

**The Marshall Sklare Memorial Lecture.****Social Science and the Jews:  
A Research Agenda for the Next Generation****Calvin Goldscheider \***  
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I am honored by the opportunity to present the Marshall Sklare Memorial Lecture for the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry and the Association for Jewish Studies and to join a distinguished group of previous awardees. I am grateful to the selection committee and for the continuing support of colleagues and researchers in the field.

I first encountered Marshall in the 1950s when I was an undergraduate at Yeshiva University studying his edited collection on *The Jews*, the first text reviewing what we knew about the sociology of the Jews. His doctoral dissertation on *Conservative Judaism* was becoming the guidebook for studying that American Jewish religious movement. We met personally in Jerusalem in the early 1970s when Marshall requested that I prepare a summary of my study on American immigrants in Israel for his updated two-volume collection of research on American Jewish sociology. Subsequently, Marshall published several reviews and updates, pulling together what social scientists knew about American Jews, much of which appeared in *American Jews*. He saw this as one of his key roles as the "Dean" of American Jewish Sociology. He articulated his vision at the Planning Conference for Modern Jewish Studies that he organized at Brandeis University in October 1979. In a paper he presented there he outlined the need for a new synthesis of the sociology of American Jews.<sup>1</sup>

In his honor and memory, I want to build on his legacy by following a somewhat similar strategy in my presentation today. But rather than review and synthesize what we know, I want to use this occasion to focus on what we should know and sketch out a research agenda that the next generation of scholars should pursue. Indirectly, I shall identify the limitations of previous research in the social scientific study of the Jews and evaluate some of the theoretical and methodological biases that have characterized some research in this area. My hope is that the next generation will proceed with a different research agenda, since both the context and object of what they will study have changed dramatically over the last several decades. I shall argue explicitly that we should not continue with outdated paradigms and limited research methods to understand how the Jewish community

is organized, how Jews behave, and what they value. In short, to learn whether and why Jews and their communities are distinctive, we need both fresh perspectives and an articulated research agenda.

My major goal is to outline theoretical, methodological, and substantive guidelines in pursuit of a research agenda for the next generation. There is nothing particularly radical or unusual about these guidelines. They are the application of what social scientists have been doing over the last decades in their examination of a wide range of phenomena. What is new is their application to the social scientific study of the Jews and their communities.

These guidelines emerge from some of the research that we have carried out. One way to think through a future research agenda is to reconsider some of the main issues that we have struggled with over the last several decades so that the need for new thinking and new ways of carrying out research will become clearer.

### **Rephrasing the General Analytic Questions**

Let me start with basics: the need to rephrase our overall analytic questions. Three compelling arguments about the Jewish past and present have been constructed to guide past analyses. These have been based, in part, on social science theories, and have also gained legitimacy in the Jewish communities in America and around the world as a basis for policy formation, setting research agendas and forming the basis for strategic planning. These arguments are also consistent with a set of ideological orientations that have been current in the Jewish community for more than a century. Somewhat oversimplified, there are three arguments as follows:

The first argument is that over the last century Jewish communities have moved away from being based on religion and religious activities to becoming secular, and hence assimilated. In modern, open, voluntary societies, Jews like others have become more secular, less attached to religious activities, religious institutions and a religious way of life. Whatever religious orientations our grandparents and great grandparents had, we have fewer of them. Religion is simply less central in the lives of Jews today, so it is argued. Indeed, Judaism, the religion of the Jews, has itself become secular. This is the so-called secularization theme. It has been applied to all Jewish communities in and outside of Israel.

A second argument focuses on the ethnic or the peoplehood dimension of Jewish identity. Jews in the past, so the argument goes, had a distinctive sense of being a people apart from the Christian and Muslim societies where they lived, i.e., Jews were a social minority, not only a religious minority. This minority status reduced access to social and economic opportunities, involved political constraints and

discrimination in everyday life, at times to extreme levels. However, with the increasing openness of society, the expansion of political rights and economic opportunities and the acceptance of Jews into society, the ethnic component has diminished. Similar to other white immigrant groups subjected to decreasing discrimination, over the generations Jews have assimilated ethnically into western societies. Jews have accepted their new situation and have been accepted by others. As generational distance from immigrant origins has increased—most American Jews do not have grandparents who have lived outside the United States—the ethnic distinctiveness of American Jews has faded. Jews have become thoroughly American. In the state of Israel, Jews remain distinctive because they are different ethnically from their surrounding neighbors, but decreasingly ethnic in their own national origins, as they have become increasingly “Israelis”. The Jews of Israel have thus become the quintessential “ethnic” Jewish community. The second argument concludes that ethnic identity recedes and ethnic assimilation occurs over time when Jews are a minority in an open society. Only where Jews are a majority, does ethnic, really a national, identity become reinforced.

