

JEWISH IDENTIFICATION AND SOCIAL GROUP WORK: AN APPRAISAL *

by EARL YAILLEN

*Director, Staff Development, YM & WHA-Irene Kaufmann Centers,
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania*

THE past may often appear as "the good old days" because the present is changing and those past days seem comfortably unchanging. Some of the forces which are pulling at the Jewish Center field today make the past for the Jewish Center field look like "those good old days." A particular storm center today is the soul-searching we are doing in relation to the Center's role in strengthening Jewish identity.

Pressures from two diverse sources compel continuous reexamination of what we are doing and of our goals.

The Pressure for Jewish Content

One pressure originates in the attempts to define the Jewish component or Jewish content. This has the longer history and has figured prominently for at least the past 20 years, especially in the past two or three years. The strongest position taken in this direction was by Graenum Berger in 1964.¹

Mr. Berger's conclusion strongly postulated that social group work no longer be the host discipline in the Jewish Center, but that such a place be taken

over by the Jewish educator. Since I know Mr. Berger only by his writings and reputation, I assume that he purposely overstated his case in order to make Center workers think about the objectives of their programs.

It is unfortunate, however, that our thinking has to be stimulated periodically by such strong statements. We all remember a similar ferment about Jewish content stirred by the attacks of the Conservative Rabbinate a few years ago.

Many Centers are sincerely striving to examine the Jewish component of their program, but it seems to this writer, that after such attacks there is a scurrying to find Jewish content in a program, or a press to evolve some kind of Jewish programming so we can claim that quantitatively we had more Jewish programming this year than we had last year. Such an approach is not only questionable on professional grounds, but leads us into attempting to predict what a certain Rabbi is going to complain about and programming around that.

This kind of behavior leads to one of three end results: (1) we find out that our prediction was wrong and that we did not have to worry in the first place; (2) the Rabbi accuses us of sponsoring a program which is the prerogative of the Synagogue or Temple; (3) we satisfy one Rabbi only to be attacked by another one.

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¹ Graenum Berger, "The Center as a Jewish Educational Institution," *Conference Papers*, National Association of Jewish Center Workers, New York, 1964, (mimeo), pp. 127-57.

And in the process, we have programmed not for our membership but for a Rabbi or Jewish educator, which is not our function.

The Therapeutic Pressure

The second pressure exerted upon us is more recent than the Jewish content pressure. It was elucidated by Robert Vinter almost a decade ago.² This approach has been commonly termed the therapeutic or remedial approach. It has occupied our thinking in one way or another. Charles Levy discussed its implications in scholarly fashion.³

Just as we have responded to the "Jewish content pressure," so at times we have succumbed to the remedial pressure just because it is a pressure. Just as we frenziedly seek Jewish content to promote, so we search for disadvantaged groups to serve in order to prove that we are really doing social group work.

If we sincerely believe that what we have been trying to do in the past is necessary, then such reactive behavior is unnecessary. I am not proposing that we stop serving mentally retarded children or physically handicapped children. However, our service to these and other disadvantaged people should be seen as part of a totality of service rather than a way of proving Vinter's thesis. A key point in my presentation is that if we purport to do social group work with our groups, we do not need to rely on serving new groups to prove that we do group work. I would also question our attempts to get on the federal gravy train just to

enhance our image in the social work community.

There has been a third reaction to these two pressures. It is a healthier reaction in that it attempts to conceptualize an approach to service rather than reacting to a pressure in an almost panicky way. This approach has been set forth by Emanuel Tropp⁴ in a most definitive way. Much of the approach seems to be based on the work of William Schwartz.⁵ The Tropp formulation is one of the finest formulations attempted of Jewish Center work.

I affirm Tropp's statement that "it is the very achievement of the task in a . . . group that provides the key dynamic around which social growth takes place."⁶ This has been an historic part of the group work approach but seems to have been forgotten by some Jewish social group workers in their desire to get on either the therapeutic bandwagon or the Jewish educator's bandwagon.

