

Fathers of the Faith? Three Decades of Patrilineal Descent in American Reform Judaism

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Reform Judaism--And "Patrilineal Descent"--Are Today's American "Norms"

Intermarriages between American Jews and non-Jews increased dramatically in the late 1960s and 1970s. Although intermarriage rates increased for both men and women, Jewish men continued to be much more likely than Jewish women to marry a non-Jew. Those intermarried couples who affiliated Jewishly tended to join Reform congregations, but many were discouraged from affiliation because they assumed their children would not be considered Jewish. According to the matrilineal principle of Jewish descent that guided Jewish law from Mishnaic authorities onward, only the children of Jewish mothers are born with Jewish status. Children of Jewish mothers were considered to be Jews regardless of their father's religion, but children of intermarried Jewish men were not considered Jews unless their born-non-Jewish mothers converted into Judaism. This matrilineal standard was officially changed when the Reform movement's Central Conference of Reform Rabbis (CCAR) voted in 1983 for Jewish "Patrilineal Descent," establishing that in the American Reform movement children of Jewish fathers are also presumed to be Jewish, just like children of Jewish mothers.¹ The sociological results of the Patrilineal Descent

decision upon American Jewry over the past 30 years are deeply important to contemporary Jewish life, and are the main focus of this paper.

The 1983 Patrilineal Descent decision was extremely important, affecting all of American Judaism, because Reform Judaism has become the American Jewish “default” mode. In contrast to Israel and most Diaspora Jewish communities, where “Progressive” or “Reform” Judaism are minority movements, today more American Jews consider themselves to be Reform Jews (more than 35 % of American Jewish families) than any other stream.² In the middle years of the 20th century, Conservative Judaism was the “default mode” of American Jewish affiliation, because Conservative congregations seemed to offer the most normative and the least problematic style of American Judaism. Orthodox affiliation was and today is still the “default” mode in most other English-speaking countries and in Israel today. Regardless of their personal religiosity, Jews in Israeli, European, and Latin American communities who attend a synagogue are most likely to find themselves in an Orthodox synagogue, while Jews preferring liberal interpretations of Judaism must seek out less numerous “Progressive” or “Liberal” or “Reform” synagogues.

The pre-eminence of Reform Judaism in America today can be understood both on practical and ideological grounds. American Reform Judaism enjoys numerical prominence because it is widely understood to be the most inclusive, practically and ideologically, of the large American Jewish religious movements, welcoming all types of Jewish households, including interfaith, homosexual, and other households that differ from historical Jewish norms. Ideologically, the Reform

movement has grown because it embraces a “map of meaning” that is comfortable to most American Jews, incorporating the major tenets of American liberalism. The Reform movement’s celebration of free choice as a Judaic concept; its articulation of a Judaic “mission” of universalistic ethicism, often called *tikkun olam*, rather than particularistic pieties; its commitment to the “Judeo-Christian” social and intellectual heritage and to interfaith dialogue; its assumption that religion is justified as a method of building good character and not as an end in itself; its comfort with the scientific study of Jewish texts, history, religion and culture—and its frequent discomfort with concepts of “chosenness” and “peoplehood”—make the movement ideologically comfortable.

On a practical, demographic level, the Reform movement has grown because large and diverse subsets of Jews and their families believe Reform Judaism will accept them as they are, including those with limited Judaic knowledge and/or uncertain religious backgrounds. They perceive Reform Judaism as less likely than Conservative or Orthodox Judaism to make them feel unwelcome. Additionally, it should be noted that many Americans call themselves “Reform” Jews but are not actually affiliated with any congregation. Reform Judaism is the generic liberal movement³ in the popular American Jewish imagination, which makes Reform religious pronouncements—including the Patrilineal Descent decision—critical to the future of American Judaism.

In addition to factors specific to American Reform Judaism, the Patrilineal Descent decision and its aftermath must be framed within the broader American context, in which ethnoreligious identity is voluntary and flexible and many Americans assume they can define their own ethnic and religious identities. Until relatively recently--and still in many places around the world--individuals have been born into ethnoreligious societies and become identified with and defined by those groups. In 21st century America, however, large segments of the population are freer than ever before to "invent" themselves as individuals. Within the broad spectrum of "white" Americans--which some observers have suggested may now include well-educated Hispanic and Asian Americans as well as Americans of "ethnic" European origins (Greek, Italian, Jewish)--individuals can choose to identify with one or another ethnic group or religion, or can create hybrid new models combining aspects of two or more traditions.⁴ As increasingly complicated U.S. Census form answers illustrate, Americans feel free to select hybrid heritages for themselves and their families. Selecting personalized options further extends a sociological "pattern of mixing" that has long been one of the defining characteristics of American life.⁵ Many Jews, like other white Americans, can and do feel comfortable viewing their ethnoreligious identities as porous and fluid, changing in emphasis over time. The Patrilineal Descent decision took place within this context, in which many Americans regard the definition of their own ethnoreligious identity to be among their personal freedoms and entitlements.

Deciding Fathers as well as Mothers Can Determine Jewish Identity

Two contemporaneous documents produced by the Reform movement spell out the rationales and the rules of the 1983 resolution: The Report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent, adopted on March 15, 1983,⁶ and a CCAR Responsa on Patrilineal and Matrilineal Descent (#38),⁷ released October, 1983. The Committee's Report focuses on the the sociological crises facing the American Reform movement, intermixing halakhic discussions with socio-historical interpretations and explanations, while the Responsa delves more deeply into changing halakhic and historical attitudes toward the establishment of Jewish status. The Report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent defines mixed marriage "as a union between a Jew and a non-Jew" and clarifies that the resolution deals "only with the Jewish identity of children in which one parent is Jewish and the other parent is non-Jewish." The Resolution's concluding paragraphs stipulate:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis declares that the child of one Jewish parent is under the presumption of Jewish descent. This presumption of the Jewish status of the offspring of any mixed marriage is to be established through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people. The performance of these mitzvot serves to commit those who participate in them, both parent and child, to Jewish life.

Depending on circumstances, mitzvot leading toward a positive and exclusive Jewish identity will include entry into the covenant, acquisition of a Hebrew name, Torah study, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and Kabbalat Torah (Confirmation). For those beyond childhood claiming Jewish identity, other public acts or declarations may be added or substituted after consultation with their rabbi.⁸

The "Patrilineal Descent" decision is sometimes characterized as a rabbinic and administrative response to existing facts: In other words, large numbers of American Reform Jewish men were marrying non-Jewish women who did not convert into Judaism, and if the movement wished these couples and their families to become part of their constituencies, they needed to adapt these new Reform definitions of who is a Jew. The reality is more complex. The concept of paternity as the determining factor in progeny being considered as having Jewish descent is a constant in the Hebrew Bible, as the authors of the Report elaborated: "both the Biblical and the Rabbinical traditions take for granted that ordinarily the paternal line is decisive in the tracing of descent within the Jewish people." Numerous examples in the Hebrew Bible determine a child's status by the father's tribe. The Report further asserts, "in the Rabbinic tradition, this tradition remains in force," citing as prooftexts examples of Priestly status--"the child of an Israelite who marries a Kohenet is an Israelite" and the Talmudic precept, "the most important parental responsibility to teach Torah rested with the father (Kiddushin 29a; df. Shulchan Aruch, Yoredeah 245.1)." Only in the case where "the marriage was considered not to be licit, the child of that marriage followed the status of the mother (Mishna Kiddushin 3.12, havalad kemotah)." The Report offers a sociological interpretation of the reason for matrilineal descent in illicit unions: "the woman with her child had no recourse but to return to her own people."⁹

Pointing out that "since Emancipation, Jews have faced the problem of mixed marriage and the status of the offspring of mixed marriage," the Committee on Patrilineal Descent brought forward precepts suggested in a 1947 proposal of the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage and Inter-marriage:

With regard to infants, the declaration of the parents to raise them as Jews shall be deemed sufficient for conversion....Children of religious school age should likewise not be required to undergo a special ceremony of conversion but should receive instruction as regular students in the school. The ceremony of Confirmation at the end of the school course shall be considered in lieu of a conversion ceremony.

The Committee then cites the 1961 edition of the Reform rabbi's manual, which stated that Reform Judaism accepts the child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother "as Jewish without a formal conversion, if he attends a Jewish school and follows a course of studies leading to Confirmation." Assuming that "It can no longer be assumed a priori...that the child of a Jewish mother will be Jewish any more than the child of a non-Jewish mother will not be," the Committee concluded "that the same requirements must be applied to establish the status of a child of a mixed marriage, regardless of whether the mother or the father is Jewish."

