

Indicators of Jewish Identity

Developing a Conceptual Framework for Understanding American Jewry

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Two statistics have come to serve as the main indicators about the condition of American Jewish life: instances of anti-Semitism, which have declined over the past 50 years, and the rate of intermarriage, which has increased over that same period. These two statistics, which address the nature of the boundaries of love and hate between Jews and other Americans, are no longer adequate measures of the American Jewish condition. Looked at in isolation they present a skewed picture of the current state of American Jewish identity and the prospects for Jewish continuity. We learn about the extent to which Jews are accepted or rejected in the American environment, but we gain no insight into the changing nature of Jewish life, Jewish identity, and Jewish expression.

The Mandel Foundation has undertaken the “Indicators Project,” the goal of which is to monitor the pulse of the American Jewish community regarding a number of indicators about the quality and condition of Jewish life in general and Jewish education in particular. In this context I have been asked to review the literature regarding American Jewish identity (both Jewish identity in particular and ethnic, religious, social and/or group identity in general) in terms of the conceptual and practical concerns, and to make recommendations about ways of developing indicators that take issues of identity into account. My task, then, is to articulate why and in what ways identity is important, and to wade through the broad literature to locate useful concepts and issues to track in a strategic way. In pulling together this material I have thought in terms of factors that enhance or detract from robust “Jewishness” of both individuals and larger collectivities.

In the past decade interest in Jewish identity in America has burgeoned, primarily because of the Jewish communal concern over “Jewish continuity.” Although continuity has taken on numerous meanings (for example, Liebman, 1995; Woocher, 1995; Ruskay, 1995/1996), a shared element among them is the emphasis placed on the continued existence or ongoingness of the Jewish group, its culture and traditions. Much of the debate about continuity has centered on identifying the sorts of Jews or ways of being Jewish that are presumed to offer the best prospects for group continuity. Communal attention has turned to sketching out various ways of being Jewish (e.g. Wertheimer, Liebman & Cohen, 1996; Cohen, 1995) along with the contents of those modes and the expected patterns of involvement of different types of Jews.

Jewish identity is now seen as the fulcrum of a vibrant Jewish life in North America, where the continuity of the Jewish group as a collective has come to be seen as dependent on the expression of strong individual identity. Low Jewish identity of individuals is seen as resulting in poorer prospects for Jewish continuity, while high or strong identity is seen as strengthening group continuity.

This was not always the case. In pre-modern times Jewish society was a theocracy protected by high communal, cultural and psychological walls, and the role of *individual identity* in maintaining group continuity was minimal in comparison. The Jewish encounter with modernity posed a different challenge. In this situation *in-group cohesiveness and interaction* (along with hostility and discrimination towards Jews by the majority society) took on a larger role in enhancing Jewish group continuity. Finally, in contemporary America, a society which is characterized by its increased openness and wide acceptance of Jews as part of the mainstream, the *psychology* of Jewishness (i.e. the individual's subjective relationship to being Jewish) has become more important than ever before. In the past simply being marked as Jewish was sufficient in dictating behavior (up to a point), whereas today, being Jewish does not determine much of anything, without some additional commitment on the part of the individual.

Since individual choice or commitment plays more of a role than in other periods of Jewish history in determining the nature of a person's Jewishness (i.e. choosing to "opt in" or to "opt out"), the contemporary study of American Jews needs to offer a window into the nature and extent of that choice. The importance of the commitment to being Jewish is something that can vary significantly among individuals, even though they may all belong to the same sociological category of people who indicate that they are Jewish by religion and have a Jewish upbringing (i.e. they share the common feature of having a Jewish background.).

Our task in this paper is to develop an understanding of what is meant by Jewish identity and the factors that affect it. In this paper I examine a number of the ways in which contemporary ethnic or specifically Jewish identity has been conceptualized within the fields of sociology, social psychology and Jewish history.¹ This discussion, entitled

¹ This endeavor would also benefit from reviews of both the philosophical and anthropological treatment of these issues, but for now these tasks lie beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, this paper does not

Alternative Conceptions of Jewish Identity, takes up the bulk of this paper. At the end of that discussion I surmise about the types of indicators it would be important to track in relation to Jewish identity. I am assuming that the indicators of identity could involve multiple levels of analysis –individuals, their families, institutions, local and national communities and the larger Jewish aggregate.

Alternative Conceptions of Jewish Identity

When we speak of Jewish identity what do we mean? As will become apparent in this review of the literature, the meaning of the term “identity” varies quite a bit. Several related but perhaps discrete phenomena are lumped together under the rubric of identity. The term is used in different intellectual and policy contexts, and these contexts matter in determining the meaning of “identity” and the limits of any particular definition. In fact, there are several different “conversations” animating the discussions of identity, each of which is about a different set of basic concerns. I will organize my discussion around four main conversations:

1. Jewish historians see the Jewish encounter with modernity as creating the problem of Jewish identity. So the contemporary Jewish conversation about the nature of and prospects for Jewish continuity in the face of an open (or a more open?) society has its roots in the beginning of the modern era. What happens when Jews encounter new meaning-systems, develop a sense of “duality,” come to feel themselves to be “Jews at home and human beings in the world?”

2. Sociologists have traced the patterns of acculturation and assimilation of American immigrant and ethnic groups, and the extent to which they remain distinctive or mix into (and transform) America. In what ways are both America and the character of ethnic/religious/social groups interacting, changing and transforming? How does

systematically probe the relationship between Jewish identity and Jewish education, although the impetus for this paper is based on an assumed linkage between them. Jewish education is one means of affecting Jewish identity, an issue I touch on in the section below entitled, “What leads to stronger Jewish identity?” But there needs to be greater clarity about this relationship: For instance, is Jewish identity an input or an output? What are reasonable expectations about the extent to which it is produced, enhanced, or muted, by Jewish educational institutions?

increasing (structural) integration of the *ethnic group* relate to the *individual's* sense of ethnic identity?

3. The conversation within social psychology addresses the extent to which and under what conditions a person experiences being or acting as part of a group. What factors and processes contribute to in-group or social identification and attachment? What are the qualities or features of identity and identity formation that should be enhanced to intensify a sense of “groupness” – feeling oneself to be part of a group?

4. Sociologists of American Jewry have examined the condition of American Jewry over time and hypothesized about its trajectory going forward. There is much debate about what elements are most telling and important to track about American Jewish identity and continuity.

I will examine each of these conversations separately, but I note in advance that the conversations sometimes overlap and also diverge. There are many researchers who have been informed by both the particularly Jewish conversation as well as by their respective “disciplinary” conversations – (S. M. Cohen, P. Ritterband, C. Goldscheider, C. Liebman, S. Herman, B. Horowitz). The convergence among the conversations comes about when the case of the Jews is brought into the picture. Sometimes the limits of different theoretical conceptions are seen more sharply in examining the Jewish case (which then becomes a corrective to theory). Clearly, the Jews are not only an ethnicity, but a religion and ethnicity intertwined, a feature which makes the Jewish case different from some other groups (Irish, Italians) but similar still to other groups (Armenians, Greeks).

The Conversation about Modern Jewish History: Maintaining Jewish Distinctiveness in the Face of Opportunity

The Jewish conversation about identity begins with the Enlightenment and Emancipation in the late 18th century, and is a central feature for Jewish historians of the modern period. It is the story of Jews and Judaism encountering the non-Jewish world, of Jews being made bonafide citizens of a country, thereby experiencing for the first time the possibility of acceptance and individual mobility. This encounter represented a sea

change in the relationship between Jews and their hosts and it created a new set of concerns for Jews.

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (1980) write,

In the accelerated process of acculturation and assimilation that characterized the Jews' entrance into modernity, a large number of Jews were estranged over time from their primordial community. Their bonds – social, cultural, spiritual and psychological—with the community of their fathers weakened, while at the same time Jewish self-identity became problematic. (p. 214)

In pre-modern times Jewish identity as we know it was not seen as problematic: Jewish was what one was and the boundaries between the Jewish world and the non-Jewish were very clear. Jews related only to Jews as their primary group, any interactions with Gentiles serving instrumental needs rather than expressive ones (Katz, 1993). The modern period is characterized by new relations between Jews and non-Jews. Modernization and the rise of the nation-state created the conditions for identity to become a concern for individuals and for the Jewish “community” as a whole.

From the perspective of Jewish identity, modernization is best understood as the historical process whereby increased exposure to non-Jewish ideas and symbols progressively erodes the given generational continuities...Its product is Jewish modernity: the ongoing situation where internal continuity stands in potential or actual conflict with forces exterior to the Jewish tradition. Put somewhat differently, a premodern, encompassing Jewish identity contracted to make room for other identity components, sometimes persisting alongside them, sometimes mingling freely with them. The relative influence of the Jewish component became subject to fluctuation, waxing or waning in relation to the new elements drawn from outside the Jewish sphere. (M. Meyer, 1990, p.7)

This is an existential concern because it addresses how and in what form Jewishness will endure in the face of the lures of the broader world.² In this presentation identity is located in the individual and involves (or, is highly responsive to) the interrelationship between the Jewish and the non-Jewish, as well as the relative share or amount of space that the Jewish occupies in relation to the non-Jewish. Note that Meyer

² There appears to be a fear of Jewish identity becoming “adulterated” in some fashion, a theme which contains within it a whole debate that is taken up in different context about the declining *quality* of Jewishness as it comes into contact with the non-Jewish (i.e. other meaning-systems).

describes this cultural contact between the Jewish and non-Jewish as a trade-off between them.

In contrast, Jacob Katz (1993) describes the emergence of a neutral “third sphere” as an outcome of the new philosophical and socio-political arrangements:

..[T]he essence of the rationalists’ social achievement lay precisely in their creation of a neutral common ground above religious differences. The human and universal had been transformed into an intrinsic value, which served as a unifying principle for all who accepted it. The demand that one decide in favor of either Christianity or Judaism lost its urgency and acuteness. From that point on, there was a third sphere – the neutral humane one—to which members of both religions could belong.

