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National Variations in
JEWISH IDENTITY

Implications
for Jewish Education

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ספרות
המרכז
לחינוך יהודי בתפוצות

Chapter 11



Jewishness in New York: Exception or the Rule?

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In November 1993, Ehud Olmert, the mayor of Jerusalem, sent a greeting to Rudolph Giuliani, the newly elected mayor of New York City: “Congratulations, from the mayor of the greatest Jewish city in the world to the mayor of the second greatest Jewish city.” Although he may have antagonized the residents of Tel Aviv, his comment showed that he recognized an underlying similarity between the Jewish environments of these two places.

The idea of place has a certain resonance in Jewish history. We find it in the image of the Israelites carrying the ark around with them as they moved from place to place in the desert, which initiated the recurrent Jewish theme of wandering versus stability. One of the circumlocutions for the name of God is *Ha-Makom*—the Place, the Omnipresent. The Temple was also called *ha-makom*; rather than calling God by his unspeakable name, the rabbis apparently felt it more appropriate to identify him by his address. Yehuda HaLevy’s poignant lament, “My heart/essence is in the East but I am (located) at the far edge of the West,” throws into relief the contrast between physical place of residence and spiritual homeland. Even the expression from Jewish folklore, “A change of place brings a change in fortune,” makes the point that place does it fact matter.

Despite its importance in the collective conscience of the Jewish people, the idea of place has played only a minor role in the American social analysis of the Jews. Mobility—both physical and social—is a topic that gets more attention, perhaps because Americans are notorious for being ever on the move. More than rootedness in a homeland, the ideas of frontier and of movement onward and upward have inspired American endeavors. Yet the question of place lies at the heart of the problem of contemporary American Jewishness. How does physical distance from (or closeness to) the Jewish center relate to spiritual and psychological distance from the Jewish people? When you are a citizen of one place and you have a connection to another place, what happens to your identity? Which place is your real place?

We have always supposed, if only for ideological reasons, that no difference regarding Jewishness is more significant than location in Israel or in the Diaspora (i.e., some other place). The Jews of Israel live in the Jewish state, and so their national group identity and their citizenship overlap, whereas for an American Jew or a British Jew, the overlap may never be as complete. Yet there are underlying dimensions that cut across this gap.

The Olmert greeting is amusing because it defines Jerusalem and New York as lying close together along a single continuum, despite the gulf separating our ideas about Israel and the Diaspora. My interest in this chapter is to explore continuities in the “Jewishness of place or locale” that cut across the bolder-faced divisions among nations, or for that matter, between Israel and the Diaspora.

“The New York Effect”

Let me start with the phenomenon—the specific case of “the New York effect.” In contrast to the portrait of American Jews that emerged from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (Kosmin et al. 1991), the New York Jewish Population Study (Horowitz 1993) showed that New York area Jews are notably more likely to identify themselves as Jewish and to view this as being their religion, not merely their ethnicity or cultural background. The vast majority of New Yorkers with any sort of Jewish background describe themselves as Jewish by religion (83%), while only 53% of the national Jewishly connected population identify this way (and only half of the national Jewish population when New York is excluded) (See table 1). Outside New York, more than three times as many Jews

Table 1
Comparison of Greater New York Jewish Population—1991¹
and U.S. Jewish Population—1990²

Type of Connection to Jewishness	New York Area	U.S. National	
	% of Total Population in Jewishly Connected Households	Overall	Excluding New York
		% of Total Population in Jewishly Connected Households	
1. Born Jews: Religion Judaism	81	51	48
2. Jews by Choice—Convents (Jews by Religion)	1 (83)	2 (53)	3 (50)
3. Born Jews with No Religion (secular) Core Jewish Population	<u>4</u> (87)	<u>14</u> (67)	<u>15</u> (65)
4. Born/Raised Jewish: Currently not Jewish	1	3	3
5. Adults of Jewish Background with Other Current Religion	1	5	6
6. Children under 18 Being Raised with Other Current Religion	<u>3</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>
Total Ethnic or Religious Background	(92)	(84)	(83)
7. Gentile Adults Living in Jewishly Connected Households	<u>8</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>
Total Jewish Connected Households	100	100	100