This CCAR decision was not a dramatic break with earlier Reform thinking--as the 1983 decision points out in citing the 1947 and 1961 documents. It was the logical outgrowth of post World War II Reform approaches and ratified decades of earlier statements, as one of its most influential advocates, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, emphasized in his statements at a 1984 Reform Biennial and his 1986 talk for a CLAL Conference on Jewish Unity. Focusing on egalitarianism as a primary

motivation--"the full equality of men and women in religious life", Schindler emotionally supported the way in which Patrilineal Descent brought the children of Jewish fathers into the fold:

It is high time that we say to them: By God, you are Jews. You are the sons and daughters of a Jewish parent. With the consent of both your parents, you were reared as Jews. You have resolved to share our fate. You are, therefore, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone. You are in all truth what you consider yourself to be: Jews as worthy as any who were born Jewish.¹⁰

Within the Reform movement, many influential leaders agreed with Schindler "that it was in their interest to accept the children of Jewish fathers and gentile mothers as Jewish, that this was a logical and legitimate religious policy to adopt," according to Reform historian Dana Evan Kaplan.¹¹

The Patrilineal Descent decision was in many ways a logical response to changing American mores in the 1970s and 1980s. While marriage within one's own ethnoreligious group had once been normative for American Christians and Jews, rates of American interfaith and interracial marriages were climbing. Pluralism and multiculturalism were buzzwords, especially among the highly educated affluent socio-economic American environments most Jews inhabited. More non-Jews found Jews to be attractive marriage partners, but fewer non-Jews marrying Jews were willing to convert into Judaism--conversion seemed unnecessary; why should they change who they were? Additionally, it seemed likely that insisting on matrilineality was an unwise policy because it seemed to be driving many potentially Jewish families away from Judaism. Increasing numbers of liberal American Jews were convinced that if Jewish institutions, including synagogues, would only lower the

barriers and be inclusive, both Patrilineal and Matrilineal families could be part of the Jewish fold, and numbers of Jews would increase rather than decrease. Affirming recently the continuing positive importance of that motivation, Rabbi David Ellenson, President of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) and a prominent historian of Jewish societies and thought, commented: "It is necessary for communities to engage in constituency retention."¹²

Ellenson and other Reform rabbinic leaders have articulated principled moral reasons for extending Jewish ancestry to the children of Jewish fathers. To many, the gendered differences in Jewish law seemed not only inexplicable but also sexist. If the children of Jewish mothers could be considered Jewish at birth, why not the children of Jewish fathers? Reminding the CCAR in 1986 that Reform Jews "refuse to accept a monolithic Judaism" because "Judaism does not speak, nor has it ever spoken, in a single, stagnant voice," Ellenson characterized the Patrilineal Descent decision as motivated by "feelings of compassion and justice--themselves informed by the tradition." Comparing patrilineality to "our [Reform] decision to ordain women as rabbis and to accord women the same public status that had previously been reserved for men [1974]," Ellenson asserted that both decisions "represent a deeply felt religious conviction on our part" related to the belief "that God created men and women in the divine image"--although "the decision to accord Jewish status to the daughters and sons of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers...has not commanded the same unanimity of assent among the members of our Conference" because of concerns about sundering Jewish unity, "*Kelal Yisrael*."¹³

Furthermore, in other situations some Orthodox authorities have voiced the concept that the children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers can be considered--if not halakhic members of the Jewish people--at least Jewish progeny (literally "seed"), "*Zera Yisrael*." Ellenson was particularly moved by the halakhic discussions of Rabbi Haim Amsalem asserting that within the context of Israeli society those non-Jewish born wives "who identify with the Jewish people and live as Jews" should be speedily converted by Israeli authorities, both out of compassion to their plight and also because the presence of so many non-Jews within Israeli families and communities constitutes "a state of emergency." Jewish law itself, Amsalem proposed, "obligates us to be as lenient as possible within the parameters of Jewish law," and suggests that it is "fitting to love them and bring them near."¹⁴ Ellenson and like-minded Reform thinkers extended these Israel-oriented concepts to Diaspora families and communities as well.

Not surprisingly, if even among the Reform movement some rabbis objected to the Patrilineal Descent decision, many Orthodox and Conservative scholars and religious leaders had reservations. Comments from all sides of the issue were gathered together in a special issue of *Judaism* (published by the American Jewish Congress) in 1985, "Children of Mixed Marriages, Are They Jewish: A Symposium on Patrilineal Descent," anchored by a scholarly analysis of "The Matrilineal Principle in Historical Perspective," by Shaye J.D. Cohen. Cohen demonstrated the ancient concept of *zera yisrael* (the "seed" of a Jewish man as a foundation for patrilineality) in Hebrew biblical texts and searched for evidence of how and why Jewish law began to rely on matrilineality rather than patrilineality for the religious identity of children.

Although many colleagues saw the matrilineal principle as being introduced in the period of Ezra (5th century B.C.E.), Cohen argued that it was still being vigorously debated by the rabbis of the Mishnah (2nd and 3rd century C.E.), and he accordingly suggested that "the matrilineal principle is a legal innovation of the first or second century (C.E)...introduced not in response to societal need but as a consequence of the influx of new ideas into rabbinic Judaism. Cohen hypothesizes that Roman matrilineality was the spur that precipitated changes within Judaism at that time."¹⁵

Rabbi J. David Bleich, then Rosh Yeshiva at Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University, saw the decision as "flagrant disregard of the elemental formal ties which unite all Jews," and rejected it as "tantamount to renunciation of the already tenuous ties which bind Reform Jews to other members of the Jewish faith-community."¹⁶ Orthodox Second Temple scholar Lawrence Schiffman, warned that the decision facilitated "retracing the steps of Paul and admitting gentiles to the synagogue," a step that would lead to American Reform Jews undermining their own Jewish status in ways perhaps similar to the historical Samaritans, Karaites, and early Christians.¹⁷ Asking "Patrilineal Descent--a solution or a problem?" Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary scholar Robert Gordis commented, "The motives that led them to take this step are self-evident," namely (1) "the vast proliferation of intermarriages in the United States and throughout the world, not excluding even Israel, represents a drain of human resources from the Jewish community which it can ill sustain, particular in view of the low birth rate in Jewish families," and (2) non-Jewish women who chose to marry Jewish men may be assumed to be at least allies to the Jewish project. Nevertheless, Gordis urged that the

non-Jewish mother be encouraged to convert, preferably before children are born, or at least after their birth, as the children themselves are converted. Gordis concludes: "If she cannot bring herself even to undertake such a course of study, or if she finds herself unable to accept Judaism after study and an exposure to the content of Judaism, then 'raising the child as a Jew' would be meaningless in any substantive sense."¹⁸ Rabbi Joel Roth (often a voice for conservative traditionalism within JTS) commented, "Numbers aren't everything," and warned that breaking the worldwide Jewish understanding that "only the offspring of Jewish females are Jewish by birth; all others require conversion in order to become Jewish" would disrupt the de facto ability of all Jews to marry each other.¹⁹ Only Judith Hauptman, professor of Talmud at JTS (she later received rabbinical ordination) raised the implications for unmarried Jewish women, the potential brides of said outmarrying Jewish men:

...and probably most important, the adoption of the patrilineal principle would confer acceptability upon inter-marriage and thereby totally subvert the goals of the laws of personal status as envisioned by the Mishnah....It would reduce the pressure on Jewish men to seek a Jewish mate....One of the last vestiges of Jewish behavior in families who do not openly observe Jewish ritual is the request by parents of their children not to inter-marry.²⁰

Hauptman's comments emphasized that under the guise of religious equality, Jewish women would be placed in an unequal situation, by losing their competitive edge in a Jewish marriage market in which American popular culture glorified what Jerry Seinfeld once called "The Shiksa Goddess." Even though openly Jewish celebrities from Barbra Streisand to Nathalie Portman are celebrated as highly attractive females, Jewish women are still frequently the butt of misogynistic, deprecating remarks.

Jewish men often internalize such negative stereotypes and view Jewish women through that colored lens.

Gendered Changes in American Reform Judaism

During the years that the Patrilineal Descent decision was passed and took effect in Reform congregations, intermarriage combined with Reform women's activism to create another perplexing new challenge--the feminization of many aspects of American Reform Judaism. To put both the Patrilineal Descent decision and Reform women's religious activism into contemporaneous sociological contexts, in the late 1960s and early 1970s three social movements—Second Wave Feminism, the Civil Rights Movement, and Zionism—powerfully affected American Judaism. American rabbis of every persuasion, especially large numbers of Reform rabbis, became visible leaders in the Civil Rights movement. Ethnoreligious particularism, rather than the melting pot ideology, gave young Jews permission to explore those aspects of life that made Jewishness distinctive.

Within the Reform movement, renewed interest in Jewish texts and rituals once considered outmoded began to percolate. This interest in things Jewish was nourished by feminism and Zionism,²¹ among other factors. Feminists pressed for genuine equality in Reform religious life, and demanded the abolition of distinctions between men and women in religious and communal leadership. The Reform movement was the first American Jewish movement to ordain a female rabbi: Sally Preisand, in 1972. Reform Jewish women, many of whom had little or no Jewish education, became a powerful force in the revitalization of adult Jewish educational

venues. Sociologically, Reform women became the “brokers” of a dynamic new involvement in Jewish rituals and ceremonies within the Reform movement.

Women, long excluded by Orthodoxy from public participation in Jewish life, and then assigned a passive role along with the laymen in their Conservative or Reform temples, helped to energize American Judaism. However, one unintended consequence of women’s activism was that Jewish connections and activities became increasingly attractive to Jewish women and less attractive to many Jewish men. Harriet and Moshe Hartman have quantified the "significant gender differences" (NJPS 2000-01) which "remain for three factors in all denominations: women express stronger religious beliefs than men, stronger (tribalistic) attachment to Jewish people than men, and a greater tendency than men to express "being Jewish" as being active in the current Jewish community and practices." That male/female divide is especially pronounced among Reform Jews.²²

The feminization of Reform Judaism is also in many ways part of the process of assimilation into American norms. Female prominence in cultural and religious realms seems “natural” on the American scene. A preponderance of female worshippers is characteristic of many American Christian churches, and popular cultural all-American imagery often depicts men fishing and watching football games while women attend to church business. In social scientific theoretical discussions as well, American scholars have long asserted that women are more “religious” than men through essential psychological differences or social conditioning and there seems to be consensus about this, at least as regards American Christianity.²³

