

THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL JEWISH POPULATION STUDY,
A NOTE ON CONCEPT AND REALITY

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When, some years ago, he published an article with the tantalizing title "Is the Scientific Paper Fraudulent?", P.W. Medawar⁽¹⁾ posed a question which surely is more than rhetoric. Medawar answers his own query with a resounding "yes", arguing persuasively, that as it appears in the scientific journals, the report on scientific discovery often distorts reality. He notes that:

'The scientific paper is a fraud in the sense that it does give a totally misleading narrative of the processes of thought that go into the making of scientific discoveries.' (p. 43)

While his criticism is directed against an old-world preference for reporting research as though it were the outcome of a purely inductive process, the charge of fraud holds equally for the report of the typical hypothetico-deductive study, and for the conventional 'survey'. It is the sad truth that scientific inquiry in real life follows neither the classic inductive nor the equally-classic hypothetico-deductive ideal. The practicing scientist winds his way, sometimes gingerly, on rare occasion with facility and more often agonizingly, among a multitude of cliffs and shoals of realistic constraint - all complications in the search for knowledge,

brought about by - well - simply by 'the way things are'... human frailty and social complexity included.

The U.S. National Jewish Population Study (NJPS), sponsored by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, by no means succeeded in conforming either to a presumably-prescribed neat model of induction or deduction, nor did it follow completely some 1-2-3 textbook sequence of fully-programmed successive survey design events. While it would be tempting to report its findings as outcomes of an elegantly reconstructed design, deviating in but minor respects from an initial vision, the need to be scientifically candid suggests another tack. It may be useful instead to contrast the Study's early concepts and later real-life circumstance, with a view to establishing an appropriate context for assessment of the Study's quantitative and qualitative findings.

The Technical Context

From the very beginning, it was clear that, in development of the National sample design, the NJPS was committed to seeking the most representative cross-section of the U.S. Jewish population possible. Neither Jewish community "master lists" nor any other artifactual array of names (e.g. addresses of Jewish households sold by commercial mailing list organizations) could constitute an adequate sample frame. But how to develop an appropriate "representative sample" of the American Jew? To answer this question, ideal and reality necessarily parted ways.

The Sampling Stratification Dilemma

An early idea, discussed but never going beyond the Study's "drawing-board" conceived of a straightforward multi-stage area probability sample, without recourse to Jewish community master lists. However appealing this procedure might have been on pure conceptual grounds, it clearly does not pass the tests of practicality and economy by failing to utilize the numerically substantial (though, of course, far from "representative") community lists. As an alternative, a sampling design was proposed that would draw, in appropriate but complex fashion, household samples both from lists (to be known as 'list samples') and samples selected on a stratified basis, by geography⁽²⁾.

Either way, whether it had been a matter of "ideal" area probability based sampling, or whether, as it turned out, a "mixed" procedure of list sampling combined with stratified area probability sampling were to be used, it was necessary to devise an appropriate solid basis for stratification⁽³⁾.

One level of stratification provided no serious obstacles; it was possible to divide the U.S. into major strata, differentiating communities at a gross level by approximate size of their total Jewish populations⁽⁴⁾.

This step yielded 39 strata and corresponding Primary Sampling Units in virtually all parts of the country. However, significant problems began to emerge when it became necessary to address the issue of 'secondary' stratification, i.e. stratification within communities.

Initially, it was hoped that a clearcut and relatively simple procedure to this end might be evolved. Four possibilities, three convenient ones (though of varied efficacy), and a fourth more laborious one, were considered.

The first alternative would have involved the utilization of 1970 U.S. Census Data on ethnic background (viz. stock, country of origin, nativity, etc.), selecting Russian, Polish, German, Austrian, Lithuanian, and kindred origins as indexes of Jewish household distribution. There are, of course, conceptual difficulties with this procedure, at any rate, - what about non-Jewish Russian or Gentile German stock for example? - But the bridge of this method's careful assessment never needed to be crossed. The Study's timing was such that 1970 Census data for sufficiently small geographic areas, such as census tracts, were not available anyway. And, in view of the internal shifting of Jewish populations, use of 1960 Census data would have been of doubtful merit.

