

Brandeis University

Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies

**Under the Chuppah:
Rabbinic Officiation and Intermarriage**

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Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies

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The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies (CMJS), founded in 1980, is dedicated to providing independent, high-quality research on issues related to contemporary Jewish life.

Established in 2005 and housed at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, the Steinhardt Social Research Institute (SSRI) uses innovative research methods to collect and analyze sociodemographic data on the Jewish community.

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Executive Summary

High rates of inter marriage have prompted intense public debates regarding officiation by Jewish clergy at weddings of Jews to non-Jews. Although for some the debate over rabbinic officiation at inter marriage hinges on theological questions, for others the discussion centers on the impact that rabbinic officiation might have on the Jewish character of the homes and families that these couples create. The present report explores several essential questions about the relationship between Jewish clergy officiation and inter married couples' trajectories of Jewish engagement.

As part of a long-term follow-up study of 2001-09 applicants to Birthright Israel, we surveyed 1,200 married young adults. The analyses explore differences between three groups of couples: in married couples, inter married couples who had a sole Jewish officiant (i.e., no non-Jewish co-officiant), and inter married couples who married under other auspices.

Among the key findings:

- Inter married couples married by a sole Jewish clergy officiant are more highly engaged in Jewish life than inter married couples who had other forms of officiation.
- Inter married couples married by a sole Jewish clergy officiant are three times more likely to raise children Jewish

compared with inter married couples who married under other auspices (85% v. 23%).

- The key differences between inter married couples who did and did not have a sole Jewish clergy officiant persist even when the gender, Jewish backgrounds, and college Jewish experiences of the Jewish spouses are taken into account.
- On multiple measures of Jewish engagement, including synagogue involvement, inter married couples whose weddings were presided over by a sole Jewish clergy officiant look very similar to the in married.
- On other measures however, sole Jewish officiation does not fully level the playing field between inter married and in married couples.

The present study cannot fully clarify the reasons for the pronounced differences between inter married couples with a sole Jewish officiant and other inter married couples. One explanation is that the decision to have a Jewish officiant reflects a continuation of the preexisting Jewish trajectory of these couples. It is also possible that the relationship with the Jewish clergy has an independent impact on subsequent Jewish commitments. Future research should explore those factors that influence decisions regarding marriage and connections to Jewish life.

Introduction

Inter-marriage is a demographic reality among American Jews. More than half (58%) of American Jews who married since 2005 chose a non-Jewish spouse (Pew Research Center, 2013). At the same time, an analysis of Pew's 2013 study of American Jews found that more than half (61%) of millennial children of inter-marriage identify as Jewish (Saxe, Sasson, & Aronson, 2014). Thus, the assumption that inter-marriage necessarily leads to population decline may prove to be unfounded.

At the forefront of controversies over inter-marriage are Jewish clergy, in particular with regard to their decisions about whether or not to officiate at the wedding of a Jew to a non-Jew. Jewish law (*halacha*) prohibits inter-marriage, and since the second century, has held that the children of a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father are not Jews (Bleich, 1981; Cohen, 1985). In the contemporary United States, both the Orthodox and Conservative movements of Judaism—which respectively represent 10% and 18% of all American Jews (Pew Research Center, 2013)—continue to affirm these halachic standards (see, e.g., Roth & Gordis, 1988). The Reform movement, which represents 35% of American Jews and is the largest Jewish religious movement in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2013), has resolved that children of a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father should be recognized as Jews pending “appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people,” such as celebration of bar or bat mitzvah (Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1983).

Although for some, the debate over rabbinic officiation at inter-marriage hinges on theological questions, for others much of the discourse concerns the impact that rabbinic officiation will have on the Jewish character of

the homes and families that these couples create. Unfortunately, Jonathan Sarna's 1990 summary that we lack “any adequate measure of the impact that rabbinic decisions (on whether or not to officiate) have actually made on the inter-marrying couples themselves” (p.4) still rings true. The present report seeks to provide a systematic analysis of the associations between rabbinic officiation at the wedding ceremonies of contemporary young adult Jews and non-Jews and the Jewish trajectories of these couples.

Jewish Officiation at Inter-marriages: The Policy Debate

On one side of the officiation debate is the view that Jewish survival is best served by a policy that encourages in-marriage, followed by strong encouragement of conversion of non-Jewish partners (Bayme, 2002; Cohen, 2006; Wertheimer, 2001). Proponents of this position also argue that, although officiation may satisfy inter-marrying couples or their families, it undermines the principles of Judaism and the sanctity of the Jewish wedding ceremony, falsely connotes rabbinic approval, and reduces the incentive for conversion for non-Jewish partners (Guttman, 2014; Kalmonofsky, 2015; Shalom Hartman Institute, 2014; Wertheimer, 2013). The rabbinic arm of the Conservative Movement, the Rabbinical Assembly (RA), prohibits clergy from officiating at, participating in, or even attending inter-marriages (Rabbinical Assembly, 2011). Some Reform rabbis also agree that officiation at inter-marriages constitutes a radical break with Jewish tradition and an endorsement of a practice that will weaken the Jewish community (Shalom Hartman Institute, 2014).

