

Professor Steven M. Cohen



MORE JEWISH FRIENDS: A KEY TO THE JEWISH FUTURE





Impact of Jewish Education

- The impact of Jewish education on Adult Jewish identity is well established
- A question still to be answered is: “does the difference in schools produce different kinds of outcomes for which types of Jews?”
- Does adult Jewish identity depend in part upon who their parents are and who their friends are?





What we do know: there are quantifiable measures of adult Jewish identity

Related to belief
Related to behavior
Related to belonging

Jewish identity embraces:

What one feels

How one behaves

What one knows

How one feels

How one connects to communal institutions, family, friends and neighbors





Children with two Jewish parents

Children with two Jewish parents score higher on all measures of Jewish identity than those who have only one Jewish parent.





Jewish Identity

- Impact of social networks (friends) on behavior
- Who your family and friends are can influence your behavior:
 - obesity study
 - shaping of religiosity





3 Overlapping components that influence Jewish commitment

- Parental engagement
- Jewish education
- Jewish social networks

All 3 overlapping components have an impact on how Jewishly identified a person is in their adult life.





What Jewish Identity is not...

Jewish identity is not a unitary concept –

It depends on:

Contexts of time

Place

Ideology





Seven Measures of Adult Jewish Identity

1. What proportion of their friends are Jewish (32% report most are Jewish)
2. In-marriage (67% of this population)
3. Observance of popular Jewish rituals: Seder, Chanukah candles, High holiday services, fasting on Yom Kippur (47% perform 3 of 4 of these)
4. Observance of TRADITIONAL Jewish rituals: attendance at services (1 X/month), lighting Shabbat candles (32% do at least one)
5. Synagogue membership (46% affiliated)
6. Other communal affiliation (JCC, UJC, AJC, Hadassah, J-Street, Reboot, etc.. (47% with no affiliations, 28% with one and 25% with two or more)
7. Whether or not they feel being Jewish is important to them (47% answer, very)





Things that affect which of these 7 matter

Age Gender Social Class Family Status Region Jewish ideology

- Jewish social networks—in-group friends and in-marriage,
- Ritual observance—be it the most popular rituals that are observed by vast majorities of American Jews, or some of the more traditional practices observed by minorities of American Jews,
- Communal affiliation—of which synagogue membership is the most widespread and the affiliation measure that is, empirically, the most efficient predictor of other measures of Jewish engagement, and
- self-ascribed importance of being Jewish





Do childhood social networks exert an effect on Jewish identity that can be observed decades later?

Who are we studying?

How do they stand on the 7 measures of adult Jewish identity?

What was their Jewish educational experience as a child?

Did they have any at all?

If so, how much?

What type?

In what institutional setting?





Do childhood social networks exert an effect on Jewish identity that can be observed decades later?

What were their social networks as children?

Parents were in-married and the adult respondent had all or mostly Jewish friends in high school (36%)

- Parents were in-married and half of the respondents' friends were Jewish in high school (16%)
- Parents were in-married but the respondent had just some or no Jewish friends in high school (33%)
- Parents were intermarried (15%)





Do childhood social networks exert an effect on Jewish identity that can be observed decades later?

How were their parents engaged with the Jewish community

- Denomination raised
- No Christmas tree in the home when the respondent was about 10 years old
- The frequency with which Shabbat candles were lit when the respondent was about 10 years old





The socio-demographic characteristics

- Gender
- Age (25–64)
- Education
- Income
- Family type: unmarried with no children, married with no children, single parents, parents of young children, parents of school-aged children, empty nesters, and widow(er)s.





Findings

Having all or most of your childhood friends be Jewish is an indicator you will likely hit most of the seven measures of Jewish identity in adulthood



Childhood social network: Who you knew affects your Jewish life

	Jewish Friends now	Jewish spouse	Popular ritual observance	Traditional ritual observance	Synagogue Member	Jewish Affiliations	Importance of being Jewish
2 Jewish parents, most all J HS friends	61	77	79	27	53	44	82
2 Jewish parents, ½ Jew HS friends	48	70	81	26	50	44	80
2 Jewish parents, none/some Jew HS friends	37	60	71	20	43	37	74
1 Jewish parent	33	47	69	20	43	36	76
Eta	.467	.264	.236	.215	.198	.201	.198



