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## JEWISH IDENTITY IN THE SUNBELT: THE JEWISH POPULATION OF ORLANDO, FLORIDA

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*This paper presents important results from a population survey of Orlando and compares its geographic, demographic, religious and philanthropic profile with the results of other Florida communities and with those of NJPS. Orlando appears to mirror the national picture relatively well, but is very different from the other Florida communities. In part, the differences from the other Florida communities are attributable to the fact that the population of Orlando is significantly younger.*

The 1990 Council of Jewish Federation's National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) revealed that significant challenges exist as the American Jewish community moves into the next century. Although the survey found signs of strength within the community, and while evidence exists of a thriving American Jewish community (including strong synagogues and Jewish Community Centers, increasing numbers visiting Israel, and the growth of Judaic Studies programs), the study indicates that large numbers of Jews have assimilated completely into American society. Levels of religious practice and membership were shown to be low even among those who identify as Jews (Kosmin, Goldstein, Waksberg, Lerer, Keysar and Scheckner 1991).

The data from this study also reveal that significant geographic variation exists in the levels of Jewish identification. In general, Jews who live in more densely settled Jewish areas tend to be "more Jewish" (Sheskin forthcoming). They are more likely to follow more traditional branches of Judaism, join synagogues and other Jewish organizations, follow Jewish ritual practices, and give to Jewish causes.

Elsewhere, I (Sheskin 1993b) have defined three "ethnic homelands" for Jews in the United States: the metropolitan areas of New York, South Florida, and southern California. These areas are recognized by Jews and non-Jews alike as important areas of Jewish settlement. The infrastructure exists in all three regions for Jews to live a fully American Jewish life. Jews who choose to live in these areas (as well

as other areas of dense Jewish settlement) do so, in part, because of the existence of a large Jewish community in the area. Jews who choose to live in locations outside areas of dense Jewish settlement include a disproportionate number of Jews who consider their Jewish identity to be marginal components of their lives. At the same time, those Jews who move to areas with few other Jews, but who have a strong Jewish identity themselves, often tend to be disproportionately active in their small local Jewish community. Perhaps they recognize the greater relative importance of their contributions in a small community.

Orlando, Florida is a small southern Jewish community in an area in which only about two percent of households contain one or more persons who identify themselves as Jewish. It lies outside any traditional area of Jewish settlement, at a significant distance (about four hours driving) from the closest large Jewish community in South Florida. The purpose of this paper is to report on the results of the Greater Orlando Jewish Community Study (Sheskin, 1993a).

## METHOD

The methodology employed in this survey is relatively similar to that used in many recent Jewish demographic studies. About 670 15-minute telephone surveys were conducted in January, 1993. 203 were produced via random digit dialing (RDD). An additional 468 surveys were completed with households with a Distinctive Jewish Name (DJN) listed in the Greater Orlando telephone directory. The survey covered topics related to geography, demography, religious practices and memberships, Jewish education, anti-Semitism, Israel, human and community services, health problems, and disabilities.

Two methodological issues are selected here for brief discussion: modifications to the RDD procedure that facilitate cost reduction and the use of DJNs to supplement the RDD surveys.

*Modification of the RDD Procedure:* The basic problem in any small, dispersed Jewish community (that is, one which is only a small percentage of the metropolitan area's total population) is to produce a representative sample of that Jewish population while keeping costs within reason. The accepted methodology is to use random digit dialing. Even with the help of a firm such as Survey Sampling, Inc. providing the RDD sample, only about 60% of the randomly dialed numbers reach a household. If only two percent of households contain someone who is Jewish, then every 100 random telephone numbers will

yield, on average, the potential of only 1.2 interviews. Even assuming an 80% response rate implies that of every 100 numbers dialed, only one will yield a cooperative Jewish household. To complete just 200 RDD interviews requires that approximately 20,000 RDD numbers be dialed. To increase the "hit rate," this survey used the following procedure. The Jewish Federation of Greater Orlando's computerized list of households was examined to produce a table listing each telephone exchange code (the 3-digit prefix) and the number of households on this list with that exchange code. Only those exchanges that collectively accounted for 95% of the *listed* Jewish population were selected for random digit dialing. This improved the "hit rate" significantly by omitting areas that contained very few, if any, Jews. There was a *small* chance that there were significant numbers of unknown Jews in areas that were not surveyed, but the benefits of the greater hit rate far outweighed the disadvantages. In these types of surveys, a map showing the geographic distribution of a sample of Distinctive Jewish Names drawn from the telephone directory is helpful to make certain there is no significant Jewish population in the geographic areas represented by the five percent of the listings in exchange codes that are not called. In any case, in a sample of 200, if the other telephone exchange codes were called, about 10 surveys would come from those exchange codes. Clearly, those ten surveys could not have any significant impact on the results.