Patrilineal Descent in Action in Reform Jewish Households²⁴

Intermarriages--marriages between a Jew and a non-Jew--among younger American Jews today are about equal for men and women: Among Jews ages 25 to 49, 40 percent of men and 40 percent of women were married to non-Jews. (In contrast among those over age 50, 27 percent of men and 19 percent of women were married to non-Jews.) Conversionary marriages--in which a born non-Jew converts into Judaism and becomes a "Jew by choice," to use a popular phrase--have decreased over the past 30 years. Looking at marriages with only one Jewish parent, and terming an intermarriage between a Jewish man and a non-Jewish woman a **Patrilineal family** and an intermarriage between a Jewish woman and a non-Jewish man a **Matrilineal family**, this examination of Jewish behaviors and connections draws on two studies: (1) in-depth interviews with 254 geographically diverse informants in intermarried, conversionary, and inmarried households (2001),²⁵ and (2) an analysis this author conducted with Daniel Parmer²⁶ utilizing as a primary statistical data set (unless otherwise cited) the last large national study conducted in the American Jewish community, the 2000-01 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS 2000-01).²⁷

Even though they intermarry at equal rates, American Jewish men and women do not behave similarly in regards to Jewishness before or after intermarriage. Patrilineal families and Matrilineal families are both intermarriages, but sociologically they are quite different from each other. Jewish women married to non-Jewish men have typically married about 3 years later than Jewish women married to Jewish men; the interviews provide the stories behind those numbers. In my interviews, Jewish women often described searching for years for appropriate Jewish male life partners, and eventually giving up and dating primarily non-Jewish men. Jewish men, in contrast,

were much more likely to articulate narratives in which the religious identity of their romantic interests was not of particular concern to them. Few intermarried Reform Jewish men worried about the religion of their children before those children were conceived and born--usually years into their intermarriages. In contrast, many intermarried Reform Jewish women worried about their children's religious identity as soon as they found themselves dating a non-Jewish man they liked, some blurting out to their stunned dates: "You might as well know, I'm going to raise Jewish children."

Both statistical and qualitative research show that Reform Jewish men who marry non-Jewish women are often deeply ambivalent about their Jewishness, and might be considered the "weak link" in American Jewish life today. The Jewish weaknesses of Patrilineal families are apparent in life cycle and social network aspects as well as religious aspects of Jewishness. Patrilineal Descent has brought more Jewish father/ non-Jewish mother families into Reform congregations, but it has not made intermarried Jewish fathers as a group more engaged by Jewishness.

The Jewish ambivalence of American Jewish fathers who marry non-Jewish women may be one significant reason that college students who come from intermarried families are far more likely to identify themselves as Jews if they have a Jewish mother rather than a Jewish father. Linda Sax's 2002 study of America's Jewish college freshmen showed that those with Jewish mothers were more than twice as likely to identify as Jews as those with Jewish fathers: of those freshmen having a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father (Matrilineal families), 38 percent identified as

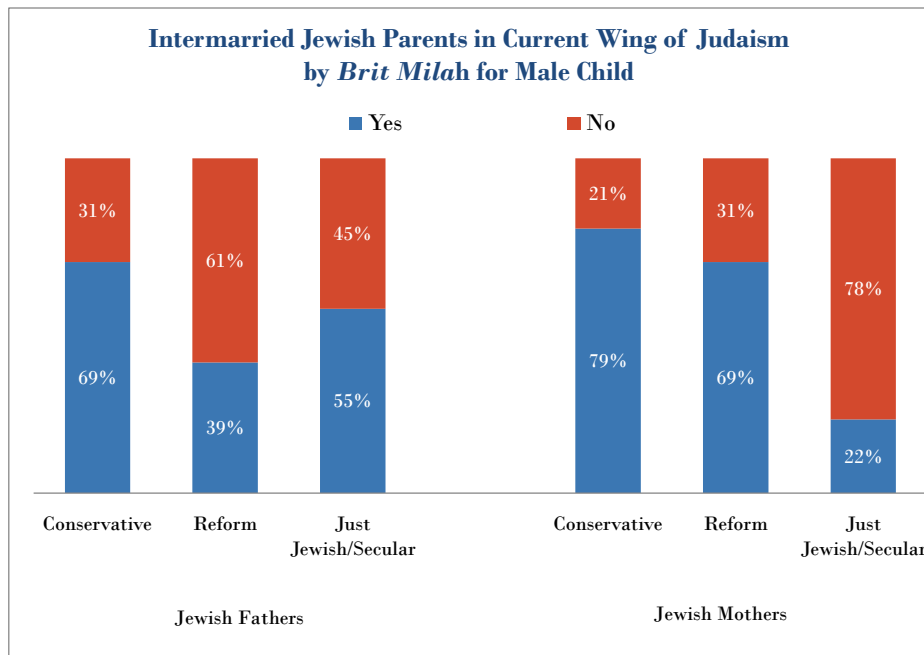
Jews. Of those having a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother (Patrilineal families), 15 percent identified as Jews.²⁸

A 2007 Brandeis study showed that weak Jewish connections continue to precede intermarriage.²⁹ For many mixed-married couples, religious issues do not become particularly intense until their first child is born. Such couples often assume that religion is not very important in their lives, and that their romantic feelings for each other can conquer their religious differences--until they face the prospect of their children being involved with ritual circumcisions or baptisms! Intermarried fathers in particular often exhibit little concern that their children be actively connected to Jewishness--although many are profoundly uncomfortable with the thought that their children would be raised as or consider themselves to be Christian. Men in Patrilineal families are more likely to oppose what they see as "too much" Christian behavior, rather than to support Jewish behavior. While Keren R. McGinity suggests that male indifference to Jewish cultural transmission is the result of "the tenacity of traditional gender roles"--"the presence of men at places where Jewish identity is nurtured (at home, the community center, the school, the synagogue) is more limited"³⁰--much of the data suggest a deeper and more systemic phenomenon.

One vivid symbol of the extraordinary differences in the ways in which Reform men and women behave and experience Jewishness is their widely differing commitment to the ritual circumcision of a male child—the Jewish *brit milah* (see Table 1). Ritual circumcision is still virtually universal among inmarried Jewish parents who affiliate with any wing of American Judaism, including Reform parents. However, among the intermarried population the picture is very different. In

Patrilineal families, 61 % of intermarried Reform men report that their male children have not had a *brit milah*. The figures for intermarried Reform women are dramatically opposite: in Matrilineal families, 69 % of women report their sons have had a *brit milah*.

Table 1



Intermarried Jewish men's comparative lack of commitment to the *brit milah* is perhaps surprising because popular psychological theories say that fathers like their sons to look like them. However, in-depth interviews with 254 geographically diverse informants (2001)³¹ revealed that while intermarried American Jewish women often take upon themselves the responsibility to raise Jewish children--with or without the cooperation of their non-Jewish husbands, in contrast many Jewish fathers are not

willing to battle with their non-Jewish wives over the issue of providing ritual circumcisions or Jewish education for their sons.

For example, an intermarried Jewish man in the Denver area described how he negotiated with himself--but not his wife--to create a compromise approach to the *bris milah* for his newborn son. "you know, I don't know what a *bris* means to me or to my life or anything like that." Knowing his wife would not object to a medical circumcision performed by a physician in the hospital: "Doctor Gonzales was the doctor who I don't think was Jewish, but I told him he was for about 15 minutes. And that he was my surrogate and that I would read a prayer while he did it....I sure hope God has a sense of humor." Meanwhile, an interview with his lapsed Catholic wife revealed that she was shocked he did not insist on a ritual circumcision. Her conclusion was, "It doesn't seem like it's that important to him. I mean I thought when we had our son, I was thinking, oh, okay, the *bris*, that's going to be a big deal." Her conclusion was that the child might not need Jewish education either: "My vision is that neither of my kids will have a bar or bar mitzvah." For her Jewish husband, a mixture of child-oriented, secularized "Jewish culture and Christian culture all mixed up together" are fine, with his primary concern being that the religious elements of Christianity not penetrate their home life:

They're not hearing about Jesus Christ or things like that. I mean it's more of the Christmas and the Easter egg hunt and Christmas gifts and a Christmas tree and Santa Claus, which I know as a Jew it's a little hard to think my daughter is growing up believing in Santa Claus, but she is....But we're not talking about going to church or anything like that.

It should be noted for context, that while only 6 percent of inmarried American Jews report that they have Christmas trees as a "cultural" symbol, 60 percent of mixed married families who identify as Jewish by religion have Christmas trees in their homes. (NJPS 2000-01). Intermarried Jewish fathers, like other American men, place less emphasis on religion and its importance. but tolerate practices geared to children.

Jewish Education for Children

Much research indicates that the future of American Jewishness is most profoundly affected by the education of children in Jewish homes. Years and intensity of formal and informal Jewish education is one of the best predictors of Jewish attachments in adulthood, even when all other factors are held constant. Many Jewish parents view giving their children a Jewish education as one of the most significant expressions of their **own** Jewish identity. In inmarried Jewish families affiliated with some wing of Judaism, male and female parents report similarly that the vast majority of their children receive Jewish education. In intermarried families, however, the gender of the Jewish parent makes a great difference as to whether or not the child receives Jewish education. NJPS 2000-01 showed that nearly three-quarters (73 %) of Reform Matrilineal families giving their children formal Jewish education. In contrast, among Reform Patrilineal families slightly over half (56 %) gave children Jewish education.

In Patrilineal families non-Jewish (usually Christian) religious education was being received by 17 % of the children of Jewish men, compared to 7 % in Matrilineal families, and well over half of the children of Jewish mothers and fathers who defined

themselves as “Secular” Jews.³² The narrative behind these statistical data is often the story of a non-Jewish spouse who is not secular like the Jewish spouse. More often than not, a religiously motivated non-Jewish mother and a secular Jewish father raise children in the mother's religious tradition. Indeed, many non-Jewish mothers articulate a willingness to raise the children in the Jewish tradition on the condition that the Jewish fathers will take an active role in their education, an offer which is ultimately not accepted.