The other side in the officiation debate is based on the argument that conversion is not

a likely scenario for many non-Jews who marry Jews and that the key strategy must be acceptance and integration of the non-Jewish spouse into the Jewish community—beginning with the celebration of the marriage (Dorff & Olitzky, 2007; Mayer, 1991). In 1973, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the rabbinical arm of the Reform movement, adopted a strong statement that opposed “participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage” (p. 97). Almost simultaneously, however, the organization reaffirmed the right of member rabbis to make informed personal decisions and choose whether or not they would perform interfaith weddings.

A growing number of Reform rabbis argue that intermarriage is inevitable, and that officiation provides an opportunity to engage the intermarried couple in Jewish life. They also argue that refusing to officiate can cause the intermarried couple and their extended family to withdraw from the Jewish community (London, 2010; Moffic, 2015; Shalom Hartman Institute, 2014). Precipitating this type of break would undermine the fundamental tenet of the Reform movement’s position on outreach that seeks to draw families nearer to Judaism and to educate the children of intermarriage (see Schindler, 1978). A 1995 survey of CCAR rabbis estimated that about half officiated at intermarriages (Fishbein, 1995). Although a 2008 resolution to lift the CCAR’s formal opposition to the practice was tabled, the organization has started providing resources for rabbis who perform intermarriages (Fax, 2012; Fishkoff, 2009; Schwartz, 2012). Some Conservative rabbis have also called for a change in the policy regarding officiation at intermarriages arguing that refusing to officiate deprives rabbis of the opportunity to bring intermarried couples into their communities or, worse, pushes intermarried couples away from Judaism altogether (Gardenswartz, 2016; Lewittes, 2015). Based on a recent survey of

Conservative rabbis, Big Tent Judaism estimates that nearly 40% of Conservative rabbis could see themselves officiating at an intermarriage if the RA permitted it (Rotem, 2015).¹

What We Know and What We Can Learn

Despite the intensity of debate about rabbinic officiation at intermarriages, there is scant systematic research on this topic. The only empirical study of the outcomes associated with Jewish clergy officiation, conducted more than 25 years ago, found no evidence that rabbinic officiation led to subsequent involvement in Jewish life or conversion of the non-Jewish partner, nor did it find that refusals to officiate led to subsequent alienation from Jewish life (Kosmin, Lerer, & Mayer, 1989). However, this study does not speak to the experiences of young Gen Xers or millennials, which may be different than the experiences of older generations.

Weddings are a pivotal moment in the life of all couples, but particularly so for intermarrying spouses. The process leading up to the ceremony can provide a unique opportunity for the couple to articulate their religious identity, commitments, and connections to a larger community. The present report explores several essential questions about the relationship between Jewish clergy officiation and intermarried couples’ trajectories of Jewish engagement. How do intermarried couples who chose a rabbi differ from other intermarried couples who did not, in terms of their Jewish practice at home, connection to Jewish institutions, and the choices they make regarding the religion of their children? In addition, how do the behaviors and choices intermarried couples make differ from those of inmarried couples? And finally, to what extent do these differences persist after we account for differences in the backgrounds of the Jewish spouses?

New Data: The Jewish Futures Project

This report is based on the 2015 survey of the Jewish Futures Project (JFP) panel. The JFP is an ongoing panel study that follows a group of American Jewish young adults as they make decisions about their education, careers, families, and Jewish life. The JFP aims to understand which experiences shape the trajectory of the next generation of American Jews with respect to Jewish life and connection to Israel (Saxe et al., 2009).

The JFP was launched in 2009 by surveying a sample of individuals who applied to Birthright Israel between 2001 and 2004, including Birthright Israel participants and individuals who applied but did not go on a trip. Those same individuals were surveyed again in 2010, 2012, 2013, and 2015. Over time, samples of individuals who applied to Birthright Israel between 2005 and 2009 were also added to the panel. Current JFP panelists represent a wide range of Jewish backgrounds. For example, 23% have a non-Jewish parent, 19% received no formal Jewish education, 22% attended a Jewish day school, and 9%

The 2015 JFP Survey: Methodology

The 2015 survey was a dual-mode telephone and web survey featuring extensive batteries of questions about the panelists' upbringing, current Jewish attitudes and behaviors, connection to Israel, and choices about dating, marriage, and family life. Field operations began on June 2, 2015 and ended on March 3, 2016. A total of 2,744 panelists responded to the survey, representing an overall response rate (AAPOR RR4) of 50% (59% for Birthright Israel participants and 40% for nonparticipant applicants).²

were raised Orthodox. Half (49%) of panelists are married (61% married to a Jew and 39% married to a non-Jew) and 27% have a child living in their household.

The analyses described in this report focus on the hundreds of panelists who remain in first marriages: those married to spouses who were not Jewish at the time of their marriage (N=549) and those married to spouses who were Jewish at the time of their marriage (N=713).³ Panelists who were raised Orthodox (N=201) were excluded from the analysis.⁴

The analyses presented below show differences between three groups of couples: inmarried couples, intermarried couples who had a sole Jewish officiant (i.e., no non-Jewish co-officiant), and intermarried couples who married with other officiation. Couples were classified as inmarried or intermarried based on their status at the time of the marriage. Thus, the five couples including a non-Jewish spouse who converted after the marriage were considered intermarriages, and the 38 couples in which one of the spouses converted to Judaism prior to the marriage were considered inmarried in this analysis. Because of the rarity of conversion in this population, we do not have enough cases to examine this group separately.

The figures shown are simple frequencies that do not attempt to control for any pre-existing differences between these groups. At the end of the report, we discuss the extent to which these differences persist once we account for differences between the groups in gender and Jewish background of our respondents.