As a second alternative, the possibility was considered of making use of commercial lists of presumably-Jewish households, again simply as a rough index. These lists, often constructed rather unsystematically and indeed, with possible biases toward higher-income areas, proved to be prohibitively expensive and otherwise impractical as extended negotiations with the mailing list firm demonstrated. And again, these lists probably would have been least adequate in areas not readily identifiable as "Jewish" -precisely those areas in which some distinctions in projected Jewish household

density was particularly important. (Similarly, while cost would have been a lesser factor, Jewish community fund-raising lists were not chosen as a stratification basis, because of their probable economic and geographic biases).

A third alternative, while perhaps the least costly, also would have been inadequate. This would have involved a simple identification of Jewish versus non-Jewish areas by knowledgeable observers, such as Jewish Federation Executives, fundraisers and other communal workers. While of manifest value and in some cities based on substantially complete lists, such simple identification did not seem sufficient. The Study needed to be certain to include, as possible, a cross-section of all Jewish households, those inactive and those residing in not-typically Jewish areas, as well as those living in more readily identifiable locations.

Finally, it was the fourth, and technically painstaking, alternative that was to be chosen. While not without shortcomings, this alternative at least had the advantage of being rigorous and concrete, covering adequately the entire relevant geographic spectrum. This procedure made use of the "Distinctive Jewish Names"/Ratio method^(5,6).

By this means, - tedious in implementation but capable of pinpointing with some sharpness the pattern of projected Jewish household concentration, - the task of secondary stratification proceeded. Hundreds of telephone directories were scanned and detailed analyses prepared. Census data were not available; it was necessary supplementally to acquire (from a commercial mailing

firm other than the one alluded to earlier) a data print-out showing estimated total household numbers by telephone zip code areas. This information was needed, of course, to establish a density ratio, i.e. the proportion of Jewish households per one-hundred total households, - the datum needed as basis for stratification, making it possible to choose densely-Jewish zip codes for one kind of sample treatment (more chance for Jewish interviews!) and less densely-Jewish zip codes for another.

It was the personal interview, of course, that ultimately provided the Study's data. The average interview length was about one-and-one-half hours. Detailed manuals were prepared to guide interviewing. All interviewers were carefully trained. Interview content and primary sampling units are topically noted in appendices.

Had the Study been willing to delay its start for two years, certain U.S. Census data, as noted, would have been of some help, and might have saved time and expense. However, as a negative trade-off, comparability in data collection with the 1970 Census would have been lost; interviewing might have had to wait until 1973 at the earliest.

By way of positive outcome, in the total design context, the use of the "Distinctive Jewish Names"/ratio method itself helps to unfold a rather meaningful picture of geographic distribution of Jewish households within the chosen communities, - a picture more distinct and potentially useful to Jewish community planning than had been previously available. This holds, not so much in differentiating the obvious, very high Jewish

concentrations from the very low, but rather by pointing to often-overlooked distinctions in the middle-range of concentration.

A further comment on the relationship between the U.S. Census and the study of Jewish populations: in the mid-sixties, the U.S. Census reopened the issue of the possible inclusion of a "religion"-question in the 1970 count. As is generally known, the concept of separation of church and state, specified in the U.S. Constitution, had been interpreted to prohibit the inclusion of a question of this kind in the decennial census. (A religion-question had been asked in a special sample survey, conducted in 1957.) Following a lengthy period of deliberations, - surfacing differences of view within the Jewish community itself on the desirability of such inclusion, - and presumably in large measure in response to the opposition of important Jewish and other organizations, - no religion question was included in the 1970 U.S. Census. At this writing (1973) the issue has not yet been raised with reference to the 1980 U.S. Census, but perhaps the time is near when the battle call may go out again, posing once more a possible confrontation between the doctrine of separation of church and state strictly interpreted, and a more liberal view of this doctrine, permitting - with appropriate protection of personal rights - the inclusion of questions that might provide a direct empirical basis for identification of the U.S. Jewish population.

