A Study of Jewish Denominational Preferences: Summary Findings

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IN THE UNITED STATES, perhaps more so than in any other society, the expression of a preference for a religious denomination is an individual, voluntary choice. Nobody is formally required to affiliate with a religious organization or even to identify with one of the many religious denominations in the United States. Thus, the decision to identify with a particular denomination or to join a religious organization can be seen as a significant personal decision expressing how one wishes to live in the world and how one stands on important existential questions. Consequently, as Jews have adapted to an open, pluralistic American society, denominationalism has become an integral aspect of American Jewish identification.

For Jews, the choices concerning denominational preference and synagogue membership express what it means to be a Jew in the United States. In particular, within the context of the voluntarism and individualism of the American way of life, the individual American Jew defines his or her religious preference in response to two related questions: (1) should one's Jewish identity be based on modern, Western models of acceptable identities, or should it be based on traditional Judaic models, such as those embodied in Jewish law (Halakhah) as set forth in traditional Jewish texts? and (2) should Jewish identity be essentially religious, based in the synagogue or temple, or should it be essentially ethnic, based in the history and traditions of the more or less autonomous, self-governing Jewish people, such as found in the shtetls of Eastern Europe or the modern state of Israel? In the United States, the choice of denomination largely entails deciding among three broadly defined branches of Judaism: Orthodoxy (including ultra-Orthodox and modern variants), the Conservative denomination, and the Reform movement.

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The basic difference among these variations is their stance vis-à-vis the competing claims of Halakhah and traditional Jewish texts, on the one hand, and the norms of Western, liberal society, on the other. The Orthodox tend to resolve issues that arise in the light of Halakhah and tradition. The Conservative movement tends to follow the practices and norms of American society when doing so can be justified by Halakhah and tradition, or at least be seen as consistent with it. The Reform movement gives precedence to the norms of liberal society and does not regard Halakhah as binding, although it does maintain allegiance to specifically Jewish theology and ethics.[1]

The findings of this study support the contention that the decision to affirm a denominational preference and/or to join a synagogue is associated with important aspects of one's Jewish life. Moreover, this association is above and beyond the influence of socioeconomic and demographic factors long thought by sociologists of religion to be determining factors of denominational preferences. Of course, in an open society, such as the United States, in which individuals freely choose their religious affiliations, boundaries within and between major faith groups are fluid and permeable. Thus, it is not uncommon for an individual Jew raised in one denomination to choose another as an adult or to marry somebody who is not Jewish.

Despite the fluidity and permeability of denominational boundaries, American Jews can be grouped into eight basic categories that represent the combinations of their decisions about religious preference and affiliation. Analysis of the 1971 National Jewish Population Survey[2] has shown that important insights into Jewish life in America can be gained from a study comparing and contrasting these basic categories. The eight categories result from the combination of the simple distinction between those who join a synagogue and those who do not and the fourfold distinction among denominational orientations: one category for each of the three major denominational preferences (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform) and a fourth for those with no denominational preference.

The eight resulting categories, and their percentages in the Jewish population in the United States,[3] are:

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[1]The small Reconstructionist movement and the even smaller Union for Traditional Judaism are spinoffs from Conservatism; the former does not regard Halakhah as binding; the latter is closer to Orthodoxy in its views.

[2]Bernard Lazerwitz, "An Approach to the Components and Consequences of Jewish Identification," *Contemporary Jewry* 4, 1978, pp. 3–8; Bernard Lazerwitz and Michael Harrison, "American Jewish Denominations: A Social and Religious Profile," *American Sociological Review* 44, 1979, pp. 656–66.

[3]These percentages may differ, due to rounding, from those cited later in the text.

1) those who express a preference for Orthodox Judaism and are synagogue members (5 percent);

2) those who express a preference for Orthodox Judaism, but who are not synagogue members (2 percent);

3) those who express a preference for Conservative Judaism and who are synagogue members (23 percent);

4) those who express a preference for Conservative Judaism, but who are not synagogue members (17 percent);

5) those who express a preference for Reform Judaism, and are members of synagogues (16 percent);

6) those who express a preference for Reform Judaism, but who are not synagogue members (22 percent);

7) those who, while they express no denominational preference, are, nevertheless, synagogue members (2 percent). Some of the members of this grouping may regard themselves as "just Jews," people who wish to affiliate with other Jews and join a synagogue because there is no other Jewish organization with which to affiliate in their Jewish community; and

