

United Jewish Communities
Report Series on the
National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01



American
Jewish
Religious
Denominations

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United Jewish Communities

FEBRUARY 2005

report IO

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INTRODUCTION

ONE OF THE CENTRAL DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF

AMERICAN LIFE is the religious diversity of its population. Religious denominations of every type dot the American landscape. The American emphasis on denominational identity has also profoundly impacted the Jewish communal system. Most American Jews identify as Jews through a denominational prism, unlike the experience in other large Jewish population centers such as Israel or the former Soviet Union (FSU). The demographic characteristics and Jewish connections of those who identify and affiliate with Jewish religious denominations therefore take on special importance in the American setting.¹

This report utilizes data from NJPS 2000-01 to examine denominationalism among American Jews. First, it describes two different ways denominational identity can be defined: self-identification and synagogue membership. Based on these two different definitions, overall denominational population estimates and percentages are provided. Further sections present detailed comparisons within each denominational definition, followed by selected comparisons between the different definitional categories. The final section consists of analytic conclusions and selected policy questions raised by the denominational findings in the preceding sections.

DEFINITIONS AND MEASURES

NJPS 2000-01 ASKED TWO DIFFERENT QUESTIONS ABOUT

DENOMINATIONS. First, it asked respondents, “When thinking about Jewish religious denominations, do you consider yourself to be Orthodox,

1. While denomination and denominationalism are originally Protestant terms, they have become increasingly common in American Jewish discourse as well; see, for example, Bernard Lazerwitz, J. Alan Winter, Arnold Dashefsky and Ephraim Tabory, 1997, *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press). Others prefer to use the term “religious movements” when referring to the various streams of American Judaism; see Jonathan D. Sarna, 2004, *American Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, just Jewish, or something else?”² This definition will be called the “**consider**” definition for the purposes of this report. Respondents did not need to be members of a synagogue or a temple to be asked this question; many of them, in fact, are not affiliated with a congregation. Nonetheless, as we shall see, a solid majority of American Jews chooses to self-identify in denominational terms, even when “just Jewish” or other options are made available to them.

A second indicator of denominational identity focuses on synagogue membership. First, all respondents were asked, “Are you/is anyone in your household currently a member of a synagogue or temple?” Forty-six percent of all respondents replied that they themselves, or someone else in the household, were currently a synagogue or temple member.³

Respondents who lived in a household with synagogue membership were then asked, “Is that synagogue Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, Reconstructionist or something else?”⁴ This definition will be called the “**synagogue**” definition for the purposes of this report. It is important to note that this definition refers to all individuals who live in a household where someone is a synagogue member, as represented by the respondent. In addition, analyses using the synagogue definition exclude Jews who do not belong to synagogues, while analyses using the consider definition include those who are and are not synagogue members.

In both definitions – consider and synagogue – identification with a particular denomination is self-reported. While denominational identification is often highly predictive of attitudes and behavior, it is important to keep in mind that respondents do not necessarily adhere to official doctrines or practices as articulated by denominational leaders.

2. As stated in the Methodological Note, p. 6, questions about current denominational identity were restricted to respondents representing the 4.3 million more Jewishly-engaged population, including approximately 3.3 million Jewish adults. In addition, the first three choices – Orthodox, Conservative and Reform – appeared in random order to prevent potential response biases, followed by the remaining choices in the order above.
3. As with the consider definition, the question about synagogue membership was asked only of respondents representing the 4.3 million more Jewishly-engaged population. The subsequent question on synagogue denomination was therefore asked of a smaller base, representing roughly 1.5 million Jewish adults.
4. As with the consider definition, the first three choices – Orthodox, Conservative and Reform – appeared in random order to prevent response bias.

TABLE I.

Weighted estimates of adult, child and total population in households, by religious denomination of respondent (“consider” definition).

	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	Recon- structionist ³	Just Jewish ⁴	Total
Total adults ¹	362,000	1,046,000	1,392,000	82,000	1,278,000	4,160,000
Jewish adults	324,000	866,000	1,140,000	65,000	851,000	3,246,000
Total children ²	216,000	251,000	322,000	26,000	281,000	1,096,000
Jewish children	205,000	211,000	267,000	25,000	187,000	895,000
Total population	567,000	1,297,000	1,714,000	108,000	1,559,000	5,256,000
Jewish population	529,000	1,077,000	1,407,000	90,000	1,038,000	4,142,000

¹ Age 18 and older.

² Age 17 and younger.

³ Data on Reconstructionist Jews should be interpreted cautiously due to small sample size.

⁴ Includes those who responded to “just Jewish” option as read to them in NJPS question, as well as those who offered responses indicating they are secular or have no denominational preference.

THE “CONSIDER” DEFINITION: POPULATION ESTIMATES AND PROPORTIONS

TABLE 1 PROVIDES ESTIMATES of Jewish household⁵ populations by the denomination of the respondent. Beginning in the first column, labeled “Orthodox,” the table shows there are currently 362,000 adults, including 324,000 Jewish adults, in households where the respondent considers him or herself to be Orthodox; 216,000 children, including 205,000 Jewish children; and 567,000 total people, including 529,000 Jews. Children make up a far greater proportion of the population in Orthodox households, 39%,⁶ than they do in any other denominational category. If Orthodoxy is able to retain these younger members as they

5. Jewish households are defined as households with at least one Jewish adult. Jewish adults and children are defined according to broad communal and sociological criteria, not according to *halacha* (Jewish law). For details, see UJC’s main NJPS report, *Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, available at www.ujc.org/njps.
6. In Orthodox homes, the 205,000 Jewish children are 39% of 529,000 total Jews.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 is a nationally representative survey of the Jewish population living in the U.S. The survey was administered to a random sample of approximately 4500 Jews. Interviewing for NJPS took place from August 21, 2000 to August 30, 2001 and was conducted by telephone. The sample of telephone numbers called was selected by a computer through a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) procedure, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error when the entire sample is used for analysis is +/- 2%. The margin of error for subsamples is larger.

The NJPS questionnaire included over 300 questions on a wide variety of topics, including household characteristics, demographic subjects, health and social service needs, economic characteristics, and Jewish background, behavior and attitudes.

The NJPS questionnaire was divided into long-form and short-form versions. The long-form version was administered to respondents whose responses to selected early questions indicated stronger Jewish connections; these respondents represent 4.3 million Jews, or over 80% of all U.S. Jews. The short-form version, which omitted many questions on Jewish topics and social services, was given to respondents whose answers on the same selected early questions indicated Jewish connections that are not as strong; they represent an additional 800,000 Jews.