However, when we discuss social group work, and especially when we discuss the whole area of Jewish identification, we must be able to look at both the individual and his developmental needs as well as the group's intent. Coming to grips with Jewish identity as a group goal is as legitimate as coming to grips with civil rights problems or any other group goal.

Lawrence Shulman said at last year's meeting:

"It is my belief that we can make a significant contribution to helping our adolescents grow up with a healthy sense of them-

² Robert Vinter, "Group Work—Perspectives and Prospects," *Social Work with Groups—National Association of Social Workers*, New York, 1959, pp. 128-48.

³ Charles S. Levy, "The 'Class Struggle' between Provision and Restoration," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XLII, No. 3 (Spring, 1966), pp. 243-49.

⁴ Emanuel Tropp, "Group Intent and Group Structure: Essential Criteria for Group Work Practice," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XLI, No. 3 (Spring, 1965), pp. 229-50.

⁵ William Schwartz, "The Social Worker in the Group," *The Social Welfare Forum*, Columbia University, 1961, pp. 146-71.

⁶ Emanuel Tropp, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

selves. I also believe that we can help them work on their sense of identification as Jews when it is of importance and of the moment to them."⁷

Mr. Shulman's discussion was based on the Schwartz approach. Mr. Shulman read portions of a record intending to demonstrate that an interpersonal problem of the members was blocking discussion of a Purim Carnival, and how the worker helped resolve the interpersonal problem. He stated a group worker who was too exclusively concerned with Jewish content would not have worked on the interpersonal problem, but would have attempted to stimulate the girls' interest in the Purim Carnival.

The implication in this approach is that there is a hierarchy of goal-setting and process; that a worker interested in strengthening Jewish identity would neglect his professional responsibility to help a group solve some interpersonal or structural problems. This approach also seems to exclude from a working diagnosis the value placed by group members on Jewishness or more specifically, on a Purim carnival. Therefore, although the Tropp-Schwartz approach is the most definitive conceptualization yet of Jewish Center work, and although it is a significant answer to the one-sided therapeutic approach, it seems to neglect the individual just as the therapeutic approach seems to neglect the group.

The Schwartz approach would dismiss the study-diagnosis-treatment process for two major reasons. The first is that such an approach biases the worker in a certain direction and prevents him from seeing other significant aspects of the group or individual situation. The

⁷ Lawrence Shulman, "Group Work Practice with Teens in the Jewish Center—a Third View," *Conference Papers*, National Association of Jewish Center Workers, New York, 1965, p. 115.

second is that such an approach usually means a study of the individual in depth and that such studies are not necessary for the group worker.⁸

There seems to be increasing recognition of the validity of the second reason; I would question the first reason. If Mr. Shulman's worker did not know about group structure or did not have some operational diagnosis he would obviously not have been able to recognize or deal with the interpersonal problem.

Social Work and Social Functioning

We have examined two pressures facing Jewish Center workers and several responses to these pressures. I propose to discuss the question of Jewish identification from yet another vantage point.⁹ Though my own position is close to that of Schwartz' orientation, I do feel that group intent does not occur haphazardly and that the worker's role is based on some assessment of the individuals in the group and their individual needs.

The key social work concept at the present time is social functioning, and its core is the concept of social role.¹⁰ Social functioning can be viewed as a person's ability to integrate the various roles he must play in society. Role theory

⁸ William Schwartz, *op. cit.*

⁹ A paper delivered at the 1966 meeting of the Council on Social Work Education discussed the therapeutic approach, the Schwartz (reciprocal) approach and another approach. The paper was delivered by Beulah Rothman and Catherine Papell and was entitled "Social Group Work Models—Possession and Heritage." The other approach was represented by Jack Rubinstein in a paper entitled "The Pittsburgh Position: Its Application to Social Group Work Practice." I personally find much to agree with in the Schwartz approach, but I also identify with Rubinstein's formulation.

¹⁰ Helen Perlman, "The Role Concept and Social Casework: Some Explorations—The 'Social' in Social Casework," *Social Service Review*, March, 1961, pp. 370-81.

is most useful in helping us look at the question of Jewish identity.

