# Generational Relationships and the Jews: Patterns of Leaving Home, 1930–1985

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Over the last century, Jews in western countries have experienced a series of social demographic revolutions. In addition to the more familiar transitions in mortality, fertility, and migration, and in urbanization, education, and occupation, there have been important changes in the structure of Jewish families and the generational relationships among family members. As for others, the family and generational revolutions among Jewish populations are the consequence of altered socio-demographic processes and have, as well, shaped these new demographic contexts in profound ways. The increased time younger and older adults spend in non-family living arrangements is among the most striking life course changes that have emerged in western countries (Young, 1987; Goldscheider and LeBourdais, 1986). These generational patterns have occurred in the context of reduced family size and the extension of life, along with the increased residential options open to older and younger persons.

The growth of non-family living among young adults has been viewed as a beneficial response to increased resources, providing privacy for both generations (Michael, et al., 1980). However, non-family living early in adulthood has also been shown to have important effects on young adults' orientation toward family roles, since it causes marriage delay and develops less traditional attitudes toward marriage and family life (Waite, et al., 1986). These research results suggest that non-family living also changes generational relationships and may be linked with a decline of familism on this dimension. Moreover, the resources invested in non-family living early in adulthood may come at the expense of other investments, not only for later family life, but also for education and future economic success.

The Jewish population in the United States has been characterized as highly familistic, with historically low proportions who never marry or dissolve their marriages (Farber, et al., 1981; Kobrin, 1985; Goldscheider, 1986). However, there is some evidence that Jews are losing their distinctiveness on this dimension of family life (Lehrer and Chiswick,1993). Much less is known about relationships between Jewish parents and their children — whether with regard to continuing co-residence into adulthood or other dimensions of familism. There is some speculation that the founding of homes for the aged among Jews well before their growth among other groups suggests an early rejection of co-residence between elderly persons and

their adult children. This is consistent with recent research showing that older Jews are more likely to endorse a "modern" norm of familism, which legitimates geographic and residential distance while reinforcing "keeping in touch" — sometimes called "intimacy at a distance" (Silverstein and Litwak, 1990; Rosenmayr and Kockeis, 1963).

An analysis comparing Jewish and non-Jewish family values in the United States found few differences, except that Jewish parents placed greater importance than others on children's "autonomy," which might well translate into residential separation between the generations (Cherlin and Celebuski, 1983). It is less clear that their children agree, since Jewish high school students did not differ from Protestants in their rating of the importance of "living close to parents and relatives" in their future lives, although both groups rated this dimension lower in importance than Catholic, Hispanic, or Asian young adults (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1993).

This paper focuses on the residential dimension of parent-child relationships during the younger generation's transition to adulthood. Intergenerational separation is expected eventually, but the question is when? Does such a separation normally occur as soon as possible — close to age 18, when high school is completed — or does separation normally occur as late as is possible in a nuclear family structure — at marriage? To what extent have American Jewish young adults participated in the increase in non-family living and have their patterns been distinctive?

The research record, even for the recent period, is ambiguous. An analysis of the leaving home patterns of young adults during the 1980s has documented that young Jewish adults experience non-family living more than any other white group. They are also distinctive in having parents who are most likely to expect it for them, suggesting that this pattern is long standing and reflects generational agreement (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1993). However, an analysis of young adults leaving high school early in the 1970s showed that Jews were less likely to experience non-family living, at least outside of college dormitories, than otherwise comparable non-Jewish young adults (Goldscheider and DaVanzo, 1989).

It is not at all clear whether these different research conclusions represent changes over time in the living arrangements of young Jewish adults (a cohort effect) or reflect differences in the samples studied and the analytic models used. Have the Jews in America always been distinctive in their leaving home patterns? Or do the differing results between the cohorts of the 1970s and the 1980s indicate that rapid changes in living arrangements and in this dimension of familism are under way among young Jewish adults?