The most important implication of this design decision is related to findings on Jewish connections. Descriptions of Jewish involvement and identity that are restricted to the more engaged part of the Jewish population (4.3 million Jews) would, in many cases, be somewhat less strong if they had been collected from all respondents representing the entire Jewish population.

In this report, all data are restricted to respondents representing the more Jewishly-engaged segment of the Jewish population (4.3 million Jews).

For further methodological information, see the Methodological Appendix in *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, A United Jewish Communities Report (available at www.ujc.org/njps.)

become adults, the denomination is likely to grow in the future, both in absolute numbers as well as relative to other Jewish denominations.

Looking at other denominations, about 1.3 million adults and children live in Conservative households, including nearly 1.1 million Jews, while Reform households have an estimated 1.7 million people, including 1.4 million Jews. Thus, Reform households contain more children and adults, both Jewish and non-Jewish, than any other denominational category. Interestingly, despite the Reform movement's more liberal approach towards intermarriage, 82% of the population in Reform households is Jewish, a figure nearly identical to that reported in Conservative households (83%). In examining the total Jewish population (adults and children combined), Conservative Judaism currently ranks a solid second – behind Reform and ahead of Orthodoxy – among the major American Jewish religious denominational preferences, but among children it is essentially tied for second with Orthodoxy.

Nearly 110,000 persons reside in Reconstructionist households.

Reconstructionism was a movement within Conservative Judaism during much of the twentieth century, and became an independent denomination in 1968, a little more than 30 years prior to NJPS 2000-01. Although relatively few Jews currently consider themselves to be Reconstructionist, these numbers appear to be steadily increasing over the past few decades. Of particular note is the fact that children make up a higher proportion of the total population in Reconstructionist households, 28%, than they do in any other denomination except Orthodoxy.⁷

Finally, close to 1.6 million people, both adults and children, live in households where respondents identify as “just Jewish,” have no denominational preference, or are secular.⁸ If “just Jewish” were to

7. Due to the small sample size of the Reconstructionist population, no further analysis of Reconstructionist respondents using the “consider” definition is included in this report.

8. For the purposes of this report, “just Jewish” includes respondents who selected “just Jewish” from the list of options survey interviewers read to them, as well as those who offered other choices of their own indicating that they were either secular or had no denominational preference. These other responses include: no Jewish denomination, secular, ethnically Jewish, culturally Jewish, non-practicing Jew, Jewish by background/birth/heritage, agnostic, atheist, and no religion. A small proportion

become a denomination of its own, it would rank second among all denominations, just behind Reform. Significantly, only two-thirds (67%) of the total population living in “just Jewish” households is Jewish, a far lower figure than for any of the denominations – and a first indication of the less robust Jewish connections of those who call themselves “just Jewish.”

Table 2 examines proportions, rather than weighted estimates, in each denominational category for Jewish adults (age 18 and older), Jewish children (age 17 and younger) and total Jews. The table shows that three-quarters of American Jewish adults self-identify with a particular Jewish religious denomination. Over one-third (35%) call themselves Reform, more than one quarter (27%) say they are Conservative, 10% consider themselves Orthodox, and 2% report they are Reconstructionist. In addition, 26% consider themselves “just Jewish.” While Orthodox Jews comprise 10% of Jewish adults, that proportion more than doubles, to 23%, among Jewish children, less than the proportion of Jewish children who are Reform (30%) but nearly the same proportion of Jewish children who are Conservative (24%). One in five Jewish children (21%) lives in households where the respondents are “just Jewish.”

Although results from NJPS 1990 and NJPS 2000-01 are not directly comparable,⁹ certain trends are nonetheless evident. Significantly, Reform has now become the most popular denominational preference among American Jews. For most of the last half of the twentieth century, this was a position that Reform had either shared with or conceded to Conservative Judaism. Orthodoxy, which for much of the past 50 years had experienced numerical declines, seems to have stabilized as a denominational preference and appears demographically poised for future growth. Finally, the denominational choices of American Jews reveal an

of respondents, less than 2%, provided other responses such as Sephardic, Humanist, and Traditional, but they are not reported here because they do not comprise a coherent analytic category and their sample size is small.

9. Direct comparisons of denominational questions in NJPS 1990 and NJPS 2000-01 cannot be made because the response options read to respondents were not identical in the two surveys. Specifically, while some respondents offered “just Jewish” as an answer in 1990, they had to offer it themselves without prompting. In 2000-01, “just Jewish” was one of the options read directly to respondents, resulting in an increased proportion of respondents claiming to be “just Jewish” in 2000-01.

TABLE 2.

Proportions in Jewish denominations among Jewish adults, Jewish children and total Jews (“consider” definition).

Denomination	Jewish Adults	Jewish Children	Total Jews
	%	%	%
Orthodox	10	23	13
Conservative	27	24	26
Reform	35	30	34
Reconstructionist	2	3	2
Just Jewish	26	21	25
Total	100	101 ¹	100

¹ Total sums to 101% due to rounding.

extremely diverse population. While most Jews still identify with a particular denomination, an increasing proportion of Jews appear to be opting out of a denominational framework, choosing instead to call themselves “just Jewish” or some variant of secular. No single category, denominational or not, garners the support of even 40% of all Jews.¹⁰

DENOMINATIONAL SWITCHING (“CONSIDER” DEFINITION)

THE SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT OF AMERICAN JEWRY is very fluid. This becomes evident when viewing Table 3, which presents aggregate levels of denominational identification when respondents were being raised and currently, and Tables 4 and 5, which examine “stayers” inside and “switchers” away from the different denominational choices. Denominational switching patterns, or “movement between the movements,” affect all Jewish denominations, albeit to differing degrees.

10. For additional findings on denominational preferences from NJPS 1971 and 1990, see Lazerwitz et. al., *Jewish Choices*.

TABLE 3.Childhood and Current Denominational Preferences (“consider” definition).¹

Denomination	Raised	Current
	%	%
Orthodox	20	10
Conservative	33	27
Reform	26	35
Other denomination ²	1	2
Just Jewish	20	26
Total	100	100

¹ Includes adults born or raised Jewish who are currently Jewish.² Includes Reconstructionist and other denominational categories.

Table 3 shows that twice as many Jews were raised Orthodox (20%) as are currently Orthodox (10%). Conservative Judaism has also experienced a decline, with a third (33%) of American Jewish adults reporting they were raised Conservative and 27% saying this is their current denominational preference. In contrast, Reform Judaism has gained adherents at the aggregate level. While 26% of adult Jews said they were raised Reform, that figure has climbed to 35% who currently consider themselves to be Reform. “Just Jewish” also appears to be increasing as a preference; 20% of respondents say they were raised “just Jewish,” and 26% currently report this as their preference.

