a broad spectrum of behavior, from the very observant to those who are only marginally connected to Judaism.

A more selective Conservative population, one that might be expected to act concretely on its identificational distinction, would refer to Conservative Jews who are affiliated with a synagogue. As noted earlier, NJPS does not provide entirely direct information for the synagogue/temple membership of individuals, since the survey asked only whether anyone in the household is affiliated with a synagogue/temple. Among persons identified as Conservative, just under half of all adult Jews live in households with synagogue/temple affiliation. But not all persons who identify as Conservative belong to households whose affiliation is with a Conservative synagogue. Nonetheless, the correlation between individual identification and household membership is high; seven out of ten persons who identify as Conservative Jews and who report a household synagogue membership are affiliated with a Conservative synagogue. We have therefore classified all Conservative Jews who report a household synagogue membership as affiliated, regardless of denomination.

Membership makes a dramatic difference in the profile of Conservative Jewry. Members tend to be older, married, and with children age 15 and older living in the household. Conversely, nonmembers are more concentrated among the young, never married, or divorced. Regional differences in affiliation are also strong. Members are even more concentrated in the Northeast than nonmembers and also live disproportionately in the West. By contrast, nonmembers are more likely to live in the South and Midwest. These findings are consistent with the general differences characterizing the four regions (see below). Both higher secular education and more Jewish education lead to higher membership rates, while nonmembers are more likely to be characterized by education below the college level and lower scores on the Index of Jewish Education.

Clearly, synagogue affiliation is attractive to families and much less appealing to persons not in traditional family configurations (table 2.7). Quite likely, it is the Jewish education of children, especially in connection with bar/bat mitzvah preparation, that encourages families to join synagogues; once members, they often remain affiliated beyond the bar/bat mitzvah of their youngest child. Among the married, intermarriage is sharply lower among members than nonmembers—6 percent compared with 36 percent (table 2.8), suggesting either that nonmembers are much more predisposed to intermarriage because of their more marginal attachment to Judaism, or that they do not feel welcome in a synagogue once they are intermarried and therefore do not affiliate.

Membership is clearly and unsurprisingly associated with much higher levels of ritual practices. About four times as many members as nonmembers light Shabbat candles and observe kashrut; only two-thirds as many of the nonmembers as members participate in such popular rituals as seders and lighting Hanukkah candles. And members much more than nonmembers consider a Jewish milieu to be important for them. Especially strong differentials are also apparent

Table 2.7  
Selected Socioeconomic Characteristics of Conservative Jews by  
Membership Status

	<i>Synagogue Members</i>	<i>Nonmembers</i>
<i>Age</i>		
18-24	9.9	8.4
25-44	33.1	44.7
45-64	26.7	21.6
65 and over	30.3	25.3
Total Percent	100.0	100.0
<i>Life-Cycle Stage</i>		
Single, under 45	5.6	15.2
Single, 45+	17.2	15.6
Adults only	32.0	38.1
Parent(s) with:		
Children under age 15	23.8	20.3
Children age 15+ only	21.5	10.8
Total Percent	100.0	100.0
<i>Region of Residence</i>		
Northeast	51.5	38.9
Midwest	12.4	8.3
South	20.8	28.3
West	15.2	24.4
Total Percent	100.0	100.0

in measures of community involvement. Not surprisingly, synagogue attendance differs significantly between members and nonmembers. Whereas half of the members report that they attend once a month or more, only about one in ten of the nonmembers attend this often. Conversely, while one-quarter of the nonmembers never attend, this is true of less than 2 percent of the members. Only one-quarter of nonmembers belong to a Jewish organization, while six out of ten members do; only one-fourth as many nonmembers as members volunteer in Jewish activities; and only half give to Jewish causes, compared with four out of five among members. Having been to Israel is also associated with higher membership rates.