## Data, Methods, and Measures

### Data

Our analysis examines the probability of leaving home, comparing Jews and non-Jews entering young adulthood over much of the twentieth century. Unlike previous analyses which have been restricted to examining one cohort of young adults, we

shall use national data that provide for the first time systematic information on changes in living arrangements over time for the total U.S. population and for Jews. These data allow for an examination of leaving home patterns among racial and religious groups for the United States for the period 1925 to 1985.

The 1987/8 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) asked a representative sample of 13,000 adults of all ages about when they left home (and returned home), including over 200 who self-identified as Jews.[1] These data on leaving home allow us to reconstruct retrospectively trends in leaving home and whether the departure was before or not until marriage for the United States as a whole, as well as for the Jews. The data contain rich details on the characteristics of adults at different points in their life course that allow us to analyze the determinants of these leaving home patterns.

The present analysis has been confined to white respondents, since Jews in the United States almost universally classify themselves as white, and race is a highly salient dimension distinguishing American family patterns. No further subdivision of the white, non-Jewish population has been made, although it would be possible for future analyses to concentrate the analysis in the geographic regions where most Jews live.

## Methods

This analysis will consider changes over the twentieth century in two major dimensions of the nest-leaving process: the age at first leaving the parental home and the route out of the home. To examine the timing of leaving home, we will present nest-leaving quartiles and a life table analysis of the duration 'surviving' or remaining in the parental home. We will focus on three routes out of the parental home — to marriage, to attend school, and to premarital residential independence (PRI). We refer to the third route, PRI — living in an independent household before marriage —as non-family living. Given the importance of war-related mobilization, particularly for one of the cohorts that we shall examine, many of whom participated in the second World War, we will also examine a fourth route —leaving home to military service. Changes over time in the route out of the parental home will be examined descriptively and in a competing risks life table analysis, where the probability or 'hazard' of leaving home taking one route, e.g., marriage, will be evaluated for all those remaining or 'surviving' in the parental home, censoring those who leave for other reasons.

## Measures

The measures that can be constructed from this data set provide the key variables that we use to understand the process and determinants of leaving home. The

1. On the basis of the total sample size, one would have expected closer to 400 respondents. However, the sampling plan involved substantial over-representation of certain key groups, including nonwhites and those in disrupted family structures, which were disproportionately non-Jews.

identification of Jewish respondents is based on the respondents' religion when they growing up. Other characteristics of their parental home when they were growing up were also included. However, as a retrospective survey, we could not include measures of attitudes toward intergenerational relationships, since these apply to the current period, rather than to when these respondents were making decisions about when to leave home and which routes to take.

*First Leaving Home:* The questions asked on leaving (and returning) home were exceptionally detailed. Respondents were asked for the age when they "first lived away from home for four months or more," with a follow-up question asking their reason for leaving home. Parallel questions allowed respondents to report about their subsequent nest-leaving experiences, allowing up to three returns and three more departures. As a result, detailed information is available on the timing of leaving home in young adulthood for all adults in the United States.[2]

*Routes Out of the Parental Home:* Our analysis of routes young people took out of the parental home, a key contributor to the growth in non-family living, is derived from the reasons they gave for leaving home. No information was collected by the NSFH about the respondents' actual living arrangements when they left home. Based on common patterns in the United States, it is likely that those who left home to marry also established a new household, although some may have gone to live with the parents of the new spouse. Those who left to attend school or join the military are likely not to have formed a new household, living instead in college dormitories and military barracks, the temporary housing associated with these short-term statuses. Those who left for other reasons, which we classified as leaving to PRI, are more problematic. We expect that in most cases, these young people are either living alone or sharing an apartment with otherwise similar young people. However, in the early period, it is likely that many may have been boarding in private homes or in lodging houses.

*Independent Variables:* The most central of the independent variables considered in this analysis is the "leave cohort" measure. Leave cohort is a transformation of the age of respondents at the survey to index the year they entered young adulthood, defined here as age 18. Given the small number of Jews in the sample, the analysis focuses on the transition to adulthood for three time periods.