...Belonging to the third sphere did not uproot the intellectual from his original social world. In most cases the new framework encompassed only part of the individual’s life...But such a duality was not easy to maintain. (p. 222)

From the duality of this neutral ground Katz describes two possible trajectories. The first involves the shedding of Judaism to become Christian, a linear decline:

For many Jews, the neutral contact with non-Jewish society led to a complete separation from Judaism. The supposedly neutral intellectual circles sometimes served Jewish *maskilim* as a way station in the transition to Christianity..(p. 222-3)

The second trajectory described by Katz predominated among the *maskilim*

...whose identification with the values of the neutral society set them apart from traditional society but whose attachment to the values and culture of their original milieu did not allow them to divorce themselves completely...It was from the neutral associations and their doctrines that these *maskilim* derived their criteria for appraising Jewish society itself... [They] pictured the future of Jewish society in accordance with the model and values of the neutral society. (p. 224-225)

Katz depicts the *maskilim* as rooted in both worlds – in the traditionally Jewish and on the neutral ground that transcended both religions, and he credits this “duality” as the source from which a transformative vision of Jewish society could be forged.

In his excellent book *Rethinking Modern Judaism* Eisen (1998) makes the case that the image of modernity and secularization have been too simplistic/stereotyped. He explains that:

..Jews did not go through the simple three-stage process that in all too many accounts.. constitutes the master-story of modern Judaism. That narrative has

Jews 1) adopting Enlightenment notions, whether learned in new schools or absorbed from the zeitgeist; 2) casting off traditional belief in God and revelation as a result of their new and rational worldview; and then 3) quite naturally or even inevitably rejecting or, at the very least, modifying the performance of inherited commandments. (p. 2)

Eisen argues that it is a mischaracterization to describe the outcome of Jewish modernity as a wholesale rejection or discarding of religious practice. In fact traditional elements can and do persist in people's lives, so we ought to revisit our idea of what modernity and post-modernity are about. Rather, he posits:

..that Jews for the most part navigated their way through modernity's unfamiliar terrain much as we do today: via *eclectic patterns of observance* and *varied, almost individual, sets of meanings* discovered in those patterns or associated with them. (p.2)

Eisen speaks of the “ ‘double consciousness’ imposed by modernity – the sense, described by W. E. B. Dubois, of ‘always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others’” (p. 20)-- and notes that many minority groups, not only the Jews, have had to deal with the “twoness” of their condition. Like Katz and his view of “duality,” Eisen sees that this twoness can lead to a transformed picture of what it means to be a Jew in the world and of what Jewish society might entail.

In any event, the historians’ portrayal of Jewish modernity places the emphasis on two categories – the Jewish and the general or American (In Katz’s discussion there are three categories– Jewish, Christian and neutral), and this analytic frame suggests the importance of tracking both the distinctively Jewish and the “general” (or not specifically Jewish) aspects of Jews’ lives to see how these are related (if at all), traded off, and transformed by the presence of the other.

Sociological Approaches: Assimilation and Maintaining Group Distinctiveness³

The question of “twoness” has been a concern within the sociological literature, although it has gone by other names over the course of the past century of the American experience: assimilation, ethnicity and ethnic identity. Each of these terms relates to the

³ I acknowledge the work of Shaul Kelner, who reviewed the sociological literature on ethnicity and ethnic identity. Much of the material summarized here is based on his draft paper entitled, “Sociological Approaches to Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity.”

underlying question of, “To what extent do immigrant and ethnic groups in America remain distinctive?” as seen in the patterns of interaction between members of these groups and the larger American society. In this context “twoness” is not about the individual’s *identity* per se, but its social structural underpinnings -- the extent of integration between immigrant/ethnic/minority groups and American society-at-large.

Defining “Ethnicity”

The term ethnicity is used in varied ways by sociologists. Generally, ethnicity refers to a way of drawing distinctions between groups of people based on socially defined characteristics that are ascribed from birth (Berreman, 1972). Ethnicity, in this view, refers to “*all* social distinctions based on birth or ancestry, be they associated with race, language, or anything else.” Within the sociological literature about assimilation, ethnicity has come to mean group *distinctiveness* in comparison to other ethnic groups, based on structural measures such as in-marriage, distinctive language, geographic clustering. The *content* of the ethnicity is not being examined, just the fact that Jews may be differentiable based on interaction or associational patterns.

Jewish ethnicity is often termed “Jewishness,” which Ritterband (1997) defines as that which is peculiar to Jews, that which marks Jews off from other peoples either absolutely or in probabilistic terms. Thus Jewishness as an abstraction stands for the markers by which both Jews and non-Jews establish the Jewish social boundary as well as the content of traditional Judaism and the behaviors and attitudes that are derivative of both.

Cohen’s recent statement (1998) attempts to separate the feeling of belonging to the Jewish people from what he views as a vulgar, middle class image:

To be clear, ‘ethnicity’ is used here to refer not to the vulgar side of Jewish ethnicity (bagels-and-lox, Jewish comedians, ostentation), but to the more comprehensive way by which social scientists use the word (social networking, formal association, cultural differentiation and more). In a manner of speaking *ethnicity refers to everything that distinguishes Jews from other religious groups*. It connotes common ancestry, shared circumstance, and common destiny... (p. 5)

In referring to the Jewish case the term “ethnicity” has an additional meaning: it is sometimes used as a synonym for secular or cultural sensibilities (such as feelings of peoplehood, of belonging to the group) as distinct from specifically religious activity.

So ethnicity has a number of meanings. Partly the fuzziness is a result of the fact that ethnic groups are not static, although many analysts treat them as if they are. Groups are often identified by their country of origin – Irish, Italians, Japanese, Mexican, etc. – and such an understanding is even encouraged by the US Census (Waters, 1990).⁴ But there is a danger of reifying national origin groups, viewing them as fixed and given categories whose meanings are clear to insiders and outsiders alike. Researchers either implicitly or explicitly take a position on whether American ethnic groups are the residue of pre-immigration cultures (Gans, 1982; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Hapgood, 1966; Kramer & Leventman, 1969; Sowell, 1981; Wirth, 1966), or are American creations, as rooted in this country as in the old world (Joselit, 1994; Nagel, 1994; Waldinger, 1996; Yancey, Ericksen, & Juliani, 1976). The former tend to see assimilation (i.e. the disappearance of the ethnic group) and erosion of the original ethnic culture where the latter observe transformation – new emerging forms which blend elements from both worlds.

With regard to American Jews and how they express their Jewishness (i.e. their relationship to whatever they see as Jewish), we shall see that viewing and measuring Jewishness as if it were a static, “original” culture is problematic. This is a normative, essentialist position that makes no room for the sociological fact that Jewish content and social patterns are both changeable and changing.

In general, sociologists have not viewed ethnic groups as solely a product of American conditions. Yancey, et. al. make an important contribution to the understanding of ethnicity, viewing it as emerging out of the interaction of migrants with the economic circumstances they find in the new country (Yancey, Ericksen, & Juliani, 1976). For example, the Italian-American community is not merely a transplant of Italian society. A group of Southern Italian and Sicilian emigrant peasants, each identifying first and foremost with their home villages, were forged by common circumstances into a new ethnic groups – Italian-Americans. Their culture borrowed forms from Italy, but adapted them to the

⁴ The position of the Jews as an ethnic minority in their countries of origin creates some confusion among American Jews, a substantial number of whom answer inquiries about their ethnicity by saying “Russian” or “Polish,” in spite of the fact that their immigrant ancestors would never have classified themselves as such (not to mention the Russians and Poles they once lived among). Actually, it is doubtful that the Jewish immigrants would have identified first and foremost as “Jews.” Rather, as is attested to by the proliferation of *landsmanschaftn*, identity was based more on town of origin, and then perhaps secondarily on broader classifications such as Litvak and Galicianer, Hasid or Mitnaged.

American setting and added new forms that would be foreign to those who remained in the villages. Gans takes a different approach, seeing the culture of the Italians of Boston's West End as more working-class than "Italian" (Gans, 1982). Yancey et. al. would be more likely to view this as an Italian-American ethnic culture, distinct from Italian culture, and inseparable from the class aspects that shape it. As a group's economic conditions change, the class-based nature of its ethnic style change with it. This was the thrust of much work on the Jews in the 1950s (Kramer & Leventman, 1969; Sklare, 1955) and has been greatly enriched by the work of a new generation of cultural and social historians (Joselit, 1990, 1994; Moore, 1981; Prell, 1999).

Throughout my discussion of the sociological literature I will limit my use of "ethnicity" to refer to *group distinctiveness at the aggregate level in comparison to other groups*. In contrast, *ethnic identity* refers to a *person's self-perception of being a member of an ethnic group*. Ethnicity -- the structural distinctiveness of ethnic groups -- has been the dominant focus in the sociological literature, while the *ethnic identity* of individuals emerging as a topic of interest only more recently. For *sociologists of American ethnic groups* attending to the barriers to assimilation or integration has predominated by and large over learning about how or whether people see themselves as members of a particular ethnic group.

The sociological enterprise thus places a great emphasis on *social structural factors*: the interrelations and social ties embodied in the economic arrangements, institutional relations, informal networks and social circles which undergird society, and are seen as separate from "culture" -- shared beliefs, practices and ideology. (Individual agency weighs in even lower in the analytic hierarchy.) Typical of the sociological indicators used to track the assimilation of ethnic groups are measures of ethnic cohesion and socio-economic attainment: residential clustering or "spatial assimilation" (looking at the ethnic composition of locales inhabited by members of different ethnic groups) language ("mother tongue" spoken at home by children of immigrants), occupation status, educational attainment, income levels; and finally, social networks (percentage of social ties with members of one's own or other groups in various domains), and intermarriage (religion of spouse).