Since the affiliated Conservative Jews are the ones most visible to the Conservative leadership, their characteristics and behavior have often been assumed to be representative of Conservative Jewry as a whole. This assumption is clearly misleading. Great variation exists between members and nonmembers. Nonmembers are significantly more marginal and therefore represent a population in need of outreach through special programming geared specifically to younger persons, to those not in traditional families, to those who may be financially constrained, and to those alienated from the formal structure of the Jewish community. In his assessment of Conservative Judaism in the 1970s, Marshall Sklare suggested that all that was needed to further augment the primacy of Conservative Juda-

Table 2.8

## Selected Jewish Identificational Variables of Conservative Jews by Membership Status

	Synagogue Members	Non-members
Percent with High Jewish Education Index <sup>a</sup>	44.8	24.6
<i>Synagogue Attendance</i>		
Never	1.5	25.4
Often <sup>b</sup>	49.8	11.3
Percent in a Mixed Marriage	5.8	36.3
<i>Selected Ritual Practices<sup>c</sup></i>		
Sabbath Candles	37.4	10.9
Kashrut	24.5	6.3
Fast on Yom Kippur	87.6	55.6
Attend Seder	89.7	59.7
Hanukkah Candles	90.0	56.9
<i>Community Involvement</i>		
Belong to Jewish Organization	57.6	23.4
Engage in Jewish Voluntarism	39.1	10.6
Contribute to Jewish Causes	79.5	49.2
Been to Israel	49.0	26.2

<sup>a</sup> High = 6 or more years of supplementary or day school.

<sup>b</sup> Once a month or more.

<sup>c</sup> Percent of respondents answering "Always" or "Usually."

ism was to induce nonmembers to activate a commitment they already had.<sup>16</sup> Two decades later, the problem apparently remains. Whether Conservative Judaism can, in fact, draw these individuals into active participation remains a key question. It presents a particular challenge, since the earlier reservoir of potential members in the Orthodox community has diminished.

#### THE GEOGRAPHIC FACTOR

An important dynamic of the American population has been its redistribution across the continent. Jews have participated fully in this movement, so that the older areas of Jewish settlement in the northeast and midwest now share more of the Jewish population with the south and west. These major population shifts have involved Jews with certain characteristics, and, in turn, have provided a particular community context within which the Jews settled.<sup>17</sup> The participation of Conservative Jews is reflected in this redistribution, and there are clear regional differences in their characteristics and behavior. The differentials are not only regionwide, but they also often apply to individual communities as well, although the patterns are not as clear for the more specific areas.



Table 2.9  
Regional Distribution and Migration Experiences of Conservative Jews

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Total Percent
1990 Regional Distribution	44.8	10.2	24.8	20.1	100.0
<i>Lifetime Migration Status</i>					
Nonmigrant	22.7	21.4	5.6	7.2	
Intrastate	37.4	30.9	6.7	18.8	
Interstate	29.4	37.3	77.0	65.5	
International	10.6	10.4	10.8	8.5	
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
<i>Five-Year Migration Status (U.S. Born)</i>					
Nonmigrant	81.8	79.0	78.1	73.2	
Intrastate	9.8	10.1	6.3	13.4	
Interstate	8.4	10.9	14.9	12.7	
International	—	—	0.9	0.6	
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	

Lifetime migration patterns show the dramatic growth in the population of Conservative Jews living in the South and West. While nine out of ten Conservative Jews living in the Northeast in 1990 were born there, this was true of only one-quarter of the Conservative Jews in the South and one-third of those in the West. The pace of change slowed during 1985–90, with the South and West both showing much greater stability. Nor has migration, either lifetime or over five years, been unidirectional; all regions have participated in exchanges with each other. In the process, regional differences have been heightened.

As a result of these interregional streams, the lifetime and five-year migration experiences of the Conservative Jewish populations in the various regions differ considerably (table 2.9). The Northeast and Midwest have strikingly higher proportions of nonmigrants and intrastate migrants than do the South and West. These two newer regions of settlement, by contrast, include especially high percentages of interstate migrants: two-thirds to three-fourths of their populations were born in a state different from their state of residence in 1990. Not all of this movement was interregional, but such high levels of mobility have certainly contributed to the growth of the South and West.

While the five-year migration rates are much lower than lifetime rates in every region, some regional differences persist. The Northeast contains the most stable Conservative Jews; over eight in ten had not moved between 1985 and 1990. Conservative Jews in the West have clearly been the most mobile. Some one-quarter had changed residence, either within the state or to another state.