Table 4 provides a more in-depth analysis of denominational switching from childhood to adulthood. The table divides Jewish adults into the denominations in which they were raised, and for each category of “denomination raised” it shows the distribution of current denominational identity. For example, the table indicates that among those who were raised Orthodox, 42% are still Orthodox, 29% are Conservative, 17% are Reform, and 12% are “just Jewish.” The findings reveal that those who were raised Orthodox or Conservative are less likely to retain these preferences (42% and 56%, respectively) than those raised Reform or “just Jewish” (78% and 70%, respectively). Half of those who were raised Orthodox and switched denominations now identify as

TABLE 4.Denomination Raised by Current Denomination (“consider” definition).¹

Current Denomination	Denomination Raised			
	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	Just Jewish
	%	%	%	%
Orthodox	42	3	2	3
Conservative	29	56	7	11
Reform	17	28	78	17
Just Jewish	12	13	14	70
Total	100	100	101 ²	101

¹ Includes adults born or raised Jewish who are currently Jewish. Within denomination raised, **bold** entries indicate current denomination is same as denomination raised.² Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Conservative, followed by Reform and “just Jewish” identification. Among those who were raised Conservative and switched denominations, more than half now identify as Reform, with progressively smaller proportions moving to “just Jewish” and Orthodox identifications. More than half of those who were raised Reform and switched denominations now identify as “just Jewish,” with most of the rest identifying as Conservative. Finally, most switchers from “just Jewish” now consider themselves Reform, with smaller proportions calling themselves Conservative and Orthodox.

Table 5 examines the current adult population base in each denomination and shows the denominations in which they were raised. Current Orthodox Jews are far more likely to have been raised in the same denomination (81%) than other Jews. About two-thirds (65%) of those who call themselves Conservative were raised Conservative, with somewhat more than half of Reform and “just Jewish” respondents saying they were raised in the same denomination that they currently report. A significant minority of Conservative and Reform respondents were raised Orthodox, while “just Jewish” respondents come from a variety of backgrounds representing all of the major denominations.

There are important patterns in denominational switching by age (data on

TABLE 5.Current Denomination by Denomination Raised (“consider” definition).¹

	Current Denomination			
	Orthodox %	Conservative %	Reform %	Just Jewish %
Denomination Raised				
Raised Orthodox	81	21	25	18
Raised Conservative	9	65	9	10
Raised Reform	4	6	57	16
Raised Just Jewish	6	7	9	55
Total	100	100	100	101 ²

¹ Includes adults born or raised Jewish who are currently Jewish. Within current denomination, **bold** entries indicate denomination raised is same as current denomination.

² Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

switching by age not displayed in tables). Those who have switched out of Orthodoxy, primarily to Conservative and Reform, are older than those who have switched into Orthodoxy. Moreover, younger Jews raised Orthodox are less likely to switch denominations than older Jews who were raised Orthodox. Those raised Conservative who have switched – primarily to Reform or “just Jewish” – tend to be much younger than those raised Orthodox who have switched into the Conservative denomination.

Several demographic challenges emerge from the findings on switchers and stayers. Orthodox Jews, if they are to increase in numbers, are not as likely to benefit from denominational switches as some other movements.

Anecdotal evidence of large numbers of *baalei teshuva* (literally, those who have “returned”) notwithstanding, relatively few Orthodox Jews claim to have been raised non-Orthodox. On the other hand, at least at present, data show Orthodox Jews are reversing earlier patterns of defection and increasingly retaining the allegiance of younger Jews who are being raised Orthodox.

Conservative Jews face a different challenge. Data on the age of

denominational switchers show that a relatively high proportion of those who came to Conservatism are elderly Jews who were raised Orthodox, while a significant minority of younger Jews raised Conservative are now Reform or “just Jewish.” The challenge becomes how to attract Conservative and non-Conservative Jews to identify with it, especially since it is increasingly unlikely that many younger Orthodox Jews will become Conservative in the near future.

Reform Jews are confronting some of the same challenges as Conservative Jews. A considerable number of Reform Jews are older adults who were raised Orthodox; as mentioned above, this type of switching is substantially rarer among today’s younger Orthodox Jews. Some former Reform Jews have also switched to “just Jewish.” However, Reform is attracting younger switchers from Conservatism as well as from the “just Jewish” group.¹¹

Finally, “just Jewish” respondents are the most heterogeneous in terms of their denominational background. As such, the growth of this segment of the population group is not a function of any one particular denominational group. A more detailed analysis that compares those who identify with three of the denominations – Orthodox, Conservative and Reform – and those who say they are “just Jewish” follows below.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS (“CONSIDER” DEFINITION)

IDENTIFYING WITH A PARTICULAR DENOMINATION – OR NONE – HAS IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS, as each preference signifies a particular set of demographic and Jewish characteristics. This section of the report and Table 6 examine the association of demographic factors and denominational identity; the next section turns its attention to the association of Jewish connections and denominational identity.¹²

11. It is also attracting non-Jews, who are not included in this analysis.

12. The analysis of denomination (consider definition), demographic characteristics and Jewish connections is restricted to those who consider themselves Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or “just Jewish.” There are too few cases for reliable analysis of those in the Reconstructionist and Other categories.

As noted in UJC's initial NJPS report,¹³ American Jews are an aging population. We begin by examining the median age of adults¹⁴ within each denomination as well as the age distributions at the top of Table 6. The aging of the Jewish population has particular significance for Conservative and Reform Jews. The median age of Conservative Jewish adults is 52, making it the oldest denomination in terms of those who identify with it. Nearly one-third (32%) of Conservative Jews are age 65 or above. Reform Jews and "just Jewish" adults tend to be slightly younger, with median adult ages of 50 and 49 respectively. Lastly, Orthodox Jewish adults are by far the youngest, with a median age of 44. Fully one-third of Orthodox Jewish adults are age 34 or younger.

Given current age disparities and denominational switching trends, it is likely in the coming decade that Conservative Jews will further decrease and Orthodox Jews will continue to increase as a proportion of the total denominational population.

Despite their younger age, Orthodox Jews are more likely to be married (74%) and less likely to be single/never married (15%) than other Jews (see Table 6). In contrast, only half (51%) of "just Jewish" respondents are currently married, with higher proportions of those who are divorced/separated (13%) and single/never married (29%) than other Jews.