A third argument follows directly from the secularization and ethnic assimilation arguments and combines the first two. It assumes that as religious identity weakens and ethnic identity fades, Jewish communities outside of Israel weaken. To support their distinctiveness, therefore, external stimuli are needed to ignite the dying embers of Jewishness. At times these sparks come from some ethnic cultural attachments and pride in a new nation-state (Israel) or some recognition of Jewish vulnerability to external forces that threaten their group survival. These external factors tend to be unstable and marginal to the daily lives of people. Thus, as secularization diminishes Judaism, and assimilation decreases Jewish ethnicity, few internally generated Jewish values or features of Jewish culture remain to sustain continuity of the community or identity. As Judaism and Jewishness fade, so the argument goes, nothing beyond externals can form the basis for the future strength of Jewish communities outside of the state of Israel. Hence, some perspectives from social science and history suggest that the Jewish diaspora is “vanishing” and Jewish communities are “eroding” and “declining” and that the death of Jewish communities outside of the state of Israel is in sight, if not in our generation then soon. In studying contemporary Jewish communities, it follows, we look for indicators of assimilation and secularization, of decline and loss of Jewish identity.<sup>2</sup>

In the secular state of Israel only the sense of peoplehood maintains group identity and distinctiveness. Even within the state of Israel, the argument continues, the Judaism component leads to sharp internal

conflicts between the religious and secular communities. And the powerful influences of imported mass media and the diffusion of western culture diminish the Jewish ethnic cultural basis of identity. Hence, even in Israel, secularization becomes dominant for the majority, who have become openly hostile to orthodox forms of Judaism. Nationalism weakens as statehood is legitimated, routinized, and normalized, except again in times of external threats and conflict. As Israeli Jewish ethnic cultural origins diminish over time, a new Israeli Jewish culture emerges that is highly selective about its historical memory and its rich cultural heritage. Israeli Jewish culture tends to emphasize the biblical roots of nationalism, often ignoring the Judaisms of the Rabbinic period and the richness of diaspora cultural developments. The Jewish cultural cement of group life is therefore weakening, sustained largely by historical reconstructions of external evil and internal survival. These arguments about secularization, assimilation, and cultural distinctiveness have informed discussions of Jewish communities in and outside of Israel and have been the implicit basis of most social scientific research.

A systematic body of evidence, I submit, challenges the main implications of these arguments. The paths Jewish communities have taken in modern, open, pluralistic societies are not adequately described by the assimilationist implications of these arguments. For while Jews have clearly assimilated, their communities have not proportionately weakened, and many have strengthened anew. The fundamental dichotomy between religious and ethnic identity is not as useful among Jews as it may be among other groups. Jews are not simply a religious group like Protestants and Catholics, Mormons and Muslims. Jewish Americans are also not an ethnic group like Italian Americans or Hispanic Americans.

Nor is the distinction between religious and secular clear since Judaism readily incorporates the secular. There are multiple empirical links between religious and secular identities. The distinctions between religious and secular, ethnic and religious also do not characterize institutions of the community. Synagogues and temples have diversified their activities to incorporate ethnic components and secular Jewish institutions have often stressed sacred themes (see Woocher). So the survival paradigms, the dichotomies of ethnicity versus religion, of minority versus majority are not very useful as research guidelines for studying contemporary Jewish communities, if they ever were in the past.

How do we go beyond the current arguments about decay that cloud our understanding of contemporary Jewish communities to new understandings and therefore new research agendas for the future? We should go beyond the nuances of assimilation versus transformation, the

rhetoric of optimists versus pessimists that trivialize the basic issues, from the selective truths of Jewish ideology and propaganda, to delve more systematically into the fundamentals of Jewish continuity and change.

Let me suggest a different paradigm. In Marshall Sklare's footsteps, I will focus on the largest Jewish community in the world, the United States.

An alternative conceptualization may begin with the argument that large, cohesive, and powerful Jewish communities have emerged in the United States, and are emerging in parts of Europe, Australia and Argentina as well, where Jews define themselves and are comfortable both as Jews and as citizens of the states where they live. Most Jews have long term roots there and have developed life styles and cultural forms, along with complex local, national, and international institutions, that enrich their ethnic and religious expressions. From the vantage point of a half-century after the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel, these multi-generational communities no longer appear to be ephemeral. Their Judaism and their Jewishness are expressed in diverse and changing ways that challenge simple assumptions about the total assimilation of ethnic white minorities and the demise of religion in modern society. For while Jews have been integrated and have become secular in some ways, their communities have become more cohesive and viable in other ways, developing new expressions of Judaism in a secular context and of Jewishness in an open pluralist and ethnically diverse society. They are well integrated into and share much of the broader national culture and society in which they live; yet their communities remain distinctive. Even as individuals move in and out of the community, the community as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Indeed, how could a community be disintegrating whose multiple and powerful institutions continuously remind its members that it is eroding?

Our research agenda should therefore begin with the astounding fact of our generation: most Jews living in a voluntary and open society choose to be Jewish rather than something else. Most Jewish families want their children and grandchildren to be Jewish, at least in some ways. Instead of asking whether the grandchildren and great grandchildren of Eastern European Jewish immigrants to America are assimilating or whether they are surviving as a community (they are doing both), as social scientists we should contextualize the central analytic questions about Jews and other ethnic and religious minorities in the United States: **What factors sustain the ethnic and religious continuity of American Jews in the absence of overt discrimination and economic disadvantage? What structural and cultural forces sustain continuity in the face of pressures toward the disintegration**

**of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of their communities?** The short answer to these questions is that communal institutions and social and family networks, the structural underpinnings of communities, using Jewish values as their themes, are the core elements sustaining Jewish continuity, even as they construct new forms of Jewish cultural uniqueness that redefine their collective identity.

