



Editor's Introduction

Harriet Hartman¹

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We open this special issue with a memorial to Rela Mintz Geffen, z”l, a scholar and applied leader in our field whose life touched personally many of us and whose work shed light on family, gender, generations, and Jewish identity, to name but a few of the areas to which she contributed.

She would, I think, be delighted to be part of this special issue entitled “Methods Matter,” because so many of the articles touch on timeless dilemmas in the social scientific study of Jewry, showing how integral methodology—how we gather the data for what we study, and make sense of it through sometimes sophisticated techniques—matters for the fundamental questions our field addresses. The theme of “deficit” versus “inventory”—the “glass half empty” versus “glass half full” perspective is brought to bear in Sivan Zakai’s research focusing on children, a subpopulation that rarely receives the spotlight in social science in general, and even less so in the social science of Jewry. The theme of “Who is a Jew?” underlies controversy over the methodology employed by Hannah Shaul Bar Nissim and Matthew Brookner, who offer a technique for classifying “Jewish” philanthropic organizations (challenged by Paul Burstein). Given the rarity of organizational studies, the challenges posed by this research are ones we all should ponder. “What is Jewish identity?” and how universal is it among Jews underlies the driving force in the multivariate technique of SSA modeled by Sergio Della Pergola, Ariela Keysar and Shlomit Levy, as well as the LCA of Janet Aronson et. al. “How are Jews Jewish?” underlies the argument for the convenience method for sampling Jews presented by Daniel Staetsky, a technique aimed at reaching more Jews than many contemporary surveys of Jews allow; he systematically presents the advantages and disadvantages of this methodology (and others) for addressing contemporary challenges. It is a suggestion that could well have been added to our special issue on Jewish community studies, published in 2016, v.36(3). At the other end of the spectrum, Ilana Horwitz makes the case for minute case studies to reach deeper into Jewish life than any survey might allow. Her example is a small qualitative study that provides great insight into the importance of family dynamics for Jewish life (in this case Jewish education), bringing us full circle to a topic Rela would embrace.

✉ Harriet Hartman
hartman@rowan.edu

¹ Glassboro, NJ, USA

The actual research presented spans the United Kingdom, Israel, and the United States, and their interrelationships and comparisons, but all contribute to an overall understanding of ways to approach the analysis of contemporary Jewish life, no matter where the focus is.

A special thank you to the guest editors, Ilana Horwitz and Ariela Keysar, who made this special issue happen!

The issue concludes with a Research Update, ably edited by Helen Kim, and two book reviews and a list of books received, edited by Daniel Parmer.

Happy reading!

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