Social Networks and Jews
Charles Kadushin

MARSHALL SKLARE MEMORIAL LECTURE
Sponsored by the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry (ASSJ)

December 2009

Marshall Sklare Award

The Marshall Sklare Award is given by the Association for the Scientific Study of Jewry (ASSJ) and honors the memory of the Cohen Center’s founding director. Marshall Sklare (1912-1992) is acknowledged as the “founding father of American Jewish sociology” and was Klutznick Family Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies and Sociology at Brandeis University. The ASSJ award recognizes “a senior scholar who has made a significant scholarly contribution to the social scientific study of Jewry.”

Charles Kadushin

Professor Charles Kadushin, distinguished scholar at the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, is a pioneer of the social network field. His book, *Making Connections: An Introduction to Social Networks Concepts, Theories and Findings*, will be published by Oxford University Press in late spring, 2010. He has conducted many large survey research projects, including a congressionally mandated study of the adjustment of Vietnam Veterans. His current work with the Cohen Center includes surveys of Jewish populations and evaluation studies.
# Table of Contents

List of Figures ......................................................................................................................................... ii  
Introduction ............................................................................................................................................ 1  
The Diaspora........................................................................................................................................... 3  
Yoseph Chaim Brenner and Circles of Intellectuals ................................................................. 5  
Power in Jewish Organizations ........................................................................................................ 10  
Some of My Best Friends are Jewish .............................................................. 13  
Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................... 16  
Notes ........................................................................................................................................................ 19  
References................................................................................................................................................ 21  
Appendix ................................................................................................................................................. 25
List of Figures

Figure 1. Social Networks: Sociogram .............................................................................................. 2
Figure 2. Yosef Chaim Brenner and fellow writers........................................................................ 7
Figure 3. Breener’s Circle in London, 1904-1908........................................................................ 8
Figure 4. Top 42 Boards, Two or More Board Members in Common, 1995 ........................... 11
Figure 5. Core Members of Three or More Boards 1995 ............................................................ 12
Figure 6. Proportion of Friends Who are Jewish by Region Density......................................... 15
Figure A1. Eli Valley cartoon.......................................................................................................... 25
Introduction

Social networks are the latest buzz in social science. The New York Times celebrated social networks as one the “new ideas” (sic) of 2003. In 2008 The Web of Science listed 1,269 articles on “social networks, up from 22 in 1980. There has also been linear growth in the number of substantive areas to which social network analysis has been applied, from train schedules in China to the HIV epidemic. The popular press and blogs have been deluged with writing about social networks. Recently, Google listed over 52 million entries for “social networks.” Seventy-five percent of adults ages 18-24 currently use social networking sites (Lenhart 2009) so the growth over time of such use is assured. Jews are not far behind. There are 860,000 entries for “social networks and Jews,” with “networking” prominently featured, for good reason. There is a “Jewish High Tech Community” in Silicon Valley. BBYO (B’nai Brith Youth Organization) has a sponsored Google networking site (sponsorship means that B’nai Brith pays Google for being the first to come up under a search for “social networks and Jews”). “Shmooze” was developed in Israel by Koret Communications in partnership with the Jewish Agency and others. The JDC (“Joint”) supports Jewish Networks. “Reboot” fosters “salons” to aid Jewish networking. “Myjworld” advertises itself as: “the no.1 Jewish social network & web community.” In the summer of 2009 I found at least 20 Jewish social network sites. In addition, it has been reported that over 500 Facebook sites are devoted to Jewish organizations and topics. Jewish organizations’ fascination with these ideas was recently satirized by cartoonist Eli Valley (see Appendix, Figure A1).

As with most things “under the sun,” to use Kohelet’s favorite phrase, Jewish interest in social networks is not new. Many of the leading intellectual forerunners and founders of the social network field were Jews. In Division of Labor (Durkheim 1947 (1902)), Emile Durkheim, the son of a rabbi, struggled to explain the transformation of modern society from the relatively tight-knit village to the more loosely connected and more complex society of the 19th century industrial revolution. The division of labor created social networks (though he did not use the term) that revolved around occupation rather than place and geography. This created new forms of integration and moral communities. In Suicide, Durkheim (Durkheim 1951 (1897)) found close networks to be protective against egoistic suicide and, because they led to clearer norms, against anomic suicide, while overly tight ones promoted altruistic suicide. The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (Durkheim 1915 (1912)) attributed a sense of the sacred to feelings of community.