The theory that guides this framework is based on the comparative-historical analysis of Jews in the modern world and cross-national studies of ethnicity.<sup>3</sup> It has three features of social life to guide research on the transformation of American Jews: (1) focusing on the structural, not only the cultural features of Jewish communities; (2) emphasizing the contexts (networks and institutions), not only the values that distinguish Jews from others; and (3) as a result, targeting communities and families rather than individuals as the units of theory and analysis. To assess the formation and developments of the Jewish community over time, we need to investigate the quality of Jewish communal life in its broadest meaning. With the emergence of the fourth and later generations, distance from immigrant origins has faded as the major axis of change in the community.

There are diverse theoretical starting points to conceptualize these patterns, using structural, social psychological and/or cultural theoretical frameworks. Our choice among them has implications for how our research is framed and how the evidence we gather is evaluated. One of the limitations of previous research has been the lack of theoretical foundation, together with implicit political ideological assumptions that has contaminated the data collected.

How do we arrive at the research implications of the structural and contextual study of Jewish communities? Let us take a brief look at how **education, families, and religion** are treated within most current frameworks and at how our research agenda should contextualize them in diverse ways. My goal is not to review in detail what we know about these themes but how to set a research agenda for the future. These three arenas of research are perhaps the most explored of all the areas of Jewish life.

### **Education**

The study of the transformation of American Jews begins with stratification, because it is a key structural condition that affects the cohesion of Jewish communities in the United States.<sup>4</sup> We know most about the educational component of stratification, and less about occupational transformations. The story of the changing educational profile of the American Jewish community from the beginning to the end of the 20th century is for the most part clear and well documented. Jews in the United States have become the most educated of all

American ethnic and religious groups, of all Jewish communities around the world and of all Jewish communities ever in recorded Jewish history. Quite a feat, given the low level of education of the American Jewish community three to four generations ago. This accomplishment reflects both the values that Jews place on education and the educational opportunities available in the United States. Over 90 percent of American Jewish young men and young women go on to college, and they are the children of mothers and fathers who also have studied in college—two generations of men and women who are college educated. A significant and increasing proportion also has some grandparents with exposure to college education. Increases in the educational level of the American Jewish population have been documented in every study carried out over the last several decades. The educational level attained is a distinguishing feature of American Jewish communities and may be a core value of contemporary American Jewish culture.

Three empirical findings have been clear: (1) Jews as a community have distinctively high levels of education, higher than most other ethnic and religious groups in the United States; (2) there has been a systematic increase in the levels of education through the 1990s, reducing only marginally the gap between Jews and others; and (3) the Jewish community as a whole has become more concentrated at the upper end of the educational distribution. The Jewish community had suffered great strain, as it lost the cohesion of a majority of uneducated peddlers, shopkeepers and artisans when few were educated. Now that nearly all have college educations, the structural cohesion of the community has increased. The same patterns appear to emerge for occupational mobility and concentration at least for some communities.

What do these stratification changes imply for the study of the continuity of the American Jewish community? There are two views. On the one hand, increases in educational attainment and concomitant inter-generational occupational mobility result in greater interaction with "others" who are not Jewish. These new contexts of interaction between Jews and non-Jews challenge the isolation and segregation of Jews and, in turn, the cohesion of the Jewish community. The contexts of schooling and the workplace may also expose Jewish Americans to new networks and alternative values that are not ethnically or religiously Jewish. The combination of interaction and exposure may result in diminishing the distinctiveness of the community over time. Thus, there is a paradox in examining educational attainment as one of the core values of contemporary American Jewish culture. The secular educational attainment so distinctive among Jews and derived from Jewish values is not only un-Jewish in content but is viewed by some as the source of assimilation. It has been often argued that better educated

Jews are exposed in colleges to secular and/or Christian values, meet non-Jewish persons whom they marry, and as a result become less Jewish, more assimilated, and over time are lost to the Jewish community. So, the circle is complete: distinctive Jewish values result in high educational attainment of Jews, which in turn seems to be responsible for the assimilation of the Jews! Thus, even the educational achievements of American Jews are viewed as part of the decline of the Jewishness of the community. Based on this interpretation, we would expect that the changed stratification profile of the American Jewish community would have resulted in an inverse relationship between educational level and measures of Jewishness.

There is another interpretation of the overall findings. High educational attainments and concomitant occupational re-concentration reflect the commonality of social class among Jews and the distinctiveness of Jews relative to others. In powerful ways, this commonality is an important source of cohesion for the Jewish community. Jews are both marked off from others and linked with other Jews by their resources, networks, and life styles, which are the obvious implications of their occupational-educational distinctiveness and high levels of attainment. To the extent that community is based on both shared interaction among members and a common set of values and life styles, these occupational and educational transformations among American Jews may be significant bases of communal cohesion. The mobility of Jews away from the educational levels and occupations characteristic of the immigrant generation has been a dominant theme in research. Missing has been the examination of new forms of social class concentration, and the inferred interaction that has emerged as a result. The study of the new forms of educational and occupational networks should become part of the new research agenda. We need to directly explore these emerging networks. In this alternative view, we would expect that the relationship between education and Jewishness would be positive, especially among those with college-educated parents.

Some studies have explored directly the changing relationship between stratification and measures of Jewishness. In the past, educational attainment and occupational mobility were empirically linked to disaffection from the ethnic community. That seems to be the case no longer. The absence of a relationship between education and occupation, on the one hand, and measures of Jewishness, on the other, emerges from several studies (see Wilder, 1998 among others). These findings may imply that having occupational/educational ties may be a sufficient basis for Jewish interaction and the development of Jewish networks. If occupational/educational concentration substitutes for Jewish communal and religious networks, then we should expect that



the relationship between social class concentration and measures of Jewishness would be weak. There have been no systematic studies of Jewish ethnic enclaves, ethnic educational networks, and ethnic business/professional connections to fully test these arguments directly.

