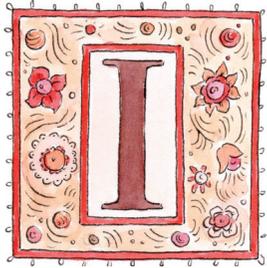


Publisher's Note



PROBABLY OWE my career to “Jewish Continuity.” In 1990, I was a young professional in the Jewish community and was considering other career choices when the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) stunned American Jewry with its finding of a 52 percent intermarriage rate (compared with 25 percent in the early ’70s). To say that this finding sent shock waves through the community would be an understatement, and a veritable industry of Jewish continuity was born.

While “continuity” became a communal rallying cry, the term never spoke to me as a Jewish educator. Why in the world would we want to continue the disastrous path that got us here? We needed disruption. Still, anything that could motivate Jewish Federations, Jewish Community Centers, camps, and funders to focus on Jewish education was a good outcome.

Over the years, the term “continuity” fell out of favor. Those uncomfortable with the content of continuity favored engagement: Let’s focus more on the magic of getting young Jews together and worry less about what happens when they gather. Let’s not be judgmental about what they ought to know, let alone what we want

them to do in order to live Jewish lives. Others objected to continuity’s implicit rejection of intermarriage, worried that a sense of disapproval would drive away interfaith families who might otherwise be attracted to Jewish life. Studies proclaimed that intermarriage was a net gain to the Jewish community, since the non-Jewish spouse was now a plus 1, and we chose to ignore the quality of Jewish identity and to focus instead on a quantity that would reassure us and lull us back to indifference. Finally, there was an attack on continuity as being fundamentally anti-feminist, relegating women to the role of mere vehicles for procreation.

Is “continuity” worth redeeming? The term seems unimportant, but the discussion it prompted in the 1990s is in desperate need of revisiting. What ought to be the nature of the Jewish community we are all working so hard to reinvigorate? What do we want Jews to know about their Judaism, their relationship to God, to Israel, to Zionism? How should they act Jewishly? How should Judaism inform their attitudes to their people, to citizenship, to the environment, to justice? Answering these questions is difficult because, for one, we don’t agree on the answers ourselves. Still, we can do better than satisfying ourselves with the numbers of young Jews we engage. Without compelling content, we are going to have a hard time making the case for continuity.

The essays in our third volume of *SAPIR* aim to fill this breach — to give us a sense of what we ought to care about, what we might do, and why it matters. *