

can sometimes be difficult. Have you or your child(ren) had any *negative* experiences that illuminate the special problems of the single-parent family within the Jewish community?

- a. What was the situation?
 - b. How did it arise?
 - c. Who was involved?
 - d. How did the various parties react?
 - e. What did you do?
 - f. How did you feel about it?
 - g. Could this kind of experience befall any single-parent family?
 - h. How might it have been avoided?
- i. Do you think that experiences such as these should be handled on a case-by-case basis or that community programs or mechanisms should be set up to deal with them?
6. Have you or your child(ren) had any *positive* experiences in relation to the Jewish community? Please describe in detail.
7. Do you now, or did you in the past, participate in any kind of single-parent group?
- a. If so, what sort of group? How did you hear about it? What were its activities? Did you find it helpful?
 - b. If not, why not?
8. Have you celebrated a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah since your separation or divorce? If so, please describe the event. If one or more of your children is between nine and 12, what plans (if any) are you making for a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah?
9. Have you any suggestions or advice to offer to other single-parent families regarding their relations with the Jewish community?
10. May we contact your former spouse?

FAMILIES OF AMERICAN JEWISH BABY BOOMERS

by Chaim I. Waxman

Jewish family policy may be simply defined as policies designed to strengthen the Jewish family. But that is actually much too simple, because it does not define the parameters of either the family which is to be strengthened or the policy-making by which the strengthening is to be achieved. Specifically, some policies may be designed to strengthen families qua families and may be equally appropriate for non-Jewish families, especially those of similar socio-economic status, whereas other policies may be specifically designed to strengthen the Jewishness of Jewish families. Some policies might be advocated as national family policy by the voluntary community—the recently passed national family leave policy is an example, whereas other policies might be voluntary in the sense that they are completely voluntary—initiated by and implemented through the institutions of the voluntary community. Presumably, those policies which are directed at the well-being of families qua families would be advocated within the halls of government, whereas those which are designed to strengthen the Jewishness of Jewish families would be solely within the purview of the voluntary community. With these broad guidelines in mind, the family patterns of American Jewish baby boomers will now be analyzed.¹

The population with which we are concerned—American Jewish baby boomers—are those who were born between the years 1946-1964 and who, when asked in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), "What is your current religion?," identified themselves as Jewish. The sample selected consists of 801 actual respondents who, when weighted for the entire population, represent 1,692,550 cases. In order to view Jewish baby boomers within some comparative perspective, their patterns will be compared to those of American Jews in the preceding generation as well as, where feasible, to those of baby boomers in the general American population. For the general American population, data was derived from the 1990 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is an extensive survey of the American population which is conducted annually by the

National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago. From the 1990 survey, the responses to questions dealing with family patterns of those born between 1946-1964 were selected. It is to be emphasized, however, that the data may not actually be as precise as they appear in the presentation which follows. This is especially the case with the NJPS, since there was only a 48 percent response rate to the surveys and we do not know the characteristics of those who did not respond. The figures, therefore, should be taken as indicative, rather than decisive.

Table 1
Marital Patterns

	26-44 NJPS90	46-64 NJPS90	26-44 GSS90
Married	66.2	77.3	59.4
Never married	23.2	5.8	18.7
Divorced	7.7	10.3	17.3
Separated	2.0	.9	3.5
Widowed	.7	5.8	1.0
Refused	.3	—	—
	100.1	100.1	99.9

When we look at the marital patterns of Jewish baby boomers, we see that, in comparison to those in the 46-64 year old cohort, the baby boomers have a lower rate of marriage. Whereas some three-fourths of those in the older cohort were married, only two-thirds of the baby boomers were married. Moreover, whereas only about six percent of those in the older cohort were never married, almost one-quarter of the baby boomers were never married. Indeed, the data in Table 1 suggest that the patterns of the Jewish baby boomers are much closer to their non-Jewish counterparts than to the older cohort of Jews.

There is, however, an obvious factor which must be considered when comparing marriage rates of baby boomers with their elders, namely, a portion of the never married among the baby boomers may be presumed

to be not-yet-married, that is, individuals who were not married at the time of the survey but who may well marry at some future date. The number of such individuals is, however, probably quite small, since the probabilities of marrying for the first time after age 45 are extremely limited.