The Sample Size Controversy

"How big should the sample be?". Beyond strict statistical considerations, indicating optimum-feasible sample size to provide data accurate within acceptable error margins, there hovers behind this inquiry a kind of meta-issue: "should the Study probe deeply or broadly? Should its focus be primarily demographic or pervasively humanistic?" And beyond this, there remains that severe resource-allocation issue: "how much can a Study afford to pay for some specified body of information?"

At an early stage, following preparation of a series of five planning memoranda prepared by Gad Nathan, Jerusalem, a sample size of 25,000 was widely discussed and proposed in a memorandum entitled "Toward a National Study of Jewish Population: A Proposal"⁽⁷⁾.

At the time, while topics to be included had been specified, no pretest of interview length had been conducted, nor had there been occasion to face certain problems of response rate and other field experiences to be encountered later.

Subsequent calculations and pretest experiences suggested a target sample size of around 10,000 to 12,000 cases. While these still large sample sizes were discussed, some colleagues opted strongly for highly conservative numbers, proposing samples in the vicinity of 3,000 cases. These colleagues argued that many national polling organizations make use of samples of that order of magnitude or smaller, (1500 cases, for instance) quite adequate results for the entire U.S. population of some 200 million, together with major geographic breakdowns.

Further, they suggested that, if a sub-sample of 3,000 cases were to be completed successfully and within budget, it could be followed by a second similar sample of approximately equal size, and so on until the largest feasible sample size may have been reached. This sequential procedure, while intellectually appealing, had the disadvantage of further extending the Study timetable and of requiring repeated tooling-up and winding-down of field operations in particular localities.

Ultimately - but perhaps not surprisingly the confluence of at least three major forces (beyond theoretical considerations, such as expected variances) came upon the scene:

(a) to reflect the quality, as well as the quantity, of key aspects in Jewish life, the interview schedule needed to be longer and more complex than initially projected. (The average interview length proved to be one and one-half hours, following initial pretest experience of an average duration of one to one-and-one quarter hours.);

(b) it proved more difficult - and thus more time consuming and costly - to obtain desired response rates, at the 75-80% level; and

(c) inflation, from time of the preparation of initial budget estimates to the period of actual field-work, - especially in connection with service costs (such as interviewing), and production costs (such as printing), created pressing needs for economy.

The final number of completed Jewish household interviews was 7,512⁽⁸⁾, though near 10,000 Jewish

households (including non-interviews, viz. refusals etc.) were in fact contacted.

The final sample, by its multi-stage design, reached these respondents in the largest and medium-size communities as well as in small towns and in rural hamlets. And, while typical community studies, upon which much knowledge about the U.S. Jewish population had been built, included but hundreds of interviews and these frequently irregularly spaced in place and time, the NJPS provides the most massive data base yet made available within a specified time period, closely comparable to a censal year, and for the entire U.S.A.

The Response Rate Reality

The NJPS set upon its task guided by a high level of aspiration concerning response rates. While detailed specifications were prepared in this respect, for brevity's sake we may note that an 80% response rate was regarded as an appropriate target, with some dips into the mid-to-high-seventies regarded as occasionally tolerable, and with more optimistic desires reaching toward rates in the upper-eighties. For the most part, though there were some urban weak spots, the targets were attained.

Perhaps the most serious problem concerning response rates (again translatable into cost considerations) occurred in the large urban centers. Particularly in the remaining dense concentration of Jewish households in Big Cities, the NJPS encountered substantial resistances to admitting strangers into homes for

interviews. Anxiety concerning urban crime, particularly burglary and assault, spawned a climate of distrust in which many potential respondents - at least on first contact- preferred to remain non-respondents. This condition proved particularly acute for the aged, though its impact was felt across the board.

A related symptom, reflecting this anxiety in more permanent form, is the "security apartment house"; here the front entrance is locked and watched by a doorman, or is opened from the respective apartments, by buzzer.

