



The Changing Face of the American Jewish Family

Edited by
Leonard Allen Sharzer
and
Burton L. Visotzky

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Rabbi Leonard Allen Sharzer, M.D., is the Associate Director for Bioethics of the Finkelstein Institute for Religious and Social Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Chapter 1

What Has Made the Jewish American Family Jewish? American? A Family?

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SHULY RUBIN SCHWARTZ

As we face the challenges of creating and maintaining Jewish families in contemporary American life, we often feel as if our problems are more onerous because they are unprecedented. But actually, many are not. Through the lens of American Jewish history, we learn that Jews in America have always had concerns about intermarriage, unconventional family configurations, and how to best balance the Jewish and the American in our family lives. Exploring how our American Jewish ancestors confronted such challenges offers insights that can inform and enrich our contemporary conversations.

Dr. Shuly Rubin Schwartz is the Irving Lehrman Research Associate Professor of American Jewish History and Walter and Sarah Schlesinger Dean of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

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Dr. Leonard Saxe is Klutznick Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies and Social Policy at Brandeis University and Director of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and the Steinhardt Social Research Institute.

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Dr. Sylvia Barack Fishman is the Joseph and Esther Foster Professor of Contemporary Jewish Life at Brandeis University and the Co-Director of the Hadassah Brandeis Institute.

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Daniel Parmer is a research associate at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University.

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Dr. Carol Ingall is the Dr. Bernard Heller Professor of Jewish Education emerita at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

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Dr. Joy Ladin is the David and Ruth Gottesman Chair in English at Yeshiva University. Her return to Yeshiva University as a woman after receiving tenure as a man made her the first openly transgender employee of an Orthodox Jewish institution.

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ADINA LEWITTES

I've come to realize that my success shouldn't be calculated by how many people I turn into me by convincing them to lead the Jewish life to which I devote myself. Rather, the fulfillment of my mission as a rabbi should be evaluated on how able I am to help people become the best versions of their own Jewish selves. This has necessitated a rethinking of how Jewish institutions can approach families in all their diversity.

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Rabbi Wes Gardenswartz is the rabbi of Temple Emanuel in Newton, Massachusetts.

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Dr. Sheila Gordon is founder and president of the Interfaith Community/IFC, an education and advocacy organization for Jewish/Christian families.

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BURTON L. VISOTZKY

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The Changing Face of the American Jewish Family: Challenges and Opportunities

Leonard Sharzer

IN THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY of the 21st century, as in the broader American community, the meaning of being a family is changing, often at a pace that communal institutions have difficulty keeping up with. Baby boomers, now in their 50s and 60s, hold positions of communal leadership and authority in the Jewish community. They grew up in mid-20th century America, when much of the institutional and communal Judaism we know today developed.

This was a generation whose communal identity was informed by the aftermath of World War II — the Holocaust; the decimation of European Jewry; and the establishment of the State of Israel. Refugees and children of refugees grew up side by side with second- and third-generation American Jews.

This was also a generation whose family identity was informed by Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, Molly and Jake Goldberg, and the Cleaver family. If Ozzie and Harriet or Molly and Jake were ever the norm, they certainly are not anymore. Families come in all sizes and configurations — single-parent families, some by choice, some not; blended families; families with same sex parents; families with transgender children or transgender parents; interfaith families; and more.

Boomers came of age as adults during the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, the Watergate scandal, *Roe v. Wade*, and the birth control pill, all of which led to an erosion of trust in authority, perhaps especially the authority

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of tradition, coupled with an obsession with autonomy, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and, more recently, authenticity.

With the aging of the Baby Boom generation, it is the members of Gen X and the millennial generation who are establishing and raising families. These young people grew up in very different times, in terms of both national culture and Jewish communal life. This was especially true in the areas of interfaith marriage and Jewish identity. Recognition of patrilineal descent by the Reform and Reconstructionist movements changed who was recognized as Jewish, and the increasing numbers of those who considered themselves Jewish but did not claim Judaism as their religion (Jews Not by Religion) changed how one was recognized as Jewish.

Jewish institutions are built around family. That includes physical institutions — synagogues, schools, JCCs — as well as temporal institutions — Shabbat, holidays, lifecycle events (*brit*, *bar/bat mitzvah*, *aufruf*, wedding, funeral). The changing face of the American Jewish family and the consequences thereof present challenges and opportunities to communal leaders. This volume brings together scholars from various social science disciplines, congregational rabbis, Jewish educators, and members of non-traditional families to examine the ways in which communal institutions are responding to new needs, to look at what needs are not being met, and to make recommendations for necessary changes.

The first four chapters look at the contemporary makeup of the American Jewish Family — who we are now. In the opening chapter, *What Has Made the Jewish American Family Jewish? American? A Family?*, Shuly Rubin Schwartz provides an historical overview of Jewish family life in America from the time Jews first arrived. She describes the challenges of minority status, poverty, dislocation, and assimilation, along with Jewish individual and communal efforts to deal with them. Leonard Saxe looks at the changing attitude toward intermarriage over the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century in *The Times They Are A-Changin': The American Jewish Family in Flux*. He recognizes that intermarriage has reshaped the contours of American Jewry and that the blending of religious traditions is altering Jewish family life, and he argues against an alarmist view of the phenomenon. He notes that the millennial generation of Jews is the first in which children of interfaith marriage have grown up with a sense of acceptance and that opportunities for Jewish educational experiences, especially during college years, have resulted in a greater proportion of Jewish young people affirming Jewish identity and

incorporating Jewish religious practices into their lives than previous generations. Sylvia Barack Fishman, in *Supporting the Jewishness of Today's Diverse Jewish Families*, presents a comprehensive look at the demographics of the contemporary American Jewish family in terms of age, procreative choices, gender, and religious makeup. She notes that Liberalism is the normative environment of most Jews and that a universal approach to such a diverse population is not appropriate, and she makes suggestions as to how the community can address these changing demographics. Daniel Parmer, in *The Jewish Family, Then and Now*, discusses the nature of Jewish families from the standpoint of both major national demographic studies and his own research among Generation X and millennial Jews. He examines the prevalence of intermarriage as well as the attitude toward intermarriage and their relationship to family formation in this group and suggests ways for the Jewish community to engage them.

Carol Ingall notes that education is affected by social trends and, in turn, affects social norms and mores. In *Jewish Education and the Changing Jewish Family*, she discusses trends in Jewish education as informed by those in American education, particularly the growing emphasis on diversity and the move toward individualism over the communitarianism of earlier generations. Joy Ladin, in *Challenges to LGBTQ Inclusion in Jewish Communities: A First-Hand Look*, discusses the issue of LGBTQ inclusion in Jewish communal and synagogue life. She relates her personal story and the difficulties she encountered in a liberal Reconstructionist synagogue that considered itself open and welcoming to LGBTQ Jews. In *A Rabbi's Journey and the Search for New Paradigms*, Adina Levittes describes a new paradigm for Jewish religious communal life in which individuals and families with diverse backgrounds, needs, and interests can find inclusion and be welcome in an authentically Jewish communal home. She goes on to address the issue of intermarriage and her personal path to a willingness to perform a civil ceremony for interfaith couples.

The remaining three chapters all deal with interfaith marriage, in many ways the elephant in the room of Jewish familial and communal life. Jeremy Kalmanofsky, in *Interfaith Marriage: The Case for Endogamy*, makes a powerful case for in-marriage. He argues for asserting and promoting expectations for behavior and faith that reinforce traditional Jewish communal norms while at the same time being welcoming to interfaith families. Wes Gardenswartz offers *Some New Thinking on Intermarriage*, arguing that intermarriage is a fact of life, whether you like it or not, and that it behooves the Jewish community and its rabbis to recognize that reality and to find ways to fully include interfaith cou-

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ples in synagogue life. This would include celebrating lifecycle events, and offering inclusive ritual participation, but would stop short of officiating at interfaith marriages. Finally, Sheila Gordon in *New Interfaith Bridges to the American Jewish Family* offers an approach to interfaith marriage that honors the faith traditions of both parents and looks to balance the two heritages that they bring to the family.

❧ Chapter 1 ❧

What Has Made the Jewish American Family Jewish? American? A Family?

Shuly Rubin Schwartz

HOW DO WE DEFINE “FAMILY” in twenty-first-century America? Who constitutes a family, and who gets to decide whether a family is “legitimate” or not? What are the factors that lead to family brokenness or dysfunction, and can such ruptures be prevented, mitigated or healed?

Such questions have roiled American life of late, for the pace of change has accelerated dramatically, especially since the turn of the twenty-first century: Twentieth-century movements that celebrated diverse racial, ethnic, and gender identities gave rise to a dramatic expansion of the range of possibilities for what constitutes an American family. Though still a matter of dispute for many Americans, the definition of marriage has broadened to include same-sex couples. Awareness of gender fluidity has increased, and more families include individuals of different races, ethnicities, and religions. Divorce, remarriage, and family formation absent marriage have stretched the boundaries of family ties and reshaped our understanding of their essence. The notion of constructing rather than inheriting one’s identity has extended to the construction of one’s family. In all of these ways, American families have become more openly characterized by their diversity and lack of convention. Yet scratching below the surface of our past one learns that what feels so radical, new, and either marvelously liberating or deeply threatening actually reflects the latest iteration of a long tug-of-war between ideals and reality. In earlier

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centuries, Puritan, then Victorian, then bourgeois ideals shaped American ideals about families. In the twentieth century, television immortalized American nuclear family ideals with Ozzie and Harriet and others. But alongside such narratives, real families included — though usually secretly or at least silently — members of different races or different religions, gay individuals, stepsiblings and stepparents, and more.

What is true of American families is no less true of American Jewish families. When we think about the American Jewish family, stereotypes, emotions, and generalizations flood our consciousness. For many American Jews, such images include nostalgic stories that have been passed down in our own families concerning the immigrant generation — no matter how many generations removed it is from us. We retell stories of patriarchs or matriarchs, of good fortune and persecution, but we do so in a way that narrows the narrative because of our natural human tendency to selectively recall the past. In the collective imagination of American Jews, we've conjured up a proverbial American Jewish family, with heart-warming stereotypes that build upon traditional homilies; literary tropes; and stage, film, radio, and film performances: American Jewish families worked hard, stuck together, made ends meet despite poverty and deprivation. An ironic sense of humor coupled with determination and perseverance enabled American Jewish families to survive adversity. Honest, loving, untainted by alcoholism or criminal behavior, American Jews cared for their own, privileging family loyalty above all. They valued education, upward mobility, community responsibility, and Jewish continuity and were nourished by shared gatherings for Sabbath and holidays, filled with aromatic home-cooked food.

With this idyllic view, some bemoan the sorry state of the contemporary Jewish family and wonder how we got to where we are today. But at the same time, we know all too well that the real American Jewish families that we live in are so much messier than our rose-colored memories. And when we are honest with ourselves, we retrieve other memories lodged in the recesses of our minds that vaguely recall the uncle who divorced, the mysterious stepsiblings who suddenly appeared at a grandparent's shivah, and the cousin who intermarried.

American Jewish families were forged over the past few centuries by hardships both ubiquitous to Jews and unique to the American landscape. Some of the challenges they faced presage contemporary ones, while others were specific to their time and place though no less threatening to the stability and

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viability of the family. The one constant throughout the American Jewish experience is the fact that the American Jewish family has always been vulnerable to societal realities that threaten its viability.

During the early years of the republic, Jews in America numbered approximately 2,500 individuals, less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the U.S. population, and the challenge of creating and maintaining American Jewish families was especially intense. Inter-marriage was part and parcel of the fabric of the Jewish community, and over 25 percent of Jews intermarried. Why? Primarily, because there were not enough Jews to go around. Families that cared deeply about in-marriage expended much time, energy, and resources to do everything in their power to ensure that their daughters married Jewish men. They looked beyond the city in which they lived, leveraging Jewish networks to identify available men. Nevertheless, given the small numbers, intermarriage routinely occurred despite such concerted efforts, and many other Jews chose to remain single rather than marry outside the faith.¹

Intermarriage proved gut-wrenching to many families. For example, Abigail Franks, a member of a prominent New York Jewish family, was heartbroken when her daughter Phila eloped to marry the gentile Oliver Delancey in 1743. As she confided to her son Naftali (Heartsey),

my spirits was [sic] for some time so depressed that it was a pain to me to speak or see anyone. I have overcome it so far as to not make my concern so conspicuous but I shall never have that serenity or peace within I have so happily had hitherto.

Abigail saw her daughter's marriage as a private tragedy that she had to bear alone, for she felt ashamed to face her community and had no peers with whom she felt comfortable sharing her anguish.

My house has bin my prisson [sic] ever since. I had not heart enough to goe [sic] near the street door. It's a pain to me to think off goeing [sic] again to town [New York] and if your father's business would premit [sic] him to live out of it I never would goe near it again.²

¹Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism, A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 44–5.

²*The Jew in the American World*, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 43.

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But many other Jewish families that included gentile members exhibited no evidence of crippling shame. A substantial number of intermarried Jews continued to engage with the Jewish community. How do we know this? Because an ample number were sufficiently involved in their synagogues to trigger conversations among the congregational board of trustees. Synagogue records reveal that some trustees believed that intermarried members posed such a threat to the Jewish future that they merited punishment. Yet when sanctions were approved, they were rarely enforced; and in most synagogues, an intermarried Jew could retain his or her seat in the synagogue and even serve as an elector. In the 1820s, some congregations tried to tighten their by-laws to limit membership to in-married men, but they did not enforce such strictures. To do so would have resulted in a loss of membership that they could not afford to bear. It would also have meant excluding prominent individuals with the means and desire to sustain the synagogue.

Most communities needed the support of every willing Jew — intermarried or not — and the leadership could not afford to take principled stands that alienated the people whose involvement they so sorely needed. Because of this, New York's Rodeph Shalom was one of many congregations that withdrew this restriction. Only after the 1840s when the number of Jews in the United States began to increase as a result of immigration from Central Europe did certain congregations such as Philadelphia's Mikveh Israel adopt more stringent standards that penalized intermarried Jews. But by and large, the small number of American Jewish families — whatever their make-up — joined forces to ensure the viability of their synagogues and Jewish communities.³

By the nineteenth century, Jews began to organize communally to combat serious challenges that threatened the stability and viability of Jewish families. For example, families could be ripped apart instantly as a result of financial misfortune, illness or death. In an era before the government assumed responsibility for the welfare of those in need, religious organizations provided such services. In nineteenth-century America, these charities were Christian, and many had an underlying proselytizing mission. If Jewish orphans grew up in Christian orphanages, they would be well fed and cared for, but they would also be particularly susceptible to missionary messages. Many Jewish communal leaders feared — for good reason — that these children would grow up igno-

³ Zev Eleff, *Modern Orthodox Judaism: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2016), 20–1.

rant of or estranged from Judaism and the Jewish community.

Believing that the collective Jewish community needed to assert itself on behalf of widows and orphans, leaders focused on providing the financial support necessary to sustain them within their families. In 1819, Rebecca Gratz, the well-known Jewish philanthropist, established the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society — the first non-synagogal Jewish charity — to provide food, shelter, fuel, employment assistance, and more to Jewish women and children. Nineteen years later, she founded the Philadelphia Hebrew Sunday School Society. Patterning her school on the Christian Sunday School movement, Gratz offered free weekly classes to both boys and girls from early childhood to the early teenage years. In this way, she hoped to instill Jewish learning, belief, and pride, thus securing the Jewish identity of Jewish children, especially those vulnerable to being preyed upon by Christian missionaries. At the same time, she strove to Americanize her students, inculcating in them a distinctive identity as proud American Jews. Inspired by her success, Jewish leaders in other cities established similar schools in their communities.⁴

To further her impact, Gratz later established the Jewish Foster Home in 1855. One of the earliest Jewish orphanages in the United States, this Philadelphia institution was dedicated to providing for Jewish orphans and destitute children who should not be “left to the precarious chance of strangers’ beneficence and . . . estranged from the religion of their fathers, left with a doubtful morality and with no feeling for the faith of Israel.”⁵

During the Civil War, sectional loyalty severely challenged notions of a close-knit Jewish family bound by common traditions and loyalty. With Jews living in both the North and the South, with abolitionists and slave owners among them, families faced divisions stemming from geography, ideology, and religion. Only through deliberate efforts to overcome such rifts were families able to survive. Rebecca Gratz, for example, was from the North and worked hard to sustain a loving familial relationship by maintaining regular correspondence with her gentile sister-in-law who lived in Kentucky, a neutral state. Similarly, Alfred Mordecai, a West Point graduate and weapons expert, found himself anguished by his probable involvement in the Civil War because the

⁴For more on Gratz, see Dianne Ashton, *Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).

⁵Quoted in <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/orphanages-in-united-states> (accessed 8 July 2016).

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vast majority of his family lived in the South. He wrote to his brother George Washington Mordecai in March 1861:

In these calamitous times it is well that relatives & friends should understand each other's position. ...I trust that nothing may prevent my carrying out the intention of making a visit in April with my dear wife to our good mother & all of you.⁶

That Alfred felt the need to write such a letter signals that he could not assume that Jewish familial ties would outweigh American political and geographic division. Only deliberate efforts such as these ensured the viability of such families despite the challenges of the era.

The immigration of more than two million Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century ushered in a whole new host of challenges to the viability of the American Jewish family. Struggling with dislocation, disorientation, poverty, and disease, these immigrants needed assistance to a degree far greater than any existing organizations were equipped to handle. What had heretofore been understood as family tragedies or local communal burdens now took on the force of national emergencies demanding a response on a much bigger scale. The founding of national Jewish communal institutions to assist Jews in need both in the United States and around the world, such as the National Conference of Jewish Charities in 1899, the American Jewish Committee in 1906, and the American Jewish Congress in 1918, enabled American Jews to address many of these problems on a larger scale.

Many Jewish immigrant families lived in sub-standard conditions in dirty, foul-smelling rooms. The president of the National Conference of Jewish Charities warned that tenements were so crowded and stifling that they drove the boys into the streets and the girls into the dance hall. Of more serious concern were rising numbers of unwed immigrant mothers, a personal status that induced such shame that it took the National Council of Jewish Women several years to fund a home for such women that would meet their needs. Desertion also posed a serious threat to Jewish families, as numerous husbands left wives and children for any number of reasons. Perhaps the husbands had immigrated first and were more assimilated than their newly arrived Eastern European families. Perhaps the men were lured to other American cities, en-

⁶ *American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader*, ed. Gary P. Zola and Marc Dollinger (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 94-6.

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ticed by the promise of employment or get-rich-quick schemes. Or perhaps they simply disappeared, disgraced at their inability to support their families in their new country. The Jewish Daily Forward sought to shame deserters into returning home through its “Gallery of Missing Husbands” by printing photos as well as heart-wrenching letters by wives struggling on their own to support themselves and their children. Pressure to address this mounting problem led to the establishment of the National Desertion Bureau in 1911, which took systematic steps to apprehend deserters. Unfortunately, many Jewish families were never reunited; some children were deposited in orphanages, while others left school to help support the family.

Jewish communal workers, guided by prevailing American morés, also worried that Jewish families weren’t adhering to the latest scientific findings about cleanliness and hygiene. Believing that a thriving home should be clean and orderly, guides such as *The Settlement Cook Book* instructed the immigrant Jewish woman on how to clear the table after a meal, wash the dishes, dust a room, and more.

Jewish philanthropic organizations of all kinds also galvanized regionally: during the Depression to help Jewish families in need; before, during, and after World War II to resettle refugees and survivors; and later to assist families from the Soviet Union.

Interestingly, in light of contemporary concerns, Jewish communal institutions did not sound the alarm bells concerning declining birth rates or rising intermarriage rates, although both were issues at the time. They focused instead on the question, “What’s Jewish about the Jewish family?” Fearing that the children of Eastern European immigrants lacked the Jewish knowledge or experiences necessary to pass on Jewish traditions, many organizations focused on educating Jewish women about how to maintain a Jewish home so that they could anchor their families Jewishly with meaningful Shabbat and holiday rituals. Jewish women’s organizations, especially the Conservative movement’s National Women’s League and the Reform movement’s National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, developed numerous pamphlets, guides, programming manuals and more to provide women with the resources to confidently introduce Shabbat and holiday rituals into their homes.

It wasn’t until the 1960s that Jewish leaders begin to express alarm over rising intermarriage rates. This concern spilled out into the public sphere with *Look* magazine’s 1964 article on “The Vanishing American Jew,” and then with

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national surveys beginning in the 1970s. Such studies began to track and report on intermarriage and other issues — such as mobility, gender norms, ritual observance, and the like — with a special focus on the impact of such variables on the Jewishness of the Jewish family.

Jewish leaders feared that the American Jewish family had acculturated successfully into American life only to disappear as a distinctive entity deemed worthy of cultivation. Thankfully, most American Jewish families no longer suffered the insidious effects of poverty, desertion, and lack of education; and they assimilated into mainstream American life. But as Jewish families came to resemble American families, they became the target of negative stereotypes that threatened them psychologically. For instance, by the 1960s, the positive Jewish mother stereotype of the caring, nurturing, self-sacrificing woman of warmth and dignity had morphed into the overbearing Jewish mother whose neuroses jeopardized the well-being of her family. Enshrined in fiction, self-help manuals, movies, television shows, and comedy routines, this stereotype pervaded public perception in the broader culture. A few examples will suffice:⁷

What did the Jewish Mother bank teller say to her customer?

You never write, you never call, you only visit when you need money.

What is the most common disease transmitted by Jewish Mothers?

Guilt.

Why do Jewish Mothers make great parole officers?

They never let anyone finish a sentence.

What is a genius?

An average student with a Jewish Mother.

What's the difference between a Jewish Mother and a vulture?

A vulture waits until you're dead to eat your heart out!

Characterized as a highly manipulative, crusty martyr whom no family member could ever please fully and who induced unending guilt in her children, the Jewish mother infantilized her offspring, constantly nagged her son to get a job, and pushed her daughter to find a rich husband. She suffocated her family, especially her children, with too much food. She demanded total loyalty from her loved ones.

⁷Examples are taken from William Novak and Moshe Waldoks, *The Big Book of Jewish Humor* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1981), 268–78

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According to Riv-Ellen Prell,⁸ Jewish mothers were also blamed for the challenges of post-war suburban life. They were held responsible for the negative effects of assimilation, for the shallowness of Jewish values, for lightweight reading that threatened Jewish culture — in other words, for creating a Judaism that failed to sustain adults. Such accusations posed a direct affront to sustained efforts on the part of individual women and Jewish women's organizations as a whole to achieve precisely the opposite, as we've discussed above. Jewish mothers were also lightning rods for critiques of the brutal demands of mobility and the parochialism that people imagined kept Jews from full acceptance by their gentile neighbors.

Ironically, this supposedly unique Jewish characteristic originated in the American cultural phenomenon known as “momism,” a mid-twentieth-century notion coined by Philip Wylie⁹ that claimed that American mothers had destroyed the morale of the nation by their overbearing treatment of their sons. So even in the realm of stereotyping, American Jewish families faced in accentuated manner the same challenges that American families more generally confronted as well.

The insidious Jewish American Princess (JAP) stereotype that became equally ubiquitous in popular culture also impacted the Jewish family negatively. Exemplified by Herman Wouk's Marjorie Morningstar and Philip Roth's Brenda Patimkin, and later popularized by Gilda Radner, Fran Drescher's portrayal of a nanny, and others, the Jewish American Princess epitomized indulgence. Young Jewish women were depicted as smart but over privileged brats. A few examples illustrate this well:

How many JAPs does it take to change a light bulb?

Two — one to pour the TaB, the other to call daddy. [or more recently: “none; I don't want to ruin my nails.”]

While preparing her will, an elderly Jewish woman consults with her rabbi. She explains that she has two requests. First, she wants to be cremated. The rabbi objects, but the woman holds firm. Second, she

⁸See Riv-Ellen Prell, “Why Jewish American Princesses Don't Sweat: Desire and Consumption in Postwar American Jewish Culture: Jews and Judaism From An Embodied Perspective,” in H. Eilberg-Schwartz, ed., *The People of the Body: Jews and Judaism From An Embodied Perspective* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 329–60.