*Use of Distinctive Jewish Names:* Given the enormous expense of RDD surveys, completion of 400 such surveys (the number needed for a 95% confidence level and a 5% confidence interval) would have been overly expensive, particularly for a small Jewish community. In Orlando, we completed one RDD survey every three hours. Consistent with other Jewish demographic studies, the Orlando RDD sample was supplemented by a list sample. The two most likely lists were the Jewish Federation's mailing list and the Distinctive Jewish Names in the telephone directory. Each presented its own biases.

Any Jewish Federation's mailing list is biased significantly toward households that are in some way involved with the Jewish community. Thus, this researcher felt that the use of the sample, in an era when the leading issue in the Jewish community is continuity, was a particular problem.

The second list, the telephone directory, comes with its biases as well. New residents are not listed. Many professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, tend to not list their home address. Single women living

alone are less likely to be listed. Intermarried households in which the husband is not Jewish and the wife does not keep her own last name are very unlikely to be in this sample. In addition, the most commonly used list of DJNs are of German and East European origin. Thus, in a community with significant numbers of Sephardic or Hispanic Jews, the DJN sample will certainly underestimate these populations.

For this survey, 467 interviews were completed with the use of Distinctive Jewish Names from the telephone directory.<sup>1</sup> Three biases were shown by the use of chi-square tests: The DJN sample was significantly older, less likely to belong to a synagogue, and less likely to be intermarried. Weighting factors were developed so that the age distribution and synagogue membership statistics in the DJN sample matched that in the RDD sample. After this step, a chi-square test showed that the difference in the intermarriage rate between the two samples was no longer significant, although the rate in the DJN sample was, of course, still somewhat lower.

It is not known whether the use of the Federation's mailing list would have produced a sample closer to the RDD sample than did the DJN sample. What is needed to determine the best sample is to design a test in which the RDD sample can be compared with both DJN and Federation's mailing list samples. Of course, the results of this type of a test may well depend upon the particular city in which it is executed, since the representative quality of the Federation's mailing list may vary significantly from Federation to Federation.

Table 1. Comparison of Orlando Survey Results with "Reality"

Factor	Survey Indicates	Actual Number
Number of Synagogue Members	(32%) 2,921	2,783 <sup>a</sup>
JCC Membership	(17%) 1,519	1,550 <sup>a</sup>
Read local Jewish Newspaper	(42%) 3,817	3,000 <sup>b</sup>
Gifts To Federation	(30%) 2,713	2,744 <sup>a</sup>

Source: <sup>a</sup> Organization's list <sup>b</sup> Circulation figures.

Two recent studies suggest that DJN sampling does produce survey results which mirror reality. In Sarasota (Sheskin 1992) no weighting factors were needed. That is, the DJN sample was not significantly different from the RDD sample on any important variable. Moreover, as Table 1 shows, the results of the Orlando survey are quite close to

reality on variables upon which it is possible to perform a "reality check," that is, to compare information based on the DJN list with that based on organization lists. While, as mentioned above, it was necessary to use weighting factors in Orlando to adjust certain biases, the overall results again mirrored reality well. Only for the reading of the Jewish newspaper does the survey number vary from "reality," the actual circulation figure. This variation may be explained by the fact that more than one household may read each copy of a newspaper.

## RESULTS

This section presents some of the most important findings of the Orlando Jewish Community Study. These findings are compared to other Florida Jewish communities, namely, Miami (Sheskin 1982), Palm Beach County (Sheskin 1987), Sarasota-Manatee (Sheskin 1992), and South Broward (Sheskin and Tobin 1991) and to NJPS results (Kosmin et al 1991). While the survey covered the broad range of topics typical of Jewish community studies, the impetus for the study derived from the Federation's Elderly Services Committee, which was examining the possibility of developing a Jewish nursing home in the Greater Orlando area (Sher 1993). While the national study has helped to shape the overall agenda of the American Jewish community, local studies serve an even more specific purpose, with planning implications for local Federations, Jewish agencies, organizations, and synagogues.