Given both the greater likelihood of being married among Orthodox Jews and their younger age, it is not surprising that they are more likely to have children age 17 or younger living in the household than other Jews. Over one-third (34%) of Orthodox Jews have a child living in the household, which is more than double the rate of Jews in each of the other denominational categories. These findings reflect the particular emphasis placed on marriage and family formation in the Orthodox community.

In terms of regional distribution, denominational preferences for the most part do not reveal any significant patterns. Orthodox Jews, however, are

the exception; over two-thirds (68%) live in the Northeast, compared to 44% of all Jews; in turn, Orthodox Jews are underrepresented in the Midwest, South and West relative to all adult Jews.

Like denominationalism, education is also a measure of acculturation, and the two variables have traditionally been correlated. At an earlier point in time, sharp educational differences demarcated those who identified with the various denominations; some of those differences – at least between Reform and Conservative – seem to be diminishing over time, though they can still be seen in the data to a certain degree. Sixty-three percent of current Reform Jews report that they have a college degree, followed by 57% of Conservative, 55% of "just Jewish" and 44% of Orthodox Jews. Among younger Jews age 18-44, however, there are virtually no educational differences between Conservative and Reform respondents (age breakdowns of educational attainment not shown in table).

As with education, income has in the past been associated with denominational status as a measure of acculturation, and these differences linger as well. In the most recent findings, Reform Jews – and to a lesser extent, Conservative Jews – appear to be wealthier on average than those who are "just Jewish" and particularly Orthodox Jews. Nearly one-third (32%) of Reform Jews live in a household with an annual income of \$100,000 or more, compared to 28% for Conservative, 23% for "just Jewish" and 21% for Orthodox. Conversely, more than half (55%) of Orthodox respondents reported a household income of under \$50,000, compared to 45% for "just Jewish," 39% for Conservative and 34% for Reform.

Lastly, denominationalism as an American feature, particularly in its Conservative and Reform manifestations, may be unfamiliar to recent Jewish arrivals. In fact, recent immigrants (since 1980) are over-represented in the "just Jewish" group: immigrants are 9% of the total adult population and 18% of the "just Jewish" population. Immigrants are also slightly over-represented among Orthodox Jews (11%) but significantly under-represented in the Conservative and Reform categories.

13. See *Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, A United Jewish Communities Report, available at www.ujc.org/njps.

14. Adults are defined as age 18 or older.

TABLE 6.

Demographic Characteristics by Religious Denomination (“consider” definition).

	Orthodox %	Conservative %	Reform %	Just Jewish %	Total %
Age					
18-34	33	19	23	27	24
35-44	18	14	17	15	15
45-54	18	22	23	20	22
55-64	10	14	13	13	13
65-74	12	14	13	13	13
75+	8	18	11	12	13
Total	100	101 ¹	100	100	100
Marital status					
Married	74	63	60	51	60
Divorced/separated	6	9	10	13	10
Widowed	6	10	9	8	8
Single/never married	15	19	22	29	22
Total	101	101	101	101	100
Number of children in household					
0	66	85	86	88	84
1	9	10	11	11	10
2 or more	25	5	3	2	5
Total	100	100	100	101	99
Region					
Northeast	68	46	38	44	44
Midwest	7	11	14	10	11
South	12	26	26	21	23
West	13	17	23	25	21
Total	100	100	101	100	99

	Orthodox %	Conservative %	Reform %	Just Jewish %	Total %
Education					
High school or below	35	19	15	21	20
Some college	20	24	22	24	23
College degree	24	32	34	32	32
Graduate degree	20	25	29	23	26
Total	99	100	100	100	99
Household income					
Under \$50,000	55	39	34	45	41
\$50,000-100,000	24	33	33	31	31
Over \$100,000	21	28	32	23	27
Total	100	99	99	99	99
Immigrated to U.S. since 1980	11	4	5	18	9

¹ Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

JEWISH CONNECTIONS (“CONSIDER” DEFINITION)

Denominational preferences reveal much about Jewish identity and how it is expressed (see Table 7). With a few exceptions where noted, Orthodox Jews exhibit the highest levels on Jewish identity measures, sometimes much higher than all other Jews. Next in rank are Conservative Jews, usually with a noticeable gap separating them from Reform Jews.¹⁵ Significantly, “just Jewish” respondents exhibit the lowest levels of Jewish behaviors and attitudes, even on measures that are not specifically religious

15. Gaps between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews in the realm of synagogue and ritual behavior appear to be increasing. Today, most Jews who call themselves Orthodox manifest religious practices that would be sanctioned by mainstream institutional Orthodoxy. In earlier periods of the twentieth century, so-called “nominal” Orthodox Jews were more prevalent: they did not necessarily engage in Jewish rituals on a regular basis, but when they did so it was in an Orthodox setting. For more on “nominal” Orthodox Jews, see Samuel C. Heilman and Steven M. Cohen, 1989, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press) and Charles S. Liebman, 1966, “Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life,” in *American Jewish Year Book* 65: 21-97 (New York: Jewish Publication Society and American Jewish Committee).

but rather more social, philanthropic, communal or cultural.

Table 7 begins by looking at whether married Jews are married to other Jews or to non-Jews. Almost all married Orthodox Jews (96%) and most married Conservative Jews (87%) are married to other Jews. About three-fourths (74%) of Reform Jews and only six in ten (61%) “just Jewish” respondents are in-married.¹⁶ Among all except Orthodox Jews, those who have been married for a longer period of time, particularly since before 1970, are more likely to be married to a Jew than those who have been more recently married; in-marriage rates have plummeted over time especially among those who say they are Reform or “just Jewish.” Consequently, when examining marriages of Jews from the most recent decade (1991-2001), Conservative and Orthodox Jews are significantly more likely to be in-married than Reform or “just Jewish” respondents. Finally, over the past 20 years, rates of intermarriage appear to be stabilizing or even decreasing among Orthodox, Conservative and “just Jewish” respondents, with Reform continuing to see an increase in intermarriage rates.

Similar patterns are also found when examining Jewish social networks. Ninety percent of Orthodox Jews and over two-thirds (68%) of Conservative Jews report that half or more of their closest friends are Jewish, with those who identify as Reform (56%) and “just Jewish” (46%) at lower levels.