⁹<https://csivc.csi.cuny.edu/history/files/lavender/momism.html> (accessed by author 5/3/17).

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says, “I want my ashes scattered over Bloomingdales.” “Why Bloomingdales?” asks the rabbi. “Then I’ll be sure that my daughters will visit me twice a week.”

Demanding, status-conscious and materialistic, spoiled as well as frigid, JAPs epitomized the anxieties of the era. Young Jewish women were unfairly targeted as the cause of rising intermarriage rates, for their purported negative characteristics were invoked to justify young Jewish men’s search for gentile mates. Docile, amiable, and blonde, gentile women wouldn’t eat Jewish men’s hearts out, bleed them dry of cash, or fail to satisfy them sexually.

Such negative stereotyping of Jewish women threatened to destroy the Jewish family from within by eroding female self-worth and sowing dissent and distrust between Jewish men and women. It would take a new generation of feminist Jewish authors, comedians, actors, and scholars to begin to overturn this entrenched stereotype.

What, then, can we learn from this condensed survey of the historical record? Above all, we see that both the strength and fragility of the American Jewish family have always been deeply affected both by what is going on not only in the American society around it but also by the specific challenges unique to its survival in each generation.

In every era, American Jewish families were threatened by antisemitic stereotypes, regional differences, socioeconomic challenges, and unrealistic expectations. Most families included those who were crippled by poverty or by physical and mental health diseases. Many Jews jeopardized the viability of their families because they were ignorant of their heritage and therefore unable to pass it on to their children, even if they had not also been plagued by ambivalence. Every era included unconventional households in which children were reared by grandparents, in orphanages, or with distant relatives; unmarried adults lived at home helping to rear nieces and nephews and to nurse aging parents. Some families chose to settle in far-flung locations in ways that enhanced business opportunities but left them fragmented and without support. Challenges to gender norms threatened the stability of many marriages and home lives. Remarriages after early death were common, bringing new combinations of step-relations into the mix, which often upset family equilibrium and interfered with the smooth transmission of Jewish rituals. In every era, some family members were gay, others were intermarried. Most of this was accepted as part of life, wasn’t discussed publicly, and, until relatively recently, didn’t rise to the level of a communal conversation.

What Has Made the American Jewish Family Jewish? American? A Family?

One detects a common thread throughout the American Jewish experience: in every era, American Jews were influenced by their surroundings. They shared the same worries that all American families had. But in addition, they feared for the Jewish future, both within their families and for the Jewish community as a whole. And as a result, they — as individual families and as a collective community — struggled to find the right balance between the American and the Jewish aspects of the American Jewish family. This very volume continues that same quest, as we struggle to incorporate new ways of thinking about both the ideal and the real in the American Jewish family, in order to determine how best to ensure its flourishing in the years ahead.

The Times They Are A-Changin': The American Jewish Family in Flux¹

Leonard Saxe

IN A FAMOUS ESSAY, “The Ever-Dying People,” Judaic scholar Simon Rawidowicz audaciously claimed that throughout Jewish history, each generation worried that it would be the “the final link in Israel’s chain” (Rawidowicz, 1986). This “fear of extinction,” he argued, helped to ensure Jewish survival. These fears took on different forms in different historical periods. As overt antisemitism waned after World War II, a new concern — assimilation — took hold and stoked anxiety about the Jewish future. A 1964 cover story from the then-widely circulated *Look* magazine, titled “The Vanishing American Jew,” succinctly captured the anxiety felt by the Jewish community (Morgan, 1964). Readers were told that “Judaism may be losing 70 percent of children born to mixed couples” and were warned of a bleak future for American Jewry. The American family, the core building block of a Jewish community, was being torn apart by rising rates of intermarriage.

The continuity crisis facing American Jewry was documented by decennial socio-demographic surveys. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, conducted by the Council of Jewish Federations, provided the most dramatic evidence. It reported that the majority (52 percent) of recent marriages of Jews

¹This paper has been adapted from remarks given at the Jewish Theological Seminary’s conference “The Changing Face of the American Jewish Family.”

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were to non-Jews (Kosmin et al., 1991). Although the survey reported modest population growth (5.5 million children and adults), the headline was the intermarriage rate and its expected dire consequences. The assumption, in part founded by the data, was that the children of intermarriage would not be Jewish. Panic ensued in the Jewish community, with federations, denominations, and private philanthropies each searching for ways to ensure Jewish continuity.

In line with Rawidowicz's thesis, the perceived continuity crisis sparked actions that may actually have changed the course of Jewish history. Efforts to diagnose the root causes of the problem proliferated, including continuity commissions (see, e.g., Woocher, 2015) and analyses of the Jewish educational systems (see, e.g., Commission on Jewish Education in North America, 1990). A host of new initiatives appeared, including grassroots projects developed by communities, national efforts supported by religious movements, and large-scale programs developed in cooperation with the state of Israel, Birthright Israel in particular.

In terms of the Jewish family, perhaps the most significant of these changes started to take shape 12 years before NJPS 1990 when the Reform movement began to reconsider its policies toward intermarriage. A 1978 speech by Rabbi Alexander Schindler (then head of the Reform movement) launched a sea-change in how the movement dealt with intermarriage (Schindler, 1978). While agreeing with other religious leaders that it was a tragedy when Jews married non-Jews, Schindler argued that the Jewish community could not reject these families. Instead of sitting *shiva* for intermarried children, he called on the Jewish community to draw these couples and their children closer to Judaism by engaging in outreach. In 1983, the movement took an additional and broader leap when it decided to accept patrilineal descent.

Despite changes stimulated by NJPS 1990, the 2000–01 decennial NJPS survey found that for the first time since scientific surveys of American Jews were conducted, the total Jewish population declined (United Jewish Communities, 2003). The 2000–01 survey, however, was methodologically problematic and likely underestimated the Jewish population (Kadushin et al., 2005). Nevertheless, it was difficult to argue that American Jewry was growing when the rising intermarriage rates were simultaneously having a powerful impact on the Jewish community. Even if there was modest population growth, it was likely the result of immigration to the United States (principally, from the former Soviet Union) and not natural family growth.

Intermarriage has, undoubtedly, reshaped the contours of American Jewry,

and the blending of religious traditions is altering Jewish family life. While the rate of intermarriage and its consequences, such as educational gaps between children of intermarriage and other Jews, are a source of concern, this paper will argue against an alarmist view of the phenomenon. Intermarriage provides an opportunity for the Jewish community to expand its reach, improve Jewish education, and find new ways to engage families in Jewish life.

Much of the discussion that follows will focus on millennial Jews—those born after 1980. This is the generation that came of age around 2000 and is, for the next several decades, the core of the adult population. Millennial Jews are just now partnering and forming their own families. Understanding this generation is critical for developing policies that support these Jewish families and engage them in Jewish life.

Demographic Change

Issues related to the size and character of the Jewish population are central to understanding how Jewish families are changing. Our concern is not population growth or decline per se, as much as it is determining the drivers of demographic change. Although the intermarriage rate seems to have plateaued, its impact has increased over time as a larger proportion of the overall Jewish population has intermarried. At the same time, the Jewish population has increased numerically, in particular since 1990 (Pew Research Center, 2013; American Jewish Population Project, 2015). Understanding which segments of the population have grown and declined is central to a constructive response to the issues confronting contemporary Jewish family life in the United States.

As shown in Figure 1, which compares the NJPS 1990's estimates with those of the 2013 Pew Research Center study (2013), the American Jewish population increased more than 25 percent between 1990 and 2013. Although some have challenged Pew's estimates (in particular, the overall estimate of 6.8 million Jewish adults and children²), the population figure is almost identical to estimates produced independently by the Steinhardt Social Research Institute's American Jewish Population Project (AJPP) using a data synthesis approach (see American Jewish Population Project, 2015; Saxe & Tighe, 2013; Saxe, Tighe, & Boxer, 2014; Saxe, et al., 2007). As of 2015, the total U.S. Jewish

²Although Pew (2013) reported the total population as 6.8 million, a reanalysis found that the population should have been 6.9 million (Tighe, et al., 2014).

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FIGURE 1: Estimates of Jewish population between 1990 and 2013/15

Source: Council of Jewish Federation's (1991) National Jewish Population Survey, Pew Research Center's (2013) Survey of US Jews, and SSRI's (2015) AJPP analysis

population had grown to approximately 7.2 million (American Jewish Population Project, 2015).

One difference between the Pew and AJPP estimates is with respect to children. Pew estimates 1.4 million children (approximately 78,000 per age cohort), while AJPP estimates 1.6 million children (approximately 88,000 per age cohort). Estimates vary due in part to the number of ways parents interpret questions about how they are raising their children. Most inmarried Jewish parents unambiguously state that they are raising their children as Jews, regardless of whether there is a religious component to their child-rearing. But for intermarried parents, characterizing their decision regarding religious upbringing is more difficult. Some have not made a decision about how they are raising their children, some are exposing their children to multiple religious traditions, and some tell their children that it will be for them to decide when they become adults.

Perhaps the most striking finding of Pew's 2013 study when juxtaposed with the findings of NJPS 1990 is the number of Jewish adults. Similar to what was found in 1990, Pew's 2013 estimate was that 1.8 percent of U.S. adults in 2013 identify their religion as Jewish. Since the percentage of U.S. adults who say their religion is Jewish has remained constant while the total U.S. population has grown, the result is an increase in the number of Jewish adults. At the same time, a significant proportion of the 2013 Jewish population are adults who have Jewish parentage or converted and consider themselves Jewish but do not claim Judaism as their religion. The proportion of "Jews not by religion"

(JNRs) has increased dramatically since 1990. Overall, the Jewish population has grown from 5.5 million in 1990 to over 7 million in 2013, representing a 25 percent increase in the total U.S. Jewish population. However, although the proportion who identify as Jewish by religion has increased just 17 percent during this period, the proportion who identify as Jewish not by religion (JNR) has increased by 70 percent (Saxe, Sasson, & Aronson, 2015).

The growth in the population who identify as Jewish not by religion should be viewed with some skepticism, not with respect to the accuracy of the estimate, but rather its meaning. Although a portion of the Jewish population has always identified as Jewish outside the boundaries of religion (Batnitsky, 2011), the increase in the number may reflect greater social acceptance of non-religious Jewish identification. Despite the fact that, in general, these individuals have weaker ties to the Jewish community and lower levels of Jewish engagement (Cohen, 2006; Cohen & Wertheimer, 2006), JNRs also include those who are highly engaged in Jewish life.

Intermarriage

Historically, intermarriage has symbolized loss for the Jewish community (Cohen, 2006; Sarna, 2004; Sasson, et al., 2017). Jewish adults who married non-Jews were typically unengaged in the community and unlikely to pass their tradition on to their children. Although much of the blame for non-engagement has been placed on the interfaith marriage itself, the explanation is more complex. There is substantial evidence that deficits in both formal and informal Jewish education are the underlying factors (Chertok, Phillips, & Saxe, 2008). Individuals who lack Jewish education tend to be less motivated to be involved in Jewish life, have narrower Jewish social networks, and have more difficulty creating meaningful Jewish experiences in their own homes. At the same time, lack of Jewish education does not provide a full explanation, and intermarriage also affects those with modest and even high levels of Jewish education. It is also evident that intermarried families who do not feel welcome in Jewish communal institutions, particularly synagogues, have little motivation to continue to be involved in Jewish life and include their children, as well as their non-Jewish partners.

Not surprisingly, intermarriage has become associated with predictions of a dark future, in particular for the children raised in these homes. Children raised in intermarried households are less likely to receive Jewish education,

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participate in Jewish home rituals, and be part of synagogue communities. Historically, these children have been less likely to identify as Jewish as adults (see, e.g., Cohen, 2006). But as noted earlier, in the 1980s and 1990s under the auspices of the Reform movement, several changes took place that opened myriad opportunities for intermarried families to participate more fully in Jewish life. The decision to accept patrilineal descent in 1983, for example, gave rise to a generation of children who could claim a legitimate Jewish identity and find acceptance in the institutions that, for earlier generations, had been unwelcoming.

Although intermarriage has been framed as a wholly negative influence on Jewish families, changing attitudes are leading to a number of developments. One marker of positive change is that adult children of intermarried parents are increasingly likely to identify as Jewish. A major generational shift is underway and is most striking for millennials (those born between 1981 and 2000). As shown in Figure 2, among those born between 1981 and 1995 who were adults by the time of the 2013 Pew survey, 61 percent of those who are children of intermarriage identify as Jewish. This figure is nearly 65 percent higher than the rate of Jewish identification for the previous generation (Gen X; see Sasson, 2013; Saxe, et al., 2015).

Among these adult millennial children of intermarriage who identify as Jewish, more than half are Jews by Religion (JBR). Thus, not only do the majority of millennial children of intermarried parents consider themselves Jewish, but they are also the first generation with a majority who identify as JBRs, rather than JNRs: 46 percent among millennials versus 25 percent for Baby Boomers and 8 percent for the Silent generation. Similarly, these millennial adults were the most likely to have had Jewish education (40 percent) and a bar mitzvah (29 percent). Although substantial gaps between intermarried and inmarried families in terms of their Jewish engagement remain, generational shifts in Jewish identity among children of intermarriage suggest additional further developments are likely.

The Future of the Jewish Family

How should the Jewish community address the effects of several decades of a 50 percent-plus intermarriage rate and the increasing rate of Jewish identification of members of those families? To the extent that these developments have increased the size of the community but also led to lower levels of overall

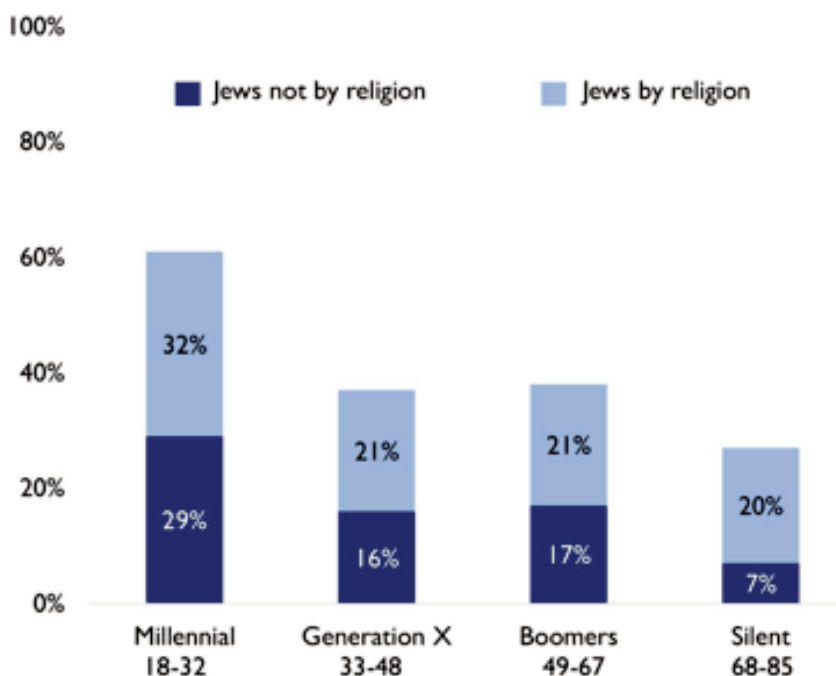


FIGURE 2: Adults of intermarried parents who identify as Jews

Source: Pew Research Center's (2013) Survey of US Jews, and SSRI's (2015) AJPP analysis

engagement, how can the community respond? In particular, in an era when intermarriage has become more normative, how can the Jewish community promote the value of Jewish family life?

As noted above, the likelihood of intermarriage and adult engagement in Jewish life is strongly pre-determined by Jewish education and experiences before adulthood. Can anything be done other than to strengthen formal and informal education for children and adolescents? Even if that could be done, the impact on the present generation of Jewish adults, particularly those who are just beginning to form their own families, will be limited. The present focus will, thus, be on Jewish young adults, mostly those who are in the twenties.

For more than a decade, my colleagues and I have followed tens of thousands of Jewish young adults who applied to participate in Birthright Israel, hereafter "Birthright." Launched in 1999, Birthright is the largest single Jewish educational initiative and provides 10-day educational experiences in Israel for 18- to 26-year-olds (Saxe & Chazan, 2008). By 2015, more than 350,000

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Jewish young adults from North America had participated in the program. Systematic surveys of Birthright applicants provide a wealth of data on Jewish young adults, including those who participated in the program and those who did not.

Our program of research includes research designed to evaluate the program's impact in the short, medium, and long term (3 months to 16 years after participation; see e.g., Shain, Saxe, et al., 2014; Saxe, et al., 2017). Data from these studies provides a wealth of information about the composition of members of the millennial Jewish population, their Jewish backgrounds and education, as well as how their identities are affected by participation in Birthright. One focus of our recent research has been on intermarriage and, in particular, how participation in the program differentially affects children of intermarriage and inmarriage. We have long-term data on how participation affects marriage and raising Jewish children, as well as shorter-term data about the effects of the program on the applicants' Jewish identities and participation in Jewish life.

In 2015, we studied a group of applicants from 2009 to 2013 who were either from intermarried or inmarried homes (see details in Sasson, et al., 2015). We examined whether or not participation during college in Jewish educational experiences — primarily Birthright, but also Jewish and Israel studies courses, as well as participation in Hillel or Chabad — could alter the trajectory of Jewish engagement. We were particularly interested in assessing whether or not educational interventions could increase participation in Jewish life of children of intermarried parents.

Our analysis used a statistical modeling procedure that enabled us to compare “typical” children of inmarriage and intermarriage (see Sasson, et al., 2015). We called the typical child of inmarriage “Rachel” and the typical child of intermarriage “Robert.”³ Using our survey data, we modeled what happened to Rachel and Robert under two scenarios: If she/he had no Jewish experiences in college such as Birthright versus if she/he had at least one substantial Jewish experience (Birthright, a course, active participation in Hillel or Chabad). The modeling technique enabled us to make Rachel's and Robert's backgrounds similar and allowed us to isolate the effects of having a Jewish educational experience in college.

By the time of the survey, our respondents were no longer in college and

³In the 2015 report, different names were used. “Rachel” and “Robert” were the names used in the presentation that was the basis for this chapter.

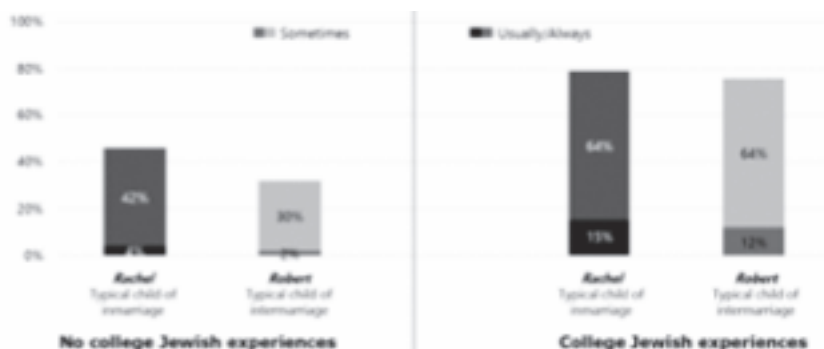


FIGURE 3: Likelihood of having a special meal on Shabbat

multiple measures were used to assess their engagement with Jewish life. For present purposes, three variables will be used as illustrations. Figure 3 compares Rachel and Robert in terms of their participation in Shabbat meals. Without college exposure to Jewish life, Rachel and Robert are quite different. Rachel has a nearly 50 percent likelihood of having a Shabbat meal, while Robert has a less than 33 percent likelihood. Neither Rachel nor Robert without college involvement participates in a Shabbat meal regularly. In contrast, Rachel or Robert who participated in Birthright and/or other college Jewish experiences, are statistically indistinguishable. Both have a nearly 80 percent likelihood of having a Shabbat meal at least sometimes and a 12 to 15 percent likelihood of participating in Shabbat meals usually or always. A similar pattern exists for the likelihood of celebrating *Rosh Hashanah* (see Figure 4).

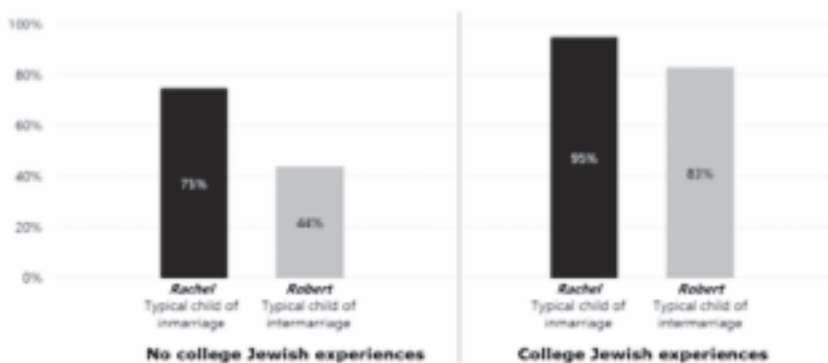


FIGURE 4: Likelihood of Rosh Hashanah Celebration

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Perhaps the most dramatic finding is the survey measure regarding feeling an emotional connection to Israel. Again, Rachel and Robert who have no college exposure to Jewish life are quite different. Rachel, from an inmarried Jewish family is much more likely to feel a connection than Robert, although her connection is relatively weak (about 33 percent). In contrast, both Rachel and Robert with Birthright and/or other college Jewish experiences have almost identical levels of connection to Israel (75 to 77 percent). Given that most of those with college experiences include travel to Israel (if not on Birthright, under other auspices), this finding is not surprising. What is surprising, however, is that connection to Israel is so sensitive to change via education. While connection to Israel may be seen as a narrow aspect of Jewish identity, the fact that the same pattern is found with multiple measures suggests the power of educational and experiential experiences.

The findings of the 2015 study of recent college alumni only suggest the potential for long-term changes in the millennial generation. One assumes that young adults who have developed a habit of participating in Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, and feeling a connection to Israel will want to form families that are involved in Jewish life. This is precisely what we are finding in a longitudinal study of Birthright applicants from the first decade of the program (2001 to 2009). The most recent study of a sample of this cohort (Saxe, et al., 2017) indicates that even a dozen years after program participation that Birthright alumni (including those who go in the years following college) are more likely to marry other Jews and be engaged in Jewish life. The effects are particularly strong for those who are children of intermarriage.

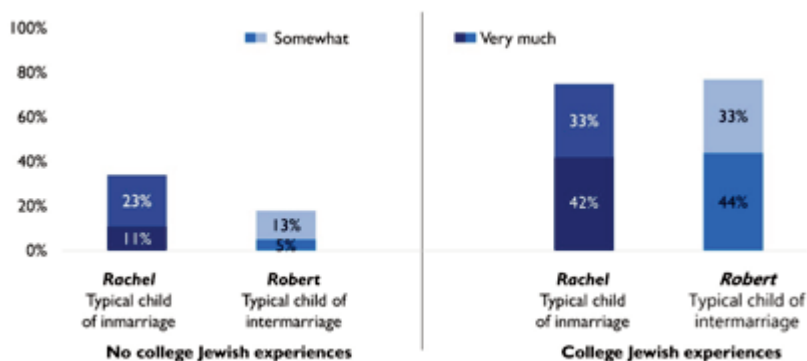


FIGURE 5: Likelihood of feeling a connection to Israel

Discussion

As signaled by the subtitle of this paper, “The American Jewish Family in Flux” we seem to be on the precipice of a tremendous shift in defining who are the members of Jewish families and understanding how they relate to the Jewish community. To some extent, socio-demographic studies which have been at the heart of Jewish communal research are misleading. They can inform us about the state of Jewish life at a particular moment and they can tell us how adults were socialized in the past, but they do not do a very good job of identifying trends and predicting the future.