Georg Simmel, considered Jewish by both the Germans and Georg himself despite his parents’ conversion to Christianity, is regarded by many to be a major intellectual father of social networks.(Simmel 1950; Simmel 1950 (1903); Simmel 1955 (1922)). Simmel, the cosmopolitan Berliner, deftly observed that cross-cutting social circles were the essence of modern life. To put it in contemporary terms, people can simultaneously be involved in a network of basketball lovers, choral singers, Israeli folk dancers, criminal lawyers, and minyan members. I will say more about social circles shortly. Finally, the term “sociometry,” a method of tracing and mapping connections between people, was invented by Jacob
Moreno (born Levi) (Moreno 1953 (Originally published as Nervous and Mental Disease Monograph 58, Washington, D.C., 1934) D.C, 1934) #1986). Sociometry led to the modern studies of complex social networks. Though a great many leading contemporary figures in the social network field are Jews, Jewish social science has invested relatively little in network analysis. In this paper I will review some of the work that has been done and suggest avenues for future exploration.

Here is what I mean by “social network.” A network is a set of relationships between objects. The objects can be anything: people, organizations, nations, power stations, or brain cells. The objects in social networks, are obviously social, though much has recently been made of other kinds of networks. The relationships between the social objects range from being in the same place at the same time to being in love, to exporting goods from one country to another. The relationships can be depicted graphically. Here is the minimum of a sociogram that involves three nodes, all mutually related. With three, according to Simmel, we have the rudiments of a social system (Figure 1).

There need not be just one relationship mapped between nodes. They might be in the same room and might also like one another. When there is more than one relationship, this is called a multiplex relationship. Things do not really get interesting until a third object is involved. In this sociogram 1, 2, and 3 are mutually related. Networks are more complex than this depiction, as we will shortly see.

Figure 1. Social Networks: Sociogram
The Diaspora

I apologize for offering the following history of Jewish social structure *al regal achat*, but there is a method to this madness. With the exception of relatively brief time periods, Jewish life in the Diaspora and in Palestine after the destruction of the Second Temple, was bereft of formal institutions capable of enforcing and policing laws on the basis of a monopoly on the use of force—the usual definition of government (Weber 1946). Babylonia had the Rosh Galut, רוש גלות, in Aramaic or Exilarch in Greek. While it was recognized by the state and had some prerogatives, the Exilarch was mainly honorific and generally relied on moral suasion for enforcement (though at times the Exilarch collected taxes and appointed judges). The famous Babylonian academies led by the Geonim that created the Babylonian Talmud may have been a relatively formal structure but relied on community norms for social control. The scope and powers of the Nasi and the rabbinical academic organizations in Palestine post the destruction of the Second Temple are disputable (Schwartz 2001), but judging from who quoted whom in the Mishna, they clearly formed a social network. Social networks based on Jewish institutions such as the trustees of a Kehilla, rabbis, Chief Rabbis, and heads of Yeshivot connected one local community to *klal Yisrael* and were the main sources of social organization and control of Jewish life until the establishment of modern Israel. *לזרןatzim המلل* (to take himself out of the community—as noted in the Haggadah) was the ultimate communal sanction against an individual.

One would expect, therefore, that network studies of Jewish communities would be very relevant and useful for understanding Jewish life and governance. Unfortunately, analysis of the role that networks played in Jewish life in the Diaspora is generally confined to using networks as a metaphor. There are at least 250 uses of the term in Jewish scholarly journals that I recently checked, but almost none go further than simply noting that relations between Jews in different regions, or between Jews and civil authorities, or more rarely within Jewish communities, were networked. What the networks accomplished, their form, the ties that flowed through them (money, halachic rulings, influence, power, marriage, etc.), remains unanalyzed. An interesting literary example is A.B. Yehosua’s *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* (Yehoshua 1999). A subtext in the novel is the complex network between Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, between Jewish traders and non-Jewish traders around the turn of the first millennium. I can only surmise how these relationships actually worked. The novelistic recreation will have to suffice. I found a few systematic studies. Some hints are contained in, (Castaño Gonzales 1997) who studied “Social Networks in a Castilian Jewish Aljama and the Court Jews in the Fifteenth Century” (Egmond 1989); “Crime in Context: Jewish Involvement in Organized Crime in the Dutch Republic”; and (Zenner 1990) “Jewish Retainers as Power Brokers.” This is a field waiting to be explored. Networks of *shlichim* date long before the Middle Ages, back to the days of the Mishna and perhaps even the Second Temple, when *Entz Yisrael* attempted to exert hegemony over Bavel by ruling on the calendar and claiming final authority on the emerging halacha. There are many contemporary examples of networks of emissaries who were critical to Zionist...
mobilization. This is actually a contested field though there are few empirical studies. I am still waiting for a study of Yishuv and later Israel shlichim to the United States from the 1920s onward.

