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It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us ...

CHARLES DICKENS, *A Tale of Two Cities*

IN MAY 1964, *Look* magazine published “The Vanishing American Jew,” which may have been the first article to project into wider public discourse the question of whether Jews in America will survive the open society. Some years later, following *Look*’s demise, Jewish audiences were treated to the quip that *Look* magazine has vanished (twice, in fact, as it was revived once) while American Jews have plainly survived. Nevertheless, fears for the disappearance of American Jewry have endured, if not intensified (e.g., Dershowitz, 1997). In 1991, the publication of the erroneous intermarriage rate of 52% (Kosmin, et al., 1991; the rate was later revised downward to 43%) sparked the formation of dozens of “Jewish Continuity” commissions and programs across the country. And to this very day, the words “assimilation,” “intermarriage,” and “continuity” continue to sharply punctuate the rhetoric of Jewish communal life and the psyche of

philanthropic and communal leaders.

If American Jewry is not exactly vanishing, or even on the path to vanishing, the strength of Jewish identities and several forms of in-group association may very well be in decline. Or perhaps not — some have argued that it is quite the contrary. In their view, American Jewry has been enjoying a period of renaissance and renewal, marked by unparalleled political power, communal organization, and cultural vitality. Most notably, as propounded by Charles Silberman in *A Certain People* (1986), this decidedly upbeat view of American Jewry takes note of Jews’ social acceptance (with

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prominence in almost all the respected professions) and economic affluence (they comprise about a quarter of the country's multi-

millionaires). It cites their political influence, manifested not only in office-holding but also in concrete collective achievements: in the latter third of the 20th Century, Jews secured consistent U.S. support for Israel to an extent

unparalleled in other countries; they helped garner the release of a million Jews from the former Soviet Union; they won widespread public recognition of the Holocaust by way of publicly supported museums and other vehicles; and they brought about the end to anti-Semitic discrimination in housing, resorts, university admissions, and employment. The widespread successes in the public arena find parallel achievements in religious and cultural life. Indicative of such developments are the vastly expanded prominence and quantity of Jewish-related books, movies, music, and other cultural endeavors, particularly by younger adults (Cohen and Kelman, 2006); increased engagement in Jewish social justice activities; thousands of sites and millions of Jewish-oriented pages on the Web; and a period of unusual religious fermentation marked by educational expansion, synagogue transformations, newly styled congregations with special appeal to those under 35, Jewish feminism, and ongoing innovation in religious music, liturgy, and ritual.

This seemingly contradictory evidence raises

an obvious question: Are American Jews really vanishing? Alternatively, are they, in fact, generating a period of ferment and vitality? Or, are both tendencies operating simultaneously, where impending demographic decline co-exists with cultural, religious, and educational excellence and ferment? Perhaps some Jews are abandoning group ties, while others are leading and pursuing the most lively and energetic forms of Jewish vitality.

Whatever the current course of trends and developments in American Jewry, how should policy-makers respond to current and likely future tendencies? Which policies can support, sustain, and expand the areas of Jewish cultural and religious vitality and renewal? What exactly are the real dangers and real opportunities for American Jewry — and how can they be respectively avoided and exploited?

To examine these and related questions, this paper relies heavily upon the *2000-01 National Jewish Population Study* (NJPS; see Kotler-Berkowitz, et al., 2003), utilizing analyses run specifically for this paper as well as previously published studies by myself and others.

A DECLINE IN "ETHNIC COHESIVENESS:" FEWER TIES LINKING JEWS

The vanishing thesis projects declines in the number of Jews, brought about by high rates of intermarriage and low birth rates. But beyond the concern with the sheer number of American Jews, the major qualitative threat to American Jewry entails the extent and nature of "group cohesiveness." Social scientists refer

BEING JEWISH *is not only about God, faith, rituals, worship, and spirituality. It is also about friends, neighborhoods, community, Israel, and Peoplehood.*

to this as the “ethnic” dimension of Jewish identity. Jewish “ethnicity” here does not mean Jewish nostalgia.

Rather, ethnicity connotes the collective aspect of Jewish identity and community. It is expressed in the prevalence of Jews with Jewish spouses, friends, and neighbors. It encompasses Jews joining together to form organizations, charities, industries, and political movements. It is about attachment to local Jews, to American Jews, to Israel, and, ultimately, to the Jewish People. The social tissue that ties Jews together is ethnicity. It is what makes being Jewish and Judaism so essentially different in form from other religions. Being Jewish is not only about God, faith, rituals, worship, and spirituality. It is also about friends, neighborhoods, community, Israel, and Peoplehood. In fact, “people,” “nation,” and other variants of the Jewish collective appear repeatedly in the Bible; “religion” does not.

It is now clear that a sense of commitment to a particular people — the Jewish People — is in decline (Cohen and Wertheimer, 2006). To take as an illustration, those aged 35-44 are less likely than their elders, 55-64, to strongly agree that “Jews in the United States and Jews around the world share a common destiny” (35% vs. 44%). They are also less likely to strongly agree that “when people are in distress, American Jews have a greater responsibility to rescue Jews than non-Jews” (25% vs. 32%); and they are less likely to strongly agree that “I have a special responsibility to take care of Jews in need around the world” (25% vs. 32%, again).

Responses to the statement “I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people” are especially relevant here. The proportions who strongly agree drop from a maximum of 72% among those 65+, to 62% for those 55-64, to 58% for the 45-54 year olds, to 52% among those 35-44, and down to a low point of 47% for adults under 35. The slide in feelings of belonging to the Jewish people stretches over a 50-year age span. In like fashion, the Jews of 2000/01 registered less attachment to Israel than those in 1990, despite the emerging intifada that, at least temporarily, heightened attachment to Israel.

DECLINING LEVELS IN ATTACHMENT TO JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD BY AGE

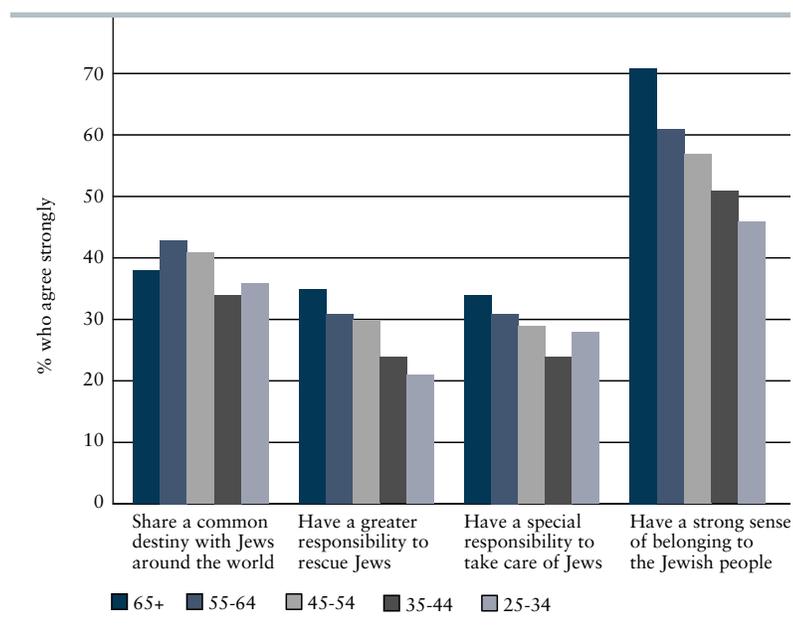


CHART 1. Declining levels in Jewish peoplehood attachment by age.