8) those who express no denominational preference and who are not synagogue members (13 percent). This category or grouping may include those who regard themselves as "just Jews." They may be carryovers of the various secular Jewish movements: Jews who are indifferent to religion but who remain active in any of the wide variety of secular Jewish voluntary associations, such as the Federation movement or B'nai B'rith. The grouping may also include those who wish to have no Jewish religious or ethnic involvement.[4]

This paper presents selected summary findings from a much larger study analyzing responses to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey[5] and, where applicable, the 1971 National Jewish Population Survey as well. The authors identify and analyze the general social, economic, and demographic characteristics of individuals in the above categories. However, the primary focus is on how choice of denomination and synagogue affiliation relates to other aspects of Jewish behavior, what changes have occurred in the 20-year period between the two surveys, the extent to which individuals change denominational affiliation from childhood to adulthood, and the rate of intermarriage. The paper concludes

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[4]The number of interviews with respondents who consider themselves Orthodox, but are not synagogue members, and the number who have no denominational preference, but yet are synagogue members, are each too few for some sophisticated statistical analyses. Thus, results from such analyses are based on only the remaining six combinations of denominational preference and synagogue membership.

[5]See Barry Kosmin et al., *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey* (Council of Jewish Federations, New York, 1991).

with some thoughts about the future size and composition of each denomination.

The Two Surveys

The 1971 NJPS data were obtained from a combination of samples from local Jewish federation lists and an area cluster sample design for Jewish housing units not on federation lists. The 1990 NJPS sample was obtained by selecting residences from among all U.S. residential telephones by a process of Random Digit Dialing (RDD).[6]

The first requirement of any Jewish population survey is to decide whom to include as a Jew. The 1971 survey did not ask directly about religious preference, recognizing that Jews can regard themselves as Jewish by religion or as Jewish in an ethnic sense. It asked respondents, "Are you Jewish?" This direct question was qualified by responses to subsequent questions about whether a respondent was born Jewish, was currently Jewish, or had a father or mother who was born Jewish.

The 1990 survey determined who is a Jew by initially asking screening questions about religious preference. If the household respondent said "Jewish," the screening questions stopped and the household was deemed eligible for the survey. If the response was "not Jewish," further questions were asked about whether the person or anybody else in the household considered themselves Jewish, was raised Jewish, or had a Jewish parent. The 1990 survey was, then, designed to include respondents who are not currently Jewish but who have recent Jewish ancestry.

To insure comparability between the two surveys with regard to Jews who have no current religious preference, the approach of the first survey is followed. In the first survey, those respondents who were raised as Jews but said they had no religious preference at present were placed into a category called "no Jewish denominational preference." The same approach has been followed with those eligible for the 1990 survey who claimed no religious preference.[7]

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[6]The one-stage 1971 survey yielded 5,790 interviews at a 79-percent response rate. The 1990 process, using a screening interview, obtained a probability sample of households in which at least one resident was then Jewish or had a Jewish parent. The survey obtained 2,441 interviews through the use of a two-stage interviewing procedure which first screened all telephone sample respondents for eligibility and, some time later, recontacted them for the actual interview. The response rate for the initial screening interview was 63 percent; the initial response rate among those screened and actually interviewed in the second stage was 68 percent, for a two-stage, combined (.63 x .68) rate of 43 percent. After clarification of final eligibility, the final response rate is nearly 50 percent.

[7]To insure comparability between the 1971 and 1990 surveys, the handful of Reconstructionists were recoded as Conservative, the denomination in which their movement

Our analysis of Jewish denominational preferences excludes respondents who have converted from Judaism to another religion or who were never Jewish themselves, even if they had a Jewish parent. Such respondents were rare in the first survey. However, the 1990 survey includes 536 respondent households in which all the members consider themselves as Christian and as never having been Jewish even though one of them had a parent who was born Jewish. Since the individuals concerned are not considered Jewish by our definition, our analysis eliminates members of these 536 (22 percent) survey households and some 25 (1 percent) respondents who, while originally Jewish, had converted to another religion. Converts to Judaism, are, of course, counted as Jews. The effort to establish consistency in the definition of who is a Jew in our analyses of the two surveys results in our using only 1,905 of the original 2,441 interviews for 1990.