¹Source: UJA-Federation 1991 New York Population Study. 8 Counties: New York City, Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester. Does not include the institutionalized or unenumerated population (668,000 households)

²Source: CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (includes 100,000 institutionalized) (3.2 million households)

answer “none” or “agnostic” or “atheist” regarding their religious affiliation, but still consider themselves to be Jewish. Clearly, although there is no one form of Jewish identity in New York, as a group, they are more at ease in describing themselves religiously as Jewish, compared to Jews elsewhere in America.

In the aggregate, New York Jews are slightly more observant than other American Jews (See tables 2 and 3). New York Jews as a group, whether living in entirely Jewish or in mixed (Jewish-Gentile) households, are more likely to practice religious rituals than

Table 2
Comparisons of Selected Jewish Practices of Households:
New York and the Nation¹

	New York 1991		National 1990 ²	
	Entirely Jewish	Mixed Jewish- Gentile	Entirely Jewish	Mixed Jewish- Gentile
Households:	(543,000)	(96,000)	(1,111,000)	(867,000)
Percentage Answering "Yes"	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Attends Passover Seder*	93	80	86	62
Never has Christmas tree	93	31	82	20
Lights Hanukkah Candles	83	69	77	59
Lights Shabbat Candles	49	18	44	19
Attended Purim Celebration*	35	15	24	12
Celebrated Yom HaAtzmaut Israeli Independence Day**	20	8	18	6
Current Synagogue Member	43	15	41	13
Contributed to Jewish Charity in 1990	68	38	62	28
Contributed to Secular Charity in 1990	68	67	67	66
Contributed to UJA-Federation in 1990	37	14	45	12

¹Source: UJA-Federation 1991 New York Jewish Population Study. 8 Counties: New York City, Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester.

Source: CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.

*Sometimes, usually, always"

**During the past year

are Jews nationally.¹ They are more likely to attend a Seder, not to have a Christmas tree, to light Hanukkah candles, to fast on Yom Kippur, to attend synagogue weekly, and to celebrate Purim than Jews nationally (although the percentage observing Israeli Independence Day is no different). While New York Jews are more likely than other American Jews to contribute to Jewish charities, they are equally likely to contribute to general (non-Jewish) charities,² and somewhat less likely to donate to the UJA-Federation. The overall social milieu of Jews in New York is more Jewish in terms of friendship networks and in terms of exposure to Jewish newspapers and magazines. In addition, contact with Israel is more extensive in New York than elsewhere in America: a larger proportion have vis-

Table 3
Comparison of Selected Jewish Practices of Individuals:
New York and the Nation¹

Percentage Answering "Yes"	New York 1991 ²	National 1990 ²
	%	%
Personal Religious Practice		
Fast on Yom Kippur	68	61
Attend Synagogue on High Holidays	61	59
Attend Synagogue Weekly	16	11
Israel Ties		
Visited Israel	42	31
Has Close Family or Friends in Israel	45	35
Jewish Social Ties		
Most Friends Are Jewish	63	45
Read Jewish Periodicals, Books*	39	28

¹Source: UJA-Federation 1991 New York Jewish Population Study, 8 Counties: New York City, Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester.

²Figures for New York are based on all core Jewish adults whereas the national figures are based on a subset of core Jews—Jews by religion only. Source: CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.

*The New York study asked about periodicals and books, "Do you regularly read? . . ." whereas the national study asked about periodicals only, "Do you subscribe? . . ."

ited Israel or have close family or friends there, compared to Jews living elsewhere in America.