In addition, several findings show that educational patterns reinforce and strengthen Jewish expressions, particularly those that are tied to participation in Jewish communal activities. College education seems to promote Jewish-related activities for the younger cohorts (below age 45), although this is not the case among older cohorts. In this sense, the relationship between attending college and Jewishness that was negatively related to Jewishness in the past had changed significantly by the 1990s. These findings would be sharpened if we studied the impact of the education of the parental generation on the Jewishness of their children. Nevertheless, the results are consistent with the view that the Jewish alienation presumed to be associated with higher levels of educational attainment occurs when higher education was an exceptional group feature, characteristic of only the few. When exposure to college and university education is an almost universal experience for American Jews, its impact on Jewishness becomes minimal. One of the methodological implications of this finding is that we need to systematically link the macro-community contexts (e.g., the proportion in particular professions at the group level in a community) with the micro-level relationships that we study at the individual and family levels. The examination of connections among levels of analysis is a methodological imperative since community context counts.

It is likely that the commonality of social class among contemporary American Jews and their very high levels of educational and occupational re-concentration are not sufficient to generate the intensive in-group interaction that characterized the segregated Jewish communities in the United States a century ago. The resource and network benefits of these stratification transformations have not recreated the cultural and social communities of Jews of a different era. Nor should we expect so since the community itself has been transformed. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that the emerging social class patterns are not a threat to Jewish continuity in the transformed pluralism of American society. Educational attainment in the past was one powerful path toward social mobility, leading to better jobs, higher incomes, escape from the poverty of the unskilled and skilled labor characteristic of parents, and in turn an escape from the neighborhoods and networks that consisted of the foreign born. Education was a means of escape from the association of foreignness, with a foreign language, a foreign culture, and foreign-born parents. For many, education was the escape from Jewishness and Judaism. In

short, education in the past was the path to becoming American but one that required leaving the community. This is clearly no longer the case.

The major finding remains clear: the educational transformations of 20th century America continue to mark Jews off from others and connect Jews to one another. The connections among persons who share history and experience and their separation from others are what social scientists refer to as community. The distinctiveness of the American Jewish community in these patterns is clear. Education has almost always been celebrated among Jews, with pride in the group's accomplishments. When children and grandchildren became doctors and lawyers, skilled business people and teachers, it was thought that this was the "Jewish" thing to do. But in those early years there was a cost. The cost was for Judaism and Jewishness and more importantly for relationships between the generations. Although parents encouraged their children to obtain a high level of education, the life style associated with higher education often meant disruption and conflict between parents and children who had different educational levels and between siblings and peers who had different access to educational opportunities.

But looking beyond the costs, we now appreciate the value of education over the last two generations. Here the value of education has not lessened but the opportunities have increased and spread. Education has not disrupted Jewishness but increased generational similarities and removed one source of the generation gap. So the meaning of two generations of college educated Jews becomes not simply a note of group congratulations and pride and not only a changed relationship to Jewishness as a basis of intergenerational commonality. Educational attainment has become a feature of families that is not disruptive within families and points to sharing and common experiences. Educational attainment is likely to reinforce the cohesion of Jewish families.

National data on educational concentration only begin to tell the story of new forms of community interaction. We need to link this educational profile to occupational networks and to the residential concentration of American Jews so that the multi-dimensional features of the community become even sharper. For example, many have noted the move away from areas of immigrant residential concentration and the residential dispersal of American Jews in new places. We have not focused our research attention on the new forms of residential concentration for American Jews of the younger generation. We need to systematically document both the residential and occupational concentration of Jews. We need not only to show the level of education, but attendance at selective schools and colleges away from home; we need to study the high levels of occupational and professional

attainment, but also the new economic networks; we need to examine the residential re-concentration of Jews and the new forms of interaction among those who are residentially dispersed. Comparatively, the geographic concentration of American Jews is astonishing for a voluntary ethnic group, integrated into American society, several generations removed from foreignness and not facing the discrimination of other American minorities.

High levels of educational attainment and the resources implied by high occupational achievement enhance the choices that Jews make about their Jewishness. As a result, Jewish identification and the form and intensity of Jewish expression are becoming increasingly voluntary in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. In that sense, the new forms of American Jewish stratification have beneficial implications for the quality of Jewish life. There is a balance between the forces that pull Jews toward each other, sharing what we call community—families, experiences, history, concerns, values, communal institutions, rituals, religion, and life styles—and those that pull Jews away from each other, often referred to as "assimilation." The evidence available suggests that the pulls and pushes of the changing stratification profile toward the Jewish community are profound. The net effect of these processes may be to strengthen the Jewish community. At a minimum, they represent a challenge to design research to study the ways that stratification reinforces communal and cultural benefits.

High levels of educational attainment point to the increased power of families, the generational increases in resources and the common lifestyles that bind parents and children together into a network of relationships. These emphases on education and achievement, of family cohesion and values have become group traits that make the Jewish group attractive to others. Unlike in the past, when interaction and marriage between Jews and non-Jews was also a mechanism of escape from Jewishness and foreignness, the Jewish group has now become attractive to others because of their family and communal traits, among which educational levels are important considerations. While stratification changes may have resulted in the disaffection of some individual Jews from the community, it may also result in the greater incorporation within the Jewish community of some who were not born Jewish, and the general attractiveness of the community to Jews and others. By binding the generations, education has become a core family value.