Understanding how societal forces shape different generations always requires some distance. From what we now know, there are at least two ways in which the millennial generation is unique. Both have important implications for the future of Jewish families. The first is that this is the first generation of young Jews who have grown up with intermarriage as accepted, if not normative. Unlike their parents’ generation, most of the millennial children of intermarried parents grew up feeling accepted. Outreach not opprobrium was their experience. That there was a dramatic generational shift in the likelihood that children of intermarriage would identify as Jews is evidence for this shift.

Second, the millennial generation had Jewish educational opportunities that were unavailable to earlier generations. There are now many opportunities for Jewish education throughout adulthood. Birthright Israel is paradigmatic of the change. As a program designed for the unengaged (but which targets those with Jewish education as well), its existence makes clear that the educational goalpost has shifted. That there is strong evidence of its impact — both among unmarried 20-somethings and partnered 30-somethings — makes clear that a new era is emerging.

Despite the positive data described here, the lachrymose narrative of Jewish life which has informed much of Jewish polity in recent decades will no doubt continue to resonate. Perhaps there is enduring wisdom in Rawidowicz’s thesis that anxiety about the future is what enables the Jewish community to thrive. That the Jewish population is increasing and that the present generation of Jewish young adults is not abandoning Judaism at the rate of earlier generations is unassailable, as is the fact that intermarriage does not seem to be the end of the road for many Jewish families. At the same time, the challenge of developing a life-spanning Jewish educational system that melds notions of religion, culture, and peoplehood is somewhat daunting.

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By requiring that we educate ourselves and our children, Judaism already provides a structure for ensuring that education is a lifelong commitment. This pursuit of learning does not stop when children go to school or become bar/bat mitzvah or go to college. The present discussion underscores the importance of supporting those interventions that have connected a new generation to their Jewish identities. Continuity will be ensured only if these efforts continue and strengthen as millennials marry and form their own families.

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Supporting the Jewishness of Today's Diverse Jewish Families

Sylvia Barack Fishman

Diverse faces of Jewish families

AMERICAN JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS today are diverse. Many look different than conventional Jewish homes in historical Jewish communities.¹ The dividing line between conventional and non-conventional Jewish families has been recalibrated during the past half-century by quickly changing and profound social, political, and economic trends. Today, for example, almost three-quarters (74 percent) of American Jewish men and 43 percent of American Jewish women between the ages of 25 to 34 are not married.² Fewer Jewish homes have children, and most have fewer children than American Jews in the 1950s, averaging 1.7 per family instead of 2.8. Today most American Jewish women and men work outside the home for pay, and the majority of

¹Aspects of this article are explored in different contexts in Sylvia Barack Fishman, "Gender and American Jewish Life," in American Jewish Year Book 2014. This article also draws on several new studies commissioned for her volume, *Love, Marriage and Jewish Families Today: Paradoxes of a Social Revolution* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press/ University Press of New England, December 2015). Yet see Shuly Schwartz's article in this volume for a different view.

²Unless otherwise cited, data in this paper have been computed by Steven M. Cohen from the *Pew Portrait of Jewish Americans* data set (2013) for use in Sylvia Barack Fishman and Steven M. Cohen, "Family, Engagement, and Jewish Continuity Among American Jews" (Jerusalem: JPPI Annual Assessment 2015).

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procreative American Jewish households (including those with young children) have two working parents. More American Jews are married to non-Jews: 44 percent of married American Jews have a non-Jewish spouse, and the intermarriage rate is almost 60 percent among Jews who have married since 2000, according to the much-discussed 2013 Pew report, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*.³ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) Jews — and the families they create — are more prominent in Jewish communities than in previous decades. Increasing rates of adoption of children of various ethnicities, and a new awareness of Jews of color, give Jewish synagogues and Jewish institutions a rainbow hue.

Some observers urge an undifferentiated Jewish communal response to these diverse families. Universal approaches are appealing, evoking the Jewish emphasis on hospitality and *hesed*. But lumping together non-conventional Jewish families, with their very different causes and needs, obstructs our vision of their diversity and interferes with our understanding of their impact on American Jewish life today. By not asking questions and analyzing the differences, we miss the opportunity to construct specific strategies and programs to support their Jewish experiences and connections.

To enhance the future of American Jewish family life, we need to start with a clear differentiation between the problematic and the benign aspects of familial transformations. Blurring the differences and creating Jewish equivalences between different kinds of non-conventional households obscures facts which serve as a basis for productive communal policies.

Considering the quality of American Jewish life demands looking inside the numbers. The Pew *Portrait of Jewish Americans* and other recent studies vividly illustrate why it is important to facilitate the formation of, and to create policies that support, households that have two identifying characteristics: (1) They are unambiguously “Jewish by religion” (not “Jew not by religion,” not “partly Jewish,” not “Jewish and something else”), and (2) they are raising Jewish children. Adults who grow up in unambiguously Jewish households are overwhelmingly those most likely to marry, to establish Jewish homes of their own, and to raise Jewish children who, in turn, create the next generation of American Jews, as the Pew *Portrait* and other recent studies show. The unambiguously Jewish procreative families bring more than nominal numbers or “pride”—they bring dynamic and transmissible Jewishness to American Jewry.

³Lugo, Cooperman, and Smith, et al., *A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews* (October 1, 2013).

Later marriage and delayed childrearing

Patterns of family formation today contrast with those of the 1950s and early 1960s, when American Jewish women and men typically met their (Jewish) spouses while attending college or soon thereafter, marrying and bearing their “2.8 children” during their twenties and early thirties. Today, American Jewish fertility rates are below replacement level, about 1.7 children born to non-Orthodox Jewish women according to the Pew Portrait of Jewish Americans (2013).

Dramatically declining numbers of procreative, unambiguously Jewish families today are primarily the result of late marriage, low fertility, and intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews. Those behaviors—as this paper discusses—are influenced by economics, changing gender roles, social and ideological trends, and other factors. Harriet and Moshe Hartman showed that Jewish men achieve a 90 percent ever-married rate only at age 45, and Jewish women when they are over age 50.⁴ Most American Jews pursue education and establish careers first, delaying marriage and children. Many postpone parenthood even beyond their late marriages. Some encounter unexpected obstacles having the children they had planned.

Behaviors and assumptions about family life are quite different among Israeli Jews than those of American Jews. Though they certainly face their own economic pressures, Israelis live in a much more pro-natalist society than contemporary America, a pro-natalism reinforced by Israeli governmental policies. In part, as a result, even *hiloni* (non-religious) Israelis say three to four children is “ideal for people like themselves” and give birth to 2.8 children. The average for Israeli Jews is 3.6, the highest fertility rate in the developed world, according to Israeli demographer Sergio Della Pergola.⁵

As the differences between American and Israeli Jewish fertility rates illustrate, personal decisions are influenced not only by economic realities but also by social norms and by the values and behaviors of one's peers. Some family decisions are influenced by American societal emphasis on the individual and

⁴Harriet Hartman and Moshe Hartman, *Gender and American Jews: Patterns in Work, Education & Family in Contemporary Life* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 2009).

⁵Sergio Della Pergola, “View from a Different Planet: Fertility Attitudes, Performances, and Policies Among Jewish Israelis,” in Fishman, ed., *Love, Marriage, and Jewish Families*, op. cit. Figure 3.

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the glamorization of singleness and childlessness. “Making a life of one’s own” wears the face of enduringly youthful independence as seen in the cover art and prose of Kate Bolick’s memoir, *Spinster* (2015).⁶ Even marriage is often swept into the seemingly irresistible tide of individualism: Economist Andrew Cherlin shows how culture-wide concepts of marriage have undergone “a transition from the companionate marriage to . . . the *individualized marriage*.”⁷ Throughout the developed world, fewer procreative families are one symptom of what reviewer Garret Keizer succinctly calls “a generation’s failure to generate.”⁸

Liberal and conservative views of the family affect Jewish behavior

Familial change is a hot topic in both liberal and conservative American political circles. Because social norms are so powerful, both liberal and conservative leaders attempt to nudge social norms into alignment with their vision of how society and individuals in society should think and behave. Some share their opinions through friendly persuasion — articles, talks, and other non-coercive communication. But extremists in both camps seek to impose their own version of social norms through legal rulings, social pressure, and even harassment. Both poles of the liberal-conservative ideological continuum influence practical changes in societal norms.

American Jews over the past few decades have engaged in a dance with liberal and conservative views of the family, sex, love, and children. Liberalism provides the normative environment of most American Jews — and is thus invisible to them much of the time. Theories and cultural values of contemporary liberal thinkers have been mainstreamed and absorbed into the lives of the majority of American non-Orthodox and some Modern Orthodox Jews. The differences between the number of children considered normative among contemporary well-educated American Jews versus both their Israeli peers and earlier generations of American Jews illustrates the powerful effect of social networks and the norms they construct. American Jews’ political identification, overwhelmingly Democratic and liberal for decades, as well as their political

⁶Kate Bolick, *Spinster: Making a Life of One’s Own* (Crown Publishers, 2015).

⁷Andrew Cherlin, *American marriage in the early twenty-first century: The Future of Children* 15, No 2: 33-55.

⁸“Homeward Bound,” *New York Times Book Review*, March 4, 2015.

activism, indicate that they are more sensitive to — and more offended by — the conservative extremism they encounter than by liberal extremism.

Extremists in both “red” conservative and “blue” liberal camps say and write things about sex, love, families, and children that seem antithetical to contemporary American Jewish family values. American Jewish liberals, for example, are repelled by over-the-top “conservative” approaches like that of talk radio personality Rush Limbaugh or politician Rick Santorum. They — and more sophisticated voices in their camp — prescribe restrictive sexual, gender, and economic roles and take umbrage at individuals and groups who don’t fit their “one size fits all” construct of model family roles. Conservative legislators have sought — with considerable success on the state level — to restrict women’s reproductive freedom by law. Some act in accord with what Diane Johnson calls “nostalgic antifeminism.” Her evidence: In one year, “nearly a thousand bills have been proposed and sometimes passed in Congress and state legislatures . . . against the inclusion of contraception in health plans, mandating intrusive vaginal ultrasounds before abortion,” along with “repealing other protections for women, and redefining rape and personhood.”⁹

Equally disturbing are some liberal positions advanced by those who call for deconstruction of conventional gender roles and social norms regarding sexuality. In largely liberal discourse, both singleness and childlessness are often glamorized. Symptomatic of this ideology, observers like Hanna Rosin propose that men are extraneous to women for creating productive families and societies.¹⁰ Others, like Elisabeth Badinter, argue that parenthood can function as entrapment, preventing young women from controlling their own lives and destinies and achieving rewarding careers, or that motherhood is not a desirable goal for women altogether, but rather a strategy of male oppression.¹¹

Gender and economics affect Jewish families

Sweeping transformations in American and American Jewish family patterns cannot be attributed to social norms alone. Significant economic trends also

⁹ Diane Johnson, “Mothers Beware!” *The New York Review of Books*, June 2012.

¹⁰ Hanna Rosin, “The end of men: How women are taking control of everything,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (July/ August 2010) 301: 56–72.

¹¹ Elisabeth Badinter, *The conflict: How modern motherhood undermines the status of women* (Metropolitan, 2012).

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have played a major role. As family researcher Stephanie Coontz observes, education for women is no longer treated as a kind of middle class finishing school but now functions to make women economically self-sufficient much more than in the past. In the 1950s, college attendance actually enhanced marital prospects because the four years of college served as a virtual marriage market. “For men, going to college was the way to get a good job. For women, it was the way to get a good husband,” and one “pillar supporting the stable marriages of the postwar era was the fact that most women could not earn a living wage on their own. Fifty years ago, the average college-educated woman earned less than the average high-school-educated man.” Both men and women expected men to be the primary wage-earners when families were formed, and as late as 1977, “two-thirds of Americans believed that the ideal family arrangement was for the husband to earn the money and the wife to stay home.”¹² Today, by contrast, women’s economic independence contributes to what Coontz calls “The New Instability” of male and female roles and expectations in the traditional bourgeois marriage.¹³

Fertility and reproductive choice

Polls repeatedly demonstrate that the majority of American Jews continue to be “liberal” in their political and social beliefs, especially regarding sexuality and reproduction — issues intimately tied to love, marriage, and family formation. As individuals and within many Jewish institutional settings, Jews often articulate discomfort with governmental control over individual sexual and reproductive choice. One seemingly paradoxical dimension of liberal attitudes toward sexuality and reproduction is the insistence that government should both allow individuals the freedom to make their own decisions and should also support the medical care and logistical apparatus which will enable individuals to utilize those sexual and reproductive freedoms. One manifestation of this paradox is that American Jews and Jewish organizations routinely advocate for the government to ensure that individuals—and not the companies that employ them—should have control over their own sexual and re-

¹²Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), p. 108.

¹³Stephanie Coontz, “The New Instability: Women Expect more, while men can provide less,” *The New York Times*, July 27, SR1, 7.

productive lives, and also that family planning and abortion are available and accessible.

Jews long enjoyed a reputation in popular culture as being very—perhaps excessively—concerned about marriage and children. However, even in its heyday, American Jewish familism was not characterized by very large families, with the exception of limited segments of the ultra-Orthodox community. (In America, some research shows that family planning is quietly employed even by many *Haredi* families.) More than other ethno-religious groups, Jews were characterized by deliberate family planning. Jewish women's "expected" family sizes tended to be consistent with their "completed" families. This was true not only of urban sophisticates: Jews in the heartland were as liberal as Jews on either coast—unlike other ethno-religious groups that tended toward greater conservatism in the Midwest and the South.

American Jews are now facing a crisis regarding marriage and the family. Their fertility levels are not only below replacement but also lower than those of their white Protestant cohort. But one factor that makes them shy away from grappling directly with the issue is that women and their lives and behavior—rather than those of men—seem to attract most attention and most of the prescriptive and/or coercive activity of extremist analysts, leaders, and politicians.

In part because an emphasis on promoting conception is perceived as the obsession of conservative political and religious "pro-life" forces who oppose women's legal ability to control conception, Jewish individuals and organizations overwhelmingly focus their activism in the other direction: American Jews disproportionately advocate for promoting access to information and techniques for the prevention of conception. And yet, American Jews as a group have the opposite problem regarding conception than the causes for which they typically advocate. Unwanted low fertility—more than unwanted pregnancy—is the primary practical family planning issue facing American Jews today.

However, discussions of delayed fertility and its repercussions, including relatively low rates of success with medically assisted conception, are largely avoided by American Jews (and their cohort among liberal Americans). This avoidance is due partially to communal norms that regard women's freedom to set their own family agendas as a kind of birthright, so that any suggestions of biological or other limitations on that freedom are seen as politically incorrect. Sara Sherbill, writing in *Tablet* on "Why I Waited to Have Children,"

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explains “month after month, year after year, waiting seemed like a good idea. There were things we wanted to do together: travel to Italy . . . or pay off our student loans . . . I wanted to finish my novel (halfway through) and take up yoga My husband wanted to wait until he felt more settled in his career and we were ready to buy a car.”¹⁴

Experiencing infertility, many Jewish women seek technological assistance, but alternative conception via medical technology becomes even more complicated than “natural” conception with advancing age. Miriam Zoll, self-proclaimed at age 50 “an official member of Generation I.V.F.,” says she was influenced by the positive images of “celebrities” who “beat the biological clock,” recalling: “Ambivalent about motherhood and thrilled to be ensconced in a meaningful career, I married in my mid-thirties and five years later started trying to make a baby the old-fashioned way.” Eventually adopting a child, Zoll concludes with a passionate denunciation of the lack of realistic information about delayed fertility: “I wish someone had told me before I embarked on my ride through hell.”¹⁵

Male behavior, at least as much as female behavior, has contributed to the decline of the normative fertile family. Many men — including many Jewish men — postpone commitments, partially because the notion of the protective male has nearly disappeared in many liberal milieus and is now — perhaps ironically — most prominent in the more conservative American religious environments. But most analysts typically attribute the decline of the family more to women’s than to men’s changes in behavior.

For example, the connection between expanded economic opportunities for women and the decline of the conventional family, with predicted catastrophic impact on the overall society, is explored by Jonathan V. Last. Reviewer Joel E. Cohen summarizes Last’s “grim tidings” concerning a catastrophic decline in fertility and argues that the survival of the family is more important than independent options for women. Last condemns “higher education for women, women’s entry into jobs other than teaching, increasing cohabitation without producing children, falling rates of ever marrying by a given age, the rise of divorce, the decreasing percentage of single-family homes, the rising percentage of apartments and condominiums, frequent change of residence,

¹⁴Sara Sherbill, “Why I waited to have children,” *Tablet* October 22, 2013.

¹⁵Miriam Zoll, “10 things I wish someone had told me” in *Lilith*, the Jewish feminist magazine (Fall 2013).

the high cost of land, and, of course, the Supreme Court,” which enabled women to abort unwanted children as a result of *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Among other recommendations, Last urges the restoration of “religion in our public square ... if for no other reason than they’re [religious believers] the one who create most of the future taxpayers.”¹⁶

Legislators attempting to repeal *Roe v. Wade* and to enact other legislation in order to reconstruct more conservative family behaviors affect the lives of real, often vulnerable women: A Guttmacher Institute report (2012) noted that “issues related to reproductive health and rights at the State level received unprecedented attention in 2011. In the 50 states combined, legislators introduced more than 1,100 reproductive health and rights-related provisions. By year’s end, 135 of these provisions had been enacted in 36 states,” largely those with Republican-controlled legislatures. *New York Times* columnist Charles M. Blow shows that conservative politicians often make birth control (not only abortion) difficult for non-elites to obtain; their social and political policies complicate life for women when they work outside the home for pay, when they become pregnant, and when they care for dependent young children or aging parents.¹⁷

Intermarried families much less likely to raise Jewish adults who establish Jewish homes

In addition to the impact of late marriage and lower fertility, the decline in unambiguously Jewish families is the cumulative result of several generations of Jewish intermarriage. According to the 2013 Pew *Portrait of Jewish Americans*, more than four out of five adult children of intermarriage choose non-Jewish spouses who do not convert into Judaism, and fewer than one in 10 grandchildren of intermarriage marry Jews.

Having two Jewish parents is the single most powerful predictor of a child growing up to create a Jewish home of his or her own. Jews share with other religious groups the sociological reality that children raised in a household with two parents who share a religion much more often grow up to

¹⁶ Joel E. Cohen, “The case for more babies,” *The New York Review of Books* (April 24, 2014), reviewing Jonathan V. Last, *What to Expect When No One’s Expecting: America’s coming demographic disaster*.”

¹⁷ Charles M. Blow, “Santorum and the sexual revolution: At war with the 1960s,” *New York Times*, March 3, 2012.

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be adults connected to that religion who, in turn, raise children in that religious faith.

Households with a mixed ethno-religious narrative differ dramatically from those raising children as “Jewish by religion,” the Pew *Portrait* reveals. While some observers celebrate the fact that increasing numbers of intermarried couples say they are “raising” their children as Jews, studies do not ask parents specifically what “raising Jewish children” means to them. Children who grow up in intermarried families are much more likely as adults to self-report they have “no religion.” One reason, as shown by numerous studies, is that intermarried parents are far less likely than in-married Jews to provide their children with Jewish education.

A recent Brandeis study shows that Jews who intermarry received low levels of Jewish education themselves.¹⁸ Similarly, my new JPPI study with Steven M. Cohen, working with Pew 2013 data, shows that intermarried Jews are also the group least likely to provide their children with Jewish education. Receiving and providing little or no Jewish education becomes a kind of family tradition for many intermarried couples. Without Jewish education, our study and previous studies have repeatedly shown, children of intermarriage may “identify” as Jewish and be “proud” of being Jewish, but they are extremely unlikely to create Jewish homes of their own and to raise children who are “Jewish by religion.”

Not least, marrying a Jew and raising Jewish children not only projects a more robust future generation for American Jewry, it measurably upgrades the Jewishness of the current generation as well. Jewishly married and parenting Jews exhibit far stronger connections to every manifestation of Jewishness, including secular measures of communal responsibility, such as having “special responsibilities to care for Jews in need,” as the Pew *Portrait* documented.

Outreach to the intermarried is an important activity, especially when combined with Jewish educational activities. Intermarried families who express an interest should be encouraged to raise exclusively Jewish children. Intermarried families have the option of becoming fully Jewish families through the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse and the creation of an unambiguously

¹⁸Theodore Sasson, Leonard Saxe, Fern Chertok, Michelle Shain, Shahar Hecht, and Graham Wright, *Millennial Children of Intermarriage: Touchpoints and Trajectories of Jewish Engagement* (Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, October 2015), pp. 15–17.

Jewish home — an option worthy of encouragement. Once a conversion takes place, data reveal those families behave much like in-married families — in other words, they become part of a more robust Jewish norm.

Decline of Jewish marriage norms influences leaders as well as laity

Personal, familial, and communal norms make a difference, and even independent individuals are often unwittingly influenced by the social norms created by the friends and culture around them.¹⁹ Although the decisions feel — and are — very personal, when individuals decide to postpone marriage and childbearing or to marry non-Jews without conversion into Judaism, “personal” choices have a ripple effect on siblings, friends, and co-workers.

Parents, too, reflect and contribute to these changing norms. Studies show that parents have an impact when they explain to their children, in words as well as deeds, why they care about creating Jewish families, although of course progeny do not come with guarantees. But endogamous norms are no longer typical in America, and recommending in-marriage today is sometimes considered “racist.” Many parents also find it difficult to articulate what Jewishness means and why it is important to them, a preexisting, deeper problem.

Not only fewer parents but also fewer American Jewish religious leaders openly advocate Jewish singles marrying Jews and creating Jewish families. Similarly, very few advocate vigorously for conversion into Judaism, as Eric Yoffie noted in his tepidly received 2005 Central Conference of American Rabbis Biennial Address to Reform rabbis. Even Jewish leaders agonize about how much to say about the importance of unambiguous Jewish families, rather than challenging their congregants to aspire to stronger Jewish behaviors. This lack of differentiation between unambiguously Jewish families and those that are “Jewish and something else,” even on the part of some religious leaders, is an important factor in the erosion of the public Jewish endogamous norm.

“Partnership” Jewish marriages with children

Slightly over one-quarter of American Jewish households consist of a father, a mother, and children under 18 at home (Pew *Portrait of Jewish Americans*,

¹⁹Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler, *Connected: How Your Friends' Friends' Friends Affect Everything You Feel, Think, and Do* (Boston: Back Bay Books/ Little Brown & Company, 2009).

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2013). When Orthodox families are removed from this cohort, only 13 percent of Jewish Americans under the age of 54 live in procreative, unambiguously Jewish households. Most of these households, in non-Jewish American society as well as the Jewish community, present an innovative model of Jewish families with much more fluid male/female gender roles.²⁰ They actually represent an extremely positive Jewish model, but their small number is quite troubling.

Dual-career families are today's typical American Jewish household with children. Among married Jews ages 25 to 64, nearly three-quarters comprise two spouses who are labor force participants, as Harriet Hartman shows in her new, definitive study, "The Jewish Family," in the *American Jewish Year Book 2016*.²¹ Less than one-quarter of Jewish children live in households with a stay-at-home parent (typically their mother). Working Jewish husbands and wives have very similar levels of educational achievement, occupational prestige, and often similar salaries. Many adopt a strategy that I call "partnership marriage." These Jewish partnership marriages, like other American families in the same educational and socioeconomic bracket as Jews, are undergoing *An Unfinished Revolution* (2010) in the words of Kathleen Gerson, featuring more flexible gender roles. Both husbands and wives enter their unions expecting ongoing negotiations and compromises, taking on previously gender-divided household roles and prioritizing the welfare of the entire family unit over the preferences of individual family members, when necessary.²²

Jewishness often represents a "third shift" of a workload, as Rachel S. Bernstein points out, that spouses have to negotiate, just as they figure out how to

²⁰ Rosalind C. Barnett and Caryl Rivers, *She Works/He Works: How Two-Income Families Are Happier, Healthier, and Better-Off* (San Francisco, CA.: Harper San Francisco, 1996); *Same Difference: How Gender Myths Are Hurting Our Relationships, Our Children, and Our Jobs* (New York: Basic Books, 2004). See also Rosalind Barnett, "Our Multiple Roles: Past, Present, and Future," in Karen Korabik, Donna S. Lero, and Denise L. Whitehead, eds., *Handbook of Work-Family Integration: Research, Theory, and Best Practices* (New York: Academic Press, 2008): 75–94.