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2. Detailed analyses of these data in comparison with U.S. data constructed from the 1940—1980 censuses suggest that the reports of respondents who left home for marriage were much closer to census figures than those who left for other reasons. Leaving home for reasons other than marriage systematically showed a younger age at leaving home in the NSFH survey than the censuses. Unless one assumes that those remaining home in their early twenties have substantially higher mortality than those leaving home as unmarried young adults, and that both have higher mortality than those who left home when they married, it seems likely that respondents rounded their own ages down. It is reasonable to assume that older respondents, sensitive to the current, earlier norms about the appropriate age at leaving home, reported lower than actual ages when they left home (Goldscheider, et al, 1994).

**TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE ANALYSIS OF LEAVING HOME AMONG JEWS AND NON-JEWISH WHITES, TWENTIETH CENTURY UNITED STATES (WEIGHTED PERCENTAGES)**

| Variable | Non-Jewish Whites | Jews |
|---|---|---|
| N | 7,898 | 219 |
| Leave cohort (year reached age 18) | 14 | 22 |
| < 1938 | | |
| 1938–1958 | 27 | 24 |
| > 1958 | 59 | 54 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Female | 52 | 51 |
| Parental education (average of both) | | |
| All cohorts | | |
| < HS | 46 | 37 |
| HS | 26 | 16 |
| HS+ | 28 | 47 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Pre 1958 cohorts | | |
| <HS | 69 | 61 |
| HS | 17 | 14 |
| HS+ | 14 | 25 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |
| Post 1958 cohorts | | |
| <HS | 34 | 19 |
| HS | 32 | 18 |
| HS+ | 35 | 63 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

The first is the pre-1938 leave cohort and includes those growing up prior to World War II, entering adulthood in most cases some time during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The middle nest-leaving cohort turned age 18 between 1938 and 1958 and includes those who confronted World War II and the baby/marriage boom of the 1950s as young adults. The most recent cohort, the post-

1958 nest-leaving cohort, came of age during the 1960s (the Vietnam period in the United States) and more recently.

The other independent variables include the respondents' gender and a constructed measure that combines the respondents' parents' education, subdivided into those whose parents' educations averaged less than high school completion, high school completion, or at least some college attendance. (Table 1 provides means for each of these variables for Jews and non-Jewish whites.) For the earliest nest-leaving cohorts, who came of age prior to World War II, this measure of parental education reflects educational levels attained earlier in the twentieth century, and for Jews, often outside of the United States.

## Describing Changes in Leaving Home

**Age at leaving home**

We present the data in quartiles (Figure 1): the first quartile is the age by which the first 25 percent had left home for the first time for a period of more than four months, with 75 percent still remaining home; the median, or second quartile, is the age at which half have left and half remained in the parental home; and the third quartile is the age at which 75 percent have left home, but 25 percent have never left the parental home for as long as four months.

Our analysis indicates that Jews have participated in the decline in age at leaving home, converging over time with the patterns of non-Jewish whites in recent cohorts. This convergence is dramatic, since it ends an older pattern in which many young Jews evidently remained in the parental home long into adulthood.

Among non-Jewish whites, the earliest quartile remained essentially stable over the three twentieth century cohorts, with 25 percent leaving home at about age 18. There is some decline in median age at leaving home, from about age 20 to about age 19. The most conspicuous decline has been in the timing of the last quartile of nest-leavers —three-fourths of those reaching age 18 during the depression and pre-depression years remained in their parental home until after age 23; three-quarters of the post-1958 period left home by age 20. These data show that most of the reduction in age at leaving home occurred between the first and second nest-leaving cohorts.

In contrast, the pattern of nest-leaving among Jews was substantially delayed. In the first nest-leaving cohorts (the depression and pre-depression group), more than three-quarters of the Jews remained at home at age 20; at age 23 more than half were still at home, and more than one quarter were still living in the parental home at age 28. The trend toward leaving home at earlier ages is quite striking among Jews, so that by the most recent cohort, there were only small differences between the Jews and non-Jews. The convergence in the age at leaving home shows that half of Jews and non-Jews of the post-1958 leave cohort leave their parental home before age 19.