Denominational Preference and Synagogue Membership: General Characteristics

It is clear that having a denominational preference and belonging to a synagogue have become prevalent among Jews in the United States. More than 85 percent of all respondents in 1990 specify a denominational preference; 47 percent claim to be synagogue members currently; an additional 19 percent claim past synagogue membership. All told, nearly two-thirds (66 percent) of all respondents are now or have been synagogue members.

The major trend over the years with respect to Jewish denominational preferences has been the continual decline in the proportion of Orthodox among American Jewish adults, from 11 percent in 1971 to 6 percent in 1990 (see table 1). (Our data, as noted below in the discussion of denominational switching, do not support claims for a return to Orthodoxy.) During this same time period, those who prefer the Reform denomination grew from 33 percent to 39 percent. Preference for the Conservative denomination and the proportion of Jews without any denominational preference have remained nearly constant during this time span, around 40 percent and 14 percent, respectively, as has the proportion who are synagogue members. However, there has been an increase

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began. Respondents who said they were "traditional" or "traditionalist," an even smaller group than the Reconstructionists, were recoded as Orthodox. Respondents who indicated they were "just Jewish," "secular Jews," or in any case not Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist or traditionalists, were classified into a category of "no denominational preference."

in synagogue membership among the Orthodox and a decrease among the Reform (see table 2).

While the proportions of the American Jewish adult population in 1990 who prefer the Conservative or Reform denomination are just about equal, Conservative Jews are more likely to join synagogues. Those who prefer the Conservative denomination constitute 51 percent of synagogue members, while the Reform, only 35 percent. A solid majority of Orthodox and Conservative Jewish adults are synagogue members. Only a minority (43 percent) of Reform adherents are synagogue members. Thus, while Reform may be on its way to being the denomination preferred by a plurality of American Jewish adults, that preference is often not accompanied by actual membership in a synagogue or temple. As one would expect, only a small proportion of Jews without a denominational preference are synagogue members.

The Orthodox and Conservative denominations have more adherents who are 60 years old or older than do the other two categories (see table 3). The Orthodox, however, also have a sizable proportion between 20 and 39 years of age, as do the Reform and those with no denominational preference. The Conservative grouping appears to be the aging one.

Furthermore, 44 percent of Orthodox homes have children 17 years old or younger, more than any of the other groupings, although not much more than the 40 percent among Reform synagogue members. The denominational "extremes," thus, have the greatest growth potential. In any case, households with children 6 to 17 years old are clearly most apt to include synagogue members. Having children of Jewish school age is strongly associated with joining synagogues (see table 3).

With regard to socioeconomic status, members of Reform and Conservative synagogues rank highest (see table 3). Reform Jews who are not synagogue members and those with no denominational preferences are next highest in socioeconomic status. The lowest-ranking groups on socioeconomic measures are Orthodox Jews and Conservative Jews who are not synagogue members.

Denominational preference is also related to political views (see table 5). In 1990, by far the most politically liberal were those respondents with no denominational preference. Reform Jews, whether synagogue members or not, and Conservative synagogue members were next most likely to consider themselves liberal politically. Conservative Jews who were not synagogue members and Orthodox Jews were the least likely to consider themselves political liberals.

Jews with no denominational preference, an extremely well-educated and politically liberal grouping, are seldom to be found in Jewish religious or communal institutions. A large minority (42 percent) of this group, even if married to Jews, have Christmas trees. In households of Jews

with no denominational preference but who are married to Christians, Christmas trees are found in a large majority (74 percent). Such Jews are also at least twice as likely as any other category of Jews to be in a household which includes a church member or to attend church services. The frequency of their church attendance, however, is considerably less than that of Protestants or even of Protestants with no denominational preference, as reported in the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Surveys for 1985 to 1989 (the most recent comparable date available to the authors). It would appear, then, that Jews with no denominational preference, even those with Christian spouses, are not themselves practicing Christians but are secular Americans who may have a tree at home during the Christmas season, a symbol even many Christians take to be secular.

Denominational Preference and Synagogue Membership: In-Depth Analysis

In the previous section, we reviewed the general characteristics of individuals with different denominational preferences and of those with and without synagogue membership. In this section, we summarize the results of multivariate statistical analysis designed to reveal the importance of denominational preference and synagogue membership above and beyond that of demographic and socioeconomic factors.

The statistical technique used in this part of our study is path analysis.[8] This technique, like regression analysis, enables us to determine the influence of one variable on another while holding statistically constant the influence of many other variables.