Cultural networks are especially important. There has been much made of the so-called “New York Jewish Intellectuals” of the 1950s through 1970s. My own study of their networks suggests that only about half were actually Jewish, and while half lived in or near New York, the rest were far flung. Network analysis looks at the whole picture, not just a few notable names. A retrospective look at the networks I mapped for the period of the 1960s showed early connections between those who later became the “Neo Conservatives” (Kadushin 2005). Literary and typical historical analyses cannot substitute for careful network analysis. The renaissance of Hebrew literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is puzzling until one realizes that an international network connected them which provided readers, funds, publishers, and mutual reinforcement. I will offer a preliminary example that draws upon the recent excellent biography of Yoseph Brenner by Anita Shapira (Shapira 2008).

As the work of Durkheim and especially Simmel suggest, the relevance of network analysis to Jews becomes especially salient with emancipation in the 19th century. The modal Jewish settlement or community in the 19th century was the Ghetto, the Jewish quarter or shtetl. Tight communal networks which were almost exclusively Jewish were typical, though as I said, there are a few studies of such networks that suggest they were actually more variegated and stratified than legend would have it. With emancipation, the network boundaries for Jews could and did expand. Social circles, first described by Simmel (Simmel 1955 (1922)), are characteristic of modern mass society and serve to integrate apparently disconnected groups such as Jews into larger societies.

In modern network terms, social circles are networks whose connections are based on common interests and values but do not have a hierarchical structure or a clear boundary. Unlike face-to-face groups, the people in circles may not be directly connected with one another and may not be aware of all of the members. Let me illustrate the idea in a “small world” example. One goes to a gathering in which one apparently knows not a soul. One asks, “Do you know X?” as a way of locating both oneself and the people in the gathering. One asks this of several people. More often than not, the others know X. This is the sign that one is in the same social circle (that is how one happened to have come to the gathering in the first place). If it turns out that after several tries no one at the gathering knows X, it is probably a sign to leave. One is in the “wrong” circle at the “wrong” party.

Simmel’s original formulation well explains the idea:
of collectivism and individualism are approximated to the same extent. On the one hand the individual finds a community for each of his inclinations and strivings which makes it easier to satisfy them. This community provides an organizational form for his activities, and it offers in this way all the advantages of group-membership as well as of organizational experience... An advanced culture broadens more and more the social circles to which we belong with our whole personality; but at the same time the individual is made to rely on his own resources to a greater extent and he is deprived of many supports and advantages associated with the tightly knit, primary group. Thus the creation of circles and associations in which any number of people can come together on the basis of their interest in a common purpose, compensates for that isolation of the personality which develops out of breaking away from the narrow confines of earlier circumstances (Simmel 1955 (1922), pp.130-135).

So this changes the picture for Jews, though Haredi communities, rightly, see expanded social circles as a challenge. I shall have more to say about the challenge posed by cross-cutting circles for studying Jewish social networks. Merely asking what proportion of your friends is Jewish does not begin to uncover the complex circles and networks in which modern Jews find themselves.

Simmel also noted that social circles can substitute for some of the attributes of primary groups, notably, the kind of social support that they offer. Importantly, social circles not only create the conditions for trust, but make for enforceable trust. If trust is violated, there are negative sanctions that are expected and can be applied. Positive and negative sanctions applied by social circles are the basis for Jewish self-governance post 70 CE.

Social circles are related to or developed from various instituted forms of social organization and cannot function completely independently. They are “pegged” to statuses, roles, and organizations. In the case of the cultural/intellectual circles of Berlin of the 1920s that Simmel discussed, the pegs were various “interests and common purposes.” I think this situation fits the case of most urban American Jews. They are well educated and have a wide variety of interests and goals other than being Jewish and belong to many organizations that have no direct Jewish connection. Nonetheless, the impact of Jewish social circles is hardly negligible as any Jewish fundraiser knows.

**Yoseph Chaim Brenner and Circles of Intellectuals**

But let me go back in time to the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. Post-Haskalah attempts to revive the Hebrew language is a typical social network movement phenomenon. I marvel at how a circle of
writers in Eastern Europe, Germany, England the United States, and Palestine at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries had the audacity to write essays, poetry, and fiction and publish periodicals (even plays) in a language that practically nobody, including most of the Hebrew authors themselves spoke. They could not depend for support on their local Yeshiva or local Jewish institutions for these organizations by and large were antithetical to the writers’ goals. The writers were sustained by a network of voluminous correspondence with one another, in Hebrew, across many national boundaries. Many of these letters have been preserved. By using them to track the network that linked the writers, the Hebrew renaissance movement can be recreated and better understood. The network was formed not only by correspondence, but by who was in the same city meeting face-to-face, and who was on the masthead and wrote for various, often short-lived, periodicals. These linkages can be retrieved by careful historical work. As a demonstration, hardly a finished piece of research, I offer a network that formed around Brenner in London from the years 1904 to 1908, as reconstructed from Anita Shapira’s recent extraordinary biography of Brenner (Shapira 2008).

