

Reconceptualizing Religious Change: Ethno-Apostasy and Change in Religion Among American Jews

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Drawing upon data from the NJPS 2000-1, we argue that traditional approaches to the study of religious mobility – both apostasy and switching – are increasingly problematic. Apostasy from ethno-religious communities, in particular, must be reformulated to incorporate an ethnic dimension. Analyses using this revised concept of “ethno-apostasy” lead to results that at times diverge from those of previous research. The findings suggest that the premise that religious switching is a binary change from one mutually incompatible state to another must be reconceptualized to account for declining support in American society for the assumption that a person can hold only one religious affiliation at a time.

Since the 1960s, observers of American religion have recognized that individuals, through their personal choices, wield a collective power to reshape the religious landscape of the United States. Religious switching and the abandonment of religious affiliation are widely acknowledged to be inherent features of an environment where religion derives its legitimacy from the free choice of people committed to finding personal meaning. The fluidity of religious identity that results has pushed scholarship away from macrohistorical theorizing about the secularizing march of Western civilization toward a sociology of religion that increasingly speaks of consumer preferences, market share and product niches. In this environment of choice, the questions of how individuals choose and how institutions influence the decision-making process have become of central importance.

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In a significant attempt to analyze the broad trends shaping American denominational mobility during the last century, Sherkat (2001) used 25 years of General Social Survey data to assess the empirical strength of various explanatory paradigms, finding some support for theories of status mobility and rational choice. Status theories explain religious switching in terms of extrareligious motivations. As originally formulated by Stark and Glock (1968b), this approach argued that switching would tend from theologically conservative denominations toward more liberal ones, as people sought the higher social status conferred by liberal denominations. Revised versions critiqued the unidirectionality of this approach, and argued instead that people who diverge from the socioeconomic status of their coreligionists would be more likely to switch denominations, preferring one whose socioeconomic profile more closely fit their own (Newport 1979; Roof and Hadaway 1979; Sherkat and Wilson 1995). Rational choice theory explains denominational switching in part through supply-side models that relate denominations' abilities to retain and attract members to the cost-benefit ratio involved in the collective production of religious goods (Finke and Stark 1992; Iannaccone 1992, 1994). It also applies demand-side models to explain religious switching. These focus on preference formation, on the role human capital plays in producing religious meaning (Iannaccone 1990; Sherkat and Wilson 1995), and on the consolidated social relations that limit choice for members of ethnic or quasiethnic religious communities such as Jews (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990; Sherkat and Wilson 1995).

Sherkat's (2001) analysis advances our ability to place American religious trends in a coherent theoretical framework. He finds no empirical support for the claim that shifts in denominational affiliation reflect a decline in denominationalism (cf. Wuthnow 1988, 1993), presents data showing that the status-climbing model of denominational change (in its original formulation) is an historically specific explanation that accounts only for the behavior of those born prior to 1944, and brings forward evidence supporting the theoretical predictions of rational choice models.

Sherkat himself raised questions about the degree to which these conclusions could be readily generalized to minority communities. Having excluded African-Americans from the sample because they "choose denominational affiliations in what is essentially a separate religious market" (2001:1461), he decided to treat them in a separate analysis (Sherkat 2002). In that study, he derived hypotheses not from universally-applicable theoretical frameworks as above, but from culturally- and historically-specific factors associated with African-American denominations.

American Jews, in contrast, were included in Sherkat's (2001) general analysis of religious change among American denominations. Sherkat found that Jews, like other "'quasi-ethnic' religious groups," had high rates of loyalty, retaining over 80 percent of affiliates. Those who ceased identifying as members of the Jewish religion tended to claim no religious affiliation whatsoever rather than cross religious lines and assume Christian or other religious identities. Applying

a rational choice framework, Sherkat explained that the "[c]onsolidation of associations" in ethno-religious communities "intensifies group pressures by linking a variety of social rewards to religious participation" (2001:1464; see also Harrison and Lazerwitz 1982). The confluence of religious and multiple extrareligious dimensions of community membership increases both the benefits of participation and costs of exiting.

The application of this theoretical perspective successfully predicted the rarity of Jewish switching to Christian and other non-Jewish denominations. Yet rather than settle the question of Jewish religious switching, the finding that American Jews are more likely to apostatize than convert raises the question in a much more complex way. In this paper, we will demonstrate that although deeper investigation into the question of religious switching among Jews may be addressed within the framework of a rational choice approach that draws on the network analytic notion of consolidated ties, the attempt is so fraught with problems that, ultimately, the effort will be better served through alternative approaches.

APOSTASY AND SWITCHING AS CULTURE-SPECIFIC CONCEPTS

As noted, the distinction between switchers and apostates has been an important theme in the study of religious change among American Jews. The applicability of general definitions of apostasy to ethno-religious communities is not without problems. The sociologist's interest in the abandonment of religious faith is not that of the theologian. It concerns the implications for human to human relationships rather than human-Divine relationships. As a result, sociological analysis must take into account the different meanings and different implications that the phenomenon has in different communities. Within an American Protestant paradigm, the renunciation of faith has been assumed to indicate the severance of social ties with religious communities and the weakening of religious communities generally. Scholarly interest in the phenomenon has emerged accordingly. Such assumptions seem misplaced, however, when applied to American Jews. It is not merely that "in groups with ethnic or quasi-ethnic characteristics, ties to the community through language, folklore, custom, intermarriage, and solidarity make disaffiliation difficult" (Sherkat 2001:1464), but that in Jewish culture the boundaries between religion and other aspects of life are blurred, and native discourse defines piety more in terms of practice rather than belief. It is to these native discourses that one must look to find appropriate indicators of the social phenomena that the abandonment of faith are typically thought to indicate.