Creating a Jewish Calendar Year

Passover has long been a well-known ritual in American popular culture. Non-Jews are frequently invited to Jewish Seders, and some churches have their own Seders to underscore the importance of the Passover texts, themes and observances to the birth of Christianity. Among Jews, Passover is often thought of as one of the most cherished holidays for creating family memories. It is not surprising that celebrating Passover through participating in some sort of Seder meal is almost universal among inmarried American Jewish parents who affiliate with any wing of Judaism. Among intermarried Jewish parents, however, in Patrilineal families 29 % of Reform Jewish fathers, compared to in Matrilineal families 19 % of Reform Jewish mothers said they did not attend a Passover Seder. Among secular intermarried Jews: 63 % of “Secular” Jewish fathers and 55 % of “Secular” Jewish mothers married to non-Jews reported no Passover Seder participation.

After Passover Seders, lighting Hanukkah candles is the most frequently practiced ritual by American Jewish parents, so the absence of that ritual, like the absence of the Passover Seder, is particularly meaningful in Jewish homes with children. In intermarried households, gender trumped denominational affiliations in reliability of Hanukkah candle lighting. Lighting candles all eight nights was reported in Patrilineal families by 55 % of intermarried Reform and 40 % of intermarried Conservative Jewish fathers, compared in Matrilineal families to 72 % of Reform and 79 % of Conservative intermarried Jewish mothers.

Synagogue attendance is much more frequently reported by Reform women than men—statistically corroborating extensive anecdotal reportage (and reversing, not surprisingly, patterns reported by and observed among Orthodox Jews). The differences between men and women in this regard were most dramatic among the intermarried population (see Tables 2 and 3): Reform and Conservative fathers married to non-Jewish women attend synagogue services much less frequently than Reform and Conservative mothers married to non-Jewish men. “Never” going to a synagogue was reported by 26 % of inmarried Reform fathers, 22 % of inmarried Reform mothers, 39 % of intermarried Reform fathers and 28 % of intermarried Reform mothers. Among the Conservative parents, only 4 % of inmarried fathers and 9 % of inmarried mothers said they never went to synagogue, compared to 43 % of intermarried fathers and 30 % of intermarried mothers.

There were striking gender and denominational differences at the high end of synagogue attendance as well: Among inmarried parents, monthly or weekly synagogue attendance was reported by 35 % of Reform and 54 % of Conservative fathers and by 40 % of Reform and 43 % of Conservative mothers. Among intermarried parents, monthly or weekly attendance was reported by 22 % of Reform and 9 % of Conservative fathers, and 26 % of Reform and 31 % of Conservative mothers.

As time goes on, sometimes non-Jewish mothers who have agreed to raise Jewish children become very interested in increasing the level of Jewishness in the family, and are discouraged from doing so by their Jewishly ambivalent husbands. One typical interview subject complained: "Cynthia is more Jewish than I am, a factor that has annoyed me. I said to her, why are you getting involved with all these Jewish organizations? It's annoying. I married a Christian who is now running around with the Jews--and I avoid them like the plague!" Other non-Jewish spouses sometimes regret downplaying their own religious background and decide to reassert themselves.

Table 2

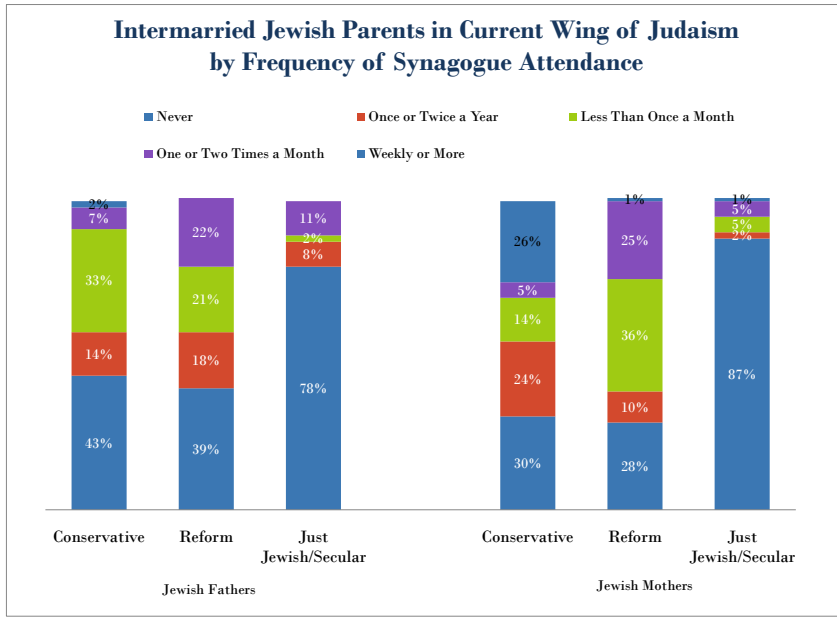
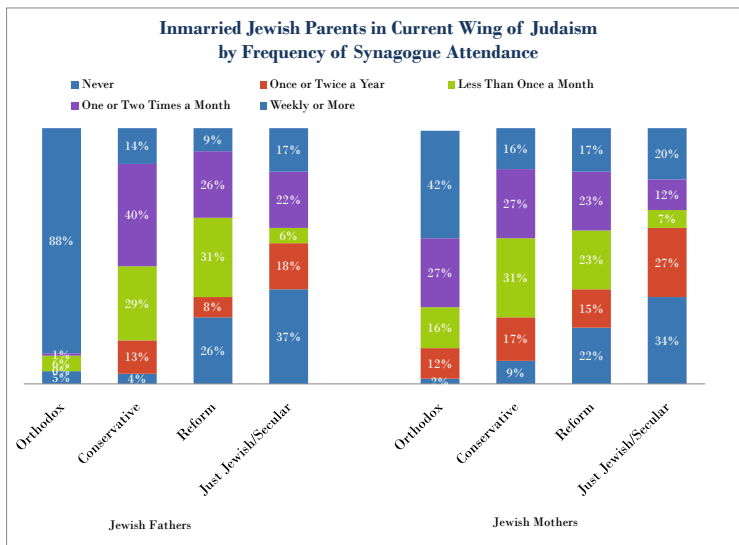


Table 3

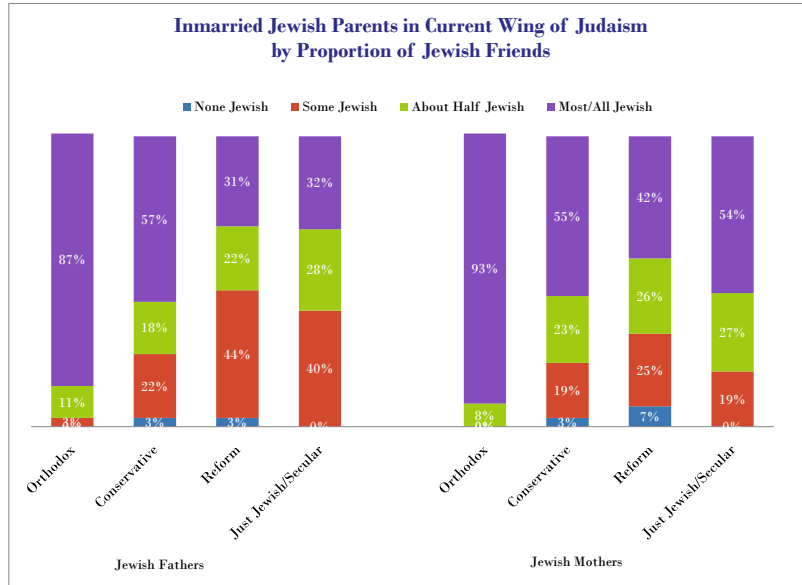


Families with Jewish Mothers Have Jewish Friends Who “Do Jewish”

Social networks have repeatedly proved to be a very salient aspect of Jewish connectedness. Statistically, friendship networks are one of the best predictors of Jewish values and behaviors. Inmarried Reform men and women differ somewhat at the high end of Jewish friendship circles and much more strikingly at the low end (see Table 4). Almost half of inmarried Reform men (47 %) report that “some” or “none” of their close friends are Jewish, compared to only one-third of inmarried Reform women (32 %). Reports of “mostly” Jewish or “all” Jewish were given by 31 % of inmarried Reform men and 42 % of inmarried Reform women, with 22 % of men and 26 % of women reporting that about half their friends are Jewish. [In comparison, inmarried Conservative Jewish parents have much higher numbers of Jews among their close friends than do inmarried Reform Jewish parents. Among inmarried Conservative Jewish parents, 57 % of men and 55 % of women each report having mostly or all Jewish friends and only one-quarter (25 %) of men and one-third (32 %) of women report “some” or “none.”]

Reform intermarried households report markedly lower levels of Jewish friends. Family type—rather than gender—seems to be the salient factor in Reform friendship circles. About two-thirds of intermarried Reform Jewish men (64 %) and Reform Jewish women (68 %) said “some” or “none” of their close friends were Jewish. Slightly more than a quarter of both men (28 %) and women (26 %) said about half of their close friends were Jewish. Only 8 % of men and 5 % of women reported mostly Jewish friends.

Table 4



The Centrality of Judaism and Jewish Activities

When asked, “How important is being Jewish to you?” (see Tables 5 and 6) Reform women, both inmarried and intermarried, were somewhat more likely to say their Jewishness was “very important” than were Reform men. 42 % of inmarried Reform fathers and 36 % of intermarried Reform fathers said it was “very important,” compared to 53 % of inmarried Reform mothers and 43 % of intermarried Reform mothers. In comparison, inmarried Conservative Jews were much more homogenous reporting the centrality of Jewishness: 69 % of inmarried Conservative fathers and 71 % of inmarried Conservative mothers said being Jewish was “very important” to them. However, intermarried Conservative Jews showed the sharpest differences

between men and women: among intermarried Conservative fathers, only 18 % said being Jewish was “very important” to them—compared to 65 % of intermarried Conservative Jewish mothers!