Finally, their intermarriage rates are lower. In New York 13% of the spouses of first marriages were Gentile, whereas the percentage is double that (26%) elsewhere in the nation. Regarding marriages over time, in New York, the percentage of first spouses who were Gentile increased five times in thirty-some years, from 5% in marriages that occurred before 1965 to 25% in post-1985 marriages. Nationally, excluding New York, the incidence rose from 5% to 47% in the same time period. Again, the New York rate is about half the national rate.

Accounting for the "New York Effect"

The contrast between the Jews in New York and Jews living elsewhere in the United States leads us to wonder "why is New York different?" Answering this question forms the bulk of my discussion.

Methodology

Before I tackle the more interesting substantive questions raised by the “New York effect,” I want to address briefly some of the methodological issues that arise.

Ideally, an analysis of New York Jews and of those living elsewhere in America would be based on a single dataset. Such a dataset exists, but it has a limitation for our purposes: the sample size of Jewish households in the New York area is sufficient only for the broadest “between group” comparisons of New York and American Jews. However, once we begin to compare subpopulations of New York Jews with their counterparts elsewhere in America, we must take a slightly different tack. Thus in this chapter I draw on two different although very comparable datasets.

A national study of American Jews (the Council of Jewish Federations’ National Jewish Population Study [NJPS]) was conducted in 1990, and a study of the Jews of Greater New York was conducted in 1991 by the UJA-Federation of New York (the New York Jewish Population Study [NYJPS]). The studies used the same means of identifying Jewishly connected households, but drew different samples in the New York area. The NJPS included 410 Jewishly connected households in the 8-county New York area (out of a total of 2,441 households surveyed nationally), while the NYJPS is based on 4,008 Jewishly connected households.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will present data both from the NJPS broken out into two subsamples (the New York area and elsewhere in America) and from the NYJPS.

Why Is New York Different?

A first question to raise about the “New York effect” is the possibility that it does not exist at all! In other words, is the effect merely a result of the sampling differences between the two datasets used to look at Jews living in New York and in America? In table 4 it is clear that irrespective of the dataset, New York Jews are more likely to describe themselves as Jewish than are other American Jews. Similarly the “New York effect” remains apparent in both datasets in comparing the Jewish practices of Jews in New York and those elsewhere in America. So the New York effect does not arise merely from differences in the two survey samples. Next we turn to more substantive considerations.

Certainly the “New York effect” as it relates to intermarriage can be explained simply in terms of the propinquity of large masses

Table 4
Comparison of Greater New York Jewish Population—1991
and U.S. Jewish Population—1990

Type of Connection to Jewishness	New York Area				U.S. National Excluding New York	
	NY JPS ¹		NYJPS ²		NYJPS ²	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1. Born Jews: Religion Judaism	1,325,000	81	899,000	66	3,210,000	48
2. Jews by Choice—Converts (Jews by Religion)	21,000 (1,347,000)	1 (83)	14,000 (913,000)	1 (67)	169,000 (3,379,000)	3 (51)
3. Born Jews with No Current Religion (secular)	72,000	4	130,000	9	992,000	15
Core Jewish Population	(1,419,000)	(87)	(1,043,000)	(77)	(4,371,000)	(65)
4. Born/Raised Jewish: Currently not Jewish	17,000	1	20,000	1	194,000	3
5. Adults of Jewish Background with Other Current Religion	19,000	1	45,000	3	369,000	6
6. Children under 18 Being Raised with Other Current Religion	44,000	3	77,000	6	626,000	9
Total Ethnic or Religious Background	(1,498,000)	(92)	(1,185,000)	(87)	(5,560,000)	(83)
7. Gentile Adults Living in Jewishly Connected Households	134,000	8	173,000	13	1,176,000	17
Total Population Living in Jewishly Connected Households	1,633,000	100	1,358,000	100	6,740,000	100

¹Source: UJA-Federation 1991 New York Jewish Population Study (NYJPS). 8 Counties: New York City, Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester. Does not include the institutionalized or unenumerated population.

