Intermarriage among Jews in Canada: A demographic perspective

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Introduction

In classical demographic analyses, the growth and decline of population groups is measured in terms of natural events such as births and deaths or in terms of in- and out-migration. This classification of population flows is appropriate when a population is defined on the basis of physical boundaries such as national geo-political borders. However, it has been shown in studies dealing with ethnic groups that other factors of flow must be considered when the population being studied is defined on the basis of ethno-cultural characteristics (Goldmann, 1998; Robitaille et Guimond, 1995). Goldmann (1998) proposes the hypothesis that changes in the size of ethnic groups within a given geographic area cannot be explained only by considering traditional demographic flows. Changes may also occur as a result of people modifying their declared ethnic identity over time. This virtual flow has been labelled "ethnic mobility".

Religion, as it is used in this analysis, is an ethno-cultural characteristic that defines a group within a larger society (i.e. the Jewish population within Canadian society). Therefore, the concept of ethnic mobility is applicable when attempting to explain changes in the number of people who identify with a particular group. Growth in the size of a particular group beyond natural population increase can be explained by new adherents identifying with the religion. Decline beyond natural population decrease may occur in a number of ways: conversion to other religions, loss of religious identity, and intermarriage.

The fact that intermarriage occurs in North American Jewish communities is an accepted and well-documented fact. This paper focuses more narrowly on intermarriage within the Jewish community in Canada. Specifically, this paper addresses the following two questions:

(1) Is the rate of intermarriage among Jews in Canada changing over time?

(2) What is the impact of intermarriage, with respect to the religious identities of children of exogamous unions?

The essential concepts and the primary data source are described in the next section of this paper. Particular focus is placed on defining the study population since it varies somewhat from the classification used by a number of studies of the Jewish community in Canada. Although the work is primarily descriptive ,an attempt is made to conduct relatively simple multivariate analyses. The results of the analysis are presented in two sections, the first focusing only on intermarriage, and the second examining the impact on the children living in families in which intermarriage occurred. This paper concludes with a summary of the findings, a discussion of the limitations of the analysis and some directions for future research on this topic.

Data, concepts and definitions

The data for this study were extracted from the 1991 and 2001 Canadian censuses of population. The subjects of analysis in this paper are *married couples* in which at least one of the partners is Jewish. The analysis also extends to the children living these families. Couples are defined as those who are *legally married* at the time of the census. This excludes common-law unions and same sex partners. In the context of this paper

intermarriage is defined as the legal union between two partners, only one of whom has declared Jewish religion in the census.

Respondents to the census may declare themselves as Jewish by religion and as Jewish by ethnic origin. A number of community studies conducted following the 1981 and 1991 censuses constructed a complex classification of the Jewish population on the basis of responses to ethnic origin and religion. In fact, this classification is currently being used in the most recent studies of the Canadian Jewish communities (Shahar 2003). It was decided to limit the definition of the study population in this paper to those respondents who declared that they were Jewish by religion. Limiting the selection of the Jewish population to the respondent's declared religion avoids the issues related to using ethnic origin as a classification variable (such as multiple responses or the distinction between identity and ancestry). Furthermore, religion is reduced to a binary concept: Jewish and non-Jewish. No attempt is made to disaggregate the non-Jewish category at this stage in the analysis.

Families are defined on the basis of social relationships (census families) and economic relationships (economic families) in Canadian census data. The analysis in this paper focuses on census families, defined as a couple with or without children living in the home or a single parent with a child living in the home. The latter part of this definition is not germane to the analysis that follows since we are concerned only with legally married couples.

Results are presented at the national level, for selected provinces and for selected Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs). There were no changes in provincial boundaries between 1991 and 2001. However, the definition of some CMA boundaries changed

between these two time points (see Statistics Canada, 2003). It is assumed that the changes have little impact on the analysis given the characteristics of the population being studied.

The size of the Jewish community in a given locality is considered to be an important ecological variable in this analysis. It is assumed that larger communities have more resources to support their population. It is also assumed that they tend to be more institutionally complete. The size of the Jewish community relative to the total population in the locality is also important. A small Jewish community within a large population is faced with greater challenges with respect to ethnic retention (Breton et al, 1990). The variable "Jewish Population ratio" was derived in order to account for this effect. It is defined as the ratio of people of who declared Jewish religion in the census to the total population living in the CMA.