The variables that we use, in order of their appearance in the relevant equations, are: (1) demographic variables, namely, gender, age, the number of minor children in the household, marital status, and number of generations one's family has been in the United States; (2) socioeconomic variables, namely, the level of secular education, the occupation of the family head, and family income; and (3) Jewish background factors: Jewish characteristics of the childhood home and years of Jewish education in one's youth. By placing these three sets of variables first in the equation, the influence of demographic and socioeconomic factors as well as of Jewish background factors is statistically controlled when we look at the significance of denominational preference and synagogue membership which come next in the equations. Thus, this statistical technique enables us to determine whether or not denominational preference and syn-

[8]Hubert Blalock, *Theory Construction: From Verbal to Mathematical Formulations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969).

agogue membership are related to a number of other aspects of the respondent's Jewish and non-Jewish involvements above and beyond the influence of demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, and the Jewish background of the respondents.

The particular aspects of our respondents' Jewish involvement in which we are interested are: attendance at religious services, religious practices at home, involvement with Jewish primary groups, activity in Jewish voluntary associations, and orientation toward Israel. We are also interested in the respondents' involvement with community organizations in the non-Jewish community.

We comment first on the relationship of the various control variables to our central variables, denominational preference and synagogue membership, and then on how the two central variables are related to measures of involvement in Jewish life and in the general (non-Jewish) community.

None of the demographic factors and none of the components of socioeconomic status are related to denominational preference at a statistically significant level. However, the relationship between the number of generations a respondent's family has been in the United States and denominational preference falls just short of statistical significance. First-generation Americans may still be more likely to be Orthodox, the second more likely to be Conservative, and the third, Reform, though the data do not convincingly show that to be so.

Childhood Jewish background (the denomination in which one was raised) is, however, related to denominational preference, as is Jewish education. In other words, while denominational preference is not based on demographic and socioeconomic factors, the choice is influenced by early Jewish education or childhood Jewish background, and, possibly, by the number of generations one's family has been in the United States.

Synagogue membership is more strongly related to our control variables than is denominational preference. For example, older respondents and those with higher family income are more likely to be synagogue members. The moderate relationship between gender and synagogue membership falls just short of statistical significance. Finally, those with school-aged children are more likely to be synagogue members than those without. Synagogue membership is not related to childhood Jewish background; however, it is related to both Jewish education and denominational preference.

Denominational preference is strongly related to other indicators of religiosity, above and beyond the influence of demographic factors, socioeconomic status, and Jewish background. In particular, it is strongly related to synagogue membership and attendance and to religious practices in the home. It is also strongly related to involvement with Jewish primary groups. However, denominational preference is at most weakly

related to involvement with Jewish community organizations and only moderately related to the respondent's orientation to Israel. The more traditional a denomination is, the less active are its adherents in non-Jewish communal organizations.

Interestingly, the relationship between denominational preference and orientation to Israel forms something of a U-shaped curve—highest among the Orthodox, at one end of our spectrum, but lowest not among those with no denominational preference, at the other end, but among the Reform, with the Conservatives between the Orthodox and those with no preference.

Synagogue membership, again above and beyond our control variables, is moderately related to the frequency of home religious practices. Some of these practices, especially those relating to Passover or Hanukkah, are perhaps as much expressions of involvement with the Jewish people and its heritage as they are observances of religious ritual. Thus, they may be relatively common among both synagogue members and nonmembers. In any case, synagogue membership is moderately related to involvement with Jewish community organizations, i.e., with Jews outside the confines of the synagogue. Finally, synagogue membership is not related to either the respondent's orientation toward Israel, to Jewish primary group involvement, or to involvement in organizations in the general, non-Jewish community.

There are important differences in the pattern of relationships with other variables for denominational preference and synagogue membership. Denominational preference is indicative of a broader, more communal orientation toward Judaism and the Jewish community. On the other hand, synagogue membership involves people in institutional influences not likely to be encountered outside of the synagogue and heightens participation in the more institutionalized aspects of Jewish life.

Religious and Community Involvement: 1971 and 1990

The existence of two generally comparable National Jewish Population Surveys, 1971 and 1990, provides a rare opportunity to compare Jewish Americans at two different times. In making such comparisons, every effort was made to render the 1971 and 1990 analyses as similar as possible, variable by variable, index by index. The results are summarized below.