Not surprisingly, Conservative Jews in the South include a much higher proportion of elderly than do the other regions (table 2.10). Southern Conserva-

Table 2.10  
Socioeconomic Characteristics of Conservative Jews

	Region of Residence			
	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
<i>Age Distribution</i>				
18-44	44.4	50.1	47.5	51.4
45-64	27.3	25.4	13.5	19.2
65 and over	28.3	24.5	39.0	29.4
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Life-Cycle Stage</i>				
Single, under age 45	10.6	8.5	12.2	9.9
Single, age 45+	19.3	10.8	19.4	8.9
Adults only	32.0	45.5	33.4	39.8
Parent(s) with:				
Children under age 15	18.3	26.7	21.5	28.1
Children age 15+ only	19.7	8.6	13.6	13.3
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Marital Status</i>				
Never married	22.2	23.8	17.2	18.1
Married	53.9	64.7	53.3	62.8
Separated/Divorced	9.6	6.7	15.1	8.4
Widowed	14.4	4.8	14.4	10.7
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

tive Jews also have an exceptionally high percentage of households consisting of adults only.

Other socioeconomic characteristics do not show a clear relation to region of residence, but some differences are noteworthy. Because of its large numbers of older persons, the South includes a disproportionate number of clerical/sales workers (occupations that are often used to supplement retirement income) and very few in managerial positions. The Midwest, with its relatively young population, has few widowed; a very high proportion in its Conservative population have had postgraduate education (44 percent compared with only about one in four in the other regions); and the Midwest includes a disproportionately high percentage of male professionals and female managers.

In general, the Conservative populations of the Northeast and Midwest are more traditional in their orientation and more strongly Jewishly identified than are those in the South and West (table 2.11). The Jewish Education Index and the Ritual Scale show a clear difference between the older and newer regions of settlement, with more persons in the Northeast and Midwest than in the South and West scoring medium or high on these two indexes. Strikingly fewer in the West also indicate that a Jewish milieu is of importance to them. Inter-marriage levels are especially high in the West, where almost one-third report a mixed marriage; below one-fifth do so in the other regions.

Table 2.11  
Jewish Identificational Characteristics of Conservative Jews

	Region of Residence			
	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
<i>Index of Jewish Education<sup>a</sup></i>				
None	18.8	25.3	25.2	28.1
Low	12.8	7.5	12.2	11.2
Medium	32.7	33.0	29.9	29.2
High	35.7	34.3	32.7	31.3
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Ritual Scale<sup>b</sup></i>				
None	2.0	14.8	7.0	7.2
Low	18.0	7.0	30.5	32.3
Medium	49.8	53.5	39.3	44.6
High	30.2	24.7	23.2	15.9
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Community Involvement</i>				
Belong to Jewish Organization	43.3	47.2	37.8	27.9
Engage in Jewish Voluntarism	22.2	45.5	3.8	16.1
Contribute to Jewish Causes	57.5	61.0	57.7	61.4
Been to Israel	37.1	38.4	42.5	31.2
<i>Jewish Milieu<sup>c</sup></i>				
Low	22.0	20.0	28.2	44.9
Medium	35.1	49.2	31.6	43.1
High	42.9	30.8	40.3	12.1
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Percent in a Mixed Marriage	19.3	16.3	16.9	31.1

<sup>a</sup> None = No Jewish Education.

Low = 1–2 years of any type school.

Medium = 3 or more years of Sunday school or 3–5 years of supplementary or day school.

High = 6 or more years of supplementary or day school.

<sup>b</sup> The Ritual Index consists of the sum of weighted values for lighting Shabbat and Hanukkah candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, attending a Passover seder, and keeping kosher. A score of 0 = none, 1–4 = low, 5–8 = medium, and 9–16 = high.

<sup>c</sup> Based on responses to questions about number of Jewish friends, Jewish diversity of neighborhood, and importance of living in a Jewish neighborhood.

The west is also noticeable for having fewer than one in three belonging to a Jewish organization and only 16 percent volunteering in a Jewish activity. At the other extreme, almost half of those in the Midwest are members of Jewish organizations and 45 percent volunteer in Jewish activities.