Declines in ethnic cohesiveness go beyond attitudes, extending to relationships. Not only do Jews have fewer Jewish spouses; they also have fewer Jewish friends. In just ten years, between 1990 and 2000, the number of Jews

who reported that most of their close friends were Jewish fell from 43% to 33%!

The individual rate of intermarriage in recent years amounted to 47%. In other words, almost half the Jews who married in the late 1990s married non-Jews who had not converted at the time of the survey. This most recently calculated national figure represents a slight rise from the 43% rate of the late 1980s, an estimate corrected from the earlier report of 52%.

Parallel trends can also be found in the erosion of attachment to well-established Jewish organizations. The proportion belonging to Jewish organizations (other than synagogues and JCCs) dropped from 31% to 24%. This

shrinkage in numbers is consistent with the aging and diminution of such once-venerable mainstays of Jewish life as B'nai B'rith and Hadassah. Whereas in 1990 about 1.2 million adults belonged to such organizations, by 2000

the total had fallen by about a quarter million. The proportion claiming to make donations to Jewish Federation campaigns also fell, by as much as one third, from 39% to 26% (or, more precisely, from an exaggerated 39% to an equally exaggerated 26% ten years later).

In fact, the 2000 survey confirmed a worrisome finding for Federation contributions that emerged in only tentative form in 1990. The recent decline in Federation donors por-

tends even further declines in the years ahead, as Jews are giving as much as before to Jewish causes other than Federations, and more to non-sectarian causes (Cohen, 2004b).

Jewish Community Centers constitute the only "ethnic" Jewish institution to retain membership levels between 1990 and 2000. In this, JCCs are the one major exception to the general rule. In sum, formal and informal ties among American Jews have declined in recent years. Moreover, they continue to do so as intermarriage and other developments drive down the rates at which Jews experience each other as friends, neighbors, and members of Jewish institutions other than congregations and JCCs.

"RELIGIOUS" ENGAGEMENT: STABILITY IN OBSERVANCE, CONGREGATIONS, AND LEARNING

At the same time as Jews are experiencing declines in their in-group associations and their commitment to the Jewish people, many encouraging and creative developments in educational, spiritual, and cultural life are taking place. One highly significant sign of this vitality emerges in the clear and outright increase in almost all forms of Jewish education (Cohen 2004a). These include the following:

- While precise estimates are hard to derive, Jewish early childhood education has become more widespread.
- Jewish day schools, once enrolling only a minority of Orthodox children, are now nearly universal among the Orthodox (at 94%) and have become almost three times

AS JEWS ARE *experiencing declines in their in-group associations and their commitment to the Jewish people, many encouraging and creative developments are taking place.*

as widespread in Conservative families over the course of just one generation (moving from about 10% among today's Conservative parents to about 26% of their children). The rate among Reform families is about 4%.

- In just ten years, trips to Israel have become more frequent as the percentage of American Jewish adults who visited the Jewish State rose from 28% to 35%.
- Jewish studies classes in universities have grown exponentially, recording attendance by 44% of those under 35, as contrasted with only 14% among those their parents' age.
- Adult education programs sponsored by synagogues, JCCs, other Jewish institutions and such systematic efforts as the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School and the Me'ah programs have expanded greatly (Grant, et al., 2004).

In addition, while attachment to well-established, "ethnic" organizations (such as B'nai Brith, Hadassah and Federations) has declined, synagogue membership remains stable and even growing. Synagogue membership, be it on a percentage basis or in absolute numbers, expanded slightly from 2.15 million Jews in 1990 to 2.21 million in 2000. Large growth in Orthodox affiliation (from 355,000 to 565,000) and small growth in Reform membership more than offset the sharp decline in Conservative numbers. While the number of American Jews who crossed the door of a synagogue worship service in the past year declined, the number attending services at least monthly held steady.

Between 1990 and 2000, the balance of several indicators of ritual behavior also remained largely unchanged. Thus, Hanukkah candle lighting, characterizing three fifths of American Jewish adults, dropped slightly, while fasting on Yom Kippur, practiced by about half of American Jews, moved upward. Small increases were registered also for Seder attendance (rising from 65% to 69%) and for Sabbath candle lighting (moving from 19% to 25%).

STABLE LEVELS OF RELIGIOSITY, 1990-2000

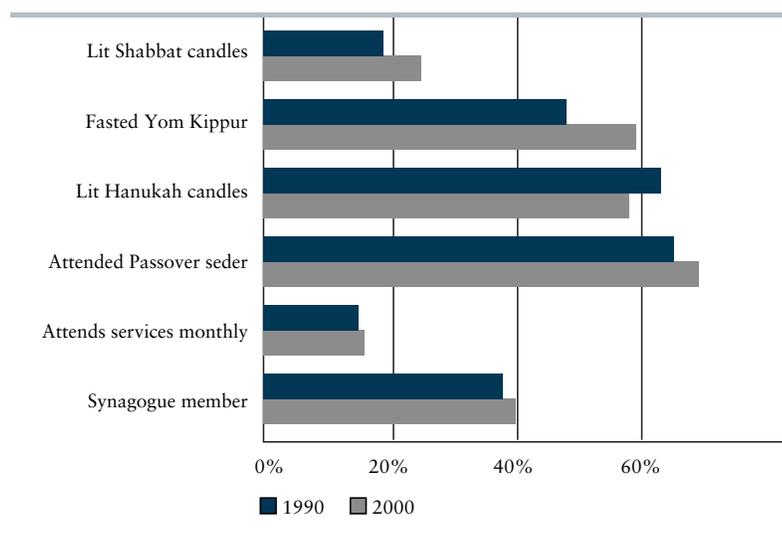


CHART 2. *Stability in indicators of religiosity, 1990-2000.*

The last few years have seen the emergence of a string of highly distinctive yet culturally representative prayer communities. They feature high Judaic competence, gender egalitarianism, attention to welcoming and community-building, dedication to text-learning, and an engagement with social justice activities. Among the better-known examples are IKAR in Los Angeles, Hadar in New York, the D.C. Minyan in Washington, and, to be sure, Shira Hadasha in Jerusalem (heavily populated by

Jerusalem residents and sojourners of Anglo-origin). To these phenomena must be added what may constitute a period of cultural efflorescence, as illustrated by developments as diverse as a burgeoning number of Jewish and Israeli film festivals, widening markets for the work of Jewish crafts people, and the production and consumption of new forms of Jewish music as represented by Matisyahu and his original promoter, J-Dub Records.