On the whole, when the denominational groupings are contrasted with regard to Jewish religious and Jewish community involvement in 1971 and 1990, the Orthodox, the most involved in 1971, remain the most involved in 1990, followed by the Conservatives. Reform Jews are the next most involved; those with no denominational preference are the least involved (see table 4 for 1990 data). Moreover, the comparative analysis of the 1971

and 1990 surveys indicates that denominational preference and synagogue membership have retained, and even slightly increased, their correlation with other aspects of Jewish identity in the nearly two decades between these two surveys.

The comparative analyses also indicate that there has been a moderate increase in synagogue attendance and in observance of home religious practices along with a considerable strengthening of the orientation toward Israel. In contrast, there has been a decline in involvement in Jewish primary groups and a moderate decline in activity in both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations.

Overall, it would appear that Jews in the United States are gradually stabilizing their religious practices while reducing their degree of involvement with other, non-synagogue features of Jewish communal life. In other words, the meaning of being a Jew in the United States has increasingly come to focus on the twin pillars of religious involvement and Israel and not on whom one socializes with or on membership in a Jewish organization.

The pattern with respect to involvement in the general, non-Jewish community is somewhat different from that of Jewish involvement. In 1990, the Jewish adults most active in general community organizations were Conservative and Reform synagogue members and those with no denominational preference. The Orthodox were the least active in general community organizations, while Conservative and Reform Jews who were not synagogue members held an intermediate position with respect to activity in the general community (see table 5).

Denominational Switching

The analyses summarized above indicate the importance of denominational preference. However, in a society in which religious identity and denominational preference are matters of individual choice, the boundaries between denominations may be rather permeable. One result is individuals changing or switching from the denominations of their parents to others as adults. Overall, 44 percent of American Jewish adults have switched from the denomination of their childhood to another as an adult. This frequency of change is somewhat more than the 15 to 35 percent reported for white Protestants.[9]

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[9]Paul D. Sullins, "Switching Close to Home: Volatility or Coherence in Protestant Affiliation Patterns," *Social Forces* 72, 1993, pp. 399–419; Darren Sherkat and John Wilson, "Status, Denomination and Socialization Effect on Religious Switching and Apostasy," research paper, Department of Sociology, Vanderbilt University, 1992.

Tables 6, 7, and 8 illustrate the permeability of denominational boundaries among Jews in the United States. More specifically, they highlight the historic decrease in the proportion of Orthodox Jews in the United States. This decrease appears whether one compares the denomination in which a survey respondent was raised with his/her present denominational preference or whether one looks at changes over the number of generations a respondent's family has been in the United States.

In the course of the lives of respondents to the 1990 survey, the proportion who are Orthodox Jews has declined considerably, with 22 percent reporting being raised Orthodox and only 6 percent declaring it a current choice. Although the popular media have claimed there is a return to Orthodoxy among American Jews, the data do not support such a claim. There does exist a *ba'al t'shuvah* movement,[10] a movement of some previously nonobservant Jews into the Orthodox fold. However, their numbers are rather small. Overall, the data show that few adults switch to the Orthodox denomination, and the grouping is dominated numerically by those who were reared as Orthodox Jews.

The proportion who prefer Conservative Judaism appears relatively stable (around 40 percent). However, the appearance of stability belies changes in the composition of the Conservative population. It results from the fact that the Conservative denomination gained enough adherents from among those reared as Orthodox to offset its losses to the Reform denomination (some 28 percent of current Conservative Jews were raised Orthodox; the same percent switched from Conservative to Reform).

The major beneficiary of Jewish interdenominational movement has been the Reform denomination. While just 26 percent of survey respondents report being raised Reform, 39 percent claimed this denominational preference as adults in 1990.

Those with no denominational preference constitute an unstable category. Almost as many adults adopt a denominational preference, even though not raised with one, as decide against having a denominational preference despite having been reared with one.

The major trend in the denominational switching among Jews in America has been from a more traditional to a less traditional denomination (34 percent, versus 10 percent from a less to a more traditional denomination). The Conservative and Reform groupings include noticeable numbers of switchers, although both groups are still dominated numerically

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[10]Herbert Danzger, *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism* (New Haven, 1989); Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkeley, 1991).

by those who grew up and stayed within their ranks. Since those who switch into these denominations are somewhat more religiously observant and Jewishly involved than those who grew up and stayed in them, American Jewish denominations may then be "pulled" in more traditional directions by their "incoming" people. Those who move into the Orthodox denomination have potentially less impact on that denomination because they are seeking to adopt a level of religious behavior that they consider higher. They look to Orthodox Jews as role models to emulate. Such is not the case with regard to those who move to less traditional movements.