The language of social science differs markedly from discourse indigenous to Jewish communities. "Apostasy," in Jewish parlance, is associated with those who exchange the Jewish faith for another religion, particularly Christianity or Islam (Ben-Sasson et al. 1971; Cohen 1999; Endelman 1987). In contrast, social scientific literature on religion typically reserves this term for the abandonment of

all religious faith (i.e., becoming an agnostic or atheist) regardless of the religion in which one was raised. Jewish communities historically have had no specific term for those who abandon all faith, except perhaps for "apikorsim," which is used as a pejorative catch-all term for the religiously unorthodox (broadly construed) of all stripes,¹ provided that they possess the requisite religious learning that enables them to be "informed heretics."² The lack of an exact term may reflect a comparative lack of concern; religious faith is not the only or even the primary criterion for Jewish affiliation, and those who have renounced their religious beliefs have often remained committed Jews. By contrast, those who join another religion are called "meshumadim" ("mumarim" and "minim" are also used) – meaning "ones who are destroyed" (cf. Wagner 1982). The multiple terms that exist indicate the salience of this phenomenon to Jewish communities throughout history. The finality of the term – if one leaves, one is destroyed – is a reflection of the fact that joining another faith has historically been seen as an active renunciation of Jewish identity, whereas being a secularist Jew has not.

This has implications for both our understandings of apostasy and religious switching. With regard to apostasy, we conclude from the above discussion that the reformulation of the concept in a manner appropriate to an ethnic religion would expand the criteria to include not only the abandonment of religious faith but also the abandonment of self-proclaimed belonging in the community. This is the approach we will adopt here. For the sake of distinguishing this particular usage from the general, we will refer to it as ethno-apostasy. We should also note that American society's construction of white ethnicity as a voluntary matter makes ethno-apostasy a realistic possibility for contemporary American Jews. Such an option is less available where ethnicity is tied to race or where the majority community enforces distinct boundaries (Alba and Nee 2003).

With regard to religious switching, we are cognizant that contemporary sociological realities undermine the notion that adoption of another faith necessarily implies an abdication of Jewish religion and Jewish communal ties.³ However, inasmuch as this understanding has deep roots both within normative Jewish tradition and scholarship on religious switching, it is not to be abandoned lightly. For the sake of the present analysis, we have decided to treat Jews who profess

¹ "Apikoros" was introduced to the Jewish lexicon to designate a Jewish follower of Epicurean philosophy, which had a successful school in 2nd century CE Antioch (Wagner 1985.) By the third to fifth century the term had broadened to include the "scoffer" and the "disrespectful person" (Wagner 1985: 114). Its use was subsequently expanded to include individuals denying tenets of Jewish theology, rather than embracing another religion.

² We are grateful to Samuel Heilman for suggesting this formulation.

³ Judaism and Buddhism are held to be compatible by some Buddhist adherents of Jewish origin (Kamenetz 1994; Lew and Jaffee 1999; Rosenzweig 1998). This view was pervasive enough that the 1990 and 2000-01 National Jewish Population Surveys counted people who were born or raised Jewish and currently identified with "nonmonotheistic" religions as secular Jews. While a great majority of the Jewish community does not recognize Christianity as compatible with Judaism, many Christians of Jewish origin believe otherwise (Harris-Shapiro 1999; Rosen 1974).

adherence to a non-Jewish religion as religious switchers, regardless of whether they continue to declare adherence to Judaism as well. Although this has the advantage of allowing comparability with prior research, it leaves unaddressed fundamental questions about the theoretical status of the concept of religious switching. We will address these issues in the discussion of the findings.

THE HISTORICAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF JEWISH SWITCHING

In the prediction that consolidated social relations will produce lower rates of out-migration from ethno-religious communities than from nonethnic religious communities, the unit of analysis is the ethno-religious group, which is treated as a homogenous entity. The degree to which ties are consolidated varies from community to community, however, as does the degree to which individual members are enmeshed in them or are subject to cross-cutting social ties (Blau and Schwartz 1984; Kadushin 1966; Sherkat 2001; Simmel 1955). At the individual level, the more a person is subject to crosscutting social ties that reduce the ability of the ethnic community to apply group pressures, the greater the likelihood ought to be that he or she will adopt a religious affiliation other than that of the ethnic group. Diverse social ties may also increase knowledge of available alternatives and reduce the entry costs associated with switching.

This, however, explains only why the exit may be made easier, failing to account for the incentives associated with entering another faith community. Research on Jewish conversion suggests that these are historically specific, inseparable from the power dynamics associated with Jews' minority position in different societies which afforded them different rights and statuses, and which adopted different positions regarding minority access to social resources (Endelman 1994, 1997; Klausner 1997).