These reluctances to be interviewed compounded also by a renewed emphasis on privacy and by suspicions understandably aroused by phony "interviewers" who turn out to be hard-sell door-to-door salesmen, made it necessary to expend considerable time and effort in re-contacting households in which the initial encounter proved abortive. Thus, the NJPS required substantial numbers of "callbacks" to reach its desired response rate goals⁽⁹⁾.

The Social Context

Increasingly, responsible investigators in the social sciences have noted that the exercise of their profession is no abstract ideal-platonic procedure, but an intensely human process, unfolding in the science's unique sub-culture⁽¹⁰⁾.

A Demography/Social Psychology Schism?

An aspect affecting, covertly and overtly, the dialogue on sample size and other issues were the scientific preferences of demographer-statistician-census-oriented colleagues on one hand, and those of socio-psychological-survey research-oriented colleagues on the other. As to desirable design strategy, the former tended to opt for large sample size and a relatively brief question list (given financial constraints), while the latter tended to prefer much smaller sample size and more detailed inquiries on qualitative topics such as Jewish identity.

While, of course, a succession of meetings, held periodically over many years, provided a basis for agreement on study objectives, such meetings did not provide sufficient opportunity for deep probing of value systems which tended to predispose toward different methodological preferences. Ultimately, including helpful involvement by colleagues at the Institute for Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and by the Study sponsor's executive staff, a modus operandi was evolved that facilitated constructive synthesis of viewpoints in study design.

Epilogue: The End as Beginning

Analysis is now in an early stage. Three work papers, on demographic characteristics, social services and intermarriage, have been prepared; these, revised, will appear as initial NJPS Technical Reports. A substantial additional publication program is contemplated.

But, whatever the written word to date, the Study's significant beginning is the present. While a truly mountainous amount of detail - from basic design to stratification to fieldwork to coding to keypunching to computer tape preparation is complete - people were, and are the Study's ultimate measure. As a data source (tapes created by more than one-quarter of a million cards as input), the Study owes its debt of gratitude to the thousands interviewed and to those associated with the sponsorship and conduct. Now, the scholar as well as the community leader are in a position to open a new era in the study of American Jewry. It is a matter of formulating the crucial issues sharply: what do we really want to know? what are the key concerns to be addressed to give new vitality to Jewish life? The real excitement is just ahead, and with the data resources at hand, researcher and practitioner should be in strategic positions to play their parts in building a firmer factually-rooted foundation for Jewish survival and meaningful Jewish actualization in the U.S.

NOTES

- (1) P.W. Medawar "Is the Scientific Paper Fraudulent?", in The Experimental Method, (British Broadcasting Corp.), Saturday Review, August 1, 1964, pp. 42-43.
- (2) This paper is not intended, of course, to provide technical details of the NJPS sample plan. These are specified in series of Sampling Memoranda, prepared by Bernard Lazerwitz, Public Opinion Survey Unit, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, to be summarized in the NJPS Technical Report on Methodology.)
- (3) For the Reader unfamiliar with the concept of "stratified samples" or "stratification" it may be noted that these concepts basically are concerned with dividing any group of units (i.e. households) into various "layers" or "slices" which differ among themselves in some respect important to the Study plan. Thus, NJPS stratification attempts to distinguish "strata" or "layers" that differ significantly in the proportion to which Jewish households may be found within them. For instance, there are 'high density' strata involving those neighborhoods in which it is projected that a high proportion of Jewish households (number of Jewish households per one hundred households generally) may be residing. Alternatively, stratification may distinguish groups of those people with names that are rated as 'definitely' or 'probably' Jewish, as against those

who may be rated 'uncertain', or 'probably' or 'definitely not' Jewish.

