

NEW DATA ON DEMOGRAPHY AND
IDENTIFICATION AMONG JEWS IN
THE U.S.: Trends Inconsistencies And
Disagreements*

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ABSTRACT

Issues of demography and identification among Jews in the United States stand at the crossroads of at least two different complementary research perspectives. The first, directly focuses on the observed trends among American Jews and is concerned with description and interpretation of these trends and their possible implications for the longer term continuity and viability of the American Jewish community. The second, more theoretical perspective, considers Jews in the United States as a case-study which may contribute in a broader effort to conceptualization of the definition, meaning and significance of religious and other types of socio-cultural groups in contemporary societies. The materials presented in this paper relate directly to the first of these two approaches. The data presented are our own new, and so far, unpublished processings of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, sponsored by the Council of Jewish Federations in New York, and directed by Profs. Sidney Goldstein of Brown University and Barry A. Kosmin of The Graduate School and University Center, CUNY and the North American Jewish Data Bank (NAJDB), with the support of a National Technical Advisory Committee. It is hoped, though, that the paper will stimulate discussion of a broader scope about the sociology of contemporary Judaism, particularly in North America, and about the socio-demographic development of religious groups more generally.

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THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT

The intellectual context within which this research develops is that of substantial disagreement concerning the data on American Jewish socio-demographic patterns and their meaning. While the debate started from a reassessment of the basic demographic trends, it soon extended to the wider question of cultural and spiritual viability and continuity of American Jewry.

Based on national data from the early 1970s, social scientists, including some Israeli demographers, were pointing to the beginning of a process of demographic *erosion*. Later data from a variety of local Jewish community studies indicated strengthening of the same patterns. The process was described as a progressive *erosion* in the demography of the Jewish family, featuring later and fewer marriages, greater marriage instability, low fertility levels, increasing rates of mixed marriage, and the loss to the non-Jewish side of a majority of the children of such marriages. The consequent aging of the Jewish population contributed to determining a negative balance between Jewish births and Jewish deaths. This together with a negative balance of accessions and secessions was leading to prospective Jewish population decline. Demographic projections actually indicated that under a variety of possible scenarios, the U.S. Jewish population at the beginning of the twenty-first century would be numerically stagnating or more likely declining, though still of very substantial size. The relative share of Jews among the total U.S. population was bound to decline, with possibly negative consequences for the position of Jews in American society. Moreover, significant similarity of socio-demographic patterns was noted among Jews in the U.S. and in other Diaspora communities, in spite of the former's distinctive high educational and occupational achievements, the pluralism of its Judaism, and the broader socio-political context of American society (DellaPergola, 1980; Schmelz, 1981; Schmelz and DellaPergola, 1983 and 1988; DellaPergola and Schmelz, 1989).

Contrary to these interpretations, a series of different arguments were suggested by a group of scholars labelled by Marshall Sklare "The Revisionists." Some of the rebuttal was unfortunately based on insufficient appreciation of the existing data, as in the case of the following citations from the influential work of Calvin Goldscheider (1986): "We know neither the patterns of current marriages in the 1980s nor the cycle of marriage and intermarriage among those born in the 1960s"

(p.12); "The limited evidence suggests that there are no simple connections between increases in intermarriage levels and demographic erosion of the American-Jewish community" (p.11); "The level of conversion to Judaism has increased and significant numbers of intermarried couples, usually over 50 percent, raise their children as Jews" (p.11); "Below-replacement fertility will characterize only a small minority of Jewish women married in the 1970s" (p.178). Little of these statements seems to be supported by the most recent data.

Moreover, beyond these demographic disagreements, and giving due attention to the fact that Jewish continuity is not a mere biological-demographic fact but also depends significantly on the nature of Jewish identification and its transmission from one generation to the next, Goldscheider formulated a challenging theoretical proposition. Stressing the presence of a strong and lively Jewish community in America, he suggested that *new forms* of Jewish ethnicity were balancing ongoing secularization. *Transformation* "means that radical structural and cultural changes are occurring, but the consequences for the Jewish community in terms of continuity and change remain unclear and require systematic study" (Goldscheider, 1989: 202). While the classic theory of assimilation (Gordon, 1964) was being rejected, the idea was suggested that "the social networks and the emerging constellation of family, ethnic and religious ties persist as bases of cohesion for the Jewish community in the twenty-first century" (Goldscheider, 1986: 183).

Around these and other theoretical propositions, other voices hinted at an ideological bias among those who were expressing concern about the future of American Jewry. Steven Cohen, for example, wrote that many Israelis believe that "the Diaspora is peripheral to the unfolding of Jewish history, and in the light of inevitable assimilation and anti-Semitism, it is also inherently unstable. These ideological perceptions may well color the interpretation of anecdotes and more rigorous evidence by the many communally influential observers of American Jewry who also are committed Zionists—be they Israeli officials or immigrant intellectuals who comprise a hefty segment of Israeli commentators on Diaspora Jewish life" (Cohen, 1986: 226-7).

This point of view was brought to the extreme by those who extended the unquestionable fact of American Jewish socio-economic achievement to the ideological proposition that "America, not Israel, is the Jews' promised land" (Neusner, 1987). Interestingly, to gain full credibility, this position needed the support of a euphoric (but very misleading) interpretation

of ongoing demographic and identificational trends (Silberman, 1985).

The attempt itself to counterpose two schools, an allegedly "pessimistic Israeli" one and an "optimistic American" one, did not correspond to the reality of the scholarly debate about the quality of Jewish life in America. Scholars well grounded in the American-Jewish community, such as Charles Liebman, were presenting a penetrating critique of the Dynamics of cultural and religious patterns among U.S. Jews (Cohen and Liebman, 1987; Liebman, 1990). Others, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, noted some deep inconsistencies in ongoing demographic and cultural changes, and preferred a very cautious stance with regard to the prognosis (Glazer, 1987; Goldstein, 1989).

It should be added that the assessment of the major trends among American Jewry was hindered by the extremely fragmented and partial character of the available sources of data. Observations of local communities at different points in time had to cope with the problem of growing differentiation between Jews in different regions and communities in the U.S. (Tobin and Lipsman, 1984; Tobin, 1989). Moreover, local community studies generally missed the alienated fringes of the Jewish population, especially those who deliberately cut their ties to the organized community. Only a representative systematic national study would solve this central methodological issue (Goldstein, 1988).

Finally, it should be noted that differences of views about the character of social changes among American Jewry may reflect a more general ongoing debate about the nature and role of ethnic identity in contemporary America. In the general literature quite contradictory propositions are found about the "twilight," "revival," or "transformation" of the ethnicity variable (Alba, 1985; Greeley, 1974; Lieberman and Waters, 1988; Novak, 1973; Yancey, Eriksen, and Juliani, 1976). The way in which ethnic identity will evolve in America, whether toward greater autonomism or assimilation of different groups, can be expected to have a bearing on processes unfolding in the Jewish community.

This paper attempts to contribute to these debates by reviewing selected aspects of changes in the demography and identification patterns that can be observed among contemporary American Jews. It is hoped that the data presented will help to improve our understanding of the issues briefly outlined above.