Issues of power and minority status lead us back to the question of status-climbing, raised by Stark and Glock (1968b). Religious switching in Jewish history has not always occurred by choice (Klausner 1997), the Spanish Inquisition being only the most well-known instance. While we exclude forced conversion from the rest of our discussion as it has no parallels in the contemporary United States, it should be noted that these cases are a clear instance of weighing this-worldly benefit against supernatural compensators (Stark and Bainbridge 1987). In cases where switching has occurred by choice, choices were typically made in a societal context suffused with formal and informal social pressure to abandon the low-status minority community in favor of the religious communities of the majority (Endelman 1994, 1997). In either case, the transition from Judaism to the religion of surrounding society was associated with the desired or imposed movement from a low-status community to a higher status one.

How are we to integrate this with the prediction that cross-cutting social ties foster religious switching by weakening the grip of the ethnic community? The historical situation of Jewish communities having heavily consolidated social

relations as a result of nonporous internal and external boundaries suggests that the critical cross-cutting ties that produce an incentive to switch faiths would be economic. Describing the situation of the Jews of Warsaw in the 1800s, Endelman declared that "conversion was a rational choice" (1997:52), speaking of rationality in a purely economic sense. The paradigmatic statement of such 19th century conversions was Daniel Chwolson's reported rejoinder when asked whether he had converted out of conviction; he felt convinced that it was better to be a professor in St. Petersburg than a melamed (a teacher in Jewish schools) in Eishyshok. If we were searching for the cross-cutting social ties to which we might impute a measure of causality, we might look to relationships with non-Jewish colleagues, customers and power brokers. But in the face of state-imposed limitations on Jews' activities (Endelman 1997), one might argue that incentives are present irrespective of cross-cutting ties, and that a more convincing account of the historical record would adopt a status based approach similar to Stark and Glock's (1968b), but more cognizant of the power relationships in operation.

Still, even if one accepts the proposition that the experience of history directs us to look toward extracommunal economic ties to predict religious switching out of Judaism, the notion that the situation of the Jews in twenty-first century America can be understood with concepts appropriate for explaining nineteenth century Warsaw is ludicrous on its face. In the contemporary American situation, state pressure to abandon Jewish affiliation is nonexistent, status distinctions between Jews and non-Jews have become much more fluid, Jewish occupational niches include fields notable for their prestige (Hartman and Hartman 1996), and Jews and non-Jews are tied together by deeply rooted social relationships that transcend the pure instrumentality of economic relations, including historically high rates of intermarriage (Phillips and Fishman in this issue). In such circumstances, the cross-cutting social ties that would be most relevant to religious switching would not be the ties of business, but the ties of community, friendship, and love.

In short, the prediction that cross-cutting social ties will reduce disincentives for religious switching out of an ethnic community offers no clear guidance regarding the way in which such ties also increase incentives for switching, or which types of cross-cutting relationships will be most associated with switching. These are historically contingent, bound up in the changing power relationships between minority communities and other sectors of society, and also with the nature of the instrumental and noninstrumental social relationships that unite people across communities. We are reliant, therefore, upon historical and cultural knowledge to guide us in translating the imprecise notion of cross-cutting social ties into specific hypotheses.

HYPOTHESES

In a situation where state pressure to change religious affiliations is minimal, and where religious affiliation is generally seen as a consumer preference, religious decisions are more likely to be localized within the context of an autonomous reli-

gious marketplace. Our decision to explain Jewish religious change as a function of religious factors or religion related social factors rather than political and economic ones reflects our understanding of the particular historical and cultural moment in which the United States and American Jews find themselves.

As we have argued, the historical circumstances that encouraged status-motivated Jewish religious switching and ethno-apostasy in the past do not characterize contemporary America, where Jews have achieved relatively high socio-economic status and no longer face significant social barriers. In light of this, we offer the first two hypotheses:

H1: Socio-economic status will not be associated with the adoption by American Jewish adults of a non-Jewish religion.

H2: Socio-economic status will not be associated with ethno-apostasy among American Jewish adults.

Formal and informal socialization of one's children in the ethno-religious community is an investment in their religious and ethnic human capital. Individuals who receive higher levels of Jewish socialization are more likely to have developed Jewish religious preferences. Additionally, ethno-religious human capital has value only within its particular tradition, so investment in this form of socialization may represent sunk costs that inhibit religious change. Therefore we offer the following hypotheses:

H3: Childhood socialization into the American Jewish ethno-religious community will be negatively associated with the adoption by American Jewish adults of a non-Jewish religion.

H4: Childhood socialization into the American Jewish ethno-religious community will be negatively associated with ethno-apostasy among American Jewish adults.

The extent to which a person has cross-cutting social ties in the form of social contacts with non-Jews will be reflected in the probability of religious switching and ethno-apostasy later in life. Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

H5: Ethno-religiously heterogeneous friendship networks will be positively associated with the adoption by American Jewish adults of a non-Jewish religion.

H6: Ethno-religiously heterogeneous friendship networks will be positively associated with ethno-apostasy among American Jewish adults.

Among the American Jews most involved in non-Jewish religious communities are those raised in households where Judaism is not the only religion prac-

ticed. We hypothesize that, by integrating Jews into non-Jewish religious environments, early exposure to multiple religions will increase the likelihood that American Jewish adults will adopt a non-Jewish religion. It would lower the entry costs associated with acquiring cultural competence, constitute a set of cross-cutting relations that may offset the social pressures and incentives to remain within the Jewish fold, and increase the chances that the religious preferences will tend in a non-Jewish direction. We also hypothesize that it will increase the prevalence of ethno-apostasy by weakening the exclusivity of the hold that either form of religious identification, Jewish or non-Jewish, has on the individual.