Overview of Officiation

Patterns of Officiation

As shown in Table 1, the vast majority (91%) of respondents whose spouses were Jewish (inmarried couples) had a sole Jewish officiant—i.e., rabbi or cantor. Among those whose spouses were not Jewish at the time of the marriage (intermarried couples), one quarter (24%) had a sole Jewish officiant and the majority (57%) had a non-religious officiant such as a justice of the peace or a friend. The remainder of this report will focus on differences between intermarried couples who had a sole Jewish officiant at their weddings and intermarried couples who did not, using unmarried couples as a comparison group.

Table 1. Type of officiation by religion of spouse at time of marriage

	Spouse not Jewish at time of marriage	Spouse Jewish at time of marriage
Sole Jewish	24%	91%
Sole non-Jewish clergy	11%	1%
Sole non-religious	57%	7%
Jewish and non-Jewish clergy	5%	0%
Other	3%	1%
Total	100%	100%

Predictors of Sole Jewish Officiation

We begin by exploring which background factors of intermarried respondents are associated with having a sole Jewish officiant. The analysis demonstrates that female respondents who married non-Jews were more likely than male respondents who married non-Jews to have a sole Jewish

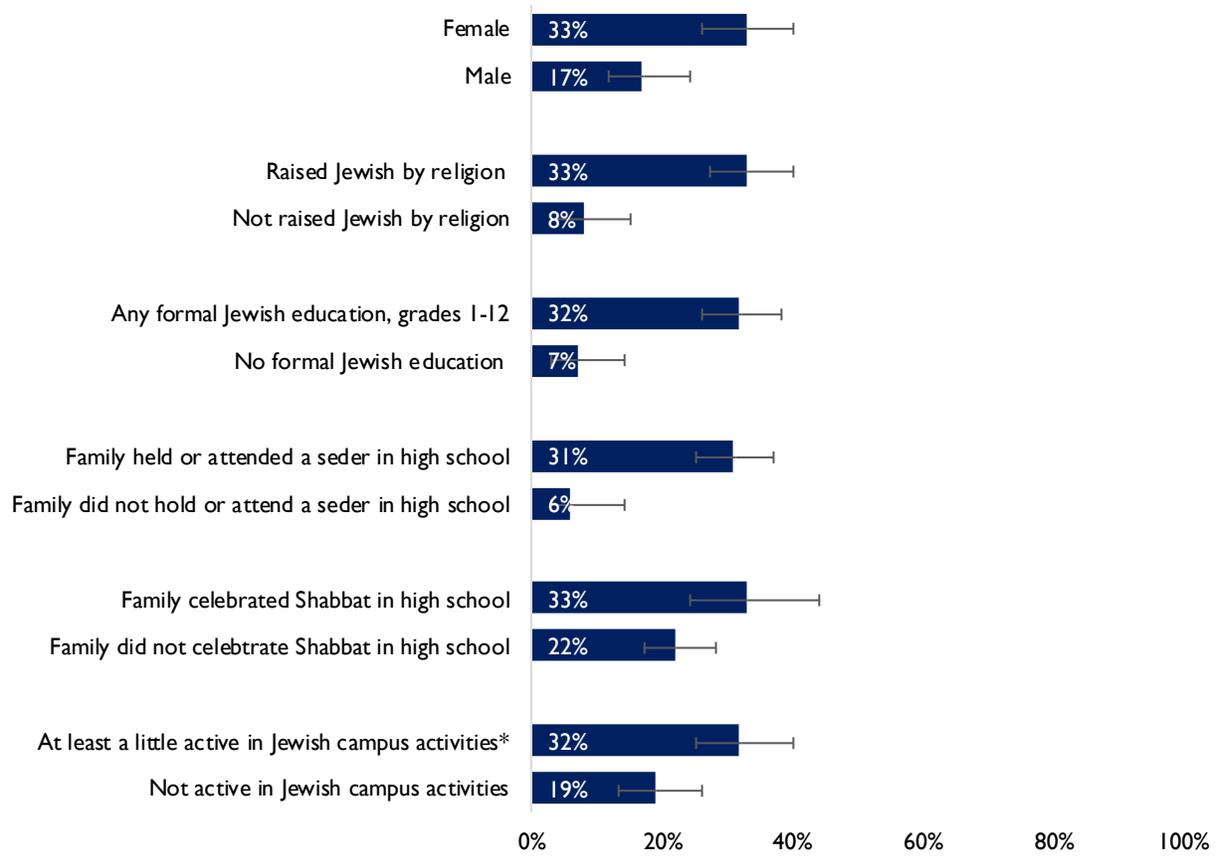
officiant: 33% versus 17%. As can be seen in Figure 1, Jewish background was also strongly associated with having a sole Jewish officiant. Among respondents who married a non-Jew, those who were raised Jewish by religion, who had any formal Jewish education, whose families observed Jewish rituals in the home during high school, and who were active in Jewish campus activities, such as Hillel, as undergraduates were more likely to have a sole Jewish officiant.