²¹ Harriet Hartman, "The Jewish Family," *American Jewish Year Book 2016*, eds. Arnold Dashefsky and Ira Sheskin (Springer, 2016): 79–126.

²² Important analysis of these new family models can be found in: Kathleen Gerson, *The Unfinished Revolution: Coming of Age in a New Era of Gender, Work, and Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 67, 81.

juggle two careers, child care, household tasks, and personal lives.²³ Although many two-career Jewishly involved families sing the praises of the family time created by Sabbaths and holidays, planning and preparing for those Jewish interludes is often time-consuming and may add additional stress to the lives of both parents. At the same time, while some have blamed the prevalence of mothers working outside the home for familial decline, observers have noted how Jewish partnership marriages nurture procreative families. Children and their parents benefit greatly when fathers become actively involved in their children's lives. Paternal involvements have made workplace attitudes toward childcare a significant consideration when constructing work schedules and meetings. And Jewish educators often comment on the increasing numbers of fathers, as well as mothers, who come to visit Jewish schools for plays, concerts, and school-related ceremonies.

Modern Orthodox partnership models

Partnership marriages, the most common type of household-with-children across the American Jewish denominational spectrum, are especially prevalent among American Modern Orthodox Jews. The Hartmans, in *Gender and American Jews*, showed that Modern Orthodox husbands and wives have the most spousal homogamy and near-equal educational achievement and occupational status.²⁴ Providing real-life examples of juggling rather than sequencing children and careers, Modern Orthodox families daily manage the Jewish juggling act, albeit no doubt variously and imperfectly. The *Pew Portrait of Jewish Americans* (2013)²⁵ revealed similar patterns. Significantly, Modern Orthodox families are especially prominent in Jewish communal and organizational work and extend themselves to the wider Jewish community and its needs. In his much-discussed article on the "The Rise of Social Orthodoxy,"²⁶ for example, Jay Lefkowitz discusses strong Orthodox Jewish social and communal activism, above-replacement fertility, and ongoing religious commitments.

²³ Rachel S. Bernstein and Sylvia Barack Fishman, "Judaism as the 'Third Shift': Jewish Families Negotiating Work, Family, and Religious Lives, in Fishman, ed., *Love, Marriage, and Jewish Families*, op. cit.

²⁴ Hartman and Hartman, op. cit.

²⁵ Pew Portrait, op. cit.

²⁶ Jay Lefkowitz, "The Rise of Social Orthodoxy: A Personal Account," *Commentary magazine*, April 1, 2014.

Shifting sexual identifications

On a much smaller scale numerically than the aforementioned factors of late marriage and low fertility, intermarriage, and two-career families, non-conventional Jewish households are also represented by lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBTQ) Jews, who have gained new visibility in America — and in American Jewish communities. LGBTQ Jews comprise about 7 percent of American Jews, according to a recent study by Steven M. Cohen, Caryn Aviv, and Ari Kelman. Married or partnered LGBTQ Jews comprise about 2 percent of American Jewry; those raising children less than 1 percent.²⁷

Though their numbers are small, those LGBTQ couples who create unambiguously Jewish families and raise Jewish children, like their heterosexual parallels, contribute to positive momentum in American Jewish life and help to shape the next generation of American Jews. Reports from the field, including a new study by Jonathan Krasner, show that most American Jews are warm and welcoming to LGBTQ couples and their children.²⁸

Jewish organizations and individuals flooded the electronic media with congratulatory messages following the June 26, 2015, Supreme Court decision guaranteeing gay and lesbian couples the right to marry. The vast majority of American Jews are persuaded by the overwhelming research data demonstrating that sexual orientation is not a lifestyle “choice” but rather is determined by genetic and other biological factors. The 2013 *Pew Portrait of Jewish Americans* reported that 82 percent of American Jews believe homosexuality “should be accepted by society”: a percentage that increased to 89 percent of Jews age 18 to 49 and 89 percent of Jewish college graduates. But LGBTQ Jewish families have mixed reports on the level of support they and their children actually receive from some segments of the Jewish community.

Single Jewish mothers—by choice or not!

Among related, statistically smaller but nonetheless significant changes, some women, including religiously observant Jewish women, opt to be “single

²⁷ Steven M. Cohen, Carol Aviv, and Ari Kelman, “Gay, Jewish, or Both? Sexual Orientation and Jewish Engagement,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 84: 154–166.

²⁸ Jonathan Krasner, “We all still have to potty train: same sex couple families in the American Jewish community,” in Fishman, *Love, Marriage, and Jewish Families*, *op. cit.*

mothers by choice.” In America, fewer than 7 percent of Jewish households with children under age 18 are headed by a single parent, reports Harriet Hartman, working with Pew data.²⁹ Although their numbers are small, many such women are strongly connected Jewishly, and a significant proportion are Orthodox. Indeed, their Jewish values are a significant aspect of their motivation to become mothers despite the lack of parenting partners.

Not finding a loving partner or spouse is frequently a matter of circumstance, rather than a matter of choice. Most women who eventually choose motherhood alone report that they would have preferred to share parenting, had the right person entered their lives. As one quipped: “I’m a mother by choice, I’m not single by choice, so don’t call me a single mother by choice.”

Meeting the challenges of the American Jewish family crisis

Familial changes have unlike causes and unlike effects on Jewish families and communities, as well. Some, especially later marriage, decreased fertility, and intermarriage, involve large percentages of Jewish adults in their fertile years. Others, such as single mothers by choice and lesbian and gay families with children, involve relatively small numbers of people.

Today’s changing American gender roles, influenced by economic trends and shifting social norms, are associated both with society-wide declines in the centrality of the family and the ethno-religious group. In many households changing gender roles are related to late marriage, lower achieved fertility, and marriage across ethno-religious cultural lines. Paradoxically, in other households, changing gender roles have led to more flexible, resilient, and durable marriages.

Many American Jews don’t think seriously about marriage in their twenties. Often the postponement of life commitments is related to a belief that women cannot manage children along with their other goals. The belief that women “can’t have it all” is accepted as truth in many circles today, as Claire Cain Miller points out, reporting that among women graduating from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, “while 78% of the business school graduates in 1992 said they planned to have children, that share had dropped to 42% in 2012.” In another Pew study, Miller reports, “58% of work-

²⁹Hartman, *Jewish Family*, *op. cit.*

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ing millennial mothers said being a working mother made it harder for them to get ahead in their careers, compared with 38% of older women.”³⁰

Women’s careers are clearly not necessarily “the problem” resulting in fewer Jewish families raising Jewish children. The great majority of Jewishly involved American Jewish families with children, including Orthodox families, have mothers who as labor force participants are doing meaningful work and raising Jewish children while they do so. Perhaps negative implications of motherhood are more dramatic and salable, and thus are more widespread and effective than stories about families who have carefully defined what “doing it all” means and are successfully doing it. One policy implication is that it might be wise to publicize “best models” and Jewish family success stories, rather than to focus exclusively on discouraging narratives.

Conclusion: Supporting the Jewishness of Jewish families

Diverse contemporary American Jewish households have different needs. Welcoming is always appropriate, but America’s diverse American Jewish households require different types of support from the Jewish community. One size does not fit all. In order to find out how we can best support different types of Jewish experiences and connections, we need to ask questions that are keyed to the specifics of each of these kinds of contemporary American Jewish households.

Young adults facing singlehood that extends beyond their preferences can benefit from programs that facilitate the creation of Jewish social networks, including but not limited to romantic liaisons. Unambiguously Jewish procreative families are often composed of one Jewish man and one Jewish woman and their biological or adoptive progeny, who would have more children if the material and human costs of Jewish living were not so onerous. Divorced or blended families, single parents, LGBTQ families, and families whose children have been conceived with the aid of a range of medical interventions may also be unambiguously Jewish and procreative and looking for more understanding and awareness from Jewish individuals and establishments. Families with mixed religious environments often struggle with challenges regarding the Jewishness of their households, characteristics that sometimes interfere

³⁰ Claire Cain Miller. “More than their mothers, young women plan career pauses,” *New York Times* July 23, 2015.

with the transmission of Jewishness to the next generation and the building of Jewish continuity.

“Normative Jewish family life” does not belong exclusively to any one stream of Judaism or political viewpoint. Families today draw on an amalgam of conservative, traditional, and liberal values; they negotiate between coalesced American and Jewish values systems. That process reinforces families and makes them more resilient. As Conservative Rabbi Elliot J. Cosgrove pointed out in a Yom Kippur sermon, “The Hyphen Within,” to be an American-Jew means to wrestle with an ongoing internal conflict—that is the “hyphen,” which Cosgrove characterizes as “dynamic tension.”³¹ Perhaps unexpectedly, constructive creative tension is one factor nourishing unambiguously Jewish families that thrive.

In supporting diverse forms of unambiguously Jewish procreative families today, no one strategy, especially not the vague term “inclusiveness,” can meet the deeply different challenges that comprise the crisis. The American Jewish community can make a difference by reclaiming unambiguous Jewishness and Jewish parenthood as cherished goals for more and more diverse American Jews. As we navigate our changed environment, these two norms can serve as useful guidelines in working to create policies that enhance the possibilities for Jewish family formation and helping to support families in their critical task of raising the next generations of American Jews.

³¹ Elliot J. Cosgrove, “The Hyphen Within,” sermon in the Park Avenue Synagogue, New York, NY, on September 22, 2015, reprinted in *The Jerusalem Post*, May 31, 2016.

❧ Chapter 4 ❧

The Jewish Family, Then and Now¹

Daniel Parmer

WHAT DO WE MEAN we speak of the Jewish family? And what is the best way to promote more of them? These questions were asked to guide panelists in preparing their remarks at the Jewish Theological Seminary's conference, "The Changing Face of the American Jewish Family." For some, the response may focus on strengthening the Jewish identity of the individual and encouraging endogamy or conversion of a non-Jewish spouse. For others, it is not about the identity of the individual, but rather the collective, familial identity that is created in the home. To promote more Jewish families, the focus will be a strengthening of the bonds of Jewishness, creating more welcoming spaces, and permitting new forms of Jewish identity to co-exist with more traditional ones.

What does the Jewish family look like today? To begin, there is no single profile of the Jewish family. The Jewish family is a married man and woman and their child. It is a married man and man and their child. It is a single mother and her child. The Jewish family is a cohabiting partnership. It is a couple and their adopted child. It is grandparents raising their grandchildren. It is multigenerational. It is interfaith, no faith, and multiracial. In short, the American Jewish family today looks more American than ever. Indeed, as the

¹The paper that follows has been adapted from remarks given at the Jewish Theological Seminary's conference, "The Changing Face of the American Jewish Family."

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Pew Research Center wrote in 2011, there are seven trends that define how Americans think about the changing structure of the American family. They are:

(1) more unmarried couples raising children; (2) more gay and lesbian couples raising children; (3) more single women having children without a male partner to help raise them; (4) more people living together without getting married; (5) more mothers of young children working outside the home; (6) more people of different races marrying each other; and (7) more women not ever having children²

Just as *The New York Times* reported on this Pew study that “[s]tatistically, [a family] is no longer a mother, a father and their biological children living together under one roof,”³ it is increasingly evident that the Jewish family is no longer predominantly a Jewish mother and Jewish father raising Jewish children.

A Task Force report on the Jewish family identified three threats to Jewish life: First, a breakdown of religious belief and practice; second, individuals becoming detached from one another and the needs of the community; and third, a self-centered lifestyle in pursuit of instant happiness and pleasure, all of which are “unmistakably linked with all the phenomena that trouble the family of today: avoidance of marriage, late marriage, voluntary childlessness, skyrocketing divorce rates and [. . .] more and more frequent intermarriage.”⁴

One may sense a discomfoting familiarity having read these words, or something like them, recently. It may sound similar to the findings from the 2013 Pew study of American Jewry bemoaning millennials or Generation X. In fact, this Task Force on the Jewish Family was convened by the American Jewish Committee in 1979. One could view this recurring trope as defeat—if these trends continue unabated, the Jewish people may disappear entirely—the so-called “vanishing American Jew.” On the other hand, one could look at this as a triumph. Jewish life is alive and well despite, or perhaps even because

²Pew Research Center. (2011). “The Public Renders a Split Verdict on Changes in Family Structure,” Washington, DC: Pew Research Center’s Social and Demographic Trends.

³New York Times, February 24, 2011 article by Katherine Schulten retrieved 21 June 2017.

⁴American Jewish Committee. (1979). *Sustaining the Jewish Family: A Task Force Report on Jewish Family Policy*, Chaim Waxman, chair, New York, Jewish Communal Affairs Department, p. 6.

it has grown to include a changing tapestry of individuals and families, rituals and identities.

The ever-present “threat” to Jewish continuity lurking behind such questions is intermarriage. Aside from antisemitism and perhaps Israel, little else motivates and galvanizes the organized Jewish community like the threat to Jewish continuity. It is that which motivated a surge of funding for Jewish day schools, Jewish summer camps, and the Birthright program in the decade following the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS). More than two decades later, Pew Research Center’s 2013 *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* reminds us that the Jewish continuity struggle isn’t over. American Jews increasingly identify as religious “Nones.” They have fewer children on average, and younger Jews marry out at higher rates than in the past.⁵ The campaign, it seems, has failed. Fortunately, as Pew reminds us, we can be comforted because it appears that nearly all groups in the U.S. are in the same boat.⁶ Perhaps even more comforting than the company we keep is that we have a long history of fretting over these issues and, in particular, over the perceived erosion of the Jewish family. And yet here we are, again, discussing what can be done.

One of the challenges facing the Jewish community is that for more than 20 years, our way of thinking about Jewish families in general, and intermarriage in particular, has been shaped by findings from the 1990 and 2000–01 NJPS studies.⁷ Not only had intermarriage rates skyrocketed from prior estimates, but also these data revealed that intermarried families had few connections to Jewish life. This brings us back to Pew. Within hours of its release, it was as if two divergent accounts of the data were presented. One offered a

⁵Pew Research Center. (2013). *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life Project.

⁶Pew Research Center. (2010). *The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families*, Washington, DC: Pew Research Center’s Social and Demographic Trends.

⁷See Kotler-Berkowitz, L., Cohen S.M., Ament, J., Klaff, V., Mott, F., & Peckerman-Neuman, D. (2003). *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*. Accessed at <<http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Studies/details.cfm?StudyID=307>> and Kosmin, B., Goldstein, S., Waksberg, J., Lerer, N., Keysar, A., & Scheckner, J. (1991). *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey*. New York: Council of Jewish Federations. Accessed at <<http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Studies/details.cfm?StudyID=305>>.

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pessimistic view of the vitality and fate of the Jewish community, echoing those from the past.⁸ The other presented a cautiously optimistic view of strength, diversity, and a challenge to some long-held beliefs.⁹ At the center of this storm is the interpretation of how connected Jews in interfaith households are and whether the strength of those bonds can sustain the Jewish people.

In many ways intermarried Jewish families resemble in-married families. They come from backgrounds of Jewish day school education and also from no Jewish education. They have in-married parents as well as intermarried parents. They celebrate Shabbat and keep kosher, and they eat *treyf* on Yom Kippur. Of course, this doesn't mean that we can't make some generalizations. On average, intermarried Jewish families appear to have fewer and weaker connections to and engagement with Jewish life.¹⁰ However, there are several issues that prevent the wholesale adoption of this statement. For example, it assumes that intermarried Jewish families today will behave similar to those of the past. After all, these data come from a survey which measures the rate of intermarriage among those who are currently married (and not all are married yet) and looks at how they are raising their children among those who have children (and many do not yet). In other words, data is not destiny. Observers of decades-long trends, who project onto current Jewish young adults a similar fate as previous generations, ignore the signs that today's young adults appear to break tradition.

As Theodore Sasson and Leonard Saxe have each written, a re-analysis of Pew's 2013 data shows "the propensity of adults with intermarried parents to identify as Jewish steadily increased from 25% in the 65 and older group, to 37% in the 50-64 age group, to 39% in the 30-49 age group, to 59% of the

⁸ See Steven M. Cohen. (2013), "American Jewry Loses Middle as Orthodox and Unaffiliated Grow", published on Forward.com, October 7, 2013. Accessed at < <http://forward.com/opinion/184986/american-jewry-loses-middle-as-orthodox-and-unaffi/> > on December 20, 2015.

⁹ See Leonard Saxe. (2013), "Ten Takeaways from Pew" published on eJewishphilanthropy.com, November 21, 2013. Accessed at < <http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/ten-takeaways-from-pew/> >.

¹⁰ Smith, Gregory, and Alan Cooperman. (2013), "What Happens When Jews intermarry?", Pew Research Center. Accessed at < <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/11/12/what-happens-when-jews-intermarry/> > on December 20, 2015; and see the contribution by Sylvia Barack Fishman in this volume.

18-29 age group.”¹¹ Unlike their older counterparts, they are not only more likely to identify in name, but also to have been exposed to Jewish education, to have celebrated a bar or bat mitzvah, and to be religiously engaged.¹² The lead authors of the Pew study of American Jewry likewise reflect that today’s intermarried Jews appear different, citing a rise in the number of children of intermarriages who identify as Jewish. They conclude that “intermarriage may be transmitting Jewish identity to a growing number of Americans.”¹³

Furthermore, although the definition of an intermarried family today is the same as it was a half century ago, one in which a Jew is married to a non-Jew, the context of what it means to be an intermarried family today is very different. The image of the Jew who marries outside the faith and rejects a Jewish life in favor of upward mobility or assimilation in mainstream America has largely faded. In fact, not only are intermarried Jews embracing their heritage, but they are transforming Jewish rituals and traditions to reflect their family life and, perhaps more importantly, many Jewish communities are welcoming these families rather than rejecting them or holding them at arms’ length. In her book *Double or Nothing*, Sylvia Barack Fishman writes that intermarried couples “invent traditions.” She postulates that the growing prominence of intermarriage has helped to create a new social reality in which previous pro-in-marriage bias has given way to pro-out-marriage ethos.¹⁴

Around the same time as the Pew study of American Jewry (2012-13), I interviewed more than two dozen Jewish young adults ages 25 to 38 for doctoral research. The interviews covered several topics including the respondents’ upbringing, friendships from childhood to the present, romantic relationships, and connection and engagement with the Jewish community. Interviews were conducted with individuals who are married, single (never married as well as divorced), and currently in a relationship including those who are dating, co-

¹¹Theodore Sasson. (2013), “New Analysis of Pew Data: Children of Intermarriage Increasingly Identify as Jews”, *Tablet Magazine*, November 11, 2013. Accessed at <<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/151506/young-jews-opt-in>>, December 20, 2015.

¹²Leonard Saxe. “The Sky Is Falling! The Sky Is Falling!”, *Tablet Magazine*, December 3, 2014. Accessed at < <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/187165/pew-american-jewry-revisited>> on December 20, 2015.

¹³Gregory Smith, and Alan Cooperman. (2013).

¹⁴Sylvia Barack Fishman. (2004). *Double or Nothing?: Jewish families and mixed marriage*. Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press.

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habiting, and engaged. Participants included heterosexual men and women as well as those who identified as gay or lesbian. Data from the interviews yield a rich portrait of Jewish young adults' attitudes and behaviors on dating, relationships, cohabitation, and marriage. Detailed findings are published in Fishman's *Love, Marriage, and Jewish Families* and in my dissertation.¹⁵ Here, I highlight three aspects of Jewish young adults' attitudes and behaviors toward marriage and the family: near-universal acceptance and desirability of marriage; delay (not rejection) of marriage; and creating intentional communities.

In the context of American society, in which cohabitation as an alternative to marriage is increasing and nearly half of all births happen outside of marriage, American Jewish young adults stand in stark contrast. Despite the growing diversity of the American Jewish community among younger generations, many of the traditional values of marriage and children persist. To wit, despite acceptance of cohabitation among those interviewed and agreement that couples in long-term relationships differed little from couples in married relationships, virtually all interviewees expressed a strong desire to be married and expressed a strong preference to delay having children until after marriage.

Second, the majority of individuals describe marriage as a partnership, not unlike an entrepreneur might speak about a business venture. For them, marriage was about finding a partner who had complementary skills or assets, was supportive of personal growth and development, and had mutual goals. For example, the response of one young woman to the question, "What does marriage mean to you?" was typical of those interviewed:

So I think of it as . . . okay, the first thing that comes to mind is just, like a team. [. . .] I think that marriage is a time where each individual partner can help stimulate and challenge and help that other partner succeed in their own individual pursuits . . . whether it is just by support, whether it is by helping them make decisions on their own life path and also being supportive or actually in some way stimulating and challenging them and inspiring them in some way.

Conversations with these young adults about who they searched for in a

¹⁵ Parmer, Daniel. (2015), ed. Sylvia Barack Fishman. "What's Love Got To Do With It? Marriage and non-Marriage Among Younger American Jews" in *Love, Marriage, and Jewish Families: Paradoxes of a Social Revolution*. Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press. Parmer, Daniel (2017). *Choosing Marriage in a Period of Decline: The Role of Homogeneity, Religion, and Social Networks in the Marriage Market among Jewish Young Adults*. No. 10272937 Brandeis University. Ann Arbor: ProQuest.

romantic partner and how they made decisions about marriage revealed that one of the reasons for the delay in marriage was finding the right person.¹⁶ For some, this meant limiting the pool of potential mates to Jews, but for many, being Jewish wasn't the determining factor. According to one interviewee:

I had good friends who were dating guys who were Jewish in name, whose mothers were Jewish, who they found on JDate or whatever, but who had never been to services, had no idea what went into a Rosh Hashanah dinner, and who in some ways were less receptive to being told, 'No, this is what it means to be Jewish.' Whereas the guys who weren't Jewish just sort of said, "Okay, what's this all about?" And that's actually come up a lot. My closest Jewish guy friend in college married one of the other girls on our floor, a nice Protestant from Michigan, and I remember e-mailing him and saying, "How did you ever get this past your mother? Your parents?" He said, "My parents asked if we would raise the kids with a Jewish identity, and her parents asked if they could send Christmas cards?" He said, "And I'd rather marry someone who's not Jewish at all than someone who is Jewish, with a totally different Jewish identity." And so it clearly didn't stop me from when I needed to do online dating. I went to JDate. I was looking for the Jewish guys because I did think it would be easier. And sometimes I still think it would be easier. But especially as I sort of said, "Now I'm pretty sure I know what my identity is and what I would want my kids to know, it's less important."

For many, a partner who was Jewish was seen as a bonus, something that might be welcomed but not necessarily sought. In fact, overtly Jewish or religious characteristics were rarely discussed in the search for a partner (except among those who identified as religiously observant) and even then was salient only when it came time to plan the wedding ceremony. For example, one young woman from the Boston area who was engaged to a non-Jew explained:

One of the reasons why I would be excited to actually be married and have that ceremony is the Jewish component, is engaging in this tradition that I know all of these ancestors of mine have participated in and getting to do that thing, that this is what many people do. And we change families, basically, and we create a new family and this is how we do that and I want to do that. [. . .] It felt nice to have grounding in

¹⁶ It is not the only reason, however, and indeed may be confounded with other factors. One of the best predictors of marriage is whether an individual is currently enrolled in school (delays marriage) or whether they have completed their education (hastens marriage).

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something else and I just, I think that when you put together a Jewish wedding and I was really excited and I really loved engaging in the process of creating that wedding, especially since it's between a Jew and a non-Jew. Getting to really work with a rabbi and delve in and decide and formulate a ceremony that is both rooted in tradition and it also really reflects the reality of our relationship, and so I felt like it offered a nice framework of doing so.