What then are the key summary points about education that should guide our research agenda? The significance of education is the commonality of experience, interaction and networks, and the family bonds that are generated by generational commonality. Education means distinctiveness for men and women and shared experiences

between the generations. Research on stratification highlights the need to study the role of networks, institutions and shared culture, including family cohesion. These have been largely the inferences of our research. A critical part of the research agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be the direct examination of these structural features, along with their cultural and social psychological counterparts.

### **A Family/Network Focus**

It is ironic that the Jewish family has been at the center of our sociological (and theological) thinking for many years but is superficially treated in our research. Indeed, a serious family focus has been conspicuously absent from our research agenda. We have designed our research to focus primarily on individual identity in a family vacuum, obtaining information from one respondent rather than from all adult family members. When we focus on family we tend only to measure childbearing but not family relationships. We have not designed research to study children when they are not living at home and the processes leading to the formation of new family unions. We have studied marriage as a "status" but have rarely explored family structure and process. We have argued theoretically for the power of networks as a basis of ethnic continuity but have not collected information on family networks. We argue about generational changes (by which we mean distance from the immigrant generation) without focusing on family relationships generationally or about life course transitions. These elementary family themes have not been systematically addressed in empirical studies, even though they are at the core of communal life among voluntary ethnic and religious groups in America.

Our implicit theory and expectation is that Jewish family life has declined over time, by which we mean the changing configuration of the nuclear family. Social science research has bemoaned the disintegration of the Jewish family for over a century. To re-phrase Rawidowicz, we have made the assumption of an "ever-declining Jewish family" and have selectively organized and interpreted our data to fit into our preconceptions. We should study families to investigate how they strengthen our communities. In a period of time characterized by increasing divorce, re-marriage, and cohabitation we have assumed that new family forms have negative implications for group cohesion. Therefore, we have failed to design studies of blended families, reconstituted families, stepfamilies, and their children, grandparents and other extended family members.<sup>5</sup>

We have incorporated "gender" by examining the differences between men and women. That is clearly inadequate.<sup>6</sup> Systematically incorporating the gender dimension requires that we examine

relationships between men and women and the intergenerational relationships between parents and children. Gender and generational relationships need to be related to an examination of institutional structures, the religious and ethnic institutions and organizations, well as a basis for studying what is happening in Jewish homes. We have a considerable literature that has stereotyped Jewish mothers and fathers, grandparents and siblings but have developed little sound social scientific research investigating these roles. Thus, a top item on our research agenda for the next decade should be the systematic study of family relationships in their broadest meaning.

Focusing on families reminds us that the family is the unit where generational continuities are critical, even as the family has been radically changing. On the continuity side, the family is where Jewish culture has placed its emphasis, in terms of religious activities, the division of labor within the household, between generations and between the separate spheres of men and women. Family also means children and networks. The radical changes in the family over the last several decades means that divorce and remarriage, cohabitation and singlehood are challenges to the culture of the Jewish community and its cohesion. But radical family changes do not necessarily imply erosion, decline, and disintegration.

Furthermore, think about Jewish college students who in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are more likely than not to attend colleges away from home and live separately from their parents for long periods of time before they marry. Think about widowhood, where women are more likely to spend significant number of years alone. Think of step parenthood and reconstituted and blended families that require new ways to reconfigure the power of family relationships intergenerationally. Shouldn't we also carry out systematic studies of the role of men in families (in addition to studying their work roles), just as we have gone beyond looking at women's family roles and studied their economic roles.<sup>7</sup> Clearly the conception of the family of a century ago cannot be the basis of our research agenda.

A focus on family changes should not be limited to identifying family patterns by age and inferring changes over time. We should design research to focus on life course changes, as inter-generational relationships, in their extended forms, unfold. We should explore the costs and benefits of union formation (when and with whom new families are formed), the timing of when young adults leave and return home, and the family relationships that emerge in blended families. In part we know little of these processes because our theoretical paradigms are embedded in thinking about the decline of nuclear families and family changes as a symptom of problems and crisis.

Perhaps the major family theme that appears to have been written about (but not studied systematically) is marriage patterns between Jews and others, in an attempt to reveal the "problems" of intermarriage. Without belaboring the point to this audience, the obsession of the Jewish community and some social scientists with the intermarriage question should be the object of our study rather than the basis of our interpretation. We know embarrassing little about intermarriages, particularly given the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of articles and reviews that have been written about it. We know even less about the family patterns that emerge subsequent to marriage. We do not have a consensus on the rate of intermarriage, even using the same data set! We have a few preliminary studies about the children of the intermarried, but no serious longitudinal data, and no details about the selectivity of the intermarried. Thus, we have not studied the consequences of intermarriage (although we tend to write endlessly about them) because we have no studies to follow-up intermarried families to examine the critical question of the quality of their Jewish family life. The list of unresearched questions is endless. It would be easier to list what we know. The current approach to data collection through cross sectional national surveys insures that we shall be in the same position a decade from now.