No matter what group work model we use as a source of practice, the question of what is a Jewish role should be of obvious importance to us. The concept of Jewish role is of key significance in discussion of Jewish identification.

Currently, a question has been raised about the Kurt Lewin formulation.¹¹ Jack Rothman's thesis strongly supported the contention that minority group identification has no bearing on a person's outgroup associations or attitudes. As important as this discovery is, it seems to be leading to another formulation by some.

This latter formulation is based on Rothman's findings that Jewish adolescents identify very readily with the non-Jewish aspects of society and are very comfortable within the context of American society. Several papers have reviewed research findings and have come up with the same conclusion.¹² American-Jewish adolescents have no sense of being different from the mass of American adolescents. In various interviews, very few adolescents were able to express any sense of uniqueness as Jews.

I am afraid that this kind of response tends to lead us down a road of false security. If our Jewish youth are comfortable, why rock the boat? Isn't this what we have dreamed of and wished for? Self-hate is no longer a problem.

Even if the dynamics of self-hate have become nearly extinct, we are still dealing with the needs of Jewish people. As social workers, we should be alert to

those needs and to the problems and potential problems facing our members.

In a sense, the ready acceptance of the theory that self-hate is no longer a major problem is a reaction to the extremism of some Center workers who have identified with the Jewish educator approach previously discussed, and it is also a reaction to what Donald Feldstein has called the Jewish infusion approach.¹³ Feldstein rightly questions the overzealousness by which we try to prove by ex-post-facto reasoning that our programming or our reasons for programming are Jewish.

Another reason for the positive reaction concerning the position against self-hate as a present reality is the striving for Jewish identification for the sake of Jewish survival. Walter Wurzberger was quite right when he asked whether ". . . we have a moral right to treat the individual as a means to the perpetuation of a cause. Is it compatible with the belief in the dignity of the individual to reduce the human person to an instrument of group survival?"¹⁴

Our goal, then, is not to run blindly in the direction of Jewish identification just to prove we are more Jewish or as Jewish as other Jewish institutions, and it is not to search out dysfunctional groups to serve in order to do what some people might define as social group work. An alternative is to examine our present clientele and any problems they have in social functioning.

The Jewish Role and Social Functioning

We all seem to agree that the Jew identifies very easily with the general society.

¹¹ Jack Rothman, *Minority Group Identification and Intergroup Relations*, Research Institute for Group Work in Jewish Agencies, American Jewish Committee, New York, 1966.

¹² Reported in Victor Sanua, "A Study of Attitudes of Adolescents Attending Jewish Community Centers in New York," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XLI, No. 4 (Summer, 1965), pp. 402-17.

¹³ Donald Feldstein, "The Emperor's Clothes," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XLI, No. 3 (1965), pp. 251-61.

¹⁴ Walter S. Wurzberger, "The Meaning and Significance of Jewish Survival," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XL, No. 3, Spring, 1964, p. 312.

In fact, as some people have said, the out-group is now the in-group and vice versa. This was brought home to us in Pittsburgh last month when we sponsored a National Jewish Youth Week program. The original planning group, which was made up of agency youth leaders, decided to invite representatives of all Jewish youth groups to sit on the steering committee and participate in the planning. As the planning went on, some of the agency members began to resist the cultural and religious aspects of the program. When some of their dissatisfaction was reported to a branch board meeting, many of the adult members of the board began to agree with the youth; and one answer to getting more interest on the part of the youth members of the agency was a suggestion not to call it *Jewish Youth Week*.

It may appear from these events that Judaism meant nothing to these youth and, in fact, to the adults. If being Jewish means nothing to our youth, we do know they have strong feelings, and we do know that they want to talk about those feelings. Therefore, we must assume that our Jewish adolescents do not see the Jewish Center as an agency where they can discuss such important problems.

Just because there is no seeming relationship between in-group identification and out-group association does not mean that a problem has ceased to exist. The late Irving Canter said “. . . the unique role of the Jewish social group worker derives from the hypothesis that in our society, the Jew develops an unstable self system, and the confusion, conflicts and ambivalent feelings this engenders can best be worked through in our kind of setting.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Irving Canter, “What Research Tells Us About Training for the Jewish Component in the Practice of Group Work in Jewish Settings,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, (Spring, 1963), p. 269.