The crucial finding here was that the majority of young Jewish adults, even those who expressed a desire to marry someone who was Jewish, did not view having a non-Jewish partner as detrimental to their participation in Jewish life. This is evidenced elsewhere as well, with a majority of Jews who were raised by intermarried parents expressing pride in being Jewish, a marked difference from older generations.¹⁷

The third finding reveals how young adults seek or create communities that are characterized as personal, intentional, and meaningful. Occasionally this meant joining an existing community or institution, but more frequently, and especially among couples without children or with young children under age five, they sought to create communities of their own or join informal, non-institutionalized communities. This trend is neither new nor novel as one can look to the decades of the 1960s and 1970s to find precedents. Today, independent *havurot* and *minyanim* have experienced resurgence, newcomers like Moishe House spans 68 U.S. communities and 26 countries, and the Chabad-Lubavitch movement continues to grow faster than any other denomination. Thus, what may appear to leadership in the organized Jewish community to be a decline in participation in Jewish life has been a shift rather than a disappearance. In the conversations with research participants, many spoke of attending gatherings with friends (Jews and non-Jews) to mark Jewish holidays or occasions. One young woman, for example, referred to her participation in Jewish life as a college student as minimal until she got her “Birthright family.” Few spoke of joining institutions such as a synagogue, and those who were inclined to affiliate frequently stated they were not ready to commit yet. A married interviewee offered her experience:

Well, the reality is that the temple here, if I was, like, wanting to be part of an active community, would really be the best fit. It's a very alternative Reform temple. Walking in there, there are people covered in tattoos, there are gay and lesbian couples. It just definitely felt like this would be the right place for me because it seems like people are

¹⁷ Saxe, 2014.

more interested in the spirituality of Judaism and the traditions of Judaism than following the strictness of it. There was a female cantor. It was just very . . . it felt good to me. Even the architecture of the temple, it was like brand new, beautifully modern, huge windows, you feel like you're outdoors. It's definitely the right fit for me, if I could get myself to feel the urge to be committed.

When we use data to talk about Jewish families, whether it is marriage or fertility or child-rearing, we must keep in mind that the vast majority of these studies give us a snapshot in time. The reality is that individuals are not static in their life course.¹⁸ They change, moving in and out of commitments, affiliations, belonging, and participation throughout their lives. There are two conclusions I wish to draw from this. The first is that if the Jewish community is committed to better understanding the Jewish family, we need to shift focus from one-time decennial surveys to an ongoing program of research, which includes at its core a longitudinal study that can measure change over time.¹⁹ Efforts to fill this gap are already underway, for example the Jewish Futures Study at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and the Steinhardt Social Research Institute's American Jewish Population Project.²⁰ The second is that the trends observed today are informative but tell only part of the story. Young Jewish adults have been panned as eschewing marriage, but this criticism is based in part on comparison to the generations which preceded them and in part on conclusions drawn from a cohort that has not yet completed this stage of life.

¹⁸See for example Bethamie Horowitz (2003) "Connections and Journeys: Assessing critical opportunities for enhancing Jewish identity." New York: UJA Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York. Accessed at <<http://www.jewishdatabank.org/studies/details.cfm?StudyID=539>>.

¹⁹A prior example in the Jewish community can be found in Keysar and Kosmin's "Eight Up" study. External to the Jewish community, the US government sponsors several longitudinal studies including the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the Health and Retirement Study, and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, to name a few.

²⁰See Sasson, Saxe, Chertok, et al. (2015). "Millennial Children of Inter-marriage: Touchpoints and Trajectories of Jewish Engagement", Waltham, Mass: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University. Also Saxe, L. and Tighe, E. (2013). "Estimating and Understanding the Jewish Population in the United States: A Program of Research" in Contemporary Jewry, 33(1-2), 43-62.

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As for the question, “How do we promote more Jewish families, particularly among intermarried households?” there are several valuable answers. Sylvia Barack Fishman notes that conversion of non-Jewish spouses appears to be one strategy that can transform intermarried families into strongly identified units, perhaps even more so than in-married families. She also points to Jewish education as a resource for connecting Jews regardless of family type. In all, she identifies three factors that connect and reinforce transmission of ethno-religious traditions or identity: (1) Jewish education, (2) a Jewishly connected home, and (3) Jewish friendship circles.²¹ Bruce Phillips’ study of children of intermarriage also identifies three factors that contribute to increased Jewish engagement: (1) A non-Jewish parent of no religion versus some other religion (e.g. Christian), (2) consciously being raised as a Jew, and (3) receiving some type of formal Jewish education.²² These strategies demonstrate effectiveness yet they neglect the role of one critical stakeholder: the Jewish organization. One cannot disparage intermarried families for failing to provide their children with a Jewish education if these educational institutions directly or indirectly stigmatize or discriminate against them. The responses of Jewish institutions, and of synagogues in particular, play an important role in the promotion of the Jewish family, in all its varieties. If we are to confer upon Jewish families the importance of engagement in Jewish life, we cannot in the same breath reject them because of the type of family they have chosen to be. Before these Jewish families arrive on our doorsteps, it is imperative that we put out the welcome mat.

²¹ Fishman (2004). *Double or Nothing?: Jewish families and mixed marriage*. Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 159.

²² Bruce Phillips. (1998), “Children of Intermarriage: How Jewish?” in *Studies of Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 14, 91.

Jewish Education and the Changing Jewish Family

Carol K. Ingall

REFLECT ON THE IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS on Jewish education, referred to in this volume as “the changing face of the Jewish family” or “the new Jewish family.” There are four assumptions behind this nomenclature. One is that current demographic changes in North America influence the Jewish community. Two is that these changes are novel. Three is that these changes manifest themselves in education, a social construction. This means that education is a two-way street, not a mirror; it is influenced by contemporary norms and trends and then “acts back” on the culture that molds schools and students and ultimately changes the social milieu. And four, that Jewish education is informed by American education, its trends, concerns, and curricular expressions. If this sounds like a complicated and fluid mix, that’s the very point I wish to make.

Having set up a series of categories, the center of which is Jewish education, I want to add more nuance to that representation. There is no question that the forces affecting contemporary American society and American public education influence Jewish education. But to what degree? In what areas? I contend that the supplementary school¹ is the locus of maximum change because it was designed as a retrofit for the public school. Because this domain represents two-thirds to three-quarters of Jewish children enrolled in Jewish schools, I will

¹I use the term supplementary school throughout this essay, although it has also been referred to as the synagogue school or the complementary school. Each option has its problems.

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concentrate on demographic trends that influence the supplementary school, with a brief nod to early childhood education and adult education.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity

When referring to the changing face of American public education, the knee-jerk reaction is to start skin-deep with racial and ethnic diversity. Acknowledging and responding to racial and ethnic diversity is a thorny issue for contemporary American public education, especially in urban areas. While I am convinced that the poet Adrienne Rich is right when she reminds us how important it is to see our own faces in the mirror, dealing with racial and ethnic diversity is not of primary importance for Jewish schools.

Four of my five granddaughters attend public schools in which the majority of students are students of color; my fifth granddaughter attends a Jewish day school, with only a handful of Asian and black students. (Surely there are Jewish day schools with no students of color at all.) The five girls use secular studies textbooks that are very different from those of my era; those blond, pet-blessed kids, Dick and Jane, and their picket-fenced home have been banished. Influenced by publishers of public- and private-school textbooks, Jewish textbooks and materials now include children of color and children in wheelchairs. They are also more likely to include Israeli, Sephardi, and Mizrahi customs in their discussion of Jewish holidays. Jewish schools and the materials in them have helped to launch conversations like the one we are having today.

Single Parent and LGBTQ Families

Another aspect of demographic change is that we have more one-parent families than ever before. If by that we mean parents who have never married, then yes—parents who are divorced or widowed, then maybe no. The single-parent family is not a new phenomenon. We often forget that less than a century ago, Jewish orphanages were a fixture in Jewish cities, even in small cities like Providence, Rhode Island. They were built by the Jewish community to house the occasional full orphan, but more often than not, the orphanage was a temporary abode for half-orphans, kids whose mothers or fathers had died, or from families with a sick parent, leaving only one wage-earner and no one to care for the children. When a parent recovered or remarried, or when the economic situation improved, children returned to their homes. We also forget

about those parents who abandoned their families, reprobates who filled the pages of the *Bintel Brief*.² Jewish schools today, like their counterparts in secular education, are more sensitive to responding to the needs of families headed by one parent or divorced parents; for example, making two sets of textbooks available for children who split their time between two parents.

The issue that is getting the most ink in discussions of demographic change, in both public education and Jewish education, is the presence of children of LGBTQ parents and students. Full disclosure: I have a gay son and son-in-law with an adopted daughter in a Jewish day school that is very sensitive to families like theirs. The school library and annual book fair include books that deal with LGBTQ issues. More work can be done in this arena in the synagogue school. Some synagogue school registration forms still ask for names of “mother” and “father” rather than referring to parent/caregiver #1 and #2. Teachers and principals should be more sensitive to the importance of using inclusive classroom language when they refer to families. Given the number of single parents and gay and lesbian parents, I’m puzzled by why Jewish schools use the precious few hours of instruction to put Mother’s Day and Father’s Day in their curricula.³ These Hallmark-generated celebrations alienate both the single-parent family and LGBTQ families in schools that pride themselves on inclusion. Why are Jewish schools still holding throwbacks like father-daughter dances while simultaneously encouraging more sensitivity to LGBTQ or gender-fluid children?

While I think the issues of diversity in all of its forms are important, they are not the social and cultural issues that have truly transformed Jewish education, nor are they the only issues that changed the face of American public education. Far more important for Jewish education are the demographic changes caused by feminism and longevity.

Feminism

While women who work to help support their families have long been a part of Jewish history, they were not the norm in the immediate post-World War II era and were not what we saw on television and film in the 50s and 60s.

²See Shuly Schwartz’s essay in this volume.

³By curriculum, I mean all the learning experiences, inside and outside the classroom, for which the school takes responsibility, thus including parent programs as well as those implemented during school time.

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Today, the two-career family is most assuredly the pattern, especially in urban areas. There are many more careers open to women, and teaching as a profession has lost its appeal. Once upon a time, “my daughter, the teacher” carried a certain status. Smart women entered this pink-collar profession because teaching was a calling, to be sure, but also because white-collar (or white shoe) options weren’t open to them. Today, the best and the brightest women are not usually found studying education, in either the American or Jewish sphere. Teaching has lost its status. Teachers are excoriated for failing to remedy issues far beyond their control, such as fractured families, limited access to health care, and most of all, poverty. Does anyone believe that the attacks of politicians, CEOs, and heads of foundations on the public schools have no bearing on recruiting candidates for Jewish education?

The fact that so many women with families are working outside the home has contributed to the diminution of hours of instruction in the supplementary school. Parents say they have no family time. Sunday classes were among the first to disappear, as second homes became more common. Suburbanization hasn’t helped either. Who can take the kids to religious school? Yet another day of instruction disappeared. The six-hour-a-week Conservative religious school is now more likely to be a two-hour, one-day-a-week school. Researchers of Jewish day school education and day school administrators note that sending a child to a Jewish day school is often as much about providing child-care coverage for a bigger chunk of the day as it is about Jewish literacy and identity. There is, however, a plus side in this element of the changing Jewish family: a demand for more early childhood education. Salaries of directors have risen; a small but significant number of young women, and even the occasional young man, are finding a calling in pre-school education. New York City is making efforts to create universal pre-K programs. Early childhood education is a new frontier for Jewish education. Jewish parents are shopping for not only pre-K programs, but childcare after school as well. Two working parents need to simplify their lives; one-stop shopping in the Jewish educational realm provides it.

The one- or two-day-a-week supplementary school could be augmented with synagogue and community programs, like drama clubs, band, choir, cooking, and reading groups rich in Jewish content. They could organize *shabbatonim* to create more immersive Jewish experiences while adding heft (and fun) to the teaching of Jewish literacy during the few hours of instruction allotted to Hebrew reading, holidays, and Bible. A “supplement” to the supple-

mentary school would be a godsend to working parents who can't pick up their kids until six (or later). Not only would these initiatives add experiential learning and Jewish culture to the curriculum, they would also provide more teaching opportunities for underemployed or part-time Jewish educators.

The Aging Jewish Community

No discussion of the contemporary Jewish family would be complete without mentioning the “graying” of the Jewish family. There is an ever-growing population of well-educated retirees eager for intellectual stimulation. I am the class correspondent for my alma mater. While I'm delighted that so many of my classmates are attending learning-in-retirement classes sponsored by or held in colleges and universities, either as students or as teachers, I wonder why there aren't more opportunities for them in their synagogues. I'm not referring here to the occasional lecture, but to classes held over extended time periods, in which the learners have a share in the planning and teaching. I applaud Context and the Florence Melton Adult Mini-Schools, but synagogues are missing opportunities to realize the promise in the title bestowed upon their educational professionals, “Director of Life-Long Learning,” by overemphasizing pediatric Judaism.

Beyond Demography

The most significant change in the American Jewish Family, however, is not one related to race, ethnicity, gender, or aging. Like other classic demographic markers, it too is a cultural byproduct, one that is influenced by American education writ large. Jews were once known for their communitarian ways: the notion of minyan, of communal rather than individual salvation, for taking care of their own. Not so much anymore.

American schools have taught an ethic of individualism all too well. Americans are turning their backs on the public school. Parents of grown children don't want to pay taxes for other people's children. The creeping privatization of public schooling with parents abandoning neighborhood schools for for-profit charter schools funded by family foundations has its analogs in Jewish school and synagogue life. Hebrew charter schools have cropped up in Florida, California, and New York. Another example of privatization of a different sort

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is parents hiring tutors and/or paying for online instruction rather than sending their children to Jewish schools. Those who do send their children to synagogue schools drop their memberships after their kids have become bar/bat mitzvah. This client/consumer attitude can be seen in the phenomenon of rent-a-rabbis for bar/bat mitzvah preparation (or weddings) and the swelling ranks of cheap Chabad-run schools for decidedly non-Chabad children.

The biggest issue in educating the American Jewish community is not that the community has physically changed. Rather, it's that there is so much confusion about its mission, objectives, and methods. In the muddle, we've turned to slogans and faddism, very much like those in American public education. Compare the goals of "No Child Left Behind" (2001) and "Race to the Top" (2014). Which is it? An education for every child? Or every child should be college- or career-ready? Doesn't a race mean someone has to be left behind? Once again, as goes American education, so goes Jewish education. What is Jewish education for? Jewish literacy? Then we need to have curricula that give primacy to Hebrew language and Jewish texts. Is it Jewish identity? (One of my colleagues referred to this goal as the "crack cocaine" of Jewish funders.) Experiential learning? Doesn't all learning rely on experiences? Which experiences? Those provided by Jewish camps in Jewish living? Those provided by 10-day trips to Israel?

There are no simple solutions for the highly individualized, locally and privately funded, patchwork of educational offerings we have created. Jonathan Snow is a neuroscientist at Barnard College who studies bees. He notes that bees are eu-social creatures; all bees work, but on separate tasks in order to maintain the hive. There are foragers, cleaners of cells, and caregivers for the young and the queen. They store food, guard the hive, and nurse the bees that make the wax for the honeycomb. But they also act as one, as a super-organism, because individual bees can't survive on their own.

I think there is something we can learn from the bees. Perhaps we can convene an educational summit to create a Project Devorah (bee in Hebrew) for Jewish education. This venture could address the big issues we tend to ignore, those that aren't "hot"—like vision, curriculum, personnel, and funding. The discussion would acknowledge the importance of local Jewish institutions—synagogues, day schools, camps, JCCs—doing the work of early childhood education, family education, and adult education, but set them in a communal and regional context so that they work together as well as individually. We Jews have placed enormous value on general education; it's time for

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a serious overhaul of Jewish education. Let's look to the bees. Perhaps we can learn to think eu-socially as an antidote to the obsessive individualism that has become so corrosive to our Jewish values and institutions.

Challenges to LGBTQ Inclusion in Jewish Communities: A Firsthand Look

Joy Ladin

THE RECENT GAINS IN LEGAL RIGHTS, and social and media recognition for LGBTQ Americans (particularly lesbian and gay Americans) have been accompanied by increasing awareness and tolerance in Jewish communities. There are more and more Jewish communities and institutions in which LGBTQ Jews are not harassed or held up for public shaming, LGBTQ lifecycle rituals are celebrated, and openly LGBTQ Jews take leadership roles.

But though tolerance is a crucial step toward inclusion, it is only a step—and once institutions and communities amend their welcome statements to include the once-taboo words “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender,” they often find it hard to recognize and confront the ongoing, day-to-day challenges their LGBTQ members face. If our goal is full inclusion of LGBTQ Jews in the Jewish world, tolerance must be seen as the beginning rather than the end of community-by-community, institution-by-institution processes of learning, negotiation, and change.

To bring the challenges of moving from tolerance to full inclusion into focus, I want to describe in detail one small example: the bat mitzvah planning process in a liberal Reconstructionist synagogue for a family—mine—in which one parent is transgender. When we think about the crises faced by LGBTQ Jews—exile from family and community, depression, suicide, and so

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on—what happened while planning my daughter’s bat mitzvah pales in comparison. But if our goal is for Jewish institutions and communities to help LGBTQ Jews live full Jewish lives, we will find that many of our challenges only become apparent when we think about individuals’ experiences in specific situations as well as wide-lens questions of policy.

It’s often said that the social, legal, and political progress for transgender Americans tends to lag about two decades behind the progress gay and lesbian Americans have made. I see that lag in the Jewish American world, too; communities and institutions that have become accustomed to gay and lesbian Jews often have little awareness or understanding of transgender Jews. Trans Jews are a much smaller minority than gay and lesbian Jews, and because gender is such a pervasive social and communal category, reckoning with transgender identity requires that communities devote a lot of communal attention to relatively few members.

So it’s not surprising that my progressive, Reconstructionist synagogue hasn’t paid much attention to its handful of transgender members. For Reconstructionists, transgender Jews aren’t supposed to raise issues that require attention. The Reconstructionist movement’s website, www.jewishrecon.org, declares:

We retain an unwavering commitment to forming inclusive communities, welcoming to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered [sic] Jews as well as multicultural families, Jews of color, and other groups traditionally excluded from full participation in Jewish communal life.¹

Unfortunately, though, this unwavering commitment to including transgender Jews is not reflected elsewhere on this website or that of the Reconstructionist rabbinical seminary, which has had a number of trans students. A search for the word “transgender” on these websites leads only to external links, mostly to transgender Jewish rituals on ritualwell.org, and one brief article on “Understanding Transgender Issues in Jewish Ethics.” Clearly, my synagogue couldn’t get much help from [jewishrecon.org](http://www.jewishrecon.org) in implementing an “unwavering commitment” to “transgendered Jews.”

But my synagogue’s welcome statement stops short of making an “unwavering commitment” to LGBTQ inclusion; it reads:

¹ <http://www.jewishrecon.org/resource/faqs-reconstructionist-approaches-jewish-ideas-and-practices>.

We are an open and welcoming community, including members who are gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, and transgender, single, in-married and intermarried, and of a variety of colors, backgrounds, physical abilities and economic means.

This statement exemplifies communal tolerance, stating that the community is open to LBGT Jews, but makes no commitment, unwavering or otherwise, to understanding or responding to the needs of LGBTQ members. My synagogue is indeed quite tolerant. Our previous rabbi was openly gay, and his predecessor made outreach to the lesbian community (there are few gay men in our area) a priority. We have had several openly transgender members over the years who have given *divrei Torah* referring to trans identity; two celebrated adult bar mitzvahs.

But tolerance has not led to full inclusion. It took years of lobbying by trans members for the synagogue board to add “transgender” to the welcome statement. Other than one “queer sukkah” gathering, organized by our previous rabbi at the very end of his tenure, I’m not aware of any LGBTQ-specific programming or educational events, or, beyond the welcome statement, any LGBTQ-specific policies, rituals, or liturgy. In practical terms, the synagogue “open and welcoming” means: “We won’t kick LGBTQ Jews out or prevent them from participating in communal life, but the community takes no responsibility for learning about, knowing or meeting their needs.”

I joined the synagogue in the mid-1980s, long before my gender transition. While I lived as a man, I was deeply involved, regularly attending services with my family, serving on the board, giving *divrei Torah* and doing other teaching. When I began living as a woman—as myself—I deliberately withdrew from involvement because I knew my ex and our children wouldn’t feel comfortable if I was there. After a year or so, though, I started going to services again. It was hard to feel safe or comfortable at synagogue, not because anyone harassed me, but because no one knew how or whether to talk about what was—for all of us, a strange situation. People who had known me for years as a man had to figure out on their own what to make of the fact that I was presenting myself as a woman. The synagogue offered no educational resources, no communal discussions of trans identity, and no guidance about whether I was welcome to use the women’s rather than the men’s bathroom or about what anyone who was uncomfortable encountering me in the women’s room should do. A few people reached out to me individually; some stared, I thought—it’s hard to be sure—or looked away. I stopped speaking up in discussions. I sat by my-

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self, in the back, and generally left before services ended, avoiding *kiddush* and other social situations. My estrangement, I felt, was my personal problem, and I felt too different and too vulnerable to do much about it. Even though I was doing educational presentations on transgender issues in Jewish communities around the country, I felt too vulnerable to take on that role in my home community when no one was asking me to do so.

It wasn't until my daughter's bat mitzvah that I saw that my marginalization wasn't just my problem and that the synagogue had not done work essential to LGBTQ inclusion. Life-cycle rituals are usually hard for families that have gone through acrimonious divorces; and when parents don't work together well, the family dynamics can be challenging for the communities in which those rituals take place. Our family was certainly not the first in our synagogue to present those kinds of challenges, but we were the first in which one parent was openly transgender, and it was clear throughout the process that the synagogue was not prepared for that situation. I didn't even know bat mitzvah preparations had begun until my daughter, whom I saw three times a week and had just turned 12, mentioned that she had begun studying her Torah portion and would become a bat mitzvah in six months. The rabbi and ritual committee had scheduled the date with my ex without consulting or informing me. When I protested, the rabbi included me in planning meetings but discouraged me from being actively involved in my daughter's preparation or the service. The rabbi and ritual committee had already accepted my ex's proposal that she lead morning prayers with my daughter and that the service would conclude with a ritual she had designed that would include everyone in the family but me. The rabbi urged me to go along with these plans in the name of easing stress on my daughter and refused to give me a role in the service other than an *aliyah* and the customary (in our congregation) brief parental blessing. During the final rehearsal, I had nothing to rehearse. I played with my youngest daughter and watched the rabbi, my ex, and my older daughter smooth out details on the *bimah*. The rabbi spoke only to my ex; when I left, he didn't notice. It shouldn't have surprised me that the community newsletter mentioned only my ex as the bat mitzvah parent—but it did.

The rabbi insisted that these were just mistakes; they certainly don't seem to have been conscious decisions. Rather, he and the community seemed to be in denial about their obvious discomfort with my status as a transgender parent, a discomfort that the official policy of tolerance made it impossible for

them to acknowledge, discuss, or work through. As a result, I kept being treated as though I weren't there, or shouldn't be.

But there was one aspect of the bat mitzvah plan that I refused to accept. My ex wanted my daughter to be called to the Torah by my former male Hebrew name, rather than my female Hebrew name. The rabbi urged me, as usual, to go along, explaining the importance to my ex of my male name and the family, lost but not forgotten, that the name represented.

But as I explained to the rabbi, it is profoundly insulting to refer to a trans person by their former name and pronouns; to call my daughter to the Torah using my former male Hebrew name would turn my daughter's bat mitzvah into a public repudiation of me as a parent and a person. I wouldn't attend such a ceremony, I told him. The rabbi pointed out that there was no synagogue policy that would justify him calling my children by my actual name. He was right: There was no policy, because after inserting the word "transgender" into the welcome statement, the synagogue had stopped working toward transgender inclusion. I suggested that the inclusion of "transgender" in the welcoming statement constituted a promise that the synagogue was a safe place for Jews like me, a place where our identities would be respected, and that policies should be developed as necessary to fulfill that promise. In the absence of a policy, I said, it was up to the rabbi. He was going to call my daughter to the Torah. He would have to decide which of these conflicting values and feelings were most important.