Factors that were not independently related to the likelihood that an intermarried respondent would have a sole Jewish officiant included informal Jewish socialization experiences (e.g., Jewish overnight camp or Jewish youth group), Birthright Israel participation, the religion in which the non-Jewish spouse was raised, and the age at which the respondent married.⁵

Birthright Israel, Inter-marriage, and Sole Jewish Officiation

Past research has found that participation in Birthright Israel is associated with increased levels of engagement in Jewish life, including a higher rate of intermarriage (Saxe et al., 2014). One might expect that when a Birthright participant intermarries that he/she would be more likely to have a Jewish officiant. We did not find such an effect. There is, however, some evidence (although we have a small number of cases) that participation in Birthright Israel is related to higher incidences of conversion before marriage.

Figure I: Proportion with a sole Jewish officiant (spouse not Jewish at time of marriage only)



Note: * Excludes those without a Bachelor's degree. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Sole Jewish Officiation and Jewish Trajectories

For many, the significance of Jewish clergy officiation centers on the belief that the presence of a rabbi or cantor at this pivotal moment will encourage intermarrying couples to continue to make Jewish choices for themselves and their children. These Jewish choices can develop in a variety of ways including engagement with Jewish religious life, cultural or communal involvement, and attitudes and attachment to Israel (Horowitz, 2003). For many commentators on this subject, of upmost importance is the decision about whether or not to raise children as Jewish (Fishman, 2004). This section explores a number of Jewish engagement outcomes for couples who intermarried with a sole Jewish officiant as compared with either respondents who intermarried with another type of officiation or respondents who inmarried. Also considered are rates of conversion among the non-Jewish spouses in intermarriages that did and did not have sole Jewish officiation.

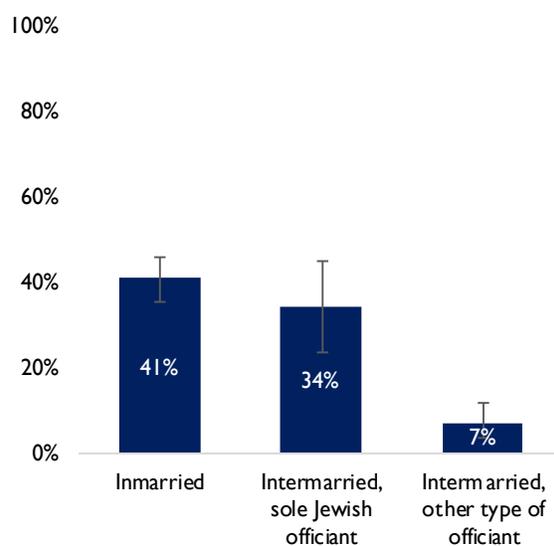
Synagogue Participation

Synagogues remain a central institution in the local landscape of American Jewish life and a potent portal to other aspects of Jewish family and communal participation. As Sales (2005, p.1) notes, “in the American context, synagogues create community, provide points of affiliation and identification, handle life transitions, educate children and adults.” Earlier research found that Jews who are intermarried are less likely than inmarried peers to affiliate with Jewish institutions (Cohen, 2006) and that when intermarried Jewish fathers perceive that their families are not fully accepted by the larger Jewish community, they and their children are more

likely to be estranged from communal institutions including synagogues (McGinity, 2014).

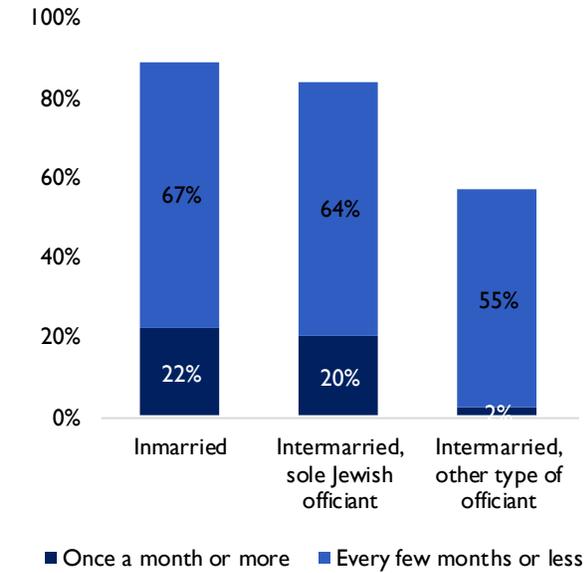
Looking at rates of synagogue membership (Figure 2) and attendance at Jewish religious services (Figure 3), intermarried respondents who had a sole Jewish officiant exhibited higher levels of affiliation and participation than did intermarried respondents who had another type of officiation. One third (34%) of intermarried respondents who had a Jewish officiant reported being members of a congregation, as compared with 7% of those who intermarried with another form of officiation. In the year prior to the survey, 57% of those who intermarried without a rabbi had ever attended a Jewish religious services, as compared to the vast majorities of those who intermarried with a rabbi (84%) and those who inmarried (89%).

Figure 2. Synagogue membership



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3. Frequency of attending Jewish religious services in the past year



Note: "Never" response not shown in chart.