In another article, he listed several sources of interference with the healthy development of the individual's Jewish “self.” These sources included: (1) the multiplicity and conflicting nature of the acceptable norms provided by the various institutionalized movements within Judaism which confuses the base of identification; (2) the culture conflict in which the reaction to a given situation, such as playing basketball on Friday night, will result in reward from the dominant group and possible punishment or at least guilt feelings obtained from the ethnic group; (3) the disparity between the idealized norm and the reality of the Jewish behavior of adults; (4) the internalization of negative stereotypes about the Jewish group which leads to distorted attitudes of Jews toward their role and status in the community.¹⁶

Therefore, even if Lewin's concept of the necessity of having a stable “ground” within the ethnic group to identify with the out-group seems to be unvalidated, it still is important in relation to the psychology of the people in the minority group.

In discussing reactions of Jews to the Rosenberg case, Aaron Antonovsky observed that

“one type of anxiety is the emotion arising from a gap between label and identity. One learns that he is a Jew—but to whatever extent he has not fully, stably and acceptingly clarified what this means, he is prone to anxiety. Sartre calls clear identity ‘authenticity’. To be authentic does not mean to be unafraid. The ghetto Jew . . . knew fear. . . . He was not, however, anxious as a Jew, for he knew who he was. The modern, emancipated Jew does not fully know who he is, and much of what he does know he cannot accept. He is the stranger who does not wish to be a stranger. . . . He retains the label of Jew, but has no identity acceptable to himself. It is this lack of

¹⁶ Irving Canter, “The Ethnic Dynamic: Problems Related to the Jewish Component,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XL, No. 2 (Winter, 1963), p. 186.

acceptable identity which is the core of the problem of anxiety for the Jew *qua* Jew.¹⁷

The Jew, therefore, in his desire to rid himself of this anxiety, becomes more and more Americanized, but his anxiety still remains. Antonovsky goes on to discuss Jewish reactions to the Rosenberg case and wonders if Jews are supposedly so secure in their Americanism and Judaism, why any Jew should have worried about whether the Rosenbergs were Jewish or not.

He concludes by indicating that the "American Jew premises his psychological security, his sense of ethnic identity, upon acceptance by 'goyim,' but he feels that the 'goy' has let him down by not accepting him. The Rosenberg case, then, does not raise the fear of a wave of anti-Semitism. It does, however, provide the 'goy' with excellent grounds for expanding his refusal to accept the Jew as an American."¹⁸

Manheim Shapiro and Werner Cohn have discussed Jewish voting habits. A large percentage of Jewish voters consistently vote "liberal," even when their socio-economic position is elevated. This would make one wonder whether insecurity serves as a basis for this kind of political behavior.

The Midtown Manhattan studies in mental health show some very significant statistics.¹⁹ The Jewish population studied was on the short end of both the well category and the impaired category. 14.5 percent of the Jewish population were categorized as well, as compared with 17.4 percent of the Catholics and

20.2 percent of the Protestants. 17.2 percent of the Jews were found in the impaired area, as compared with 23.5 percent of the Protestants and 24.7 percent of the Catholics. The highest category for the Jews was to be found in the mild and moderate area.

It has become an accepted fact that socio-economic level has something to do with mental health, and we know that a large number of impaired people are found in the lower classes.²⁰ Therefore, someone could postulate that it is not surprising to find Jews in the middle category of mild and moderate symptoms, since a large number of Jews are in the middle-class or identify with the middle-class.

However, when the Midtown Manhattan study held socio-economic status constant, the Jews in the mild and moderate range were still statistically more numerous than Protestants and Catholics. In fact, the SES standardization completely leveled the differences between the Protestants and Catholics.²¹ Therefore, if SES does not seem to serve as a variable in the production of anxiety, until something better comes along I feel that one hypothesis for such anxiety is the ethnic factor.