DATA AND CONCEPTS

The data for this paper are derived primarily from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) some reference to the earlier 1970 National Jewish Population Study is also made. These two studies are the sole existing instances of large-scale, statistically representative, national surveys of American Jewry. Both surveys reflect the absence of official data on the Jewish population in the United States, and the need to provide such data through independently sponsored research. The Council of Jewish Federations sponsored both surveys.

In the absence of a full listing of Jews from a comprehensive, general population register or from Jewish community lists, the selection of a representative sample of Jewish households for research purposes is a complex and costly operation. In the 1970 NJPS, after initial stratification and selection of regions and locales within the U.S., Jewish Federation lists were used, supplemented by area sampling and random interviewing. The 1970 study included about 7,500 Jewish households (Massarik, 1975 and 1977; Lazerwitz, 1978). The 1990 NJPS research design was more complex and provided a more extensive coverage of the target population. A national random sample of 126,000 households was reached by telephone using a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) method. Respondents were asked to state any current or past attachment to Judaism for self and each member of their households. Questions related to whether a person was Jewish, considered self Jewish, was raised Jewish, or had a Jewish father/mother. A positive answer to any of these criteria qualified the entire household for the study's next stage. A very wide definition was thus adopted to identify the target population. At a second stage (summer 1990), a panel of 2,441 eligible households was re-interviewed through a lengthy questionnaire which included standard socio-demographic items and abundant coverage of issues relating to Jewish identification and participation in Jewish community activities (Goldstein and Kosmin, 1991; Kosmin, Goldstein, Waksberg, Lerer, Keysar, and Schechiser, 1991).

Tables 1 and 2 provide a formal description of the composition of populations surveyed in 1970 and 1990, by types of Jewish identification at birth and at time of survey. A few key concepts and definitions should be briefly outlined (Schmelz and DellaPergola, 1991). Each survey population includes a "core" of those who define themselves as Jews, either identifying with

the Jewish religion, or not having any religious preference, yet with a clear Jewish parental background. This **"core"** also includes a category of **"Jews by choice,"** i.e., joiners of the Jewish group whether or not formally converted. Another group, which we define as **"extension,"** consists of all persons of Jewish parental background who identify themselves with another religion. These include converts from Judaism and children or grand-children of mixed marriages. This **"extension,"** together with **"core"** Jews, form what we call the **"extended"** Jewish population. The latter, together with all those currently non-Jewish members of mixed households who themselves lack any past attachment to Judaism, and which we define as the **"periphery,"** constitute the **"enlarged"** Jewish population. The **"enlarged"** Jewish population is the largest aggregate of all individuals who belong to households with at least one current or past Jew.

Tables 1 and 2 show how the internal typological composition of the **"enlarged"** Jewish population has changed between 1970 and 1990. Part of the changes are explained by the more extensive research techniques of the later study. However, the effects of the augmented frequency of out-marriage and of other identificational processes clearly show up in the data. The estimated size of **"core"** U.S. Jewish population remained nearly unchanged between 1970 and 1990, increasing from 5.4 to 5.5 million. Stability prevailed in spite of the substantial Jewish immigration from a variety of countries (USSR, Israel, Latin America, Iran), estimated at 200-300,000 during the relevant period. The balance of conversions to and from Judaism turned from positive to slightly negative. At the same time there appears to have been a dramatic increase in the number of both non-Jews with a recent Jewish background, and non-Jewish members in mixed households (these are mostly unconverted non-Jewish spouses, see below). In 1990, the **"extended"** Jewish population reached 6.8 million persons, and the **"enlarged"** Jewish population approached a figure of 8.2 million.

It should be realized that these results are arrived at by taking into account the subjective declarations of respondents, and processing them systematically with the help of a computer program which jointly considers each person's various combinations of current and past attachment to Judaism. The set of Jewish statuses obtained, and the derived population estimates, thus result from a combination of subjective and **"objective"** (or the principal investigator's) criteria. This amounts to a call for caution when interpreting the data. Further

Table 1

**Estimated Jewish Survey Population (Enlarged Jewish Population),
By Identification At Time Of Birth And Survey, USA, 1970-1971**

| Born Jewish | Jewish at time of survey | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|-----------|
| | Yes | | No | Total | |
| | By religion | Secular | Total | | |
| Total | | | 5,420,000 | 435,000 | 5,855,000 |
| Yes | | | 5,335,000 | 65,000 | 5,400,000 |
| No | | | 85,000 ^a | 370,000 | 455,000 |

a. "Jews by choice"

| | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|
| "Core" Jewish population | 5,420,000 | | |
| "Extended" Jewish population | 5,485,000 | "Extension" | 65,000 |
| "Enlarged" Jewish population | 5,855,000 | "Periphery" | 370,000 |

Source: Adapted from Massarik (1977). Includes an estimated 50,000 Jews in insitutions.

Table 2

**Estimated Jewish Survey Population (Enlarged Jewish Population),
By Identification At Time Of Birth And Survey, USA, 1990**

| Born/raised/ background Jewish | Jewish at time of survey | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| | Yes | | | No | Total |
| | By religion | Secular | Total | | |
| Total | 4,395,000 | 1,120,000 | 5,515,000 | 2,675,000 | 8,190,000 |
| Yes | 4,210,000 | 1,120,000 | 5,330,000 | 210,000 ^a | 5,540,000 |
| Jewish origin | | | | 1,115,000 ^a | 1,115,000 |
| (Age 18+) | — | — | — | (415,000) | (415,000) |
| (Age 0-17) | — | — | — | (700,000) | (700,000) |
| No | 185,000 ^b | — | 185,000 ^b | 1,350,000 | 1,535,000 |

a. "Other religion now"

b. "Jews by choice"

| | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| "Core" Jewish population | 5,515,000 | | |
| "Extended" Jewish population | 6,840,000 | "Extension" | 1,325,000 |
| "Enlarged" Jewish population | 8,190,000 | "Periphery" | 1,350,000 |

Source: Adapted from Kosmin, Goldstein, Waksberg, Lerer, Keysar and Scheckner (1991). Includes an estimated 100,000 Jews in institutions.

aspects of the problems involved with identification of the Jewish group are discussed below.

During the 1970-1990 period, the total population of the United States grew by 22%, from 205 to 250 million persons. The percentage of "core" Jewish out of total American population thus declined from 2.6% to 2.2%. The "enlarged" Jewish population constituted 3.3% of the national total inhabitants in 1990.