Intermarriage

Traditionally, Eastern European Jews viewed marriage as a mechanism to meet the communal concern for the preservation of the Jewish people and their religion. Jews in America have largely adopted the modern notion that marriage is essentially a means to express mutual romantic wishes. Thus, one would expect the frequency of intermarriage in American society to vary with the degree of acceptance of modernity; that is, to be lowest among the Orthodox, somewhat higher among Conservatives and highest among Reform Jews. The data do indeed show that denominational preference is clearly related to whether one marries a Jew or not, as is synagogue membership, the other expression of Jewish identity focused on in this study.

As expected, the more traditional the denomination, the lower the rate of intermarriage. Also as expected, synagogue members are less likely to be intermarried than nonmembers. Finally, the intermarriage rate has been increasing since 1960 for all types of Jews, whatever their denominational preference or lack of one and whether or not they are synagogue members.

In 1990, among those identifying as Orthodox, 93 percent had spouses who were born Jews, as did 82 percent of Conservative Jews, 60 percent of Reform Jews, and 41 percent of Jews with no denominational preference.

Synagogue members, in each denomination, are somewhat less likely to intermarry than nonmembers. Among married synagogue members who are currently Orthodox, 98 percent are married to spouses who were born Jewish; among married Conservative synagogue members, 88 percent; and among married Reform synagogue members, 66 percent. Unfortunately, the NJPS data do not allow us to determine the temporal or causal relationship between synagogue membership and intermarriage.

Among the couples married between 1970 and 1990, 89 percent of those identified as Orthodox include two partners born into Jewish families or who now consider themselves Jewish even though not reared as

such; for those couples now identified with the Conservative denomination, 63 percent include two spouses born into Jewish families or who are converts into Judaism. For those identified as Reform Jews, only 44 percent are couples who are both currently Jewish; and for those couples with no denominational preferences, only 18 percent (see table 9).

Converts to Judaism are most often found in the ranks of Reform Judaism. Indeed, 24 percent of Reform synagogue members are such converts, compared to 8 percent of Conservative synagogue members and virtually none among members of Orthodox synagogues. The Jewish individual with a non-Jewish spouse generally does not convert out of Judaism. However, many of the respondents who were raised in Orthodox or Conservative homes but who married non-Jews have shifted to a less traditional denominational grouping or to having no denominational preference.

A positive sign for Jewish continuity is that a respondent who is a Jew by choice, or whose spouse is one, is generally (78 percent) a synagogue member (see table 10). Moreover, such couples are much more Jewishly involved than those who are in religiously mixed marriages. Conversion, then, appears to more often indicate a significant change of identity than a change for convenience's sake.

Intermarriage has varied outcomes with respect to whether the children are reared as Jews. A crucial factor is whether or not the originally non-Jewish spouse becomes a Jew by choice. Where that happens, the children are apt to be reared as Jews. In 97 percent of conversionary couples, children are being reared as Jews. Gender also makes a difference. When the wife has a Jewish background but the husband does not, a majority (52 percent) report raising their children as Jews; where the reverse is the case, and only the husband has a Jewish background, only a minority (25 percent) are raising their children as Jews. Overall, fewer than 40 percent of households where there is a religiously mixed marriage are raising their children as Jews.

Conclusion

American Jews express their relationship to Judaism and to the organized Jewish community through decisions concerning denominational preference and synagogue membership. Taking such "Jewish stances" goes a long way toward expressing what the individual takes being Jewish to mean living in American society. Among the three major denominations, the Orthodox are still the least assimilationist; the Conservatives are still in an intermediate position between the Orthodox, on one side, and the Reform and those with no denominational preference, on the other.

The analysis presented above suggests that as Jews have become an integral part of American life, those who wish to remain Jewish increasingly define Jewishness in terms of Judaism, that is, in terms of religion rather than in terms of informal contacts with other Jews and participation in Jewish voluntary associations devoted to charitable or other causes. An orientation toward Israel, however, also remains an important, and increasingly significant, component of Jewish identity.