**FIGURE 1. JEWISH AND NON-JEWISH NESTLEAVING QUARTILES, BY NESTLEAVING COHORT**

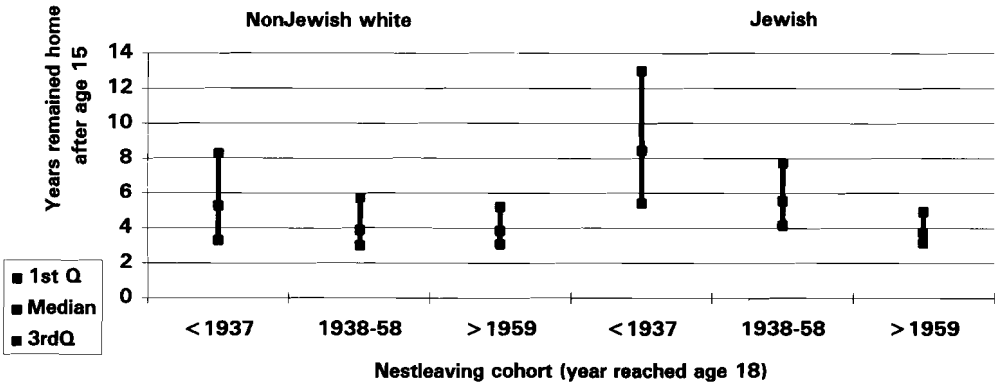
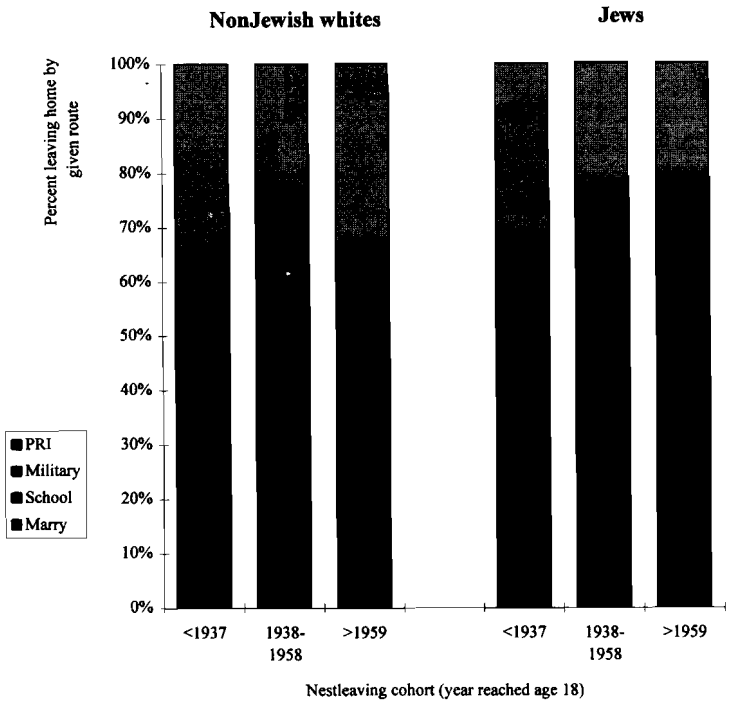



**FIGURE 2. ROUTES OUT OF THE PARENTAL HOME IN THE 20TH CENTURY UNITED STATES: JEWS AND NON-JEWISH WHITES**



**Route out of the Parental Home**

How much of the differential timing of leaving home is a reflection of differential ages at marriage? Perhaps, the exceptional pattern among Jews of the older cohort reflects the later Jewish age at marriage. If marriage was the dominant route out of the home in the years prior to World War II, then the later ages that young adult Jews left home could be accounted for by their later marriage age. We examine this question by examining data on routes out of the parental home for these three nest-leaving cohorts, again comparing Jews and non-Jewish whites (Figure 2).