An outstanding exception to the regional split is the percentage contributing to Jewish causes. Only small differences characterize the four regions, and not in the expected direction. Conservative Jews in the West are just as likely as those in the Midwest to contribute; those in the Northeast and South are slightly less likely to do so. Perhaps solicitation methods are equally effective in all regions; perhaps those in the West prefer to show their identification through

monetary donations rather than giving of their time or through formal affiliations with the organized Jewish community. It is also possible that giving opportunities within the Jewish community are more varied in the West so as to appeal better to its distinctive population.

#### THE DYNAMICS OF CHOICE

As we have seen, geographic mobility of the Conservative population has been a prominent factor in determining the current configuration of Conservative Jewry. Other forms of mobility are important as well, in particular the entry and exit of persons into and out of Conservative Judaism. Who is raised a Conservative Jew and remains one throughout his or her lifetime, who joins the movement, and who leaves have a significant impact on the profile of Conservative Jewry.

Because the denominational identification for American Jews is a matter of choice, it is easy for a person to switch out of or into Conservatism or any of the other denominations, or out of any specific denomination altogether. Such changes may be a matter of religious belief, but more often other factors are salient. A switch may occur because one denomination is seen as a more "Americanized" or a more traditional form of religious worship; because only one or two options are available in a given community; because of convenience and proximity of facilities; because of marriage, family, or friendship networks; because switching is seen as part of upward social mobility; or because of a host of other reasons. While NJPS-1990 does not provide information on why denominational change did or did not occur nor on when it occurred, it does allow some measure of that change. Questions asked about the denomination in which the respondent was raised and about current denomination permit us to identify the past denominational identification of persons who reported they were Conservative at the time of the survey and the current denomination (or lack thereof) of respondents who indicated they had been raised as Conservative Jews.

Information on denominational switching shows the fluidity of such identification. At the time of the 1990 survey, an estimated 1.6 million adults identified as Conservative Jews (table 2.12). Of these, some 917,000 reported that they had been raised Conservative and about 651,000 said they had not been raised as Conservative (for some, denomination raised was unknown). Another 728,000 indicated that they had been raised as Conservative but now identified with another denomination or none at all. Thus, there are somewhat fewer persons who were raised non-Conservative and have become Conservative than the number of persons who were raised as Conservative and no longer identify with the denomination.

Examination of the losses and gains shows that the shifts have generally been from the more to the less traditional movements. The vast majority of the

Table 2.12  
Denominational Changes of Conservative Jews

	Estimated Population	Percent Distribution of Gain/Loss	Net Gain/Loss
No change	916,770	—	—
<i>To Conservative from raised as:</i>			
Orthodox	492,400	75.6	+477,400
Reform	63,400	9.8	-365,700
"Just Jewish"	23,400	3.6	-59,900
Other	43,700	6.7	-32,600
Non-Jewish	28,000	4.3	-65,100
Total Gain	650,900	100.0	
<i>From raised as Conservative to:</i>			
Orthodox	15,000	2.1	+477,400
Reform	429,100	58.9	-365,700
Reconstructionist	31,100	4.3	-31,100
"Just Jewish"	83,300	11.4	-59,900
Other	76,300	10.5	-32,600
Christian	93,100	12.8	-65,100
Total Loss	727,900	100.0	
Net change			-77,000
Total current			
Conservative population	1,588,100 <sup>a</sup>		

<sup>a</sup> Includes some for whom information on denomination raised is unknown.

gains to Conservative Jewry have come from the Orthodox, while the largest losses have been to Reform. The shifting clearly has serious implications for the size of the Conservative movement, since the reservoir of Orthodox Jews, from which so many came into Conservatism, has shrunk sharply and is unlikely to provide the mass of population from which to draw in the future. By contrast, becoming Reform or "just Jewish" or moving out of Judaism altogether, continues to be a viable option. The losses to Conservative Judaism identified as of 1990 may thus continue into the twenty-first century, unless the denomination is able to attract members from other denominations or from among those who have no denominational identity.