Processes of Assimilation

There is a large historical and sociological literature that has addressed both the nature and the extent of ethnic or immigrant group assimilation into America. Insofar as it relates to the Jews, this literature examines the experience of the European immigrants to America (who came between the 1880s and the 1920s) and their descendents. Clearly assimilation is not a single phenomenon, a point that Milton Gordon made (1964), but involves some distinct processes, the most important of which are *behavioral* and *structural* assimilation. Behavioral assimilation, also termed *acculturation*, “involves the taking on of the cultural behavior patterns of the ‘host’ society” --individuals taking on the language, values, beliefs and behaviors of the majority culture. Structural assimilation refers to the social interaction of people from different ethnic backgrounds, the mixing of minority and majority. Gordon distinguished between *secondary* structural assimilation-- at work, in neighborhoods, schools, and so on --and *primary* structural assimilation where the relationships are more personal and intimate -- among friends, family, religious communities. At the time he was writing (1960s) acculturation without structural assimilation was what he observed among the “white ethnics” of European descent, a condition he termed “structural pluralism,” in that racial, ethnic and especially religious categories “retained their separate sociological structures.”

Will Herberg argued in *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (1955) that religion had replaced ethnicity as the locus of group distinctiveness, and he viewed ethnicity as a transitory stage through which immigrants and their descendants passed on their way to becoming Americans of particular religious persuasions. (Note that in this context the term ethnicity connotes ancestry group and refers to the experience of European immigrants and their descendents.) Although Jews were unusual in that they (unlike the Irish or the Poles) were both an ethnic and a religious group, Herberg’s point was that (white?) Americans would soon no longer be distinguishable based on their ethnic practices and cultures, but only in terms of their different religions. Note that religion in this formulation is about the faith or creed of the individual.

The predominant expectation among many observers was that with acculturation and assimilation, a process that involved the steady breaking down of the social boundaries between groups, ethnic distinctiveness would fade away and eventually disappear. This view

was challenged in the 1960s and 70s with the emergence of the debate over the future of ethnicity among the descendants of the European immigrants. Would Hansen's Law that the grandchildren remember what the parents want to forget (Hansen, 1938) apply to the descendants of the immigrants from Italy, Ireland, and Eastern Europe? Some observers of the ethnic scene believed they were witnessing a revival of ethnicity among whites (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Greeley, 1971), challenging the dominant view of "straight line assimilation." But empirical evidence for the revivalists' claims was not overwhelming. Rather, the research of the next two decades tended to support the "straight-line assimilation" thesis.

Ethnic Identity

Compared to the experience earlier in this century where being ethnic hurt one's chances in attaining high social status, the past 20 years have revealed a

new [pattern] where white ethnic groups have roughly equal life chances to attain many highly valued statuses...[although] one still finds evidence of ethnic differentiation. But the final implication is that ethnic differences are declining among Americans of European background (Alba, 1990, p. 9)

Consequently with the decline in ethnicity as expressed in terms of structural differentiation, analytic attention has turned to the *perception* of ethnic distinctiveness among individuals -- ethnic identity. (Alba, 1990, Gans, 1979; Waters, 1990). The study of ethnic *identity* has come to the fore only where ethnic group differences have ceased to have negative social consequences. This point is underscored by the fact that studies of Blacks and Hispanics have virtually ignored the study of ethnic *identity* in favor of sociology's traditional preoccupation with group formation, conflict and mobility (Omi & Winant, 1994; Steinberg, 1989; Wilson, 1980). In America, race remains the great divide.

Herbert Gans (1979) has posited "symbolic ethnicity" as a consequence of the ongoing structural assimilation of ethnic groups into America. He argues that with the disappearance of ethnic neighborhoods, ethnic economic enclaves and endogamous ethnic households, ethnicity has come to be experienced as a local feature of an individual's identity rather than being a feature embedded in the group life in the "old neighborhood."

Where expressions of group life were once experienced as primordial, natural, innate, and part of the environment, these expressions of identity have become more episodic and potentially voluntary. They have become an option, rather than a given. Once the individual's concern is with ethnic *identity*, and not with "ethnicity" (i.e. cultural practices or group relationships), the existence of an actual group becomes irrelevant. People can develop attachments to symbolic groups, picking and choosing ways of being ethnic that are "easy and intermittent" and that "do not conflict with other ways of life." Ethnic symbols "are 'abstracted' from the ethnic culture and pulled out of its original moorings, so to speak, to become stand-ins for it" (p. 422). The move is from external hard facts of ethnicity to internal, personal, subjective experience.

In spite of the seeming persistence of ethnic culture, Gans argues, symbolic ethnicity is just another point in the secular trend of straight-line assimilation. (Note that he sees the religious or *sacred* culture of ethnic groups as less affected by acculturation and assimilation, although he also writes about "symbolic religiosity" (Gans, 1994)). But he is careful to emphasize that symbolic ethnicity could persist for generations, as long as it offers psychic benefits with few attendant costs. Gans views symbolic ethnicity as the dominant form of ethnicity among whites, which leads him to predict a further declines in ethnic organizations and cultures, as group identity becomes an outcome of personal choice in terms of meaningfulness, rather than emerging out of communal ties based on common fate, history and ancestry.

Gans places much weight on "bricks and mortar" – physical proximity – as the basis for "real" ethnicity. I wonder how he would revise his view, if at all, in light of "bytes and modems" interaction we see emerging today. Do these new forms serve to overcome the consequences of geographic dispersal? Do they offer a new means of interaction at the level of the collective through which community (or at least shared images and commitments) can emerge or be maintained?

There is recent empirical support for Gans' view. For her 1990 book *Ethnic Options* Mary Waters conducted in-depth interviews with 60 third- and fourth-generation white Catholic ethnics about their ethnic identities (Waters, 1990). She concludes that symbolic ethnicity, with its emphasis on choice without constraint, individualism, and a costless community, best accounts for the ethnic aspect of her respondents' lives. Intermarriage

plays an important role in the increasing personalization of ethnicity, by introducing a further element of choice into people's ethnic identities. Considering that people of mixed ancestry have more latitude in how to identify, their views of what it means to be Irish or Italian become more important because these views can influence their choices. But as the structural elements of ethnicity decline, knowledge of ethnic culture is reduced to stereotypes. On this tenuous basis the decision to identify is made. The personal nature of this symbolic ethnicity, and the lack of real knowledge of ethnic heritage, is perhaps best exemplified by a woman in the study who celebrates her Irish heritage by eating sauerkraut (Waters, 1990).

The appeal of such ethnic identification is that it allows people to express their uniqueness (and avoid being just “plain vanilla”) by feeling part of an undemanding community. They can identify with a group, but since they need not interact with the group to feel ethnic. The group exerts no constraints on them. They are completely free to choose how to identify and what content to give this identity (Waters, 1990).

Richard Alba draws similar conclusions from his survey of 540 white, English speaking adults in upstate New York (Alba, 1990). “Ethnicity, which was once transmitted by a communal web of enmeshing families, neighborhoods and informal networks, is now dependent on the identities of individuals” (p. 205). He finds people of unmixed ancestry the most likely to identify ethnically and engage in ethnic behaviors. But this group makes up a declining proportion of the white population (it is already a minority), such that a further decline in ethnic identification is probably inevitable because the array of choices is so expanded. Like Waters, Alba argues that rising interethnic intermarriage rates have eroded the position of the family as the main structural support for ethnicity. Although intermarriage among people with different ethnic identities does not interfere with each individual’s personal identity, it does produce children of mixed ancestry who, as noted above, are less likely to find a particular ethnic identity to be salient, in part because there are so many choices. But it is precisely this commitment to an ethnic identity that best predicts whether parents will pass on an ethnic heritage to their children. All in all, Alba’s findings suggest that the grandchildren of interethnic intermarriage will face an even wider array of options about their ethnic identities, and because they will have potentially less commitment to any one of them, they will be unlikely to identify in ethnic terms.

These studies portray a decline in the structural foundations and practical importance of ethnicity among whites, which has transformed the nature of their connection to ethnicity. Where once ethnicity was part of the ambience of the neighborhood, ties to the ethnic group are now sustained only by individual choice. This results in an ethnic identity that is largely personalized, intermittent, feel-good and symbolic. Contrast this with the continuing relevance of race/ethnicity for the life-chances of blacks and Hispanics, and the reason for the lack of concern with ethnic “identity” among scholars studying these groups becomes clear. Individual ethnic identity becomes relevant analytically when group-level ethnicity is not.

Yet Gans, Alba and Waters all converge in saying that for *individuals* ethnic identity can remain meaningful (if personalized), even if the structural bases for ethnicity are dissipating. Alba concludes his book by stating,

In a society where racial cleavages remain profound and where ethnicity is revitalized by new, non-European immigrations, there are incentives to retain a specifically ethnic identity, even if it has little practical consequence in everyday life. In particular, ethnic identities have become ways of claiming to be American, and this is a profound change from the past. Ethnic identity can be a means of locating oneself and one’s family against the panorama of American history, against the backdrop of what it means to be American.. No longer, then need there be any contradiction between being American and asserting an ethnic identity. Increasingly they are accepted as the same thing. Therein lies the ultimate significance of the transformation of ethnicity for white Americans. (p. 318-319).

In other words, among most descendants of European immigrants to America, “twoness” has taken on a new meaning. Where before being Italian or Irish was experienced as being at odds with being American, now having an ethnic identity is an American hallmark. For white Americans of different European ancestries, the sociological effect of people invoking their diverse ethnic identities is ultimately unifying. That people can say regarding immigration and social mobility “We have each come from this” has come to be seen as part of the essence of being American.

Assimilation and American Jewish Distinctiveness

From early on in the sociological literature Jews were viewed as offering an example of successful ethnic group acculturation. Sometimes the Jewish case is viewed as a rule and other times as an exception. From the perspective of American sociologists, the socio-economic attainments of American Jewry have been remarkable in comparison with the ethnic and immigrant groups who arrived on American shores at a similar point in time. Jews today are often held up today as an example of a group which has retained group distinctiveness even with its very high socio-economic attainment. This is not exactly the image of “straight-line assimilation” that has been predicted sociologically, where higher education was expected to lead to greater structural assimilation and consequent shedding of ethnicity. Instead, the Jewish case can be seen as an example of a group that has maintained its group distinctiveness in the face of remarkable socio-economic achievement and perhaps because of it. It is striking to contrast the howl and cry from within the Jewish community over the weakening of Jewish identity and the threat of assimilation in America with the sociological image of American Jewry as remaining distinctive and robust in their patterns of socio-economic attainment and social cohesion.