Methods

Simple odds ratios were constructed to analyse the primary phenomena of interest in this study. The following three ratios were calculated:

$$OR_{jmjf} = P_{jf} / P_{njf} \tag{1}$$

where OR_{jmjf} is the odds ratio of a Jewish male marrying a Jewish partner,

P_{jf} is the proportion of Jewish wives, and

P_{njf} is the proportion of non-Jewish wives.

$$OR_{jfjm} = P_{jm} / P_{njm} \tag{2}$$

where OR_{jfjm} is the odds ratio of a Jewish female marrying a Jewish partner,

P_{jm} is the proportion of Jewish husbands, and

P_{njm} is the proportion of non-Jewish husbands.

$$OR_{jc} = P_{jc} / P_{njc} \tag{3}$$

where OR_{jc} is the odds ratio of the child of an exogamous couple being Jewish,

P_{jc} is the proportion of Jewish children in exogamous families, and

P_{njc} is the proportion of non-Jewish children in exogamous families.

Odds ratios are interpreted as follows. A ratio of 1 indicates that the probability of a given event is 0.5. A ratio greater than 1 indicates a higher probability of the event and less than 1 indicates a lower probability. It is important to note that two ratios are calculated for intermarriage (formulas 1 and 2 above) since it can be assumed that the selection of a life partner is not a unidirectional event.

Jewish couples

It has been observed that intermarriage is increasing among members of the Jewish communities in North America (Weinfeld 2001). Some authors suggest that the prevalence of intermarriage is directly related to the size of the Jewish community in a particular locality. The analysis presented below offers empirical evidence to support both notions in the case of the Canadian Jewish community.

A number of general trends are apparent from the odds ratios at the national level. First, it appears that Jewish women are more likely to marry Jewish men than vice-versa. If one examines the ratios for 1991 (see **Table 1**) it can be seen that a Jewish woman is over eight times as likely to marry a Jewish man whereas a Jewish man is only 6.5 times as likely to marry a Jewish partner. Although one cannot attribute any motives on the part of the Jewish males or females, it is clear that this situation introduces some complications for young Jewish women seeking Jewish partners. The eligible pool of Jewish males is being depleted by those who are marrying out of the religion. This

disparity holds true for 2001 as well—5.3 for women and 4.5 for men—although the difference is less dramatic than it was 10 years earlier.

Table 1: Odds of intermarriage, 1991 and 2001

	1991 Census - odds ratios		2001 Census - odds ratios		
Geography	**Husband marries Jewish wife**	**Wife marries Jewish husband**	**Husband marries Jewish wife**	**Wife marries Jewish husband**	**Jewish Density**
Atlantic	2.21	2.54	1.87	1.23	0.13
Québec	8.82	13.07	6.17	8.59	
Ontario	7.05	8.77	4.93	5.67	
Prairie	4.41	6.34	3.16	3.42	0.50
British Columbia	2.31	2.45	1.48	1.84	
Montréal	9.54	13.54	6.64	9.20	2.63
Ottawa	3.04	5.49	2.51	3.59	1.08
Toronto	8.70	10.32	6.29	7.05	3.54
Winnipeg	7.67	9.65	4.36	5.86	1.93
Calgary	3.13	4.77	2.69	2.91	0.69
Edmonton	3.00	4.50	2.65	2.48	0.43
Vancouver	2.51	3.07	1.77	2.47	0.88
Canada	*6.51*	*8.33*	*4.47*	*5.27*	

The results in **Table 1** also bear out the assumption that the rate of exogamy among Jews in Canada is increasing over time. An examination of the odds ratios shows that they declined between 1991 and 2001, signaling that both women and men are less

likely to marry within the religion in 2001. This appears to be a general trend across Canada. We also see that the gap between men and women with respect to intermarriage appears to be narrowing over time.

The likelihood of intermarriage is very highly correlated with the density of the Jewish population living in a given locality[1]. There is no surprise in this finding. The data show that regions with lower Jewish population ratios experience higher rates of intermarriage, as indicated by the lower odds ratios in **Table 1**. For example, the odds of a Jewish woman marrying a Jewish man in Edmonton are only 2.48 in 2001. The corresponding Jewish Population ratio is 0.43. By comparison, the equivalent results for Montréal are 9.22 with a population ratio of 2.63. While this relationship generally holds true across Canada, an interesting anomaly exists when comparing Montréal and Toronto. Although the population ratio is lower in Montréal, the corresponding odds ratios are higher, indicating lower rates of intermarriage. A number of factors serve to explain this apparent anomaly. First, the presence of a large Sephardic community in Montréal may partly explain this outcome. Another likely contributing factor is the presence of a large ultra orthodox Jewish community. Finally, the Jewish population in Montréal is older than that of Toronto (median ages are 41.8 and 39.4 respectively in 2001).