These results show that Jews resembled non-Jewish whites most in the earliest cohort, with about half leaving home at marriage for both groups and one third leaving home to residential autonomy before marriage. Evidently, the much later age pattern of leaving home characterized all routes that young Jewish adults took out of the parental home. Jews in this early cohort were more likely than non-Jews to leave home to join the military, since they had remained home long enough that the war found many of them still living with their parents. Jews were also considerably less likely than non-Jewish whites to have left home to attend school. But overall, it is clear that the big differences between Jews and non-Jewish whites in the timing of leaving home were not due to differences in the routes taken out of the home by the two groups.

The overall change in routes out of the home characterizes both Jews and non-Jews. Marriage declined and attending college away from home increased over time. For both groups, the military has decreased as a route of importance in the nest-leaving process in the most recent cohort. The post-1972 period witnessed the ending of the military draft and has meant that most enlistees enter the armed services after some period of independence.

The shifts in residential independence before marriage among non-Jewish whites are not mirrored among Jews. Nonfamily living appears to have been a fairly common route out of the parental home for both groups of young adults during the depression and earlier, primarily for males (data not shown). In general, young people who were not financially ready to marry had to leave their parental homes, which for most whites were commonly located in rural areas, to find work, which was available in the city. This form of nonfamily living reflects an older pattern of young adulthood in Western Europe and the British Isles, where service and apprenticeship took many away from their parents to support themselves, often to provide earnings to their parents, and also to save for marriage. "Independence" was not the point, and they rarely established separate households, living instead in the homes of their employers or in boarding/lodging houses (Hajnal, 1982). For Jews, this pattern of leaving home may have been associated with international migration to the United States and with a similar stage of "independent" living in boarding houses in America's urban areas.

Leaving home for "independence" before marriage declined in the middle cohort. Both groups experienced an increase in leaving home to attend school, an increase particularly dramatic for Jews. Leaving home to enlist in the military

continued or increased, particularly among non-Jews. All of the increase in leaving home to attend school between the two early cohorts came from nonfamily living among Jews, who experienced no decrease in the proportion leaving home for marriage, unlike the case for non-Jews. Evidently, the early Jewish participation in the marriage/baby boom of the 1940s and 1950s (Della Pergola, 1980), coupled with a later pattern of leaving home, allowed marriage to remain an important route out of the parental home for Jews.

For the most recent cohort, leaving home before marriage for "independence" increased substantially among non-Jews, but not among Jews. Both groups saw a major decrease in the role of marriage as a route out of the home, as the rapidly rising marriage ages of this cohort placed marriage well after the "normal" ages at nest-leaving. The dramatic change in routes out of the home for Jews is not to nonfamily living but to attend school away from home. Leaving home for education is the first experience away from home for nearly half the Jews who reached age 18 after 1958. This is the case for barely a third of the non-Jewish white young adults.

Clearly, the connection between the timing of leaving home and the route out of the home is not a simple one. When Jews leave home by the same route as non-Jews, they often do so later, at least among older cohorts. It is important, therefore, to examine these differences using methods that can distinguish these two rapidly changing dimensions of the nest-leaving process. This requires an analysis of competing probabilities or risks.

## The Risk of Leaving Home

For the cohorts in this analysis, Jews left home on average more slowly than non-Jews (Table 2). The first row shows that a young Jew's risk of leaving home was only about 85 percent as great as that for non-Jewish whites, controlling for nest-leaving cohort. The results are essentially the same when gender and parental education are controlled, as well (data not shown). The choice by Jews to leave home to attend school and their avoidance of both marriage and nonfamily living as routes out of the parental home are patterns that also appear for the group as a whole, with Jews having only about 60 percent the risk of leaving home for either route. In contrast, Jews show a relative risk 1.9 times that of non-Jewish whites in leaving the parental home by going away to school.