It turns out that in terms of social structure Jews are not so assimilated after all (at least not in New York City). Waldinger’s study (1996) of ethnic networks in the New York labor market is an impressive account of how ethnic groups establish occupational niches that guarantee their continued access to certain jobs, even as they freeze others out. The case of the Jews is an interesting one, in that concentrations in skilled and unskilled jobs in the garment industry allowed the Jews significant economic mobility, such that today Jews are especially employed in prestigious white-collar occupations and professions. The existence of the white-collar niche tends to be self-perpetuating, channeling young Jews into law, medicine, finance, media, social work and other sectors (Waldinger, 1996).

Waldinger's argument is especially important in light of the organized Jewish community's focus on Jewish identity. Waldinger is suggesting that identity is less relevant to the perpetuation of the ethnic group than the persistence of Jewish occupational niches. Of course, the niche guarantees nothing about the cultural forms Jewishness will take, and it is these cultural forms which appear to be of interest to the communal organizations that have adopted the “continuity agenda.” But the niche does help maintain a certain level of

group interaction, shared experience and similarity in class position, all of which serve as structural bases for group survival. The economy structures people's lives, and constrains many Jews to live their lives in a milieu populated by many Jews. The content of that Jewish milieu, however, might not accord with traditional norms of what Jewishness should be.

In sum, the message from the sociological conversation about acculturation and assimilation of American ethnic groups is that social cohesion, which reinforces interaction among group members, is good for group continuity. Despite increases in intermarriage and geographic mobility and dispersal -- the typical indicators of structural assimilation -- compared with other groups American Jews have retained an exceptional distinctiveness in their patterns of interactions, reinforced by their social and political patterns, religious structures and historical sensibility (Alba, 1990; Lipset & Raab 1995).

The sociological analysis places great weight on the maintenance of social cohesion and the structural supports for ongoing interaction. Density of networks, class commonality, residential clustering, common language, and in-marriage are seen as markers of group distinctiveness and yielding of ongoing, evolving ethnicity. With the exception of studies of white ethnics by Waters and by Alba, the sociological literature does not examine identity directly. Ethnic identity is seen as the ethnicity of last resort, emerging as topic only when social structure no longer differentiates. From the sociological perspective we see a move from innate ethnic belonging emerging out of a tightly knit world of white ethnics (Italians, Poles, Irish, etc.) segregated from mainstream America to a more voluntary sense of ethnic identity expressed in transitory (episodic) acts of "symbolic ethnicity" existing within an American culture that has become more of a mosaic than a melting pot.

Our review has traced the shift in analytic focus from social structure to individuals as the main determinant ethnicity. Alba writes (1990):

Since social differences among white ethnic categories are declining if not dissolving, and contact between persons of different ethnic origins is pervasive, ethnic solidarity in whatever form can be maintained only if there are critical masses of individuals who *consciously* identify themselves in ethnic terms and are so identified by others, and who act, at least some of the time, in terms of these identities. (p. 24)

Ethnic identity, like all identities, is fundamentally about the individual's perception of self. As such, it lies within the purview of social psychology, which has addressed the relationship between people and groups.

Socio-psychological Approaches to Identity: The Relationship between the Individual and the Group⁵

Like ethnicity for sociologists, *identity* is a central concern for psychologists but its meaning has been hard to pin down. Yet that should not hinder us. As Roger Brown (1986) has noted, "Identity is a concept that no one has defined with precision, but it seems we can move ahead anyway because everyone roughly understands what it means" (p. 551). In this section of the paper I will review in a limited way some of the concepts and research that I view as important for developing an understanding of [American] Jewish identity. In particular I draw on the research in social psychology that examines the interface between the individual and the groups or categories with which s/he is associated. Only a little of the research has dealt specifically with Jews and their sense of Jewish identity or connection.

When prejudice and intergroup relations were major concerns within American social psychology, group identity was explored in terms of ethnocentrism and group chauvinism as part of the effort to understand intergroup conflict and cooperation (The question was how to ameliorate these tendencies). In the period around World War II, the plight of Jews motivated some influential research and theorizing. Two main subjects of inquiry concerned the authoritarian and prejudiced personalities on the one hand, and the consequences of being a member of a stigmatized or victimized group on the other hand. For example, in 1939 Kurt Lewin wrote an essay entitled "When Facing Danger," followed by one in 1940 entitled "Bringing Up the Jewish Child," and a 1941 piece entitled "Self-Hatred Among Jews." These essays addressed the strategies for creating a sense of well being in individuals, given their group's highly victimized status.

Clearly Jewish identity and the fate of the Jewish group have changed significantly over the years, a transition that is well illustrated by the shift of Jewish

communal concern from what was termed “survival” to what is now called “continuity.” Today, however, Jews no longer seem to capture the imagination of social psychologists as a compelling or emblematic case to be examined, perhaps because American Jews have succeeded in integrating into white mainstream America and are no longer the disadvantaged minority they were in the first half of this century. (In this regard, the field of cultural studies has found the Jews to be of interest. For instance Brodtkin’s (1999) recently published book is entitled *How Jews Became White Folks*.) This new situation poses a new set of questions. For instance, what is the relationship between being Jewish and being white? Is there an experience of “twoness” in a society where Jews have come to be seen as part of the majority (i.e. hegemonic) group? These questions have yet to be explored.

While there is no overarching psychological theory of ethnic identity, relevant linkages to this topic are to be found within two main conceptual frameworks. One, which emerged primarily from personality psychologists originating with Erikson, views identity as an integrative process over a person’s lifetime. “The emphasis of these models is on the internal integrity of the self, with identity a goal that individuals seek in reconciling various motives and experiences”(Deaux, 1996), including the experience of one’s ethnicity. The second more socio-psychological conception of identity sees the individual as embedded in social structure. Here a person’s self-concept is seen as comprised of two main parts – personal and social identities. One’s social identity is seen as shaped by images of and interactions with the world beyond the self, including any number of social groups and categories (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Ethnic identity is treated as one instance among many possible social identities that a person might have.

The integrative approach locates identity in the deep structures of a person’s psyche and sees it as shaped by the models presented in family, society and other settings and contexts over the course of a person’s life. The individual’s lifelong task is to explore, select among, integrate and internalize these various identities, including ethnic and religious identity, into a workable whole. In this vein Erikson noted that one’s relationship to one’s community could provide an ongoing sense of personal continuity

⁵ Judith Schor provided some bibliographic assistance for this section of the paper.

and coherence (1976). The early inculcation of ethnic belonging is a potential base on which to build an integrated identity. When a person's earliest experiences include a tie to the ethnic or religious group, this group tie has the potential to be experienced as natural and innate because it is deep and preconscious.

However, the fact that a person is born into and raised as a member of a particular ethnic group does not guarantee that this group membership will become an important part of a person's identity. In this regard psychologists have explored the process of ethnic *identity development* which addresses how a person may come to take on an ethnic or racial identity in adolescence and adulthood. The process of developing a racial or ethnic identity has been described as a series of stages in which the "givens" of one's life, in this case ethnicity, are explored and reconsidered in a conscious, active way:

Individuals progress from an early stage in which one's ethnicity is taken for granted, on the basis of attitudes and opinions of others or of society; through a period of exploration into the meaning and implications of one's group membership; to an achieved ethnic identity that reflects a secure, confident sense of oneself as a member of a group. Furthermore, an achieved ethnic identity is not necessarily a static end point of development; individuals are likely to reexamine their ethnicity throughout their lives and thus may reexperience earlier developmental stages. (Phinney, 1996, p. 923)

The opportunity to *consciously* explore how one feels about being a group member (for instance, a Jew, an African-American, a Mexican-American, etc) is posited to be an essential element in the process of ethnic identity formation.

There has been some empirical examination of these ideas, especially regarding members of "ethnic groups of color in the United States" (Phinney, 1990, 1989; Cross, 1991), but very few studies have explored ethnic identity development among "white ethnics." (In studies that have included "white ethnics," these subjects have been treated as an undifferentiated comparison group.) To what extent the findings apply to American Jews has not been explored empirically. By and large the study of ethnic identity has been built on the premise that the status of the ethnic group is lower (and disparaged) in comparison to "the dominant group" (Phinney, 1990), an assumption that could easily be questioned in the case of contemporary American Jewry. Moreover, as Phinney notes,

In the published studies on ethnic identity in adolescents and adults, researchers have generally focused on single groups and have used widely discrepant

definitions and measures of ethnic identity, which makes generalizations and comparisons across studies difficult and ambiguous. The findings are often inconclusive or contradictory (1990, p 500).

Clearly there is room for more research in this area. Phinney has attempted to develop an instrument that could be used among a range of ethnic groups (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – see Appendix), and I have incorporated some of these items into my recent study of adult Jews (Horowitz, forthcoming) which is discussed below.

In addition to the fact that the research about ethnic identity development has not included the case of the Jews (or other whites), the studies have focused on adolescents and college students, with practically no studies examining adults older than college age. Only one study has followed individuals over time (and this was limited to the college years --Phinney and Chavira, 1992). Yet there seems to be an important developmental trajectory to Jewish identity among American Jews, whose identities seem to shift as they pass through different life stages and situations. It will be essential to develop an understanding of the process of constructing a Jewish identity, and the circumstance under which this takes place. The “Connections and Journeys” research (reported below) addressed some of these concerns, albeit retrospectively. More research is needed in this area.

An alternative approach to identity is found in the work of social psychologists who view the individual’s self concept as emerging from the web of relationships with other persons, groups and social categories to which s/he may belong. Tajfel (1981) defined social identity as

that *part* of an individual’s self-concept which derived from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. (p. 255)

In this view, the mere fact that a person is labeled or categorized (by him-/herself or by others) as a member of a group or category -- a doctor, parent, Jew, female – is what constitutes a person’s social identity and these labels link the individual to other people who share that category. These category memberships come along with affective meanings and evaluations, as well as social and behavioral expectations and

consequences. From this formulation of social identity we get a sense of what the minimum requirements are for a person to feel part of a group.