We assume that intermarriages result in a decline in the quantity and quality of Jewish communities, and then use the data on rates of intermarriage to support our preconceived notions. There is an equally plausible set of interpretations that would lead to an opposite conclusion.<sup>8</sup> Even with individual intermarriage rates of 33 percent and couple intermarriage rates of 50 percent, quantitative gains to the Jewish community are likely, depending on the extent that non-Jewish born persons identify with and are accepted by the Jewish community. And group gains to the Jewish community may continue in the second generation depending again on the ways that families raise their children. Unfortunately, we only have simulation models to demonstrate these counter-intuitive points, as our research designs fail to track identity changes over the life course and do not follow through on how the children of intermarried identify themselves when they form families. Nor do we know how these patterns have evolved over the last several decades when the intermarried have become more accepted by Jewish institutions and the networks of Jewish relatives and have increasingly been the children of Jewish mothers rather than Jewish fathers. Hence, like education, intermarriage is not likely to have the same meaning in the new context of family relationships as it did in the older context of rejection and escape.

The issue is not which argument about intermarriage is correct. Without adequate research methodologies and without newly designed

empirical evidence systematically gathered, we will continue to reiterate our biases rather than study Jewish families. Prospective, longitudinal research on families and households, the intermarried and the Jewishly married, should be the highest item on our research agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Studying Judaism and Jewish Culture**

From what we have outlined, social, economic, and family processes that unfold over time are core items on the research agenda in the study of Jews, as for other ethnic and religious groups. In addition, culture, of which religion is one part, is a major element in studying Jews and their communities.<sup>9</sup> That position requires that we explore Judaism in its broadest sense as it unfolds over time and the life course. We simply cannot continue to assume that those who identify themselves as orthodox are “religious” and others are less so. We cannot assume that membership in a religious institution at one point in time is a basis for developing a religious identity over time. Nor should we continue to base our exploration of Judaisms on the self-classification of persons into denominational categories that have become less meaningful than in the past. We should not be satisfied to consider the observance of selected religious rituals as indicators of religiosity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Identifying the percent that light candles on Friday night in the cross section does not tell us much about Judaism or Jewish culture in the community.

Studying Jewish communities requires that we study relationships and structures, roles and statuses within the cultural realm. The religion of Jews (their practices, values and activities) and their religious institutions and leadership, their organizations and ideologies should be explored in depth. “In-depth” means at a minimum the examination of changes over historical and life course time frames. We have incorporated in our surveys, and appropriately so, measures of the intensity of religious expression. What Jewish surveys since the 1960s have not included questions on candle lighting on Friday night or Hanukkah, or Passover Seder celebrations? On the basis of these and similar ritual questions we have identified changes and variation in the religious (i.e., the ritual) activities of Jews. Based on these data we have concluded something about religious decline and secularization. But the sample survey view of Judaism is myopic and unconvincing from social science perspectives on religion.<sup>10</sup>

If we only had the survey questionnaires as a guide to the study of Judaism, we would have a most distorted view. If the survey questionnaire were our Judaic text, we would conclude that some religious rituals are more important for Jewish continuity than are others. Are lighting candles more important to measure than doing

good deeds or having a Friday night dinner with family members, or visiting the sick? We always ask the former and almost never the latter. Have we distorted our views of "Jews on the periphery" by measuring whether they publicly attend the synagogue regularly or whether they have separate dishes for meat and dairy? Do our theoretical presuppositions dismiss their seders on Passover and Hanukah celebrations by noting that they are "only" occasions of family get-togethers and that Hanukah is "but" the Jewish counterpoint to Christmas in America? Again we have some exceptional models for in-depth studies of Judaism from social anthropology.<sup>11</sup> But we have rarely integrated comprehensive quantitative research with these qualitative insights.

Our research agenda should go beyond religion and a focus on selected rituals and synagogue attendance to explore other forms of Jewish culture. We have neglected to carry out social scientific studies of Jewish art and literature, Jewish music and Jewish dance. Historical studies of Yiddish culture in America, the world of our fathers and mothers, have often been presented as eulogies for the death of Jewish culture, the end of an era, as in the historical examination of the demise of the Yiddish press. But we have missed the systematic study of new forms of Jewish culture, popular and institutional, in diverse media that have exploded onto the scene in the last decade. We are certainly behind in studying the role of new forms of communication media, the Internet, in the development of contemporary global Jewish culture. We haven't even begun to study the explosion of Jewish texts in translation and the evolution of weekly newspapers addressed to Jewish audiences.

Again, key to our research agenda is the need to study the diverse forms of religious and cultural expressions and organizations, based on the diverse Jewish values of the community not narrowly on selected religious rituals. We need to broaden our conceptualization of Jewish culture to include a wide range of expressions to explore changes as they unfold over the life course.

### **Jewish Institutions and Networks**

One of the powerful features of American Jewish communities is the extensive and conspicuous presence of local and national institutions within the community. But we have not systematically studied these Jewish institutions and organizations. If the study of stratification and family networks have not been included in our studies, where have we put the study of Jewish institutions? Of course we have included whether people are synagogue members or financially support Jewish communal institutions but we have not asked whether living in a community that has a Jewish community center or a Jewish home for



the aged matters for the quality of Jewish life. Is there any evidence to suggest that swimming or playing golf with other Jews in Jewish institutions should be dismissed as lacking in important forms of Jewish interaction and networks? Where in our analysis have we placed the community context of institutions? Do we find out in our surveys whether Jewish day care strengthens Jewish networks and community? Does our emphasis on national Jewish studies mask the rich diversity among Jewish communities in their institutional associations and networking? Indeed, our national focus has moved us away from the possibility of studying the Jewish contexts of our communal life.