**BEYOND AVERAGES:
THE TWO JEWRIES**

On average, American Jews are decreasingly ethnic in the sense that fewer are engaged in formal and informal associations; fewer report Jewish spouses, friends, neighbors, organizational memberships, and attachment

to Israel and the Jewish People. At the same time, they are no less inclined religiously. This dimension relates to congregational membership, ritual observance, and participation in Jewish education (a sphere largely sponsored by syna-

gogues and other religious institutions and centered on religious texts and practices). In broad terms, with all their inexactitude, I have referred to these two trends as "ethnic decline" and "religious stability" (Cohen, 1998).

Though useful as summary statistics, averages obscure important internal variations. Underlying the population-wide averages

is decided movement in two opposing directions by the more and less engaged portions of American Jewry, or, in short: polarization. The two wings of the Jewish identity spectrum are growing larger, and the vast middle is in decline.

Consider the following. There is an important segment of American Jewry, one about evenly divided among Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and non-denominational Jews. It is a population segment where the observance of Passover and Chanukah is almost universal and where the vast majorities (80% or more) belong to synagogues, attend services on the High Holidays, and fast on Yom Kippur. Majorities light Sabbath candles, report that most of their friends are Jewish, feel that being Jewish is very important to them, have been to Israel, and contribute to Jewish charities. Most also send their young children to Jewish pre-schools and their older children to Jewish youth groups. Almost half of this segment did some volunteer work for a Jewish organization in the past year, attended an adult Jewish education program, and feel very attached to Israel. Roughly a third belong to a JCC, send their children to Jewish day schools, keep a kosher home, and have been to Israel twice or more. What's more, as a group they have had a reasonably strong Jewish upbringing. Hardly any report having been raised by intermarried parents or having had a Christmas tree in their home growing up; about half spent some time in a Jewish summer camp; and more than a third participated in a Jewish youth group. In fact, a quarter attended day schools and even more visited Israel in their younger years.

AS INTERMARRIAGE *has become more common, the intermarried have become, as a group, relatively more engaged in Jewish life — more learned, more observant, and more communally active.*

So, who are these people — these highly affiliated, reasonably observant, and at times very well-educated Jews? They are in-married Jewish couples with school-age children.

Not only are they highly engaged; their engagement levels have been growing. As intermarriage has become more common, the in-married have become, as a group, relatively more engaged in Jewish life — more learned, more observant, and more communally active.

Why should this be so? As years of research on the intermarried have demonstrated, those who marry out derive from weaker Jewish backgrounds in terms of parental observance and Jewish education (Cohen, 2005; Medding et al., 1992; Phillips, 1997; Fishman, 2004, 2006). Correlatively, the in-married enjoy the opposing characteristics. When they were children, their parents were more observant; they experienced more extensive and more intensive Jewish educational experiences; and they lived in areas with more densely settled Jewish populations.

In part because of their distinctive storehouse of Jewish social, spiritual, and cultural capital built up over the years, the in-married have spurred a major expansion in Jewish educational utilization. In comparing the in-married who are 25-39 with those who are in-married and roughly their parents’ age (55-69), we find marked differences in day school attendance (29% vs. 12%), Israel travel in their youth (25% vs. 10%), Jewish camping (42% vs. 29%), and, as noted earlier, courses taken in Jewish Studies (43% vs. 13%). The in-married are even far more Jewishly edu-

cated than were their counterparts 30 years ago. And, signs point to an even further increase in the levels of their own children’s Jewish education. They suggest that the in-married are riding an inter-generational “up escalator” in Jewish education.

RISING LEVELS OF JEWISH EDUCATION AMONG YOUNG IN-MARRIED JEWS

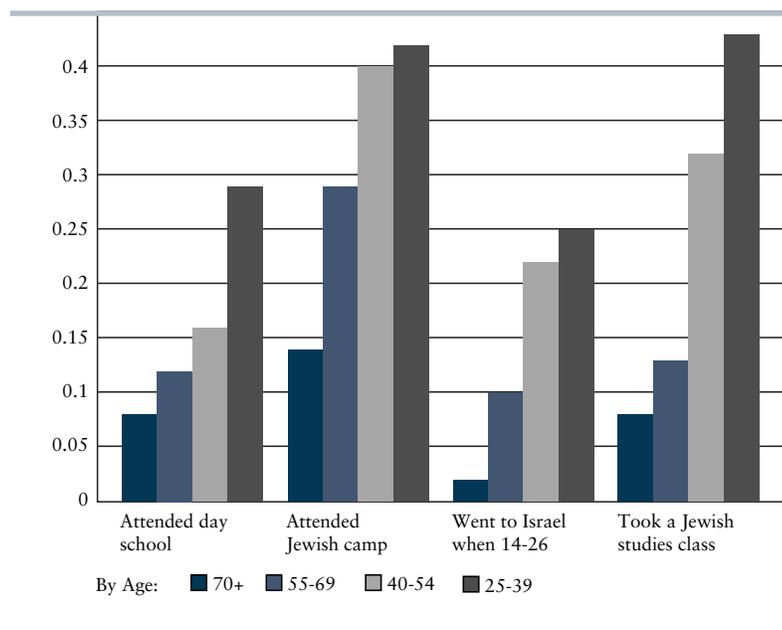


CHART 3. *Rising levels of Jewish education among younger in-married Jews.*

The intermarried homes with school-age children stand in sharp contrast. As compared with the in-married, only half as many of the intermarried observe Passover, Chanukah or Yom Kippur, or belong to a synagogue. Just 7% have mostly Jewish close friends (as compared with 53% of the in-married). Only handfuls (from 9-14%) attend services at least monthly, have been to Israel, light Sabbath candles, keep kosher at home, or volunteer in Jewish contexts as compared with about four times as many among their inmarried counterparts. The

HIGHER RATES OF JEWISH ENGAGEMENT AMONG IN-MARRIED VS. INTERMARRIED (of those with children)