Indeed, the main empirical findings are based on experimental work using the *minimal group* research paradigm. There is a large body of research which has demonstrated that the merest artificially imposed differences in group membership (such as being randomly assigned to the either the “Klee” or “Kandinsky” group) are seen as leading to group-related behavior, in particular, to in-group favoritism. The logic of this experimental approach is: if minimal, artificial differences produce such clear effects, how much the more powerful are the effects when the differences are real and maximal, such as those involving differences in ethnicity or religion?

Since people are members of any number of categories and groups (or, find themselves adopting all sorts of social roles), they end up with multifaceted identities. The relationship among these elements is something that the theory of social identity needs to address. What is the status of any one identity in relation to the others? This issue has been handled in several ways. First, *salience*, *centrality* and *commitment* have been identified as a key dimension regarding the organization of a person’s social identity (Tajfel, 1981; Deaux, 1996). Some analysts have distinguished among these. Salience is seen as transitory and highly dependent on context, where centrality implies a degree of commitment and self-awareness (Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

The point here is that the psychological importance of being Jewish may vary among people and in different situations. Thus we can imagine a person with only a minimal connection to being Jewish as well as a person with maximal connection. A person with minimal connection to the group category (e.g. one who says, “I have a Jewish heritage, but this does not relate to my day to day life.”) may see this group membership as relevant only in particular (episodic) situations and contexts. For this person, being a group member (having that label) may not be experienced as particularly important or central to the person’s self-concept, yet self-perception appears to be a minimum requirement for subsequently developing any sort of more meaningful Jewish identity. In contrast, a person with a “maximal” Jewish identity would see his/her Jewishness as an essential and over-arching aspect of his/her self-definition. It would figure in more prominently in that person’s self-concept. A theory of Jewish identity

needs to include some measure of the degree of psychological centrality or subjective identification with being Jewish.

A second way that the interrelationship between aspects of identity has been addressed by social psychologists has been by positing some process of balancing various aspects of the self in different settings (Brewer, 1991, 1993), and expressive sequences (Horenczyk and Nisan, 1996). Brewer examines the conflict between a desire to feel unique or distinctive versus feeling part of a group. Horenczyk and Nisan see the need for expression of different aspects of one's identity as leading someone who feels "too Jewish" in one situation to compensate for this by asserting other aspects of his/her identity in a subsequent context. This idea of balancing is the dynamic analogue to the issue of existential "twoness" we saw regarding identity in the work of modern Jewish historians and is suggestive as to the particular conditions under which a person's Jewish identity might be invoked.

From category membership to group belonging

Relevant to issues of group continuity, Alba (1990) has described the "aggregation issue," where he wants to examine "How the identities of different individuals articulate with each other:"

[A]re there meaningful collective ethnic identities? It is not ultimately enough to find masses of individuals who identify themselves ethnically in meaningful ways...It is necessary also to ask whether the ethnic identities of individuals aggregate in ways that sustain ethnic solidarity..(26)

Tajfel (1981) and others have emphasized the distinction between a social category and a group. A category becomes a group when there is a perception of interdependence or "shared fate" among members. Lewin (1952[1997]) wrote about this concept in his essays: "Not similarity but a certain interdependence of members constitutes a group." Campbell (1958) addressed this idea methodologically in his felicitously titled essay, "Common fate, similarity and other indices of the status of aggregate as social entities." This concept is about the extent to which a person sees herself as tied to other people in the "same" social category, and without this concept, we are left with an overly cognitive approach to social identity where we have people who label themselves as being part of a

category like “plumbers,” but whose relationship to other plumbers remains unexplored (unplumbed?). Deaux (1996) discusses the extent to which “interdependence” plays a role in different types of social groups. Clearly shared fate has been an important component of Jewish identity, given both the lessons of history and the Jewish collective ideology which states, *kol yisrael areivim zeh ba-zeh* (all Jews are interdependent). However, if the experience of being Jewish is changing (from being part of an outcast, victimized group to one that is advantaged and well integrated) there may be more variability in people’s feelings of common fate, which would be important to track.

In the case of Jewish identity a second response to Alba’s “aggregation problem” – how do the identities of individuals relate to the group-level attributes? -- is to be found in examining the extent to which people enact the conventionally understood practices and activities that constitute Judaism and Jewishness. This has been the standard approach in the extensive survey work about American Jewry and their Jewish involvement (Cohen, 1982, 1988, 1991; Kosmin et. al, 1991) as well as in some key theoretical work on Jewish identity (Herman, 1977). However, there is a growing debate about what constitutes this canon of behavior, a debate which hinges on a fundamental difference in outlooks about what is authentic Judaism: Is this limited to *halacha* (understood as a closed system) or does it include as well other ways of expressing Jewish values which are emerging in different subgroups, such as involvement in social justice activities? It is at least a logical possibility that a person might have strong ties to Jewishness which are not expressed in traditional “tribal,” ethnic, or religious ways. If studies fail to inquire about how people express or experience their Jewishness, even if these are completely unconventional in terms of group habits and traditions, these modes of potentially significant Jewish expression are missed altogether, and people whose Jewishness is expressed only in these ways end up being categorized as completely uninvolved with Jewishness, Judaism, or the Jewish group.

Social Psychological Studies of Jewish Identity

There have been two widely cited social psychological explorations of Jewish identity. Simon Herman, a student of Lewin’s who conducted the only systematic research empirical program about Jewish identity (1977) defined Jewish identity in terms

of both the patterns and attributes of the group and the relationship of the individual to those attributes. He saw as his task to describe “the nature of the individual’s relationship to the Jewish group as a membership group,” the individual’s perception of and feelings about the attributes of Jewish group-level identity, and the extent to which the individual adopts these attributes. He summarizes these ideal content elements of a Jewish identity:

1. ..the Jewish group [is seen as] being both a national and a religious entity, and not just exclusively one or the other;
2. the Jewish group occupies a position of centrality in [a person’s] life space;
3. being Jewish has a positive valence;
4. the Jewish group serves as a source of reference in significant spheres of [a person’s] life;
5. [the individual] acts –more particularly in the daily conduct of his life—in accordance with norms of the group, which have a distinctive Jewish stamp. (p.55)

This is the most clearly normative definition of Jewish identity that has been developed and can be viewed as providing a “maximal” definition of Jewishness. Herman’s surveys were carried out in Israel among Israeli students and their parents, and among university students visiting Israel from different Jewish communities around the world (United States, South Africa, Russia, France, etc.) He was able to examine in a comparative frame the relationship between being Jewish and being of a particular nationality, and the extent to which these different memberships/identities were consonant, dissonant or neutrally related. Some sample questions from his surveys appear in the Appendix.

Kelman’s (1999) theoretical exploration of Jewish identity development draws on his well known a general theory of social influence (Kelman, 1961). He describes three modes of social influence – compliance, identification and internalization -- that can result in different types of involvement in a social system. Relating this to the case of Jewish identity, Kelman begins by noting that ethnic or national groups have “group identities” over and above the identities of individual group members, where

group identity and its various components represent external inputs that become incorporated in an individual’s personal identity through various processes of social influence.

He argues that an individual's specific relationship to being Jewish depends on the extent to which a person internalizes and integrates elements of his/her Jewish heritage or background into the core of his/her personal identity. In contrast to a "vicarious" Jewish identity which emerges from a person's compliance with the demands of the immediate context, or a "conferred" Jewish identity, which emerges from a person's identification with other people, an "authentic" Jewish identity is "one composed in large part of internalized elements" which the individual has incorporated over the years. An authentic identity is one that is enduring across changing contexts and relationships, whereas the conferred and vicarious identities are less stable.

In contrast to Herman's normative stance, Kelman emphasizes the *individual's* reckoning with the fact of his/her Jewish origins and upbringing in order to develop "a firm personal identity." He is less interested in the maintenance of *group-level* collective attributes and considers that the individual's internalized Jewish identity might conflict with "the requirements for maintaining the unity and stability of Jewish *group* identity, at least in its traditional, historical sense." Kelman describes his strategic approach as one of "individualizing" Jewish identity rather than "maximizing" it. He recognizes his controversial stance:

Such a model may not be acceptable to those who are committed to the unity and integrity of Jewish identity in its traditional form. There is good reason to argue, however, that in the complex, pluralistic, rapidly changing world in which we now live, the model presented here is more conducive to the incorporation of Jewish identity into an authentic, integrated personal identity. By opening up the communication between Jewish values and other values, it may transform some of the Jewish values, but in so doing retain their vitality. The alternative may be a Jewish identity that is offered in maximal form but accepted in minimal form – stripped of content, playing an insignificant role in a person's daily life or existential choices, and activated only when there is an opportunity for status enhancement or threat to group survival.

In my own research entitled *Connections and Journeys* (forthcoming, 1998) I investigated American Jewish identity using a number of the concepts which emerged from the socio-psychological approach to social identity. Similar to Waters' (1990) and Alba's (1990) inquiries into the relationship between having an ethnic ancestry and the meaning of that for the individual, I examined the relationship between a person's Jewish background and the extent to which this is a psychologically central or integrated

component of a person's identity. Beginning with 87 in-depth interviews, I explored people's internal, subjective understanding about the content and meaning of being Jewish in their lives, in addition to examining what they saw as their Jewishly-related actions and behaviors (Horowitz, 1998). I then developed a survey questionnaire, which incorporated some of these elements (see Appendix for sample questions). This survey was administered to 1,500 New York based, American-born Jews ages 22-52. In this study Jewish *identity* was examined separately from Jewish practice, which was measured in terms of both religious observance and cultural activities. The analysis resulted in seven patterns of Jewish engagement based on different combinations of subjective centrality, religious ritual practice and cultural-communal modes of action. For most people a sense of psychological centrality of Jewishness correlated with engagement in Jewish practice: for one-third of the sample being Jewish was a central component of identity and was expressed in intensive involvement in Jewish actions, and one-third of the sample were people for whom being Jewish was something about which they were rather indifferent—it was a membership category but not a central component of identity (and this group was not very involved in Jewish activities). However, one-third of the sample evinced mixed patterns of centrality of Jewish identity and enactment of Jewish “behaviors.” These findings could be said to illustrate the diverse ways of being Jewish which range from Herman's traditional normative definition to Kelman's more personally defined, to a minimalist form of connection to being Jewish – mere membership in the Jewish category.