Brenner, as many of you may know, was an iconic figure in early Hebrew literature. He influenced an entire generation of writers from the Ukraine, to White Russia, to Poland, to Germany, to Britain, to the United States, and Palestine. His oeuvre is hardly read today but, according to Shapira, his life is second only to Bialik and Agnon in the attention of literary critics. His influence may be attributed to his networked connections and his rather odd but forceful personality. Social networks, as we said are linked to and draped around institutions and organizations. Hebrew networks were in part built around key periodicals, which were the main publishing and economic literary engines of the time. The periodicals, almost all of them now archived in one place or another, published political analyses, literature, and literary criticism. Novels were serialized as they were in Western media of the late 19th century (Dickens is a well-known example of a serialized writer), and the periodicals were the major publishers of longer literary fiction. The correspondence of Brenner and his friends when he was in London, 1904-1908, which I will used as an example of a network, is derived from the footnotes to Shapira’s chapter on the London period. Much of it revolves around Brenner’s periodical, המעורר (Hameorer (The Awakener) that he started in London which lasted but two years and seven issues —partly a victim of finances but mainly Brenner’s inability to secure what he thought were quality manuscripts. The title conveys Brenner’s left wing orientation. Brenner, who at this time earned his living, such as it was, from typesetting Yiddish publications, also wrote in Yiddish, edited, wrote much of Hameorer, typeset, proof read, and publicized, and otherwise supervised the entire enterprise. Pictures are said to be worth a thousand words. First an archive public domain photo of some of the characters (later in Palestine) and then a network diagram of the correspondence (Figure 2-3).
Figure 2. Yosef Chaim Brenner and fellow writers

From left to right: David Shimoni, Yosef Chaim Brenner, Alexander Siskind Rabinovitz, S. Y. Agnon, 1910.
The network diagram definitely does not speak for itself, so some commentary. Since the source is correspondence cited in the footnotes in a book about Brenner, the people obviously are those who revolved around Brenner, who is at the center. (This is technically called an “ego network.”) The arrows show who wrote to whom. The numbers on the lines show the number of letters noted in the footnotes for that chapter in Shapira’s book.6 The distances between the points or the nodes, is based on the shortest path that connects any two nodes, so Chayah Wolfson, who was killed in a pogrom in 1905, is out on an edge because four paths connect her letters to others with Brenner. An algorithm—a computer program—(“spring embedding”)7 places the points on a plane, preserving this distance. Moreno drew the network diagrams that he called sociograms by hand, an almost impossible task and one prone to errors. Try it sometime, it will drive you to distraction in any sociogram over 15 or so points. There are 37 in this diagram. The figure includes some correspondence between people other than Brenner that Shapira used to tell her narrative. This allows us to separate the network into different circles that are based on maximizing the number of interconnections within and minimizing the number of connections from that circle to any others. This intuitive idea of a clique is not so easy to accomplish as it sounds because until recently, one could either minimize connections outside the clique or circle or maximize those within it, but not do both. The algorithm which accomplishes both was recently developed by a physicist (Newman

Figure 3. Brenner’s Circle in London, 1904-1908
The different colors show the four different circles. The computer program that drew the network and calculates the circles is part of a package called Ucinet 6,(Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 2004) whose version of July 2009 was used. I give you this detail not to snow you with my erudition but to demonstrate how far we have come since Simmel and Moreno’s original insights. We do not arbitrarily decide who is “in” and who is “out” but we have a rule for doing this. In this way, findings can be replicated or attacked.