*Population Size and Geography:* The Orlando Jewish community is unlike any other studied Florida Jewish community, including Miami (Sheskin 1982), South Broward (Tobin and Sheskin 1991), West Palm Beach (Sheskin 1987), and Sarasota-Manatee (Sheskin 1992), on a number of important dimensions. The other Florida communities include large numbers of transplanted elderly retirees from the Northeast (Sheskin 1985), producing age pyramids with narrow bases and broad tops. In some aspects, the other communities (with the partial exception of Sarasota-Manatee) are exurbs of the New York metropolitan area. Orlando is much more a typical southern town, with a mid-sized, assimilating Jewish population.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Orlando Jewish Community Study found 9,044 households containing at least one person of Jewish heritage. In all, the households surveyed included 23,413 persons, 18,848 of whom were Jews themselves, and 4,565 who were not. In part as a response to the overall growth in the metropolitan area, the

Jewish population increased by 43% between 1985 and 1993. This growth has also come about as a result of the growth of the tourist industry in the southern part of Orange County, including the Disney theme parks. The movement of the movie industry (Disney/MGM and Universal studios) into the area has been particularly important to the recent growth.

While more Jews live north of the Orlando Central Business District than south, mapping the distribution of Jewish households shows that Orlando, unlike all other studied Florida communities, has no identifiable Jewish neighborhoods. Moreover, the current dispersed distribution shows little sign of changing: 31% of new residents are moving to North Orlando, 32% to Central Orlando, and 37% to South Orlando. These findings help to explain why the delivery of services to this community is particularly difficult. There is no readily identifiable single location for Jewish agencies and organizations wishing to serve the entire community.

Only 14% of Jews are born locally, although more than one-third were born in the South. About half were born in the Northeast and only eight percent in the Midwest. While this is the highest percentage of locally born Jews in any Florida community study so far, it is a very low figure compared with Jewish communities outside the state. In addition, about one-third of the population has moved to the area within the past five years. Two implications may be drawn from these findings.

First, because a large portion of the community is not native and a large portion is of recent origin, little feeling of commitment to local institutions—both Jewish and non-Jewish—exists. The local synagogue is not the one that people “grew up in,” nor is it the one that they expect their children to join upon becoming adults. This situation in the long run likely acts to minimize synagogue membership as well as to minimize the commitment of members to a synagogue.

Second, we can expect to see an increase in synagogue membership and community involvement in Orlando in the near future because of the recent population growth. The impact of a recent immigration often has a delayed effect. For example, in Orlando about 40% of those in residence for 5 or more years are members of synagogues, versus only 22% who are in residence for less than 5 years. When people enter an area, they often live in temporary housing or simply desire to wait until they are more settled prior to joining community organizations.

One of the most important findings that bears on the issue of Jewish identity in Orlando, in comparison with that in other Florida communities, is that 73% of Jews are American-born of American-born parents

(third generation or higher). Twenty percent are American-born of foreign-born parents (second generation), and only seven percent are foreign-born. The percentage of third generation or higher (73%) compares to 23% in West Palm Beach, 27% in South Broward, 32% in Miami, and 43% in Sarasota-Manatee. The percentage of Jews who are third generation or higher compares with 62% for the core Jewish population in the 1990 NJPS. Clearly, the further away American Jews are from the European Jewish experience, the greater the rate of intermarriage and assimilation. Thus, generational status may be seen as a major explanatory variable in the examination of religiosity below.

*Demography:* As mentioned above, the age distribution for Jews in Orlando is significantly different from any other studied Florida Jewish community. Only 12% of the population is age 65 or over and only 15% is age 60 or over. This compares with 67% in West Palm Beach, 63% in Sarasota, 55% in South Broward and 19% for American Jews as a whole. This translates to 3,536 persons, only 866 of whom are age 75 or over. Of these, 468 are female, 389 of whom live alone. About one-third (130) of the women 75 or over and living alone earn less than \$10,000 per year. These factors, combined with other findings, led to a recommendation of a "go-slow" policy with respect to the establishment of the proposed Jewish nursing home.