When we look at the marital patterns of the older baby boomers, the 35-44 year olds, we find that the rate of never married drops to 16.1 percent for males and 12.7 percent for females. Among the 40-44 year old group, the rate is 14.1 percent for males and 14.7 percent for females. Thus, the differences between the baby boomers and their elders are actually not quite as dramatic as the data in the table would seem to indicate. Nevertheless, the patterns of the Jewish baby boomers still appear to be more similar to their non-Jewish peers than they are to their Jewish elders.

Although it is difficult to ascertain at this time with any degree of accuracy the precise nature of the process based solely on these data, it may be suggested that although American Jews are not disappearing, they are becoming much more similar to their non-Jewish counterparts and that the impacts of ethnicity and religion are decreasing in terms of their social significance. What we may be beginning to see, then, is a pattern which does not fall neatly into either the perspective of the assimilationists or that of the transformationists.² It has elements of both, and can probably be better explained in terms of James Davison Hunter's "culture wars" thesis, namely, the division of confrontational lines is now in terms of traditionalists versus modernists rather than the historic divides between religions.³ In other words, the differences between Jews and others of similar socio-economic status are rapidly disappearing, in line with the theses of Herbert J. Gans, Richard D. Alba, and Mary C. Waters.⁴ In and of itself, this does not quite mean that American Jewry is disappearing. When viewed within the context of other variables, however, the implications for the future of the American Jewish community are rather stark.

The differences between the traditionalists and modernists can be seen when the never marrieds are examined in more detail. None of the 26-44 year old females who are never marrieds are in Orthodox households and only 2.6 percent of the males are. Of the males, 13.8 percent are Conservative, and of the females, 23.2 percent are. The vast majority are Reform or unaffiliated. Among 35-44 year old never married males, 9.4 percent are Conservative; all others are either Reform or unaffiliated. For females, however, more than forty percent are Conservative, with the rest being

Reform or unaffiliated. The possibility of a "drift hypothesis,"⁵ to explain the high rate of Reform among the unmarrieds was then examined. In other words, it was considered that perhaps the high rate is explained by the fact that those who are traditional but remain unmarried drift to Reform or become unaffiliated because they feel uncomfortable in the more traditional Conservative and Orthodox denominations which place so much emphasis on marriage.

However, the evidence from questions about their upbringing suggests that drift does not play a major role in the current denominational characteristics of the never marrieds. Among those never married males, ages 35-44, for whom there is information about upbringing and parents' denomination, all of those who now identify as Reform (16.1%), stated that their parents were Reform, and all of those who identified as "Jewish and Other" (48.1%) stated that their parents were Christian. Those who identified as "Just Jewish" (35.8%), stated that their parents were Conservative. Among never married females, ages 35-44, 41.5 percent of those who identified as Reform (31.2%), stated that their parents were Orthodox. On the other hand, 58.5 percent of those who identified as Reform and all of those who identified as "Just Jewish" (29.8%) stated that their parents were Reform, and all of those who identified as "Secular" (39.0%) stated that their parents were Secular.

At the same time, there are aspects of the family patterns of the Jewish baby boomers which remain distinct from those in the general American population. The divorce rate of Jews has traditionally been considerably lower than that of non-Jews,⁶ and it continues to be so. Jewish baby boomers have a lower percentage of divorced than either older American Jews or non-Jewish baby boomers. Indeed, the divorce rate of Jewish baby boomers is less than half of that of the general American baby boomer population. However, it is also significant that almost two-thirds (64.3%) of those who are divorced stated that they did not obtain a Jewish divorce. This is a matter which should be of concern for communal Jewish family policy, because it presents a source of potential rupture of relations between segments of the organized community, namely, between religious traditionalists and modernists.⁷

Accordingly, there seems no basis for any anxiety over the future of the American Jewish family *qua* family. The family life of America's Jews appears to be highly stable. Unquestionably, America's Jews experience

much stress and tension in their family lives, especially since they occupy rather high socio-economic status. America's Jews, for example, have an incredibly high labor-force participation rate.