Jews may seem comfortable as Americans, but in a sense running after the slippery American dream covers up the anxiety below the surface—an anxiety based on a lack of *definition* as Jews, which is the unstable ground Lewin discussed. Just as we know that the continuous search for middle-class comforts produces anxiety among the non-Jewish population,²² the continuous

¹⁷ Aaron Antonovsky, "Like Everyone Else, Only More So: Identity and Anxiety, and the Jew" in Stein, Vidich and White, *Identity and Anxiety*, Free Press, Glencoe, Ill., 1960, p. 428.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 433-34.

¹⁹ Leo Srole, Thomas Langner, Stanley Michael, Marvin Opler, and Thomas Rennie, *Mental Health in the Metropolis: The Midtown Manhattan Study*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1962, pp. 300-24.

²⁰ August Hollingshead and Fredrich Redlich, *Social Class and Mental Illness*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1958.

²¹ Srole *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

²² C. Wright Mills' *White Collar* still remains the classic in this area. Mills wrote more with contempt than with pity, but the study still remains the best one in the field, in my estimation.

search for middle-class comforts as a means of making us better Americans produces even more anxiety in the Jewish population. I would also suspect not only the high incidence of anxiety as a symptom of this problem, but we could also find even more evidence in the high amount of psychosomatic illnesses which are overly prevalent among Jews, including hypertension, ulcers, and arthritis.

Therefore, on the one hand we have anxiety produced by a lack of clarity about what being Jewish is, and on the other hand we still find ourselves part of a minority, no matter how comfortable we are.

As Rabbi Richard Rubenstein, of Pittsburgh, has pointed out:

“There is more than ample evidence that the ghetto does not end when the Jew achieves the cultural level of his non-Jewish neighbors, or when he is freed by a liberal interpretation of his religion from ritual compulsiveness. The ghetto continues to exist as long as Jews remain through no fault of their own, what Max Weber termed a parish community, with all that this spells out in terms of Jewish insecurity, self consciousness, and predetermined relationships with the non-Jewish world.”²³

And when our adolescent population tries to find an image for itself as Jews, what does it use as a yardstick? It uses the Orthodox frame of reference as a yardstick for being Jewish.²⁴ This even heightens the anxiety, since it produces guilt. And as we become more guilty and anxious, the tendency is to escape into the search for status and recognition by the socio-economic route. Our adolescents then become images of their parents; and essentially the normal struggle between the adolescent and the

parent does not become one of finding a definition for being a Jew, but becomes a struggle for becoming more and more like the parent at a faster and faster rate.

Somewhere during adolescence the Jewish youth finds the search for a Jewish identity as fruitless, since not too many adults are ready to help him honestly examine the problem. And therefore, the Jewish adolescent's fight for independence is not predicated on being different from his parents but wanting immediately those things that the parents deny him, i.e., the car, smoking, getting intoxicated, and especially not having to attend meaningless religious services or classes.

The Agency and Jewish Identification

The role of the group worker and of the Jewish group work agency in relation to Jewish identification or Jewish content in the context of what has been discussed then becomes a necessary and important one. We do not have to hunt for Jewish programming as a facade to satisfy some critics, and we do not have to feel guilty about what we are attempting to do as social workers, if we want to come to grips with these problems.

The Jewish community is searching for identity and meaning, just as the general community is searching for some meaning to life when the gross national product is made the goal of life. But in addition, the Jewish community needs to find meaning in relationship to its Jewishness.

The Jewish adults have failed to solve this dilemma and delegate such activities to other agencies. At present, the synagogue and temple seem to have that assignment and are not coming to grips with the real problem. Some lay people, and evidently a number of Jewish group

²³ Rabbi Richard Rubenstein, “The Vocation of the Modern Rabbi,” *The Reconstructionist*, Nov. 27, 1959, p. 9.

²⁴ Bernard Rosen, *Adolescence and Religion*, Schenkman Publishing Co., Cambridge, Mass., 1965.

workers, seem to feel that Jewish Centers can play a role in helping Jewish people with their identity problem.