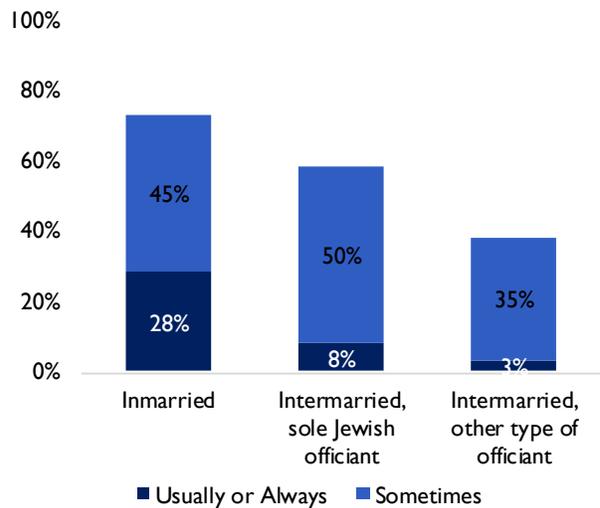
Home Jewish Ritual Practice

The home is often seen as an incubator for Jewish life, inculcating awareness of the Jewish calendar and habits of Jewish religious and cultural practices. One of the concerns about intermarried couples is that they will be less likely to provide a Jewish home life for themselves or their children. A recent study of millennial children of intermarriage found that they were much less likely than their counterparts from inmarried households to have been exposed to Jewish ritual practice at home during childhood (Sasson et al., 2015).

Intermarried respondents who had a sole Jewish officiant exhibited higher levels of home Jewish ritual practice than intermarried respondents who had another type of officiation but lower levels of practice than inmarried respondents. For example, half (50%) of intermarried respondents with Jewish officiation reported "sometimes" attending a special meal for Shabbat, as

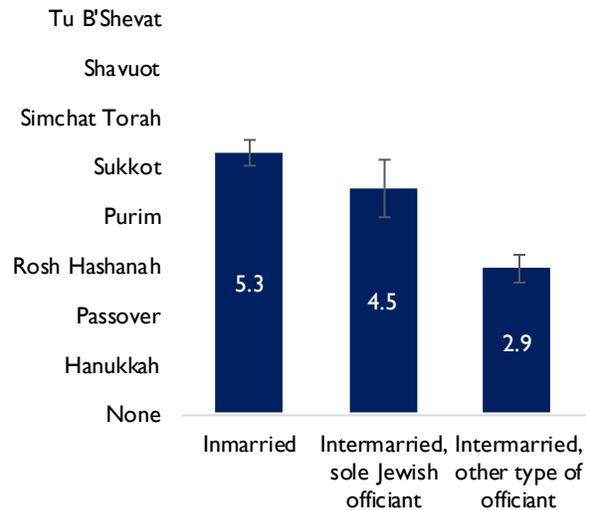
compared with one third (35%) of those who intermarried without sole Jewish officiation (Figure 4). At the same time, respondents with Jewish officiation were still less likely than inmarried couples to celebrate Shabbat more frequently ("usually or always"). This pattern is also evident in terms of Jewish holiday celebration⁶ (Figure 5) and the importance placed on keeping kosher (Figure 6).

Figure 4. Frequency of having a special meal on Shabbat



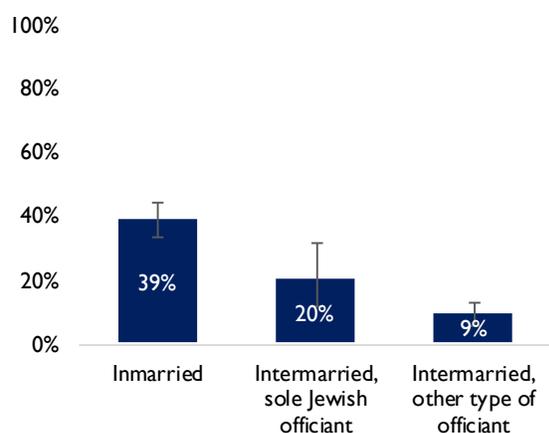
Note: "Never" response not shown in chart.

Figure 5. Mean score on index of Jewish holiday celebration



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

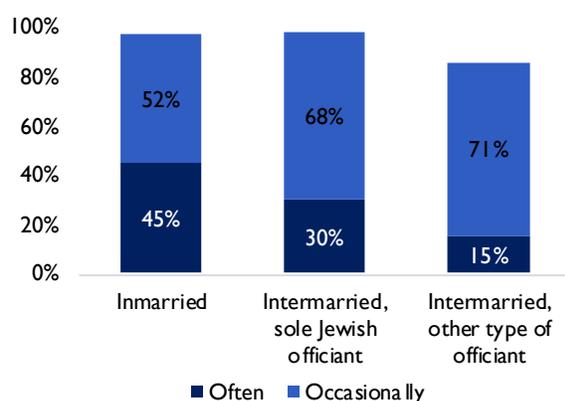
Figure 6. Keeping kosher at least “a little” important



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Intermarried respondents who had a sole Jewish officiant were also more likely to discuss Judaism with family and friends, as compared with intermarried respondents who had another type of officiation. The main difference between the groups is the frequency of the discussions. Intermarried respondents with a Jewish officiant were more likely than intermarried respondents with other officiation to have Jewish-related discussions often (30% compared to 15%), but were significantly less likely than inmarried respondents to do so (45%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Frequency of talking to family and friends about Judaism in the past year



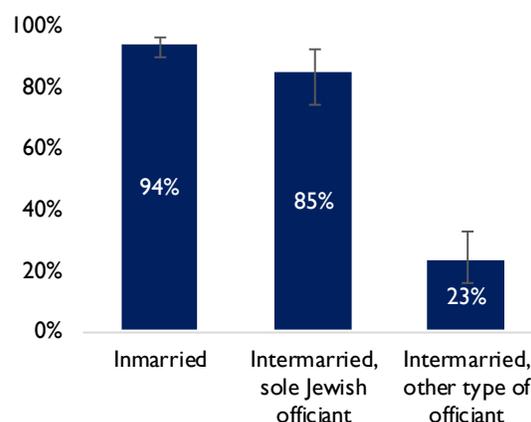
Note: “Never” response not shown in chart.