The shifts have had a profound impact on the profile of Conservative Jewry at the end of the twentieth century (table 2.13). Because much of the in-switching from Orthodox occurred several decades ago while out-switching to Reform is more recent, Conservative Jewry has become older: the in-switchers are disproportionately age 65 and over and in households without children, while the out-switchers are more likely to be young adults with children under 15. Because of these age differentials and because the in-switchers from Orthodox were more likely to be immigrants or the children of immigrants, those who adopted Conservatism are somewhat less educated than the out-switchers, who are concentrated among the college educated. Differences extend to occupation. Sur-

Table 2.13  
Socioeconomic Characteristics of Jews Who Have Changed Denominations

	No Change	To Conservative	From Conservative
<i>Current Age</i>			
18–24	9.3	2.1	4.9
25–34	22.9	10.4	19.9
35–44	26.0	18.8	31.4
45–64	21.8	25.4	28.3
65 and over	20.0	43.3	15.6
Total percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Life-Cycle Stage</i>			
Single, under age 45	14.5	4.1	6.8
Single, age 45+	11.5	23.5	7.7
Adults only	28.2	40.0	33.6
Parent(s) with:			
Children under age 15	27.1	19.0	34.6
Children age 15+ only	18.7	13.4	17.2
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Marital Status</i>			
Never married	25.4	11.1	15.4
Married	52.7	61.3	68.3
Separated/Divorced	12.7	10.1	11.9
Widowed	9.1	17.5	4.4
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Education</i>			
High School or less	26.8	34.6	22.6
Some College	44.3	39.9	49.2
Post-graduate	28.9	25.5	28.2
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Occupation (of those in labor force)</i>			
Professional	40.6	38.9	34.0
Manager	19.1	15.9	13.4
Clerical/Sales	27.1	35.7	37.4
Blue Collar	13.2	9.5	15.2
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0

prisingly, compared with the lifetime Conservative Jews—the stayers—both in- and out-switchers are heavily concentrated among clerical/sales workers, but probably for somewhat different reasons. The in-switchers may be lower white-collar workers because many are using such jobs to supplement retirement income; the younger out-switchers may still be developing their careers and eventually move to higher-level positions.

The data on intermarriage show that the in-switchers have particularly low levels of mixed marriages, with only 15 percent married to a non-Jewish spouse compared to one-quarter of the stayers. Notably more of the in-switchers are conversionary marriages than either the stayers or the out-switchers. Of those who left Conservative Judaism, half are married to a non-Jewish spouse, and many of these no longer consider themselves Jewish. Our findings thus suggest

Table 2.14  
Selected Jewish Identificational Characteristics of Jews Who Have Changed Denominations

	No Change	To Conservative	From Conservative
Synagogue Members	38.7	49.3	24.0
<i>Index of Jewish Education<sup>a</sup></i>			
None	31.9	24.6	33.6
Low	9.6	12.8	15.3
Medium	29.8	28.4	30.9
High	28.7	34.2	20.2
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Ritual Scale<sup>b</sup></i>			
None	11.1	9.2	18.3
Low	27.3	17.3	39.0
Medium	41.0	45.1	34.0
High	20.6	28.4	8.6
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Been to Israel</i>	31.1	37.2	24.4
<i>Jewish Milieu<sup>c</sup></i>			
Low	35.8	25.8	44.6
Medium	35.1	37.6	39.2
High	29.2	36.6	16.1
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Percent in a Mixed Marriage</i>	25.9	15.2	50.3 <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> None = No Jewish Education.

Low = 1–2 years of any type school.

Medium = 3 or more years of Sunday school or 3–5 years of supplementary or day school.

High = 6 or more years of supplementary or day school.

<sup>b</sup> The Ritual Index consists of the sum of weighted values for lighting Shabbat and Hanukkah candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, attending a Passover seder, and keeping kosher. A score of 0 = none, 1–4 = low, 5–8 = medium, and 9–16 = high.

<sup>c</sup> Based on responses to questions about number of Jewish friends, Jewish diversity of neighborhood, and importance of living in a Jewish neighborhood.

<sup>c</sup> 52 percent of respondents who switched from Conservative and are included in the mixed-married category identified as non-Jews at the time of the survey.

that switching is very often related to intermarriage, and quite likely is the direct result of intermarriage. If intermarriage levels continue at the high levels characteristic of the 1985–90 marriage cohort, then losses can be expected to continue at equally high levels unless some kind of direct and successful intervention is developed.