There are two arenas that dramatically illustrate our limited research agenda: politics and Jewish education. We have defined the study of politics as how Jews vote or how the Jewish vote has become less supportive of the Democratic Party. We need as well to focus on the broader meaning of Jewish politics to include the ways in which a voluntary community organizes itself and mobilizes its constituents, and as a basis of Jewish communal cohesion.<sup>12</sup> We should be studying the changing policies of this voluntary community, how have they been developed, what are their national and international political networks? We have carried out few systematic studies of the governance of the Jews in their communities as a basis for assessing Jewish cohesion.

Similarly, our studies of Jewish education focus on how many years and in what types of institutions people (mostly children) are exposed to Jewish education. But we view the Jewish educational enterprise in very limited terms. We need longitudinal data to evaluate Jewish education, in both its institutional and non-institutional forms, to deal with elementary problems of selectivity (how much are we observing the effects of Jewish education and how much are our results the effects of who is likely to be exposed to Jewish education). What impact has the explosion of Judaic education at the university level had on students, of the Jewish education associated with museums, or of adult forms of Jewish education? The creative impulse to develop new, diverse, and challenging forms of Jewish education has not been matched by their systematic evaluation and assessment. I have often argued that the quality of a university course should be assessed by how much the instructor learns. I would also argue that the quality of Jewish education, especially at the younger ages, is how much the parents learn (at least what networks they form with other parents). As far as I know we have never asked that question in our demographic/community surveys. The Jewish networks that are formed in conjunction with exposure to Jewish education require systematic study.

### Methodological Themes

How shall we study these complex themes in the changing Jewish community? Do we just add more questions on national surveys? Do we only carry out small illustrative, richly textured ethnographies that are difficult to generalize or evaluate? Do we simply expand the list of themes to be covered? I suggest that we adopt alternative methodological strategies than the ones currently characteristic of research on contemporary Jewish communities. These should take into account the diverse methodological approaches to explore the diverse facets of the Jewish community in depth. We should move beyond census-type data and beyond cross-sectional snapshots. Demographic surveys have their limited place but hardly suffice to provide insights into contemporary patterns, even those of demographic interest. Fundamentally, I would argue for the integration of qualitative and quantitative strategies and apply these methodological strategies in diverse settings longitudinally. The methodological imperative is to generate studies that focus on changes over the life course as they unfold using diverse methodological strategies, incorporating religious and family transitions as well as changing networks within these designs. I know that such a research agenda will require extensive investments in research. But think about the funds that have already been spend on the NJPS 2001 and what few new insights those data have the potential to provide. The problem is much more of vision than of economics.

One methodological dilemma is the categorization of who should be considered part of the community. The categorization of Jews is not simply a sampling question or the basis of an ideological and political debate but a profound theoretical and practical concern. To note that in a voluntary community people can define themselves in and out of the community at various points in their lives becomes a challenge for those who have taken snapshots of the community at one survey time period. This is particularly the case for those in transition, children not living at home and young adults before they form families of their own. Identity should be viewed in life course terms, as variable in the contexts of people's lives, not only in cross-sectional generational terms.<sup>13</sup> The treatment of "who is defined as a Jew" as static, ascriptive, objective and fixed by biology (or religious conversion of a particular kind) may meet some *halachic* religious standard but should be not be a guideline for research. (It is of course legitimate to study *halachically*-defined Jews but it is not acceptable to use *halachic* definitions as a constraint on our research perspectives.) The distinct groupness of Jews lies not in their DNA but in their distinct experiences historically and in the cultural construction of their identities.

Categorizing some Jews as “core” and others as “periphery” (as was done in the formal reports of the National Jewish Population Survey in the United States in 1990) is to do more than establish an arbitrary classification system. The distinction is a social construction of the margins of the community, to culturally polarize, and to justify policy initiatives directed at the “core” and not at the “periphery”. This is a theory of “Jewish Darwinism”—only the fittest Jews survive and therefore only they are deserving of our support and our policy attention (a phrase used by Rabbi Jonathan Sachs, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain). And to consider that we categorize Jews in this way on the basis of a cross-sectional snapshot, asking questions over the telephone about current Jewish identification! We obviously need to reconsider the diversity of Jewish self-definitions (without a pre-existing ideology about who is a core Jew) and examine in our research the implications of our social/cultural constructions of identity. We should explicitly recognize that the categorization of Jews is a variable (over time, place and the life course) to guide our research.

### **The Diversity of Jewish Communities**

There are two forms of the communal diversity that need to guide our research agenda. The diversity proposition applies **among** communities within the United States and **between** the United States and other countries. If our premise that contexts count (contexts of social, political, cultural and economic processes, institutional and historical contexts, networks and the life course) then it follows that when context changes, Jewishness and Judaism changes; and when contexts vary, Jewishness and Judaism varies. Our expectations should be that community variation is normative, not exceptional. Hence we should not be surprised that the measures of what characterizes Jewish communities in different places should vary. We obviously would not use monthly Mikvah use in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as an indicator of Jewish identity among adult Jewish women nor the avoidance of wearing clothing made of wool and linen (*Shatnez*) but we might have used these in 19<sup>th</sup> century Morocco or Slobodka. We would also not only use the public celebrations of Hanukah and celebration of Rosh HaShanah as indicators of how communities in the 1950s expressed their Judaism. How shall we study the Judaism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What are the diverse measures of Jewishness and Judaism that vary among and between communities and characteristic of various time periods and life course changes? Whatever the specific response to these questions, the diversity among communities should be an integral part of our research agenda. The argument that “we are one” national community (fostered by studies of internal migration, for example) misses the macro-context of communal diversity.