The type of childhood Jewish education varies sharply by denominational preference. Half of all “just Jewish” respondents received no Jewish education as children, roughly double the proportion of any other denomination. While some of these are FSU immigrants, many others are not. The major difference between Reform and Conservative respondents was twice-or-more per week programs (about half of Conservative versus

38% for Reform) as opposed to once-a-week programs (three out of ten Reform, versus one out of six Conservative). Over half (55%) of Orthodox respondents, in contrast, attended Jewish day school.¹⁷

As noted in the introduction, stating a denominational preference does not necessarily mean that one belongs to a religious institution, let alone subscribes to the practices and beliefs as articulated by that denomination. In the case of self-reported Orthodox Jews, however, the vast majority (86%) are synagogue members. On the other end of the spectrum, fewer than in one in six (15%) “just Jewish” respondents are members of a synagogue. As with synagogue membership, respondents are sharply distinguished by synagogue attendance, even as measured by attending one time a year. While the vast majority of Orthodox (94%), Conservative (85%) and Reform (74%) Jews attended synagogue in the year before their NJPS interview, less than half (44%) of “just Jewish” respondents make that claim.

Outside the synagogue, respondents also vary sharply in their observance of popular Jewish ritual practices or ceremonies. Whether holding or attending a Seder in the past year or fasting for all or part of Yom Kippur, “just Jewish” respondents are much less likely to participate in these observances than all other Jews. Conservative Jews are slightly less likely to participate than Orthodox Jews, while Reform Jews report lower levels of activity than Conservative Jews, particularly on Yom Kippur fasting.

Attitudes towards Jewish peoplehood and Israel also function to demarcate the respondents by their denominational status. Almost all Orthodox Jews, for example, “strongly agree” that they have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people; in addition, over two-thirds report they are very emotionally attached to Israel and a slightly higher proportion have visited Israel. Three-fourths of Conservative Jews also feel strongly about Jewish peoplehood, although Israel attachments and visits are noticeably lower

16. As Table 7 notes, the overall rate of in-marriage is 78% among all married adults in the more Jewishly-engaged population of 4.3 million Jews. In the total Jewish population of 5.2 million Jews, the overall rate of in-marriage among married adults is 69%. In-marriages include marriages between two born Jews and conversionary marriages in which one spouse (or in rare cases both spouses) converted or informally switched to Judaism.

17. Rates of day school education among Orthodox Jews have increased dramatically, so that about 80% of Orthodox Jews age 18-34 report having attended Jewish day school when growing up, and 90% of Orthodox children 6-17 are currently in day schools. See the UJC PowerPoint presentation, “Orthodox Jews,” at www.ujc.org/njpsreports.

TABLE 7.

Jewish Connections by Religious Denomination (“consider” definition).

	Othodox %	Conservative %	Reform %	Just Jewish %	Total %
In-married	96	87	74	61	78
(total among those married)					
In-married by year of marriage					
(among those married)					
Before 1970	99	94	95	88	93
1970-79	96	90	75	51	77
1980-90	92	74	66	45	67
1991-2001	97	80	55	44	65
Half or more of closest friends are Jewish	90	68	56	46	65
Childhood Jewish education					
Day school	55	11	5	6	12
2+ time per week program	22	49	38	25	36
1 time per week program	6	16	30	19	21
None	16	24	26	50	31
Total	99 ¹	100	99	100	100
Synagogue and ritual observance					
Synagogue member	86	61	47	15	47
Attended synagogue/temple during past year	94	85	74	44	71
Held/attended Passover Seder	94	89	82	57	79
Fasted all/part of day last Yom Kippur	91	78	57	34	60
Attitudes					
Strongly agree that “I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people”	91	74	56	39	60
“Very positive” feeling about being Jewish	90	88	80	64	79
Strongly agree that “I have a clear sense of what being Jewish means to me”	92	83	71	56	73

	Othodox %	Conservative %	Reform %	Just Jewish %	Total %
Israel					
Very emotionally attached to Israel	68	39	21	24	32
Have ever visited Israel	73	53	34	27	41
Philanthropy					
Contributed to Federation in past year	29	48	33	14	32
Contributed to any other Jewish cause in past year	80	64	47	23	49
Affiliation					
JCC member	36	28	19	11	21
Member of other Jewish organization	44	40	28	14	29
Jewish cultural activities					
Read Jewish media	88	78	65	44	65
Listen to Jewish audio/media	81	53	40	32	46
See Jewish movie/video	51	57	47	43	49
Read book for Jewish content	83	64	53	42	56
Use Internet for Jewish information	52	45	38	29	39

¹ Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

than among their Orthodox counterparts. Reform Jews and those who are “just Jewish” have the lowest levels. While Reform Jews score noticeably higher than those who are “just Jewish” on feelings about Jewish peoplehood, there is little to distinguish the groups regarding their connections to Israel.

Jews with a particular denominational preference – be it Orthodox, Conservative or Reform – also exhibit higher levels of activity in other spheres of Jewish life. They are at least twice as likely (and in some cases even more likely) as “just Jewish” respondents to have contributed to Federation and to any other Jewish cause in the year before being interviewed for NJPS. Federation giving, incidentally, is one of the few examples where Conservative Jews exhibit the highest level of participation, with nearly half (48%) contributing.

Those who identify as “just Jewish” may be reticent to belong to a religious institution like a synagogue when they do not necessarily think of themselves in denominational or religious terms. However, lower levels of affiliation are also evident with respect to Jewish Community Centers (JCC) and other Jewish organizations. Orthodox Jews are the most likely to be a member of a JCC (36%) or other Jewish organization (44%), followed by Conservative and Reform Jews, with those who are “just Jewish” scoring at the lowest levels.

Finally, respondents were asked a series of questions related to Jewish cultural activities such as reading a Jewish newspaper, magazine or other publication; listening to Jewish audio/media; seeing a Jewish movie or reading a book because it had Jewish content; and using the internet for Jewish information. The gap in participation between Reform and “just Jewish” respondents on these items is somewhat narrower compared to many of the other measures of Jewish connections, with a significant minority of “just Jewish” respondents, ranging from 29 to 44 percent, reporting engagement in one of these cultural activities. Nonetheless, even on items of a cultural note the same overall denominational pattern prevails: Orthodox generally scored the highest, followed by Conservative, then Reform, and lastly by those who are “just Jewish.”