²Source: CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS). Does not include the institutionalized or unenumerated population.

of Jews there. In other words, the sheer numbers of Jews who live in the New York City area, coupled with the high density of Jews in relation to the overall population of the area, make it more likely for Jews to interact with other Jews just by chance, which would lead

us to expect a lower intermarriage rate (Blau & Schwartz 1984; Rabinowitz 1989). However, propinquity alone does not explain the more extensive Jewish practice among New York Jews.

New York Jewish practice may stand out from the profile of the rest of American Jewry due to other factors: New York's Jewish population may be older, more Orthodox, or more recently arrived in America (thus closer to the "Old Country" or to the experience of overt anti-Semitism) than other American Jews. Yet in fact New York Jewry is remarkably similar to the rest of American Jewry in terms of the basic demographic characteristics of age structure, educational attainment, and household composition. Although New York Jewry is somewhat more recently arrived in America compared to Jews nationwide, the difference in proportions is not large enough to account for the discrepancy in New York and national rates. Within generational strata, New York Jews continue to outscore their national counterparts on most measures of Jewish activity.

More germane to the "New York effect" is the fact that in America people who express their Jewishness as a current connection to the Jewish religion ("Jews by Religion") are more likely to be found in the Northeast (which includes the New York area) than elsewhere in the United States. "It is by far the dominant location" for Jews by religion (Goldstein 1992.) Can the "New York effect" be explained simply on the basis of this regional variation in the nature of Jewishness? To examine this let us look only at the people who see themselves as unequivocally Jewish by religion (I will call them "Jewish Jews"³) and compare the New Yorkers with the non-New Yorkers among them. In addition, in order to be as rigorous as possible, we will look only at "Jewish Jews" who are third generation or longer in America (in other words, those whose grandparents were born in America).

Third-generation "Jewish Jews" in New York look very similar to "Jewish Jews" outside New York on key indicators (see table 5). They are equally as likely to have had some Jewish schooling and to have had a Bar Mitzvah ceremony.

However, in terms of current denomination, New York Jewish Jews are almost five times more likely than the non-New Yorkers to be Orthodox (10% vs. 2%), and less likely to be Reform (41% vs. 55%). So although the third-generation "Jewish Jews" in New York resemble their counterparts outside of New York in terms of their sociodemographic characteristics, when it comes to current denomination, a larger proportion of New Yorkers are Orthodox. In addi-

Table 5
Background by Local
Perfect Cases Only* + 3rd Generation or Higher

	New York Area		U.S. National Excluding New York
	NYJPS ¹ N = 1011)	NJPS ² N = 142)	NJPS ³ (754)
Denomination Raised			
Orthodox	13.5	7.7	10.6
Conservative	44.0	45.1	40.4
Reform	32.6	36.6	44.4
Just Jewish	6.7	7.7	2.9
Something Else	3.2	2.9	2.7
Jewish Schooling			
Ever received Jewish education	79.0	77.5	84.1
Bar/Bat Mitzvah	55.2	62.7	66.1
Current Denomination			
Orthodox	9.7	3.5	2.3
Conservative	34.2	30.9	32.0
Reform	40.6	50.7	54.8
Just Jewish	9.4	9.1	5.3
Something Else	6.1	5.8	5.6

¹Source: UJA-Federation 1991 New York Jewish Population Study (NYJPS). "New York Area" includes New York City, Long Island, and Westchester.

²Source: CJF National Jewish Population Study (NJPS).

*"Perfect Cases" are those in which people indicate that their religion of birth, religion of upbringing, and current religion are Jewish.

tion to (and perhaps along with) their greater Orthodoxy, as a group the New York "Jewish Jews" appear to be more observant than non-New Yorkers in their practices (see table 6). The "New York effect" remains: among third-generation "Jewish Jews" in America, New Yorkers are still more Jewish.

The conventional wisdom is that New York looks more Jewish due to the preponderance of Orthodox Jews living there. Allowing for the fact that the proportion of Orthodox in New York is nearly five times higher than outside New York, what happens when we compare "Jewish Jews" of each denomination in New York with their counterparts outside of New York? Does the New York difference disappear?