Table 2. Demography: Comparison of Orlando with NJPS

Category	Orlando <sup>a</sup>	NJPS <sup>b</sup>
Age 19 and under	25%	23%
Age 60 and over	15%	19%
Persons per Household	2.6	2.6
Married	68%	63%
Single	22%	22%
Widowed	6%	8%
Divorced	4%	7%
College Graduates	52%	51%
Employed Full Time	57%	52%
Employed Part Time	8%	11%
Retired	8%	9%
Median Income	\$45,700	\$39,000

<sup>a</sup> 1993    <sup>b</sup> 1990

The comparison of several other Orlando demographic indices (see Table 2) with the 1990 NJPS (Kosmin et al 1991) is instructive. The Orlando community is slightly younger and the average household size in Orlando (2.6) is equal to that found in NJPS. Marital status shows only minor differences, with Jews in Orlando being somewhat more likely to be married than is the case for Jews nationally. The percentage of college graduates is approximately equal to the NJPS finding. Orlando Jews are more likely to be working full time. Finally, the median income in Orlando is significantly higher than the median income nationally. Thus, Orlando mirrors the national picture relatively well demographically, but is somewhat younger, more apt to be married and of somewhat higher income.

*Religiosity:* In both Orlando and nationally, about two out of three Jews associate themselves with one of the three main religious denominations

Table 3. Religiosity: Comparison of Orlando with NJPS

	Orlando	NJPS
Orthodox	2%	6%
Conservative	33%	27%
Reform	30%	33%
Just Jewish	35%	34%
Always Light Chanukah Candles	64%	57%
Always Attend Seder	54%	55%
Always Light Sabbath Candles	9%	14%
Kosher in Home	6%	15%
Always Have Christmas Tree	18%	22%
Never Attend Services	34%	27%
Attend Services Monthly or More	21%	22%
In-married Couples	59%	68%
Conversionary	9%	4%
Mixed Married	32%	28%
Synagogue Membership	34%	39%
Jewish Organizational Membership	30%	27%
JCC Memberships	17%	17%
Adults with Formal Jewish Ed.	65%	67%
Been to Israel	34%	26%



(Orthodox, Conservative, Reform). The lack of a significant local infrastructure for an Orthodox lifestyle has meant that this area has not attracted Orthodox Jews. However, the percentage of Conservative Jews in Orlando is six points higher than the national figures, while the percentage of Reform Jews is three points lower. Thus, overall, Jewish identification in Orlando differs only marginally from the national picture.

Measures of home religious practices differ from the national picture. Only for lighting Chanukah candles is there a greater level of observance (64%) for Orlando Jews than is the case nationally (57%). Lighting Chanukah candles is a child-oriented activity. This finding may be the result of there being a greater percentage of married persons in Orlando and the somewhat younger population and, thus, more families with young children. Orlando compares favorably on this measure with other Florida communities (in which average age is considerably higher), with only 48% in Sarasota-Manatee, 57% in Miami, 58% in West Palm Beach, and 64% in South Broward always lighting Chanukah candles.

The percentage (54%) who always attend a Passover Seder is about the same in Orlando as is the case nationally. Attendance at a Passover Seder remains one of the most observed Jewish religious practices. The Orlando figure compares to 54% in Sarasota-Manatee, 56% in South Broward, 60% in West Palm Beach, and 70% in Miami. The fact that the populations in the other Florida cities tend to include more elderly may help to explain these differences.

The other Jewish practices shown in Table 3 indicate that Orlando is less observant than Jews nationally. Only nine percent always light Sabbath candles, compared to 14% nationally. Only six percent keep a kosher home, compared to 15% nationally. Thirty-four percent never attend synagogue services, as contrasted to 27% nationally. Orlando is well behind other Florida communities with respect to lighting Sabbath candles and keeping a kosher home. However, with respect to never attending synagogue services, Orlando's percentage (34%) is just about equal to that in Sarasota-Manatee (33%) and West Palm Beach (32%), but is much higher than Miami (24%), and South Broward (19%). The reason for non-attendance in Orlando, however, is likely to be the assimilation of the young, whereas the reasons for non-attendance in the other Florida communities are apt to be different. Much of the non-attendance elsewhere in Florida occurs among elderly who feel strongly Jewish, but whose transportation and health problems restrict attendance.

Attendance at services on a regular basis (once per month or more) in Orlando (21%) is about equal to the 1990 NJPS finding (22%). This figure can be compared with Sarasota-Manatee (24%), West Palm Beach (31%), South Broward (19%), and Miami (17%). Geography is one reason for the relatively high rate of synagogue service attendance on a regular basis in Orlando. As discussed above, and unlike any of the comparison Florida Jewish communities, there are no Jewish neighborhoods or geographic concentrations of Jews in Orlando. Thus, those who wish to establish a Jewish social network and to associate with other Jews on a regular basis must do so by regularly participating in a Jewish institution. In South Florida (Miami, South Broward, and West Palm Beach), in particular, one can develop a Jewish social network by simply becoming involved in condominium life. In many Florida condominiums up to 90% of the occupants are Jewish. Moreover, many have clubhouses with recreational, educational, and cultural activities that act much like Jewish Community Centers. Some condominiums have "synagogues" and minyon groups that meet in the condominium clubhouses. Such is far from the case in Orlando, where associating with other Jews takes some effort.