In sum, the field of social psychology has defined several components of social identity that are relevant for understanding Jewish identity. First, group or category membership and self-labeling are seen as the minimum conditions necessary for group identification to occur. In addition, the extent to which a social identity is experienced as central, salient or important is a key dimension for differentiating among individuals. Finally, the extent to which group members see themselves as interdependent and sharing a “common fate” is a third important dimension.

In addition to these elements which emerge from the research about social identity in general, the specific case of Jewish identity raises the issue of the *content* of

an individual's Jewish identity. Scholars of Jewish identity differ about how normative or descriptive a stance to take in this regard. On the one hand, one approach to identity described here (in addition to the concept of symbolic ethnicity described above) points to individualized choice in determining the contents of a person's ethnic identity, suggesting the importance of a constructivist, meaning-based approach to studying Jewish identity (Horenczyk & Bekerman; Horowitz, forthcoming). Other scholars have called for a more normative, essentialist view of what constitutes Jewish identity (Cohen, 1991; Liebman, 1995; Herman, 1977). Liebman (1995) has argued that irrespective of what people feel or believe to be Jewish, these views ought to be weighed against the normative (elite?) understanding of what Judaism is about – The Good or Educated or Knowledgeable Jew. The size of gap between this idea of “the Jewish” and the views of most people will motivate our optimism or pessimism about the condition of American Jewish identity.

American Jewish Social Scientists: Assessing the Condition of American Jewish life

A cadre of American social scientists, nearly all sociologists, have studied American Jewry “for its own sake,” out of special interest in assessing the Jewish condition. Three main empirical stories have emerged from this work. First, several scholars have examined the American Jewish population in terms of its patterns of *social cohesiveness*, with the view that cohesiveness should be thought of as an “enabling condition” for Jewish group continuity and individual Jewish identity. Second, there is a large body of empirical work, which has attempted to explain *what leads to weaker or stronger Jewish identification of individuals* in terms of two main questions. One set of analyses has addressed the impact of “Generation in America” on Jewish involvement. The second set of analyses examines the power of Jewish education in relation to Jewish identity.⁶ Finally, in assessing whether the condition of American Jewry offers evidence of assimilation or transformation, a third set of analyses have segmented the American

⁶ Currently there are studies underway that address a *third* area of concern – the impact of intermarriage on the Jewish identities of children. I will not address this important emerging area of research at this time.

Jewish population in terms of *variations in the nature and extent of Jewish practice and identity*.

It is worth noting that the use of the term “identity” in this body of work typically refers to Jewish involvement and Jewish practice (which has been called “identification”), rather than to identity in the subjective psychological sense as employed by social psychologists (Himmelfarb, 1982).

Social Cohesion and Its Consequences

Goldscheider and Zuckerman (1984), and Goldscheider (1986) show that American Jews have remarkable basis for social cohesion, a condition from which group culture and identity flow. They view ongoing Jewish community and continuity as the products of the continual interaction of Jews with other Jews – wherever that occurs. Goldscheider (1997) looks at Jewish patterns of educational and occupational attainment, diversification and self-employment compared to that of non-Jewish whites over time (1910 to 1990). He finds a clear pattern of ongoing distinctiveness and sees this as “[pulling] Jews toward each other, sharing what we call community – families’ experiences, history, values, communal institutions, rituals, religion and life styles.” In contrast he defines assimilation as those forces “that pull Jews away from each other” (p. 274).

Goldscheider (1986) notes that the commonality of social class characteristics among American Jews is an additional factor that moderates the effects of assimilation. The *stability of this attainment from parents to children* means that each new generation is not getting dramatically more education than the next, since the educational attainment is already so high. He points out how much this contrasts with the dramatic shifts experienced by earlier generations of American Jews ---from immigrant generation to their children, and from that second generation pattern to the third.

Ritterband (1995, 1997) takes a theoretical position similar to Goldscheider about the role of distinctive structural patterns as being markers of stronger boundaries of the group, but his choice of indicators is even more fundamental. Ritterband has analyzed Jewish fertility patterns as well as geographic concentrations in comparison to other groups. He sees *sheer population size and density* as crucial factors in promoting social

cohesion and group maintenance. However, unlike Goldscheider who explicitly avoids addressing the content of the interaction, Ritterband's interpretation of the data is more wistful (i.e. judgmental) about the passing of "traditional" Jewish community. Assimilation and integration have been good for Jews as individuals, but devastating for the Jewish community, which he sees as suffering the effects of secularization. He emphasizes the costs of structural integration, and identifies the main issue as the decline in a sense of transcendent community, thus returning the conversation to the issue of *quality* of Jewishness or community. In contrast, Goldscheider and Zuckerman refrain from judging the content or quality of the Jewishness, since their view is explicitly non-normative. They see interaction and cohesion as prerequisites for Jewish culture and continuity, but they go no further in identifying the necessary enabling conditions for Jewish group life.

What Leads to Strong Jewish Identity?

Scholars have pursued two empirical explorations regarding the factors that lead to strong Jewish identity (and identification). The first topic is the impact of length of time in America on the Jewish identification of individuals in subsequent generations. The second topic is about the impact of different forms of Jewish education during childhood on Jewish identification in adulthood.

Generation in America

A number of scholars have examined the relationship between length of time in America and individual Jewish identification. Here analysts have compared the ritual practices and ethnic behaviors of the Jewish immigrants to America (the first generation) to those of the children of immigrants (second generation) to those of the grandchildren of immigrants (third generation) and so on. In the context of the mass immigration from Europe between the 1880's and 1924, Jews who were immigrants to America were typically characterized by ethnic solidarity (e.g. living in Jewish neighborhoods) as well as religious practices, the observance of which declined from first

to second to third generation of American-born Jews (Cohen, 1988; Goldstein & Goldscheider, 1968; Himmelfarb, 1984).

This might be termed the “erosion model” of American Jewishness, since secularization and acculturation lead to a decline in individual Jewish practice with each passing generation in America. The stereotype is that the European immigrants started off strongly Jewish and several generations later their children and grandchildren have sloughed off their Jewishness and become American or Americanized. Thus the Jews who were closer to the European experience appear to evince more Jewishness than those who are more removed. Note that in this formulation, European Jewishness, as indexed by ritual and religious practice, is seen as more authentic, while the idea of an American Jewishness pales by comparison.

One problem with the Generation in America approach to American Jewishness is that it tracks only a narrow set of traditional Jewish ritual, religious and communal practices, without allowing for a wider range of variations in Jewish practice. In effect this accounting strategy gives higher marks to a more homogeneous traditional Jewish population, and lower marks to a population characterized by a wider variety of less traditional Jewish behaviors.

Early Exposure to Jewish Education

The second body of work about Jewish identity relates the effects of Jewish education and schooling in childhood to subsequent Jewish identification in adulthood (Goldstein, 1997; Cohen, 1995; Lipset, 1994; Rimor & Katz, 1993; Cohen, 1988; Bock, 1976; Himmelfarb, 1984). Simply put, in this conception longer and more intensive Jewish schooling (along with both the parents’ decision to educate a child this way and the social context which supports this) is seen as leading to stronger Jewish practice and by extension, to stronger Jewish identification. The idea is that high saturation, early and often, creates a habit of involvement, a reservoir of knowledge and a set of social ties upon which to draw over a lifetime.

Like the Generation in America model, the Early Exposure to Jewish Education model contains within it an underlying assumption about the nature of Jewish identity

and Jewishness. First, there is a conception of Jewish identity based on a particular *content* – a configuration of normative, conventional Jewish values, beliefs, attitudes and practices. For instance, the measure of Jewish identity used by Lipset (1994) is a single scale composed of 18 items –a set of practices that together convey a certain way of being Jewish: being involved in adult Jewish education, having a synagogue membership, subscribing to a Jewish newspaper, giving to Jewish causes, volunteering for Jewish causes, membership in Jewish organizations, lighting Shabbat candles, attending Seder, keeping kosher, having separate dishes, observing Hanukkah, Purim and Yom Kippur, handling no money on Shabbat, having mostly Jewish friends, celebrating Israel’s Independence Day, giving children a Jewish education, and marrying a Jewish spouse.

Second there is a notion is how Jewish identity becomes “strong,” or bounded. In this case Jewishness is seen as an almost primordial loyalty that comes early in the life of the individual, separate from (and perhaps prior to) reflection, choice and decision-making. In the case of the Early Exposure to Jewish Education model, identity becomes fixed prior to adulthood. Strong Jewishness is seen as resulting from a series of socializing experiences beginning in the family, and including both formal and informal schooling, trips to Israel, youth programs, summer camp, to name a few. Here an educated (or, at least, a loyal) Jew is the result of a good (or, at least, an intensive) Jewish education and upbringing. The message of this model is that the earlier and more fully one is exposed to Jewish education, the better for the future of the Jews as a group.

Both analyses (Generation in America and the power of Jewish education) appear to suggest the importance of the immersion of the individual in intensive Jewish environments as a means of strengthening identity. In the case of Generation in America, the immigrant generation represents that intensity, while intensive Jewish education (especially in childhood) is seen as an enabling condition for Jewish identity.

Segmenting the Jewish Population: Maximal, Minimal and Mixed Patterns of Involvement

There has been ongoing debate about the extent to which the aggregate condition of American Jewry can be seen as one of “assimilation” or as “revival.” Cohen (1988)

lays out the competing arguments of “assimilationists” versus “transformationists” in assessing the condition of American Jewry. He analyzes the patterns of ritual practice, communal involvement, and informal associations for different subgroups in the 1981 New York population: younger versus older; immigrants versus native born; and family life stage.

In Cohen’s analysis (and those of many other analysts of American Jewry) “integration” is the term preferred for structural assimilation (measured by number of Jewish friends, and spouse’s religion), and “assimilation” is used to refer to the erosion of the practice of Judaism as measured by declines in religious ritual observance and communal involvement. He examines the patterns of Jewish population in New York in 1981, using cross-sectional analysis to compare Jewishness by age and generational group. He concludes by saying he sees integration but not assimilation (i.e. loss of distinctiveness).