But does it make sense? In this case it does. First, we begin see why Brenner was so influential.8 The network encompasses a list of who was prominent in Hebrew literature at the time. The circle immediately concerned with publication of Hameorer is designated by the nodes in red. The blue ones are his close circle from his home town of Homel in Ukraine and those he knew and corresponded with from that early period, most of whom did not contribute to Hameorer, a matter of great concern to Brenner. The ones in grey at the bottom of the chart are members of the older literary establishment. Yoseph Klausner, already a distinguished professor of Hebrew literature (Amos Oz’ uncle), served in part as a go between. Brenner disliked Bialik because he was too bourgeois and mercilessly rewrote Brenner’s submissions to Bialik’s publishing ventures, but Brenner nonetheless needed him. They probably never met face-to-face but, according to Shapira, had an intense relationship. The black nodes were Brenner’s intimates, including two women (Chaya Wolfson and Sarah Marmor) with whom he may have been in love. The network, based only on correspondence, is incomplete. Additional analysis could include those who wrote for Hameorer, those who were on the masthead, and those who Brenner saw face-to-face in London. The data for the latter are included in the biography. Copies of Hameorer are in several libraries in Israel and would yield the names of authors and the mastheads. A complete analysis of the Hebrew literary circles of the time would include the circles around other periodicals and lead to a far better understanding of the renaissance of Hebrew literature and the forces that sustained it and those that divided it. But one thing is clear: These circles transcended geographic propinquity and the indifference, and often enmity, of the established Jewish institutions of the time. The relationships provided the emotional and financial support without which there would not have been a revival of Hebrew literature. The network diagram also shows the multiple pulls on the writers: their home town affiliations, their friends and lovers, geography, and the circles of other writers, not necessarily liked by Brenner’s colleagues but whose influence was crucial nonetheless.
Power in Jewish Organizations

I jump forward 100 years to 1995. Archival or publically available records can be mined to analyze the current state of American Jews. Ma’yan, “The Jewish Women’s Project” was interested in the relative power of women as compared with men in national Jewish organizational life. As part of the research we undertook for them, we developed a database of members of the boards of the top national Jewish organizations in 1995 (Horowitz, Beck, and Kadushin 1997). The top 48 organizations were chosen by a panel of 20 experts—the names of the organizations should come as no surprise to this audience. While the board members or, in the case of huge boards, the executive committee, are in principle a matter of public record and usually available on the organization’s stationery, securing these names was not as easy then as one might imagine, although today 990 IRS forms available online give at least the top officers. Eventually, we collected the names from all but three organizations, 3708 names in total, 405 of whom were members of more than one board. Studies of corporate overlap have become a staple in understanding the workings of power (Davis and Greve 1997; Mizruchi 1996), and they have been extended to understanding voluntary organizations (Galaskiewicz, Bielefeld, and Dowell 2006). In the Ma’yan study we used the overlap between Jewish organizational boards to gain some insight into the relative power of men and women. There are various network-based indicators of the extent to which people act as go-betweens and the extent to which people potentially can influence others. A power or influence measure takes into account that people who have connections are connected with people who have even more connections. Women constituted about 20% of the membership of Jewish boards of organizations that were not exclusively women’s organizations, such as Hadassah. This is about the same proportion as for non-Jewish voluntary organizations in the United States. Indeed a minority, as Ma’yan suspected. But using network influence and “betweenness” measures, as well as data from a survey of these board members, we concluded that once women got onto a board, they had about the same power and influence as men.

Maybe. But using more sophisticated methods that were not readily available to us in 1995, I now find that at the very top of the pyramid there were fewer women with less influence than the men. Let me illustrate. First, a map of the top organizations that are connected through two or more common board members (Figure 4).
The size of the circles is proportional to the “betweenness” of the organizations—the extent to which, based on their board members, they link other organizations. The thickness of the lines is in proportion to the number of board members in common. Not linked by at least two board members to the other organizations were the Rabbinical Assembly, Israel Bonds, and the Wexner and Mandel Foundations. AIPAC lived up to its function, with the most linkage—you can make of this what you will—followed by NJCRAC, whose function was intentionally a linking function. CLAL linked “left wing” religious organizations to the mainstream. Much can be learned from an extended perusal of this diagram of the Jewish world of 1995, which of course included organizations that have changed or no longer exist in the form in which they were at that time.

I then zeroed in on the people who were members of the boards in the center of the map of organizations, and drew a sociogram of those who were members of three or more boards and who were all connected by at least one common membership (Figure 5).
Names are attached to the nodes. No privacy or confidentiality has been violated since this is public information that has been transformed by social network analysis into meaningful data. The size of each node is proportional to its power—that is, the number of boards it is linked to, weighted by the centrality of the board. In personal terms, they are “chosen” by those who are already chosen. This may not be politically correct, but the women are colored pink and men blue. There are about 20 percent women in this core—the same proportion as overall on boards that are not exclusively women’s organizations. There are only three women in the center of this network, Helen Burger, Shoshana Cardin, and Yonna Ann Goldberg or one third of those in the core circle, somewhat fewer that the proportion of men, 45% in the center. I do not know what the picture might look like today because the study has not been done.
Some of My Best Friends are Jewish