H7: Mixed Jewish and non-Jewish religious upbringing in childhood will be positively associated with the adoption by American Jewish adults of a non-Jewish religion.

H8: Mixed Jewish and non-Jewish religious upbringing in childhood will be positively associated with ethno-apostasy among American Jewish adults.

METHODS AND DATA

National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01

This paper uses data from the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2000-01 and its partner study of households without any tie to Jewish identity, the National Survey of Religion and Ethnicity (NSRE) 2000-01 ($n=4,027$) (cf. Kadushin, Phillips, and Saxe 2005; Kotler-Berkowitz in this issue; Kotler-Berkowitz et al. 2004; Schulman 2003; United Jewish Communities 2003b; United Jewish Communities 2003c).

As the use of the NJPS is limited by various methodological constraints (cf., Kadushin et al. 2005 and Kotler-Berkowitz in this issue), it is important to review those that relate to this paper: lost screening data and the interaction of the survey instrument and definitions of Jewishness.

Lost screening data. The NJPS first screened for Jews and "People of Jewish Background" (PJB – those with some connection to Jewish identity but who did not consider themselves to be currently Jewish) before switching to a randomly selected respondent in order to complete the main interview. Data are missing, however, from about two-thirds of the cases where people were offered the main interview and refused. Respondents who rejected longer interviews were significantly more likely to come from ethno-religiously mixed households than those who agreed to participate in the main interview (Phillips, Kadushin, and Saxe 2004). As switchers and ethno-apostates are more likely to be found in such households, failing to adjust for this bias may result in invalid estimates. We use Phillips et al.'s (2004) revised weights, which take account of these biases.

Survey instrument. People of Jewish Background (PJB) received a different instrument than the Jewish subsample, omitting questions concerning current Jewish practice and adding questions specifically designed to learn more about people who

switched to other religions. As the definition of a person as a Jew or PJB was based, in part, on the question "Do you consider yourself Jewish for any reason?" respondents who were raised Jewish but currently identify as Christian were interviewed as Jews if they answered affirmatively, and did not receive questions about switching. Data are systematically missing from a nonrandom 46 percent of cases; thus, questions like age at time of switching cannot be examined. Other variables excluded from analysis include travel to Israel and attending Jewish summer camp during childhood.

Switching as a rare event

Recent papers by King and Zeng (2001a, 2001b) emphasize the importance of considering the possibility of bias in logistic regression when either ones or zeroes are scarce. A rare event is defined as a binary dependent variable with "dozens to thousands of times fewer ones...than zeroes" (King and Zeng 2001b:138). In such cases, estimated probabilities of an event occurring will be too small, unless corrections are made. The effects of corrections are largest where numbers of observations are less than a few thousand and where the events make up less than five percent of cases. Our data appear to meet these criteria, with about 4,000 observations and with ethno-apostates making up 4.2 percent of cases. As Tomz, King and Zeng's (1999) relogit procedure for Stata (StataCorp 2004) is for binary rather than multinomial logistic, analyses are run as pairs of binary logistic regression (stayers vs. switchers; stayers vs. ethno-apostates), which provide consistent estimates of the parameters of multinomial logistic models (Begg and Gray 1984; Long 1997). Comparisons between multinomial logistic models for complex survey data and relogit results show substantive differences in the predicted direction.

Defining religious change

Analyses of religious switching and apostasy generally define the population of interest as being any individual raised in the religious tradition of interest. In the case of American Jews, however, the possibility of having been raised in an intermarried household means that a somewhat broader standard must be used. Accordingly, the population eligible for analysis includes all respondents who responded yes in any way to the question "Were you raised as a Jew?" including those who were coded by NJPS interviewers as having been raised "half" or "partially" Jewish (United Jewish Communities 2003d:10). As noted above, we have decided to treat Jews who profess adherence to a non-Jewish religion as religious switchers, regardless of whether they continue to declare adherence to Judaism as well. Therefore, respondents who, as adults, identified at the time of the survey with Judaism and another religion or exclusively with another religion are classified as switchers. Ethno-apostates are defined as individuals who at the time of the survey categorized themselves as having no religion and who said they did not consider themselves to be Jewish. Stayers are classified as respondents who at the time of the survey were exclusively Jewish by religion or did not identify with a religion but still considered themselves to be currently Jewish.

Independent variables

The following sociodemographic variables are modeled: female, a quadratic term for age, and parents' migrant status.⁴ As there was no significant difference in the probability of religious change between being an immigrant or having two immigrant parents, the latter term was kept (thus including migrants). Respondents with one immigrant parent were as likely to change status as those with no migrant parents.

Education and socioeconomic status are introduced as predictors of social status. The respondent's highest educational achievement (less than high school, junior college, college, graduate/professional school) is used as a linear term, as it better modeled the effects of education than combinations of dummy variables. To model socioeconomic status, we use NORC 1989 occupational prestige scores (Nakao and Treas 1992).