I was delighted to hear the misery in his voice. Finally, I wasn't the only one suffering in this process. It was my son who resolved the conflict. He suggested that his sister be called by my current name, with the addition of the Hebrew phrase "formerly known as" my former Hebrew name. The rabbi agreed, and when the time came, he uttered the naming formula so quickly even I couldn't tell what he was saying. It was a bittersweet resolution. I was able to attend my daughter's bat mitzvah, and my ex- and my daughter were able to have the importance of my male identity to their history affirmed. Before the service, my children and I had a painful but wonderful discussion about my new Hebrew name, which they had never heard. It's Tikvah, I said; it means "hope." I told them that during my life as a male, I had no hope; the name "Tikvah," suggested by my best friend during the hardest part of my transition, was like a beam of light flashing in the darkness, pointing me toward the hope I had never learned to feel.

Hope is a bridge from the troubled world that is to the Promised Land

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where all of us will be welcomed, loved, and celebrated for who we truly are. Naming my daughter as a daughter of Tikvah when she was called to the Torah marked her bat mitzvah as part of that bridge. But her bat mitzvah wasn't held in the Promised Land, it was held in this one, where even progressive Jewish communities like mine are only beginning to wrestle with the practical issues—and potential conflicts—raised by inclusion of transgender Jews. Those issues may take communities by surprise, but there is nothing surprising about the fact that inclusion requires attention, time, and other community resources. Inclusion of Jews in wheelchairs requires rebuilding bathrooms and installing ramps. Inclusion of Jews of color requires communities to confront long-held assumptions and biases. Inclusion of more observant members into less observant communities may require kashering of kitchens and installation of timers to control lights on Shabbat. Inclusion of less observant members into more observant communities may require more English and transliteration, and new educational programs.

Because transgender Jews are a tiny minority, and the issues we raise have so little precedent in Jewish sources and Jewish history and tradition, communities will be working through them for a long time. I'm so grateful that you and I are working on them together.

🕎 Chapter 7 🕎

A Rabbi's Journey and the Search for New Paradigms

Adina Lewittes

IT'S GREAT TO CONTRIBUTE to this important and timely conference volume on the changing Jewish family. I'm honored to share my view from the trenches of Sha'ar Communities speaking from my perspectives as a rabbi, a wife, and a mother.

Some quick background on Sha'ar: Trends show that people want choices in their Jewish lives when it comes to belief, practice, and membership; and that small, intimate communities are increasingly prized over larger, more institutional settings. Today's costs of affiliation—synagogue, JCC, day school, summer camp—are also prohibitive to many. In response, Sha'ar (Hebrew for portal or gate) offers a new paradigm that welcomes many and varied approaches to Jewish identity. We've created multiple portals from which one can choose to enter Jewish life and establish Jewish connections. Like a deconstructed synagogue, we have “gates” that meet for different kinds of Jewish experiences: one for study, one for youth programs, one for travel, one for prayer, one for healing rituals, one for social activism, and so on. Each gate has its own community and fee structure. For some, one gate suffices. For others, several beckon. For many, Sha'ar is a primary and first-ever Jewish home; for others, it is a secondary one offering unique opportunities unavailable elsewhere.

Our board reflects the diversity of our gates and the people they attract: Our chair is GenX, our treasurer an octogenarian; other board members are parents, some professionals, and we always have a high school senior on our leadership team.

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Jews seeking alternative communities, intermarried Jews, and LGBTQ Jews all find a home in Sha'ar. Because of our unique membership model and broad access, lots of people on the “outside” come to us, as well as people who are unable to turn to their own religious communities when they find themselves in new or what feel like unusual circumstances. Let me tell you about some of those folks, people whose lives are helping to shape the future of Judaism here and around the world, and who have had a profound impact on my life—personal, professional, and spiritual.

One note of clarification: I want to suggest we move away from labeling the people and families I'm going to tell you about as “nontraditional,” as if their values and commitments are the antithesis of what Judaism has historically meant and looked like. These are Jews who feel and behave in ways deeply Jewish, and who, with great devotion, are bringing new voices and faces to our continually evolving tradition. Those who reject Jewish life altogether might better be called “nontraditional.” These people are doing anything but that. Let's use language that's inclusive, even of those Jews whose lives compel us to rethink boundaries and standards. Doing so will only ensure the unity of our people and the resiliency of our precious heritage.

Serving as the rabbi for the *brises* of two sons born to a same-sex couple in our community illustrates this truth. The slight modification of the liturgy to reflect two mothers was almost insignificant when set against the backdrop of beautiful *niggunim* (melodies), profound *divrei Torah*, loving and thrilled grandparents, relatives and friends, and the power of a dramatic ritual that has marked the birth of Jewish boys for thousands of years.

The scene was not that different at a baby naming I led for the daughter of an intermarried couple at which the non-Jewish husband's Chinese parents spoke with humility about their gratitude to the Jewish community for embracing their beautiful new granddaughter.

Participating in the funeral for my congregant's husband who was an African-American Christian required more creativity. His family and pastor led the service, while I shared teachings and melodies that provided a warm, familiar embrace to his Jewish widow and her family.

In many ways, the choices my wife, Andi, and I have made together over the last 13 years helped more than anything to widen and deepen the reaches of Sha'ar communities. My primary role in the Bergen County Jewish community has been as a mother to my children. More often than not, I've been observed on the pulpit or read about in the newspaper, I've

been seen driving kids to school or the JCC, watching recitals at the dance studio, or cheering on my son's hockey team. I bump into people on early-morning runs and at the yoga studio. I've interrupted prayer at the synagogue to tend to my daughter's bruised knee when she was a little girl. In a mostly family-oriented community, we've been infinitely "ordinary." Our time has been filled with the same kinds of activities and pressures as other working parents. Our home pulsates with the same blessed, chaotic rhythms of now teenagers and young adults—their clothes, their music, their schoolwork, and their friends.

My teachings often refer to our family life and adventures. We regularly entertain members of Sha'ar in our home, around our lively Shabbat table. Pre-bar/bat mitzvah meetings with kids and parents mostly take place at our home where our family life serves as a backdrop to the milestone being celebrated by my congregants, allowing them a peek into the easily recognizable routine of our gang of two mums and 6 kids. Pre-marital counseling sessions also often take place in our home where both heterosexual and same-sex couples can witness firsthand my relationship with Andi and identify universal patterns of what it means to bring two lives together as well as to build a blended family.

Moving fluidly between my roles as mother, wife, and rabbi has shown people the basic human impulses that animate my life and theirs. I believe that for those whose lives look different than most others, as does mine, it has opened for them a true and proud sense of belonging to the Jewish community. By living our Jewish values clearly and publicly, we've been able to widen the tent of our Jewish community as our tradition, and our humanity, teaches us to do.

Two years ago, there was no formal space in the Jewish community of northern New Jersey for teenagers struggling with or exploring their sexuality, or for parents of Jewish LGBTQ teens. Realizing we were a natural home for such initiatives, Sha'ar launched an affinity group for such parents, led by a social worker from Jewish Family Services and me, to share their experiences of raising their kids. We also launched an amazing annual Purim party called "The Un-masquerade Ball" for LGBTQ Jewish teens and their friends and allies to celebrate Purim in a setting where they can actually remove the masks and disguises they often feel obligated to wear in the world and instead celebrate who it is they truly are.

But every so often, your tent stretches even more widely than you knew it could. Five years ago, a family came to me buckling under the strain of their 12-

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year-old son finally emerging from years of emotional trauma and social isolation by transitioning to become the girl he always felt he was. On top of the obvious challenges the parents and their two other children were negotiating, their Conservative synagogue, where they had belonged for years and had celebrated their older children becoming *b'nei mitzvah*, informed them that, under the circumstances, the synagogue could not allow their soon-to-be daughter to celebrate what would now be her bat mitzvah in their community.

Feeling scorned, rejected and in deep pain, they came to me. Maybe they had heard Sha'ar is an inclusive community? Maybe they figured since I'm gay I'd be more welcoming? We opened ourselves to them and offered them a spiritual home and a loving and supportive community without judgment or prejudice. I was able to assure their privacy as their daughter's transition proceeded, making it comfortable for the parents and siblings. Most importantly, we renewed the family's understanding of their Judaism as a compassionate, relevant, and healing framework for the complexity and diversity of life in the twenty-first century.

But that's not the end of the story. In the next chapter, the family challenged a different aspect of Jewish life as we know it, especially us rabbis. As the bat mitzvah approached, we all assumed I would be officiating. Not only was I the spiritual leader of their new community; I had walked alongside them on their extraordinary family journey with their transgender daughter. I was so looking forward to the honor of celebrating her, and them, on that day.

As we began to plan the Shabbat *minhah*-afternoon service, the bumps in the road we had travelled together began to surface. I was working on the ceremony directly with the mother. A strong, creative, and artistic woman, a poet and a writer, and a mother whose strength awed me, she was also emphatic about certain things she wanted for her now-daughter's bat mitzvah: photography and videography to capture this courageous moment in her life, freedom to alter and edit the liturgy and the service itself to reflect their family's personal beliefs and creative spirit; and the option to serve non-kosher food.

While devoted and proud Jews, they were not ritually observant and wouldn't pretend to be for anyone. They were a tight and devoted clan who had been through so much and felt they needed to do things their way. After one especially tough discussion wherein I explained the meaning behind the traditions I felt bound to represent at their celebration, the mother turned to me and said words that echo within me to this day: "You are our rabbi, Dini. We admire you and are grateful to you. But I am my family's spiritual leader." In other words, she

was the authority who would decide what is meaningful and appropriate for her family.

In the end, they hired another rabbi to officiate at the bat mitzvah, and I was one of the invited guests with a small role to play. The service was made up of traditional prayers, contemporary poetry, personal reflections and creative rituals. It was beautiful and heartfelt. Still, I felt a profound loss—for myself and for the family—being there as a guest like any other, given the intense relationship we forged during their deep crisis in the preceding months.

Sadly, our relationship has never been the same. But I learned so much from it and from them. This story became a seminal moment in my rabbinate to which I return again and again and which informs many decisions I make today as a rabbi. I've come to realize that my success shouldn't be calculated by how many people I turn into "me" by convincing them to lead the Jewish life to which I devote myself. Rather, the fulfillment of my purpose, my mission as a rabbi, should be evaluated on how able I am to help people become the best versions of *their own Jewish selves*, guiding them to make educated, thoughtful and authentic decisions about how to live as proud and responsible Jews.

As the Jewish world and Jewish families continued to become more accepting of its diversity and complexity, it was this renewed understanding of myself and my rabbinate that led me to rethink our community's historic stance against rabbis performing weddings for couples who are intermarrying. While it was a long and heartfelt journey to the place I am in now, one I wrote about in *Tablet Magazine*,¹ it has yielded for me, for Sha'ar, and if I may dare say, for the larger Jewish community some very compelling outcomes.

Recognizing that the reality of intermarriage is here to stay and that refusing to officiate was having no effect on limiting the trend, the larger communal conversation began to focus on what response could stem the subsequent exodus from the Jewish community of intermarried couples that many predicted and witnessed. After years of struggle and deliberation, which I wrote about in detail, I decided it was time to stand by Jews who were marrying non-Jews but for whom their Jewish identity remained a priority and who, together with their non-Jewish partners, had committed to establishing a Jewish home and raising a Jewish family.

¹ Adina Lewittes, "Intermarriage, I Do! A Conservative Rabbi Takes the Plunge," *Tablet Magazine*, February 4, 2015. <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/188465/intermarriage-i-do>.

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To secure their ongoing devotion to Judaism, I felt it was important to acknowledge their love and the choices they were making while sending the clear message that we want and expect their continued involvement in our communities. To the Jewish partner, I want to convey the importance of their ongoing Jewish commitments. Falling in love and marrying a non-Jew doesn't absolve you of your Jewish responsibilities. To the non-Jewish partner, I feel it's critical to offer a warm and genuine welcome and even a note of gratitude that they've committed to establishing a Jewish home and raising Jewish children, and to model an approach to Judaism that is meaningful and compelling enough to spark in them a deeper interest in the community they're joining.

For such couples, after intensive pre-wedding sessions, I will perform a civil ceremony that includes Jewish teachings, music and readings and some of the *minhag* (custom-based rituals) such as a *huppah* (marriage canopy) and the breaking of a glass. But I will not use any of the historic halakhic rituals such as a *ketubah* (marriage contract) or the liturgies around the exchange of rings or the *sheva berakhot* (seven wedding blessings) that I believe should be reserved for the wedding ceremony of two Jews.

I find that I say no to a request as often as I say yes. Sometimes I sense that the commitment to a Jewish home and Jewish children isn't fully formed or shared by both partners. Sometimes the couples will want a full, traditional Jewish wedding and will walk away over my resistance to that. I've had powerful conversations explaining that while I will marry them in a ceremony infused with Jewish spirit, they also have to understand that there are consequences—not punitive, but logical—to their choices and that the traditional rituals aren't appropriate for their circumstances because they were crafted with two Jews in mind. But what is underlying their insistence, at least in some cases, isn't naiveté or ignorance. Rather, it's their anxiety over whether or not they'll still be loved and included in their Jewish community that leads them to insist on a full Jewish ritual embrace.

The response from these couples and their families has been overwhelming. And it's not just about being thankful. After one wedding, the Jewish bride's parents' faces shone as they introduced me to friends craving not only the same Jewish spirit at their own children's upcoming intermarriages, but also for a rabbi to articulate the expectation I had expressed during the ceremony that these couples remain connected to Judaism. They recognized I'm not out there to accommodate reality; I'm trying to transform it into meaningful Jewish lives. When the bride opened her speech at the reception by tearfully thanking me

for marrying them, I knew she understood not only the journey I made, but the one I charged her and her non-Jewish husband to make, too.

At our first pre-wedding session, during which we spoke about the importance of acceptance even as I explained the Jewish community's concerns about continuity, one non-Jewish Mexican-American groom who had pledged to make a Jewish life with his Jewish fiancée, spoke of being welcomed so warmly by her traditional Jewish family, especially by her grandfather, a survivor of the *Shoah*, who shared with him his tragic experiences. With all of this love and trust shown to him, this groom expressed that he now feels a deep responsibility to carry forward the family's Jewish identity and to ensure the continuity of their story for generations to come.

In all but one of these intermarriages, the couples continue to study, often with me, throughout the months following the wedding to grow their understanding of Judaism so they can fulfill their shared vision of a Jewish life together. And in all but one, the non-Jewish partner has asked that we deepen our discussions to include the prospect of eventually converting. While my data set is still relatively small, I believe the results of being willing to accept people for who they are, being present to them in the place in which they find themselves as they begin their married life, and forging an open-hearted and open-ended relationship with them are encouraging and validating.

My motivation in having taken this path is a passionate commitment to inclusion, not exclusion. By writing and speaking on this topic, I'm trying to stimulate discussion and model approaches that can, and I pray will, enfranchise those who risk becoming alienated, while strengthening the Jewish people and maintaining the dignity and integrity of Jewish tradition.

In the wake of the article I wrote, I received many messages from colleagues who shared the sense of urgency that we find a way to stand with these couples and their families as they turn to us for leadership and seek to maintain their connection to Judaism.

I'm happy to report that some of us have come together to rethink our stance toward intermarrying couples through a process steeped in Jewish learning and discussion. While I had to make the heartbreaking decision to leave the Rabbinical Assembly in order to fulfill this part of my calling as a rabbi, I'm very proud to be a part of these new rabbinic initiatives and to help forge a shared path forward.

I'm grateful and honored to be able to share the stories of people who may be asking us to rethink some of our assumptions but whose dedication to Judaism

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is integral to the future of Jewish tradition and the destiny of its people. They have shaped my life and allowed me to shape theirs, and no doubt folks like them will become a part of all of our lives in the very near term, if they aren't already.

It is my hope that the vistas and visions on the pages of this volume create new horizons for our community and lead us to a place of *shleymut*, of wholeness, and of *shalom*, of peace, as Jewish life continues to unfold and reveal all its magnificent, complex holiness.

Interfaith Marriage: The Case for Endogamy

Jeremy Kalmanofsky

AFTER THE RELEASE OF THE 2013 PEW STUDY, I sat in a seminar at the UJA-Federation of New York, where the sociologist Steven M. Cohen parsed the grim data for a group of rabbis. The American Jewish community would be doomed if it could not reverse massive defection, he said, such as the finding that 2.1 million children of at least one Jewish parent did not consider themselves Jewish in any form. Slipping into Hebrew for emphasis, Cohen tried to convey it in terms even we rabbis could understand:

“רבותי וגבירותי, אם אין יהודים אין יהדות!” — Gentlemen and ladies, if there are no *Jews* there won’t be any *Judaism*!

An Orthodox rabbi in the room promptly rejoined:

“אם אין יהדות אין יהודים.” If there is no *Judaism* there won’t be any *Jews*.

As the wise Reb Tevye would say, “He is right, and he is also right.” Our religious civilization will evaporate without an enduring community of identified Jews. At the same time, only a thick braid of shared narrative, practice, and values can sustain any Jewish identity worth the name. I have often thought about that little exchange as I consider my role as a rabbi serving a heterodox twenty-first-century American community.

We should all be long past any illusions that most North American Jewish families will live as their grandparents did: in tight-knit Jewish neighborhoods,

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studying, working, and marrying only within the tribe. Little in today's American melting pot would even make that picture seem desirable. To many people, exogamy is worth celebrating, a marker of Jews' full integration into this open society. Especially since 2017's rise in hate crimes and white supremacist rallies, no one can forget that antisemitism still exists, but overall the most significant feature of the American Jewish experience is how much they love us, not how much they hate us.

The changed facts on the ground dictate no one single self-evident public policy or analysis.

Some argue that the old endogamy norm gives off an unpleasant smell of tribalism or even racism, and it is time to set it aside. The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College has taken this position even for clergy, asserting that not even rabbis should be expected to marry Jews. Others argue that whatever we might prefer, opposing intermarriage is futile, "like being against gravity," says Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism. The only way to serve families is to affirm Jews' relationships, regardless of the ethnicity, faith, or gender of the spouse.

Among Conservative Jews, increasing numbers are saying that matrilineal identity markers are pointless barriers, and sexist to boot, so children of any Jew, man, or woman should be recognized as members of the tribe. Some rabbis have resigned from the Rabbinical Assembly over the endogamy standard and say they will now officiate at intermarriages when convinced that a couple is seriously committed to building a Jewish home and family. Still others continue to hold the traditional line, arguing that endogamy norms are central to Israel's covenant and that rabbis should officiate at religious ceremonies only when two Jews marry. I'm in this last camp, believing that it is possible for rabbis and synagogues to welcome intermarried Jews and their families warmly, even without performing their weddings or abandoning matrilineality.

In evaluating the available strategies for addressing the changing family, we are tempted to ask social scientists to just solve this for us. But it is not immediately obvious to me which are the most salient data from Pew and other studies. Is it the high intermarriage rate *per se*; that among Jews who have married since 2000, 82 percent of Reform and 39 percent of Conservative Jews married gentiles? Or alternatively, is it that many of those who marry gentiles do not reject their heritage but rather seek their own paths for retaining Jewish commitment, as recounted in *Jewish on Their Own Terms*, Jennifer A. Thompson's research?

Is it the hopeful news that 59 percent of millennial children of intermarriage say they identify as Jews? Or should we pay more attention to the fact that most of them consider themselves Jewish “not by religion,” a statistical category in which two-thirds of parents do not raise their children as Jews in any way whatsoever, neither by religion nor culture? Is the key the positive impact of Birthright and other college experiences on the children of endogamy and exogamy alike, as Leonard Saxe and his Brandeis University colleagues have found? Or is it the fact that the typical child of intermarriage arrives at college without any Jewish education at all, neither formal nor informal, as Saxe also notes? Is it the October 2016 report by Saxe, Fran Chertok, et al. that exclusive rabbinic officiation tracks with impressively increased Jewish engagement among the intermarried? Or does that finding indicate no particular rabbinic influence but really describe the obvious point that the 24 percent of intermarried couples who chose Jewish-only clergy were more disposed toward Jewish commitment than the 11 percent who chose Christian clergy or the 57 percent who chose non-religious officiation? All of these data and more are relevant, but one cannot derive a prescription from a description, an *ought* from an *is*. Social science cannot answer how Jewish institutions should approach exogamy.

These are hard problems, and perhaps no single answer will be right for every community. Communal leaders will interpret data differently and pursue different tactics and strategies. On balance, this is good. When facing tough challenges, it helps to run different experiments at the same time rather than pursue a single avenue. Perhaps, to borrow another metaphor, the Jewish community is like an orchestra: We need people to play the bassoon alongside others playing the viola. As we confront transformative changes, I should be grateful that some of my colleagues will play different instruments than mine.

For me, as a community rabbi, intermarriage is not a “problem” to be “solved” or a “disease” to be “cured.” It’s not immoral to marry a non-Jew; it doesn’t make you a bad person. I have no illusion that by declining to officiate at weddings between Jews and gentiles rabbis can dissuade anyone from marrying the person she loves. I don’t even really want to, since I am happy for anyone who finds a life partner.

But I do think we can defend Judaism’s endogamy norm in the context of the fight to build communities of moral and spiritual purpose that practice Judaism seriously and to acculturate new generations to their heritage. The main goal of our religious civilization is not that every Jew has a Jewish

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mother-in-law. It would be more correct to say that we hope every Jew will have Jewish grandchildren, grandnieces and nephews, and students who will keep our tradition alive.

What strategies will most likely make that dream come true? I return to that sharp exchange about whether Jews sustain Judaism or vice-versa. The obvious answer is *both*. It is essential that Jewish communities—especially heterodox ones like mine—throw our doors open to as many people as still want Jewish connection. It would be pure foolishness and a failure of imagination to chase away the intermarried or the unmarried, or the disabled, or multiracial families, or prospective converts, or those of comparatively untraditional sexual and gender profiles, or really anyone at all who wants a Jewish home.

Nevertheless, only a rich and textured Judaism can exert enough gravity to keep them after they've entered even the most welcoming doors. Only a thick engagement in a religious culture—in which participants share a sense of covenant, of common histories, aspirations, behaviors, norms, ethics, a common calendar, a common vocabulary, common rituals, and literatures—is a Jewish identity worth preserving at all. Only a Judaism that confers real blessings and also imposes real demands will be vigorous enough to survive another post-modern century.

During my career, I have known considerable numbers of intermarried families who succeed admirably in raising Jewish children and building Jewish homes, full of Jewish practices and values. And needless to say, I've seen plenty of endogamous families who don't. I regret that in some of my previous published remarks on this subject I failed to make this clear. I want to stress that the argument I pursue in this essay applies not only to those Jews married to non-Jews. It applies in equal measure to all Jews, whatever their family status.

Given our demographic struggles, it is not surprising that many Jewish leaders take up a commercial metaphor and speak of “lowering the costs of entry” that might keep people away. These voices have a point and I learn from them.

I want to temper that enthusiasm just a little with a few reflections on what we might call spiritual economics and the basics of supply and demand. Jewish communal leaders might think of ourselves as having an excess supply of our product and distressingly feeble demand. Is the best strategy to drive the price down to win new customers? Is it not possible that giving it away at “loss-leader” or “below-cost” rates will trigger persistent downward pressure on the prices that people will be willing to pay in the future? And since people tend

to value what they pay for and not what they get on the cheap, might we not inadvertently communicate that intense Jewish communal involvement is not really worth the effort?

The truth is closer to the teaching of *Pirkei Avot*: “According to the effort, so is the reward.”