Table 6
Current Jewish Practices by Locale
Perfect Cases Only* + 3rd Generation or Higher

Percentage Answering "Yes"	New York Area		U.S. National Excluding New York
	NYJPS ¹ (N = 1011) (%)	NJPS ¹ (N = 142) (%)	NJPS ² (N = 754) (%)
Religious Practices			
Attends a Passover Seder	93	95	91
Lights Hanukkah Candles	83	81	86
Never has Christmas Tree	80	75	65
Fasts on Yom Kippur	65	61	57
Attend Synagogue on High Holidays	55	49	57
Lights Shabbat Candles	36	30	37
Attended Purim Celebration	30	23	24
Uses Separate Dishes for Milk and Meat	21	18	10
Celebrated Israeli Independence Day	14	6	14
Handles No Money on Shabbat	14	8	7
Attend Synagogue Weekly	10	5	5
Fasts on Fast of Esther	6	2	3
Buys Kosher Meat	(NA)	5	35
Jewish Social Ties			
Most Friends Are Jewish	58	48	34
Participated in Adult Jewish Education in Past Year	22	8	15
Israel Ties			
Visited Israel	32	23	23
Has Close Friends in Israel	34	28	23
Philanthropic/Organizational Ties			
Household Has a Synagogue Member	33	35	41
Household Gave to			
. . . . Jewish Charity	58	47	52
. . . . Secular Charity	67	71	70
. . . . UJA-Federation	28	33	34

¹Source: UJA-Federation 1991 New York Population Study. "New York Area" includes New York City, Long Island, and Westchester.

²Source: CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Study.

*"Perfect Cases" are those in which people indicate that their religion of birth, religion of upbringing, and current religion are Jewish.

Among Orthodox "Jewish Jews," the New Yorkers are altogether more observant than their national counterparts—on every ritual practice, Jewish social tie, Israel connection, except for giving to general (secular/non-Jewish) charities and giving to the UJA/Federation, where there were no differences. Unfortunately, there are so few cases in the NJPS that these data are merely suggestive of what other studies have shown. The practice of Orthodoxy in New York differs from what counts as "Orthodox" elsewhere in America. Undoubtedly this arises from the concentration of the *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) communities in New York (Heilman & Cohen, 1986, 1989).

In contrast to the strength of the "New York effect" among the Orthodox and among third-generation "Jewish Jews" who are Conservative or Reform, the extent of Jewish practice comes across as altogether more homogeneous (compared to the Orthodox) across the nation, except in relation to a few key practices where the New Yorkers excel (see table 7). These include never having a Christmas tree, fasting on Yom Kippur, having mostly Jewish friends, having visited Israel, and having close friends or family living in Israel. Taken together these elements reflect the salience of Jewishness as an aspect of New York City's overall environment. The large Jewish presence in New York is the underlying variable giving rise to each of the specific behaviors that continue to distinguish New York non-Orthodox Jews from their national counterparts. For the non-Orthodox, New York's Jewish advantage arises from the kind of setting it offers, rather than from the greater piety of its populace. While New York's Orthodox Jews are in fact more *frum* or "observant" than Orthodox Jews living elsewhere in America, New York's non-Orthodox Jews appear to be more Jewishly observant in large part because the social context itself appears to activate them.