Table 5

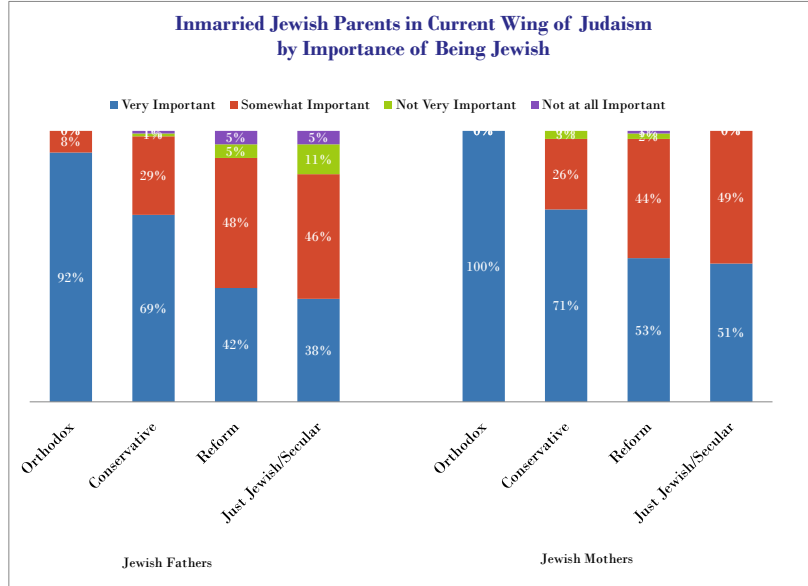
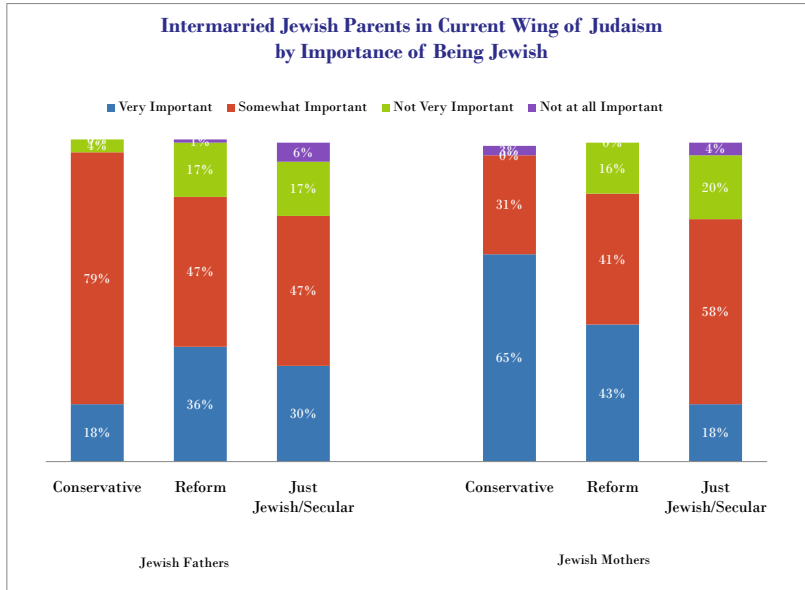


Table 6



Who Makes Decisions About the Child’s Religion?

In a little discussed question on the NJPS 2000-01 survey, parents were asked who makes the primary decision about their child’s religious life. As might be expected, the most characteristic overall respondent reply was that “both spouses” together make these decisions. However, there were significant and highly suggestive departures from this consensus answer along gender lines (see Tables 7 and 8). In inmarried Reform families, while only 5 % of fathers said they made religious decisions about their children on their own, with 83 % of fathers saying both spouses made decisions together, fully one-third of inmarried Reform mothers (33 %) felt personally responsible for their children’s religious decisions. These gender differences were even more pronounced—and arguably more significant—in intermarried Reform families. In intermarried Patrilineal Reform families, 30 % of

Jewish fathers said they made decisions about their children's religion on their own, with more than two-thirds of them (68 %) saying they and their non-Jewish wives made these decisions together. However, the answers were exactly and dramatically reversed in intermarried Matrilineal Reform families. Nearly two-thirds (64 %) of Reform mothers married to non-Jewish men said they made the decisions about their children's religion by themselves.

Table 7

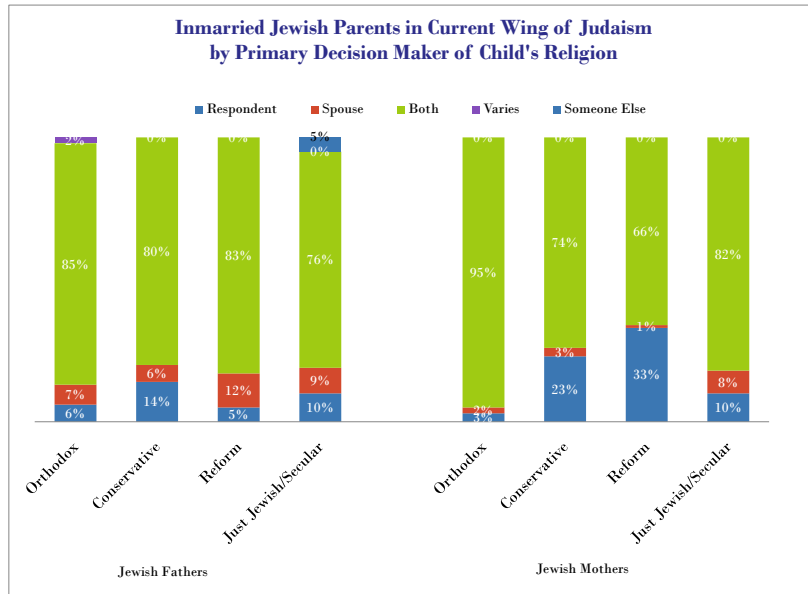
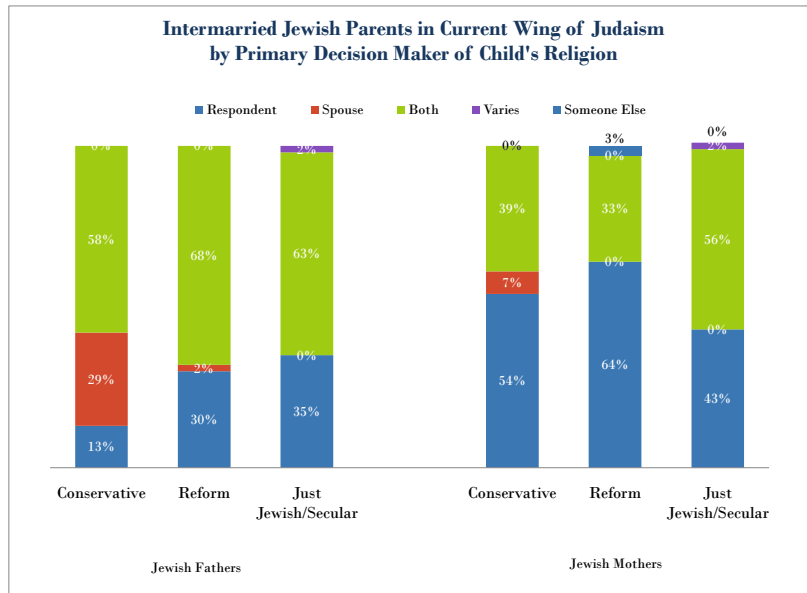


Table 8



Rabbinical Responses to Patrilineal Descent in American Reform Judaism

Intermarriage has been a challenging issue for the Reform movement. Interfaith households comprise a growing proportion of almost every Reform congregation—and the majority in some. On one hand, the large number of interfaith families that join Reform temples are flocking to instead of fleeing from engagement with the Jewish community, and most interfaith families joining Reform congregations seem interested in maintaining Jewish connections. On the other hand, only one out of four children of interfaith marriages grows up to create his or her own Jewish home.

Reform rabbis, educators and lay leaders have puzzled over the most appropriate strategies to utilize in serving the interfaith segment of the Reform

community. Some voice concern that focusing on families that include non-Jews shortchanges the inmarried or conversionary families that form their Jewish “core,” or that they may be unwittingly changing or distorting Judaism so as not to alienate or disturb their non-Jewish congregants. Among the many issues they puzzle over is how to encourage formal conversion into Judaism by non-Jewish spouses (especially non-Jewish women), while not making those who choose not to convert feel like second-class citizens.

The requirement that children in Reform Jewish schools must not be simultaneously receiving another form of religious training was one of the boundaries that distinguished Reform Jewish outreach programs from unaffiliated Jewish outreach programs such as those conducted by some federations and Jewish Community Centers, by outreach organizations like Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI), and by other independent institutions. This boundary between Reform Judaism and non-sectarian Outreach efforts, that requires that Judaism be the only religion children are formally schooled in, however, has not been complied with uniformly in Reform congregations, as Rabbi Eric Yoffie noted in his forthright 2005 sermon at the Houston Biennial. Yoffie said:

It sometimes happens that when an identifying Jew marries an identifying Christian, the couple will bring both religions into the family. They tell themselves that ‘if one religion is good, then two religions are better.’ But what does this does is cause confusion for a child, who recognizes at a very young age that he cannot be ‘both,’ and that he is being asked to choose between Mommy’s religion and Daddy’s religion....some parents, desperate to avoid conflict with each other, insist on passing the conflict on to their

children by asking them to decide for themselves. And they then enroll their child in both a Christian Sunday school and a Hebrew school.³³

After explaining why he feels that the parental strategy of raising children in two religions is psychologically damaging, Yoffie went on to explain that it is religiously damaging as well, and to urge Reform congregations to “formalize boundaries and say no.” Yoffie said:

Ten years ago, on the recommendation of our Outreach Commission, the Union Biennial passed a resolution encouraging our congregations to enroll only those children who are not receiving formal religious education in any other religion. That was a wise and humane decision. Still, some synagogues have been reluctant to comply. In some cases, they have adopted a “don’t ask, don’t tell,” policy. Even if a child is attending a church school, as long as the parents say nothing, the synagogue says nothing....

