American Jews for Jewish Family Life

View Judaism

Editorial Features

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Maurice and Marilyn Cohen
Center for Modern Jewish Studies
Brandeis University

Cohen Center
Researcher Explores Demand for Jewish Child Care

"Most Jewish mothers in the United States today are employed outside the home. The issue for working mothers is not whether they will use child care—
but whether they will use Jewish child care or a nonsectarian arrangement," says Gabriel Berger, research fellow at the Cohen Center.

Berger is exploring the changing realities and communal opportunities surrounding the area of Jewish child care, working from a variety of sources, including Jewish population studies, government documents, and other research literature.

He notes that the mushrooming need for Jewish child care has changed the nature of the potential clientele. American Jewish women in the past typically dropped out of the labor force when they began families. Those Jewish women who continued to work during their child-rearing years tended to cluster around two ends of the economic spectrum: either they were high powered—and often affluent—
career women, who were able to hire live-in help, or they were women of restricted financial means, either
because of divorce or low household income. Therefore Jewish community planners for many years approached child care as a social service needed by limited numbers of mostly lower income Jewish clients.

Today, however, the great majority of Jewish middle-class women continue working through their children's preschool years. Ironically, costs for live-in help are prohibitively expensive; particularly in those cities that offer the best employment opportunities for women. For example, in Boston, where

opportunity for Jewish educators and planners," says Berger. "Young families are otherwise often unaffiliated, and they may regard Jewish involvements as too expensive or as not meeting their needs. However, in the area of child care they represent a ready, strongly motivated market for Jewish educational services." Jewish parents express a strong preference for Jewish-sponsored child care. Moreover, Jewish child care can give both children and parents access to Jewish environments that they would not otherwise experience.

The preponderance of middle- and upper-middle-class parents among those Jews requesting Jewish child care indicates that Jewish childcare programs could be made far more self-supporting than is commonly supposed by Jewish communal planners.

"Jewish families need child care," Berger emphasizes. "They prefer Jewish child care. Providing Jewish child care does not undermine the Jewish family—on the contrary, it provides an important support for the Jewish family. This is especially true if the child care program is designed as an educational program."

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<th>Total Household Income of Households Needing Child Care Services</th>
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<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
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<td>Less than $40K</td>
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<td>Baltimore (1985)</td>
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<td>San Francisco (1987)</td>
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Spotlight on Staff

Gabriel Berger Named Research Fellow

Gabriel Berger, who holds two Brandeis University master's degrees, a magna cum laude graduate of Brandeis University, has done graduate work in Community Planning and Area Development at the University of Rhode Island and held the Sachar International Fellowship in England, where she studied the progress of women's rights in England.

Before coming to Brandeis University for his graduate work, Berger was a consultant for the Argentinian Federation of Jewish Community Centers and the Human Resources and Organizations, Inc., both in Buenos Aires. At the Argentinian Federation, he assisted four community centers in organizational planning and conducted board development programs and staff training sessions. He was also a researcher for the American Joint Distribution Committee, where he published a study on Perspectives in Community Work with College Students, and he was the director of the college students department of the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina.

During his studies at the Hornstein Program, Berger was a graduate intern at the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, where he staffed a small foundation that provides grants to students projects.

In addition to Berger's research on Jewish child care, described in this issue of Centerpieces, he assists in the organization of data and in the writing of proposals. He is currently involved in a research project on patterns of organizational affiliation and movement in a number of American Jewish communities.

Sharon Sasser Joins Cohen CMJS Staff

Sharon L. Sasser, has been named a research assistant at the Center. Sasser, a magna cum laude graduate of Brandeis University, has done graduate work in Community Planning and Area Development at the University of Rhode Island and held the Sachar International Fellowship in England, where she studied the progress of women's rights in England.

Sasser assisted Gary Tobin in conducting research for Jewish Perceptions of Antisemitism. As part of this effort she collected information from Jewish community relations agencies and interviewed key professionals and lay leaders. She has also been responsible for gathering data from Jewish community population studies for Center presentations for the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Jewish Appeal.