Those who are married, particularly the females among them, who have small children and/or those with elderly parents unquestionably experience the conflicts which many other Americans experience between responsibility to family and responsibility to job. The communal agenda might, therefore, include efforts to alleviate those conflicts, tensions, and frustrations. To the extent that the community is supportive of governmental efforts to ease such burdens among the citizenry, the communal organizations may act as advocates for such efforts on behalf of Jews who might benefit as Americans, rather than as Jews *per se*. Alternately, the organized community might devise private-sphere efforts aimed at alleviating those burdensome conditions. Here, too, there might not be anything specifically Jewish about the initiatives and, indeed, they might be just as appropriate for other ethnic and religious groups. What makes them Jewish are the facts that they are initiated by Jewish agencies and the target population is Jewish. Whether the community ought to advocate for governmental policies and programs or have them come from the private sphere is an ideological issue which is beyond the realm of at least this social scientist. It is certainly not a question which can be answered from empirical analyses of the American Jewish community or the American Jewish population.

Another segment of the population which has needs that are family-policy related and are frequently overlooked is that of the divorced. Although they are a relatively small percentage of the American Jewish population—as indicated previously, they are less than 8 percent of the Jewish baby boomer population—those who are divorced experience not only emotional but significant material consequences as well, which may deeply affect the family's abilities to maintain itself within the Jewish sphere. Specifically, it has been documented that there is a high cost of living Jewishly.⁸ It is, therefore, of special significance that the household income of divorced Jewish baby boomers, both male and female, is considerably lower than of their married counterparts. Whereas among all Jewish males and females ages 26-44, only 29.3 percent had household incomes of less than \$40,000 in 1989, 66.2 percent of divorced male and 60.5 percent of divorced female Jewish baby boomers had household

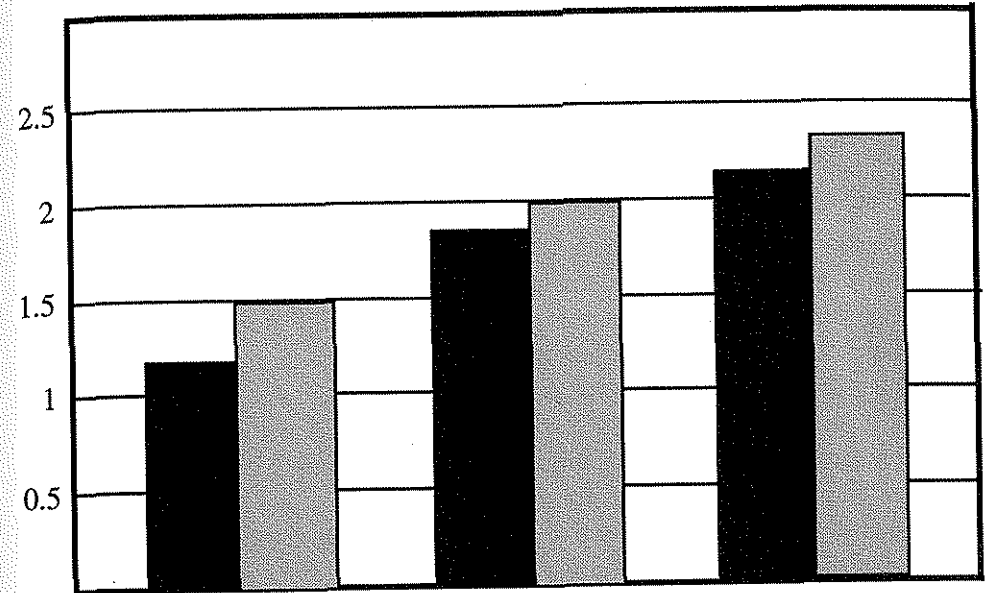
incomes of less than \$40,000 in 1989. The community, therefore, might look to ways of reducing the communal-related expenses of families of divorce. Precisely how this might be done without appearing to be "rewarding" divorce is a matter which must be carefully considered.

American Jews have historically had lower birth rates than those of the general United States population, and that pattern continues. The birth rate for all Jewish females ages 26-44, is exceptionally low, 1.2 percent. For those who are married, divorced, widowed, or separated, the mean is 1.5 children. Almost a quarter of them, 24.1 percent, are childless. In the general American baby boomer population, the mean birth rate is somewhat higher. For those females who are married, divorced, separated, or widowed, it is just about 2.0; for all females, it is 1.8. When socio-economic status is held constant, the birth rate differences between Jewish and the general American baby boomers decline. For Jewish females ages 46-64 who are married, divorced, separated, or widowed, the mean birth rate is still higher; they have almost 2.3 children. The mean birth rate for all Jewish females, ages 46-64, is 2.2. It is also noteworthy, though hardly of major significance, that there has been an increase in the birth rate among never married Jewish females. Among those in the 46-64 year old group, none had any children, whereas among the baby boomers, 1.7 percent of them had a child.