Consider what may be the opposite of social circle network analysis but which passes for “network” analysis of contemporary Jewish life. Intuitively, the widely used “How many of the people you consider to be your closest friends are Jewish?” as “Most” or “All,” as the NJPS 2000 questionnaire would have it (about 30%), ought to reveal Jewish social circles that surround the individual respondent to surveys. I have used the question myself, and Steven Cohen has often used it (Cohen and Kelman 2008; Cohen and Kotler-Berkowitz 2004). The problem with this item is, in some respects, its apparent advantage. It correlates very well with items that indicate deep embeddedness in the Jewish community, but it fails to show the other aspects of Jews’ friendships. In a recent Cohen Center survey of young people ages 24 to 34 who had once applied for a Birthright Israel sponsored 10-day-trip to Israel, the question correlated highly with the following: hours of Jewish education, belonging to a synagogue, “I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people,” parents not intermarried, married to a Jew, volunteering for a Jewish cause, and not volunteering for a non-Jewish cause. The last item is symptomatic. There are no bridges here. The more Jewish friends one has, according to this question, the more Ghetto-like one’s situation. Is this a marker for Jewish continuity? Not necessarily. The story is more complex. Cohen and Kelman report that at least half of the friends of young Jewish adults are Jewish but that single young Jews do not affiliate with Jewish institutions as often as their inmarried cohorts. So their informal circles are important. (Cohen and Kelman 2008). This is a matter of half empty and half full. The network of sophisticated young singles on which Jewish continuity depends is involved in Simmel-like circles that include non-Jewish friends. Yet the presence of non-Jews in the network does not necessarily lead to intermarriage.

Context is important. Young Jews may find themselves in a context in which there are few or many Jews. We did a study of Jews on eight college campuses where the undergraduate proportion of Jews varied from seven to 25 percent (Kadushin and Tighe 2008). Being a minority had its costs. The proportion of respondents who felt it was “easy to be Jewish on this campus” was highly related to the proportion of Jews on the campus. But even on campuses with a small minority of Jews, those with a high proportion of Jewish friends even though they also indicated a connection to others, non-Jews, on campus, felt it was easier to be Jewish. Jewish circles can coexist with non-Jewish relations in a context in which the majority is not Jewish. If Jews are to be part of mainstream America, there is little choice.

There is another way of examining networks of Jews that is between a full network analysis and simply asking people to report on the percentage of Jewish friends in their circle. Invented in the 1970s (Wellman 1993), this method asks survey respondents to name (initials will do), who helps them with what, or with whom they have had discussions on important matters. Respondents are then queried on various characteristics of each person named (usually up to five), how the respondent came to know them and when, and how well the persons named know one another. A mini-network, called an ego-centric network (much like the one we showed for Brenner’s London circle), is created.

Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies
surrounding each respondent. The nature of their relationships to the respondent and each other is revealed, along with the extent to which those relations are segmented into separate networks or constitute a relatively closed system. This allows for a much more subtle examination of the way Jews are related to one another and to networks of non-Jews. Unfortunately, this approach, used from time to time in the General Social Survey sponsored by the National Science Foundation is almost never used in Jewish studies.

The one good example I know of was part of a study of Jewish high school teenagers (Kadushin, Kelner, Saxe, Brodsky, Adamczyk, and Stern 2000). In spring 1999, researchers at Brandeis University’s Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies surveyed approximately 1,300 Jewish teenagers and their parents. The teenagers, ages 13 to 17, were drawn from Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and independent congregations in three regions in Massachusetts selected according to the density of the Jewish population (high: 34% Jewish, moderate: 26% and low: 3%). These individuals marked a bar or bat mitzvah ceremony in the selected congregations in the five years preceding the survey. Nonetheless, this population is by no means homogenous, and extensive efforts were taken to ensure participation by teens of diverse levels of Jewish commitment. In addition, there was an oversample of Jewish day school students. The response rate was 82%. This account of the network aspects of the study draws upon Shaul Kelner’s paper presented to The AJS when it met here in Los Angeles seven years ago (Kelner 2002).

One section of the survey instrument consisted of an ego social network questionnaire. Respondents were asked to list up to eight of their closest friends. Descriptive information was collected about each friend mentioned, including whether each friend was a family member, “consider[ed] him/herself Jewish,” and was seen in various settings such as school, work, and extracurricular teams and clubs, as well as a variety of ethnic settings such as a Jewish summer camp, and afternoon/weekend Jewish school and whether the friends knew one another. This information goes far beyond what percentage of your friends are Jewish and allows, among other things, for an investigation into the way Jewish friendships are embedded, or not, in various institutional settings, including the neighborhood. School is the most important institutional setting for teenagers so it is no surprise that over 75% of all close friends in this study met in school. But ecology also counts. If we examine the totality of the friends nominated in this method, in areas of high Jewish density, half of the friends met in school were Jewish, one quarter in medium density areas, and under one fifth in low density areas (Figure 6). Not shown on the chart is the 100% Jewish friends for day school students, who notably have few non-Jewish friends. There is less of a decline from regions of high density to those of low density in the proportion of friends who are Jewish but who are not friends met in school. Schools reflect the social ecology of the region. Beyond the school reality, individual choice has more of an effect, as individual seeks out those who are like themselves.