THE “SYNAGOGUE” DEFINITION: POPULATION ESTIMATES AND PROPORTIONS

A second way to analyze American Jewish denominational patterns is to focus only on Jews living in households that belong to a synagogue. As indicated in the NJPS main report, 46% of all American Jews belong to a synagogue or temple, representing 40% of all Jewish households.¹⁸ As Table 8 shows, just over 1.5 million Jewish adults and just over 600,000 Jewish children live in these synagogue households; this is slightly more than half (51%) of the “consider” Jewish population. An overwhelming majority (92%) of all people – adults and children combined – who live in synagogue households are Jewish,¹⁹ as opposed to 79% of the total population in “consider” households.²⁰

More Jewish children (228,000) live in Orthodox synagogue homes than in the synagogue households of any other single denomination. In addition, children comprise 39% of the total population in Orthodox synagogue households, as opposed to 22% of the Conservative, 23% of the Reform, and 26% of the Reconstructionist populations. Despite the fact that there are noticeably fewer Orthodox adults than Reform or Conservative adults, this is compensated for by a far younger adult Orthodox population that is significantly more likely to have children – especially more than one child – living in the home (for further details, see next section of report and Table 10 below).

Interestingly, there are slightly more “synagogue” Orthodox Jews than there are “consider” Orthodox Jews. The attrition of some 15% of consider Orthodox Jews who are not synagogue members is more than

18. See *Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, A United Jewish Communities Report, available at www.ujc.org/njps. The fact that 46% of Jewish adults live in the 40% of Jewish households belonging to synagogues means that synagogue households have, on average, more Jewish adults in them than other households.

19. In synagogue households, 89% of adults are Jewish and 97% of children are Jewish.

20. It is crucial to understand that the “consider” population includes the “synagogue” population, thus reducing differences between them. If comparisons were made between the synagogue population and the consider population that does not belong to synagogues, differences between the groups would be substantially more pronounced.

TABLE 8.

Weighted estimates of adult, child and total population in households, by religious denomination of respondent (“synagogue” definition).

	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	Reconstructionist ³	Other ⁴	Total
Total adults ¹	363,000	552,000	661,000	45,000	76,000	1,697,000
Jewish adults	343,000	503,000	567,000	35,000	70,000	1,518,000
Total children ²	234,000	158,000	200,000	16,000	16,000	624,000
Jewish children	228,000	153,000	197,000	15,000	14,000	607,000
Total population	597,000	710,000	861,000	61,000	92,000	2,321,000
Jewish population	571,000	656,000	764,000	50,000	84,000	2,125,000

¹ Age 18 and older.

² Age 17 and younger.

³ Data on Reconstructionist Jews should be interpreted cautiously due to small sample size.

⁴ Majority in this category fall under “combination of Reform and Conservative.” Others include Traditional, Sephardic, Havurah and various combinations of other denominations. Data in this category should be interpreted cautiously due to small sample size.

made up for by those who do not consider themselves to be Orthodox yet belong to an Orthodox synagogue. In contrast, all of the other denominations have far more people in the consider category than in the synagogue category.

Table 9 displays proportions across various Jewish population segments according to denominational identification. Overall, 37% of Jewish “synagogue” adults are Reform, followed by Conservative (33%), Orthodox (23%), Other (5%)²¹ and Reconstructionist (2%). Besides being the most popular “consider” preference, Reform is now the most popular “synagogue” preference as well. This is a new and significant development, as Conservative had ranked ahead of Reform in this area during the second half of the twentieth century.²²

21. Other includes Traditional, Sephardic, Humanist, Havurah, Jewish Renewal and various combinations of denominations.

22. See Lazewitz et al., *Jewish Choices* and Marshall Sklare, 1955, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press).

TABLE 9.

Proportions in Jewish denominations among Jewish adults, Jewish children and total Jews (“synagogue” definition).

Denomination	Jewish Adults %	Jewish Children %	Total Jews %
Orthodox	23	38	27
Conservative	33	25	31
Reform	37	32	36
Reconstructionist	2	3	2
Other	5	2	4
Total	100	100	100

Many significant trends emanating from the synagogue population figures pertain to Orthodox Jews. While one out of ten Jews overall is Orthodox according to the consider definition, that figure more than doubles (23%) when focusing instead on the synagogue population. Relative to others, as we have already seen, more Orthodox Jews (86%) are synagogue members, which explains the increased proportion of Orthodox Jews among synagogue member households. In addition, the 228,000 Jewish children in Orthodox homes represent 38% of all Jewish children in synagogue homes, an even greater proportion than Jewish adults in Orthodox synagogue homes. In contrast, synagogue households that are Conservative and Reform claim a smaller proportion of Jewish children than they do Jewish adults.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS (“SYNAGOGUE” DEFINITION)

IN THE SECTIONS ABOVE WHERE THE “CONSIDER” DEFINITION WAS USED, findings revealed that Orthodox Jews are appreciably younger than other Jews while Conservative Jews were the oldest. Among

“synagogue” Jews, these trends are even more apparent. The median age for adult synagogue Jews is 42 for Orthodox, 49 for Reform and 52 for Conservative, which is a somewhat wider gap than for the “consider” Jewish population. As Table 10 shows, more than half (55%) of Orthodox Jewish adults are age 44 or younger, compared to a third (33%) of Conservative and 38% of Reform adults.²³

Not only is the synagogue adult Orthodox population relatively young, but also as mentioned above more children live in Orthodox synagogue households than in the synagogue households of any other denomination. When comparing the synagogue and consider figures for the same denominations, synagogue Jews are slightly more likely to have children living in the household than consider Jews. Even so, as seen in Table 10, less than two in ten (19%) Conservative and Reform synagogue adults live in a household containing at least one child, while 25% of Orthodox synagogue adults live in a household containing two or more children.

Across the denominational spectrum, synagogue Jews are remarkably similar in their marital status. Slightly more than two-thirds are married while slightly less than a fifth are single and never married, with the remainder widowed, divorced or separated. There is a slightly higher percentage of singles in the Orthodox synagogue population (18%) than in the Orthodox consider population (15%), and a slightly lower percentage of marrieds (71% versus 74%). Reform and Conservative synagogue members, on the other hand, are somewhat more likely to be married than their “consider” counterparts.

Synagogue Jews vary considerably in which region they live, depending on their denominational status. Relative to the total U.S. Jewish population, Orthodox Jews are over-represented in the Northeast, where seven in ten reside, and under-represented in all other regions. Conservative synagogue Jews mirror the total synagogue population, with half living in the

23. The analysis of denomination (synagogue definition), demographic characteristics and Jewish connections is restricted to those who belong to Orthodox, Conservative and Reform synagogues. There are too few cases for reliable analysis of Reconstructionist and Other synagogue respondents.

TABLE 10.

Demographic Characteristics by Religious Denomination (“synagogue” definition).