It is clear that New York provides a distinctive context for religion and ethnicity—for Jewishness—compared to elsewhere in the United States. This may be part of New York's attractiveness to certain types of Jews, whether leading them to migrate there, or keeping them anchored in the city. Another way of expressing it is that Jews who leave the New York City area may be less Jewish than those who stay, or that they may become less Jewish as a consequence of leaving the region.⁴

Being Jewish in New York has implications, just as being Jewish in Israel does. For the most Jewishly active, New York offers a range of Jewish expression, of Jewish subcultures, which is unparalleled in America. New York City is a place that traditionally has allowed for a great variety of Jewish identities (just as all cities

Table 7
New York¹ Compared to Nation²: Jewish Practice by
Current Denomination
Perfect Cases Only^c 3rd Generation

Percentage Answering "Yes"	Conservative		Reform		Just Jewish	
	(346)	(241)	(410)	(413)	(95)	(40)
	New York	Non New York	New York	Non New York	New York	Non New York
	(34%)	(%)	(41%)		(%)	(%)
Religious Practices						
Attends Passover Seder (1)	97	94	94	92	80	75
Never has Christmas Tree	90	74	73	63	62	40
Lights Hanukkah Candles	91	88	81	86	62	70
Fasts on Yom Kippur (3)	79	73	61	52	39	20
Attend Synagogue on						
High Holidays	72	71	44	53	15	28
Lights Shabbat Candles (1)	45	52	22	30	11	20
Attended Purim celebration (2)	32	29	19	22	18	13
Uses Separate Dishes for						
Milk and meat	26	17	5	5	3	0
Celebrated Israeli						
Independence Day	18	20	6	11	5	5
Attend Synagogue weekly (3)	6	7	2	3	3	3
Handles No Money on Shabbat	8	8	6	5	4	0
Fasts on Fast of Esther (3)	6	3	4	1	4	0
Social Ties						
Most Friends Are Jewish	63	44	53	28	37	25
Participated in Adult Jewish						
Education in Past Year	23	20	14	11	7	8
Israel Ties						
Visited Israel	32	33	26	18	24	12
Has Close Friends in Israel	36	28	23	17	27	20
Philanthropic/Organizational Ties						
Household has a Synagogue						
Member	43	52	22	38	14	10
Household gave to						
. . . . Jewish Charity (2)	65	66	52	46	30	33
. . . . Secular Charity (2)	67	71	70	69	67	70
. . . . UJA-Federation (2)	38	43	25	30	7	18

Source: UJA-Federation 1991 New York Jewish Population Study.

Source: CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.

Religion of upbringing and current religion are Jewish.

Sometimes, usually, or always

During the past year

Asked of respondent only. All other religious practices were asked about household as a whole.

offer wider berth than smaller towns for the expressions of their citizens) so that not only does New York have more Orthodox Jews, but it also has more Jewish atheists. This leads to a rich array of Jewish expressions—Jewish tabloid wars, Jewish cultural life, a real Jewish politics, which were thought to be a possibility only in the Jewish state. In short, the quality of Jewish life in New York is superior even if in the eyes of some the quality of general life is lacking. This would shed some light on the fact that between 1981 and 1991 New York's Jewish population was more apt to remain in the city than its white non-Jewish population: perhaps for some the superior quality of life in Jewish terms mitigates the problematic aspects of New York's quality of life in general.

For the minimally connected or inactive Jewish person, New York Jewishness resembles Israeli secular identity. It is part of the culture of the place, in that it is contextual, rather than belief-based. In this regard the comedian Lenny Bruce remarked,

If you live in New York or any other big city, you are Jewish. It doesn't matter, even if you are Catholic; if you live in New York, you're Jewish. If you live in Butte, Montana, you're going to be goyish, even if you're Jewish.⁵

Bruce and his generation were hyperaware of the overall Jewish presence in the city—that it was a Jewish place, even if the rest of America most certainly was not. He held, essentially, that the place determines style, if not exactly identity.

What is it about New York that makes it conducive to Jewishness? Certainly the structural features of the New York Jewish community give rise to its greater Jewishness, notably its large Jewish population size and density over a long period of time. Large population size alone means that diversification is possible on many levels. We see this diversity among the many Jewish subcultures and communities that exist in New York, which support a variety of types of Jewishness. A broad range of Jewish services is available in New York, in addition to a wide array of general services offered by Jews. The presence of this rich, varied Jewish infrastructure in New York City is itself a consequence of the city's history as a place with a significant Jewish population.