Before coming to the Cohen Center, Sasser was research associate and co-contractor of the Brookline Demographic Study, where she authored volumes on The Neighborhood Profiles and The Public School Enrollment Profiles.

Sasser is currently working on a study of Jewish singles and coordinating A Profile of American Jewry in the 1980s to be published by the Center.

New and Noteworthy

Tobin Views Antisemitism Through Eyes of American Jews

"Most younger Jews have no tolerance for intolerance," says Dr. Gary A. Tobin, director of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, in his new book, Jewish Perceptions of Antisemitism. "The American Jewish community as a whole does not believe that it has to hide its Jewishness or abandon it in order to escape antisemitism. American Jews know they cannot put an end to antisemitic beliefs, but they are committed to fight to contain their expression."

Tobin's book, written with the assistance of Center researcher Sharon L. Sasser, differs from earlier studies of antisemitism in that it presents the phenomenon as it is perceived by American Jews. It explores such issues as the twin processes of assimilation and assimilation; the dual affection that American Jews feel for America and Israel; denial, warpiness, and fear as responses to antisemitism; how the Jewish press influences perceptions; general community and antisemitic trends; Jewish institutional approaches to antisemitism; combating antisemitism; and how Jews measure the "reality" of antisemitism.

European Jewry and American immigrants often felt that enduring the antisemitic behaviors of the non-Jews surrounding them was part of being Jewish. Therefore, earlier generations of Jews paid little attention to all but the most provocative incidents, notes Tobin. Contemporary American Jews, in contrast, take freedom from racism and bigotry as their birthright. They are more likely to register—and resist—even "minor" indignities of their freedom from harassment.

"Paradoxically, because of their free movement in the more open society of today, the American Jews are more likely than their parents were to come into contact with subtle antisemitic behaviors and attitudes," Tobin points out. "Thus, younger, more assimilated third and fourth generation American Jews, who have many non-Jewish contacts, often say that they are experiencing antisemitism. However, the antisemitism they encounter tends to be interpersonal and nonviolent, rather than overt, violent, frequently government-sanctioned antisemitism typical of the pre-American experience."

One form of "antisemitism" that American Jews often mention is the relentless focus that the general press accords to news about Israel. Because most American Jews are both loyal Americans and deeply devoted to the survival of Israel, they are especially sensitive to the nuances and implications of press reportage of events in the Middle East.

"Israel is constantly in the news," Tobin asserts. "Events that take place in Israel are sometimes reported as if they were happening in Nebraska or California. But the news is not always good, and in many Jewish eyes the coverage is not always balanced or 'fair.' Jewish perceptions of antisemitism turn out to be quite accurate. Of particular concern with anti-Israel/anti-Zionist diatribes is well founded. Most anti-Israelism is connected in both rhetoric and deed to antisemitism. The interchangeable use of Zionism and Jew in anti-Israel propaganda is not lost upon either Jewish or non-Jewish recipient."

American Jews are kept abreast of trends in antisemitism not only through their own experiences and those of their friends but also, and even primarily, through information gathered by the Jewish defense institutions, such as the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Jewish local

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Gary A. Tobin, Director
Lawrence Stemberg, Associate Director

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Center Research

Inclusive Scale Will Measure Developments in Jewish Identity

Does a class in Jewish attitudes toward death and dying increase one’s level of Jewish identity? How about a one-week trip to Israel or participation in a Jewish theater group? Which activities should Jewish community planners regard as the most effective in promoting strong feelings of allegiance to Jewish life?

“We can’t measure people’s hearts to see how committed they are to Judaism and the Jewish people, but we can measure tangible manifestations of Jewish identity, such as Jewish attitudes and behaviors,” says Mordecai Rimon, research associate at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. Rimon has devised a scale that will be used to measure the impact of selected activities on Jewish identity, and also to compare communities in terms of their Jewish identity.