We have accepted the challenge in a generalized way and have been talking about Jewish identification as a Jewish Center goal for two decades. However, we have allowed other agencies, especially the religious agencies, to dictate, directly or indirectly, and usually by threat, the method we should use in arriving at that goal. In addition, we have developed some confusions and, in effect, many Centers have become places where Jewish youngsters go to play "Jewish basketball," and Jewish adults go to sweat in a "Jewish steam room." At times, when we do attempt to sponsor Jewish programs, our members do not see the difference between our sponsorship of such programs and their sponsorship by religious institutions. Some of our members resist such programs, not because they seem to conflict with programs sponsored by synagogues and temples, but because they find the programs of the religious institutions as having no meaning for them.

Therefore, the image of the Center must change, especially for our younger members. This is not to say that we should give up programming around Jewish holidays or other prospective meaningful areas.

In addition, however, we must begin to help our members discuss their feelings and anxieties around their Jewishness and its relationship to the general non-Jewish problems facing them.

"Our basic premise is that Jews growing up in our society have problems relating to their Jewishness and that one of our major functions is to help them deal with this reality. Our contention is that the worker must have the capacity to understand what these conflicts might be and he must have the information which would be helpful to members in dealing with these conflicts. . . .

I believe that he (the group worker) does his job best when he has the respect and

integrity of members which permit him to accept members fully and encourage them to live the Jewish lives they have chosen. This kind of accepting attitude would encourage members to explore alternate approaches to Jewish living and freely probe their attitudes toward Jewish religious and cultural experiences. A worker concerned with people would be impelled to stimulate them to taste and test new Jewish experiences because he believes that probing and testing are important to their social and psychological development."²⁵

If we are to approach our members in this manner, then they must know what we are attempting to help them achieve. Therefore, the procedure begins at intake so that there is no mistake about the focus of the agency. The other process that begins at intake and beyond is the continuous study and diagnosis of the individual, including the important area of his Jewish self-image. This would include knowledge of the family's attitude and behavior around Jewishness, the member's religious affiliation and attitude toward that institution, his peers' attitudes, etc.

And just as we make a contract with the member around areas he can feel he can discuss in the group or with the worker, we make a similar contract around his search for Jewish identity. And just as we creatively use program for other areas, we do the same thing around Jewishness. What are his feelings around the Ecumenical Council and its declaration on the Jews? How does he feel about the movie "The Pawnbroker"?

One of the more interesting developments in some Centers is the development of curriculum programming. What I have read about such programming makes me wonder about the efficacy of such devices. There is a great deal of

²⁵ Irving Canter, "What Research Tells Us About Training for the Jewish Component in the Practice of Group Work in Jewish Settings," *op. cit.*, pp. 269-70.

difference between making a group hold a certain number of Jewish programs and establishing a contract whereby the member knows that he is free to discuss his problems around being Jewish. In our overzealousness to produce Jewish programming, the curriculum approach seems to be a ready-made answer. But is it really helping the members solve their problems of identification?

And as we help our members examine their feelings about their Jewishness and their lives within the framework of American society, we must realize that our Jewish heritage can be a source of strength for our members. Our members are looking for values; and as they become American-value oriented, they begin to question the problems they see around them.

But the major values in Jewish tradition are those which can help them out of their dilemma. The problem is that many of them have not been confronted with these values and their application to present-day problems. Morris Ticktin listed some of the important values:

1. Respect for the individual and personal integrity
2. Respect for differences and tolerance of all points of view
3. Social justice and equality
4. Attitudes toward education
5. Mutual responsibility²⁶

A key Jewish tradition is that of the strength of the family. Our non-Jewish friends still believe that one of the wonderful facets of Jewish life is the strength of its family life. However, the Jewish family in the third and fourth generation is becoming no different from the family in the general community. The problems that face the American

non-Jewish nuclear family now face the Jewish nuclear family.

If, as social workers, we question the direction of American society and its effect on the personalities of our members, we have a duty to help our members face up to these problems and, if necessary, not only to help them change their behavior, but to influence change in the aspects of society which produce social dysfunctioning. If as Jewish social workers we find that Jewish values can be a cornerstone to such changes, we also have a duty to utilize them as the positive force they can be.