The process of Americanization, with all its benefits, presents a challenge to those concerned with the long-term survival of Jewish life in America. The composition of the American Jewish population of the next generation will, to a sizable degree, be a result of a substantial population exchange with the rest of the American population within a society in which interfaith boundaries are clearly permeable. According to projections made by the present authors, just 36 percent of the next generation of Jewish children will have parents both of whom were themselves born Jewish. That is, no more than 36 percent will have four Jewish grandparents. The percentage is projected to be somewhat higher (58 percent) in families with Orthodox and Conservative denominational preferences, and lower (24 percent) in families where the preference is for the Reform denomination and in families without a denominational preference.

Most of the non-Jewish population that joins the Jewish population will likely do so as Reform Jews. As a result, the Reform and, to a lesser extent, the Conservative movements will face the problem of socializing into their communities a considerable number of children from families with one parent who was raised as a Christian and who has family ties to the Christian community. It is to be expected that many children with such backgrounds, especially if the Jewish parent has no denominational preference or affiliation, will have limited ties to the Jewish community or will disappear into an American secular melting pot.

Although the 1990 NJPS shows the Orthodox denomination having lost about one-third of its adult day-school graduates to other denominations, primarily the Conservative, there are signs that Orthodoxy has reached the bottom of its population decline. With an increasingly effective education system, an above-replacement-level birthrate, and very low intermarriage rate, the Orthodox denomination could well experience a slow but steady increase in its small percentage of the American Jewish community.

Although the Conservative denomination has lost a substantial proportion of its young people to the Reform denomination, any further decline may be stemmed by an increase in the proportion of its children who attend Conservative Jewish day schools, which seem to be particularly effective in aiding denominational retention. The Conservative denomination may drop behind the Reform as the largest denominational prefer-

ence; however, there are likely to be more Conservative than Reform Jews among future synagogue members.

If the trends up to 1990 continue into the next generation, the Reform denomination can be expected to experience further growth and to become the most common denominational preference. Continued switching from the Conservative to the Reform denomination, in conjunction with the considerable ability of the Reform denomination to retain its young, plus some gains from conversions associated with intermarriage will aid this process.

Finally, the proportion of the American Jewish population with no denominational preference will depend a good deal upon how many of the substantial number of Jews marrying non-Jews join its ranks. If having a denominational preference is increasingly accepted as an important way of participating in American society, then the future ranks of Jews with no denominational preference, especially among those married to other Jews, should decline, or at least remain relatively stable.

TABLE 1. JEWISH ADULT DENOMINATIONAL PREFERENCE AND SYNAGOGUE MEMBERSHIP, 1971 AND 1990 (PERCENTAGES)

A. Denominational preference of all respondents	1971	1990
Orthodox	11	6
Conservative	42	40
Reform	33	39
No preference	14	15
Base	100	100
N	5790	1905

B. Denominational preference of synagogue members	1971	1990
Orthodox	14	10
Conservative	49	51
Reform	34	35
No preference	3	4
Base	100	100

C. Denominational preference of non-synagogue members	1971	1990
Orthodox	7	4
Conservative	35	31
Reform	33	41
No preference	25	24
Base	100	100

TABLE 2. JEWISH ADULT SYNAGOGUE MEMBERSHIPS BY DENOMINATIONAL PREFERENCE, 1971 AND 1990 (PERCENTAGES)

	Synagogue Membership	
Denomination	1971	1990
Orthodox	66	72
Conservative	57	59
Reform	51	43
No preference	11	13
For all adults	48	47
N	2429	752

TABLE 3. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS BY ADULT JEWISH DENOMINATIONAL PREFERENCES, AND SYNAGOGUE MEMBERSHIP, NJPS, 1990 (PERCENTAGES)

	Orthodox	Conservative		Reform		No Preference
Characteristics	Member	Member	Not Member	Member	Not Member	Not Member
A. Women	48	53	53	53	50	41
B. Age of adults:						
20–39 yrs.	46	32	37	42	48	44
60+ yrs.	30	32	31	16	20	26
C. Generation in U.S.:						
Foreign-born	28	11	7	5	4	10
U.S.-born parents	23	44	46	70	67	56
D. Socio-economic status:						
Univ. graduate	64	70	52	80	63	65
Family income $80,000+	7	26	11	35	20	17
E. Children:						
5 or younger	26	13	13	17	15	19
6–17 yrs.	18	16	9	23	12	13