TRENDS AND DIFFERENTIALS IN JEWISH IDENTIFICATION

The changing weight and emphasis of the various identificational types of identification and sub-populations just mentioned, within the "enlarged" Jewish population is outlined in Table 3. By

Table 3
Respondents (Enlarged Jewish Population), By Jewish
Status And Age, USA, 1990 (percentages)

| Respondent's Jewish status | Respondents age | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Total ^a | 18-29 | 30-44 | 45-64 | 65+ |
| N (unweighted sample) | 2441 | 452 | 991 | 602 | 391 |
| N (weighted sample) ^b | 318582 | 57340 | 123486 | 70921 | 66223 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Core, total | 80.5 | 79.7 | 77.1 | 79.2 | 88.6 |
| Jew by religion | 62.1 | 56.2 | 56.3 | 60.8 | 79.0 |
| Jew by choice | 3.0 | 1.7 | 4.2 | 3.4 | 1.7 |
| Secular Jew | 15.4 | 21.8 | 16.6 | 15.0 | 7.9 |
| Extension, total | 19.4 | 20.3 | 22.6 | 20.8 | 11.4 |
| Converted out | 6.4 | 5.1 | 7.0 | 9.1 | 3.4 |
| Jewish origin | 13.0 | 15.2 | 15.6 | 11.7 | 8.0 |
| Periphery^c | | | | | |
| Gentile | 0.1 | — | 0.3 | — | — |

a. Including age unknown.

b. Percentages relate to weighted sample data. In this and the following tables, weighted sample figures should not be taken as equivalents for the size of the actual populations described. Weighting procedures simply reflect the stratified, differential sampling procedures adopted in this survey. A further multiplier of about 10, on the average, should be introduced to obtain rough equivalents of the actual populations involved.

c. Relates to respondents only, and does not reflect the actual presence of Gentiles among the "enlarged" Jewish population.

comparing different successive age groups of respondents, a time bound trend emerges. The relative weight of secular Jews, i.e., Jews saying they have no religion, has tended to increase at the expense of Jews who identify by religion. The trend toward relative increase of the "Jews by choice" appears to have stopped among the younger group. Yet, marriages that still will take place among this group may produce some increase in the number of "Jews by choice."

The lower part of Table 3 includes respondents who are not Jewish themselves, although they may have some Jewish individuals in the respective households. Their relative weight has tended to increase over time, especially those of "Jewish origin," i.e., the non-Jewish children or grand-children of mixed marriages. On the other hand, the relative frequency of out-conversion from Judaism seems to be declining. It should be noted that virtually no Gentiles responded in the 1990 NJPS, but as noted in Table 2, the number of Gentiles in mixed households is very substantial.

The basic typology of Jewish statuses shown in Table 3 is re-examined in greater detail in the following tables to detect the differences in Jewish behaviors and attitudes that exist between these different types. Table 4 examines these differentials with regard to a selection of eleven Jewish indicators. There is great variation in the frequency of compliance with the selected Jewish patterns. In rough progression from most to least frequent, Jews identifying by religion think being Jewish is important or very important (87%), have both parents Jewish (85%), prefer one of the three major Jewish denominations (84%), attend synagogue service at least once a year (83%), give to Jewish philanthropies (59%), had Bar/Bat Mitzva (55%), have a majority of Jews among their friends (45%), live in a neighborhood with a visible Jewish presence (43%), are members of a Synagogue (39%), visited Israel (32%) and attend synagogue a few times a month or more (15%). The ranking is quite similar among the "Jews by choice" and the secular Jews, although there are notable exceptions. "Jews by choice" appear to catch-up and even lead on some of the religious dimensions of Judaism, but they are weaker with regard to the network of ethnic relations within the Jewish community, or regarding interest toward Israel.

Secular Jews are obviously weaker on the religious dimensions, but they are also weaker on each of the more ethnic variables. One significant finding is the lower percent of secular Jews with both parents Jewish, in comparison with the Jews who

Table 4
Respondents, By Selected Aspects Of Jewishness and Jewish Status, USA, 1990

| Jewishness indicators | Respondent's Jewish status (extended population) | | | | | | Total |
|--|--|---------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| | Core | | | Extension | | | |
| | Jew by religion | Jew by choice | Secular Jew | Converted out | Jewish origin | Jewish origin | |
| | Weighted sample* | | | | | | |
| Total (1) | 197750 | 9706 | 48994 | 20290 | 41481 | 318592 | |
| Total (2) | 192688 | 9474 | 39693 | 7020 | 18980 | 268218 | |
| Total (3) | 55304 | 2744 | 48994 | 20290 | 41481 | 169174 | |
| Total (4) | 64373 | 4122 | 16786 | 13478 | 8380 | 107139 | |
| | Percentages | | | | | | |
| Both parents Jewish (4) | 85 | 4 | 52 | 7 | 0 | 60 | |
| Had Bar / Bat Mitzva (1) | | | | | | | |
| Regular | 54 | 4 | 25 | 13 | 1 | 38 | |
| Adult | 1 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | |
| Jewish denomination (4) | | | | | | | |
| Orthodox | 6 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4 | |
| Conservative | 36 | 27 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 25 | |
| Reform | 42 | 49 | 10 | 7 | 9 | 31 | |
| Other Jewish explicit | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 3 | |
| Secular Jewish | 6 | 14 | 20 | 4 | 2 | 8 | |
| All other answers | 6 | 8 | 58 | 81 | 75 | 29 | |
| Hs. Synagogue membership (1) | 39 | 56 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 27 | |
| Synagogue attendance (2) | | | | | | | |
| Few times a month or | 15 | 36 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 12 | |
| Ever during year | 83 | 85 | 36 | 32 | 19 | 70 | |
| Non-Jewish service attendance (3) | | | | | | | |
| Few times a month or more | 2 | 3 | 13 | 57 | 43 | 22 | |
| Ever during year | 37 | 39 | 49 | 84 | 76 | 56 | |
| Jewish philanthropy (1) | 59 | 59 | 20 | 16 | 13 | 44 | |
| Most friends Jewish (1) | 45 | 33 | 13 | 3 | 6 | 32 | |
| Jewish neighborhood (1) | 43 | 26 | 19 | 15 | 12 | 33 | |
| Visited Israel (1) | 32 | 11 | 13 | 9 | 3 | 23 | |
| Importance of "Being Jewish" (4) | 87 | 82 | 42 | 53 | 47 | 73 | |

a. For each variable, total size of the weighted sample is indicated in parenthesis, with reference to the upper part of the table. Parts of the questionnaire were administered to sub-samples only. See also note b to Table 3.

identify by religion.

In general, as should be expected the Jewish "core" population, whether identifying by religion or secular, displays greater Jewishness than the "extension" of non-Jews of more or less recent Jewish origin. Yet, this is not always true. Some residual attachment to Judaism exists among some persons who now formally identify with another religion. The highest such display concerns the profession of interest toward Judaism.

The frequency of attendance of Jews to non-Jewish religious services is surprisingly high. It is substantially greater than attendance of Jewish services on the part of former Jews and other persons of Jewish descent.

Table 5 illustrates the variations in the respondents' basic perceptions of what the fundamental character of Judaism is. Judaism before emancipation could be described as a package of religion, ethnicity, nationality, culture and further elements. The social and cultural transformations connected with the modernization process brought about a separate and at times antagonistic definition of each of these components of Jewish identity. In the North American context, Judaism tended to be identified mostly according to its religious component (Herberg, 1955; Smith, 1984). America was a secular society, strenuously defending the separation between state and church, and confining religion to the private. Yet, religion supposedly represented a highly significant social variable, defining virtually each member of society. Thus, the normal assumption would be that Jews (and others) in America would define Judaism primarily as one religious group.