Cohen’s recent study (1998) entitled “Religious stability and ethnic decline” continues this same theme. His enterprise has been to repeatedly track both religious practice as well as markers of both ethnic distinctiveness and of ethnic identity. Note that his use of the term “ethnic” includes both markers of structural distinctiveness (friendship patterns, neighborhood composition, and religion of spouse) as well as measures of group feeling and belonging (see Appendix for sample questions). However, he does not differentiate between these conceptually, although our review of the general sociology literature differentiated between ethnicity (a property of the group measured by aggregate patterns) and ethnic identity (a property of the individual).

Cohen has attempted to segment the population in terms of different levels of Jewish religious practice (1995, 1991, 1988) Using levels of normative religious practice as his criteria, he creates a scale of three main types of Jewish involvement (he started with five points in 1988, but in later studies (1991, 1995) he tries out a three-level typology, using same approach, but using a more simplified categorization): “Involved; Moderately Affiliated – ‘the Jewish middle’ – and the Peripheral.” This segmentation is significant because it provides a means of prioritizing among different ways of being Jewish based on what might be thought of as *maximal* and *minimal* patterns of Jewish practice and activity. The maximal pattern includes those people who

1. attend synagogue twice a month or more, *or*
2. have visited Israel at least twice, *or*
3. maintain two sets of dishes at home for meat and dairy products (in accord with Jewish dietary laws).

The minimal pattern is made up of people who

1. attend synagogue only on High Holidays (if then) *and*
2. do not fast on Yom Kippur *and*
3. have never visited Israel.

Moderately Affiliated Jews are those who fail to meet the criteria of either the Involved or the Peripheral (p.398).

Cohen states that the future of American Jewish continuity hinges on the fate of the broad middle group of American Jewry – the Moderately Affiliated. This formulation has been used by some to rule out or discount the peripheral group as not being worth the trouble, and to suggest that the “Involved” deserve a greater share of communal resources (Wertheimer, Liebman & Cohen, 1996). Most significant is the fact that Cohen’s segmentation is based on levels of normative religious practice.

Like Cohen, I have differentiated the population, but the basis of segmentation are three dimensions: the nature of a person’s *subjective commitments* to Jewishness as well as the nature and extent of a person’s overt *behavioral actions, as expressed in terms of religious ritual and in terms of broader cultural-communal involvements* (Horowitz, forthcoming). Based on the correlations among these scales, three overall modes of Jewishness emerged regarding people’s current identities: those with little or no behavioral involvement, who appear to be indifferent about being Jewish and have no active relationship with it; those who are intensively engaged as Jews, who place a priority on a Jewish worldview and lifestyle over that of the American mainstream; and those with *mixed* patterns of Jewish engagement. Among these three broad conceptions of Jewishness, the two extremes are known, understood since they corroborate the “conventional wisdom” about Jewish life – that the American Jewish future has been seen as a forced choice between assimilation and Jewish distinctiveness. Yet the study more fully uncovers the middle possibility, which has been less well understood up to now. This group is not simply the default between the two extremes of assimilation and

intensive Jewish involvement, but is better conceptualized as perhaps the most distinctively American of the three modes of Jewishness:

This middle mode combines two dimensions: a more circumscribed Jewish involvement along with success in the American mainstream. The people who have mixed patterns of Jewish engagement are not indifferent about being Jewish, but their ongoing Jewish involvement depends on it being meaningful and fitting in with their lives. The people who fit this especially American form of Jewishness experience their Jewishness as a set of values and as a historical people-consciousness more than as a mode of observance.

In addition to examining the current status of a person's Jewish connections, this study revealed that a significant portion of New York Jews (40-60% depending on the measure) experienced *changes* in their relationship to being Jewish,

suggesting that it is not a fixed factor in their lives but a matter that parallels growth and personal development. A large proportion of these people were raised homes with some clear Jewish commitments, but not overriding ones. For these people identity is best expressed as a narrative, rather than as a fixed state or set of attributes.

I identified five types of "journeys" or patterns of change, two of which were *stable* patterns and three of which involved *movement or change in Jewishness* over the course of a person's life. The stable patterns included those with *steady low* or non-engagement with Jewishness, and those with *steady high* intensity involvement with Jewish life. The three more dramatic journeys involved movement in different directions: *lapsing* further away from involvement; *increasing* the intensity of Jewish involvement; and finally, the *inner or interior* journeys where a person's internal subjective value commitments intensify, while religious and communal practice remains low or decreases. Fully one-third of the sample experienced this interior journey. The interior journey was especially characteristic of people whose current Jewishness was characterized by mixed *patterns of engagement*, and it was not characteristic of either the most intensively involved or the most Jewishly indifferent.

From this brief review of the social scientific research about the condition of American Jewish identity and continuity, three types of indicators regarding identity have been suggested. First, the importance of social cohesiveness as a correlate of identity has been shown, along with the importance of population size and density. The ongoing

interaction of Jews with other Jews in various domains sets the groundwork for other possibilities that can then lead to an intensified Jewishness. (Of course, denser Jewish networks are also a consequence of person's heightened Jewish engagement). Second, the importance of a person's Jewish self-perception is an essential dimension to track, separate from the nature and extent of a person's Jewishly motivated actions, which is the third aspect worth tracking.

Summarizing the Discussion

This review of the literature about Jewish identity has explored the topic from a number of vantage points. The "problem" of Jewish identity is discussed by historians as resulting from the Jewish encounter with modernity. The changing interrelationship between Jewish and Gentile *societies* led to the experience of what has been termed "twoness" at the individual level -- being at once a Jew and a person in the world. This formulation refers simultaneously to two levels of analysis -- the group and its culture, and the experience of individuals-- and it sets the stage for our subsequent explorations of Jewish identity and Jewish continuity within sociology and social psychology. The issue of how individuals relate to this twoness is something that has endured until now as a central issue regarding contemporary Jewish identity --some people seeking to remain both Jewish and "general," while others have viewed these as a forced choice between Jewish involvement and assimilation.

What has changed sociologically is the degree of integration and social acceptance which characterizes the Jewish experience in America today as compared to 50 years ago or to Europe in the 18th century. The review of the sociological literature relevant to understanding Jewish identity has examined the relationship between ethnicity (as expressed in the structural distinctiveness of one group compared to other groups) and ethnic identity (a person's self-perception of being a group member). Social cohesion and isolation were good for both group continuity and individual ethnic identity. Where group boundaries once promoted group continuity by keeping individual group members segregated from the surrounding society, this is no longer the case. Among white ethnics structural distinctiveness and social cohesion have decreased as ethnic groups have mixed in more completely with broader America. Thus the individual's self-perception

as an ethnic group member (and the role of that self-understanding in subsequent decision-making) receives less “support,” at the very moment that it has become more important in determining future ethnic group continuity. The problem of individual Jewish identity was recognized 200 years ago, but its central role in promoting Jewish group continuity has emerged only more recently.

The socio-psychological examination of social identity began by exploring the most minimal conditions for group identification. Lack of awareness of one’s connection to being Jewish results in feelings of indifference, whereas merely labeling oneself as having a Jewish heritage results in-group preference. This cognitive awareness coupled with several other aspects of group identity, such as viewing one’s group membership as a central component of one’s self-concept, and feeling a sense of responsibility for other group members, move our description of a person’s Jewish identity in a more maximal direction.

The importance or centrality of group identity can vary significantly across people and also within a single person’s lifetime in relation to changing circumstances. In addition, the elements of Jewishness which people find meaningful can vary significantly from person to person, and these may deviate from the notion of the “ideal” at the group-level.

Finally, the social science research about American Jewry has highlighted several elements that provide “enabling conditions” for Jewish identity. The most fundamental enabling condition for promoting Jewish group continuity and individual identity is sheer density and concentration of Jewish population within a particular locale. Simply having a large number of Jews in one place promotes the creation of Jewish infrastructure and creates the potential for a Jewish cultural milieu. Second, social cohesion is both a cause and a consequence of increased interaction among group members. Being exposed to an intensive Jewish environment, whether as a result of one’s upbringing or due to particularly intensive educational experiences promotes the Jewish identity of individuals.

The American Jewish population can be segmented into different clusters that represent different ways of being Jewish. Some people are more maximally involved in normative Jewish ways; others are open to Jewish expression in their lives and are

seeking personal connections to Jewishness, while still others appear to have only a minimal connection to being Jewish.

Beyond Anti-Semitism and Intermarriage: Developing Indicators of Jewish Identity

The impetus for this exploration of the notion of Jewish identity is a desire to expand the range of indicators about the American Jewish condition. The review of the various literatures suggests some clear directions that could fruitfully be undertaken. I will discuss these in terms of four groups of indicators: measures of individual Jewish identity; measures of social cohesion; structural indicators based on Jewish population density; and finally, a means of tracking the changing relationship between “the Jewish” and “the American.”

Indicators of Individual Jewish Identity

There has been a 30-year enterprise of studying American Jewish identification and involvement in Jewish life, based mainly on socio-demographic surveys. Every ten years, these surveys have tracked the activity levels of Jewish individuals in terms of ritual practice, cultural and educational involvements and institutional affiliations, philanthropic giving, and friendship networks, but they have not looked directly at Jewish identity as understood in the psychological sense. Yet it is more apparent than ever before that Jewish continuity depends on the individual’s commitments and decision-making. In addition to looking at Jewish practices and involvements in Jewish life, it is essential to examine the *subjective experience* of being Jewish. The elements that need to be investigated include:

1. The portion of Americans that in fact have a Jewish background of some sort, and are linked to Jews by virtue of ancestry, background and marriage.
2. A minimum requirement for social identity is *awareness or acknowledging* of one’s membership in a group. Knowing a person’s self-perception and whether or not a person even labels him-/herself, as Jewish would be a way of tracking this issue.
3. Since the centrality or psychological importance of being Jewish can vary from person to person, it is essential to examine a person’s self-definition: to what extent, if at all, is being Jewish an important part or central component of a person’s identity?