The effect of intermarriage on the next generation

Children represent the future for all societies. Although immigration is a source of growth for all open societies, natural population increase is an important component of demographic growth. The analysis of these flows becomes somewhat more complicated when the study population is defined on the basis of religious or other ethno-cultural

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[1] According to calculations derived from the data from the 2001 Census the correlations between the odds of intermarriage and population density are 0.933 for males and 0.883 for females.

characteristics. Other factors such as ethnic mobility and exogamy also influence the components of population growth and decline.

From a demographic perspective, exogamy in itself does not necessarily signal either an outflow or inflow for a particular religious or ethnic group. However, exogamy may have an impact on the next generation – the children born to intermarried couples. It has been observed that the "… family replenishes the supply of Jews, and socializes children into Jewish life and community" (Weinfeld, 2001: 127). Therefore, we need to examine the impact that intermarriage has on the children of these couples with respect to their religious identity.

A dichotomous variable was constructed to classify the religion of children from exogamous unions for this analysis. They are either Jewish or not Jewish. No attempt is made to further disaggregate the non-Jewish category into other specific religions or no religion, since this would not contribute a great deal to the conclusions drawn from this analysis. Also, the analysis was limited to families in which there is at least one child and in which the union is clearly exogamous with respect to Jewish religion.

As with the preceding discussion on intermarriage, the results of the analysis are presented by cross-tabulating the odds of a child's religion being declared Jewish by the type of exogamous union – either the husband or the wife is Jewish. The following table presents the odds ratios for selected geographic areas for 1991 and 2001. Discussion will be limited to the seven CMAs listed in the table and the summary for Canada.

Table 2: Odds of the child in an intermarried family having Jewish religion, 1991 and 2001

	Exogamy	1991	2001
Atlantic	Husband Jewish	0.47	0.24
	Wife Jewish	1.56	1.53
Québec	Husband Jewish	0.48	0.39
	Wife Jewish	1.08	1.65
Ontario	Husband Jewish	0.39	0.45
	Wife Jewish	1.27	1.72
Prairie	Husband Jewish	0.38	0.36
	Wife Jewish	1.26	1.36
British Columbia	Husband Jewish	0.14	0.40
	Wife Jewish	1.18	1.64
Montréal	Husband Jewish	0.51	0.42
	Wife Jewish	1.17	1.86
Ottawa	Husband Jewish	0.33	0.46
	Wife Jewish	0.86	1.88
Toronto	Husband Jewish	0.40	0.45
	Wife Jewish	1.46	1.76
Winnipeg	Husband Jewish	0.43	0.38
	Wife Jewish	2.33	1.65
Calgary	Husband Jewish	0.36	0.37
	Wife Jewish	1.20	1.00
Edmonton	Husband Jewish	0.41	0.37
	Wife Jewish	0.77	1.14
Vancouver	Husband Jewish	0.11	0.45
	Wife Jewish	1.39	1.40
Canada	*Husband Jewish*	*0.37*	*0.41*
	Wife Jewish	*1.22*	*1.65*

Jews are often singled out in the literature on ethnic retention and transmission for two reasons: the role of women in preserving the culture and traditions in the home and the fact that they tend to be among the ethnic and religious groups with the highest degree of retention (for examples see Alba, 1985 and 1990; Breton et al, 1990; Isajiw, 1999). This "retention hypothesis" is founded on the importance of religious and ethnic traditions in ensuring continuity and on the role that women play in maintaining the traditions in the home.

If we accept this hypothesis we would expect to find significant differences in the odds of a child identifying as Jewish depending on the religious composition of the intermarried couple. We would expect that children living in families in which the female partner is Jewish to be more likely to declare their religion as Jewish. In fact, the data in **Error! Reference source not found.** support this hypothesis. We see that the odds of children being identified as Jewish are greater than 1 when they are living in exogamous families in which the mother is Jewish[2]. Conversely, the odds of the child being Jewish are substantially less than 1 when the husband is Jewish. This finding clearly supports the important role of women in religious identity retention for the Jewish community in Canada.