When the networks surrounding each individual are examined in detail, it becomes apparent that in lower density areas, Jewish
friends who do not attend the same schools are encountered through Jewish organizations such as synagogues; youth groups; immersion programs, such as summer camps; and trips to Israel. In all three regions, about 60% of respondents participate in a Jewish organization at least once a month. These organizationally-involved respondents typically participate in two Jewish organizations. Organizations are important and form the basis of personal friendships. This is an important lesson that goes to the heart of the attempt to create Jewish networks, as satirized by Eli Valley in our first slide. “Networking” cannot exist in thin air, as it were, on its own. As Kelner puts it,

Non-school ethnic networks are heavily dependent on the embeddedness of social relations in organizational contexts… Without them, the chances for Jewish community in ethnically sparse areas are slim. In light of this, it is no surprise to find that as the density of the Jewish population decreases, Jewish friendships become increasingly embedded in Jewish institutions or do not exist at all. (Kelner 2002, p.14)

While the majority of respondents in all three regions have Jewish friends, the proportion with no Jewish friends rises sharply from 5% to 21% and 32% as Jewish population density decreases. There are all kinds of policy implications from this analysis, which is a small part of what can be done with this dataset collected 10 years ago. It is far superior to the simple question, “What proportion of your friends are Jewish?” For example, organizational and institutional embeddedness of Jewish circles and friendships, a crucial aspect of minority statuses, cannot be otherwise tracked. We need to do more of these kinds of studies.
Conclusion

Let me review what I think we know about networks and Jews. We need to rethink the very idea of network. First, and this is very important, a list is not a network. A perhaps silly example: There is a difference between a list of Lamed Vavniks and a network of Lamed Vavniks. Were the few righteous connected with one another, or at least some of them, then the world might be a different place. We tend, however, to think in terms of lists. When Abraham bargained with the Almighty over Sodom, he was concerned with the sheer number. A minyan, the final irreducible minimum, as interpreted by the Rabbis, is of course a face-to-face group which is by definition one kind of a network. But Abraham, had he a sophisticated view of networks, would have wanted to know about how the few righteous were connected with one another and their links, if any, to the evil others. L’havdil, lists of Jewish community notables do not tell us very much. We would need to know how the rabbis of the Mishnah and Talmud were linked to one another and to different communities in Palestine and Babylon. Despite the lack of much archeological evidence of a rabbinic presence in Roman Palestine (Schwartz 2001), the traditional interpretation of the importance of Rabbinic Judaism may have rested on the apparent tight networks of the rabbis as preserved by the discourse of oral arguments, not by nameless authorities but by quoted individuals linked to one another. According to Mosca (Mosca 1939 [1923]), minorities rule if they are linked to one another. A network study of the Mishna is yet to be made. Hebrew literature courses assign lists of important writers. But the revival of the Hebrew language as a modern literary medium rested not on Ben Yehuda or even his limited circle, important as they were, but on an entire network of Hebrew writers preexisting and following Ben Yehuda. The network had centers of power, and often contentious circles. A study of the network of Hebrew writers as it emerged over time has yet to be done. Agnon’s and Bialik’s place in literature is assured not only because of the quality of their work but, at least to some degree, by their self-conscious positioning of themselves at the center of key literary networks.

Contemporary lists of machers are not very useful. It is nice to know who major donors are and who makes the Forward top 50 list. But this is no guide as to how the American Jewish community works. We produced a map of interconnections of top machers and top organizations in 1995. One suspects that the kind of people on a list would be different today. But much more germane to the apparent crisis of Jewish fundraising is the structure of Jewish fundraising. Not only are the kind of players different, but their interconnections are probably different. To the casual observer, the structure seems much more fragmented. In what ways are the Forward top 50 connected? We don’t know. We certainly don’t know the implications of this picture for the future of American Jewry and its relationship to Israel, because we simply don’t have the picture.