Raising Children Jewish

Alarms about communal continuity have intensified over the last 25 years as studies reported that intermarried parents were substantially less likely than inmarried parents to raise their children as Jews (Fishman, 2004; Goldstein, 1992). The 2000-01 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) estimated that just one third of children in intermarried households were being raised Jewish (United Jewish Communities, 2003). Among intermarried respondents in the current study, 36% (N=259) have a child who lives with them at least part time, and for 86% of intermarried respondents, the oldest child in the household has not yet reached school age.

When asked in which religion their oldest child was being raised, almost all (94%) inmarried respondents said “Jewish.” The overwhelming majority (85%) of intermarried respondents who had a sole Jewish officiant also indicated that they were raising their children in the Jewish religion. This is compared with 23% of intermarried respondents who had another type of officiation (Figure 8).

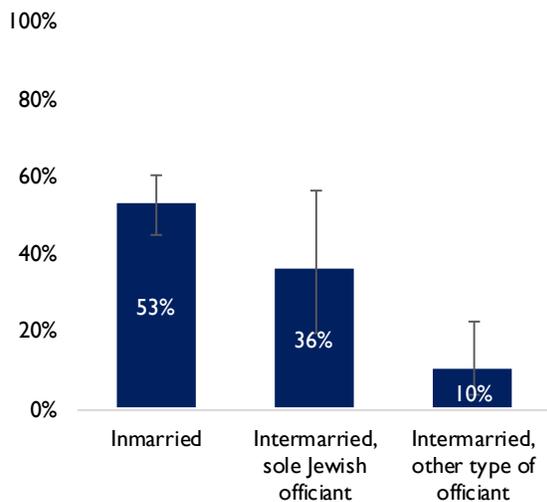
Figure 8. Oldest child being raised Jewish by religion



Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Recently, policy makers have identified the toddler and preschool years and Jewish early childhood education as key gateways into Jewish life for both children and their families (Beck, 2002; Wertlieb & Rosen, 2008). As shown in Figure 9, it appears that, of those whose children are enrolled in early childhood education and care, inmarried couples are most likely to choose a Jewish setting, followed by intermarried couples who had a sole Jewish officiant, and finally intermarried couples who had another kind of officiant. However, the small number of intermarried respondents with children in this study means that there is considerable uncertainty around these estimates.

Figure 9. Type of daycare, nursery school, or preschool for oldest child below school age



Note: Only those sending their child to some form of early childhood education and care. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

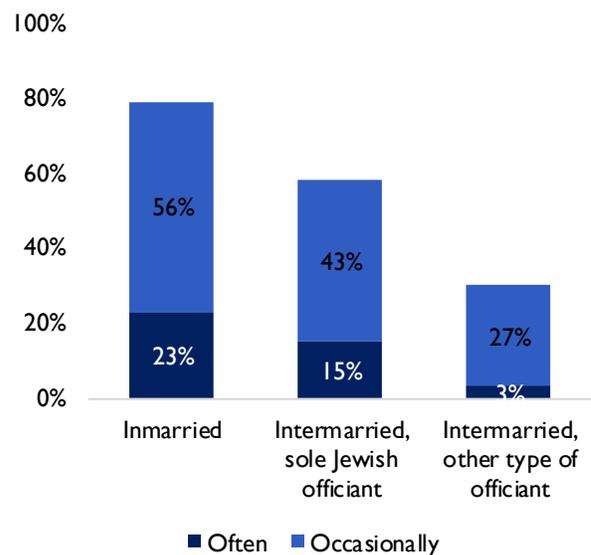
Jewish Communal Connections

According to the 2013 Pew Research Center's survey of Jewish Americans, 62% of Jews believe that being Jewish is primarily about

engagement with Jewish heritage and culture. This section examines some of the ways, aside from religious observance and affiliation, that Jews express their Jewish identity and their connection to the larger Jewish community.

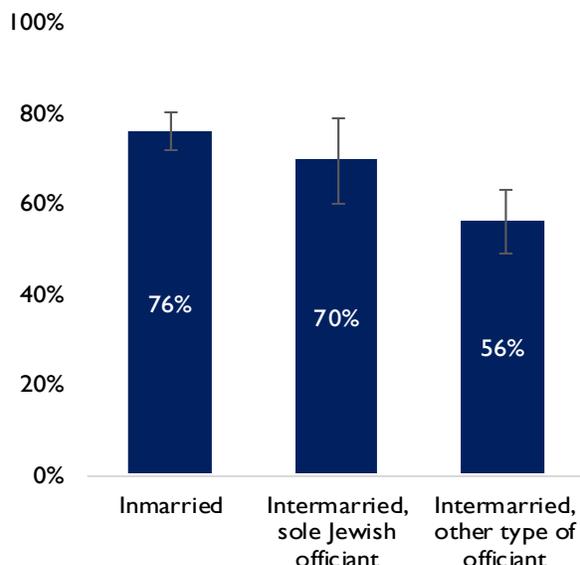
Intermarried respondents who had a sole Jewish officiant, as compared with intermarried respondents who had another type of officiation, exhibited higher levels of participation in local Jewish community events (Figure 10) and consumption of Jewish or Israeli cultural content (Figure 11). Inmarried respondents had higher levels of cultural connections than intermarried respondents who had a sole Jewish officiant with regards to participation in local Jewish community events, but it is not clear whether or not these groups differ in terms of cultural consumption.