Let me concretize that metaphor a little. Let us imagine, for example, that a given community found its use of Hebrew in services and its public communication was overly challenging to some members. Let us imagine that in addition to some reasonable measured steps—like offering more Hebrew classes and always translating phrases in the bulletin—the community concluded that it needed quantitatively more English and less Hebrew in public life. Words like *shaliaḥ tzibbur*, *gemilut ḥasadim*, *avelut*, *pikuaḥ nefesh*, and *keva* and *kavvanah* were deemed off-putting to those unfamiliar with the lingo, barriers that made prospective members feel unwelcome. They were, in terms of spiritual microeconomics, too expensive and cut from the budget. This hypothetical community also might decide it would be cheaper, less demanding and more welcoming, to recite the blessings *Ahavah Rabbah* and *Ga'al Yisrael* in English. For some communities, those might be the right choices. In general, however, I would argue that this hypothetical attempt to lower the costs of accessing Jewish life would inadvertently whittle down the authenticity and resonance of that community’s religious culture, ultimately robbing those Jews of a sacred vocabulary they could share with Jews everywhere.

I am cribbing this argument in part from Laurence R. Iannaccone’s very influential 1994 essay “Why Strict Churches are Strong.”¹ An economist by training, Iannaccone wonders why “expensive” religion—the kind that demands unusual eating and drinking practices, restrictive sexual mores, distinctive dress, copious volunteer hours, charitable donations, regular worship and study—grew tremendously during the last third of the twentieth century, while “cheaper” alternatives, less demanding in all those ways, languished. Why were Evangelicals and Mormons flourishing while Episcopalians and Presbyterians dwindled?

Iannaccone argued that when “purchasing” religion, like anything else, you get what you pay for. An expensive religion is usually a better product. Churches that demand people’s hearts, minds, and bodies get them—at least from the committed core. Those churches that make minimal demands receive

¹ *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 99, No. 5 (Mar., 1994), pp. 1180–1211

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commensurately less devotion from their adherents. Moreover, the demands of high-cost religion tend to drive off free riders—those peripheral, sometimes nominal adherents who contribute little to group mission and sometimes actively detract from it by their indifference, ambivalence, or even guilty hostility. This translates to an overall higher level of enthusiasm and commitment among members. And that good spirit among the core means that more people will want to join in the long run.

Of course, there are also inelastic ceilings on how high prices can rise. If a church becomes too expensive, then only a tiny number of fanatics will join. We call these cults instead of churches.

But just imagine visiting a church whose members share an enthusiastic commitment to a common purpose, identity, and faith. You'll sense their intensity right away. But when you visit one whose members attend sporadically, who are unfamiliar with the church's liturgy or its web of ideas, who are ambivalent about whether they want to be there in the first place, who don't regard the church as central to their personal identities, that community will probably be palpably dull.

There are certainly limits to how far one can take this economic metaphor for religious devotion. Yet these observations can illuminate Jewish life. Modern and not-so-modern Orthodoxy seem like excellent illustrations of thriving expensive religions. As for us heterodox Jews, our communities certainly have lower price points than do the Hasidim of Boro Park. Still, I would argue that while building welcoming communities, we also should generally try to nudge up the price—and therefore the value—of Jewish engagement. Conservative Judaism should propound contextually appropriate expectations for behavior and faith that reinforce, not vitiate, Jewish norms. Don't undercut your own product!

It would be a mistake to focus on rabbinic officiation at intermarriages as more than one example among many relevant cases. But to borrow a halakhic term, in this case and others I would say that American heterodox Judaism should recover a sense of *lekhat'hila* (*a priori*) and *bedieved* (after the fact), or "the expensive optimal" and "the cheaper acceptable."

When it comes to marriage, we should articulate that *lekhat'hila*, the expensive optimal of endogamy is more likely—not guaranteed, but more likely—to foster families that take Jewish education, ritual, values, faith, and covenantal identity seriously. If both parents affirm that they are Jews, they are more likely to transmit their heritage to a new generation than if one parent

asserts—and I take non-converting non-Jewish spouses at their word—that they actually do *not* consider themselves members of the people of Israel, neither sharing its past nor its future, not holding its customs sacred, not adopting its faith. That’s not even raising the question of whether, when kids are born, the non-Jewish parent will discover that her childhood faith suddenly seems more meaningful than she thought, and she now wishes to expose her children to it. We smile knowingly when Jewish parents feel this way. Christians feel it, too.

Expensive optimal *lekhat’hila* options are not necessarily morally better, in marriage or in other areas. But they usually are Jewishly better, intensifying commitment not weakening it, and helping communities maintain a critical mass of committed enthusiastic members whose Jewish identities are at the core of their lives.

Many of the rationales I have heard for why Conservative rabbis should change their policies and begin endorsing intermarriage are more or less explicit that contemporary people need the cheaper options. Get real, we are told. Meet people where they are. Don’t judge. Don’t even presume to press the non-Jewish partner to convert, which would certainly be a *lekhat’hila* route, creating a new, often very eager Jew.

Proponents of change on intermarriage insist, and surely believe, that they do not favor diluting the content of Jewish life. But let’s be a little honest. Typically, though not invariably (and hooray for the exceptions), intermarried families manifest less intense Jewish commitment. Not none, but few send their kids to Jewish day schools or even to supplemental Hebrew schools, let alone to summer camp. Most score lower on measures of Jewish behavior. Most self-report lower levels of connection to Judaism as a religion. As a Conservative rabbi, I am in the religion business, which demands high-cost investments in literacy, values, and covenantal community.

To repeat, I know intermarried Jews who grow and intensify their Jewish lives. But the principal argument for why I and my colleagues should respond to a changed American Jewish family with a changed intermarriage policy is that Jews today are unwilling to pay for a religion stressing covenants of faith, fate, and destiny. “Most Jews today do not approach Judaism that way,” wrote Ed Case, head of InterfaithFamily.com, in a letter to *The Forward* [March 20, 2015], responding to an earlier article of mine on this topic. Yes, they want meaningful practices shared with like-minded others, but not so much that they draw boundaries around tight communities of faith.

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An especially honest articulation of this position comes from Paul Golin, associate executive director of Big Tent Judaism, a leading outreach organization, himself married to a non-Jew and a vigorous advocate for interfaith families. He wrote, also in *The Forward* [August 3, 2015]: “We’re post-ethnic, post-tribal ... Jewish-when-we-want-to-be Jews. And we’re fine with that. It’s not our whole lives.”

I mean no disrespect to Golin and his family when I note that his statement looks like a chilling illustration of Iannoccone’s theory. Strict churches will be strong because their members feel passionate about them, but try to build a thriving community among people who say from the outset: “I’ll be Jewish sometimes, when I feel like it. It’s not my whole life. So can you please show me what’s on the discount rack?”

Some of my colleagues advocating a new policy exhort us to just say “yes!” to love, to families, to relationships. There is a huge cost in saying no, they argue, driving families away instead of welcoming them home.

True, there is a cost to saying no, but sometimes there is also a cost to saying yes, in terms of the spiritual economics and the relative intensity of expensive and inexpensive religion.

Failing to privilege endogamy over exogamy, in my view, would incur the high cost of yes. To imagine that less expensive *bedieavad* options—regarding marriage, as well as other kinds of Jewish practice and identification—will produce comparably strong religious communities is a fantasy. As much as possible, given each community’s context, we want to encourage expensive *lekhat’hila* commitment.

Now, favoring endogamy is not necessarily the same thing as refusing to perform an intermarriage. Admittedly, the halakhic term *bedieavad* means something that is not optimal but that is still acceptable. If I decline to perform an intermarriage, doesn’t that mean I really believe it is *assur* (forbidden), not merely *bedieavad* sub-optimal? Yes, by the canons of Jewish law, intermarriage is technically forbidden, and my *prima facie* relationship to halakhic norms is to follow them, absent a compelling moral critique.

Still, I do think there are ways to maintain endogamy as a communal norm *lekhat’hila* without simultaneously treating the intermarried as second-class, marginal citizens. First, if we’ve learned anything from Chabad, it is that we should never give up on any Jew coming to love her magnificent ancestral tradition. All Jews can still have meaningful Jewish experience and learning, and we should do what we can to reach out to them and invite them into

Jewish growth. In my own professional experience, I believe that it is possible to maintain warm and supportive relationships with intermarried people, even as they know my halakhic policy positions.

Second, there are middle-ground steps that do not include officiating at interfaith weddings but do not anathematize those ceremonies. I see no point, in 2017, of banning Conservative rabbis from attending interfaith weddings, even as a guest, even for family members, as current Rabbinical Assembly policy holds. For the sake of my sister and brother-in-law, I myself violated this rule without a moment's hesitation and would not consider doing otherwise. If rabbinic boycotts ever had the power to convey strong disapproval, they don't now. This rule should change. Further, I see no point in refusing to wish interfaith couples congratulations at their happy days. Similarly, we should find maximal appropriate roles for non-Jewish parents at their children's *britot*, baby namings and bar and bat mitzvah celebrations.

More boldly, increasing numbers of Conservative rabbis are wondering: Whom would it hurt if we devised some new ceremony to celebrate with the families of our communities? After all, rabbis love their congregants, they hope the congregants love them back, and (let's face it) congregants' happiness is crucial to rabbis' continued employment.

I confess, I find it unlikely that Conservative rabbis will resist the pressures of American life indefinitely, and I expect that some will take a different route. This does not please me. I do not think this route will be wise or effective. It would be much better to encourage conversion, but I anticipate that in the coming years many of my colleagues will begin performing alternative interfaith weddings, as some already do.

Can much be done to gin up the price and value of Jewish commitment for couples in interfaith weddings? Those who have already begun officiating or who favor a change often float certain proposals, like asking the marrying couple to sign a promise to raise and educate Jewish children or officiating only when they deem a couple "serious." I find these routes dubious.

First, I doubt that promises made to satisfy a rabbi can be relied upon to carry much weight down the road in a family's life. Some young couples will agree to the terms merely to play along to satisfy their parents. Others will legitimately mean well now but cannot predict how they will feel about Judaism or their own religions in another 10 years when they actually have children. While those same risks are present in conversions, they will certainly be lessened when a born-gentile makes a formal commitment to become a Jew, not

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just to support his spouse's practice of a religion he does not want for himself.

Also, as a rabbi, I am not God's police. In my humble opinion, it is overreaching for rabbis to arrogate to themselves the right to pass or flunk an intermarrying couple who seeks rabbinic help. The very reason we are having this conversation about intermarriage is that we're supposed to "meet people where they are" without judgment, right? I find it dubious that a rabbi would look almost any couple in the eye and say: "In principle I perform intermarriages, but not for you two. You seem kind of unserious." It is even more absurdly unlikely to imagine synagogue rabbis celebrating one member family's wedding and declining to celebrate another's: "Yes, Mrs. Schwartz, I know I did the Goldberg kid's wedding, but your son didn't really seem as enthusiastic, and your daughter-in-law still kind of likes church." No rabbi will say this. None.

An alternative idea has been to reverse the conversion process, beginning with the actual conversion itself when a candidate—presumably one engaged to marry a Jew—initiates the process, then later following up with the Jewish learning and training. I think this proposal is 180 degrees, or at least 165 degrees, backwards. No one values what they get for free. To born-Jews, to those converting for marriage, to those sincere converts unmotivated by marriage, this proposal would convey that Jewish identity markers are sheer hocus pocus that can be imposed nominally, utterly without demands and substance. Can anyone really think that the newly converted, newly married Jews will take their post-conversion education as seriously as they would have before? Laurence Iannaccone would say that taking something expensive and making it cheap is no way to create a strong religious community.

American heterodox Jewish identity in the twenty-first century navigates a truly unprecedented social landscape. Time will tell in what form, how, and even whether it will endure. I am arguing in this essay that the impulse to keep people connected to Jewish heritage by being radically welcoming is an excellent approach. But it can also overcorrect and promise people a fantasy that they can have Jewish identity always on their own terms, unanchored to the shared covenant without which Jewish religion is all but vacuous and Jewish ethnicity is all but meaningless.

As a rabbi, I wish to say instead: Judaism is serious and deserves to be taken seriously. Judaism is expensive and is worth the price.

❧ Chapter 9 ❧

Some New Thinking on Inter-marriage

Wes Gardenswartz

Why New Thinking on Inter-marriage is Necessary Now

INTERMARRIAGE IS HAPPENING. And it is happening widely despite a generation of Conservative movement policies aimed at discouraging it. Congregants too numerous to count have made appointments with me to tell me that their son or daughter is getting married to a non-Jew. These include members who have been maximalists in every sense: They come to synagogue regularly; they serve in leadership positions in the synagogue and in the Jewish community; they sent their children to Jewish day schools and Jewish summer camps; they connected their children to Israel on family and community trips. After all this Jewish education, our son or daughter has fallen in love with and is marrying a non-Jew. These parents ask: What should we do?

To date, the Conservative movement has sought to deal with intermarriage by advancing two objectives that are in obvious tension with one another. One, to discourage intermarriage and to assert the primacy of the ideal of endogamy and prohibit rabbis from performing any other kind of marriage: we demand that a Jew should marry a Jew. Two, to welcome into the community the interfaith couple, and their children, whom we hope to educate as Jews.

The non-Jewish spouse who agrees to raise Jewish children is warmly called a beloved companion of the Jewish people.

The attempt of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards to navigate this tension has resulted in a policy, over the last 30 plus years, of “no to the

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wedding, yes to the marriage.” Conservative clergy cannot officiate at the wedding. Indeed, they cannot even attend the wedding. But after some other clergy or a justice of the peace has performed the wedding, we are happy to welcome the couple to our synagogue if they are educating their children as Jews. Temple Emanuel has strictly adhered to this policy.

As will be explained below, this policy does not work. We need a new policy.

The New Thinking

1. We affirm and reaffirm that the ideal is that a Jew marry a Jew.
2. We live in a pluralistic, open society, where a significant number of our children will fall in love with and marry a partner of a different faith. Doing so does not make them bad human beings or bad Jews. It is just life in twenty-first-century America.
3. When our children fall in love with and wish to marry a partner of a different faith, the ideal is that that partner convert to Judaism prior to the wedding.
4. We recognize that there are many reasons why the partner of a different faith may not wish to convert. They may not want to disrespect their parents or grandparents. They may be atheists. They may be sincere adherents to their religion.
5. Since the mid-1980s, it has been the established law and practice of the Conservative movement, via the decisions of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, to regard non-Jewish spouses who raise their children as Jews as “beloved companions of the Jewish people.” These beloved companions, when they die, may be buried in a Jewish cemetery.
6. In that same period, it has also been the established law and practice, as noted above, to say no to the wedding but yes to the marriage. After somebody else marries the interfaith couple, Conservative clergy would welcome them into their Conservative synagogue.
7. This policy does not work. It disserves the couple, the couple’s parents, and the Conservative synagogue. The period of pre-wedding planning between a couple and their rabbi is crucial for trust and relationship building. Depriving that couple and a Conservative rabbi of that period

of trust and relationship building creates a trust and relationship deficit that in many cases can never be overcome. That couple bonds with a rabbi from another denomination, often joins that rabbi's synagogue, and vanishes from the Conservative movement. Often their parents follow. In other cases, the couple joins no synagogue, and some will join a church. This policy alienates families from their Conservative synagogue just when it would be most helpful for those families to be more deeply connected to their Conservative synagogue. For that reason, Temple Emanuel has adopted a new policy.

The New Policy of Temple Emanuel on Intermarriage

After a year of study, in June of 2015, Temple Emanuel's Board of Directors overwhelmingly approved the following policy:

Temple Emanuel will treat an interfaith couple as a Jewish-Jewish couple except that its clergy cannot officiate at the interfaith wedding. In between doing nothing for that interfaith couple (which is what we had been doing) and officiating at the wedding, there are 10 concrete things we do now for our interfaith couples that we do for our Jewish-Jewish couples. Each of these steps deepens the relationship between the interfaith couple and our community and clergy.

1. **Extensive counseling with our rabbis.** If you get engaged to a non-Jew, please call us. We want to meet with you and your fiancé. If your child gets engaged to a non-Jew, please call us and let us know, and please encourage your children to call us as well. We meet with in-married couples 6 times before the *huppah*. We would love to meet with an interfaith couple 6 times before their wedding as well.
2. **Work with the interfaith couple to write letters of love and gratitude to their parents.** We encourage a Jewish-Jewish couple to write letters to their parents, thanking them for the love and home in which they grew up, which now enables them to build a home of their own. When adult children share these letters with their parents on the eve of the wedding, it is always profoundly moving. We would love to do this with an interfaith couple as well.
3. **Work with the interfaith couple to write love letters to one another which they share a day or two before their wedding.**

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When a couple gets married, it is important that they focus on the important stuff: why they love one another, why they are making this biggest and most wonderful decision of their lives. But all too often, life gets in the way of that kind of reflection. Wedding to-do lists get in the way. Every couple I have ever married writes an old-fashioned, pen-and-paper love letter to one another, which they do not share until they get into my study. I leave as they read their love letters. They focus on what they should be focusing on: each other.

4. **Blessing the couple on Shabbat morning.** When a Jewish-Jewish couple gets married, they come for an *aliyah* on Shabbat morning so that we can bless the Jewish home they are about to build. When an interfaith couple gets married, we will bless the couple as well. The Jewish partner takes the *aliyah*, the partner of another faith stands with the Jewish partner, and we bless the couple with the prayer that God help them build a home filled with love and joy, peace and companionship, happiness and harmony.
5. **Work with the couple to deepen their observance of Shabbat as a sanctuary in time.** Jewish or not Jewish, religious or not religious, we could all use Shabbat in the way that Abraham Joshua Heschel described it: a sanctuary in time. We would work with our couple to ask them to think about how they could evolve Shabbat into a time unlike any other, a time for reflection, renewal and deepening.
6. **Writing the Wedding Charge.** If the couple is to be married by a justice of the peace, we can write a wedding charge that reflects our now deep and intimate relationship with the couple and offer it to the justice of the peace to read at the wedding. This is not the same as being there, but it is as close to being there as we can possibly be within our movement's rules. In the vital and sometimes gray center, we make compromises.
7. **Affixing a mezuzah on the doorpost of their home.** Nothing would make us happier than going to the home of an interfaith couple and putting up a mezuzah, a beautiful ritual we do with Jewish-Jewish couples. It would be a privilege and a joy to do it with all of our couples.
8. **Kabbalat HaTorah ceremony on Simhat Torah.** Every year on Simhat Torah, we have a beautiful ceremony where parents and their

young children who are beginning their Jewish education receive a miniature Torah which is transmitted from parents to children. If an interfaith couple chooses to educate their children as Jews, we would love to include them in this communal celebration of learning Jewish values.

9. **A Birthright subsidy for a Honeymoon in Israel.** Encourage a couple to spend their honeymoon in Israel by subsidizing their honeymoon. Nothing stokes the Jewish soul as powerfully as a trip to Israel, and we can't think of a better wedding gift that our synagogue could offer than encouraging all of our newly married couples—Jewish-Jewish and interfaith—to begin their married life in the eternal homeland of the Jewish people. Let's light a Jewish fire.
10. **Approaching conversion as did Hillel in the Talmud.** In the Talmud, Hillel does not require an 18-session course for conversion. Hillel recognizes that conversion is a lifelong process of learning and growing. He converts a candidate and then adjures him to continue his Jewish learning. While we encourage candidates for conversion to take a rigorous year-long course, we also want to give them the option to follow the model of Hillel in the Talmud: some content and learning, conversion, and a continued commitment to study. Should the partner of another faith become a Jew in this fashion, our clergy are delighted to officiate at the wedding.

We gave great thought to crafting this new policy so that it would not alienate our more traditional members. We hope and believe that it does not do so. For those families whose children marry Jews, great! That Jewish-Jewish couple receives all the presence and relationship-building of the synagogue and its clergy, including officiating at the *huppah*. Extending these 10 steps to interfaith couples does not derogate from that presence and that relationship for the Jewish-Jewish couple.

Our new policy enables us to do much more than we have done for our interfaith couples, who are our children, too. In the months since we have adopted our new policy, our clergy have worked with interfaith couples in all these ways. We hope that bringing an interfaith couple, and their families, closer to the synagogue in the months before their wedding, rather than pushing them away, will also draw them closer to God, to Torah, and to the Jewish people.

❧ Chapter 10 ❧

New Interfaith Bridges to the American Jewish Family

Sheila Gordon

“No religion is an island. We are all involved with one another . . .”

Abraham Joshua Heschel, 1965

HESCHEL’S PROPHETIC WORDS, spoken 50 years ago at a groundbreaking lecture at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, still resonate today. In 1965, Heschel, who reveled in the barriers he broke down in his daily conversations with Union’s Reinhold Niebuhr, had a passion for interfaith relationships, rare at the time. Yet he could not have anticipated the dramatic shift in paradigms that have occurred since: the decline of homogenous, heterosexual, two-parent families; the ethos of the younger generation with their multicultural values of tolerance and nonbinary thinking; and the current norm of interfaith marriages.

There is no question now that the American Jewish family is very different from what it was in Heschel’s day. The changes have been rapid and stunning. Perhaps the most dramatic difference is that our families are not homogeneously Jewish. With distant and even close relatives who are not Jewish, today’s American Jewish family is now—at least in part—*interfaith*. This profound difference compels those of us who care about Jewish continuity to ask fresh questions from new perspectives and to pose new strategies, not only from the perspective of Jewish institutions, but particularly from the perspective of the families themselves.

I was honored to be invited to participate in the Jewish Theological Sem-

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inary colloquium on the “Changing Face of the American Jewish Family.” Unlike the other participants in the fascinating and important day-long conversation about the changing family, I am neither a Jewish scholar nor a Jewish communal professional. I am an engaged Conservative Jew, long married to a committed Episcopalian in a proudly “principled interfaith” marriage.¹ Based on the dynamics of my own marriage, I founded and built an organization, Interfaith Community (IFC), to meet the expressed needs of similar families—needs which are still not being widely or well met.

This made me somewhat of a renegade (or at least an unusual voice) at the JTS conference where I was an intermarried Jew. I heard in my panel and throughout the day the observations of Jewish clergy, leaders, and communal professionals. What I tried to bring was the authentic perceptions of interfaith families themselves.

I daily confront a new ethos among interfaith families and, more broadly, in the population as a whole, especially among the millennial generation. This new attitude prizes multiculturalism and openness. Official Jewish representatives necessarily bring their own lens to the interfaith issue. My co-panelists, for example, focused on policy issues such as officiating at interfaith weddings, facilitating conversion, and definitions of who is a Jew.

The interfaith families I know, however, have a different perspective. They focus on their families in which religion is one, but only one, important factor in their busy lives. They want continuity with their respective heritages, but also fairness and some balance between two traditions. They do want to keep a Jewish—just not an exclusively Jewish—identity for their family.

They need time and space to make their own journeys to grapple with these issues, pathways to affiliation, and bridges that connect, first as a couple, then as a family. They need education about religion as adults. They recoil at being pressed to make prenuptial decisions about conversion or specifically how they will raise their prospective children. Consider how a Jewish couple—before marrying—might feel if required to promise that their prospective children will definitely attend Jewish day schools. Consider how one partner might feel if required to shed any major part of their identity before having time to fully experience the alternatives.

¹Brandeis scholar Sylvia Fishman (*Double or Nothing: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*) coined this term to describe families in programs like those of the Interfaith Community which provide intentional and carefully developed offerings to transmit two traditions.

The broader Jewish community has developed some bold and enterprising approaches to the intermarried, most notably InterfaithFamily.Com and Big Tent Judaism (formerly Jewish Outreach Institute), which encourage families to raise their children as Jews. Recently, the Union for Reform Judaism called for “audacious hospitality” in welcoming the interfaith. But these approaches are Jewish-centric. They do not appear to affirmatively acknowledge the religion of other partner or the couple’s impulse toward fairness and respect. They do not speak to many of today’s interfaith families and individuals, those who are, in effect, exploring a dual-faith path. Specifically:

- For the growing number of today’s interfaith families who want to respect both their religious traditions, the “welcoming” approaches can appear “conversionary,” however gently expressed.
- These families do, however, want access to good Jewish education, to Jewish clergy, and to Judaism. It is critical that Jewish institutions are engaged with them.
- To reach these families, Jewish institutions must be prepared to acknowledge the validity of dual-faith education, to educate alongside other traditions, and to trust that the seeds it sows will substantially contribute to Jewish continuity.