“Jewish identity” and “assimilation” are slippery terms, explains Rimon. It is important for researchers and Jewish community planners to adopt an objective, multifaceted definition of Jewish identity, which will enable them to accurately measure developments in American Jewish life. The scale will serve as an indicator of a theoretical construct of Jewish identity. Researchers will be able to examine groups of American Jews to determine their Jewish identity level before and after a variety of educational programs and life experiences. Changes in the measurable Jewish identity level will suggest the potential of the given activity to enhance or detract from intensity of Jewish feeling and behavior.

Rimon’s scale includes three basic categories: Jewish background, attitudes, and behaviors. Background data are based on generation, place in life cycle, and level of Jewish education and attendance, visiting Israel, and Jewish friendship patterns.

Rimon is testing his Jewish identity scale using data from the population studies of Jewish communities across the country. He is discovering which indicators of Jewish identity correlate highly with each other. In general, he observes, variables correlate highly within each group. Although individual factors do not necessarily correlate highly with each other, they all fit into a larger, rich and multifaceted assembly that reflects Jewish identity.

These discrepancies, Rimon suggests, emphasize the importance of a multifaceted scale, which measures Jewish identity not by one but by all three relevant groupings: background, attitudes, and behavior. “Ideally,” he adds, “we would be able to supplement the scale with data on knowledge about Judaism and psychological identity factors. Since these are not measured by the data we currently possess, we can make our scale as accurate as possible by making it as inclusive as possible. When we understand how Jewish activities affect increases and decreases in the various factors on the scale of Jewish identity, educators, planners, and community leaders will be able to work more effectively toward strengthening the Jewish commitments of contemporary American Jews.”

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One Case Study: CJF Women’s Division Leaders

The inclusive Jewish identity scale devised by Dr. Mordecai Rimon at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies can be used to compare groups of American Jews with each other. When communal leaders have an accurate picture of the level of Jewish identity found in a population, they can more effectively plan programming, recruitment, and fund-raising approaches for that particular group.

One case study in Jewish identity run by Cohen Center research staff is based on a survey of Council of Jewish Federation (CJF) Women’s Division leaders. The data for this study were gathered from 130 completed questionnaires, composed by Center staff, which were distributed to Women’s Division leaders during and after the 1986 General Assembly of CJF.

The Women’s Division leaders were a distinctive group, despite the fact that respondents to the questionnaires included a diverse aggregation from Federations throughout the United States. Their Jewish identity profiles as well as their socioeconomic profiles were quite different than those of randomly selected Jewish women of the same age in the Jewish population studies. Women’s Division leaders ranked far higher than average in each of the Jewish identity categories: background, attitudes, and behavior.

Seventy percent of Women’s Division respondents said they always or usually light Shabbat candles, for example, compared to between a quarter and a third of Jewish women in Washington, D.C., Kansas City, Atlantic City, Baltimore, Worcester, Rochester, MetroWest, New Jersey, St. Louis, and Phoenix. Similarly, the Women’s Division leaders scored relatively high in other Jewish behavior, such as synagogue membership and attendance.

Not only did Women’s Division leaders differ by rating higher on individual items, they exhibited a higher correlation between identity categories than women in the Jewish population studies. Among the Women’s Division respondents, those who had a strong Jewish organizational profile—serving as officers, working on several committees, volunteering many hours per week, and participating in the same organizations for many years—also scored high on their Jewish social and religious profile.

Similarly, Women’s Division respondents’ attitudes correlated with their behavior more closely. Leaders who voiced the most positive feelings about support for Israel tended to be those who had visited Israel several times, often including extended stays. In terms of Jewish communal planning, this close correlation between attitude and behavior among leadership groups may illustrate the importance and efficacy of leadership missions to Israel in enhancing volunteer and philanthropic support for Israel.
Antisemitism, Continued from page 3

Community Relations Councils, and many other organizations. "Through their public relations offices, lobbying efforts, and access to the press, these institutions are adept at disseminating information about antisemitism to the mass media throughout the United States," says Tobin. "The issue of antisemitism is constantly before the public eye because of their diligence in gathering information on antisemitism and monitoring antisemitic events."