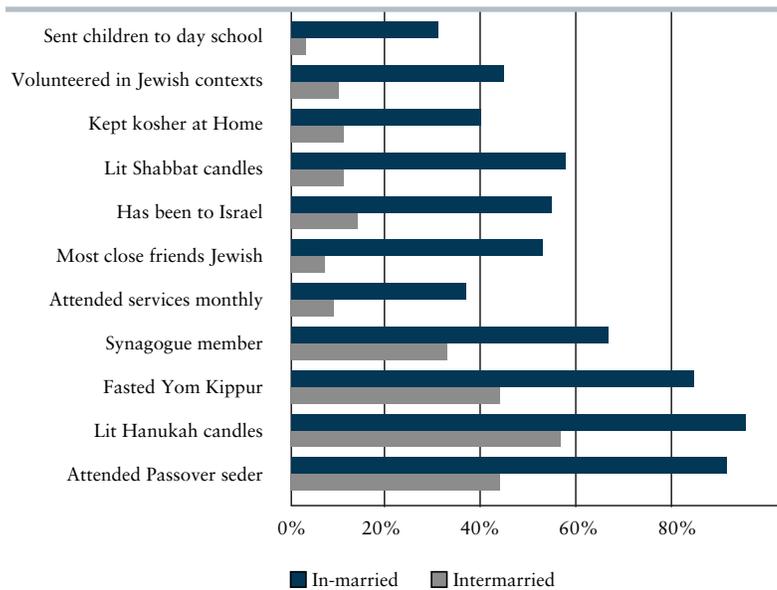


CHART 4. Higher rates of Jewish engagement among in-married than among the intermarried (those who are parents, only).

HIGHER RATES OF JEWISH EDUCATION AMONG IN-MARRIED VS. INTERMARRIED

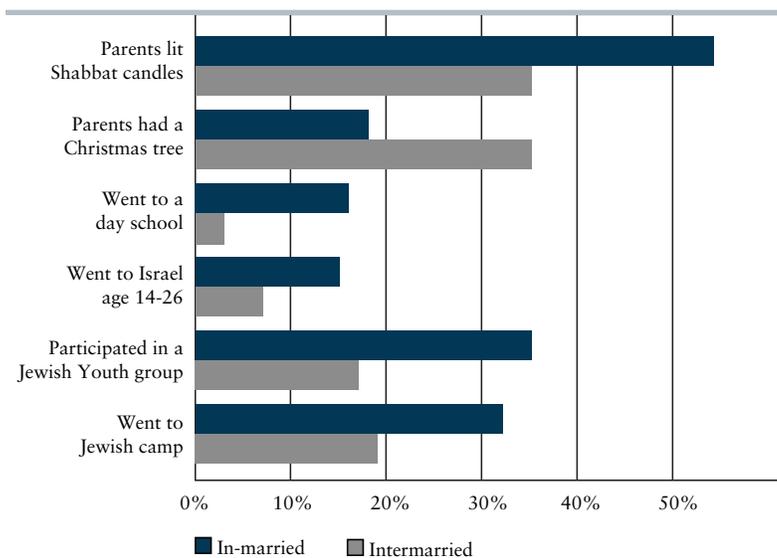


CHART 5. More Jewish education among the in-married than among the intermarried.

biggest gap is found with respect to sending one’s children to day school: 31% for the in-married versus 3% for the intermarried.

These lower rates of engagement, though in large measure a direct consequence of intermarriage, are also partially due to the far lower rates of Jewish education that intermarried Jews experienced in their youth. As compared with the in-married, only about half as many attended Jewish summer camp or participated in a Jewish youth group or visited Israel as a youngster, and a miniscule 3% attended a Jewish day school. Twice as many of the intermarried as the in-married grew up with Christmas trees in their homes, and far fewer observed their parents lighting Shabbat candles. Among the intermarried, in fact, the rates for those who had Christmas trees and Shabbat candles are about equal; among the in-married, three times as many saw Shabbat candles lit in their homes on Friday nights as those whose families erected Christmas trees in December.

The gaps between the in-married and intermarried are so large and persistent that it seems that we are developing into two distinct populations: the in-married and the intermarried. The former is far more engaged in Jewish life and is raising about three-quarters of the next generation of American Jews. In contrast, the latter segment is far less engaged and is responsible for raising only a quarter of today’s Jewish children under the age of 18. The identity chasm between in-married and intermarried is wide, which suggests the imagery of “Two Jewries.” At the same time, not-

withstanding this imagery, we need to recall that the in-married and intermarried often derive from the same families and continue to maintain warm ties of kinship as parents and children, brothers and sisters, and other relations.

With this said, we cannot ignore a critical master-theme for Jewish policy formation: Intermarriage does indeed constitute the greatest single threat to Jewish continuity today, both on an individual level (for specific Jewish families and their descendants) and on a group level (for the size and distinctiveness of the American Jewish population).

THE INDEPENDENT IMPACT OF INTERMARRIAGE

In part, but only in part, the low levels of Jewish involvement among the intermarried derive from their low levels of Jewish education, their parentage (having one Jewish parent), their parents’ low levels of ritual practice, and their tendency to live in areas with relatively low levels of Jewish density. (For a parallel analysis, see Phillips and Fishman, 2006.)

With this said, intermarriage itself helps further diminish Jewish involvement. We may take a concrete example. Suppose two siblings with equally low levels of parental observance and Jewish education make different marital choices. One marries a Jew and the other marries a non-Jew. Empirically, the intermarried sibling will be far less likely than his or her in-married brother or sister to raise children as Jews, let alone affiliate with Jewish institutions or practice many Jewish ritual observances.

To take another example, we may consider the Jewish respondents in the NJPS who were the products of intermarriage (one of their parents was not Jewish, yet as adults, they continued to identify as Jews). As a group, they report very low levels of parental Jewish engagement and Jewish engagement, resulting in an intermarriage rate of 76%, far higher than the national average. Those who marry non-Jews raise their own children as Jews just 7% of the time. However, the small number of these offspring of intermarried parents who go on to marry Jews report raising Jewish children as frequently as 74% of the time. For these Jewish children of intermarried parents, whom they choose to marry has a very strong impact on whether they will raise Jewish children, with all the attendant consequences for Jewish involvement.

For purposes of Jewish continuity, raising one’s children “exclusively in Judaism” is critical. Any other decision, such as raising children in Judaism and something else (let alone as “nothing” or in Christianity or another religion) produces high rates of disaffiliation with being Jewish and intermarriage (Phillips, 2005).