When we look at denominational variation in the birth rates of American Jewish baby boomers, we find that the Orthodox have the highest rate (3.3%) and the Conservative and Reform rate are very similar to each other (1.4% and 1.3% respectively). Interestingly, the rate of non-affiliated is somewhat higher than that of Conservative and Reform, 1.9 percent. Although the Orthodox baby boomer birth rate is considerably higher than that of the others, it does not have all that much impact on the overall Jewish birth rate because the Orthodox are, percentage-wise, only a small segment of the American Jewish population. Anyone looking for a replenishing of the American Jewish population from the Orthodox birth rate will inevitably be quite disappointed.

Since the birth rate only becomes an issue of communal concern when it is below replacement level, and the rate of the 46-64 year olds is just about at replacement level, there is no communal issue there. With respect to the baby boomers, however, there is a serious issue since their birth rate is considerably lower than replacement level.

Chart 1
Mean Birth Rates, 1990 — Females



Jews 26-44 (NJPS) US Pop. 26-44 (GSS) Jews 46-44 (NJPS)
Series 1: all; series 2: married, divorced, separated, widowed

■ Series 1 ■ Series 2

About a quarter (24.4%) of female Jewish baby boomers said they expect to have children within three years, and 69.3 percent stated that they did not. The mean lifetime expected number of children for female Jewish baby boomers is 2.0, which is still below replacement level. The traditionalist-modernist factor is again suggested in the fact that among female Jewish baby boomers who were married prior to 1985 and who have no children, 1.6 are Orthodox, 28.8 percent are Conservative, 48.8 percent are Reform, and the rest are Secular, non-affiliated, or other.

Serious as the birth rate issue is, it remains questionable whether communal policies can have any significant impact upon it. Various suggestions have been made and attempts undertaken to provide incentives for

couples to have more children, such as day schools providing tuition reduction in families with more than three children, but it is doubtful whether any of these have had any impact. Certainly the continuing decline of the American Jewish birth rate provides no evidence that such incentives work. On the other hand, it may be argued that the reason they haven't worked is that they are so few and far between. The scarcity of even such modest programs means not only that the purported incentives do not really amount to anything even approaching a meaningful economic factor in the totality of one's experience; it is also a loud message that the community is not all that committed to increasing the birth rate.

In addition, there is no evidence that, even if the community were committed, any programs implemented would have the desired result. The fact of the matter is that there is an almost universal pattern of an inverse relationship between socio-economic status and birth rate; that is, the higher the socio-economic status, the lower the birth rate, and vice versa. That pattern manifests itself within countries and between countries. Thus, despite the fact that a number of Western European countries implemented pro-natalist policies following World War II, they did not experience increases in their respective birth rates. Even with those policies, the higher the gross national product rose, the more the birth rate fell. This is not to suggest that the American Jewish birth rate will continue to fall. It has probably reached its nadir. All that is being suggested is that it is doubtful whether policies can be designed to promote any significant increase in that birth rate.

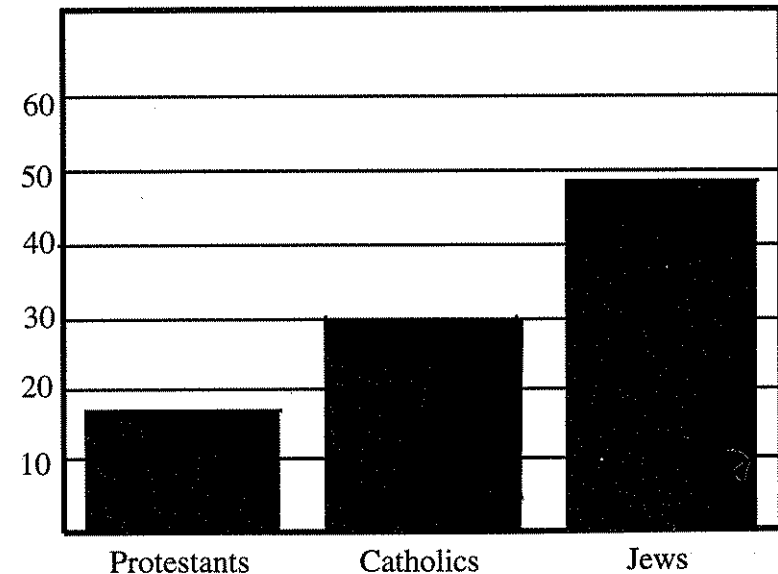
The 1979 Task Force on Jewish Family Policy refrained from dealing with the whole issue of intermarriage because a major study of the phenomenon was being undertaken under the auspices of the Jewish Communal Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee at that time. Since then, however, the pervasiveness of intermarriage has been starkly revealed, especially in the data of the 1990 NJPS. A few statistics from the baby boomer generation will suffice. Half of the spouses of those who are married identify as Jewish (50.7%). As indicated in Table 2, this is very significantly higher than the intermarriage rate of Protestant and Catholic baby boomers.