Figure 10. Participation in an activity or event sponsored by local Jewish community in the past year



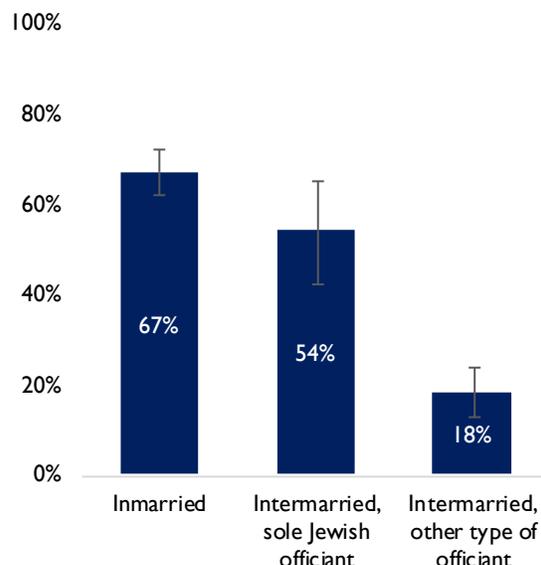
Note: "Never" response not shown in chart.

Figure 11. Consuming any Jewish or Israeli cultural content* in the past year



Note: * Includes music, literature, non-fiction, films, TV, and web content. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 12. Giving to Jewish or Israeli organizations or causes in the past year

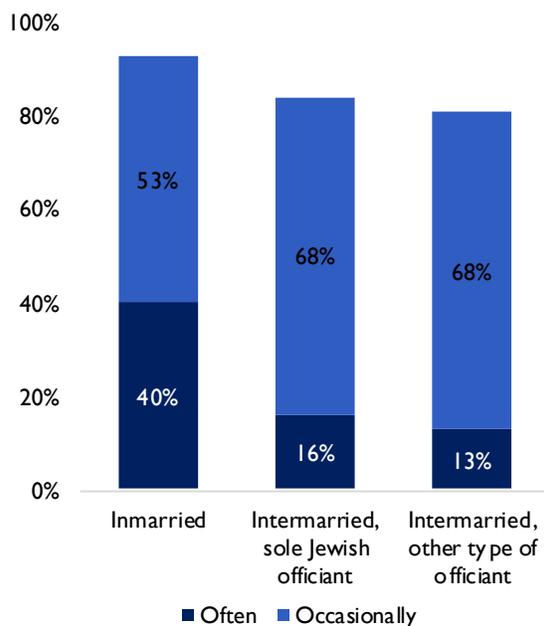


Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Intermarried respondents who had a sole Jewish officiant, as compared with intermarried respondents who had another type of officiation, were also more likely to donate to Jewish or Israeli organizations or causes (Figure 12). Inmarried respondents may also exhibit higher levels of giving than intermarried respondents who had a sole Jewish officiant, but this difference was not statistically significant.

In terms of discussing Israel with family and friends, the two groups of intermarried respondents were indistinguishable from one another, and both discussed Israel less frequently than inmarried respondents (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Frequency of talking to family and friends about Israel in the past year



Note: "Never" response not shown in chart.

Officiation and Jewish Trajectories: Accounting for Preexisting Differences

The figures above illustrate that, on many outcome measures, intermarried couples who were married with a sole Jewish officiant are more Jewishly engaged than other intermarried couples and somewhat less engaged than inmarried couples. However, as shown in Figure 1, those who intermarried with a sole Jewish officiant grew up with stronger Jewish backgrounds than those who intermarried under different auspices. In addition, those who married another Jew tended to come from even stronger Jewish backgrounds than those who married a non-Jew with a Jewish officiant.⁷ To what extent are the results presented above simply a reflection of these pre-existing differences?

To address these questions, we ran a series of statistical models that adjust for differences between respondents' gender, childhood Jewish background, and participation in Jewish activities during college.⁸ Even after controlling for these factors, intermarried couples who married with a sole Jewish officiant were still significantly more engaged in Jewish life than other intermarried couples on many of the outcomes discussed above. In particular, they were significantly more likely to raise their oldest child Jewish by religion, enroll children in a Jewish early childhood education setting, belong to a synagogue, attend religious services, celebrate Jewish holidays, participate in Jewish community activities, donate to Jewish or Israeli causes, and talk to family and friends about Judaism. In contrast, there were no statistically significant differences between intermarried couples who married with or without a sole

Jewish officiant with respect to Shabbat and kashrut observance, consuming Jewish or Israeli cultural content, or talking to family and friends about Israel. However, our ability to detect smaller differences between these groups is limited by the relatively small number of intermarried couples in each of these groups.

On some measures, inmarried couples were likewise still significantly more engaged in Jewish life, as compared to intermarried couples with a sole Jewish officiant, once pre-existing differences were accounted for. This was the case with respect to Shabbat observance, importance of kashrut observance, discussions about Judaism with friends and family, decisions to raise children Jewish by religion, participation in Jewish community activities, and discussions about Israel with friends and family. In contrast, there were no statistically significant differences between inmarried couples and intermarried couples with a sole Jewish officiant with respect to synagogue membership, Jewish religious service attendance, holiday observance, enrolling oldest child in a Jewish early childhood education setting, consumption of Jewish or Israeli cultural content, or giving to Jewish or Israeli causes, once pre-existing differences in Jewish background had been accounted for. Any differences in these outcomes between the inmarried and the intermarried with a sole Jewish officiant are too small to be detected, given the small number of intermarried couples with a rabbi.