In short, Jewish institutions must *build, not burn bridges*.

Who are the interfaith?

The explosion of interfaith marriage is affecting every non-Orthodox Jewish family in the United States.² Seventy percent of recent marriages among non-Orthodox Jews are to people who are not Jewish. Over half of all non-Orthodox nuclear families are interfaith. (*Try counting the number of cousins and nieces and nephews who are not Jewish in your own extended family!*) The assumption that everyone in the family is Jewish is a remnant of the past. The emerging

²The trend is coupled with the overall decline of religion and the intense competition for people’s time and attention that is the dominant feature of contemporary life. In fact, it is not too much of a stretch to see the real threat to Jewish continuity not from a marriage where Judaism competes with/accommodates another religious tradition but in the growing number of time-deprived families where the real competition is between religion and other activities. The need to address this issue is common among all religions.

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generations see the world differently. At least 25 percent of intermarried Jews are choosing to raise their children as “Jewish and something else.”³ Meanwhile, the children of intermarriage are being acculturated in the great wave of characteristically open-minded millennials.

Thanks to an important study of millennial children of intermarriage,⁴ we have some riveting new insights into the emerging future. A core finding is that this new generation—interfaith or not—think of themselves as multicultural and embracing diversity. They appreciate “the experience of switching from one ‘cultural frame’ to another.”

For Jews, one important result of this change is that interfaith millennials increasingly seem to reject Jewish ethnocentrism. As one young woman interviewed in the study argued, “*I think that an appreciation for modern non-Jewish culture . . . can actually help us grow and be better Jews, but if you’re not open to that . . . I don’t really want to be part of that . . . mentality.*”

The study, a product of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis, is potentially transformative. It concludes that the Jewish community need not despair; in fact, it argues that children of interfaith marriage have strong potential to nurture Jewish continuity. But it is also very clear that the members of this new generation will set their own rules and pave a new way, doing so from the perspective of religion being their choice and *because* they know about other traditions. The implication is that Jewish identity can no longer be “top down,” that religion is no longer a family tradition being passed down between generations; rather, it is a dialogue with other cultures and traditions that leads to individual choices about religion that may embrace, build on, or even separate from one’s religious heritage.

The Cohen study concludes that today, contrary to the assumption that children must be raised from birth as exclusively Jewish, there are many points that can be pivotal in identify formation. It focuses on “touchpoints” at which a young person’s Jewish identity can be stimulated. Among these touchpoints are experiences like attending Hillel programs in college or participating in a Birthright trip to Israel as a young adult.

³These data are cited in the important Pew Report, *Portrait of Jewish Americans* (October 2013). This report also describes the “Nones,” the large and growing number of Americans whose response to research inquiries is that they have “no religion.”

⁴*Millennial Children of Intermarriage: Touchpoints and Trajectories of Jewish Engagement*, Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, October 2015.

That said, for children who grow up in an interfaith household that is not “principled” or intentional about transmitting either tradition, being a young adult interested in religion can be confusing and unmooring. These young adults tend to feel they don’t have the tools to explore religion on their own and worry that, in doing so, they might alienate their parents.

Poignantly illustrating the experience of some adult children of interfaith marriage, one young woman who spoke at the launch of the Cohen millennial study found herself beginning to cry. Raised in an interfaith household with essentially no formal religious education, she found Judaism attractive in college. She met and is about to marry a young Jewish man and have a Jewish home. Her pain derives from concern that her Christian mother feels rejected by this choice. If her family had the benefit of education and support from an “interfaith community,” this passage, rather than being bittersweet, could be normal and comfortable. Resonating with her sadness and her religiously limited upbringing, a millennial young man observed:

As another of today’s millennial children of interfaith marriage, and one who has made his own personal choice for a strong Jewish identity, I emphasize that we are not just data points in a research study but real individuals, each of whom has come to terms with his/her interfaith identity in unique and very personal ways.

—Benjamin Arenstein, IFC interfaith intern and student in a joint undergraduate degree program at Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Today we see couples and young adults with increasingly varied perspectives on interfaith marriage. In consultations I provide to couples, I see a clear trend toward the millennial mindset with an expectation of “doing both” in their new households, regularly supported by their parents who are at ease with their adult children’s plans. At the same time, I still meet many couples who struggle deeply and carry the angst of earlier generations.

Regardless of their particular mindsets, all of these couples are embarking on a journey that will affect their religious identification. The journeys will be different, with different points that may be pivotal. In addition, there will be attitudinal and personality differences among couples influencing how they may respond to particular approaches taken by religious institutions.

Clearly the environment for religious identification is complex and chang-

ing very rapidly, but thus far not only has the Jewish community's response to intermarriage been top down, it has been framed with assumptions about the dynamics of couples' relationships, and it has been articulated in Jewish-centric language. The notion of dual-faith families has been alien and unthinkable, even though the families themselves carry forth a proud Jewish identity. The focus on historic policy matters like officiating at weddings has seemed to preclude institutional and attitudinal responses that would not require policy changes. Even the most enterprising and adaptive "outreach" strategies focus on *Jewish* choices. "Welcoming" in these terms is often perceived as patronizing and controlling.

It is essential for Jewish leaders to consider how they would feel if asked to ignore their Jewish heritage—that is, if the shoe were on the other foot.

The top-down "welcoming" approaches may work well for a couple in which the Jewish partner is strongly committed to the Jewish faith and the other partner is weakly connected to his or her faith. It may also not upset a relationship in which neither partner cares particularly about religion. But the approach can boomerang in the case of couples in which both members feel strongly connected to their respective heritages, or in which each partner is strong-willed and does not want to be dominated by the other's tradition, or when one partner simply feels marginalized by an exclusively Jewish choice.

All of these approaches tend to overlook some basic human needs: for education, for community, and simply for time to mature and evolve. Many people have limited education about their own religion. Most couples need time and processing to determine how they will address religion (and many other matters!) in the family and household they are forming.⁵ Finally, if a couple is making a choice about religion that departs from that of their parents, the couple will want a community of likeminded people who support their choices. My work over two decades, and as part of an interfaith family myself, has provided me with a rich reservoir of insights about the needs and the journeys of interfaith families.

⁵While religion has distinctive demands, complex families can accommodate many differences—with omnivore/vegan, classical/hip-hop, and Yankees/Red Sox requiring their own disciplines of mutual respect.

The Interfaith Community's experience

Interfaith families are a growing presence, challenging the conventional wisdom that families have only three choices about religion: to keep to a single tradition; to attempt to engage with both traditions in what is likely to be a muddled blend of the two; or to “do nothing” about religion. I helped found the Interfaith Community out of a belief that there is a fourth option: intentional, respectful, and non-didactic education about both traditions. This approach provides literacy about and comfort with both partners' religions, while preserving their essential distinctiveness. It aims to nurture particular religious continuity and ensure that religion is a positive and respectful dimension of family life. As an independent organization serving Jewish-Christian families since 1987, the Interfaith Community⁶ aims to nurture religious continuity in the context of strong families. It is built on three interrelated precepts:

- education is a prerequisite to affiliation
- community creates the framework for confident choice
- authenticity — of ritual and meaning — inspires individual connection

Programs were developed in direct response to the expressed needs of those in interfaith relationships. Conceived by members and shaped and refined by professional staff, they include:

- counseling and support for couples, including a professionally developed workshop curriculum
- a formal educational curriculum for children from pre-school through grade 8
- plans to develop a formal educational curriculum for adults
- a range of holiday religious services and celebrations about both traditions

⁶The work of IFC began informally in 1987 with some children's classes and other programs. In early 2001, efforts to formalize and expand led to a formal curriculum developed by JTS- and UTS-trained educators and a number of locations in the greater New York area and beyond where chapters evolved and provide the programs. Through these efforts, IFC has directly served many hundreds of families and had the opportunity to test and hone its philosophy and its programs.

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The Interfaith Community was built on the premise that many interfaith families at some point need the support of an organization that is neutral about religious choice and that represents the needs of the families themselves. The Interfaith Community believes that such a “safe and neutral space” is essential for many families as they take their journeys, whether the journey of choice is to “do both,” or to affirm a primary role for one tradition, or to connect to a particular church or synagogue.

While working to give interfaith families the resources for religious engagement, the Interfaith Community differs deliberately from a traditional religious education program in that it does not take on a formal role in “faith formation.” As part of its commitment to preserving the distinctions between the two religions, it sees faith formation as the job of a church or synagogue.

Instead, the Interfaith Community aims to inspire children and adults to take religion seriously, to gain an understanding of the different possibilities that are open to them, and to choose to engage with religion in a way that is personally meaningful. To encourage this process, Interfaith Community classes are intentionally taught by two teachers, a Jewish and a Christian educator, side by side, in teams. These are professional educators who model serious engagement with one tradition and respect for and curiosity about another tradition. By learning with these educators, children see adults who are knowledgeable about their traditions and who live these traditions deeply, gaining inspiration to help them craft their own religious choices.

Consistent with its commitment to authenticity, the IFC curriculum has been developed by educators trained at JTS and at Union Theological Seminary. IFC is proud that the majority of its teachers are also products of the two institutions, able to embody the vitality and power of each particular religious tradition.

The founding Jewish educator in 1987 (the initial phase of IFC’s work) was JTS-ordained Rabbi Lavey Derby, at that time the director of Jewish education at New York City’s 92nd Street YMHA. In his words:

My experience is that the more people examine their own religion and learn about their spouse’s, the more likely they are to understand the similarities and the very real differences between them. And in turn, that growing understanding will contribute to an authentic approach to a family’s religious experience, not the interchangeability of religious symbols As with any marriage, interfaith couples must develop a deep and abiding respect for each other, for each other’s faith, and for the children’s right to learn and to choose

More recently, another JTS-trained teacher, a rabbinical student at the time, explained his reasons for choosing to teach in the IFC program and his observations.

I wanted to be able to be exposed to the life of interfaith families, to understand where they were coming from. . . . While it is now acceptable for interfaith families for be part of the Jewish community, it is only if they decide to raise their kids Jewish [That] denies [children] a part of their religious heritage and tradition. . . . I see [interfaith education] as a task that has never existed before, to connect the religions together. If this were the only path to Judaism, it would be problematic. But it can be a positive thing, not just something we accept because it is here. —Rabbi Ari Saks,⁷

In addition to Rabbi Derby and Rabbi Saks, other former IFC teachers have gone on to play important Jewish communal roles.⁸ The IFC curriculum for children spans kindergarten through grade 8, teaching about holidays, the Bibles, sacred spaces and rituals, and the histories and cultures of both traditions. It concludes with a capstone course that integrates the previous learning and facilitates exploration and reflection on religious identity. At this point, some children choose to prepare for bar or bat mitzvah, while others continue their religious journeys.

One high school junior looking back at his personal decision to be bar mitzvah, commented, “I wouldn’t have known how to address my feelings had I not been part of the Interfaith Community . . . [a place] where I had to consider my own religious background and future.”

For one 12-year-old, the moment of clarity was triggered in a typically rich IFC class on “How do I help others.” For the Jewish component of this lesson, the Jewish teacher, a passionate and progressive Orthodox rabbinical student, explained first in Hebrew and then in English the Jewish principle in which one must “not stand idly by . . .” The 12-year-old later recounted that

⁷Rabbi Saks’ observations were initially made while he was a Conservative rabbinical student and, at his request, were quoted anonymously in a book about dual-tradition families — “Being Both” by Susan Katz Miller. Now that he is ordained and leading a congregation, he is comfortable with sharing his views publicly.

⁸Other former IFC teachers graduates of JTS, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Hebrew Union College, and Hebrew College (Boston) have moved on to various positions, including chaplain at Brown University, education director at Workmen’s Circle, and vice president of Milwaukee Jewish Federation, UJA-Federation, Machar (D.C.), and Temple B’nai Israel (MA).

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he told his mother that he wanted to be bar mitzvah “because I feel that I am more part of the Jewish community. . . I thought about it a lot after one of these classes . . . and I felt that I was Jewish.”

That teacher articulated his understanding of his role, team-teaching with a Christian educator: “Our objective is to empower children and adults with knowledge about both traditions.”

For the parents, being in an interfaith marriage with the support of the Interfaith Community has been rewarding. Like most adults, they bring to marriage a grasp of religion that stopped by age 13. For many, being in an interfaith marriage provided a fresh opportunity to engage with their religion. One Jewish woman, who is raising three young children with her Christian husband, observed:

I'm more Jewish than I've ever been, because it's all on me . . . I have ownership of it, and if I want to do my religion justice, I'd better know my stuff! And I love it. If I'd married another Jew, I would kind of sit back a little bit, do the Passover dinner and sort of let it take over. But it's my responsibility, so I'm becoming a better Jew, in that aspect, while I'm learning so much about Catholicism.

In turn, her Christian husband remarked on the contrast between his engagement with Catholicism growing up, when he would “go through the motions, go to church every week . . . but never think about it,” and his current engagement. He explained:

Being married to a Jew, I've started to think about it, and I really do believe that I've never taken [my religion] quite so seriously as I do now.

Reasonable concerns are raised that a religious education built around two different traditions can be diluted at best and confusing at worst. When, however, this education is offered in an intentional way, and in the context of a community, the results can be quite the opposite. Echoing the sentiments of many parents, one Jewish father remarked:

Thanks to his participation in Interfaith Community classes, my 7-year-old child is much more educated about religion than I was at his age . . . and is tolerant and appreciative of religious difference.

Other parents have spoken of the significance of giving their children a sense of religious identity, even when this identity, for the time being, is “both,”

or “Jewish and Christian,” and the comfort that belonging to a community can bring.

“I want my children to see and connect with others like them, and to be proud of their interfaith heritage,” one parent explained, articulating one of the most powerful reasons that parents cite for wanting their children to belong to a group like the Interfaith Community.

Among the adult children educated in the IFC program, some have made a defined choice (almost always a Jewish choice). One young woman who made that journey was the child of a spiritually inspired Christian mother and culturally focused Jewish father who raised her in the IFC with education about both her heritages and the tools and the communal support to make her own journey. Judaism began increasingly to capture her imagination when she was in her twenties. As a young college graduate, she took an Introduction to Judaism course to flesh out her earlier education. She read. Then she moved to Los Angeles where, with my encouragement, she found IKAR, the innovative Conservative synagogue. She connected—deeply. At age 31, this adult child of a Jewish father joyfully went to the *mikveh* to confirm that she had fully embraced Judaism—specifically Judaism in the Conservative tradition.

Her choice also embodies the strong appeal of Judaism, especially when presented with integrity and love, and even alongside another tradition. Her experience, moreover, stands in sharp contrast to the conflicted young woman described earlier (in the discussion of millennials), who had no formal religious education and neither family nor communal support for a religious choice.

Of other adult children who had been educated in the IFC, some felt comfortable sustaining two traditions, while others continue to be engaged in such a spiritual journey. Even so, all seem to have developed respect for religion and to feel prepared and supported in their choices. They know that they have bridges they can take to full religious connection if they so choose.

Despite its essential fairness and balance, the model so far has been rejected by Jewish institutions—perhaps out of fear or at best out of misunderstanding—but *the model is not a threat to Judaism* or to religion in general. Rather, it is a pathway to religion, one which is particularly in sync with today’s ethos. When today’s interfaith couples perceive that they cannot find ways to accommodate both traditions, *the alternative is increasingly to do nothing.*

The Next Frontier: New Interfaith Bridges . . .

It is time to create new mechanisms that will support families like those who chose the Interfaith Community, families whose impulse is to ensure that their children have knowledge about both their heritages. What has become clear through IFC's work is that families need and desire authentic religion and connection with clergy, rituals, and sacred spaces. But for many families, that connection cannot be—at least in the early stages of their journey—exclusively within one religious tradition.

Interfaith families need a safe base and an accessible bridge to fuller engagement with formal religious traditions by way of institutions that are genuinely comfortable for families that respect both heritages.

Collaborations

I hope to see Jewish institutions cooperate with local churches in facilitating such neutral “*interfaith bridges*.” The Interfaith Community’s curriculum provides a powerful basis for education, but dual-faith families need and want deeper exposure and connections to Jewish institutions. Once both partners feel respected by and educated about the other tradition, many are ready for a more intimate connection to the Jewish tradition, a place where they can engage with clergy and a full spectrum of authentic Jewish experiences.

The Interfaith Community’s local chapter on Long Island has developed such a collaborative relationship. It is a partner in a “multi-faith campus” where IFC offers its classes and shares space with a synagogue and a church. The arrangement provides the interfaith families with both community and the non-dogmatic and balanced education about both traditions that they desire. At the same time, they have access to both a Jewish and a Christian “home.” Along with other IFC members, they can attend authentic Jewish services, comfortable that the rabbi accepts their principled dual-faith choice. Similarly, they can attend Christian services. For those children or families who want to choose Judaism as their primary religion, they turn naturally to the rabbi, who has overseen numerous bar mitzvah ceremonies of IFC children.⁹

Interfaith collaborations like the proposed “bridge” program demonstrate

⁹The decision of a Long Island IFC child who chose to be Bar Mitzvah is included in a segment featuring IFC on the PBS program Religion and Ethics Newsweekly (January 8, 2015) <http://www.pbs.org/video/2365399307/>.

the value of the dual-faith family and its place in contemporary Jewish institutional life — encouraging more engaged practice among the Jewish partners and powerful models for religious identification for the children. While Jewish institutions often view such families as a threat to Jewish continuity, IFC families have a respect for authentic religion, which can only ultimately strengthen the Jewish community.

In today's culture, interfaith couples are increasingly choosing to begin their households as dual faith. The collaborative bridge mechanism described here is one new way to keep these families connected to religion in general and to Judaism in particular.

We also know that we are in the midst of unprecedented change, laced with forces that pull people away from religion altogether. For many families, the new “dual-faith” tension is not between Judaism and Christianity but between religion and soccer practice. Increasingly institutional religion is undermined as people drift away from religion altogether. The Pew Report describes the growth of “Nones” who indicate that they have no religion at all; and in Western Europe, for example, the drift is a strong tide leaving most families entirely disconnected from religion and mystified by those who remain connected.

It is critical that we continue to plant sturdy seeds for future generations. Creating mechanisms to capture today's dual-faith inclination is an essential companion to Jewish-focused strategies such as Big Tent Judaism's “concierge” program, InterfaithFamily.com's “connections” program, as well as the Steinhart Foundation's powerful focus on secular identity.

The experience of the Interfaith Community has demonstrated that when interfaith families and their children have time, community, and education, they are drawn to the richness and vitality of authentic Jewish practice. To reach these families, Jewish institutions must be prepared to acknowledge the validity of dual-faith education, to educate alongside other traditions, and to trust that the seeds it sows will substantially contribute to Jewish continuity.

Jewish institutions must not burn bridges for families who care about their heritage; they must build bridges to keep them connected.

❧ AFTERWORD ❧

Burton L. Visotzky

THIS VOLUME HAS HAD A LONG GESTATION. In December 2013, the Louis Finkelstein Institute for Religious and Social Studies hosted a “Lunch and Learn” program at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) called *Modern Families: The New Jewish Season*. This modest program was the brain-child of Rabbi Leonard Sharzer, M.D., a colleague whom I am blessed to have as the associate director of the Finkelstein Institute at JTS, where he oversees programming on bioethics. There was overwhelmingly positive reaction to the testimonies offered at the panel discussion — voices that attested to the broad variety of Jewish family configurations. We were asked repeatedly to shine further light on the shifts from what had been perceived as a “normative, nuclear family” to what is actually found in the American Jewish community where we all live.

Rabbi Sharzer responded by planning an all-day colloquium entitled, “The Changing Face of the American Jewish Family,” which took place at JTS on June 1, 2015. The essays in this slim, but important volume stem from that wonderful day of debate, argument, passion, and love of the Jewish community. As should always be the case among leaders in the Jewish community, it was “a debate for the sake of Heaven.” If you have read this far you have seen strong, even sharp disagreements not only about the demographics of the current Jewish world and what they mean for the Jewish future, but also about how we should proceed as a community to embrace our future. The day was marked by open and thoughtful engagement with the serious issues of Jewish

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identity and our future. The thought-provoking conversation made us realize that the ideas we shared merited a broader platform.

This book is the next stage in that conversation. Each of the contributors was at JTS for the colloquium. But each has taken the opportunity while setting their words to paper to update and even modify what they said then. What you hold in your hands is a verbal snapshot of the American Jewish community's changing face. Since the first luncheon session five years ago, the issues discussed here have moved to the fore in our community. JTS celebrated the 10th anniversary of the decision to ordain people who are gay and lesbian. There have been transgender faculty and now also trans rabbinical and other students at JTS. It is commonplace to see single mothers and single fathers, gay and straight, raising their children in the Conservative Jewish community. But, as remains the case three and a half decades following the decision to ordain women, we still have much to learn. Some of the essays in this book poignantly outline the work still to be done.

The issue of intermarriage has also become a point of contention within the Conservative movement. No longer hiding in the shadows, our rabbis are not only attending intermarriages as guests, they are increasingly performing them — even at the cost of membership in the Rabbinical Assembly (RA). JTS and the RA are holding the line, and our rabbis welcome their guidance. But the demographics of the movement show us that the issue will not just disappear in the face of this modest resistance.

As I travel North America as a scholar-in-residence at Conservative synagogues, I note anecdotally what statistical analyses bear out, an increasing number of intermarried families among our membership. While this is often true for the “Jews in the pews,” they, by and large, are an aging population. However, among their children, intermarriage is widespread. It should not be surprising that even after sending our children to Ramah camps and Schechter Day Schools, when we send our children to colleges and universities, they meet non-Jews. Nor should we be shocked, shocked, that our children fall in love and marry their college friends. Shall we then lock them in a box, as Genesis Rabbah suggests Abraham did to Sarah as they entered Egypt?

Facing the reality of our population today requires hard, honest conversations about intermarriage. It necessarily will provoke disagreements. In this volume, such conversations are offered in the hope that they will be received as “these and those are the words of the living God.” Everyone writing here wants the welfare and healthy future of the Jewish community. Each one of us

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is aware that the subject of intermarriage, sore though it may be in our generation, was an issue for Moses (his father-in-law was a Midianite priest); Esther (who married a gentile and saved the Jewish people); Abraham, Ruth, and yes, Ezra. Each of these biblical models took differing paths. Each of the Jewish leaders in this book have done the same.

In American Jewry today, we are all Jews by choice; by which I mean that it is far too easy to opt out of our community, so all who identify as Jews do so by their own volition. If we make the wrong choices, we may be excluded by all or parts of our community. No longer confined by the walls of a ghetto, we are at an inflection point. What will the face of the American Jewish community look like a decade from now? I do not know. But it is my fervent hope that the combined essays in this volume will lead our Jewish community to make informed choices, having read the arguments so thoughtfully offered here.

BLV, Adar, 5778

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The Changing Face of the American Jewish Family

EDITED BY

Leonard Allen Sharzer and Burton L. Visotzky

In the American Jewish community of the 21st century, as in the broader American community, the meaning of being a family is changing, often at a pace that communal institutions have difficulty keeping up with. Baby boomers, now in their 50s and 60s, hold positions of communal leadership and authority in the Jewish community. They grew up in mid-20th century America, when much of the institutional and communal Judaism we know today developed.

Jewish institutions are built around family. That includes physical institutions — synagogues, schools, JCCs — as well as temporal institutions — Shabbat, holidays, lifecycle events (brit, bar/bat mitzvah, aufruf, wedding, funeral). The changing face of the American Jewish family and the consequences thereof present challenges and opportunities to communal leaders. This volume brings together scholars from various social science disciplines, congregational rabbis, Jewish educators, and members of non-traditional families to examine the ways in which communal institutions are responding to new needs, to look at what needs are not being met, and to make recommendations for necessary changes.

—*From the Introduction by Rabbi Leonard A. Sharzer, M. D.*

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