There is no escaping that dual education is harmful and unfair to the child. It also causes problems in the religious school, where teachers are often unable to handle the conflicts that arise. Experience has shown that it is far better for our congregations to adopt our 1995 policy and present it in a sensitive way to all concerned. As our resolution stated, our rabbis and educators should also meet with parents, explain the reasons for choosing a single religious tradition, and offer them study and counseling....Let us not forget the lesson of King Solomon who—faced with two mothers claiming the same child—knew that the parent who refused to cut the child in half was the one who loved him more.³⁴

In a focus group conversation several years ago with principals of Reform religious schools, I asked whether their admissions protocol included asking parents of prospective students whether their children would also be receiving Christian religious instruction. Virtually to a person they all confirmed that they did not ask this question, either in the admissions interview or at any later time during the years of schooling. The principals themselves hypothesized that many of the children they

taught probably were, but that they would rather not know about it, because knowing would raise issues that they were not comfortable dealing with.

Yoffie's statements discouraging dual religious education were featured in a URJ press release, but were nevertheless not much remarked upon in Jewish newspapers across the country. However, his statements in the same sermon encouraging conversion into Judaism were widely written up, and received a lot of attention—much of it negative. According to first-hand observers at the 2005 Biennial, a lot of whispering along with a scattering of half-hearted applause greeted Yoffie's assertions that conversion is the best form of outreach to the intermarried. Yoffie asserted that many Reform congregations had been so welcoming to intermarried families that they were actually discouraging conversion. In order to convey the power and lucidity of Yoffie's message here, I quote the complete section of the sermon in which he urges rabbis and congregations to be more assertive about encouraging conversion:

Another challenge that we face is the decline in the number of non-Jewish spouses who convert to Judaism. There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that interest in conversion has waned in our congregations. In the early years of Outreach, Alex Schindler often returned to this topic. Alex told us: "We need to ask. We must not forget to ask." And, for a while, our movement actively encouraged conversion. Many of our congregations began holding public conversion ceremonies during regular worship services. But such ceremonies are far rarer now. The reason, perhaps, is that by making non-Jews feel comfortable and accepted in our congregations, we have sent the message that we do not care if they convert.

But that is not our message. Why? Because it is a mitzvah to help a potential Jew become a Jew-by-choice. Because the synagogue is not a neutral

institution. It is committed to building a vibrant religious life for the Jewish people. Because we want families to function as Jewish families, and while intermarried families can surely do this, we recognize the advantages of an intermarried family becoming a fully Jewish family, with two adult Jewish partners. Judaism does not denigrate those who find religious truth elsewhere. Still our synagogues emphasize the grandeur of Judaism, and we joyfully extend membership in our covenantal community to all who are prepared to accept it.

And, by the way: Most non-Jews who are part of synagogue life *expect* (Yoffie's emphasis) that we will ask them to convert. They come from a background where asking for this kind of commitment is natural and normal, and they are more than a little perplexed when we fail to do so. So we need to say to the potential converts in our midst: "We would love to have you." And, in fact, **we owe them an apology for not having said it sooner.** Special sensitivities are required. Ask, but do not pressure. Encourage, but do not insist. And if someone says, "I'm not ready," listen. If we pursue conversion with a heavy hand, the result could be to generate resentment. And, yes, there will be those for whom conversion will never be an option. But **none of this is a reason for inaction. The time has come to reverse direction by returning to public conversions and doing all the other things that encourage conversion in our synagogues.** (My emphasis)

Yoffie's sermon itself generated resentment. Not only was it lukewarmly received at the Biennial, it was greeted with howls of outrage by Reform congregants whose children were married to non-Jews and by non-sectarian Jewish Outreach movement periodicals and Internet chat rooms. In these written formats, a new axiom or mantra soon appeared: "**Conversion is not Outreach. Urging conversion is not an Outreach strategy.**" The non-sectarian Outreach industry urged that Outreach professionals should scrupulously avoid giving the impression that Conversion is the

end-goal of Outreach efforts. They urged laypeople and professionals alike to clean up their language so that no perceived denigration to the intermarried could be intuited. Instead, engagement with Jewishness, as an end in itself, is the goal.

The reaction of the official Reform Outreach program³⁵ to the much-publicized conflict over the prominence of conversion as an outreach strategy has been mixed. On one hand, *Reform Judaism Online*, the URJ journal that advertises itself as the “world’s largest circulated Jewish magazine,” often includes warm stories about how converts love Judaic texts and Jewish holidays and life cycle events. On the other hand, Yoffie’s comments about pro-actively facilitating conversion are seldom mentioned. A close content analysis of the way Yoffie’s speech is presented in a new Reform discussion and study guide, Alan Bennett’s *Outreach: The Next Generation*, shows how his original message has been not very subtly transformed. In a section entitled “Presidential Calls for Outreach,” the emphasis of Yoffie’s talk has been shifted completely to celebrating the “heroism” of non-Jewish spouses who raise Jewish children—rather than on encouraging them to actually become Jews:

Extending the [Schindler’s] platform in 2005, URJ President Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie used the words “heroes of Jewish life” to describe those non-Jewish spouses who are involved in synagogue activities, offer active support to the Jewish involvements of spouses, learns about Jewish customs, attends synagogue worship from time to time, and commits to raising children as Jewish.³⁶

An unintended consequence of the Patrilineal Descent decision as a communal norm is that rabbis who articulate a preference for inmarriage sometimes evoke outrage from their congregants. An excellent example appeared recently in the

Religion News Service article, “Rabbi Gives Cupid a Nudge with JDate,” which describes a New Jersey rabbi’s Yom Kippur sermon at Temple Rodeph Torah. Rabbi Donald Webber reportedly “offered to personally pay for six-month memberships to JDate, the popular Jewish online dating service, for any singles in the congregation who asked.” So far, about nine singles in the congregation have accepted the rabbi’s offer and are meeting Jews through JDate. Weber, who had served this particular congregation for almost a quarter-century, elaborated during his sermon on the demographic reasons for his advocacy:

A recent study from HUC-JIR indicates that fewer than 10 % of grandchildren of intermarried parents identify as Jews.....We need you to look at Jewish people when you’re dating. There aren’t a lot of us around. You’re going to have to look in specific places. Number one? JDate. No joke. Half the weddings I’m doing now are people that met on JDate....Do we believe that it’s important enough that it must go on [Judaism], that we make a difference in the world? That if there are no Jews in the world that the world will be poorer than it is now? If we believe that, then we’re going to need to do some things about it.

While many of his congregants were very pleased with the sermon (and immediately emailed their young adult children advising them to enlist in the rabbi’s campaign for Jewish dating), others were angry and offended. As Rabbi Weber explained, those congregants heard his praise of the creation of exclusively Jewish families as a denigration of intermarried families—which he emphatically insists was neither in his mind nor his words. He analyzed congregational discomfort with rabbinic direction by commenting that rabbis who advocate on behalf of Jewish families try to find a “middle ground,” but are often perceived as “sounding like a dictator.”³⁷ The episode illustrates the extent to which the historical Jewish norm of endogamy (inmarriage) has been turned inside out: whereas exogamy (outmarriage, intermarriage) was historically considered transgressive and discouraged through social sanctions such as

ostracism or isolation, in America today any expression of disapproval of exogamy--or even a preference for endogamy--is considered transgressive and deserving of public and private critiques. Even rabbis who try to promote endogamy are perceived to be crossing the line.

Conclusion: Assessing Current Realities

"The eventual sociological implications of patrilineal descent are still unknown," Dana Evan Kaplan asserted in his discussion of "Patrilineal Descent: The Reform Movement's Watershed Resolution of 1983" (2000). However, repeated studies, including the research discussed in this paper makes the sociological implications clear.

In terms of welcoming and drawing close Patrilineal families and their children, for the minority who do indeed draw close, the decision has been a powerful success:

- **Highly identified Jewish children of Patrilineal families who believe themselves to be--and act as though they are--fully enfranchised Jews enrich American Jewish life today.** These children of Patrilineal families are enriching the Jewish people on many levels and in many ways. Although statistically the children of Jewish mothers are far more likely to identify as Jews than are the children of Jewish fathers--even in long term Patrilineal Descent environments--there is no question that some children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers are profoundly drawn to Jews and Judaism. These children illustrate the power and validity of the concept of *zera yisrael*. Because they have been raised with the idea that they are fully Jewish through their fathers, some of these offspring feel

unambivalently Jewish. Some are involved with Judaism as a religious faith. Some focus on ethnicity and peoplehood, and spend significant time in Israel. Some love--and create--Jewish cultural expressions. Such patrilineally descended Jews often identify with Jewish destiny. Others yearn for and reach out for more Jewish connections. They are significant members of the Jewish community and should be treated as such.

