Secular Outcomes and the Importance of Intergenerational Investments of Human and Social Forms of Capital: Does Religion Make a Difference?

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Research regarding the familial exchange and investment of human and social forms of capital is an interdisciplinary topic of interest for a myriad of important behavioral, social and cognitive outcomes. In our recent exploration of how secular (particularly education) and non-secular factors independently and/or concomitantly contribute to below replacement fertility patterns among Jewish Americans, we became intrigued by the considerable intergenerational transference of social, religious and human forms of capital within the Jewish family and sub-community. In particular, we were struck by the significantly higher rates of educational attainment among Jews in comparison to their U.S. counterparts: in the year 2000, 76.5 percent of the Jewish American population between the ages of 25 and 44 have a college degree or higher (NJPS 2000), compared to only 28.1 percent of their U.S. counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In general, we found that the lower average fertility of Jewish American women may be motivated, at least in part, by a desire to ensure their own children have the same, if not greater, educational opportunities they had while growing up. Sustained levels of below-replacement completed fertility can thus be an unintended consequence of high levels of maternal education and the intergenerational transference of home-produced human capital. In the words of Alan Dershowitz (1997) "American Jews – as a people – have never been in greater danger of disappearing through assimilation, intermarriage and low birthrates. The even worse news is that our very success as individuals contributes to our vulnerability as a people." What remains unclear, and what we will clarify in this continuing research effort, is what factors contribute most to the secular success of this subgroup; is it the intra-familial exchange and transference of

religious forms of human and social capital? Or, are secular factors primarily responsible and more influential when examining secular outcomes?

Relatively recent findings indicate that the accumulation of religious human and social capital among adolescents with high levels of religious involvement is related to higher educational expectations and better math and reading skills (Regnerus 2000). Smith (2003) also suggests that exposure to religion in adolescence fosters an elevated level of comfort in more diversified social circles. These findings are indicative of a positive relationship between the secular and non-secular domains, but how this translates into later life experiences is less clear. In this research we attempt to sort out the childhood/adolescent secular from non-secular influences on educational and occupational achievements in early adulthood. Using the recently released 2000 National Jewish Population Survey, we are able to focus on a religious subpopulation that has successfully maintained a unique cultural identity simultaneous to their (highly) successful assimilation within the mainstream. Given that the American Jewish population, on average, is more highly educated, holds higher prestigious jobs, and nets a higher household income than the overall U.S. population (United Jewish Communities Report 2000), the usefulness of this data source for elucidating the importance of religious versus non-religious factors on secular outcomes (such as education and occupation) is apparent.

Indeed, it is arguable that by looking at a secularly successful yet identifiably non-mainstream religious subpopulation we are eliminating extraneous factors that might otherwise confound findings if we were to consider all religious groups more generally. For instance, can it be demonstrated that some significant component of the above-average educational attainment and occupational success of the Jewish population is reflective of norms and values that may, at least in part, be the result of their specific religious upbringing? Or, might we find that educational and occupational achievement is independent of one's level of religiosity and instead more reflective of their high rates of assimilation within the mainstream population? We assess the latter scenario by considering the extent of religious traditionalism (i.e. Jewish education, ritual practices, denomination, etc.) during childhood and adolescence and whether *intra*-group disparities in our secular outcomes of interest vary by *how* one was raised Jewish. The

pathways through which religion may potentially enhance/hinder one's accumulation of human and social capital are varied. For instance, having a Jewish education during childhood several times a week, in addition to secular schooling, may positively impact lifelong educational and occupational trajectories via widened social circles and consequently elevated levels of social capital. In contrast, if one's education is attained through *either* non-secular (i.e. Jewish day school or Yeshiva) *or* secular (i.e. public schools) institutions – **but not both** – his/her social capital may be negatively impacted by a more limited, less diverse social circle (when compared to those with exposure to both). With respect to human capital, learning the history and language (Hebrew) of Judaism at young ages likely enhances one's accumulation of religious human capital, but whether this occurs in lieu of, versus in addition to, other mainstream forms of human capital is uncertain. Given that members of the Jewish community also stress secular forms of human capital (such as education and employment), efforts have been made to lessen the amount of time necessary to acquire Jewish forms of human capital, such as greater reliance on English versus Hebrew (if used at all) in prayer services, and inclusion of English translations in prayer books for those who are less familiar with the Hebrew alphabet (Chiswick 2002). This, of course, is intimately linked with the notion that secular effects cannot be completely separated from the religious, but by limiting our sample to only Jewish Americans we are better able to disentangle the independent and interdependent nature of these two cultural domains.

In our research to date we have focused on one specific dimension of adult behavior, clarifying how both secular and non-secular factors additively and interactively impact on childbearing and childrearing for the national Jewish population. As an extension to that work, we are now looking at both men and women to assess whether or not earlier manifestations of religious-linked behaviors in childhood and adolescence translate into socially and/or economically productive behaviors in adulthood as a direct result of intergenerational investments and exchanges within the family and sub-community. We hypothesize, and preliminary findings suggest, that youth who are sufficiently exposed to both religious and non-religious activities will more effectively operate in a social and economic adult world than will those whose upbringing was more within an exclusively religious or exclusively secular world.

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