However, the details of the table show clearly that this pattern averages group differences that changed over the three nest-leaving cohorts. For these probability estimates, the risk of leaving home for non-Jews in the middle cohort is the reference group, with all other groups' risks calculated relative to them.

### Non-Jews

Starting with non-Jews, the coefficients for the total portray the increased risk of leaving home by a given age, i.e., the drop in age at leaving home, much of which occurred by the second cohort. Non-Jews in the depression cohorts and earlier left home only 63 percent as fast as those in the cohorts who came of age during World War II and the decade thereafter. The Vietnam and later cohorts continued this

decrease, but more slowly, leaving home on average 15 percent faster than the middle cohort.

**TABLE 2. RELATIVE RISKS OF LEAVING HOME AMONG JEWS AND NON-JEWISH WHITES, OVERALL AND BY ROUTE AND LEAVE COHORT, TWENTIETH CENTURY UNITED STATES**

| Leave Cohort (Year reached age 18) | Total | Marriage | For School | PRI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All Cohorts: | | | | |
| Jews | 0.846* | 0.596* | 1.899* | 0.604* |
| Non-Jews[a] | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| By Cohort: | | | | |
| Non-Jews | | | | |
| Pre–1937 | 0.634* | 0.763* | 0.560* | 0.957 |
| 1938–1958[a] | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 | 1.000 |
| Post 1958 | 1.148* | 0.840* | 1.823* | 1.818* |
| Jews | | | | |
| Pre-1937 | 0.394 | 0.456 | 0.307 | 0.481* |
| 1938–1958 | 0.645* | 0.761 | 0.854 | 0.601 |
| Post 1958 | 1.243 | 0.371* | 4.410* | 1.182 |

* Significantly different at $p < .05$ from 1938–1959 for non-Jewish whites; from non-Jewish value in same leave cohort for Jews.

a. Reference.

The changing marriage risks clearly reveal the decline in age at marriage that occurred during the war and post-war years, since the depression cohorts left home for marriage only three-quarters as fast as the middle cohort. For the most recent cohort, the pace of leaving home to marriage slowed. Most likely this slowing down only reflected part of the overall increase in marriage age, since research has shown that those who leave home at marriage are likely to marry considerably earlier than those who do not (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991). Much more dramatic are the rapid increases in leaving home to attend college, more than tripling the relative risk of leaving home via this route at a given age over the period. The recent increase in

leaving home to independence before marriage, increasing the risk of this exit from the parental home by 82 percent, is nearly as dramatic.

**The Jews**

The Jews, however, are different, becoming more different in the recent period in terms of the routes out of the home, even as they have become more similar to non-Jews in their overall timing. For the oldest cohort, Jews resemble non-Jews of the middle cohort in overall pattern, being generally slower in leaving home, with relative risks of about 40 percent of those of non-Jews in the middle cohort for all routes. However, only the value for PRI is significantly below the value for the early cohort of non-Jewish whites, in part because of the small number of Jews in this older cohort, but also because of the high level of nonfamily living among non-Jews of the depression and earlier cohorts.

The Jews also mirror the increased risks of leaving home for marriage, followed by a dramatic decline. Leaving home for school and nonfamily living, on the other hand, show fairly continuous increases from cohort to cohort. It is important to point out that for the youngest cohort, the Jews are not significantly different from non-Jews in the overall risk of leaving home and are leaving home at a younger age. The few Jews who remain home until marriage do so significantly more slowly than non-Jews; if they leave home for nonfamily living, Jews also do so significantly more slowly than non-Jews. On the other hand, they leave home for higher education significantly faster than non-Jews, a pattern not characteristic of the earlier cohorts. Beneath the surface of convergence between Jewish and non-Jewish leaving home patterns lie sharp differences in routes and their timing. These differences imply that intergenerational relationships are really very different between Jews and non-Jews, despite their superficial similarities.[3]

We also examined differences in the determinants of these patterns between Jews and non-Jewish whites, focusing in particular on differences between men and women and on the effects of parental education. Data not presented in tabular form show that there are more gender differences among Jews than among non-Jewish whites: leaving home to go to school and to nonfamily living is more characteristic of sons among Jews than is the case among non-Jews, while the greater likelihood that daughters will leave home to marriage is more characteristic of Jews than of non-Jews. Gender differences also seem to have narrowed more in the non-Jewish population than among Jews.