TABLE 4. PERCENT HAVING HIGH LEVELS OF JEWISH INVOLVEMENT BY ADULT JEWISH DENOMINATIONAL PREFERENCES, NJPS, 1990

Jewish Involvement Indicators	Orthodox	Conservative		Reform		No Preference
	Member	Member	Not Member	Member	Not Member	Not Member
Jewish education (8+ yrs.)	54	59	33	39	20	19
Synagogue attendance (25+ times/yr.)	76	30	7	18	2	2
Home religious practices[1]	91	57	23	21	10	5
Jewish primary groups[2]	92	57	35	31	16	10
Jewish org. activity[3]	74	64	26	52	21	6
Involved with Israel[4]	75	51	30	28	20	19

[1]Shabbat candles; Kiddush; Hanukkah candles; kosher home.
[2]Most friends Jewish; neighborhood Jewish; opposes intermarriage.
[3]Member several Jewish organizations; works 20+ hours per month for Jewish organizations; gave money to Jewish organizations.
[4]Number of visits to Israel; emotional involvement with Israel.

TABLE 5. ADULTS WITH A HIGH LEVEL OF GENERAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND LIBERAL POLITICAL OUTLOOK, BY DENOMINATION AND SYNAGOGUE MEMBERSHIP, NJPS, 1990 (PERCENTAGES)

	Orthodox	Conservative		Reform		No Preference
Indicators	Member	Member	Not Member	Member	Not Member	Not Member
General community org. activity[1]	17	42	27	44	31	44
Politically liberal	23	40	34	39	44	56

[1]Member several general community organizations and also gave to non-Jewish charities.

TABLE 6. CHILDHOOD AND CURRENT DENOMINATIONAL PREFERENCES FOR ALL ADULT JEWISH RESPONDENTS, NJPS, 1990 (PERCENTAGES)

Denomination	Childhood	Current
Orthodox	22	6
Conservative	39	40
Reform	26	39
No preference	13	15
Base	100	100

TABLE 7. CHILDHOOD DENOMINATION BY CURRENT PREFERENCE FOR ALL ADULT JEWISH RESPONDENTS, NJPS, 1990 (PERCENTAGES)

	Was Raised			
Is Now	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	No Pref.
Orthodox	24	1	0	5
Conservative	52	62	9	20
Reform	16	28	79	28
No preference	8	9	12	47
Base	100	100	100	100

TABLE 8. ADULT DENOMINATIONAL SHIFTING BY GENERATION IN U.S., NJPS, 1990 (PERCENTAGES)

	Preference in 1st U.S. Gen.		Preference in 2nd U.S. Gen.		Preference in 3rd+ U.S. Gen.	
Denomination	As Child	Now	As Child	Now	As Child	Now
Orthodox	41	21	40	9	10	3
Conservative	27	43	35	50	40	34
Reform	12	19	14	28	36	48
No preference	20	17	11	13	14	15
Base	100	100	100	100	100	100

TABLE 9. FAMILY TYPES FOR JEWISH MARRIAGES OF 1970 TO 1990, BY DENOMINATIONAL PREFERENCE, NJPS, 1990 (PERCENTAGES)

Denomination	Both Partners Born into Jewish Families	One Partner Convert-In	One Partner Jewish, One Partner Christian	One Partner Jewish, One Partner None or Other	Base
Orthodox	83	6	6	5	100
Conservative	54	9	24	13	100
Reform	30	14	43	13	100
None	15	3	55	27	100

TABLE 10. MODES OF JEWISH INVOLVEMENT OF JEWS MARRIED 1970 TO 1990, BY TYPE OF MARRIAGE, NJPS, 1990 (PERCENTAGES)

Jewish Involvement	Both Partners Born into Jewish Families			All Convert-In Marriages	Heterogeneous Marriages		
	Orth.	Cons.	Ref.		Cons.	Ref.	None
Synagogue member							
Yes	83	64	50	78	22	19	3
No	17	36	50	22	78	81	97
Jewish org. activity index							
High	76	54	44	43	12	15	7
Moderate	17	36	28	34	30	31	25
Low	7	10	28	23	58	54	68
Jewish primary group involvement index							
High	93	64	39	27	4	3	2
Moderate	7	26	34	36	15	16	8
Low	—	10	27	37	81	81	90
Synagogue attendance							
12 or more per yr.	80	42	19	50	8	11	2
3–11	13	30	33	27	27	16	6
1–2	7	23	37	15	45	54	54
0 times	—	5	11	8	20	19	38
N (couples)	30	107	86	62	74	158	125