Secondly, and in more complex ways, the diversity of Jewish communities means that relationships between processes that are established for one community may not characterize other communities. We should not be surprised that the relationship between educational attainment and occupational specialization will vary among communities. History and labor market contexts are defining qualities for stratification. Nor should we expect that the interrelationships among measures of assimilation at the national level will characterize local communities or that the determinants and consequences of integration will be uniform among communities. How ethnicity and religious components of Jewish identity vary among communities has never been systematically studied. The diversity among communities over time and social space does not mean that there are no national patterns or trends. Rather the diversity challenges us to study the social patterns at the community level and search for comparative similarities and differences.<sup>14</sup> We have yet to heed the call for systematic comparative studies of Jewish communities.

What are we expected to learn from comparative research? Where the axis of difference is Jews compared to others we will learn about the multiple basis of distinctiveness of Jewish communities; where the axis of difference is among Jewish communities we will learn about the contexts of greater and lesser Jewish cohesion; where the axis of differences is time period or life course, we will learn about historical, community level and family contexts that shape Jewish communities. The diversity of community structure is an essential research proposition in exploring the contexts of Jewish communities. This proposition would also characterize cross-national comparisons of Jews.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Let me briefly summarize the themes that emerge from my assessment of where we should set our research agenda.

**Theoretical diversity:** The need for diverse new paradigms and theoretical frameworks that go beyond ideology and oversimplified theories to focus on communities not only on individuals; and primarily emphasize the exploration of institutions, family processes, and social networks.

**Methodological diversity:** The need to move beyond community surveys and national population studies, as well as beyond isolated ethnographic and qualitative methods to systematically integrate qualitative with quantitative methods; beyond cross-sectional to longitudinal strategies, to capture the dynamic of changes as they unfold over time and the life course.

**Thematic and substantive diversity:** We need to move beyond a satisfaction with description and national Jewish demography and the over simplified projection of numbers toward a re-examination of the themes of social life, including family processes, community, politics, religion, economics, and stratification. Among the items that need to be explored are the expansion of our studies of religiosity and Jewish culture to include the networks and institutions and the diverse ways that Jewish values are expressed, again over the life course and time. We need to adopt a broader research agenda to carry out more comparative research within and between communities to capture the complex heterogeneity among Jewish communities.

We have entered a new century and a new millennium. Continuity with the past is limited when the communities that we are studying have changed so drastically. We should first and foremost be focusing on the community as the object of our study. Within communities we should be focusing on studying families as they unfold over the life course, connecting these to diverse expressions of Jewish culture and the networks that sustain them.

A final note with regard to the agenda for research. I have outlined some of the diverse themes, theories and methods and substantive concerns that should guide our research in the future. Given this rich agenda, I am struck by the ways we have diverted our energies from these grand questions about Judaism and the Jewishness of families and communities to obsess about biology. Imagine if 90 percent of American Jews were ending up with marriage partners who happened to be born Jews but didn't care much about their Jewishness one way or the other. There would likely be no perceived crisis and we would not be concerned about Jewish continuity in America. There would be no erosion; no demographic decline and we would probably be arguing among us about the right ways to investigate the decline of traditional Judaism. We should move our research agenda away from the catch phrases of communal organizations to serious research that will, if successful, reshape the communal agenda. More importantly, a new diverse research agenda will justify our social scientific study of Jews and their communities and attract the next generation to carry out the new research agenda.

## NOTES

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\* Part of this paper was initially developed in a series of Stroum lectures I presented at the University of Washington. These lectures will appear

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in a volume entitled, *Studying the Jewish Future*, University of Washington Press.

<sup>1</sup> See his chapter in *Understanding American Jewry*.

<sup>2</sup> The list of references of this genre is quite long. See for example the materials in Wasserstein, 1996; Webber, 1994; and articles by DellaPergola. The tradition of these themes stretches back to the beginnings of the social scientific study of the Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Historians find even longer record of the lachrymose theory of Jewish history. See Rawidowicz, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Again the list is long. For some of my own work see, for example, Goldscheider and Zuckerman, 1984, Goldscheider, 1986, 1996, 1997a, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> For the empirical details see Goldscheider, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> We often know about extended family members among Jews only in stereotypical and crude form from popular culture. We have rarely systematically studied interaction with extended family members.

<sup>6</sup> See the suggested framework needed in Davidman and Tenenbaum.

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the only time we consider the family roles of men is when they are absent or missing.

<sup>8</sup> See the argument in Goldscheider, forthcoming.

<sup>9</sup> I would study "culture" within a structural framework. Others may carry out cultural studies of social structural patterns. The cultural object of our studies should not be confused with the framework used.

<sup>10</sup> See the excellent critical review by Horowitz, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Heilman's social anthropological research on Judaism and on synagogue life are classic examples. The research by Cohen and Eisen on "moderately affiliated Jews" is another attempt to move beyond the standard survey approach. Both sets of studies have strengths and provide important insights. Methodological problems limit comparability and generalizability and neither focuses on changes generationally or over the life course.

<sup>12</sup> See the studies by Kotler-Berkowitz on new ways to think about Jewish political cohesion: also Zuckerman, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> The strongest and most persuasive argument at the individual and ethnographic level has been made by Horowitz, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Deborah Dash Moore sets a fine example in her research contrasting communities in California and Florida.

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