	Orthodox %	Conservative %	Reform %	Total ¹ %
Age				
18-34	36	20	21	24
35-44	19	13	17	16
45-54	20	24	27	24
55-64	8	12	14	13
65-74	10	15	11	12
75+	8	16	10	12
Total	101 ²	100	100	101
Number of children in household				
0	64	81	81	77
1	11	13	15	14
2 or more	25	6	4	9
Total	100	100	100	100
Marital status				
Married	71	68	67	68
Divorced/separated	6	5	8	7
Widowed	6	9	7	8
Single/never married	18	17	18	18
Total	101	99	100	101
Region				
Northeast	70	50	37	48
Midwest	5	12	18	13
South	13	24	26	22
West	11	14	20	17
Total	99	100	101	100
Education				
High school or below	33	18	10	18
Some college	22	25	22	23
College degree	24	29	34	30
Graduate degree	22	29	35	29
Total	101	101	101	100
Household income				
Under \$50,000	51	29	28	34
\$50,000-100,000	25	32	32	31
Over \$100,000	23	39	40	35
Total	99	100	100	100

¹ All synagogue members, including those belonging to synagogues other than Orthodox, Conservative or Reform.

² Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Northeast, about one quarter (24%) in the South, 12% in the Midwest, and 14% in the West. Thirty-seven percent of Reform Jews live in the Northeast (where they are underrepresented), with 18% in the Midwest, 26% in the South and 20% in the West, reflecting a more balanced regional distribution relative to the other denominations.

Overall, there are very small differences between the educational levels of “synagogue” and “consider” Jews. Forty-six percent of synagogue Orthodox and 58% of synagogue Conservative possess a college degree, compared to 44% of “consider” Orthodox and 57% of “consider” Conservative. In the case of Reform, there are somewhat larger differences between the synagogue and consider populations, with the synagogue group having a slightly elevated educational status. Among the synagogue Reform, 69% have a college degree, compared to 63% of “consider” Reform Jews. Moreover, while 90% of synagogue Reform have at least attended college, the same is true of 85% of “consider” Reform Jews.

Finally, synagogue Jews are wealthier, on average, than “consider” Jews. About 40% of Reform and Conservative synagogue Jews and about a quarter (23%) of Orthodox synagogue Jews report living in a household with an annual income of over \$100,000. This is the case among only 32% of Reform, 28% of Conservative and 21% of Orthodox “consider” Jews. At the other end of the income spectrum, 28% of Reform, 29% of Conservative and 51% of Orthodox synagogue Jews reside in households earning less than \$50,000 a year. These are lower percentages than for the corresponding “consider” respondents in each of the three denominations (Reform, 34%; Conservative, 39%; and Orthodox, 55%). Under both definitions, Orthodox Jews report lower income, on average, than Conservative and Reform Jews.

JEWISH CONNECTIONS (“SYNAGOGUE” DEFINITION)

Two overall trends emerge from the data on Jewish connections of synagogue Jews, which are shown in Table 11. First, as with “consider” Jews, synagogue Orthodox Jews report the most frequent and highest

levels of Jewish activity, feelings and background across many – although not all – of these measures, followed by Conservative and then Reform Jews. Second, Conservative and Reform synagogue Jews have an appreciably stronger “Jewish” profile than Conservative and Reform “consider” Jews (see Table 6).

Most married synagogue members, irrespective of denomination, are married to another Jew. Overall, virtually all (98%) of Orthodox, 92% of Conservative and 84% of Reform synagogue Jews are in-married. Among Reform and Conservative Jews, those who have been married for a longer duration are more likely to be in-married than those married more recently, as is the trend among “consider” Jews. However, among the most recently married Conservative and Reform Jews (1991-2001), synagogue Jews have higher in-marriage rates (86% and 73%, respectively) than their “consider” counterparts (80% and 55%, respectively). Furthermore, in-marriage rates among the most recently married synagogue Jews, irrespective of denomination, are equal to or slightly higher than in-marriage rates for synagogue Jews married between 1980-1990, suggesting a stabilization of intermarriage in the synagogue population.

In-marriage is one indicator of ties and relationships to other Jews. Another measure is friendship networks, and synagogue Jews have very strong Jewish connections in this area as well. Nine out of ten Orthodox Jews, 77% of Conservative Jews and 69% of Reform Jews indicate that half or more of their closest friends are Jewish. For Conservative and Reform Jews, these are higher figures than for Conservative (68%) and Reform (56%) “consider” Jews. Most synagogue Jews also have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people: 90% of Orthodox, 80% of Conservative and over two-thirds (68%) of Reform Jews strongly agreed with this sentiment (date not shown in table). Again, for Conservative and Reform synagogue Jews, the figures are somewhat higher than for “consider” Conservative and Reform Jews.

Adult synagogue Jews vary by the type of Jewish education they received as children. As with “consider” Jews, different types of formal Jewish

TABLE II.

Jewish Connections by Religious Denomination (“synagogue” definition).

	Orthodox %	Conservative %	Reform %	Total ¹ %
In-married				
(total among those married)	98	92	84	90
In-married by year of marriage				
(among those married)				
Before 1970	100	99	96	98
1970-79	98	95	90	93
1980-90	96	84	72	82
1991-2001	97	86	73	84
Half or more of closest friends are Jewish	90	77	69	76
Adults’ childhood Jewish education				
Day school	57	14	5	19
2+ time per week program	24	51	45	41
1 time per week program	7	14	27	19
None	12	21	24	21
Total	100	100	101 ²	100
Current children’s Jewish education				
Day school	89	26	4	33
2+ time per week program	3	34	37	29
1 time per week program	3	21	42	20
Other	0	6	1	2
None	5	13	16	16
Total	100	100	100	100
Religious service attendance				
More than once a month	66	31	24	36
About once a month	9	16	20	16
3-9 times a year	10	24	31	23
High Holidays only	9	21	14	15
Other/none	6	8	11	9
Total	100	100	100	99

	Orthodox %	Conservative %	Reform %	Total ¹ %
Ritual observance				
Held/attended Passover Seder	99	95	94	96
Fasted all/part of day last Yom Kippur	93	82	70	79
Lit Chanukah candles all or most nights	94	83	78	83
Always/usually light Shabbat candles	85	50	25	48
Keep kosher at home	86	30	8	34
Israel				
Very emotionally attached to Israel	66	41	27	41
Have ever visited Israel	75	57	44	55
Affiliation				
JCC member	39	40	32	36
Member of other Jewish organization	43	44	46	44
Philanthropy				
Contributed to Federation in past year	32	55	49	47
Contributed to any other Jewish cause in past year	83	73	69	74
Jewish cultural activities				
Read Jewish media	93	84	80	85
Listen to Jewish audio/media	81	58	50	60
See Jewish movie/video	52	64	50	55
Read book for Jewish content	83	70	62	70
Use Internet for Jewish information	54	51	46	51

¹ All synagogue members, including those belonging to synagogues other than Orthodox, Conservative or Reform.

² Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

education were most popular depending upon denomination: day school (57%) for Orthodox, and twice-a-week programs for Conservative (51%) and Reform (45%). These figures are slightly higher than for the corresponding “consider” groups. Overall, a slightly higher proportion of adult synagogue Jews in each denomination (88% for Orthodox, 79% for Conservative and 76% for Reform) had some kind of formal Jewish educational experience than did “consider” Jews (84% for Orthodox, 76% for Conservative and 74% for Reform).

Significantly, children age 6-17 in synagogue Jewish homes are more likely to be currently receiving a Jewish education than the adults did when they were children, irrespective of denomination. Ninety-five percent of Orthodox, 87% of Conservative and 84% of Reform children in this age group are currently receiving some form of Jewish education. The vast majority (89%) of Orthodox children are enrolled in Jewish day school, a far higher figure than for Orthodox adults when they were growing up. Over one quarter (26%) of Conservative children are currently receiving a day school education, which is nearly double the rate of Conservative adults. The increased proportion of Reform children with a Jewish education, on the other hand, is entirely due to a higher proportion (42%) attending once-a-week programs.

Not surprisingly, a substantial proportion of those who belong to synagogues attend religious services with some regularity. Although a popular stereotype about American Jews is that many only attend synagogue on the High Holidays of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, this is not the case with respect to synagogue members. Only 9% of Orthodox, 21% of Conservative and 14% of Reform synagogue Jews reported that they attended religious services only on the High Holidays in the year before their NJPS interview. Most of the synagogue population attends far more frequently, with 75% of Orthodox, 47% of Conservative and 44% of Reform Jews stating that they attended once a month or more.

Jewish rituals and practices are observed to varying degrees by synagogue Jews, depending on their denominational status and the frequency of the

particular ritual or commemoration. Annual rituals such as the Passover Seder, fasting on Yom Kippur and lighting Chanukah candles are observed by a clear majority of synagogue Jews regardless of denomination, though small to moderate differences exist among the groups, with Orthodox Jews reporting the highest levels, followed by Conservative and then Reform Jews. In addition, relative to “consider” Jews, participation rates on these measures are higher for Conservative and especially for Reform synagogue Jews. Weekly or daily rituals, however, reveal much more substantial differences between synagogue Jews of different denominations. For example, 85% of Orthodox synagogue Jews always or usually light Shabbat candles, compared to 50% of Conservative and 25% of Reform synagogue Jews.

As with the consider population, Orthodox synagogue Jews have significantly stronger Israel connections relative to other Jews. In terms of their attitudes about Israel and Israel visits, there are only slight differences between Orthodox and Conservative synagogue Jews and their corresponding “consider” groups. Reform synagogue Jews, while still revealing weaker attachments than both synagogue and consider Conservative Jews, show somewhat stronger connections in this regard than all Jews who consider themselves Reform.

For other measures of communal affiliation, philanthropy, and Jewish cultural activities, synagogue Jews show increases over “consider” Jews to varying degrees. The increases are slight for Orthodox Jews and somewhat more substantial for Conservative Jews, while Reform Jews display the largest increases. As a result, on the final nine measures in Table 9 addressing affiliation, philanthropy and cultural activities, Conservative synagogue Jews have the highest ranking on three measures (contribution to Federation, JCC membership and viewing movie/video for Jewish content) and Reform synagogue Jews in one (membership in other Jewish organizations). In contrast, for most other Jewish connections measures in Table 9, the rank order is usually Orthodox followed by Conservative and then Reform. On most of these final nine measures, differences among

synagogue Jews of different denominations are much less pronounced than they are for other religious, Jewish or demographic factors discussed earlier.

CONCLUSIONS

THIS REPORT'S ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS leads to several important conclusions. In addition, it raises significant policy issues and questions for discussion by the Jewish communal system generally and Federations specifically.

The data show that denominational status matters. Nearly three-fourths of American Jews, including many who are not synagogue members, identify as Jews through a framework of a particular Jewish denomination. This has crucial implications for the communal identity of US Jewry. As the data make clear, those who consider themselves to be any denomination – Orthodox, Conservative or Reform – show stronger Jewish attachments on a wide variety of communal, ritual, philanthropic and cultural measures than do people who are “just Jewish.” The type of denomination is correlated with Jewish connections as well; while some “just Jews” are Jewishly engaged and a small proportion of Orthodox unengaged, the rank almost always falls in an Orthodox-Conservative-Reform order, followed by “just Jewish.”

Synagogues also matter. While identification with any Jewish denomination, regardless of type, has important communal implications in and of itself, there exists a further level of distinction. Within any particular denomination, Jews who are current synagogue members are noticeably more Jewishly-engaged – communally, ritually, philanthropically, culturally – than all Jews who state a preference for that same denomination. Comprising 46% of American Jewish adults, synagogue Jews have much in common, irrespective of their denomination. On numerous demographic and Jewish measures, for example, synagogue Reform Jews have a profile that comes closer to synagogue Orthodox Jews

than to the “just Jewish” population. The strong correlation between synagogue membership and an extensive range of Jewish connections has important implications for the Jewish communal system and for Jewish life generally. Synagogues and other Jewish institutions – including philanthropic institutions like the Federation system – support and rely on each other through their often overlapping memberships and constituencies. Synagogues are also associated with Jewish family and social networks that sustain and nourish Jewish life and behaviors in the broader Jewish population.

Finally, the NJPS data show that synagogues of all denominations will need to address numerous demographic challenges. What is often thought of as the typical American Jewish household – two parents and two children – is in fact relatively rare today. Most American Jews, no matter their denomination, live in households without any children at all: they may be, for example, single/never married, divorced, widowed, or married empty-nesters whose children no longer live with them. While these developments – creating what some communal leaders are beginning to refer to as different “gateway” populations – are evident for synagogue Jews, they are even more the case for the “consider” population, especially among those who are “just Jewish.” Over time, the structure of the contemporary American synagogue has been primarily geared towards two-parent families with children, but the changing demographic reality facing denominations, synagogues and the broader Jewish communal system suggests a reassessment of US Jewry and new strategies for the strengthening of American Jewish religious and communal life.



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