The 1990 survey reveals that this is not truly the case, and that the conventional interpretation may have been overemphasized in previous years as well. In fact, only 48% of Jews by religion, 55% of "Jews by choice" and 33% of secular Jews say a Jew in America is primarily part of a religious group (in a multi-response question). A higher share of American Jews identify as an ethnic group, though the percentages are not absolutely high. Expectedly, the highest ethnic identification appears among secular Jews (69%) and the lowest among the "Jews by choice" (45%). Identification as a national group is accepted by an even lower share of American Jews. The emerging mode of identification is instead along the patterns of a cultural group: 69% of the Jews identifying by religion, and 79% of both the "Jews by choice" and the secular Jews agree with such definition.

Although there may be some legitimate doubts about the

Table 5
Respondents' Definition Of A Jew In America, By Respondent's Jewish Status, USA, 1990 (percentages)

| Respondent's definition of a Jew in America ^a | Respondent's Jewish status (extended population) | | | | | | Total |
|--|--|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| | Core | | Extension | | Total | | |
| | Jew by religion | Jew by choice | Secular Jew | Converted out | | Jewish origin | |
| Religious group | 48 | 55 | 33 | 54 | 44 | 47 | |
| Cultural group | 69 | 79 | 79 | 68 | 49 | 69 | |
| Ethnic group | 60 | 45 | 69 | 57 | 50 | 59 | |
| National group | 43 | 33 | 39 | 55 | 52 | 44 | |
| Religious and/or cultural | | | | | | | |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | |
| Both | 38 | 48 | 31 | 38 | 22 | 36 | |
| Religious only | 10 | 6 | 2 | 15 | 22 | 10 | |
| Cultural only | 29 | 31 | 44 | 28 | 26 | 31 | |
| Neither | 19 | 15 | 17 | 16 | 27 | 19 | |
| Religious and/or ethnic | | | | | | | |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | |
| Both | 30 | 32 | 24 | 30 | 24 | 29 | |
| Religious only | 17 | 20 | 7 | 20 | 20 | 16 | |
| Ethnic only | 27 | 13 | 43 | 25 | 24 | 29 | |
| Neither | 19 | 32 | 16 | 17 | 28 | 20 | |
| Religious and/or national | | | | | | | |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | |
| Both | 20 | 29 | 14 | 35 | 24 | 21 | |
| Religious only | 29 | 26 | 18 | 18 | 16 | 25 | |
| National only | 22 | 5 | 24 | 18 | 26 | 21 | |
| Neither | 25 | 41 | 37 | 25 | 27 | 28 | |

a. Multiple choice question. All totals include unknown. Based on weighted sample (4). See note a to Table 4.

meaning attributed by the respondents to these various definitions, the implications of these findings should not be underestimated. The data appear to be consistent with an ongoing transition of the Jewish community from the previous sense of peoplehood based on a commonality of values and the strong affective bonds of family and physical proximity. Clearly, "culture" provides a much more open, yet more ambiguous and less binding parameter for defining a group. Culture does not provide a mutually exclusive bond, with regard to outsiders, as the traditional family, community and above all its religious values and authorities did at an earlier time. Culture can be more easily acquired, shared or lost. It constitutes a lively and viable bond, but one that seems to be weaker than its alternative defining criteria: religion, ethnicity and nationality.

The changing patterns of Jewish identification are examined in detail by age of respondents, for both Jews identifying by religion (Table 6) and for secular Jews (Table 7). According to the projected data of the 1990 NJPS, about 4.2 million people in the U.S. identify as Jewish born and currently Jewish by religion. This is the backbone of American Jewry, although its share of the total Jewish population is undergoing some erosion (Table 3). Patterns of identification within this group (Table 6) show, overall, a considerable amount of stability. Comparing older with younger age-groups, some Jewish rituals have tended to become more diffused, such as having a Bar/Bat Mitzva ceremony, or attending Synagogue at least once a year. At the same time, there are signs of moderate weakening in some aspects of Jewish identity, such as increases in the proportion of respondents not identifying with any of the three major denominations, declining rates of synagogue attendance a few times a month or more, having Jewish friends, living in a Jewish neighborhood, giving to Jewish philanthropies, having been to Israel, and having both parents Jewish. Several variables point to stabilization among the younger adult age-groups, after declines among the older cohorts. The figures for these young adults should be considered as open to further changes in connection with future life cycle events—namely marriage, child-rearing and geographical mobility—known to exert reinforcing or weakening effects on Jewish identification.

The definition of the basic pattern of Jewish identity, too, is changing across age-groups. Religion and especially culture, have tended to become more prominent defining concepts for that majority of American Jews who identify by religion; though ethnicity and nationality have attracted a comparatively stable

Table 6
Jewish Respondents, Identifying By Religion, By Selected
Aspects Of Jewishness And Age, USA, 1990 (percentages)

| Selected Jewish indicators | Respondents age | | | |
|--|-----------------|-------|-------|-----|
| | 18-29 | 30-44 | 45-64 | 65+ |
| Both parents Jewish (4) | 75 | 81 | 88 | 93 |
| Had Bar/Bat Mitzva (1) | 66 | 59 | 52 | 41 |
| Jewish denomination (4) | | | | |
| Orthodox | 5 | 5 | 4 | 10 |
| Conservative | 33 | 32 | 39 | 45 |
| Reform | 47 | 46 | 43 | 30 |
| All other answers | 15 | 17 | 14 | 10 |
| Hs. Synagogue membership (1) | 35 | 33 | 43 | 43 |
| Synagogue attendance (2) | | | | |
| Few times a month or more | 8 | 13 | 17 | 18 |
| Ever during year | 87 | 84 | 82 | 78 |
| Non-Jewish service attendance (3) | | | | |
| Few times a month or more | 0 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Ever during year | 40 | 33 | 44 | 31 |
| Jewish philanthropy (1) | 44 | 50 | 64 | 76 |
| Most friends Jewish (1) | 34 | 34 | 51 | 62 |
| Jewish neighborhood (1) | 35 | 36 | 44 | 55 |
| Visited Israel (1) | 30 | 26 | 31 | 43 |
| Being Jewish important (4) | 90 | 85 | 91 | 87 |
| A Jew in America: (4) | | | | |
| Religious group | 65 | 51 | 48 | 36 |
| Cultural group | 85 | 78 | 71 | 48 |
| Ethnic group | 65 | 68 | 65 | 42 |
| National group | 48 | 41 | 43 | 44 |

See note a to Table 4.

share of respondents. In any case, within each age group, it is the cultural pattern of being Jewish in America that attracts a relative majority of respondents.