This diversity carries over into the institutional and organizational aspects of New York. As a result of New York's long-standing Jewish population size, New York has become the flagship for the organizational life of the American Jews. Many national and international Jewish cultural, religious, and communal institutions are

based there. The seminaries from three denominations are in New York City, as are the headquarters of major American Jewish communal institutions. Whatever the historical reasons for their location in New York City, these institutions continue to attract the elite of Jewish communal, religious, and cultural life, thus adding to the quality of the population in addition to its quantity.

The Jewish "presence" in New York arises from both the masses of Jews making up a large percentage of the city's total population, as well as from the wide spectrum of Jewish options there. (While the large Orthodox and Haredi (ultra-orthodox) populations are particularly visible, these are not the only signs of a Jewish presence.) The public face of Jewishness is a larger one, and consequently the city's general range of symbols is very likely to include Jewish symbols as well as those of other groups. A major department store tells its customers (via advertising in the *New York Times*) to come celebrate Hanukkah in the store. As a result of New York City's parking regulations (which are suspended on Jewish as well as on other holidays) even non-Jews may be aware of the occurrence of every Jewish holiday. A more significant example relates to the perception by some that there is a Jewish vote that figures into the city's politics.

All in all, in New York, Jews have a higher profile than in other American places. It feels important and acceptable to be Jewish in New York, because there is (and has been) a Jewish presence in the city. Jewish issues get covered by the general press. One feels more comfortable being a Jew in a place where being Jewish is part of the fabric of the life of the city. In other cities where the density of Jews is much lower, Jews have a much lower profile, and thus Jewish identification requires a certain motivation and effort.

Ultimately, "Jewish" and, by extension, "non-Jewish" have become meaningful categories in New York. In part, this arises from the sheer numbers of Jews who live in New York, but it is also the case that the culture of the city heightens awareness about Jewishness as a social category, as groups in the city become aware of one another and of the boundaries around them. In this regard, consider the differences between New York and the rest of the nation in terms of the flows into and out of Judaism—the percentages of converts to and from Judaism (see table 1). The national rates are three times as high, suggesting that whereas nationally the boundary between Jew and non-Jew may be permeable, in New York it is only semipermeable. Thus, Bruce was not exactly accurate. It is not the case that non-Jews in New York are Jewish; rather, they are aware of Jewishness and of its absence. They can meaningfully call themselves "non-Jews."

Jewishness in New York has become a social category of consequence, over and above the private lives of individuals who live there (Horowitz & Solomon 1992). As such, New York offers a climate that makes it easier for Jewish people to identify with Jewishness and Judaism, in contrast to the social forces that may work against such identification elsewhere in the nation. With stronger Jewish identification, we expect more extensive practice of measures of "public Judaism."

Toward a Sociology of "Jewishness of Place"

That Jewishness varies across nations or cultures seems easy to accept, yet I have argued that Jewishness varies by locale *within* the same society. To be a Jew in New York City certainly differs from being Jewish elsewhere in America, but no doubt comparing the city to generalized American Jewry is itself a false picture. We need to compare New York to Cleveland, Boston, Washington, Chicago, or to Los Angeles. At the same time, it is worthwhile to consider the extent to which the qualities that make New York a seemingly unique Jewish place cut across national, historical, and ideological boundaries. Is New York Jewishness closer or farther from being a Jew in London, or Tel Aviv, or Haifa, or, for that matter in Warsaw or Vienna at the turn of the century?

To address these questions a more general concept of "Jewish environment or place" is needed that goes beyond the specifics of the New York case. This enterprise involves identifying the various combinations of social and historical forces that bolster the retention of Jewish identity or affect its nature. With regard to the quality of Jewishness in any given place, there are several key dimensions that need to be examined. Most basic is the size of the Jewish population; its density, both in relation to the total population and to the relevant comparison group (i.e., white non-Hispanics in New York, but, for the Ashkenazic Jewish populace of Montreal, Anglophones are a more appropriate reference group). When the effect of density is examined, there seems to be a "tipping point" or threshold effect once the Jewish population accounts for at least around 10 percent of the total population, suggesting that density is a major social determinant of the Jewish identity of individuals.