If part of our anxiety stems from the fact that we are identified as being different, then we should make that difference stand for what it really means. It is something that can contribute its share to making America the kind of society that we as social workers feel it should be. And just as we should take a stand with Jewish values as a strong cornerstone within American society, we should utilize our social work values and skills within the Jewish community. Just as the Jewish in Jewish community center should stand out within the general society, community should stand out within the Jewish community. The Center need not be a new sect as distinct from Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionism, but should serve as a focal point within which all views can be aired and discussed.

Although, as I indicated before, I disagree with Graenum Berger's solution, I do agree with one of the aspects of his presentation. Mr. Berger would make the family the cornerstone of the Jewish Center program.²⁷ If family membership means anything at all to Center programming, it should serve as a basis for what we do and not only as a basis for raising funds through increased membership dues.

²⁶ Morris Ticktin, "Value Conflicts: Their Implication for Jewish Community Center Work," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2 (Winter, 1962), pp. 146-47.

²⁷ Graenum Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

And when I speak of family involvement, I do not mean a phony kind of togetherness where we advertise that the family who swims together stays together. If our goal is to help our young club members grapple with the questions of their Jewish identification, we cannot do this in a vacuum. Any changes we may help produce can be negated at home. And, in addition, we must realize that our goal is not to separate our members from their homes but to strengthen their families as well.

And last but certainly not the least, the accusation of irreligiousness among Jewish social workers may be true, or it may stem from the worker's belief or desire not to encroach on the Rabbi's territory. However, as social workers we also know that many human needs are based on unconscious conflicts and fears. Many of us have reacted to certain aspects of organized Jewish religion because we could not accept certain rites, rituals, and ceremonies as necessary or meaningful.

However, just as very traditional Jews have not understood the real importance of certain rituals and have promoted rituals for ritual sake, we, in our reaction against them, have not perceived their importance either. As a psychoanalytically oriented Rabbi has stated, "So much of Jewish theology is an irrelevance that it may frequently serve to confuse both Rabbi and community. On the other hand there can be no meaningful Jewish identity without rite and ritual."²⁸

"The unconscious did not come into existence with Freud. The basic dilemmas of the human situation and man's relatedness to these dilemmas have existed and been dealt with long before the twentieth century. The power of the religious myth is that it frequently expressed and communicated the deepest and most abiding of human concerns to succeeding generations within the religious

community. The transparency of the symbol and the fact that the myths have lost their literal historic authenticity in many cases is irrelevant to their central function which was to give expression in depth to continuously significant aspects of the human condition. . . . I do not mean to suggest that all religious rites are worthy of being continued. I would even want to suggest that many of them arise out of obsessional motivations which once understood diminish our need for them. There remains, however, a body of ceremonies so deeply and adequately rooted in human need that they are unlikely ever to be dispensed with."²⁹

Therefore, Jewish values, including the stress on family life as well as certain religious rites and rituals, are important cornerstones in the totality of what we are attempting to do. As we help our members come to grips with their problems, we are in turn helping them to evolve Jewish practices which can be meaningful to them within modern society. Some religious institutions may even want to join us in this endeavor when they see that we are not attempting to usurp anyone's powers but that we are essentially trying to help our members solve their problems of social functioning which can never be done through a one-dimensional approach.

Conclusion

Any examination of our practices does not involve only agency staff but the total agency including our boards. Our boards are just as confused as our members and as we are. The search for Jewish identity is not only part of adolescence, but involves all of us.

Such an examination will make our boards uncomfortable and will make us uncomfortable, but this does not mean that we can desist from such an attempt. In doing so, we will be basing our practice on what we claim is our forte, the

²⁹ Rabbi Richard Rubenstein, "The Symbols of Judaism and Religious Existentialism," *The Reconstructionist*, May 1, 1959, p. 16.

²⁸ Rabbi Richard Rubenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

social functioning of our members. We may not be able to promise miracles, but at least our focus will be based on our competency.

If we use our skills and knowledge as social workers correctly, then we will not

have to be stampeded into reacting to pressures of one sort or another, but we will continually react to what we diagnose as the problems facing our members. And in reality this is what the community should expect of us.