Table 2
Married Baby Boomers, Spouse's Religion (%)

	Protestants (GSS)	Catholics (GSS)	Jews (NJPS)
Protestant	83.3	16.7	7.9
Catholic	11.1	70.0	22.5
Jewish	.9	1.1	50.7
None	3.7	7.8	9.8
Other	.9	3.3	8.1
No Answer	—	1.1	1.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The comparative intermarriage rates of American Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish baby boomers are graphically represented in Chart 2.

Chart 2



Additionally, as indicated in Table 3, of the 49.7 percent of the spouses of Jewish baby boomers who do identify as Jewish, 44.3 percent were born Jewish, and of the spouses of those Jewish baby boomers who married between 1985-1990, only 36.7 percent identify as Jewish.

Table 3
Religion of Spouse of Jews, ages 26-44

	<i>Current</i>	<i>Born</i>	<i>Married 85-90</i>
Jewish	50.7	44.3	36.7
Catholic	22.5	29.4	30.0
Protestant	7.9	12.3	11.0
Other	8.1	10.4	11.4
None	9.8	1.7	10.9
Don't Know	.8	1.7	—
Refused	.2	.2	—
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

In terms of the Jewishness of the American Jewish baby boomer family, intermarriage is a major indicator. The realm of mate selection is one of the major areas in which both ethnicity and religion have historically manifested their social significance. Whatever else may be argued about the implications of the dramatic rise in the rate of Jewish intermarriage, one very important consequence is clear. Specifically, as intermarriage increasingly becomes the norm, the family ceases to play its historic role in Jewish socialization, that is, in the formation and transmission of Jewish identity and providing the central social structural context for Jewish identification. In addition, as has been indicated, intermarriage does not seem to be an isolated variable. The vast majority of those who are intermarried are also otherwise estranged from the Jewish social structure: they do not belong to synagogues or Jewish organizations, and they do not routinely perform Jewish ethno-religious rituals.

In a newspaper article on the topic, Egon Mayer asserted that, "The mandate of the American Jewish public, laity and leadership alike, is for efforts of inclusion, not policies of exclusion."⁹ This assertion follows garnering of testimony from "countless American Jewish parents facing

the prospect of an interfaith marriage," who plead that they don't want to lose their religion but they also do not want to lose their children. The evidence, however, indicates that, in reality, despite their parents' sincere wishes, the overwhelming majority of those who are intermarrying are simply not concerned about Jewish identity. It has no more significance for them than does ethnicity for the majority of other Americans whose grandparents were immigrants from Europe at the turn of the century. Most of those born American Jews who intermarry today neither reject nor strongly retain their Jewish identity. They simply do not feel all that strongly about it. They harbor no ill toward the Jewish community and may even feel positively about aspects of Jewish life. But being Jewish and, even more, having Jewish children, is not something to which they attach great importance. All of the evidence indicates that in mixed marriages—and they are the overwhelming majority of intermarriages—Jewish identification is generally very weak to non-existent. As Peter Medding, Gary Tobin, Sylvia Barack Fishman and Mordechai Rimor put it, "the likelihood of creating an unambiguous Jewish identity, should such indeed be the intention or the desire, is virtually nil."¹⁰ Clearly, then, the entire subject is one which requires much more extensive and careful analysis. In any case, it seems quite clear that in terms of communal policy, if that policy is based on the objective of maintaining and strengthening Jewish identity and identification, there is no reason to anticipate that the children of mixed married couples will manifest either. Nor does the empirical evidence support the expressed hope that a basic change in the communal approach to intermarriage—i.e., mixed marriage—will prove to be the salvation of the American Jewish community.