Other structural aspects of place that are important to track are the number of Jewish institutions in a community and the community's age, as well as some evaluation of the place's status as a

Jewish cultural center (or boondocks). In terms of perception and representation there are a range of issues concerning the nature of the local Jewish presence: the extent to which Jewishness is a social category, the content of this social category, and the degree of acceptance (or rejection) of Jews and Jewishness by non-Jews. Are Jews and Jewishness seen as significant factors in the life of the place? Does society view Jews as productive or counterproductive in relation to its collective effort? Are Jews seen as central or marginal in the intellectual life of the place? Regarding the social perception of the place in the eyes of other Jews, we can ask how often do other Jews (of various stripes) visit the place, in other words, to what extent is a place seen as a center for Jewish life and as a center for life in general? To what extent and in what ways do Jews interact with the rest of society? For this, not only should intermarriage rates be considered, but also other measures of interconnection (e.g., number of Jewish members of government, Jewish involvement in the cultural life, public personages who are Jewish, and Jewish penetration of various networks).

Eventually, localities where Jews live can be described and even mapped out in terms of these various social and structural dimensions, with an eye toward analyzing the nature and viability of Jewish life there. For instance, in New York City Jews have high visibility, are accepted by the mainstream, and are seen as playing a positive and productive role in the city's efforts. In contrast, American Jews are less visible nationally, in comparison to Jews in New York City's life, although the prominence of Israel in America's consciousness may act, in part, as a proxy for Jews. Yet Jews in America are both *accepted* by non-Jews and *viewed as productive* in the nation's efforts. As a foil to both of these examples, consider the case of early twentieth-century Viennese Jews: they were highly visible, highly rejected by non-Jews, and seen as pariahs (i.e., as unproductive).

At a time when so much attention in the American Jewish communal world is focused on reaching Jewish individuals—whether getting them to do more Jewish things, protecting them against intermarriage, or attempting to reach out to the unaffiliated individuals—the notable thing about “the New York effect” (or any other local effect, for that matter) is that it redirects our attention to the importance of the Jewishness of the *place*, in addition to that of the *person*. It reminds us that New York Jews and Jewishness are exceptional in America, and that the greater degree of observance and practice of the city's Jews compared to other American Jews is both

a cause and a consequence of the prominence of Jewishness in the city. At the same time, by examining the relationship between the practice of Jewish individuals and the nature of Jewishness as a social category in any particular place, I have suggested the value of adopting an analytic stance that is more consciously *social* or *contextual* rather than relying on an overly atomized or *individual* approach. In this regard the New York case is no exception. In analyzing (and attempting to change) the level of Jewishness, the emphasis should not be only on intervening in the lives of individuals. Rather, it should involve changing aspects of the context in which people make their decisions and that influences their sense of what the options are. This dual focus would improve the thinking and communal policy-making about continuity, outreach, and the issues of "boundary management" between Jews and their neighbors.

Notes

1. Note that in New York only 15% of the households are mixed, whereas nationally nearly three times that amount are mixed (44%).
2. A. Keysar finds a similar pattern in her analysis (see Keysar 1993).
3. "Jewish Jews" are the "perfect cases" in the NYJPS and NJPS in which people indicate that their religion of birth, their religion of upbringing, and their current religion is Jewish.
4. Paul Ritterband has begun to investigate the historical basis of New York's difference. One of his hypotheses is that New York is different because the migrants who chose to settle there were different from other immigrants: The German Jewish settlement was highly dispersed, whereas the Eastern European Jewish settlement was centered in NYC.
5. Lenny Bruce (1981) "Jewish and Goyish," In *The Big Book of Jewish Humor*, edited by W. Novak and M. Waldoks. (New York: Harper), 60.

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