The story with regard to the effect of parental education is more complex, and raises key questions about the role of family co-residence in the educational attainment and social mobility of children. In general, higher parental education is associated with later leaving for marriage and earlier leaving via other routes. Young adults with very poorly educated parents are also very likely to leave home to nonfamily living, reflecting their heightened need to support themselves. However among the older cohorts of Jews, high parental education had much less

3. We note that the data also show that the pattern of "returning" to the parental home is similar between Jews and non-Jews.

effect on their children's leaving home. What is clear is that the early cohorts of Jews were less likely than non-Jews to leave home to attend college. But this pattern did not mean that Jews were not getting educated. In fact, Jews' late nest-leaving of the earlier cohorts is likely to reflect a strategy of cheaply financing higher education by supporting children to live at home and attend college.

This generational argument showing how Jews invested in the education of their children while being supportive of their continuing to live at home is consistent with the data we presented earlier (Table 1). These data show the level of parental education for two cohorts, the early two combined and the more recent cohort. Jewish children of these early cohorts left home more slowly, particularly to attend college, than non-Jews, despite their parents' somewhat higher levels of education (25 percent of the Jewish parents had educations averaging more than high school compared with 14 percent of the parents of the non-Jews).

Nevertheless, the children of the earlier cohorts may be considered approximately the parents of the youngest cohort, and were able to increase their level of college attainment faster than was the case for non-Jews — 63 percent of the most recent cohorts' parents averaged some college among Jews compared with only 35 percent among non-Jews. Remaining at home, in this case, led to increased investment in the next generation, providing the resources for the most recent generation of Jewish parents to send their children away to school in large numbers.

## Conclusion

Our results suggest that the puzzle in the literature, in which Jews were less likely to leave home for nonfamily living in the 1970s but more likely in the 1980s might, in fact, be correct. The data we presented portray rapid changes during the 1940s to 1980s, with Jews beginning far below non-Jews in this behavior, but increasing dramatically with time. There are too few cases of Jews in this sample to adequately test this hypothesis more directly, but our results are consistent with this supposition.

Our analysis of leaving home in young adulthood comparing Jews and non-Jewish whites has shown dramatic changes over time in both the timing and routes out of the home. Jews have become similar to non-Jews in the timing of leaving home but have become more distinctive in the routes selected. The emerging distinctive pattern among Jews is likely to have important implications for the relationships between parents and children. The investments made by Jewish parents in the education of the next generation link their children to them in ways that are different both from the past and from the non-Jewish pattern. Leaving home among non-Jews of the most recent generation has occurred at earlier ages than before and as often for "independence" as for education. For Jews the overwhelming reason young adults leave home at an early age is to go to college. This is a new form of "dependence" of one generation on another, one that may generate new family connections and support as parents facilitate the nest-leaving of their children, even as they continue to control the financial strings.

Non-Jews' growing likelihood of leaving home for nonfamily living at a young age means greater independence and weaker family ties (and less financial commitment to the education of their children beyond high school). In contrast, the Jewish patterns of early nest-leaving to attend college may result in new family-based ties and connections. Emerging Jewish patterns of family relationships between the younger and middle generations, emphasizing family connections that are not residentially based, fits in with a broader view of these generational relationships between the older and middle generation, which could be thought of as financial "intimacy at a distance."

Taken together, new forms of generational family relationships among Jews may be emerging at the end of the 20th century, different from what they had been in the past, but potentially of sufficient depth to form a strong basis for family networks. These new forms of familism and generational family ties at both ends of the family life course need to be studied directly and in detail to learn how these may change as the older and younger generations forge new bonds of relationships.

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