Discussion

For Jews who hold by religious law, conversion of a non-Jewish partner is the only path to forming a Jewish household. Despite the communal and religious focus on conversion, it is relatively rare among the population at large and particularly among the spouses of our respondents (3% converted prior to getting married and 1% converted later). As a result, some liberal clergy, including Reconstructionist-, Reform-, and Conservative-ordained rabbis and cantors, have increasingly decided to officiate at weddings of couples with a non-Jewish partner. Clearly, social scientific data cannot resolve the differences between various perspectives on this topic. Our focus instead was to understand the Jewish trajectories of contemporary intermarried couples whose weddings took place at a point in history when having officiation by Jewish clergy was not a rare occurrence, but a choice that was available for them to make.

The findings provide clear evidence that intermarried couples who had Jewish clergy officiation are more highly engaged in Jewish life than intermarried couples who did not have a sole Jewish officiant at their wedding. One third of intermarried couples, whose marriage was officiated by a rabbi or cantor, are synagogue members, more than four times higher than intermarried couples who were married by another type of officiant. Intermarried couples married by a Jewish officiant are three times more likely to raise children as Jewish compared with intermarried couples who married under other auspices. The key differences between these two groups persist even when the gender and Jewish background of the Jewish spouse are taken into account.

On many critical measures of Jewish engagement, intermarried couples whose weddings were presided over by Jewish clergy look similar to the inmarried. For example, intermarried couples with Jewish clergy officiation, as compared with inmarried couples, have very similar rates of synagogue membership (34% vs 41%) and of raising children Jewish (85% vs 94%). Sole Jewish officiation at intermarriages does not, however, fully level the playing field between intermarried and inmarried couples on all measures of Jewish engagement. For example, intermarried couples who had Jewish officiation are somewhat less likely to have a special meal on Shabbat.

As clear as these findings are, the present study cannot fully explain why the differences between intermarried couples with a Jewish officiant and other intermarried couples exist. It is possible that the decision to have a Jewish officiant reflects a continuation of the Jewish trajectory that these couples were already on when they made the choice to have a Jewish wedding. Although we control for some pre-existing differences in the Jewish backgrounds, gender, and Jewish college experiences of the Jewish spouse, intermarrying couples who choose to have sole Jewish officiation may differ in other ways, such as the religious and cultural connections of the non-Jewish spouse. It could be that these differences are simultaneously driving intermarried couples' decisions to both choose a Jewish officiant for their wedding and subsequently foster a Jewishly engaged home and family.

It is also possible that involvement of Jewish clergy has an independent impact on the lives of intermarried couples. Prior research

demonstrates that synagogue rabbis are instrumental in welcoming intermarried couples into Jewish life (Chertok, Rosen, Sales, & Saxe, 2001). Interactions with Jewish clergy in preparation for the wedding may serve to welcome the non-Jewish partner into Judaism, establish the groundwork for a continuing relationship, and affirm the couple's prior decision to raise a Jewish family. However, the opposite may also be true. Rejection by Jewish clergy may serve to dissuade couples from pursuing other Jewish commitments and connections. Although the current study does not allow us to know if couples who were not married by Jewish clergy sought out a rabbi or cantor, it is clear that future research should explore what happens when a rabbi or cantor refuses to marry an intermarrying couple.

The chuppah, the tent-like canopy under which a couple stands during the Jewish marriage ceremony, is often thought of as a symbol of the Jewish home that will be established by the new couple. Whether or not that home will be a conducive setting for the practice of Jewish rituals, celebration of Jewish holidays, and rearing of children as Jews will undoubtedly be influenced by multiple factors, including the officiant who presides over the wedding. We believe that much remains to be learned about how couples make decisions about Jewish commitments and connections. It is our hope that the present findings contribute valuable data for conversations about engaging intermarried young couples in contemporary Jewish life.

Notes

¹Although methodological problems with the survey's sampling cast doubt on the precise figure (Shain, 2015), undoubtedly, some Conservative rabbis are calling for a change in policy regarding officiation at intermarriages.

²Complete methodological details available upon request.

³Marriages include a small number of civil unions (N=7), and about 2% (N=32) of the marriages/civil unions are same-sex.

⁴Panelists raised Orthodox almost universally married Jews—only 2% (N=4) married non-Jews. Furthermore, about three quarters continue to identify as Orthodox. Removing the raised Orthodox from the comparison group provides a more reasonable benchmark against which to measure the Jewish trajectories of intermarried couples.

⁵See Table 1 in the Technical Appendix for results of a logistic regression model of officiation at intermarriages.

⁶Jewish holiday celebration is measured by an index. Eight Jewish holidays were ordered in terms of “difficulty” by a Mokken scale procedure, which confirmed that the eight variables form a single scale with a strong Loevinger's H scalability coefficient of 0.86 (Hardouin, Bonnaud-Antignac, & Sébille, 2011).

⁷See Table 2 in the Technical Appendix for results of logistic regression model of religion of spouse.

⁸See Tables 3-14 in the Technical Appendix for full results of these models.

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