Focusing upon children raised exclusively in Judaism, we find the same sorts of patterns among day school alumni as among the children of the intermarried, despite the fact that

INTERMARRIAGE

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these two groups experienced very different levels of Jewish education and home observance in their childhood years. Even for day school alumni, who they marry also dramatically influences their chances of raising their children as Jews. If they marry a non-Jew who does not convert, just 61% raise their children exclusively in Judaism, as compared with 99% of those who marry Jews. By similar logic, the measure of impact for intermediate groups (those raised by two Jewish parents, but with no day school in their youth) stands between these two figures.

THE IMPACT OF INTERMARRIAGE ON THE DECISION TO RAISE CHILDREN EXCLUSIVELY IN JUDAISM (for Jews from four types of parental homes)

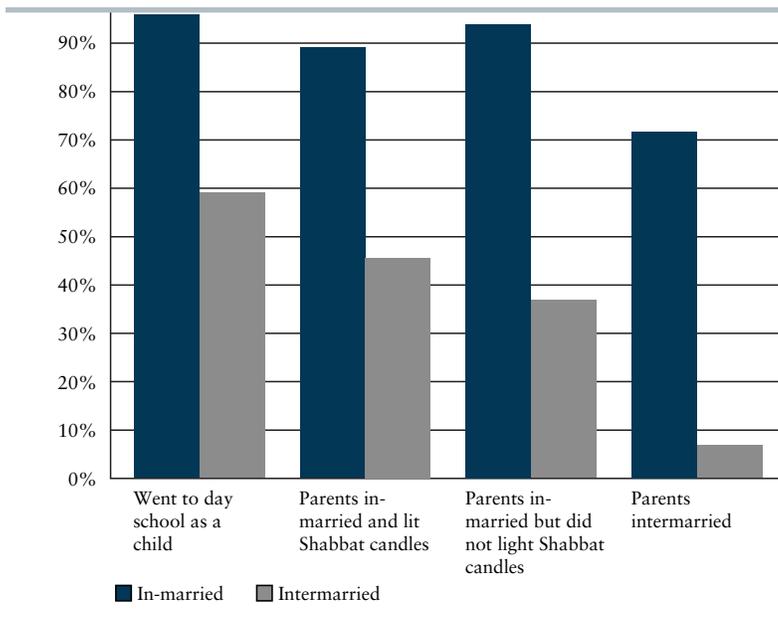


CHART 6. *The impact of in-marriage on the decision to raise children exclusively in Judaism, among Jews of four levels of Jewish education and socialization.*

The bottom line: Whether one comes from a strong Jewish parental and educational background or a weak Jewish parental and educa-

tional background, intermarriage makes a difference — a very large difference — in the likelihood of raising one’s children exclusively in Judaism. In fact, few inmarried Jewish couples decide otherwise. In contrast, the majority of intermarried couples choose to raise their children as other than “exclusively in Judaism.”

The decision to raise one’s child as Jewish in turn affects whether one joins a congregation, observes Jewish holidays, makes friends with other Jews, contributes to Jewish charities, and a host of other resultant behaviors and decisions. By affecting the religious upbringing of one’s child, intermarriage influences a wide variety of other Jewish choices.

In short, intermarriage independently depresses Jewish involvement. It both reflects weaker Jewish socialization in the past and promotes lower levels of Jewish engagement today.

BEYOND AFFILIATION

One important implication of these findings is that parents exert significant influence on the chances that their children will marry Jews. “Doing Jewish together” as a family, as symbolized by home ritual observance, attendance at synagogue as a child, providing many forms of Jewish education, and guiding one’s child to universities and other environments with numerically large concentrations of Jews, illustrates the options under parental control. The inmarried generally come to their adult Jewish lives today with greater Jewish cultural, spiritual, and social capital than do the intermarried. Those with more Jewish capital tend to marry Jews; while those with less Jewish capi-

tal tend to marry non-Jews. The aim, then, is to increase the cultural, spiritual and social capital of today’s Jewish children, so that they will marry Jews and raise their own Jewish children when they mature.

Concerns with the “assimilated” and the “unaffiliated” (overlapping, though not identical, groups) have led many policy-makers to focus on promoting increased affiliation with Jewish institutions. They seek to “reach the unaffiliated” and bring as many as possible from the unaffiliated to the affiliated side of the ledger.

This minimalist goal is, well, minimalist. It assumes that the affiliated are adequately engaged in Jewish life and that their children are unlikely to intermarry. In point of fact, the so-called affiliated span a wide range of engagement, activity, commitment, and learning levels. Even though as a group the chances that their children will marry non-Jews amounts to only one in four, the affiliated are far from “safe.” If the goal of policy-makers is to ensure a culturally vibrant Jewish community, the affiliated offer as many people at risk of raising children who may intermarry, and a greater accessibility to intervention as compared to those who are unaffiliated (Wertheimer et al., 1996).

JEWISH EDUCATION WORKS

The results are in: Jewish education works. Studies of specific experiences (e.g., camps, or day schools, or Israel experiences) as well as studies of combinations of experiences document the impact of Jewish education in almost all its varieties (Bock, 1976; Cohen,

1974, 1988, 1995, 2000; Cohen and Kotler-Berkowitz, 2004; Dashefsky, 1992; Dashefsky and Lebson, 2002; Fishman, 1987; Fishman and Goldstein, 1993; Himmelfarb, 1974, 1979; Grant et al., 2004; Rimor and Katz, 1990; Sales and Saxe, 2003). The same may be said for studies of short-term impact, as measured by subjective assertions of change, as well as studies of impact over time, stretching from education in childhood to engagement in Jewish life in adulthood 20, 30, 40, or even more years later. Evidence of impact ranges over a wide variety of outcomes, embracing ritual observance, communal affiliation, beliefs and attitudes, social networks, and, of course, intermarriage — the most important single predictor of all other forms of adult Jewish engagement.

Using data sets collected in different places at different points in time with different sampling techniques, numerous studies arrive at quite similar conclusions. They all control for the correlative impact of Jewish upbringing and parental Jewish engagement, taking into account observance, the Jewishness of one’s childhood friendship circles, and in-marriage/mixed marriage of one’s parents. And they all find that almost all forms of Jewish education diminish the frequency of intermarriage and elevate adult Jewish engagement, albeit with significant variations in magnitude of impact, with day schools uniformly leading the list.

ONE IMPORTANT

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Most recently, in a study of Jews born in America after 1945, a sub-set extracted from the 2000-01 NJPS, I estimated (Cohen, forthcoming) the impact of several Jewish educational experiences in childhood upon the chances of intermarriage some 20 to 40 years hence (see table, page 15). This study estimated that net of all other forms of Jewish education and of parental observance, day

school attendance reduces intermarriage by 14 percentage points.