Then there is problem of Jews becoming “white,” as Richard Alba put it (Alba 2006). White means that Jews are interpenetrated into the American mainstream. Jewish personal identity is at stake as well as the viability and influence of Jewish organizations. Concentrating on Jewish exclusivity, an all Jewish environment in the American
Diaspora, is certainly one solution to the crisis and the one favored by the allegedly growing Haredi community. This approach calls for an end to interpenetrating Jewish social circles. Since these circles are endemic to most Jewish life in America, this is an impractical solution for most Jews. A list of the number or percentage of one’s friends who are Jewish does not address the issue. Suppose 60% of one’s close friends are Jewish. This is not a “Jewish network.” These 60% can be linked in various ways to the 40% who are not Jewish. At one extreme, the circles do not overlap. One has non-Jewish circles and Jewish circles and never the twain shall meet. This is probably an unrealistic scenario. But the interpenetration of Jewish and non-Jewish circles has implications for ethnic in-marriage and how one handles it, as well as to whom one invites to one’s seder and the consequences of that. Need I mention Barack Obama’s seder list? We have no idea as to the extent of interpenetrating Jewish and non-Jewish circles and certainly not the social, religious, or political implications of this interpenetration.

Finally, let me return to Eli Valley’s cartoon which pokes fun at attempts to create Jewish networks (And let me read some of the text for you if you can’t see it clearly):
“Apparently, the entire Jewish community is entranced by the idea of social entrepreneurs.”
“Are you insane! A social entrepreneur is someone with no discernable talent beyond the idea of speaking excitedly.”

The logical paradox is very clear. Through conscious, formal means we want to develop informal “spontaneous” Jewish networks. Organization leaders have for years struggled with this paradox as they try to create informal leaders within their organizations who are loyal to the formal leaders. When I last checked during my organization consulting travels, no one had a good handle on this problem. The one thing we do know, is that informal networks have to have a “peg” to hang on—some kind of related formal institution, structure, or category. As with all matters in social networks, this is a feedback loop. Networks lead to organizations and to social institutions as well as being the product of organizations and institutions. A good understanding of this issue and where to break into a circular process requires more thought and more data on informal social networks in Jewish life than we now have. We have the tools and the concepts, but we have not yet systematically applied them to this vexing but important issue.

My goal has been to leave you with more questions than answers. I hope I have succeeded.
Notes

1. I have benefited from the comments of Shaul Kelner, Bethamie Horowitz, Theodore Sasson, and Leonard Saxe.

2. Some experts note that *regel* is probably not “foot” but rather “rule” from the Latin; “religion” is also a derivative of “rule.”

3. An example is Yehuda Shenhav who contends that misguided shlichim created the exodus of Iraqi Jews to the State of Israel and robbed them of their heritage. Others contest his account of their actions and networks (Shenhav, Yehuda. 2003. *היהודים-הערבים: לאומיות, דת והאנטישמיות. Tel Aviv: Am Oved*).

4. Bendix, the translator, changed Simmel’s use of “circle” to “group,” which he erroneously thought was more appropriate. I have changed “group” back to Simmel’s original usage (Kadushin, Charles. 1966. “The Friends and Supporters of Psychotherapy: On Social Circles in Urban Life.” *American Sociological Review* 31:786-802).


6. I am indebted to Igor Karagodsky, an intern at Brandeis’ Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, for assistance in going through the footnotes in Shapira’s text.

7. A spring embedder considers the nodes as metal rings in a plane that are connected to one another by springs and that therefore repel or attract each other. A spring embedder works in iterations. In each iteration, the forces exerted on each node v are computed. Each incident edge (u,v) attracts the node v with the force $f(u,v)$ in the direction of u, with $f(u,v)$ being proportional to the difference from the distance of u and v and the length of the spring (“Hooke’s Law”). Conversely, each leaving edge (v,u) repels the node v away from from u with the force $f(v,u) = -f(u,v)$. After all forces have been summed up, the rings are moved in the plane according to the forces exerted on them. (By the force exerted on it, a ring is subject to a certain acceleration into a certain direction that is considered constant for a short period; the new position of the ring is the position at the end of this period.) Then the spring embedder steps into the next iteration. With a sufficiently large number of iterations, a state of equilibration is reached, in which the force exerted on each ring is 0.
8. An interesting review of the book observes that the biography does not analyze the literary greatness of Brenner’s writing and how it evolved but only Brenner’s place in literary circles. In the end the reviewer thinks this approach is useful, but he does express some reservations.

9. There were smaller connected groups not connected with this main core.

10. There may be some ethical concerns since although the data are public, the network analysis reveals data that are not otherwise available.
References


Sklare files.


Appendix

Figure A1. Eli Valley Cartoon

The Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University is a multi-disciplinary research institute dedicated to the study of American Jewry and the development of religious and cultural identity.