In comparison, the attitudes and behavior of secular Jews (Table 7) appear to be a more weakened version of the Jews by religion than an alternative to it with equally explicit though different contents. It is true that a higher proportion of the secular Jews declare that culture ethnicity and to some extent nationality define the fact of being Jewish in America. However,

Table 7
Jewish Respondents, Secular, By Selected Aspects Of
Jewishness And Age, USA, 1990 (percentages)

| Selected Jewish indicators | Respondents age | | | |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | 18-29 | 30-44 | 45-64 | 65+ |
| Both parents Jewish (4) | 47 | 32 | 67 | 87 |
| Had Bar/Bat Mitzva (1) | 17 | 28 | 30 | 19 |
| Jewish denomination (4) | | | | |
| Orthodox | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Conservative | 11 | 10 | 7 | 15 |
| Reform | 6 | 13 | 8 | 11 |
| All other answers | 82 ^a | 77 ^a | 84 ^a | 74 ^a |
| Hs. Synagogue membership (1) | 7 | 3 | 9 | 5 |
| Synagogue attendance (2) | | | | |
| Few times a month or more | 0 | 2 | 6 | 0 |
| Ever during year | 17 | 36 | 41 | 40 |
| Non-Jewish service attendance (3) | | | | |
| Few times a month or more | 9 ^a | 17 ^a | 16 ^a | 3 |
| Ever during year | 51 ^a | 56 ^a | 45 ^a | 24 |
| Jewish philanthropy (1) | 12 | 19 | 26 | 33 |
| Most friends Jewish (1) | 6 | 10 | 19 | 33 |
| Jewish neighborhood (1) | 19 | 15 | 24 | 27 |
| Visited Israel (1) | 4 | 10 | 22 | 28 |
| Being Jewish important (4) | 24 | 41 | 60 | 53 |
| A Jew in America: (4) | | | | |
| Religious group | 48 | 22 | 34 | 30 |
| Cultural group | 86 ^a | 77 | 69 | 83 ^a |
| Ethnic group | 60 | 78 ^a | 62 | 76 ^a |
| National group | 56 ^a | 36 | 31 | 22 |

a. Higher value than among Jewish respondents identifying by religion
(see Table 6).

See note a to Table 4.

at each age group, and with respect to each of the Jewish behaviors and attitudes selected for this analysis, the seculars show lower levels of involvement. With very few exceptions, the trend is one of further weakening when passing from older to younger age groups. What seems particularly significant is not the expected estrangement of seculars from Jewish religious life, but rather the weakness of their Jewish relational network.

The intensity of their participation in non-Jewish religious services is far greater than Synagogue attendance. From these data, the secular Jews appear to be the product of earlier processes of assimilation (fewer than half of the younger adults aged 18-44 have both parents Jewish), and on the move toward stronger involvement in a non-Jewish environment.

BOUNDARIES OF THE COLLECTIVE REVISITED

The Jewish patterns just described point to the growing complexity of identification and differentiation within the Jewish population. The amount of existing complexity and even contradiction appears even greater when the basic typology of identification is re-examined in the light of several, complementary criteria. Tables 8 and 9 present a cross-classification between the different types of core and periphery which exist within the "extended" Jewish population, and the respondent's preferred denomination. While this latter variable was intended to clarify the internal ideological-institutional structure of American Jewry, the answers reveal a far greater and truly intriguing portfolio of preferences. We organized the types of denominations preferred into five major groups: Jewish explicit, Jewish none, Jewish non-Jewish, non-Jewish explicit, and unknown.

It appears, first, that quite a few people classified as Jewish, by virtue of their own declarations and proximate family relationships, actually manifest a preference for Christian or other non-Jewish religious denominations. The opposite is true too: many non-Jews with some Jewish background continue to express a definite preference for Jewish religious denominations. Similar inconsistencies appear within the Jewish "core" population between being or declaring to be religious and secular. In Table 8 we underlined all those cases which apparently present no such contradictions: respondents with Jewish religious status *and* a Jewish denomination (56.2% of the "extended" Jewish population); those with secular Jewish status *and* no preferred denomination (3.2%); and those with non-Jewish status *and* another religion as preferred denomination (13.6%). This leaves out no less than 27% of the whole extended sample. Of these, 7.4% are Jews who inconsistently present themselves between being religious and secular; 12.7% are persons with an "objectively" attributed Jewish status which also feature a

Table 8
Respondents, By Jewishness Status and Denomination, USA, 1990 (weighted sample)*

| Respondent's denomination | Respondent's Jewish status (extended population) | | | | | | Total |
|---------------------------|--|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| | Core | | | Extension | | | |
| | Jew by religion | Jew by choice | Secular Jew | Converted out | Jewish origin | | |
| Total | 64373 | 4122 | 16786 | 13478 | 8380 | 107139 | |
| Orthodox | 4038 | 85 | 282 | 109 | — | 4515 | |
| Conservative | 22947 | 1107 | 1576 | 873 | 675 | 27178 | |
| Reform | 27287 | 2009 | 1705 | 970 | 734 | 32706 | |
| Reconstructionist | 1167 | — | 121 | 127 | 224 | 1639 | |
| Multiple denomination | 1604 | — | — | — | 307 | 1911 | |
| Just Jewish | 2612 | 575 | 984 | 188 | — | 4359 | |
| Secular | 390 | — | 1465 | 119 | 176 | 2151 | |
| Non-participating | 556 | — | 394 | 212 | — | 1162 | |
| Agnostic/atheist | 154 | — | 590 | — | — | 744 | |
| Don't know | 1825 | — | 1340 | 1114 | 490 | 4769 | |
| No answer, refuse | 1083 | 151 | 1345 | 309 | 201 | 3089 | |
| Messianic | 240 | 195 | — | 119 | — | 554 | |
| Jewish + other religion | — | — | 244 | 237 | 74 | 555 | |
| Christian | — | — | 1073 | 5226 | 3576 | 9875 | |
| Other religion | 468 | — | 5665 | 3874 | 1922 | 11931 | |

a. See also note b to Table 3.

— No cases.

Total respondents (extended Jewish population) = 107139 = 100.0
 With Jewish religious status and denomination = 60244 = 56.2
 With secular Jewish status and no-denomination = 3433 = 3.2
 With non-Jewish status and other religion = 14598 = 13.6
 All other "inconsistent" combinations = 28864 = 27.0

composit Jewish-non-Jewish or a more definite non-Jewish identity; and 6.9% are persons with some Jewish background, a definite attribution of a non-Jewish religion, and a persistent involvement with Jewish identity (Table 9). The finding of more than one in four respondents with "inconsistent" replies to different questions on their own ethnoreligious identification cannot be attributed to statistical errors. It is a rather revealing indication of the actually blurred characteristics and contents of Jewish identification in America.

A further element of interpretation is introduced in Table 10 which shows the percentages of respondents stating that to be a Jew is very important for each given combination of Jewish status and denomination. Not unexpectedly, the perceived importance of being Jewish is highest among those who consistently manifest their identity via a religious definition and a clear denominational preference. The expected gradient among the major denominations (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform) emerges. Jews who are consistently secular display far lesser interest for being Jewish. The amount of interest is quite variable, though generally low among other sub-groups within the survey population, including ex-Jews. One small group with extremely high percentages of interest in Judaism is those preferring the Messianic denomination—probably Jews for Jesus—whether currently Jewish or not.

These findings seem to support recent interpretations about the subjectivization of ethnic or religious identity, and the composite character of the religious representations thus obtained (Waters, 1960). The data also point to a growing internal differentiation within American Jewry, and to the difficulty of establishing clear and unequivocal group's boundary and distinctive values. In this respect, the quantitative, socio-demographic perspective suggested in this paper is fully consonant with the findings obtained through a more qualitative, anthropological perspective of religion in contemporary American-Jewish society (Liebman, 1991). The attempt to cover the whole gamut of American-Jewish identities with categories that are both all-inclusive and mutually exclusive seems to have encountered great and unprecedented complication.