Particularly important for the vitality of the movement is the impact that the shifts have had on those characteristics that relate to Jewish identification and involvement. Here, the movement has gained persons with higher levels of Jewish education, ritual index scores, and Jewish milieu scores than were characteristic of those who had been Conservative all their lives (table 2.14). The Orthodox pool from which so many of those who switched to Conservative Ju-

daism are drawn has clearly had a strong, positive effect on the level of Jewish identity and behavior among Conservative Jews. On the other hand, those switching out of the movement have tended to be less Jewishly educated and to score lower on ritual practices and Jewish milieu.

Persons who switched to Conservatism also have higher levels of household synagogue membership (half are members) than those who have been constantly Conservative (39 percent); the out-switchers are much less likely to belong to affiliated households (only about one-fourth do so). The net result has been to heighten the level of identification of Conservative Jews.

The continuation of the past trend of interdenominational flows into the future is unlikely. Just as American Jewry as a whole can no longer count on transfusions of Yiddishkeit from immigrants, Conservative Jewry can no longer count on large numbers of strongly committed Jews to switch into the movement from the Orthodox. It can, however, expect to continue losing members from among the more peripherally identified. While this would have the effect of continuing to increase the level of commitment of those remaining—if continuing members retain current levels of identification—it would also serve to reduce the size of Conservative Jewry. Such heightened commitment may also occur if Conservative Judaism attracts the more committed persons from less traditional denominations.

Another factor that has slightly affected the pattern of switching and that may have a more profound effect in the future is the growth of Reconstructionist Judaism. No adults in the sample identified as having been raised Reconstructionist, but some 2 percent indicated that they had been raised Conservative and now identify as Reconstructionist. While the numbers switching out of Conservatism to Reconstructionism are thus minimal, these persons are highly selective of the more Jewishly identified. If Reconstructionism continues to grow and the number of persons becoming Reconstructionist increases, their switching may serve to weaken the most committed core of Conservative Jews. The trend needs careful tracking over the next few years.

### *Entering the Twenty-First Century*

The foregoing analysis of the sociodemographic and Jewish characteristics of the Conservative population in 1990 points to several areas that will pose major challenges to the movement in the coming decades. These challenges must be seen within the broad framework of American society and changes in its attitudes toward and acceptance of religious diversity. The changes that occurred from the 1960s through the 1980s have already profoundly affected how individuals relate to religious institutions and how they deal with private expressions of religiosity. Further transformations are inevitable.



At the most basic level, persons who identify themselves as Conservative Jews do not necessarily manifest this denominational identity by being members of households that belong to a Conservative or any other synagogue. That more than half are in unaffiliated households suggests that concerted efforts may be necessary to reach this segment of the population. The reasons for their lack of institutional membership may well be conditioned by factors beyond their control—economic constraints or lack of a Conservative or any other synagogue in the area where they live (especially if they have moved away from centers of Jewish concentration) or by purely personal preferences. Better understanding of the dynamics involved in membership are essential to understanding why so many Conservative Jews do not express their identity through membership and also to designing strategies to attract the unaffiliated and retain current members. The generally low rate of affiliation among Conservative Jews and the selective characteristics of those who belong to synagogues also suggest that relying exclusively on studies of synagogues and their members provides incomplete and possibly biased information about Conservative Jewry as a whole. The data we have analyzed from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, encompassing both affiliated and unaffiliated Jews, thus provide important, basic information on Conservative Jewry as a whole and on the differences between members and nonmembers.<sup>18</sup>

Conservative Jews vary widely in their religious practices, despite the overall halakhic positions taken by Conservative Judaism. This “pick and choose” approach to religion resembles that characterizing the general American population and even those Jews identifying as Orthodox. For Conservative Jews, the selectivity of practices may be exacerbated by the very nature of the movement. Conservative congregations have a great deal of autonomy in setting their own practices and formats, albeit within the confines of general Conservative ideology. Conservative congregations can therefore offer many entry points for individuals seeking affiliation. Moreover, since Conservative Judaism is seen as lying between the more traditional Orthodox on the one hand and the more liberal Reform on the other, many Jews may believe that, as Conservatives, they can personally opt toward one side or the other, choosing the practice that suits them best at any given time.