To model the effect of Jewish socialization, variables indicating Jewish denomination raised, Jewish education, participation in a Jewish youth group, and Jewish religious practices during childhood are included in Model 2. For denomination raised, dummy variables indicate having been raised in an Orthodox or Conservative household (combined as their coefficients were statistically indistinguishable) and having been raised in a Reform household. All other parental households form the suppressed category. Jewish education is measured by an index that uses information about the type and duration of Jewish schooling to estimate the number of hours of Jewish education received (Himmelfarb 1977). A squared term is used, as it had a better fit than the alternate specifications of Jewish education we had considered. Jewish practices during childhood are measured as a dummy variable for ever attending synagogue during childhood.

Although we lack the panel data that would allow us to investigate the impact of friendship groups prior to switching or ethno-apostasy, NJPS includes information on social network during high school, which is added in Model 3. As one's choice of friends by this time is not solely the decision of one's parents, this variable is of a different order than those used to measure socialization. The density of the pre-adult social network was measured using an adaptation of Kadushin and Kotler-Berkowitz's (2004 and their article in this volume) index of adult social networks. The index, split into two dummy variables, is based on high school friendship and dating patterns, with the cut points for high, medium or low (the reference category) Jewish social network being developed from analysis of the constituent variables.⁵

⁴ As the incidence of religious switching and ethno-apostasy has changed over time when analyzed at the bivariate level, the quadratic term enabled the model to include non-linear effects, as were in fact found. Both terms for age were significant at the $p < .05$ level in the final model.

⁵ High school friends are scored as none or some Jewish = 0, about half Jewish = 1, most or all Jewish = 2. High school dates are scored as only or mostly non-Jews = 0, both Jews and non-Jews = 1, only or mostly Jews = 2. These scores are added together. The dummy variables are coded as 0 = no Jewish social network (the suppressed category), 1 to 3 = Medium Jewish social network, 4 = High Jewish social network.

TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Variables in Models

Variable	Mean	S.D.	N
Switcher	0.103	0.304	4,003
Apostate	0.040	0.195	3,831
Female	0.517	0.500	4,080
Age	48.663	18.614	4,046
Age squared	2714.506	1917.882	4,046
Non-U.S. born parents	0.288	0.453	4,080
Degree	2.416	1.279	4,053
Raised Orthodox or Conservative	0.492	0.500	4,031
Raised Reform	0.261	0.439	4,031
Jewish education (* 100 hrs) sq.	590.865	1436.399	4,076
Jewish youth group	0.216	0.412	3,996
Childhood synagogue attendance	0.834	0.372	4,070
High Jewish social network	0.244	0.429	4,062
Medium Jewish social network	0.575	0.494	4,062
Intermarried parents	0.196	0.397	4,054
Raised half-Jewish	0.111	0.314	4,080
Christmas tree	0.247	0.431	4,063

Finally, we investigate the impact of mixed heritage in Model 4, adding dummy variables for the following: having intermarried parents, being raised in two religious heritages and having a Christmas tree while growing up. Respondents whom NJPS coded as having been raised "half" or "partially" Jewish are classified as having a dual religious upbringing. Those raised exclusively as Jews form the reference category.

Means and standard deviations of variables used in this analysis are shown in Table 1.

RESULTS

Model 1 introduces demographic controls and variables associated with status (see Table 2). Women show no greater or lesser propensity than men to switch to a non-Jewish religion or to become ethno-apostates. Significant differences are seen in the effect of age upon the two phenomena (see Figure 1, using estimates from Model 4). Both evince curvilinear relationships, but in different directions. The probability of religious switching ranges between 2.5 percent and 5.6 percent, and is higher for those born from 1940 through 1960 (i.e., the Baby Boomers, broadly speaking) than for those in the cohorts coming before or after. In contrast, the probability of ethno-apostasy (which ranges between 1.4 percent and 3.5 percent) is highest in the youngest cohorts, lowest among those born between 1940 and 1960, and rising slightly among those born before 1940. This

TABLE 2

Odds Ratios from the Binary Logistic Regression of Religious Status on Selected Variables