MIXED MARRIAGE: LEVELS AND VARIATION

Much of the complexities in Jewish identification presented

Table 9
Respondents, By Jewish Status and Denomination, USA, 1990 (percentages)

| Respondent's denomination | Respondent's Jewish status (extended population) | | | | | Total |
|---------------------------|--|---------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Jew by religion | Jew by choice | Secular Jew | Converted out | Jewish origin | |
| Total | 60.1 | 3.8 | 15.7 | 12.6 | 7.8 | 100.0 |
| Jewish, explicit | 53.2 | 3.0 | 3.4 | 2.0 | 1.8 | 63.4 |
| Jewish, none | 3.5 | 0.5 | 3.2 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 7.9 |
| Unknown, refuse | 2.7 | 0.1 | 2.5 | 1.3 | 0.7 | 7.3 |
| Jewish + non-Jewish | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 1.0 |
| Non-Jewish, explicit | 0.4 | 0 | 6.3 | 8.5 | 5.1 | 20.4 |

Overall Percentages^a

a. Small column and row discrepancies due to rounding.

| Definitional typology of "extended Jewish population (respondents) | |
|---|-------|
| Grand total | 100.0 |
| Consistently Jewish, total | 66.8 |
| By religion | 56.2 |
| Secular | 3.2 |
| Uncertain | 7.4 |
| Inconsistently Jewish/non-Jewish, total | 19.6 |
| Core (Jewish) status | 12.7 |
| Extension (non-Jewish) status | 6.9 |
| Consistently non-Jewish, total | 13.6 |
| | 100.0 |
| | 84.1 |
| | 4.8 |
| | 11.1 |
| | 100.0 |
| | 64.8 |
| | 35.2 |

Table 10
Percent of Respondents Agreeing That Being Jewish in Very Important In Your Life"
For Any Given Combination Of Jewish Status and Denomination, USA, 1990 (weighted sample)^a

| Respondent's denomination | Respondent's Jewish status (extended population) | | | | | | Total |
|---------------------------|--|---------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|-----------|-------|
| | Core | | | Extension | | | |
| | Jew by religion | Jew by choice | Secular Jew | Converted out | Jewish origin | | |
| Total | 52 | 54 | 7 | 15 | 19 | 38 | |
| Orthodox | 83 | .. | .. | .. | — | 77 | |
| Conservative | 63 | 59 | 19 | 0 | 59 | 58 | |
| Reform | 43 | 44 | 7 | 10 | 0 | 40 | |
| Reconstructionist | 48 | — | .. | .. | .. | 49 | |
| Multiple denomination | 73 | — | — | — | 0 | 61 | |
| Just Jewish | 12 | 75 | 41 | .. | — | 29 | |
| Secular | 87 | — | 0 | .. | .. | 16 | |
| Non-participating | 28 | — | 0 | .. | — | 13 | |
| Agnostic/atheist | .. | — | 0 | — | — | 0 | |
| Don't know | 41 | — | 0 | 26 | 0 | 21 | |
| No answer, refuse | 12 | .. | 0 | 0 | .. | 4 | |
| Messianic | .. | .. | — | .. | — | 100 | |
| Jewish + other religion | — | — | .. | .. | .. | 27 | |
| Christian | — | — | 0 | 16 | 33 | 21 | |
| Other religion | 20 | — | 1 | 10 | 0 | 5 | |

a. Weighted sample (4). See note a to Table 4.

.. Less than 300 cases weighted.

— No cases.

above derive in one way or another from the spread of interfaith marriage in American. Intermarriage is one of the classic processes discussed in sociological and demographic theory relative to situations when different social groups have an opportunity for interaction in a relatively open social setting. This is not to say that the longer run consequences of intermarriage in terms of the group identity of the offspring can be easily predicted, or that intermarriage is equivalent to complete loss of those who intermarry to their group of origin. However, certainly intermarriage frequencies constitute a leading test of the intensity of intergroup interaction and integration that exists in any society with a given amount of cultural heterogeneity.

In the case of American Jews, intermarriage rates were quite low during the first half of the twentieth century, leading some observers to the assumption that the Jews' long-term integration into American society would be characterized by a high degree of cultural autonomy and community cohesiveness. Available data pointed to a sharp up-turn in the rate of intermarriage from the late 1960s. The 1970s and 1980s saw a continuous growth in heterogamy rates amidst a growing controversy about the actual levels, and their possibly positive or negative consequences for Jewish identity transmission and continuity. In any case, less than half the children of mixed marriage were brought up as Jews according to a majority of available studies (DellaPergola, 1989).

The 1990 data (see Table 11) point in the first place to a continuing increase in intermarriage in recent years. The percentages of Jewish-born spouses, of either sex, marrying non-Jewish born partners increased from 8% among the 1941-50 marriage cohort, to 23% in 1961-70, and 50% in 1981-90. These figures were quite consistent with the 1970 NJPS findings relative to the marriage cohorts that could be compared on both studies.

A non-negligible proportion of non-Jewish born spouses converted to Judaism, but their share diminished from 22% in 1941-50, to 11% in 1961-70, and 9% in 1981-90. On the other hand, the proportion of Jews converting out fluctuated between 3% and 7%. After discounting the data for conversion to Judaism, the proportion of Jewish-born with a currently non-Jewish spouse was 7% for 1941-50 marriages, 21% in 1961-70, and 46% in 1981-90. Translating these individual mixed-marriage rates into couple rates, the figures were 14%, 34% and 61%, respectively. The majority of all new Jewish households formed

Table 11
Indicators Of Jewish Identification Of Respondents
And Spouses, Selected Years Of Marriage, USA, 1990

| | Total | Selected years of marriage | | |
|---|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | current couples ^a | 1941-1950 | 1961-1970 | 1981-1990 |
| N (unweighted sample) ^a | 1435 | 140 | 184 | 502 |
| N (weighted sample) ^b | 180245 | 19270 | 19102 | 66781 |
| Own identification of Jewish-born spouses (percentages) | | | | |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Jewish by religion | 78 | 90 | 83 | 70 |
| Secular Jew | 17 | 7 | 10 | 25 |
| Former Jew | 5 | 3 | 7 | 5 |
| % of Jewish-born marrying non-Jewish-born spouse (out-marriage) | | | | |
| Males | 32 | 4 | 28 | 51 |
| Females | 31 | 12 | 18 | 50 |
| Total individuals | 32 | 8 | 23 | 50 |
| (1970 NJPS) | 8 | 6 | 22 | n.a. |
| Total couples | 48 | 15 | 38 | 67 |
| (1970 NJPS) | 15 | 12 | 35 | n.a. |
| % of non-Jewish-born spouses choosing Judaism | | | | |
| | 12 | 22 | 11 | 9 |
| % of Jewish-born with currently non-Jewish spouses (mixed marriage) | | | | |
| Males | 28 | 3 | 24 | 45 |
| Females | 28 | 12 | 17 | 47 |
| Total individuals | 28 | 8 | 21 | 46 |
| (1970 NJPS) | 7 | 6 | 17 | n.a. |
| Total couples | 42 | 14 | 34 | 61 |
| (1970 NJPS) | 13 | 11 | 28 | n.a. |
| % of Jewish-born with currently non-Jewish spouse, by own identification | | | | |
| Jewish by religion | 19 | 3 | 10 | 41 |
| Secular Jew | 50 | 32 | 57 | 52 |
| Former Jew | 88 | 86 | 100 | 83 |
| % of Jews by choice with currently non-Jewish spouse | | | | |
| | 11 | 0 | 0 | 12 |

a. Only couples of respondents and spouses were included. The few co-resident couples in multiple family households were excluded.

b. Percentages relate to weighted sample data. See note b to Table 3.

