

Family Consultation

BY DOROTHY RABINOWITZ

(Author of Home Life and The Other Jews)

On April 23 and 24, 1972, several dozen prominent scholars and sociologists, rabbis and researchers gathered in the conference rooms of the American Jewish Committee to exchange intelligence on a matter of increasing concern to the American Jewish community: the status and future of the Jewish family. Organized by the Jewish Communal Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, the Consultation reviewed demographic facts and intermarriage statistics, analyzed comparative behavior profiles on child-rearing, and worried about political trends among Jewish youth, divorce rates and other threats to traditional Jewish family patterns. The free-wheeling discussions left at least this visitor with the feeling that what the participants did not know about the thoughts, habits and predilections of American Jewry was probably not very important anyway.

One learned, for example, that when it comes to the use of physical punishment and other coercive child-rearing measures, Jewish mothers rank lower than High Protestants (Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Congregationalists), but not at low as "non-religious" mothers -- the two groups with whom Jews seem to have the most in common. That, compared to other groups sampled, Orthodox women have, on the average, the lowest educational attainment, although their husbands' education level equals that of Reform Jewish Husbands. That Jewish children have the lowest participation in formal groups like Boy Scouts and Campfire Girls -- they are not joiners -- while their mothers have the highest rate of organizational participation of all the groups tested.

All this, and more, stems from the researches of Dr. Zena Smith Blau, Professor of Sociology at Northwestern University and Senior Research Scientists at the Institute for Juvenile Research at the Illinois Department of Mental Health. Dr. Blau has been studying behavior and social patterns among Jewish, High Protestant and non-religious families with children in an upper middle class elementary school.

There were some surprises in Dr. Blau's findings. She noted ruefully, for instance, that the present generation of Jewish mothers are no longer lowest on the scale of coercive punishment of children -- a regressive assimilation, Dr. Blau believes, toward the ways of non-Jews.

On the other hand, she reported, Jews continue to outrank every other group in level of aspiration for their children; and marital stability is still higher among Jews than among others.

Considerable disagreement emerged over Dr. Blau's calm appraisal of the changing sexual patterns on the college campus. The much-vaunted "sexual revolution," Dr. Blau asserted, is not really a revolution at all. Young men and women are simply more at ease and less armed with each other today, she believes -- and she considers that situation all to the good. Several of her colleagues insisted, however, that there was indeed a sexual revolution under way, and that it boded ill for Jewish family life.

By and large, the conferees addressed themselves in serious terms to serious issues, the most important of which was the transmission of Jewish identity. Dr. Marshall Sklare, Professor of American Jewish Studies at Brandeis University and regarded in some quarters as the Jewish sociologist, was a keynote speaker. He pointed out that the Jewish family had held together despite an earlier conflict between generations -- the conflict between immigrant parent and immigrant child. Even today, Dr. Sklare noted, Jews tend to interact with their families far more than other groups do. One study he cited, for example, by Dr. Robert Winch, indicated that some 78 per cent of Jews in the metropolitan area maintain relationships with at least 12 households of kin (compared to 35 per cent among Catholics and 16 per cent among Protestants). Nevertheless, cautioned Dr. Sklare, changing life styles have produced a new alienation that threatens Jewish continuity.

Describing some of the differences between the Jewish radicalism of the thirties and the radicalism of the present day, Dr. Sklare noted that the former did not fragment the family. Indeed, the Jewish radicalism of the thirties was usually a family affair. Even the atom spies,

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, had drawn brothers and cousins into their espionage activities. Contemporary Jewish radicals, Dr. Sklare observed, are overrepresented among the militants; they tend to be second generation offspring; they all show a marked concern for the underdog; and most typically, they have weak religious identification.

Perhaps the most sharply debated subject of the conference was the issue of intermarriage. "Everyone now has someone in the family or close to it, who is intermarried," Dr. Sklare observed. "This is unique in Jewish history."

The conferees seemed to agree that the major responsibility for Jewish alienation rested with the nuclear family, which has failed to keep children actively Jewish, failed to maintain the Jewish family tradition and exposed its children to an environment which made intermarriage not only possible but likely. The Jewish family, Dr. Sklare pointed out, has substituted for its once prime role as transmitter of Jewish identity the synagogue, the Jewish school, the Jewish camp, the trip to Israel. "They are all surrogate Jewish families," he observed.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Sicilian Pizza



HOME DELIVERY
734-1523

(In Somerset Shopping Center)

YOUR HOST

SUPPORT YOUR LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE NOW IN ITS 8TH YEAR

IN NEW YORK IT'S LINDY'S
IN LAS VEGAS IT'S

foxy's

KOSHER STYLE
DELI • RESTAURANT
24 HOURS

GOLDEN STEER STEAK HOUSE

Featuring . . .

- PRIME RIBS
- SEA FOOD
- COCKTAILS
- STEAK
- ITALIAN CUISINE
- BANQUETS
- GOURMET DINNERS

Advance Notice required on:
PHEASANT • CHUKAR • QUAIL
WHOLE GOOSE • GUINEA HEN
SUCKLING PIG • WHOLE LAMB

Our 11th Year

For Reservations, Call

384-4470

5 P.M. to 12:30 A.M.



308 W. SAHARA

(2 Blocks West of Sahara Hotel)

NEW & EXISTING HOMES
MOBILE HOMES

BUILT IN

VACUUM CLEANING SYSTEM

A POWERFUL CENTRAL VACUUM
AT A PRICE LESS THAN MANY PORTABLES

SALES

SERVICE



INSTALLATION

DO-IT-YOURSELF

FOR MORE INFORMATION & FREE ESTIMATE CALL

384-7870



RESIDENTIAL • COMMERCIAL • INDUSTRIAL
2328 S. HIGHLAND DR. - LAS VEGAS

LUNCHEON

BUFFET

\$1.49

SILVER SLIPPER

GAMBLING HALL AND SALOON