The sociological impact, however, includes several areas of concern:

- **Patrilineal Descent accelerates declining numbers of mothers in Jewish families who identify as Jews** in two ways: (1) It is associated with lower rates of conversion into Judaism by non-Jewish wives of Jews; and (2) It is associated with high rates of intermarriage in which there is no advantage to marrying a Jewish woman. Homes with Jewish mothers are statistically much more Jewishly active and connected than homes without Jewish mothers. This is true both of mothers who are born Jews and mothers who convert into Judaism. Conversionary marriages--in which a born non-Jew converts into Judaism and becomes a "Jew by choice," to use a popular phrase--were, prior to the Patrilineal Descent decision, primarily the conversions of non-Jewish wives into Judaism. Many of these conversions took place before the marriage, so that the marriage ceremony could use the traditional language of building a "true house of Israel, according to the laws of Moses and Israel." Others took place after marriage, often before a child had a Jewish birth welcoming ceremony or bar/bat mitzvah. The motivation was to create an "all of one kind" family. By the time the Patrilineal Descent decision was passed in 1983, rates of conversion by non-Jewish women were already declining; conversions have decreased

even more over the past 30 years. While we have no way of knowing whether Patrilineal Descent influenced this decline, it must be recognized that since according to Patrilineal Descent, the children of Jewish men are considered Jewish even when the mother remains a non-Jew, there is in a sense no "reason" for her to convert formally into Judaism.

- **Jewish men who marry non-Jewish women--thus creating Patrilineal Jewish families--are among the least Jewishly connected Jews in America today.** The alienation of men and boys from Judaism continues to be a systemic problem in American Jewish societies. It affects not only religious rituals and synagogue attendance, but also attachments to Jewish peoplehood, friendship circles, marriage choices, caring about Jews in Israel and around the world. This alienation both contributes to and is exacerbated by intermarriage, and is on full display in Patrilineal families: For example, when the 2005 Boston Jewish Population Study, conducted by researchers at the Steinhardt Institute of Brandeis University, was released in November 2007, headlines in Jewish newspapers across America spotlighted one finding: 60 percent of Boston families with one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent reported raising their children as Jews. What didn't make the headlines from the same study was the finding that in Matrilineal families nine out of ten intermarried Jewish mothers intended to "raise Jewish children," compared to just over half of Jewish fathers in Patrilineal families.³⁸ It is important to place the Patrilineal Descent decision into the context of the profound gender imbalance currently evident in American liberal Judaism. American Jewish women are more involved with Jewishness than are Jewish men in almost every

religious and secular-ethnic sphere. As this essay has discussed and research details³⁹, Jewish men who marry non-Jewish women are statistically strikingly less Jewishly involved than intermarried Jewish women. Homes in which the only Jewish parent is a weakly connected Jewish man rank among the most marginal within American Jewry, partially because they do not include a Jewish mother.

- **Patrilineal descent removes the marital "market advantage" that Jewish women previously enjoyed, further undermining the status of Jewish women.** The Patrilineal Descent decision has arguably had a negative effect on the personal options of Jewish women, who, as a group, still articulate a preference for Jewish spouses. Jewish men and Jewish women become "equal" as parents who produce children with Jewish status. A Jewish man need not marry a Jewish woman if he wishes to have Jewish children. The practical, social-psychological result has been that Jewish men, for decades more prone than Jewish women to intermarriage, are now more liberated than ever to do so. Meanwhile Jewish women now have an intermarriage rate about equal to that of Jewish men, partially as a response to marriage market forces. While the normalization of Patrilineal Descent within the Reform movement has institutionalized inclusiveness to such an extent that even intermarried families who avoid synagogues say they have never been made to feel uncomfortable by Jewish worshippers, it is still primarily families with Jewish mothers who affiliate with synagogues and temples today. The ambivalence toward Jews and Judaism that presumably plays some role in the intermarriage of some Jewish men also plays a role in the religious character of their households.

As we have noted, interview research reveals that Jewish women who marry non-Jewish men often report that they would have preferred initially to marry a Jewish man.

- **Outreach efforts that focus on welcoming non-Jewish mothers in Patrilineal households often shift emphasis away from Jewish fathers and mothers.** Organizations not affiliated with any wing of American Judaism, such as Jewish Outreach to the Intermarried (JOI) have focused much of their energy on the non-Jewish mothers in Patrilineal families, creating JOI "Mother's Circles" that reach out to non-Jewish mothers raising Jewish children. These efforts are highly effective in many ways, and have the great educational advantage of helping to build social networks as well as Jewish cultural literacy. They created, for example, a series of JOI Mother's Day Cards that celebrate that American holiday with a special "Thank you" to non-Jewish mothers raising Jewish children. The implication that non-Jewish mothers of Jewish children are special carries the perhaps unintended message that Jewish mothers are less special. Moreover, this focus has two limitations: (1) It does not address Jewish male ambivalence toward Jews and Judaism. Because they are aimed primarily at non-Jewish mothers and do not also deal with the ambivalence (and sometimes outright antipathy) of Jewish fathers in Patrilineal families, "Mother's Circles" and efforts like them can only go so far in bringing Patrilineal families closer to Jewishness. (2) Celebrating and lionizing non-Jewish mothers raising Jewish children--and not the Jewish mothers who raise Jewish children--such efforts may, however

unintentionally, further undermine the sociological status of Jewish mothers.

- **Patrilineal Descent isolates American Reform Judaism from liberal/progressive worldwide Judaism as well as from American Orthodox and Conservative Jewish communities.** Significantly, Progressive, Liberal, or Reform congregations around the world do not necessarily follow the lead of American Reform Judaism that the children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers are presumed to be Jewish if they are being raised as Jews. Indeed, at an international conference of liberal Jewish movements in San Francisco in 2011, it became apparent that non-American Reform leaders have often resisted adopting the American Patrilineal Descent example. Diaspora communities that are strongly tied to Israel, such as South African Jewry, feel deeply affected by (and vulnerable to) the knowledge that Israeli religious authorities do not accept patrilineally Jewish children as Jews, according to journalist Sue Fishkoff. For these and other reasons, Patrilineal Descent is "not catching on in Reform worldwide."⁴⁰ Thus, Patrilineal Descent is a factor in the current prominence of Reform Judaism in the United States--and, conversely, Patrilineal Descent is a wedge issue not only separating Reform Judaism from Conservative and Orthodox Judaism but also from other international Reform communities.

Policy implications:

The best case scenario for the children of Jewish Patrilineal families is that they should resemble the children of two Jewish parents, coming from households with

Jewish mothers. For both inmarried and intermarried families, the Jewish success rate--regardless of parentage--is highest among children who experience rich Jewish educational backgrounds, including formal Jewish education through the teen years, Jewish camping, and trips to Israel. Among American Jews today, girls and women are more likely to have received greater Jewish education than Jewish males. For this and other reasons, as a group (of course there are many exceptions) Jewish men who intermarry often go into the marriage already apathetic or ambivalent about their Jewishness. Men are much less likely than women to become pillars of Jewishness in intermarried homes.

Nevertheless, there are some success stories. Some Jewishly identified children of Patrilineal families have weak Jewish backgrounds, but at a point in their life journeys some encounter inspiring Jewish interventions, such as a welcoming rabbi or teacher, or, increasingly, a Birthright Israel trip. Such children, teens, and adult progeny of intermarriage can benefit from the same follow-through activities as the children of two Jews. (Yet another argument for creating effective follow-through programs.)

1. Beyond this, we actually know little about strategies to bring boys, young men, and Jewish males in general closer to Jews, Judaism, and Jewish life. The Jewish community has yet to fully confront and deal with this Jewish gender imbalance. The community as a whole--not only intermarried families--is affected by male disaffection. Jewish leaders and educators need to learn more about how to connect

American males to their Jewishness: This paper's first policy recommendation is a plea for **further research into strategies for connecting liberal American Jewish males**--including those in mixed married families--to Jewishness.

2. The second policy recommendation is to **increase an emphasis on conversion**. It is very unlikely that the Reform movement will wish to rescind the 1983 decision. Instead, Eric Yoffie's 2005 plea that American Jews, especially in the Reform movement, incorporate warmer encouragement of conversion as an outreach strategy seems particularly appropriate now. Conversionary families are very similar to inmarried families in their Jewish connections and activities. Gentle, welcoming encouragement of conversion may be the most beneficial outreach strategy currently available to the Jewish community.

3. Thirdly, many painful situations are caused by the reality that Jews converted by Reform rabbis are often not embraced within the Israeli context. Despite the political and religious delicacy that would no doubt be required, this paper concludes by recommending that the Israeli government pursue more concerted efforts to find ways to allow populations both inside and outside of Israel **who think of themselves as Jewish to achieve official Israeli governmental** (even if not Orthodox halakhic) **recognition** that they share the destiny of the Jewish people.

Discussing historical Orthodox attitudes toward conversion, David Ellenson and Daniel Gordis wrote, "the parameters of the law and its holdings are forged in the crucible of life by human beings who bring intense convictions in specific historical contexts to the cases that come before them."⁴¹ This paper urges that in the specific context of America in the second decade of the 21st century, faced with the historically unusual situation of widespread intermarriage and weakened male Jewish connectedness, a response of increasing educational efforts for all segments of the

population, and welcoming non-Jewish spouses of Jews to formally become part of the Jewish people through conversion would retain the positive results, and help to mitigate the areas of concern produced by Patrilineal Descent.