Sources: 1990 NJPS, our processing; Schmelz and DellaPergola (1983).

in America in recent years involved a non-converted non-Jewish spouse.

The differential out-marriage propensities of Jews identifying by religion and of secular Jews, which were very substantial in the past, were greatly narrowed among the more recent marriages. The differential by gender of spouses seems to have gone, too, in the context of more diffused heterogamy. It should be stressed that the current U.S. data on intermarriage strongly resemble the trends observed in the past in European communities whose size, though, was much smaller than American Jewry. The exceptionalism of U.S. Jews is a thing of the past, at least with regard to their patterns of family formation.

Given the role of marriage and the family in the chain of transmission of intergenerational continuity, it is interesting to examine the frequency of mixed marriage among selected Jewish sub-populations with different socio-demographic characteristics (Table 12). The findings may hint at the role of mixed marriage as a co-variate of structural change within the Jewish group; they can also point to the casual mechanisms that are more or less conducive to mixed marriage. The data refer separately to Jewish male and female respondents. They should be interpreted as couple frequencies which are commonly higher than the corresponding individual frequencies of heterogamy.

One general finding is that the frequency of mixed marriage has increased, particularly during the last 20 years, all across the board. Mixed marriage was still comparatively rare in the 1940s. It was more common and much more differentiated during the 1960s. The most recent data point to very significant increases, and a tendency to converge at similar levels among different socio-demographic groups. As to the differential levels, they mostly confirm previous research, though there are some interesting new developments.

Region of residence and geographical mobility fail to produce the clear East-West or stayer-mover differences that could be observed in the recent past. Mixed marriages are more frequent among males who marry older or remarry (a phenomenon not found among females). One of the most interesting findings is the apparent reversal of the past relationship between education and socio-economic status, and the rate of mixed marriage. It is now clear that out-marriage is more frequent among lower than among higher-status Jews. Jewish denominations and frequencies of synagogue attendance have the strongest, and expected, associations with heterogamy levels. The picture is less sharply defined with regard to Jewish education. A past

Table 12
Percent Of Jewish Respondents With Currently
Non-Jewish Spouse (Mixed Marriages), By Sex And
Selected Years Of Marriage And Sociodemographic
Characteristics, USA, 1990

| Selected characteristics in 1990 | Male respondents | | | Female respondents | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|---------|---------|--------------------|---------|---------|
| | 1941-50 | 1961-70 | 1981-90 | 1941-50 | 1961-70 | 1981-90 |
| Region of residence | | | | | | |
| North East | 10 | 16 | 62 | 15 | 16 | 58 |
| Middle West | 26 | 25 | 59 | 12 | 56 | 27 |
| South | 0 | 28 | 62 | 7 | 0 | 62 |
| West | 0 | 32 | 53 | 18 | 24 | 59 |
| Migration status | | | | | | |
| Foreign born | 0 | 5 | 13 | 22 | 36 | 49 |
| Local born | 17 | 17 | 60 | 4 | 15 | 55 |
| Migrant within US | 4 | 33 | 62 | 21 | 21 | 43 |
| Age at marriage | | | | | | |
| 18-24 | 12 | 19 | 44 | 12 | 26 | 51 |
| 25-29 | 3 | 26 | 57 | 15 | 20 | 61 |
| 30-34 | 0 | 38 | 52 | 18 | 0 | 79 |
| 35-39 | 0 | 0 | 62 | 0 | 40 | 45 |
| 40+ | 0 | 19 | 80 | - | 0 | 40 |
| Times married | | | | | | |
| 1 | 6 | 21 | 54 | 13 | 23 | 59 |
| 2+ | - | 18 | 72 | - | 11 | 50 |
| Education attainment | | | | | | |
| High School | 0 | 33 | 69 | 12 | 31 | 56 |
| Some college | - | 0 | 76 | - | 0 | 58 |
| B.A. | 16 | 13 | 54 | 5 | 17 | 58 |
| M.A.+ | 7 | 20 | 55 | 32 | 12 | 54 |
| Occupation | | | | | | |
| None | 11 | 21 | 57 | 4 | 18 | 58 |
| Professional | 4 | 18 | 59 | 20 | 26 | 60 |
| Managerial | 8 | 22 | 50 | 14 | 16 | 48 |
| Sales | 8 | 11 | 55 | 33 | 15 | 46 |
| Clerical | 0 | 72 | 67 | 8 | 15 | 55 |
| Blue Collar | 9 | 21 | 76 | 37 | 47 | 50 |
| Jewish denomination | | | | | | |
| Orthodox | 7 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 31 |
| Conservative | 4 | 14 | 47 | 4 | 2 | 41 |
| Reform | 10 | 12 | 58 | 11 | 18 | 62 |
| Other | 0 | 58 | 74 | 56 | 68 | 64 |
| Synagogue attendance | | | | | | |
| Weekly | 0 | 12 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 31 |
| Monthly | 0 | 0 | 23 | 0 | 5 | 33 |
| Few in year | 8 | 13 | 44 | 3 | 6 | 40 |
| Almost none | 7 | 37 | 70 | 19 | 31 | 67 |
| Jewish education | | | | | | |
| Day school | 0 | 27 | 43 | 0 | 51 | 22 |
| Supplementary | 9 | 22 | 61 | 15 | 13 | 58 |
| None | 0 | 12 | 63 | 12 | 29 | 58 |

day-school experience seems to have the expected moderating effects on mixed marriage; but not so with supplementary education, still the leading tool for Jewish education in the U.S.

Finally, the 1990 data show that only 28% of the children of current mixed marriages were raised Jewish. Some 41% were raised in a non-Jewish religion, and 31% were raised with no religion. While the possibility exists that part of the latter will be attracted to their Jewish option, the current pattern probably means that there will be net losses to the "core" Jewish population in the next generation (Kosmin, Goldstein, Waksberg, Lerer, Keysar and Scheckner, 1991).

DISCUSSION

The new evidence from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, such as the materials presented in this paper, contribute to the effort aimed at conceptualizing and reassessing the socio-demographics and identification of U.S. Jewry. In our view, the trend in demography and identification briefly illustrated here raise serious questions about the main thrust of the contemporary Jewish experience in America. Among the problematic issues to be noted are the large and still rising extent of mixed marriage, the substitution of a concept of culture for that of religion or peoplehood as the main defining criterion of one's attachment to Judaism, the rapid expansion of the weakly identified periphery of the Jewish community, and the growing visibility of a composite Jewish-non-Jewish identity among people who are Jewish by any conventional account. On the face of the data presented, our previously expressed opinion of an ongoing process of *erosion* is strengthened. The alternative concept of *transformation* seems to be acceptable mainly if we take it in the sense that certain sections of American Jewry are undergoing transformation into something perhaps more American, but definitely less Jewish.