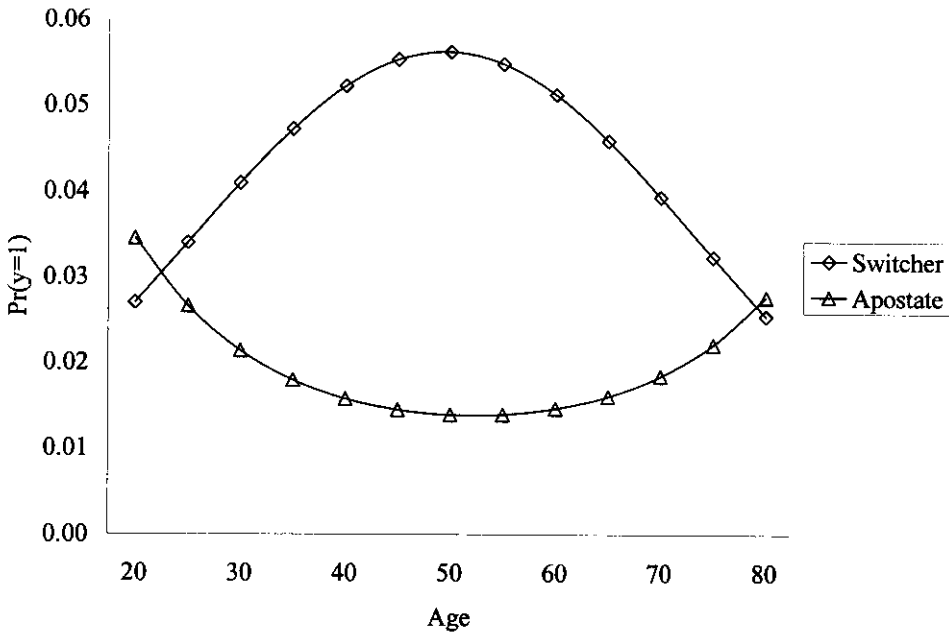
Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Switcher	Apostate	Switcher	Apostate	Switcher	Apostate	Switcher	Apostate
Female	1.149	.587	1.114	.561†	1.154	.564†	1.236	.538†
Age	1.059†	.906*	1.051	.909*	1.055	.916*	1.091*	.909*
Age squared	.999*	1.001†	.999†	1.001†	.999*	1.001†	.999*	1.001*
Non-U.S. born parents	.461**	.315*	.415**	.268**	.479*	.297**	.808	.309*
Degree	.650***	1.003	.701***	1.018	.714***	1.035	.773**	1.114
Occupational prestige	.991	1.000	.992	1.005	.991	1.004	.987	1.002
Raised Orthodox or Conservative	-	-	.562*	.693	.585*	.755	1.023	1.122
Raised Reform	-	-	.370***	.802	.371***	.815	.675	1.252
Jewish education (* 100 hrs) sq.	-	-	.999**	1.000	.999*	1.000	1.000*	1.000
Jewish youth group	-	-	.498*	.176**	.547*	.186**	.852	.236*
Childhood synagogue attendance	-	-	.489**	.497†	.504**	.532†	.755	1.076
High Jewish social network	-	-	-	-	.172***	.189**	.352**	.296*
Medium Jewish social network	-	-	-	-	.585*	.566	.787	.657
Intermarried parents	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.125***	2.649*
Dual-religion upbringing	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.132***	5.648***
Christmas tree	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.783*	.989
Log pseudo-likelihood	-1,204.21	-600.39	-1,036.27	-524.07	-1,008.04	-512.68	-796.68	-452.71
D.F.	6	6	11	11	13	13	16	16
Pseudo R ²	0.077	0.051	0.180	0.118	0.202	0.136	0.362	0.219
Observations	3,945	3,778	3,837	3,672	3,827	3,662	3,797	3,632

Source: (United Jewish Communities 2003a)

Note: † $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

FIGURE 1

Effect of Age on Estimated Probability of Religious Switching and Apostasy



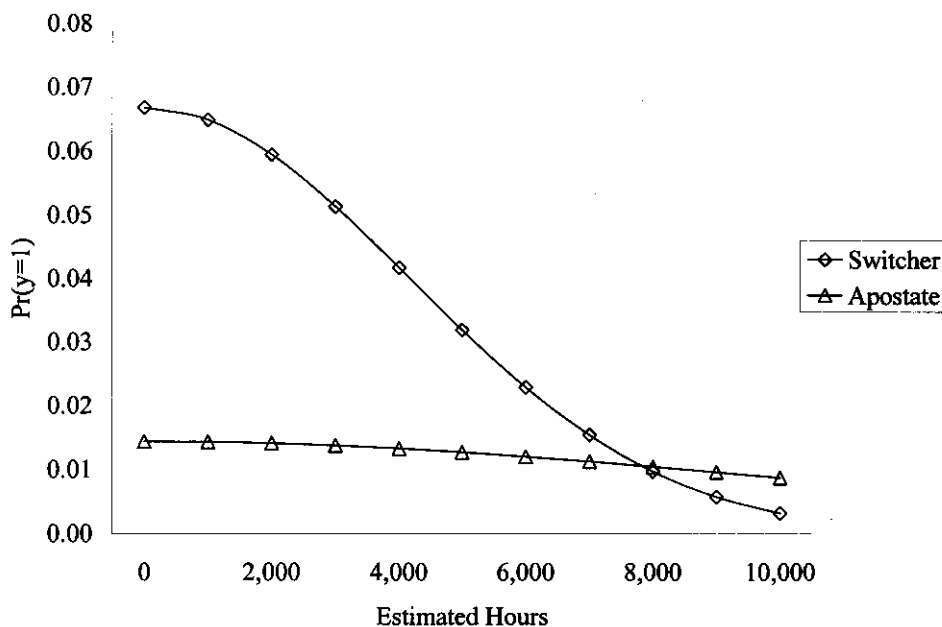
stands in contradistinction to Sherkat's finding, using a measure of religious apostasy rather than ethno-apostasy, that the youngest cohort of Jews (born 1956-1980) was the only one that did not have a higher than expected levels of religious apostasy (2001:1481,1483). Both ethno-apostasy and religious switching outside of Judaism were less likely among immigrants and the children of immigrants than among children of American-born parents.