Endnotes

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- ¹ "Reform Movement's Resolution on Patrilineal Descent," Report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent, adopted on March 15, 1983. Can be accessed at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/source/Judaism/patrilineal1.html>.
- ² Jonathan Ament, *UJC Report Series on NJPS 2000-01, American Jewish Religious Denominations, Report 10* (New York: United Jewish Communities, 2005), pp. 8-9.
- ³ Jacob J. Staubb, "A Reconstructionist View on Patrilineal Decent," in *Judaism* 133, Vol 34, No. 1 (Winter 1985) pp. 97-106, notes that the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot (FRCH) passed a 1968 resolution and a 1979 resolution, both of which declared "that the Reconstructionist Movement and its affiliated institutions will consider these children [born of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother] if the parents have committed themselves to rear their children as Jews by providing circumcision for boys, Jewish education for boys and girls, and if the children fulfill the requirements of bar/bat mitzvah or confirmation." Although the American Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) was the first to admit women and to make the RRC a comfortable place for gay and lesbian Jews, and has long conveyed messages of inclusiveness and acceptance, Reconstructionist Judaism is numerically small.
- ⁴ See Mathew Frey Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identitties in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, NY: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
- ⁵ Paul R. Spikard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
- ⁶ "Reform Movement's Resolution on Patrilineal Descent," *op.cit.*
- ⁷ *Contemporary American Reform Responsa 38. Patrilineal and Matrilineal Descent* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, October 1983), can be accessed at: data.ccarnet.org.
- ⁸ "Reform Movement's Resolution on Patrilineal Descent," *op.cit.*, p. 4 of 4.
- ⁹ Report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent (p. 2 of 4).
- ¹⁰ Alexander Schindler, Remarks at the Clal Conference on Jewish Unity (Princeton, NJ, March 16, 1986), in Aron Hirt-Manheimer, ed., *The Jewish Condition: Essays on Contemporary Judaism Honoring Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler* (New York: UAHC Press, 1995), pp. 259-260.
- ¹¹ Dana Evan Kaplan, *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 236.
- ¹² Rabbi David Ellenson, personal interview at Brandeis University, March 14, 2013.
- ¹³ David Ellenson, "The Integrity of Reform Within *Kelal Yisrael*" (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis 97th Annual Convention, ed. Elliot L. Stevens, 1986) XCVI: 21-32.
- ¹⁴ David Ellenson, "The Rock from Which they were Cleft," review essay of Haim Amsalem, *Zera Yisrael (Seed of Israel)* and *Mekor Yisrael (Source of Israel)* in *Jewish Review of Books* (Winter 2012): 41-43.
- ¹⁵ Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Matrilineal Principle in Historical Perspective, in *Judaism, op. cit.*, pp. 5-13."
- ¹⁶ J. David Bleich, "The Patrilineal Principle: The Crucial Concern," in *Judaism, op. cit.*, pp. 14-19.
- ¹⁷ Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Jewish Identity and Jewish Descent," in *Judaism, op. cit.*, pp. 78-84.
- ¹⁸ Robert Gordis, "Patrilineal Descent--a Solution or a Problem," in *Judaism, op. cit.*, pp. 32-40.
- ¹⁹ Joel Roth, "An Halakhic perspective on an Historical Foundation," in *Judaism, op. cit.*, pp. 62-67.
- ²⁰ Judith Haputman, "Patrilineal Descent--An Examination of the Issue, in *Judaism, op. cit.*, pp. 45-49.
- ²¹ Reform rabbis and laypersons began to spend more time in Israel, and became attached to Hebrew, contemporary Israeli music, Jewish dance, and other aspects of Israeli culture, including the Israeli

secular attachment to the holidays of the Jewish calendar year. The formal choir began to give way to guitar-playing rabbis, in some settings, who played melodies they had heard first in Israel. Rabbis and other Reform visitors to Israel came home with diverse Israeli *kippot* (ritual head coverings), and some of them proceeded to wear their acquisitions to Temple.

²² Harriet Hartman and Moshe Hartman, *Gender and American Jews: Patterns in Work, Education & Family in Contemporary Life* (Waltham, MA: HBI Series on Jewish Women/ Brandeis University Press, 2009), p. 138.

²³ Scholars seem to be divided as whether this is a universal phenomenon or not. "By now it is so taken for granted that women are more religious than men that every competent quantitative study of religiousness routinely includes sex as a control variable," Rodney Stark, "Physiology and Faith: Addressing the "Universal" Gender Difference in Religious Commitment", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Sep., 2002), pp. 495-505. Stark articulates the supposedly universal assumption. While some researchers assert innate psychological leanings are the basis for female religiosity, others suggest differential socialization creates gender differences, arguing: "men are assigned [by society] roles that are more instrumental than socio-emotional and thus are less concerned with problems of morality," but women are more relational in their development and more inclined toward religiosity.

Research, however, shows feminization is neither universal nor inevitable: Examining the intersection of gender and religion around the world, D. Paul Sullins (2006) uses international data revealing that in religions other than Christianity—especially Judaism and Islam—men are often equally or more religious than women. Outside the United States, gendered approaches to religion are diverse. Men, rather than women, are often perceived as more religious. Sullins shows, "Worldwide, there is no measure of religiousness on which Jewish females score higher than Jewish males. Jewish men report significantly higher rates of synagogue attendance and belief in life after death than do Jewish women; otherwise, there is no sex difference in religiousness among Jews." D. Paul Sullins, "Gender and Religion: Deconstructing Universality, Constructing Complexity," in *American Journal of Sociology* 112, No. 3 (November 2006), pp. 838-880, pp. 844, 846.

²⁴ Graphic figures prepared by Daniel Parmer, in Sylvia Barack Fishman and Daniel Parmer, *Matrilineal Ascent/ Patrilineal Descent: The Growing Gender Imbalance in Contemporary Jewish Life* (Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, 2008).

²⁵ Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Double Or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage* (Waltham, MA.: Brandeis University Press/ University Press of New England, 2004). This book is based on 254 in-depth interviews with husbands and wives in four American locations: New England, New Jersey, Atlanta, and Denver, from 1999 to 2000. The initial report was published as *Jewish and Something Else: A Study of Mixed Married Families* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2001). The research was supported by the American Jewish Committee and implemented by researchers at Brandeis University.

²⁶ Fishman and Parmer.

²⁷ The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 was conducted by the United Jewish Communities (UJC), Lawrence Kotler-Berkowitz, et. al. 5,148 respondents were interviewed. See www.jewishdatabank.org for more information and to download the data.

²⁸ Linda J. Sax, *America's Jewish College Freshmen: Current Characteristics and Recent Trends Among Students Entering College* (Los Angeles: University of California Higher Education Research Institute, Hillel Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, 2002), p. 227.

²⁹ Leonard Saxe, Fern Chertok, Benjamin Phillips, "It's not just who stands under the chuppah: Jewish identity and mixed marriage" (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University's Steinhardt Social Research Institute, 2007).

³⁰ Keren R. McGinity, "Gender Matters: Jewish identity, intermarriage, and parenthood," in *Contact: The Journal of the Steinhardt Foundation for Jewish Life* 14, No. 2 (Winter 2012):12-13. See also McGinity's books, *Still Jewish: A History Women and Intermarriage in America* (New York: NUY Press, 2009), and *Strangers in the Fold: Jewish Men, Intermarriage, and Fatherhood* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

³¹ Fishman, *Double Or Nothing?*

³² Increasing Jewish secularism and intermarriage are interrelated: secular American Jews are more likely to marry non-Jews, and intermarried Jews are more likely than in-married Jews to call themselves "secular." According to the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2008, which examined secularism in the United States, percentages of American Jews who identify as "secular," "unaffiliated," or "cultural Jews who identify by ethnicity alone" rose from 20 percent in 1990 to 37

percent in 2008. "I attribute the shift to a combination of disaffection from Judaism and intermarriage," commented key investigator, Dr. Barry Kosmin. (Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), 2008* (Hartford, CT.: Trinity College, 2008). Indeed, in the NJPS 2000-01 and in earlier ARIS studies it was already apparent that children raised in intermarried households were far less likely to be "raised as Jews," far less likely to receive Jewish education, and much more likely than those raised in inmarried households to identify as "secular" when they reached adulthood.³² Both the likelihood of creating an intermarried household and the likelihood of identifying as secular increase when intermarriage becomes the family tradition (NJPS Report 2000-01: Variations in Intermarriage, Intermarriage and Current Jewish Connections (NJPS United Jewish Communities/ Jewish Federations of North America). As we have noted, around three quarters of Jews with only one Jewish parent marry a non-Jew. About one-third of American Jewish intermarried families nationally say they are "raising child/ren as Jews." Among those intermarried couples not raising children as Jews many report that the household has no religious affiliation. Almost 60 percent with only one Jewish parent who were "raised as Jews" are intermarried, and about 86 percent of those with only one Jewish parent who were "not raised as Jews" are intermarried

³³ Sermon by Rabbi Eric Yoffie at the Houston Biennial, Houston, TX, Nov. 19, 2005, Union for Reform Judaism 68th General Assembly (<http://urj.org/yoffie/biennialsermon05/>).

³⁴ Yoffie, Sermon 05, *op. cit.*

³⁵ For further discussion of this phenomenon, see Sylvia Barack Fishman, "The Jewish Outreach Enterprise: Rhetoric and Reality," in Steven T. Katz and Steven Bayme, eds., *Continuity and Change* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 2011), pp. 105-129.

³⁶ Alan D. Bennett, "Outreach: The Next Generation discussion and study guide," in *Reform Judaism online: Union for Reform Judaism* (<http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles>; Winter 2007), p. 1 of 6.

³⁷ Jeff Diamant, "Rabbi gives Cupid a nudge with JDate," in *USA Today*, Nov. 8.

³⁸ Leonard Saxe, et. al., *Jewish Population Study of Greater Boston* (Waltham, MA.: Brandeis University Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, and the Boston Combined Jewish Philanthropies, 2005).

³⁹ Fishman and Parmer, *Matrilineal Ascent/ Patrilineal Descent*.

⁴⁰ Sue Fishkoff, "Why is patrilineal descent not catching on in Reform worldwide?" *JTA Jewish and Israeli News*, San Francisco, February 15, 2011.

⁴¹ David Ellenson and Daniel Gordis, *Pledges of Jewish Allegiance: Conversion, Law, and Policymaking in Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century Orthodox Responsa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2012), p. 166.