4. To what extent, if any, does a person feel a connected to other Jews across time and space? Is there a sense of sense of an interdependence of fate with other Jews or with Jewish history?
5. The content of being Jewish can vary significantly across people. What elements are especially meaningful for different individuals living in different milieus?
6. What Jewish actions flow from different ways of being Jewishly identified? In addition to tracking traditional (normatively Jewish) activities in which Jews typically engage, it is important to be mindful of less conventional, emerging forms of Jewish expression.
7. How does being Jewish get played out, if at all, in a person's daily life or existential choices? For instance, when parents face the decision of how to educate their children, they are faced with a series of choices and options about the values and commitments they want to convey regarding many aspects of life, including Jewishness. A similar sort of decision-making takes place regarding charitable giving.

Social Cohesion

It is important to continue to examine the social structural characteristics of Jewish life in America, since ongoing cohesiveness is related to increased interaction among Jews. At the aggregate level, we would want to keep tabs on the structural distinctiveness of Jews in different domains: for instance socio-economic patterns, residential, occupational clustering, and mobility, as well as intermarriage statistics.

Structural Indicators of Jewish Identity

Mapping out the basic social structural features of different locales offers an important means of tracking the quality of Jewishness in any given place. For any local community there are several key dimensions could fruitfully 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% of the total population, suggesting that density is a major social characteristic. 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).

The Changing Relationship Between “the Jewish” and “the American”

Although my charge in writing this paper was to review the literature about Jewish identity and to make recommendations about relevant indicators, I end my exploration of these concerns by expanding the original charge. *In order to understand contemporary American Jewish identity it is essential to begin to develop a more comprehensive picture of how Jews and Jewishness are interacting currently within American society.* The growing inter-penetration of Jews and America plays a significant role in relation to the dynamics of American Jewish identity. At an earlier time when Jews were a disadvantaged minority, the experience of the individual hinged on acceptance or rejection of group membership. At that time it made sense for the American Jewish community to keep track of instances of defamation, discrimination and anti-Semitism directed towards Jews on the part of the larger society. Today, being Jewish does not create social barriers to advancement – indeed, as a group Jews today are among the most advantaged of American ethnic groups– but the consequences of this newfound social acceptance have not been fully explored.

It is important to develop new ways of thinking about the Jewish experience in America. We might ask, 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 in government, Jewish involvement in the cultural life, public personages who are Jewish, Jewish penetration of various networks). In terms of social perception there are a range of issues concerning the extent to which Jewishness is a social category, the content of this social category, and the degree of acceptance of Jews and Jewishness by non-Jews. I see the social structural differences as varying more widely by local community, whereas societal acceptance of Jews and Jewry is something that needs to be tracked nationally.

An Order of Priorities

Given limited resources for research, I would suggest a three-pronged approach. First, a sensible strategy for developing a set of indicators is to build on existing communal studies of American Jewry. This is especially useful regarding the measures of individual Jewish identity. A number of the suggestions regarding *individual* Jewish identity described above are likely to be included to at least some extent in the National Jewish Population Survey, and may well be included in subsequent local community studies. These studies already probe conventional religious and communal *behavioral* involvement, and need to now include questions about a person's *subjective sense of connection to Jewishness*, as well as new modes of Jewish expression. A means of exploring the variable *contents* of Jewishness for different individuals and subgroups should also be included (see Appendix for examples).

To a certain extent, the measures of social cohesion and Jewish population density can be derived from these communal surveys, although these data will need to be supplemented by comparative statistics about the larger American (white, non-Hispanic) population, drawn from the United States Census and perhaps from other data sources.

A second approach is to concentrate on a few key communities to develop the full range of indicators I describe regarding a single locale. There are a number of American cities that have been studied regularly in terms of Jewish population characteristics (for instance, New York, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles and Providence, in addition to others), and general population characteristics could be drawn from census data. For instance, in conducting the 1991 New York Jewish Population Study (Horowitz, 1993; 1995), a census tract identifier was attached to each case. This allowed me to aggregate cases in terms of New York City community board districts, about which the New York City Department of City Planning had produced statistical reports. Data about the Jewish and general populations could then be compared. These existing data could provide the basis for a more extensive inquiry, as well as new data collection. Obviously, this local approach is inadequate for addressing research about the national picture

The third approach is to support limited research endeavors to develop measures about some of the newer areas of inquiry I raise in this paper. In particular, a study of *decision-making regarding Jewish education* would be a fruitful subject to explore. It would be important to understand what leads a family to send their child to a Jewish school at different points over the years (pre-school through high school). A worthwhile research endeavor would be to look at families over the life cycle (or at different critical periods of their lives) to examine the considerations and concerns that they have about how and to what extent to become involved in Jewish life. One exploratory study I can imagine would be to look at families with 8th graders who are even considering a Jewish high school as an option, and to examine the range of considerations that go into their decision-making: cost, nature of the public schools, desire for Jewish education, quality of secular studies, composition of the student body, (desire for diversity versus homogeneity), and so on. Of course, the availability of a range of options among which to choose is essential in such a study. The broader the range, the more nuanced the decision-making. In this regard, New York and Boston are two cities where the options are sufficiently broad in terms of types of schools (a few very different Jewish school; other private schools, and some excellent public schools). Such a study could involve in-depth interviews and focus groups with families who recently completed this process as well as with families about to begin.

A fourth approach is to begin to develop an inexpensive set of social indicators by gathering statistics from existing data about the interpenetration of “the American” and “the Jewish.” The data for some of these indicators are collected routinely by various bodies and would need to be identified and compiled (if only in the form of a “Harper’s index” following Harper’s Magazine!). What is needed is a set of social indicators comparable to the types of indicators that the federal government routinely supplies.

Conclusion

The bulk of this paper has been devoted to reviewing the concepts and research findings about ethnic group identity in general and Jewish identity in particular from the vantage point of several different disciplinary “conversations.” Despite the fact that each discipline has its own set of concerns, it has been reassuring to see that many of the findings echoed across these several domains.

Given the “twilight of ethnicity” among white Americans, the growing importance of the individual’s subjective relationship to his/her ethnic (i.e. Jewish) background has been recognized by scholars in several disciplines. Examining people’s subjective commitments to being Jewish, separate from and in addition to their involvement in activities, forms the centerpiece of any future effort to develop indicators of Jewish identity.

In addition to tracking Jewish identity directly, I have recommended that other enabling aspects of Jewish identity be explored: measures of social cohesion, the contextual aspects of particular communities, and finally, changing relationship between Jews and America. Taken together, gathering regular information about these different aspects of individuals -- their identities and patterns of involvement – and about how they are situated in their communities would begin to provide a needed update of American Jewry and would serve as a potential corrective to a perhaps skewed communal self-image.

Appendix

Sample Questions from Various Studies

Jean Phinney (12-item Multi Ethnic Identity Measure) (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, et. al, 1999)

In terms of my ethnic group, I consider myself to be _____.

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.
(4) *strongly agree* (3) *agree* (2) *disagree* (1) *strongly disagree*

1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my own ethnic group such as its history, traditions and customs.
2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.
3. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
4. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
5. I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
6. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
7. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
8. To learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.
9. I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group and its accomplishments.
10. I participate in ethnic cultural practices such as special food, music or customs.
11. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
12. I feel good about my ethnic background.

Simon Herman (1977)

1. Does the fact that you are Jewish play an important part in your life?
2. If you were to be born all over again, would you wish to be born a Jew?
3. Do you identify with:
 - Jews who suffered in the Holocaust?
 - Jews who suffered from attacks in Islamic countries?
4. Do you feel your fate is bound up with the Jewish people?
5. To what extent do you feel close to each of the following Jewish communities: (Israel, USA, USSR, Arab countries, Latin America, England, France, South Africa).

Bethamie Horowitz (forthcoming)

The subjective Jewish centrality scale is based on the following items:

1. I am proud to be a Jew.
2. I have a clear sense of what being Jewish means to me.
3. I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people.
4. I have a special responsibility to take care of Jews in need around the world.
5. Overall, the fact that I am a Jew has very little to do with how I see myself.
6. It's important for me to have friends who share my way of being Jewish.
7. When faced with an important life decision, I look to Judaism for guidance.

(Note: The original format for these items was a four point agree-disagree scale. To create the scale each item was dichotomized at the median split. The fifth item, "Overall, the fact that I am a Jew has very little to do with how I see myself," was indexed in terms of the amount of *disagreement*.)

The following battery is a means of tapping the content of a person's Jewishness:

There are many different ways of being Jewish. How much, if at all, does being Jewish involve for FOR YOU PERSONALLY [insert item-rotate]? Would you say....("A lot, Somewhat, only a little, not at all")

- a. Remembering the Holocaust
- b. Supporting Israel
- c. Leading an ethical and moral life
- d. Observing Jewish law (halacha)
- e. Studying Jewish texts
- f. Making the world a better place
- g. Learning about Jewish history and culture
- h. Attending synagogue
- i. Having a rich spiritual life
- j. [R has children:] Giving your children a Jewish education
[R has no children:] Giving children you might have a Jewish education
- k. Celebrating Jewish holidays
- l. Supporting Jewish organizations
- m. Believing in God
- n. Being part of a Jewish community
- o. Giving to charity

Steven M. Cohen (1998)

The “Good Jew”

1. In your opinion, for a person to be a good Jew, which of the following items are essential, which are desirable, which do not matter, and which are undesirable (better not to do)?
 - a. Believe in God
 - b. Contribute to Jewish philanthropies
 - c. Support Israel
 - d. Contribute to non-sectarian charities
 - e. Belong to Jewish organizations

 - f. Belong to a synagogue
 - g. Belong to a Jewish Community Center
 - h. Attend services on High Holidays
 - i. Lead an ethical and moral life
 - j. Have a kosher home

 - k. Study Jewish texts
 - l. Educate oneself about Judaism and Jewish history
 - m. Have mostly Jewish friends
 - n. Work for social justice causes
 - o. Be a liberal on political issues

 - p. Be a conservative on political issues
 - q. Marry a Jew (or a convert to Judaism)
 - r. Celebrate the Sabbath in some way
 - s. Give one's children a Jewish education
 - t. Feel attached to the Jewish People
 - u. Visit Israel during one's life

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