As predicted, occupational prestige (one of the two status-related predictors included in the model) bore no statistically significant relationship to either religious switching or ethno-apostasy. The other indicator, highest degree attained, also showed no significant relationship with ethno-apostasy. Contrary to the hypothesis, however, it evinced a negative relationship with religious switching. Even when controlling for all the other variables entered in the later models, those with lower degree attainment were more likely to switch to a non-Jewish religion than those with higher levels of education. There was no difference, however, across socioeconomic status in terms of the propensity to ethno-apostasy.

Model 2 adds socialization-related predictors. The only one of these predictors significantly related to ethno-apostasy was participation in a Jewish youth group. This had the effect of reducing the likelihood of ethno-apostasy. Other than this, the data offered no evidence of a relationship between childhood

FIGURE 2

Effect of Jewish Education on Estimated Probability of Religious Switching and Apostasy



Jewish socialization and reduced rates of adult ethno-apostasy. In contrast, all of the socialization-related variables – youth group, schooling, synagogue attendance, and childhood denominational affiliation – initially showed negative relationships with adopting a non-Jewish faith as an adult. In every case save Jewish education, however, the relationships became non-significant once dual religious upbringing was controlled for. The greater the duration and intensity of Jewish schooling, the less likely a person was to switch to another religion (Figure 2).

In Model 3, we see that people with many Jews among their high school friends were less likely later in life to adopt a non-Jewish religion or to become ethno-apostates.

The final model introduces three indicators of the presence of non-Jewish religious traditions in the Jewish households of origin. All three – having one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent, being raised “half/partially Jewish,” and having a Christmas tree – are each strongly associated with abandoning Jewish religious self-definition as an adult in favor of a non-Jewish religious identification. The first two, but not the third (Christmas tree), are also associated with increased propensity to ethno-apostasy.

DISCUSSION

Underlying the analyses in this paper has been a claim that Jewish religious switching and ethno-apostasy are historically and socially contextual phenomena. Their meanings in the religious free market of twenty-first century America differ from those ascribed to them in eras and settings where societal and economic pressures encouraged Jews to leave Judaism. From this basic premise emerged our expectation that the traditional historical pattern of status-related religious change would not be evident in the contemporary data. In the case of ethno-apostasy, this hypothesis (H2) was borne out. Socioeconomic status bore no relationship to ethno-apostasy one way or another.

In the case of religious switching, we found no evidence that Jews with high socioeconomic status would be more likely to switch out of Judaism, as had been the case historically. Hypothesis 1 stated that with the demise of this positive relationship between SES and switching, the two would become entirely unrelated. We offered no suggestion, however, that the relationship might reverse itself. In fact, although there is clear evidence that the historical pattern no longer holds, the differing results for occupational prestige and degree attainment mean that we are unable to definitively assert whether SES is unrelated to Jewish switching or negatively related to it. The notion that contemporary Jewish switching may be more likely among those of lower SES would comport with findings of research on denominational switching generally, which has found that people who diverge from the SES of their co-religionists will be more likely to switch (Newport 1979; Sherkat 1991), and that the switcher will be likely to move into a denomination whose SES profile more closely matches his or her own (Newport 1979). As American Jews cluster in the higher range of socioeconomic indicators (Goldstein 1992; Hartman and Hartman 1996; Kotler-Berkowitz et al. 2004), increased likelihood of switching among those who do not fit this profile would suggest that class and status remain relevant factors in Jewish religious switching, but in a way that breaks with earlier historical patterns. This finding also has parallels in studies of interfaith marriage between Jews and non-Jews, which have found that Jewish exogamy, formerly associated with people of higher SES, now disproportionately involves Jews of lower SES (Ellman 1987; Keysar et al. 1991; Kosmin et al. 1989; Medding et al. 1992; Phillips and Fishman in this issue).

The implication of this finding for a general theory of religious switching is to qualify Sherkat's assertion that status related switching is applicable only to pre-1944 cohorts (2001:1484). Although this may be true if status-related switching is understood in terms of Stark and Glock's (1968b) vision of a unidirectional process of status climbing, it does not agree with the evidence presented here. The finding that religious switching out of Judaism in contemporary America may be associated with lower SES even when controlling for age suggests that status related explanations of denominational mobility may still be

appropriate. But the most appropriate status-based explanations would be multi-directional models of status alignment (Newport 1979; Roof and Hadaway 1979; Sherkat 1991) rather than a reversion to Stark and Glock's (1968b) original thesis of status climbing.

Our finding that SES was unrelated to ethno-apostasy is particularly significant in light of our contention that reconceptualizing apostasy to include an ethnic dimension will shed more light on the actual process of disaffiliation in ethno-religious communities. Using a purely religious definition of apostasy, Roof and McKinney (1987) found that Jews who renounced religious faith had higher average occupational prestige than those who remained adherents of the Jewish religion. Likewise, broader studies of American religious communities have found that higher levels of secular education are associated with a higher propensity to renounce religious faith (Caplowitz and Sherrow 1977; Hadaway and Roof 1988; Need and de Graf 1996; Roozen 1980). The positive relationship between SES and apostasy, evident when apostasy is defined solely in religious terms, does not hold when ethnic dimensions of apostasy are also taken into account. Although high status attainment may influence the nature of affiliation within the boundaries of the ethnic community – promoting secular ethnic self-definitions rather than religious ones – this does not imply a greater propensity to dissociate from the ethno-religious community. There is imperfect but suggestive evidence to this effect, given that those raised without a Jewish denominational affiliation are no more likely to abandon ethnic allegiances than those raised in the three major Jewish religious denominations, all other factors being equal. Inasmuch as contemporary sociological interest in apostasy stems from a desire to understand the social phenomenon of disaffiliation from religious communities, this reformulation of apostasy to incorporate an ethnic dimension offers a more complete, culturally appropriate understanding of the dynamics of disaffiliation from ethno-religious communities.

