

Intermarriage and Religious Upbringing with Inferences about Jewish Population Size Using Alternative Definitions of Judaism: Insights from the 2000 National Jewish Population Survey.

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There is little consensus regarding the future of the Jewish population in the United States, both with regard to the prospective size as well as composition of the religion. This issue has been considered from many perspectives including but not limited to a variety of subjective interpretations of what the religion is and will be and how this relates to the key questions of continuity and survival, at least in a form that to some extent overlaps historic criteria of inclusion. This research, which is currently underway will focus on several issues intimately linked with the overall issues noted above.

For a variety of reasons, there is strong evidence at this time that Jewish fertility levels, reflecting both an older and highly educated population, are moderately below replacement level. Also, modest Jewish net migration levels at present have little impact on population size. However, these factors in all likelihood have only modest impact compared with the major effect of intermarriage, and the related phenomenon of how the children in these intermarried units are raising their own children. This is an extremely difficult factor to evaluate as it is to many researchers highly subjective. Our objective is to suggest the potential impact of both intermarriage as well as how children are being raised on the shorter term size and mix of the religion. As indicated below, there is no one universally accepted definition of Judaism nor of the criteria that define appropriate religious upbringing consistent with varying definitions of what constitutes “necessary and sufficient” religious upbringing—and it certainly is well beyond scope for us to attempt to resolve this issue. However, what we will do, using a range of definitions, including on the one hand a quite subjective “raising my children Jewish” parental statement to a number of parental verbalized specific child and family behaviors and attitudes, strive to define a range of possible criteria for classifying children as “Jewish”. These results should provide useful information for those concerned with issues associated with the continuation of the religion from a variety of perspectives.

The 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey includes a wide range of inputs that can provide important insights into the above issues. This survey includes a national sample of about 4,500 Jews over the age of 18 and includes a wide range of information on religious, cultural, and indeed ethnic behaviors and attitudes of the overall Jewish population as well as linked social and demographic behaviors intimately linked with population growth and decline. Specifically, this research will (1) explore in a multivariate context religious and secular antecedents of Jewish male and female respondents linked with the probability of intermarriage and then (2) clarify within a similar context how various aspects of intermarriage—both prior to and following

marriage—are independently linked with how children are being raised from a religious perspective.

Clearly, intermarriage has different meanings and visual manifestations for individuals from different Jewish (as well as different non-Jewish) backgrounds. At one level, a Jewish respondent who identifies with a specific denomination may be defining appropriate behaviors and attitudes in ways different than a respondent from a different denomination or a respondent who views him or herself as Jewish but not affiliated with a specific denomination. This carries over to definitions of intermarriage as well as to definitions of whether one is raising one's child within the religion. It is not our objective to define the religion, behaviors or attitudes from one particular perspective, but rather to consider the implications of intermarriage, however defined, for raising children Jewish or not Jewish, however defined. The key point is that we can explore a wide range of definitional issues and suggest a wide range of definitional options for intermarriage and for raising children Jewish, differences that reflect the current reality of the religion.

In research that is already extensively underway, using self-reported denominational definitions, respondent reports on partner religion, as well as responses to a question on whether a child is being raised Jewish. We have found for respondents in the key marrying and childbearing ages, consistent with other evidence, that the more traditional the denomination raised, the lower the likelihood of being intermarried. Also, the intermarried bear fewer children and also are substantially less to say they are raising their children Jewish (e.g. 57% of children in intermarriages compared with 99% of children in Jewish marriages for women 35 to 44 years old).

This masks a number of important questions; first, if we control for a wide range of secular and specific religious priors, how important are the more generic effects of whether the respondent is Orthodox, conservative, Reform, or less institutionally connected? Additionally, and at the core of this work, we will explore more carefully what is meant by raising a child Jewish. There is substantial evidence that how a child is raised, in terms of religious upbringing, peer linkages, and other religious or non-religious factors, can impact in major ways on subsequent adult religious orientations. While we clearly do not know these children's prospective adult behaviors, important insights can be gained from exploring the connections between their parents' upbringing and recent behaviors, particularly their religious connections (both institutional connections and individual attitudes and behaviors that may be linked with their formal denominational connections.) In this regards, we will try to sort out the independent predictive values of these Jewish antecedents.

Also, to the extent sample sizes permit, we will attempt to sort out independent effects associated with denomination, related behavioral attributes, and intermarriage, by appropriate stratifications or interaction terms, whatever appears to be most effective from statistical perspectives. Avoiding any personal biases, we will try to conclude with some more general statements regarding the potential shorter term future of the religion considering only verbalized responses about whether a child is being raised Jewish (more or less the more standard way for making projections of this type) in comparison with

behavioral-specific child outcomes, such as child religious schooling, and specific within-home religious behaviors and attitudes.