- (4) American Jewish Yearbook estimates of Jewish population sufficed for this purpose, e.g. see this publication, 1970 (New York: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society of America), pp. 344-353.
- (5) The concept of this method is stated in S.C. Kohs and L. Blumenthal, Survey of Recreational and Cultural Needs of the Jewish Community, Los Angeles, National Jewish Welfare Board, 1942 (unpublished report), and Fred Massarik, "New Approaches to the Study of the American Jew, The Jewish Journal of Sociology, Volume XIII, No. 2, December 1966. Essentially, this method is based on the concept that a specific list of "Distinctive Jewish Names" (DJNs) (consisting of either 35 or 106 designated names) stands in a relatively consistent ratio to a hypothetical total list of Jewish names. With telephone ownership so widespread that there is little economic bias, (with the possible exception of unlisted phones in certain high income areas and occasional gaps in isolated transient areas), telephone directories provide a reasonably adequate, readily available base for the method's application.
- (6) The method takes account of a variety of procedural strictures. For instance, business addresses are eliminated; estimated correction factors are applied to compensate for absence of telephone listing, due to unlisted phones or transiency. The "multiplier"

of the ratio may be varied to reflect specific community conditions of higher or lower than average appearance of DJNs.

- (7) See NJPS proposal document, Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, New York, 1965.
- (8) This figure includes interviews in so-called "tie-in" communities which conducted local studies in conjunction with the nationwide study. In addition to this number there are, beyond the several thousand Jewish "refusals" and inconclusive contacts, many thousands of non-Jewish contacts in households necessarily included in the area probability sampling phase.
- (9) Following extensive trial runs, in the Study's latter stages, it was found that telephone interviewing proved to be an appropriate fieldwork procedure to raise response rate levels. Prof. Morris Axelrod was especially helpful in this Study phase.
- (10) This issue has been treated, for instance, by Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972; and Robert W. Friedrichs, *A Sociology of Sociology*, New York, Free Press, 1970.

APPENDIX A

U.S. National Jewish Population Study

Primary Sampling Administrative Units

Allentown, Pennsylvania
Atlanta, Georgia
Atlantic City, New Jersey
Utica, New York
Auburn, New York
Rome, New York
Baltimore, Maryland
Newark-Essex-Bergen, New Jersey (North New Jersey)
Boston, Massachusetts
Buffalo, New York
Providence, Rhode Island; Cape Cod, Mass.; Eastern Connecticut
Central New Jersey (Red Bank-Long Branch-Asbury Park)
Williamsburg, Virginia
Charleston, West Virginia
Chicago, Illinois
Cincinnati, Ohio
Cleveland, Ohio
Denver, Colorado
Detroit, Michigan
District of Columbia
Elmira, New York
Erie, Pennsylvania
Evansville, Indiana

Fort Wayne, Indiana
South Bend, Indiana
Knoxville, Tennessee
Greenville - Jackson - Vicksburg, Mississippi
Hartford, Connecticut
Houston, Texas
Tucson, Arizona
Las Vegas, Nevada
Central California
Los Angeles, California
San Gabriel, California
Louisville, Kentucky
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Miami, Florida
Minneapolis - St. Paul, Minnesota
Nashville, Tennessee
New York City and surrounding areas
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Poughkeepsie, New York
San Francisco-Oakland, California
Seattle, Washington
Tacoma, Washington
Stamford, Connecticut
St. Louis, Missouri
"No known Jews" counties

APPENDIX B

U.S. National Jewish Population Study Questionnaire Content

- SECTION S: Screening Section
Determines eligibility for interview
- SECTION A: Family Background
Age, sex, where born, etc.
- SECTION B: Religion
Branch of Judaism, activity in temple, etc.
- SECTION C: Jewish Education
What Jewish education received, quality, projected education for children under six.
- SECTION D: Organizations
Memberships in Jewish clubs, general clubs; how active, etc.
- *SECTION E: Marriage and Children
Marital status, number of children, etc.
- SECTION F: Mobility and Housing
Rent/own, type dwelling, value, previous address, future plans to move, etc.
- SECTION G: Community Involvement
Contributions to Jewish/general charities, etc.
- SECTION H: Education and Labor Force
Highest grade achieved, job last week, major occupation, industry, etc.
- SECTION I: Attitudes
re: Jewish life

MARRIAGE, BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS

*also Sections EA and EB for terminated marriages and additional children.