The permeable nature of the lines between the major denominations and the large overlap in practices makes it difficult to define a strictly Conservative position and may thus encourage individual choice. Individuals with widely varying practices and beliefs can feel comfortable within the Conservative movement and can choose to respond to encouragement to be more observant at their own pace or not at all. At the same time, Conservative Judaism may also be attractive to Jews from other denominations or with no denominational iden-

tity who are seeking a more structured religious experience than offered by Reform, but who are not generally halakhically observant.

There remains within the Conservative leadership some of the vagueness about matters of ideology that were identified by Sklare as a possible weakness in the 1950s.<sup>19</sup> That the leadership is aware of the inconsistencies between ideology and practice is suggested by efforts to delineate more clearly for Conservative Jews just where Conservative Judaism stands on a wide variety of beliefs and practices, including kashrut and intermarriage. *Emet v'Emunah* was one step in this direction.<sup>20</sup> More recently, in May 1996, the Conservative movement issued a policy statement on intermarriage that clearly delineates the movement's position on that issue. Achieving a balance between the official ideology of the movement and the need and desire to be inclusive of Jews who do not necessarily subscribe to most of the stated positions is a major challenge facing the movement.

Our analysis also makes clear that age is an important factor in determining individual religious behavior. In this respect, the baby-boom generation is of critical importance, most especially because of its size. As the baby-boomers move into middle age and beyond, their influence may have profound effects on the shape and content of Conservative Judaism. Although our analysis has not focused specifically on the baby boomers, we have found that younger Conservative Jews (ages 18–44) show a strong proclivity toward independence and largely avoid any formal affiliation with the organized Jewish community. They also appear to have put increasing emphasis on those rituals that are family oriented and observed only once a year (for example, Hanukkah candles and Passover seder); few keep kosher or observe Shabbat, as indicated by lighting candles. As they age and assume the responsibilities of raising children, their attitudes may change and they may become more involved in Judaic matters. This may be the case especially if they or their children have been exposed to a Conservative day school education and Jewish camping. Since both of these experiences are becoming more prevalent than was true in the past, they may have a strong impact on the future direction of Jewish involvement and identity.

There is little that the Conservative movement or the Jewish community as a whole can do to control the societal forces that have helped shape American Judaism. If large families are widely seen as a detriment to achieving personal life goals, then pro-family programs in the Jewish community will have little effect on raising the birthrate. Nonetheless, family support in the form of available childcare, subsidized Jewish education for children beyond the first child in a family, scholarships for Jewish camps, and Israel incentive programs are all ways in which Conservative congregations can enhance the Jewishness of families.

If economic opportunities shift from one region of the country or from one area to another, most Conservative Jews, like other Jews and Americans generally, will tend to move to the places where they can earn a better livelihood, regardless of the Jewish amenities available in those places. Others will move in search of a more desirable physical environment, motivated by such concerns as climate and ecology. It becomes important, then, for the Conservative movement to be responsive to mobility, at both the individual and the institutional levels. Especially useful would be programs designed to strengthen small and isolated Conservative congregations, as well as to support Jews living in areas where no congregations exist at all. Provision of visiting scholars and educators and dissemination of printed and electronic educational materials (such as video tapes and materials on the internet) are all ways to reach these communities and individuals. Facilitating transfer of membership from one Conservative congregation to another and/or credit for initiation fees would enhance continuation of membership among mobile individuals. Welcome wagons sponsored by Conservative synagogues might also be useful, as would tracking those who move—with the original congregation informing the Conservative congregation(s) at the member's destination that a new Conservative family/individual is arriving, so that contact can be made quickly. A central data bank of members of Conservative congregations might be useful in coordinating such an effort. In this way retention of Conservative Jews would be enhanced, and they would be helped to integrate into their new Jewish community quickly and more fully.

We have seen that in the past decades Conservative Jewry has lost adherents because they have shifted to other denominations, especially to the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, or moved out of Judaism altogether. Some of the losses are attributable to the appeal of less stringent practices and fewer demands on time and lifestyles. Many losses are the result of high levels of intermarriage, especially among the younger segments of the Conservative population. Whether these trends will continue at the same levels into the twenty-first century is difficult to predict. That they are likely to continue at least in the short run is quite probable. The challenge, then, is to develop strategies for intervention.