The ratios presented **Error! Reference source not found.** show a number of other interesting patterns. The probability of a child being Jewish when the mother is Jewish has increased between 1991 and 2001 for all but two of the CMAs included in this study. Only Winnipeg and Calgary show a decline in the odds ratio for women between 1991 and 2001. It is difficult to speculate on why this may be the case in Calgary.

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[2] An odds ratio greater than 1 indicates that the probability of the child being Jewish is more than 0.5.

However, in Winnipeg, it is likely that the demographic ageing of the community is a factor in the outcome.

The correlation between Jewish population ratio and the religious identity of children living in exogamous unions is not as strong as in the comparison between the probability of exogamy and Jewish population ratio. In fact, the correlation is rather weak (0.383) in cases where the Jewish parent is the father and only moderately strong (0.688) when the mother is Jewish. The seven CMAs selected in this analysis all have well established Jewish communities that can be considered institutionally complete with respect to religious and cultural amenities for the children (i.e. afternoon and full-time Jewish schools, youth groups, summer day camps and sports and recreational facilities). The moderate correlation for women suggests that intermarried Jewish mothers tend to avail themselves of the facilities available in the community in order to support cultural and religious retention among their Jewish children.

Conclusions

Three very distinct findings are presented in this paper. First, the rate of intermarriage among members of the Jewish community in Canada is increasing. Coupled with this, the data show that the size of the Jewish community in which the people are living has an impact on the propensity towards intermarriage. Previous work on this topic suggested that the likelihood of intermarriage among Jews is greater on the west coast – specifically Vancouver – than in central Canada. Vancouver would have lower probabilities of intermarriage among Jewish couples than either Edmonton or Calgary if the likelihood of intermarriage were merely a function of Jewish population

ratio. The results in **Table 1** do not follow this pattern, supporting the notion that a west-coast phenomenon exists.

The second finding is that women are more likely than men to seek a Jewish partner, although the gap between the sexes in this respect has narrowed between 1991 and 2001. A quick reaction to this finding, as stated earlier, would be that the trend of men marrying out of the religion is reducing the pool of eligible Jewish partners. This scenario is a plausible explanation for the narrowing of the gap. However, one must also consider the possibility that the fact that Jewish women are marrying non-Jewish men may, in effect, result in an increase in the Jewish population in Canada in the future for two reasons. First, some of the non-Jewish men marrying these Jewish women may convert to Judaism. Second, and more importantly, the children of such unions are more likely to be raised as Jews, which leads directly to the third finding.

According to the results presented in this paper, women have a greater influence than men on the religious retention of the children. Moreover, the strength of this influence appears to be greater in 2001 than in 1991. It would be presumptuous to suggest that a trend exists on the basis of two time points. However, the results for 2001 are very encouraging for the Canadian Jewish communities. It would be interesting to see whether local administrative data, such as enrolments in Jewish schools, Jewish summer camps, sports clubs and other community activities support this finding.

The analysis presented in this paper is essentially descriptive. It is based on a simple classification of marriage and of Jewish identity (based on religion). No attempt was made to examine whether or not couples in common-law unions behave differently with respect to intermarriage. Also, no distinction was made between first and subsequent

marriages. Following from this, we do not know whether the children are the biological offspring of both parents or whether the families are blended.

We also know nothing about the degree of religious adherence of the subjects in this analysis. It was speculated that the presence of a strong Ultra-Orthodox community in Montréal contributed to a lower rate of intermarriage when compared to Toronto. Detailed data on the religious distribution of the Jewish population (i.e. counts and characteristics by denomination – Hassidic, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, etc.) would strengthen the analysis substantially.

A topic such as trends in intermarriage calls for multivariate models that would allow us to assess the impact of factors such as age at marriage, immigrant status, marriage sequence (i.e. first, second, third, …), human capital characteristics and social capital characteristics. Such models would also make it possible to assess the impact of these independent variables over time. Naturally, this requires longitudinal data, which are not currently available.

It would also be helpful to be able to sub-classify the population by types of Jewish identity. In fact, the Canadian Jewish communities have adopted such an approach in their current round of profiles drawn from the 2001 Census of Population. Part 3 of the 2001 Census Analysis Series, being conducted by Charles Shahar (of the Montreal Jewish Federation) on behalf of the United Jewish Federations of Canada, is titled "Issues of Jewish Identity". It will include a cross-sectional profile of intermarriage among Jews in Canada.

The occurrence of intermarriage among members of the Jewish communities in Canada is an indisputable fact. However, more work is needed to analyse the impact of intermarriage on the longer-term survival of the Canadian Jewish communities.

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