The impact of attendance at supplementary school more than once a week is 2 points if continued for more than 6 years; each informal education experience (camping, youth groups, or Israel

travel in one's youth) reduces intermarriage by 4 percentage points. All of these estimates refer to cumulative impact; the more Jewish educational experiences, the lower one's chances of intermarriage. For example, someone who went to a supplementary school that met twice a week into adolescence, went to Israel, and attended a Jewish camp can be compared with someone with the same background with no such experiences. The chances that the former would marry a Jewish spouse would increase by 14 percentage points (comparable to reducing the intermarriage rate from 47% to 33%).

Only one form of Jewish education actually generates *more* intermarriage: Sunday school (or, in general, one-day-a-week supplementary school, generally associated with Reform congregations). All other things being equal,

those who report going to a Jewish school only once a week (e.g., "Sunday School") for 1-6 years experienced an *increased* likelihood of marrying non-Jews by 8 percentage points, as contrasted with those who never went to a Jewish school.

One might attribute the effect to bad teaching or bad curriculum. But, the differences in the impact on intermarriage between one-day-a-week and two/three-day-a-week supplementary school in quality of instruction are too large to be explained by the small (if any) differences in instructional quality and curriculum. Pedagogic differences alone simply cannot be at the root of Sunday school's counter-intuitive and counter-productive results. Rather, we need to look not at the experience of Sunday school per se, but at its students, or more appropriately, their families. Those who attend Sunday schools come disproportionately from intermarried homes. Sunday schools may act as a sorting-out device, serving to concentrate those with relatively weaker Jewish cultural capital and reinforcing openness to intermarriage rather than opposing it.

Jewish educational experiences operate on several levels. They certainly convey knowledge, by providing instruction in the beliefs, tenets, history, and practice of Judaism. They also affect attitudes, reinforce commitment, and highlight the saliency of being Jewish; and they socialize Jews into a world of practice, of "doing Jewish." One key mechanism through which Jewish educational experiences operate is in the formation and strengthening of Jewish social networks, which provide

WHEN THE BORN

JEWISH partner comes to the marriage with a stronger Jewish education and parental observance, non-Jewish fiancés and spouses are more likely to convert to Judaism.

THE NET IMPACT OF JEWISH SCHOOLING ALTERNATIVES AND OF INFORMAL TEEN JEWISH EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES* UPON MEASURES OF ADULT JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

Controlling for: sex, age, region, denomination raised, presence of Christmas tree, Sabbath observance in the home, and number of Jewish friends in high school

(Sub-sample: Adults, now 18-54, US-born, raised Jewish, but not raised Orthodox)

Entries represent the gap (in points on a 0-100 scale) between those receiving the respective form of Jewish education and those receiving none (either no Jewish school or no informal Jewish education), adjusting for statistical controls above.

| OUTCOME: | IN-MARRIAGE | OBSERVANCE* | AFFILIATED* | BELONGING* |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Day school | +14 | +12 | +11 | +12 |
| 2+ X week school, 7+ years | +2 | +4 | +13 | +7 |
| 2+ X week school, 1-6 years | -1 | +3 | +10 | +0 |
| Sunday school, 7+ years | -8 | +4 | +3 | +2 |
| Sunday school, 1-6 years | -9 | +3 | +4 | +5 |
| NUMBER OF TEEN EXPERIENCES* | | | | |
| 3 (camp, youth group, Israel) | +12 | +16 | +21 | +29 |
| 2 | +7 | +11 | +19 | +13 |
| 1 | +3 | +6 | +10 | +10 |

****Key — Observance:** composite of seder, lighting Hanukkah candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, keeping kosher in some way at home, and usually lighting Shabbat candles. **Affiliated:** membership in synagogue, JCC, and/or another Jewish organization. **Belonging:** 4 items on feeling very positive about being Jewish, having a clear sense of what it means to be a Jew, belonging to the Jewish people, and being Jewish very important. Total **number of informal Jewish educational experiences** consists of: overnight Jewish camp, Jewish youth group, and visiting Israel.

Data Source: NJPS, 2000-01.

Analysis forthcoming in Steven M. Cohen, "Jewish Education and Its Differential Impact on Adult Jewish Identity," in Jack Wertheimer (ed.), *Family Matters: Jewish Education in an Age of Choice*, University Press of New England.

young Jews with ties and friendships to other Jews. In turn, this process reinforces Jewish norms shared by their families and, in time, elevates the chances for in-marriage, as well as for eventual contact, recruitment, and affiliation with Jewish institutions.

Undoubtedly, greater participation in such experiences can only serve to lower the inter-

marriage rate, especially when such experiences are intensive, numerous, and enduring. Moreover, education (and strong Jewish upbringing) exerts salutary effects even in the event of inter-marriage. When the born Jewish partner comes to the marriage with a stronger Jewish education and parental observance, non-Jewish fiancés and spouses are more likely to convert to Judaism. Should conver-

sion not take place, the chances that children will be raised exclusively as Jews are higher in marriages where the Jewish spouses have undergone more extensive and intensive

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Jewish educational experiences. In other words, even in the event of initial inter-marriage, accumulated Jewish education serves to further chances of Jewish continuity, either by increasing the likelihood of conversion (making the inter-marriage an in-mar-

riage) or by increasing the likelihood that the mixed married couple will raise its children exclusively in Judaism.

PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION: LINK EXPERIENCES

Clearly, the Jewish community has a strong interest in promoting Jewish education. The question is how to do that. In recent years, organized Jewry has indeed expanded participation in most major forms of Jewish education, including Jewish pre-schools, day schools, Israel travel, Jewish studies courses, and adult Jewish education.

Advocates for Jewish education have increased capacity (more schools, more camp beds), lowered costs (vouchers, free trips to Israel), enlarged personnel training programs, supported teacher salaries and benefits, developed better marketing, and strengthened boards. One approach yet to receive much attention is that which focuses on improving

the linkages among various educational experiences — that is, expanding the flow of students between and among different venues for Jewish education (Wertheimer, 2006, forthcoming). This policy seeks to expand recruitment by turning to the most likely candidates for *more* Jewish education — those who already experience *some* education.

Participants in one form of education are likely to participate in simultaneous or succeeding forms. Those who attend pre-schools are far more likely than others to move on to day schools, and eventually Jewish camping, youth groups, and Israel experiences. Day school students disproportionately participate in the informal Jewish teen experiences, just as campers and youth group members overlap, and both are likely sources of participants in high school trips to Israel. Many youngsters certainly move from one experience to another, but the rate at which they do so is far from universal and leaves much room for further expansion.