The final and, perhaps, most basic question in the entire issue of Jewish family policy is that of, for whom? Who is the target population of Jewish family policy? If the target population is those for whom the Jewishness of their families and family life are weakest, then it must be recognized this is precisely the population which will probably be least affected by whatever the organized community undertakes. This is the group which is most alienated from almost all communal involvements. And, indeed, it is the lion's share of the Jewish baby boomer population! Thus, about two-thirds of American Jewish baby boomers—and this includes only those who identified themselves as Jewish by religion and excludes all those born of Jewish parents but who no longer identify as Jewish—live in

households in which no one belongs to a synagogue (65.1%); 60.8 percent state that no one in their households *ever* lights candles on Friday night, and another 20.7 percent state that only sometimes does anyone light candles on Friday night; and, 71.8 percent state that they are not members in *any* Jewish organization. Further analysis is needed to definitely determine that the 60-70 percent in each of these cases are, in fact, largely the same individuals, but there is already good reason to suspect that that is the case. If it is, then it is highly questionable whether any policies undertaken by the organized community will reach these individuals. If they do not, then the efforts will be for nought and might perhaps be better expended on devising ways to strengthen the quality of Jewish family life of those who are, in varying degrees, communally connected and who manifest their concern for Jewish continuity through those connections. This is an issue which the community will have to decide upon and for which a definitive answer cannot be found in survey research.

NOTES

1. This should not be taken to suggest that this is the only age group for which family policy is significant. This is clearly not the case! Young children, for example, are obviously a very important population for whom family policy is, or should be, a central focus. Since the overwhelming majority of the parents of young children are themselves between the ages of 26-44, many of the policy issues which involve children are covered by this population. Likewise, the aged, who are an increasing percentage of the American Jewish population, are not directly covered in the following discussion of Jewish family policy, although some of what relates to them is covered in the discussion of the baby boomers and their parents. Both the aged and children were singled out as important populations in the report of the Task Force on Jewish Communal Policy which I chaired for the Jewish Communal Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, *Sustaining the Jewish Family* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1979). The major reason that this essay is limited to the baby boomers is that this is the population for which data were most extensively available, since it is the subject of a book which I am writing for the series, *American Jewish Life in the Nineties*, to be published by State University of New York Press.

2. See the essays by Nathan Glazer, Steven Cohen and Charles Liebman in Steven Bayme, ed., *Facing the Future: Essays on Contemporary Jewish Life* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1989), and Chaim I. Waxman, "Is the Glass Half-Full or Half-Empty?: Perspectives on the Future of the American Jewish Community," in Seymour M. Lipset, ed., *American Pluralism and the Jewish Community* (New Brun-

swick, NJ: Transaction, 1990), pp. 71-85.

3. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic, 1991)

4. Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," in Herbert J. Gans, Nathan Glazer, Joseph R. Gusfield, and Christopher Jencks, eds., *On the Making of Americans: Essays in Honor of David Riesman* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), pp. 193-220; Richard D. Alba, *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

5. For a discussion of the drift hypothesis in its original context, namely, in terms of the relationship between social class and schizophrenia, see Chaim I. Waxman, *The Stigma of Poverty: A Critique of Poverty Theories and Policies*, Second Edition (New York: Pergamon, 1983), p. 42.

6. Chaim I. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), pp. 163-165.

7. The issue is actually even more complex in that it is not only one of whether a Jewish divorce was obtained but also what kind. Further discussion of this is in Chaim I. Waxman, "Is the Glass Half-Full or Half-Empty?," p. 80.

8. Aryeh Meir and Lisa Hostein, *The High Cost of Jewish Living* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1992).

9. Egon Mayer, "The Case for a New Inter-marriage Policy," *Jewish Week*, Sept. 4-10, p. 18.

10. Peter Medding, Gary Tobin, Sylvia Barack Fishman and Mordechai Rimor, "Jewish Identity in Conversionary and Mixed Marriages," in David Singer, ed., *American Jewish Year Book 92* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1992), p. 39.