It is not that the data are being accepted as they are without exception. At the preliminary stages of analysis of the 1990 NJPS, where we still stand now, objections were voiced concerning the initial classification of Jewish identificational types. Alternative criteria suggested (Cohen and Berger, 1991), would produce a picture of a somewhat less assimilated U.S. Jewish population through the exclusion of several marginal cases. However, since the survey was based on a national representative sample, these exclusions would amount to a significantly smaller Jewish population. Obviously, the most

recent study should be placed in the context of previous research, and its findings reconciled with a general historical view of the development of Jewish population and community. The question would then become how, with somewhat more moderate yet still very substantial rates of mixed marriage and cultural alienation, did the Jewish population decline by about half a million between 1970 and 1990. Any gains in quality, obtained through redefinition of the 1990 data file, would become losses in quantity, and vice versa.

Beyond the basic question "More or less Jews?" (in its different meanings), a convincing interpretative framework should be provided to address the overall social significance of the observed trends. One fact that has clearly emerged is the blurring of the past boundary not only between Jews and non-Jews but also between Jewish and non-Jewish values and behaviors among a growing minority of the Jewish community itself. In this context, the analysis has failed so far to show the emerging of a viable secular alternative to counter a weakening of the more traditional religious option. Jewish secularism in the past did often represent a creative Jewish alternative to religious traditionalism. But in the present context, self-defined secular Jews, rather than displaying innovative forms of Jewish identity, appear to represent an intermediate stage in a process between assimilation in the previous generation and further assimilation in the following one.

We should stress, at this point, that it is *not* our intention to suggest that these trends apply to the majority of American Jewry, or that they foreshadow the disappearance of Jews in America. Our own analysis and abundant evidence point to the persistence of a more strongly identified Jewish center within what we have called (in a more technical sense) the "core" Jewish population. In recent years, this center may have expanded, both as a result of its own demographic increase, and by attracting new people. One significant indicator is the considerable expansion of the Jewish day-school system in the U.S. during the 1980s (DellaPergola, Rebhun, and Sagi, 1991). While still enrolling a relatively small minority of the Jewish school-age population, day-schools reflect a growth in the demand for more intensive Jewish socialization of children on the part of their Jewish parents. Other aspects of the cultural and institutional Jewish community network also appear to be strengthening, as Jewish education undoubtedly did.

The trend toward a weakening of the relevance of Judaism is mainly visible at the periphery of the Jewish community, but

not only there. Perhaps the most intriguing question concerns the apparent redefinition of the fundamental perception of Judaism as a culture rather than a religion or an ethnic group. On the face of our data, the primordial, exclusive, transmitted character of the Jewishness variable is loosening and is being substituted by a looser, subaltern concept. "Culture" seems a residual category out of a past stronger Jewish identification, especially in view of the fact that the actual elements of a Jewish culture (the Hebrew language, literature, religious rituals, philosophy and the like) are unknown to most of their respondents. This change is interesting in view of the recent evidence of a growing overlap in the United States between socioeconomic status and sociocultural identity. A correlate is the increasing subjectivization of ethnic identity among those many Americans with composite ethnic ancestry (Lieberson and Waters, 1988).

Jews, who once were perceived as one of the lowest status ethnoreligious groups, have now achieved the status of one of the socially uppermost American religious denominations. Intermarriage, which once was more frequent among the better educated and upwardly mobile Jews, is today highest among the relatively few who lack a college education or are blue-collar workers. Jewish identity is not incompatible with upward social mobility. The recent data on intermarriage even suggest that we may be witnessing a substitution of subpopulations within the framework of the American Jewish social structure, whereas relatively greater losses are incurred at the lower social levels and relatively fewer losses or even some gains occur at the higher levels. Theoretically, overlap between socioeconomic status and cultural identity might strengthen Jewish group cohesiveness. Viewed in the context of broader American social trends, being Jewish may increasingly be an attribute accepted among the upper social stratum in the U.S. It is hence entirely appropriate that Judaism should be perceived as a cultural variant of the predominant American model, rather than a separate, all-inclusive way of being in America. Such transformation stems from American social reality more than from forces operating from within the Jewish community.

The problem, from the particularistic point of view of Jewish continuity, is that the diffusion of intermarriage and other forms of intergroup exchange have now reached unprecedented levels—closely matching the general level of heterogamy among U.S. whites. Intermarriage is no more the product of a logically elaborated intention by a small minority of Jewish cultural

“deviants” to sever their ties with the Jewish community, as it might have been the case in the earlier decades of the century. It simply happens among the most different strata and categories of Jews, probably as the result of what has appropriately been termed—though with an entirely different analytical intention—“frequent nonconflictual interaction” (Goldscheider and Zuckerman, 1984: 9) between the Jewish minority and the non-Jewish majority. Among the younger Jewish adult cohorts, the majority of individual and family intimate relational networks tend to be no more exclusively Jewish but include growing proportions of non-Jews. This naturally involves a growing personal participation of Jews in non-Jewish religious rituals and symbolic ceremonies in what is a secular, yet latently if not openly Christian society.

A Jewish person may be able to distinguish between acts performed or messages received by an inner belief and those which merely represent a tribute to peaceful coexistence and social harmony. However, when it comes to the transmission of values and behaviors to the next generation, these intimately felt distinctions are probably lost. A child who has grown up with observance and respect of both Jewish and non-Jewish religious rituals will possibly keep both at the core of his identity—thus becoming the carrier of a sort of new syncretic, Judeo-Christian (or neo-marranic?) culture—or become estranged from both, turning to one of the many non-religious alternatives that the American culture can offer (including some forms of neo-paganism).

While these are only speculations suggested by a preliminary examination of the new findings, the first corporate response of the organized Jewish community seems to be one of strong and sincere concern. Communal action called to face the situation follows two main strategic directives. The first is to try to reach-out to the weaker sections of the community, which today include many young Jewish adults who live in arrangements different from the conventional Jewish nuclear family composed by two Jewish parents and their children. According to this view, outreach should aim especially at what we have earlier defined as the “extension” and the “periphery” of the “enlarged” Jewish population. The alternative approach is to focus on the more strongly identified center of the Jewish constituency, to prevent its slipping toward the periphery (Olshansky, 1991; Schrage, 1991). The more specific targets for community action concern the intensifying of Jewish education at the school level, a policy for Jewish university students and other young single

adults, outreach to the inter-married, creating structures and systems to tackle rootlessness, emphasizing the community's unity and national goals above and beyond localistic and ideological divisions.

Interestingly, perhaps for the first time, a note of discouragement emerges among the American Jewish leadership about the actual ability of Judaism to preserve itself on a large scale in the context of the American way of life. The somewhat unexpected result is that *aliyah* to Israel has been suggested by some community leaders as one way to cope with the challenges that American society poses to Jewish continuity. Needless to say, such thinking meets vigorous criticism by those who believe American Jews should be able to cope with their problems *in America*.

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