Unfortunately, most professional directors of pre-schools, day schools, camps, and youth groups seem to make little effort to recruit on behalf of other educational experiences that may coincide with, or follow upon, their own. Much more can be done to mobilize, motivate, and incentivize the directors of the respective educational agencies to encourage their students and participants to consider other forms of Jewish education. Of all the as yet untried techniques for increasing enrollments in day schools, camps, youth groups, and Israel experience programs, this route may be the most effective.

PROMOTE ASSOCIATION: CULTURAL LIFE & SOCIAL SERVICE FOR YOUNGER ADULTS

The role of Jewish education in promoting in-marriage is fairly well-recognized in Jewish communal circles. In contrast, the equally powerful (if not more powerful) influence upon intermarriage of proximity to other Jews, Jewish residential density, and association (informal ties among Jews — friends, neighbors, co-workers, and the like) has received far less recognition than this domain deserves. Who one happens to meet or know has as much to do with the chances of marrying a Jew as does one’s Jewish commitment and education. Jews living in areas of high density (with lots of Jews relative to the surrounding population) are more likely to marry Jews. Thus, Jews in Nassau County (for example) report lower intermarriage rates than those in Suffolk, while Jews in Philadelphia report lower rates than those in, say, Denver. Also linked to more in-marriage is having had more Jewish friends in high school and college, which is a corollary of living in areas with high Jewish residential density. Zip code may in fact be more predictive of in-marriage than Jewish education in that people still date and marry those they live near.

The performance of any intentional behavior requires both motive and opportunity. Jewish education and a strong Jewish home life provide the *motivation* for marrying a Jew. But, the presence of friends, social networks, and a large local Jewish population provide the *opportunity* to act upon that motivation. In the absence of an explicit and conscious motivation to marry someone Jewish, the mere pres-

ence of numerous potential Jewish marriage partners may result in what may be called “inadvertent in-marriage.”

Alongside efforts to increase educational participation as a way of promoting in-marriage (and, of course, for other good reasons as well), the Jewish community also has an interest in promoting informal Jewish association (Jews acquainted with other Jews), social networks, and residential density among non-married Jewish younger adults. Policies and programs that manage to bring Jews into contact with one another foster in-marriage (and counter intermarriage). Encouraging Jewish young adults to live in Jewishly-dense neighborhoods, attend universities with large Jewish populations, go to concerts with large numbers of Jews in the audience, and participate in any form of Jewish communal or educational activity all contribute to Jewish association and social networks. Moreover, Jewishly “meaningful” activity, where Jews come together and engage in behavior that has sacred or historic significance, is obviously preferable; but even association without explicit Jewish intentionality operates to promote in-group friendship and, ultimately, in-marriage.

In major metropolitan areas, Jewish cultural events — such as film festivals and concerts — create venues where Jews congregate, meet friends and familiar faces, and reinforce the social networks that tie them together. As a

WHO ONE HAPPENS *to meet or know has as much to do with the chances of marrying a Jew as does one’s Jewish commitment and education.*

result, they acquire a sense of location within a predominantly local Jewish social life that inevitably serves as sources of referral for dating. Recent interviews with young adults suggest that many prefer to "do Jewish" in non-Jewish and partially Jewish spaces (Cohen and Kelman, 2006). In previous generations, Jews in the company of non-Jews tended to mute their obvious ethnic traits and expressions.

MANY WANT JEWISH

events where they can, at least theoretically, meet and bring their non-Jewish friends, making the objective of providing Jewish social networks that much more challenging and complex.

This younger generation is saying that the presence of non-Jews provides an occasion to express and display their Jewishness. Many want Jewish events where they can, at least theoretically, meet and bring their non-Jewish

friends, making the objective of providing Jewish social networks that much more challenging and complex.

With this said, opportunities for undertaking social justice, community service and other forms of activism still reinforce Jewish social networks among young adults, and they provided, as well, a measure of informal Jewish education. Notable is the recent prominence of the American Jewish World Service, the Progressive Jewish Alliance, the Jewish Funds for Justice, Avodah, the Religious Action Center, spark, and other national examples of innovative service opportunities. While no systematic empirical studies have yet documented the impact of volunteer service engagement upon Jewish commitment and Jewish social networks, the available evidence strongly suggests the efficacy of such efforts. Well-accepted

educational theory argues that the combination of action, study, and association works to leave a lasting impact upon the student or participant (Putnam, 2000).

PROMOTE CONVERSION WITH COMMUNITY RABBIS

Within five years of their marriage, some 15% of non-Jews who marry Jews convert to Judaism (or switch their identities without the benefit of a formal conversion) thereby changing inter-marriages into "conversionary marriages." These conversionary marriages (i.e., in-married couples entailing a born Jew and a convert to Judaism) report rates of Jewish involvement that approach those of in-marriage between born-Jews (Cohen 2005; Medding et al., 1992). Moreover, the Jewish engagement levels for both types of in-marriage vastly exceed those associated with inter-marriages, increasing the likelihood that the children will become Jewishly engaged as adults.

Some speculate that the Reform movement's acceptance of patrilineal descent in 1983 (accepting as Jewish the Jewish-raised child of either a Jewish father or mother) may have diminished the frequency of conversion. In point of fact, no statistical evidence supports such speculation. The long-term decline in conversion rates, lasting over half a century, is smooth and steady with no particular drop following the 1983 decision. In the few cases where out-marriage occurred in the 1950s, over two-fifths became in-marriages through conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. From 1965 to 1974, the conversion rate hovered at just over one-third. From 1975 to 1995, it slid to just over a quarter, with no particular

decline after 1983 or so. As noted, for marriages conducted in 1995-2001, the rate stands at 15%, but we must recall that at the time these were new marriages with few children as of yet (the survey was conducted in 2000/01). It stands to reason that more conversions among the recently married will accumulate with the passage of time.

Some argued that by dropping the requirement that a child's mother be Jewish for the child to be seen as Jewish, the Reform movement vitiated one incentive for non-Jewish wives of Jewish husbands to convert. But, it seems that the decision had little impact on the conversion rate, revealing something about the motivations of converts.

Apparently, assuring the acceptance of their children as Jews in the eyes of the rabbis was not a major motivation for conversion on the part of non-Jewish spouses (who are most often women). Rather, as Fishman (2006) demonstrates, those who converted in the past, as in the present, did so in part out of genuine religious conviction, in part out of concerns for providing a religiously harmonious household and out of a willingness to accommodate the preferences of their Jewish spouses (who are most often men). None of these motivations is directly affected by the patrilineal decision.