Orlando has a lower percentage (59%) of couples that are both born-Jews than is the case nationally (68%). On the other hand, nine percent of couples are conversionary (a born-Jew married to a Jew-by-choice). Thirty-two percent of married couples in Orlando are in mixed marriages, compared to 28% nationwide. In spite of this somewhat greater mixed marriage rate, Orlando has a somewhat lower percentage of households (18%) who always have a Christmas tree than is true nationally (22%). However, the percentage (18%) with a Christmas tree is much higher than is the case in South Broward (5%), Sarasota-Manatee (8%), and West Palm Beach (9%). This comparison clearly is affected by the differences in the age distribution and intermarriage rates among the Florida communities.

Turning to measures of Jewish institutional affiliation, we find that Orlando is close to the national average on synagogue membership (34% in Orlando, 39% nationally), organizational membership (30% compared to 27%), and JCC membership (17% for both). A similar argument can be made for the membership data as was proffered above for attendance at services: membership is more important in areas with no concentration of Jews if one wishes to maintain a Jewish identity.

Finally, a somewhat higher percentage of households in Orlando (34%) have had at least one household member visit Israel than is the case for Jewish households nationwide (26%). On the other hand, the

percentage in Sarasota-Manatee (53%), South Broward (52%), Miami (45%), and West Palm Beach (45%) is considerably higher. That the Orlando percentage is higher than the national percentage may reflect differences in income. That the Orlando percentage is much lower than the other Florida communities doubtlessly reflects the age differences; older persons have had more years to make such a trip.

*Philanthropy:* Table 4 shows some comparisons between Orlando and the NJPS on three measures of philanthropy: overall giving to Jewish charities, giving to the Federation and giving to non-Jewish charities. With respect to overall giving to Jewish charities, the percentage in Orlando doing so (58%) is at about the same level as is the case nationally (56%). Compared to other Florida communities, however, the percentage is low: West Palm Beach (91%), Sarasota-Manatee (76%), and South Broward (68%).

Table 4. Philanthropy: Comparison of Orlando with NJPS

	Orlando	NJPS
Give to Jewish Charities	58%	56%
Give to Federation	30%	34%
Give to Non-Jewish Charities	71%	67%

With respect to giving to Federation, the percentage in Orlando (30%) is also just about at the national level (34%). Interestingly, in Orlando 46% of in-married couples donate to Federation, but only 17% of the mixed married couples. This difference is similar to that found nationally, where 45% of all Jewish households donate to Federation, compared to 12% of mixed households. Again, compared to other Florida communities, however, this percentage is low: West Palm Beach (56%), Sarasota-Manatee (43%), and South Broward (44%).

Finally, with respect to giving to non-Jewish charities, Orlando's results (71%) are also just about at the national level (67%) and, like the national results, display no significant difference between entirely Jewish and mixed households. West Palm Beach (84%) and Sarasota-Manatee (81%) are significantly higher, but South Broward (56%) is significantly lower in this regard than is Orlando.

## CONCLUSION

This paper presents important results from a population survey of a southern Jewish community and compares its geographic, demographic, religious and philanthropic profile with the results of other Florida communities and with those of the 1990 NJPS. Orlando appears to mirror the national picture relatively well, but is very different from the other Florida communities. In part, the differences with the other Florida communities are attributable to the fact that the population of Orlando is significantly younger. However, quite clearly, Orlando lies outside what has been called the South Florida Jewish homeland (Sheskin 1993b). Many of the younger people who chose to move to Orlando may have had less concern about the existence and the quality of the local Jewish community than did those younger Jews who moved to Southeast Florida (Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties).

The NJPS has served its purpose of helping to set the agenda of the American Jewish community. Local studies will do the same for each federated Jewish community. In Orlando, it became clear that community priorities should include a strong emphasis on Jewish continuity and that, while the goal of a Jewish nursing home provided the initial impetus, it would not become economically feasible for about five to ten years. (Sher 1993).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The names are taken from the list provided in Chenkin (1971). For a discussion of the use of DJNs see: Massarik (1966) and Lazerwitz (1986).

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