Jewish Education: How these students educated/types of institutions

	Jewish Friends Now	Jewish spouse	Popular ritual observance	Traditional ritual observance	Synagogue member	Jewish affiliation	Importance of being Jewish
Day School	67	91	91	58	75	60	92
Hebrew school 7+yrs	48	63	86	23	53	46	81
Some informal exp, did not attend Day or Hebrew 7+	47	66	76	22	48	42	79
No informal, some formal J. ed	36	51	64	10	37	31	69
No informal or formal J. ed	42	66	62	15	30	24	74



Jewish Education means (adjusted)

	Jewish Friends Now	Jewish spouse	Popular ritual observance	Traditional ritual observance	Synagogue member	Jewish affiliation	Importance of being Jewish
Day School	59	85	81	42	59	48	85
Hebrew school 7+yrs	48	61	82	24	50	45	80
Some informal exp, did not attend Day or Hebrew 7+	48	66	76	24	49	42	80
No informal, some formal J. ed	39	54	67	13	41	35	71
No informal or formal J. ed	44	72	70	19	41	32	77
Eta	.319	.262	.333	.398	.267	.267	.267



Even controlling for Jewish education, childhood social networks remain a significant predictor of Jewish identity

	Jewish friends now	Jewish spouse	Popular ritual observance	Traditional ritual observance	Synagogue Member	Jewish affiliations	Importance of being Jewish
2 Jewish parents, most/all J HS friends	60	75	78	25	52	43	81
2 Jewish parents, ½ Jewish HS friends	48	71	80	26	50	43	80
2 Jewish parents, none/some Jewish HS friends	38	62	72	22	45	38	75
1 Jewish Parent	33	46	70	20	43	37	77
Eta	.467	.264	.236	.215	.198	.201	.198



Influence of Jewish education on adult identity

	Jewish friends now	Jewish spouse	Popular ritual observance	Traditional ritual observance	Synagogue member	Jewish affiliations	Importance of being Jewish
Day school	53	83	80	41	57	47	84
Hebrew school 7+ yrs	48	60	82	23	50	45	80
Some informal exp. Did not attend Day school or Heb 7+	48	67	76	24	49	42	80
No informal, some formal J. ed	42	57	68	14	42	36	71
No informal or formal J. ed	47	73	72	19	41	32	77
Eta	.315	.259	.329	.404	.268	.267	.270





Other Findings

By comparing the coefficients for social networks and education, we learn that childhood social networks exert a greater impact upon adult Jewish friendship. For predicting in-marriage, the two childhood experiences are about equally important. In contrast, the impact of childhood Jewish educational experiences is more pronounced upon ritual observance, communal affiliation, and subjective Jewish identity in adults. Nevertheless, the differences in impact are small, with social networks coming close to Jewish education on all adult outcomes with the exception of traditional ritual observances where the education lead is substantial.





Conclusion: Networks Work

In summary, both of these childhood indicators—social networks and education—play an important role in adult Jewish identity, independently of each other. Above and beyond Jewish education, having Jewish friends (and parents) in the childhood especially for having Jewish friends later in life, and to a lesser extent, for in-marriage, and for all other measures of Jewish identity.





Recommendations

- Impact of Jewish education can be augmented by the creation and sustenance of strong Jewish social networks.
- Jewish social networks operate to nurture, sustain and encourage Jewish engagement of all sorts.
- Jewish educators should have an explicit mission to bestow Jewish friendship networks on children and adults who are increasingly unlikely to find them on their own.
- Well-connected people exert more influence than social isolates – we need to identify and mobilize well connected children for their own benefit and the benefit of others around them.





About Professor Steven M. Cohen

- Sociologist of American Jewry
- Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy at HUC-JIR and Director of the Berman Jewish Policy Archive at NYU Wagner
- 1992 he made aliyah and taught for 14 years at Hebrew University in Jerusalem
- Serves as Research Director of Synagogue 3000, Senior Counselor to the Chancellor at JTS, and Director of the Florence G. Heller/ JCCA Research Center
- In 2010 he received the Marshall Sklare Award of the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry.
- The book, Sacred Strategies, which is co-authored, just won a National Jewish Book Award.



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