Some have speculated that rabbis officiating at wedding ceremonies of Jews with non-Jews are in a position to induce a closer connection to Judaism on the part of the intermarried couple. The limited available evidence suggests that involvement of a rabbi in the wedding ceremony of an intermarrying cou-

THE LONG-TERM SLIDE IN RATES OF CONVERSION (percent of born non-Jewish spouses who converted or switched to Judaism by 2001, by year of marriage)

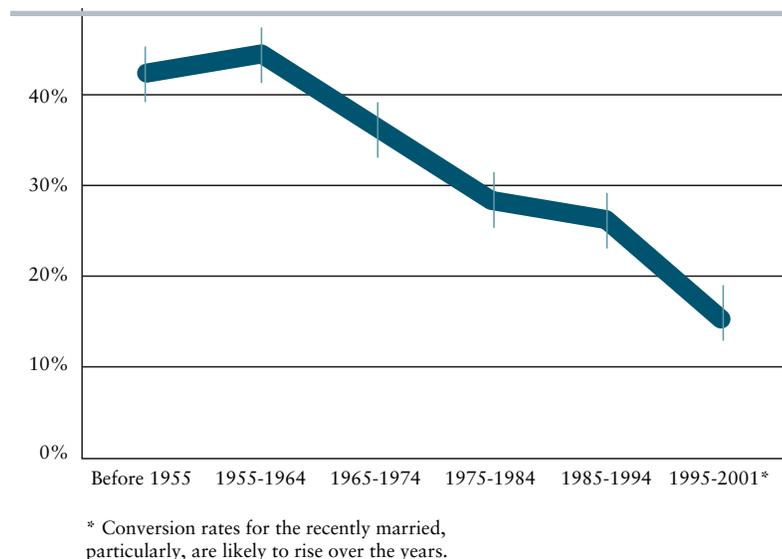


CHART 7. *The long-term slide in rates of conversion among born non-Jews married to Jews, 1950—2001.*

ple exerts absolutely no impact upon their future engagement in Jewish life (Mayer, 1989). Sylvia Barrack Fishman's recently published qualitative analysis (2006) suggests that the rabbi of the congregation to whom couples turn when seeking religious education for their children may well be positioned to influence their engagement in Jewish life. Some evidence suggests that public ceremonies marking conversion, such as recognition by a congregation, serve to encourage further conversions.

Rabbis report that they devote considerable time to interviewing, counseling, and teaching those interested in conversion and that a good number of such individuals (perhaps half) are not members of their congregations. If an under-served market of potential converts finds congregational rabbis unavailable or inaccessi-

ble, then we certainly need community-sponsored rabbis who specialize in counseling potential converts. These rabbis would not be needed so much to engage in teaching classes, as this function is fairly well covered at present. Rather, they are needed to serve as gateways and counselors to conversion.

Presumably, these positions would be staffed by young rabbis, possibly working part time (evenings and Sundays are times of peak demand for meeting with prospective con-

verts) and, thus, entailing fairly limited costs. To save overhead expenses, they could be based in congregations where they would provide opportunities for potential converts to experience and be welcomed into functioning Jewish communities.

Experimenting with this model in a few cities will allow us to test the assumption of pre-existing demand for conversion services, as well as the "unit-costs" for facilitating conversion to Judaism. A philanthropically funded rabbinic conversion corps would send a message that the Jewish community encourages and welcomes conversion, contrary to widely held perceptions of rejection or ambivalence, at best.

A PHILANTHROPICALLY

funded rabbinic conversion corps would send a message that the Jewish community encourages and welcomes conversion, contrary to widely held perceptions of rejection or ambivalence, at best.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

About half of all American Jews 22-39 years old are unmarried. Synagogues, JCCs and Jewish organizational life generally exert little appeal for them, leaving a majority of this

demographic segment institutionally unaffiliated. But their lack of affiliation should not be taken as a lack of engagement with being Jewish. After all, if past behavior is any guide, the vast majority (over 90%) will marry; about half of those who marry will marry Jews; and, of these in-married, over 80% will at some point affiliate with a Jewish institution. Of the half who will marry non-Jews, most will report feeling positively about being Jewish (Beck, 2005), although the evidence regarding how they raise their children shows that positive feelings for being Jewish do not generally translate into effective behavior that sustains Jewish continuity. At the same time, notwithstanding the major differences between in-married and intermarried, we should not be led to believe that the in-married's Jewish future is assured.

For the non-married, synagogues, JCCs and organizational life are not particularly effective in bringing these Jews together. Thus, cultural events and social service opportunities may offer the best alternatives for performing that function. Of course, one can (and should) make other arguments on behalf of a culturally rich and socially engaged Jewish community; but the social networking function alone would seem to justify these endeavors as worthy of Jewish communal and philanthropic support.

No single program or social policy offers the possibility of sweeping and immediate change in outcomes. No magic bullet will guarantee a culturally vital Jewish community in America that will engage the vast majority of Jews. Rather, the cumulative and interactive effect of

the multiplicity of instruments of Jewish education and socialization can have a profound impact on American Jews as a whole, as they do now for only select numbers of American Jews. To take one example, the combined net impact of day school, youth group, Jewish camp, and Israel experience upon intermarriage amounts to approximately 30 percentage points, enough to more than halve the intermarriage rate, if only more Jews were to avail themselves of these experiences combined. Beyond these educational experiences in childhood and adolescence, we also have such options as campus Hillels, Jewish Studies classes, social justice activities, cultural events, and other policies that will likely foster Jewish association and residential density and help to provide the rationale for “Why be Jewish?”.

Some have asked, “If Jewish education is so good, then why are things so bad?” We have two answers. First, things are not so bad. We must recall the numerous points of strength of American Jewry: affluence, political influence, scholarly productivity, cultural innovation, religious ferment, increasing use of Jewish educational options, and persisting residential concentration, to say nothing of an impressive philanthropic commitment, albeit one shifting away from historic patterns and institutions. The shortcomings of Jewish education (and presumably of synagogue life, Israel travel, cultural events, and social activism) rest not so much with an inability to influence participants as to attract partici-

pants. While educational, cultural, religious, and volunteer experiences can always be improved (and should be improved), the true challenge to policy-makers is in the area of recruitment: How do we encourage more Jews to make use of day schools, youth groups, Israel travel, Jewish camps, Hillels, Jewish Studies classes, volunteer opportunities, cultural events, and inspired congregational life?

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But given the sharp differences in the origins, conditions and futures of the in-married and intermarried populations, policy makers will need to begin thinking differently about how to address these two population segments. The in-married are generally affiliated and sometimes highly affiliated. For them, many untapped opportunities exist to enlarge participation in Jewish educational activities, be they formal or informal, focused on texts, cultural engagement, social justice activities, or spiritual experiences. For the intermarried, outreach efforts may improve engagement of the current generation; but only conversion substantially improves the chances that today’s intermarried couples will have Jewish grandchildren in two generations.

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