There was little evidence supporting the proposition that childhood socialization into American Jewish culture would lower the likelihood of ethno-apostasy (H4). Only youth group participation seemed to make a difference. On the other hand, indicators of Jewish socialization were associated with a reduced propensity to adopt a non-Jewish religion as an adult (H3). These relationships, however, seem to be explained by the fact that Jewish children raised with dual religious upbringings have lower levels of Jewish socialization. Among Jews with two Jewish parents, factors like greater synagogue attendance or adherence to a specific Jewish denomination during childhood are not related to religious switching as an adult.

We offered several rationales for hypothesizing that being raised in two faiths would be positively related to adoption of a non-Jewish faith (H7). These included lower entry costs associated with acquiring cultural competence, cross-cutting relations that would offset social pressures from the Jewish community, and impacts on preference formation. The consistency of the results in support of the

hypotheses makes it difficult to determine the relative weight of the push and pull factors in accounting for the observed relationship. In explaining ethno-apostasy, only the theory of cross-cutting relationships was invoked (H8). (The same was true of the high school social network variable – H5 and H6). Taken together, the failure to disconfirm the four hypotheses that drew on a theory of cross-cutting social ties suggests that, problematic though the concept is, it may still be useful in predicting the likelihood of abandoning ethno-religious communities, whether for another religious faith or for none at all.

More than anything else, the predictive strength of dual religion upbringing is the striking finding of this analysis. In contrast with surveys that do not ask about dual-religion upbringing (such as the General Social Survey in all years except 1998), NJPS 2000-1 made the issue almost inescapable. Because the survey accepted multiple responses for questions about childhood and current religious affiliation, it forced researchers to make decisions about how to code individuals who professed or were raised in more than one religion. As a result, a fundamental conceptual problem in the study of religious mobility that tends to be hidden when other datasets are analyzed is pushed to the fore. The idea of “religious switching” is premised on an assumption, rooted at the foundation of the monotheistic faiths, that one religious affiliation precludes all others. A person may switch from religion to religion, but at any given time, he or she is assumed to be an adherent of only one faith. The very use of the term “switching” implies a “switch,” which has two mutually exclusive states: “on” and “off.” Typically, there is no notion that one can simultaneously be Jewish and Christian, or Christian and Moslem (but see Hartman and Kaufman’s discussion in their article in this issue). But what is treated as a theological non sequitur is increasingly becoming a sociological reality. The notion that religion is a mutually exclusive category is at variance with the lived experience of a growing number of people, particularly the children of interfaith marriages (Fishman 2004; Phillips 1997). Thus the religious realm may be undergoing the same increase in fluidity and personalism seen in the ethnic realm (Alba 1990; Waters 1990). Since this is true even in cases where the theological divide is as sharply defined as that between Judaism and Christianity, we speculate that it may also characterize instances where theological differences are less pronounced and rates of inter-group marriage are greater, as among the Protestant denominations.

In this context, the notion of religious switching is inherently problematic. We found that a mixed religious upbringing in childhood was related to the decisions about religious identification made as adults. But to frame this in terms of religious switching seems to miss the true significance of the social phenomenon we are observing. Contemporary American realities are weakening the millennia-old conception that religious affiliations are a set of mutually exclusive categories connected only by a quantum change from one state to another. The repercussions for religious institutions, theologies, and communities are likely to be far reaching.

How might the sociology of religion take account of this situation? From a methodological perspective, several options seem reasonable. Where a child is raised in one religion or denomination by parents of two faiths or denominations, parental religion may be introduced to the analysis as an independent variable, as we have done here using intermarriage. Where a child is raised in two or more religions, an indicator variable for dual religion upbringing may be included in the equation. A more radical strategy, not explored here, may be to fully embrace the notion of religion as choice, abandoning notions of “staying” and “switching” entirely. The entire population in such a religious outcome analysis, whatever their religious background, may be considered to be potential members of a given religion (other religions can be merged or not at the analyst’s discretion). Parentage and religious upbringing can then be treated as influences like any other, albeit powerful ones. Conceptually, such an approach is appealing as it treats religion as a contingent choice rather than an ascribed identity, more closely hewing to the idea of a religious marketplace. Dual religion identities can be considered another analytic category (or categories). The drawback of such a fully-specified model – the potentially large number of categories of the dependent variable – can be rendered more meaningful by generating estimated probabilities or changes in odds of given variable(s) on a given outcome.

Although methodological innovations can partially address issues raised by dual-religious upbringing and the blurring of religious boundaries, at a deeper level the challenge to the sociology of religion is conceptual more than methodological. To the extent that the study of religious switching remains preoccupied with the notion of movement of between clearly bounded, mutually exclusive communities, it will be projecting a vision of a religious landscape that seems more like a fading oil painting hanging in a dark museum than a continually refreshing video stream from a live webcam.

Note: For References, refer to the Bibliography at the end of this issue.

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