Their allies in bringing these stories to the attention of the Jewish public are often found among the professionals publishing Jewish journals, magazines and newspapers. "While stories of national significance that concern Jews are widely covered by the general press, day-to-day stories of battles with antisemitism are left to the Jewish press," Tobin comments. The general press often ignores evidence of antisemitism that American Jews find vital to their interests "unless it is emeshed in some exciting, dangerous, or offbeat story."

Above all, the American Jewish reaction to contemporary antisemitism is one of wariness and readiness for action, Tobin believes. American Jews do not woulce whether they should combat antisemitism—but how best to fight it through political, educational, and media-based strategies. They have become increasingly sophisticated players in the American political system, learning to search for allies with mutual interests, rather than for "friends" who will be with them on every issue. "As we move into the 1990s, Jews will become even more active in the political process," Tobin predicts. "At the time of the greatest social, political, and economic success and security, American Jews have many concerns. They see signs of persistent and latent antisemitism and growing disenchantment with Israel, especially in the liberal camp, which has traditionally included many Jews. Jews fear liberal tolerance for communism, which may threaten the well-being of Soviet Jews, but many are even more leery of Fundamentalist views. They dread the introduction of antisemitism into the political realm, as Lyndon B. Johnson from the right and Leor Farrakhan from the left exacerbate Jewish fears."

American Jews are covering every aspect of antisemitism: They generally have accurate insights into antisemitic behaviors and attitudes. Two thousand years of diaspora existence have sharpened the sensitivities of Jewish individuals and communities. For American Jews today, as for their predecessors in previous epochs of Jewish history, the ability to recognize antisemitism is proving a useful survival technique. American Jewry has a unique opportunity: to respond to an episodic phenomenon, whereas the other groups, Professor Goldscheider suggests that the American Jewish community has responded with remarkable creativity to the challenges of modernity.

Conservative Judaism
By Marshall Sklare
Paper. 356 pages. $12.75.

This pioneering work by Professor Sklare, which illustrates the evolution of the Conservative movement, established many of the issues and methodologies of the sociology of the modern Jew; it continues to have tremendous impact upon thinkers in the field and is highly relevant to Jewish life today.

Perspectives in Jewish Population Research
Edited by Steven M. Cohen, Jonathan S. Woolcher, and Bruce A. Phillips
Paper. 215 pages. $22.50.

This book is a guide for researchers, planners, and lay leaders involved in all types of Jewish population research. It contains 14 detailed essays, which discuss every step of the study process, are intended to increase the value of local Jewish population studies while minimizing their cost.

American Jews: A Reader
Edited, with introductions and notes, by Marshall Sklare
Beerman House, 1983.
Paper. 460 pages. $10.95.

A comprehensive reader on topics in American Jewish sociology. American Jews includes thoughtful, readable essays by more than a dozen contemporary writers and is used extensively at colleges and for adult education courses. Professor Sklare's introductions and notes illuminate the essays and place them in a meaningful context.

Understanding American Jewry
Edited by Marshall Sklare
Cloth. 310 pages. $21.95.

In this innovative volume, the foremost scholars of contemporary Jewry review existing studies and delineate future research needs in fields such as Jewish identity, religious life, education, family, population research, immigration to the United States, organizational and community research, intergroup relations, and community structure.

Research Reports series include:

Gary A. Tobin, A Needs Assessment Study for the Developmentally Disabled Jewish Population of MetroWest, New Jersey. The service needs of the developmentally disabled have long been absent from the Jewish communal agenda. This groundbreaking report explores the nature of disabilities in one Jewish community and the kinds of assistance currently provided by the Jewish community. It then analyses the unmet needs of the developmentally disabled and makes policy recommendations. $1.75

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