Some of these strategies have been indicated above. Others might involve concerted efforts to intensify Jewish education at all levels of both formal and informal experiences. The Orthodox emphasis on a vigorous and widespread day school movement serves as one example. Full day school education through the teen years may well help to retain the youth, particularly if it is coupled with stimulating youth group, camping, and Israel experiences. To be successful, however, day school education must also involve the parents. Moreover, since a large segment of Conservative Jewry is unlikely to be able or to want to send their children to day schools, supplementary education must also be improved and

synagogue family education programs strengthened. Such efforts are already being made in some locations. Other congregations, including the smaller synagogues away from centers of large Jewish populations, must be encouraged and helped to institute similar programs. The national organizations of the Conservative movement may be especially helpful in this respect.

If the Conservative movement is seeking to retain its members, to strengthen their Jewish identity and commitment to Conservative Judaism, and perhaps to draw in those Jews who identify as Conservative but hold no formal synagogue affiliation, then it must develop programming that can be effective despite trends in the larger society. It must seek to speak to Conservative individuals and families on a personal, meaningful level. A first step toward realization of this goal is to know the characteristics of the constituency. The data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey have helped us to do so.

By identifying the sociodemographic and Jewish profile of Conservative Jews in relation to those identifying with other denominations, by recognizing the importance of both age and regional differences, by distinguishing between members and nonmembers, and by examining the dynamics of change within the Conservative population, the important first step has been taken to establish the basis for making informed decisions about planning and programming.

### Notes

1. Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (New York: Schocken, 1972).
2. *Ibid.*, 252.
3. Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).
4. Barry A. Kosmin et al., *Highlights of the 1990 CJF National Jewish Population Survey* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations, 1991).
5. The findings of NJPS-1990 often center on the core Jewish population, which is defined as Jews by religion, Jews by choice, or secular Jews (*ibid.*); here we refer to this population as Jews. Excluded from most of the analyses are those persons included in NJPS-1990 who were of Jewish descent but were not Jewish at the time of the survey; they are included when we discuss denominational switching.
6. The information on household synagogue/temple membership is based on a question that asked whether anyone in the household held such an affiliation. The respondent may thus have lived in a household in which only one individual held a membership or in a household that held a membership as a whole. When we speak of synagogue affiliation, therefore, we are referring to a general context within which the respondent is operating, rather than to membership of a specific individual. Moreover, in our analysis by synagogue membership we do not distinguish between persons who identify as Conservative Jews who indicate Conservative affiliations and those Conservative Jews affiliated with synagogues/temples of other denominations.
7. Sidney Goldstein and Alice Goldstein, *Conservative Jewry in the United States: A Sociodemographic Profile* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1998).
8. Unlike the data in the other tables on which our discussions are based, the data in table 2.3 include children under age eighteen.

9. As with synagogue/temple membership, many specific ritual practices refer to the household as a whole and not specifically to the respondent. Readers should be aware that the only aspects of ritual practice we discuss that relate directly to the respondent are fasting on Yom Kippur and synagogue attendance. To the extent that household practices set a context, however, particularizing them to individual household members seems justified.
10. Sidney Goldstein and Calvin Goldscheider, *Jewish Americans: Three Generations in a Jewish Community* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968).
11. Wertheimer, *A People Divided*.
12. For some analyses, we distinguish between persons age 18–24 and those age 25–44, but the small number of younger persons represented among respondents precludes consistent use of this youngest age category.
13. Completed education was ascertained only for persons over age 25, since many younger persons continue their schooling into their twenties.
14. Data on marital status and intermarriage are not included in the tables presented here.
15. Cf. Sidney Goldstein and Alice Goldstein, *Jews on the Move: Implications for Jewish Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
16. Sklare, *Conservative Judaism*, 260–261.
17. Goldstein and Goldstein, *Jews on the Move*; Paul Ritterband, "The New Geography of Jews in North America," *New Insights on a Changing Jewish Community*, Occasional Paper No. 2 (New York: North American Jewish Data Bank, Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, 1986).
18. See also Bernard Lazerwitz, J. Alan Winter, Arnold Dashefsky, and Ephraim Tabory, *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).
19. Sklare, *Conservative Judaism*.
20. *Emet v'Emunah* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1988).