Reframing the Study of Contemporary American Jewish Identity*

Bethamie Horowitz
New York, NY

Introduction

In this paper I describe the current state of knowledge about contemporary American Jewish identity and propose an agenda for future research–"both to advance [our] scientific understanding and to provide information relevant to policy decisions." Not surprisingly, what we know about "Jewish identity" has been shaped by the framing questions that have been addressed by scholars. I shall suggest here that the basic frame within which American Jewish identity has been examined has changed. For many years the main line of inquiry has been "How Jewish are American Jews?" This question emerged out of the analysis of the assimilation of Jewish immigrants into America, reflecting two sides of that experience–striving to become American, and the relationship to Jewishness. More recently the question has shifted to: "How are American Jews Jewish?" This question, posed in a different set of societal circumstances, addresses the varied ways that people relate (if at all) to the fact of their Jewishness.

I will examine each of these questions in turn. My review of "How Jewish are American Jews" takes up the first half of the paper, followed by a discussion of the emerging research about the nature of contemporary American Jewishness. Finally, I suggest some new directions that ought to be pursued in future research.

How Jewish Are American Jews?

The most extensive body of empirical work about American Jewish "identity" has considered: "How Jewish are American Jews?" Sociologists have addressed this question from two vantage points:

1) The extent to which Jews as a group are characterized by distinctive social patterns that differentiate them from other ethnic and religious groups, which I will refer to as the "sociological distinctiveness" approach;[1]
2) The degree to which Jews follow traditional or shared religious and cultural practices, which I will call "the declining level of Jewish practice" approach.

The first of these vantage points is represented by the very large body of research about assimilation and integration of American ethnic,

religious and minority groups that has explored how the European immigrants to America (who came between the 1880s and the 1920s) and their descendents have entered the broader American society. Within this context, American Jews have been compared to other ancestry groups (such as Italians, Irish, and Poles) in terms of ethnicity. In this usage ethnicity refers to group distinctiveness based on social structural measures, such as inmarriage, distinctive language, and geographic clustering.[2] The content of the ethnicity has typically not been examined (presumably because it is not comparable across different ethnic groups); rather, the focus has been on the degree to which Jews (or any other group) are distinguishable from other white ethnics in terms of their patterns of interaction or association.

The second approach to "How Jewish are American Jews?" has defined Jewishness in terms of specific traditional or recognizably Jewish practices. This approach is exemplified by the research about the length of time (generational status) in America and its impact on aggregate levels of Jewish practice. This body of work examines the ritual practices and ethnic behaviors that characterized (or were thought to characterize) most Jews at one point in time and in one set of circumstances and compares these aggregate levels of Jewish practice for each succeeding generation of Jews. Thus, Jewish immigrants to America (the first generation) were compared to the children of immigrants (second generation) and to the grandchildren of immigrants (third generation) and so on. 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). In contrast to the "sociological distinctiveness" perspective about the nature of American Jewishness with its focus on structural indicators of group boundaries, the "declining level of Jewish practice" perspective tracks a particular configuration of Jewish religious and cultural practices thought to indicate strong Jewish identity and involvement.

From each of these two approaches a different "story line" emerges. I will explore each of these, beginning with the "Jewish sociological distinctiveness" perspective. This particular Jewish story is set within the larger tale of the assimilation into America of European ethnic groups.

Structural Distinctiveness

Elsewhere (Horowitz, 1999b) I have reviewed the vast literature about the assimilation to America of the European immigrants and their descendents, which I summarize briefly here. The American descendents of most European immigrants have assimilated into

America, and consequently the structural distinctiveness of Poles, English, Germans, Irish, and Italians, for example, is disappearing (Lieberson and Waters, 1988; Alba, 1990). At the same time American society itself has become less monolithic and more culturally diverse.

As the old ethnic neighborhoods have disappeared, Gans (1979) has suggested that "symbolic ethnicity" has emerged to replace more substantive ethnicity based on actual interaction. Gans' influential notion is that ethnicity has come to be experienced as a feature of an individual's identity rather than as something that arises out of ethnic group life in the old neighborhoods. Where being part of an ethnic group was once experienced as primordial, natural, innate, and part of the environment, this experience has become more episodic and potentially voluntary, particularly as intermarriage has increased and ethnic clustering has decreased. Ethnic affiliations have become an option, rather than a given. 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 their original moorings, so to speak, to become stand-ins for it" (p. 422). The shift is from the externally supported, hard facts of ethnicity to internally relevant, personal, subjective experience of ethnic identity.

In spite of the seeming persistence of ethnic culture, Gans argues, symbolic ethnicity is just another point along the way toward assimilation. But he is careful to emphasize that symbolic ethnicity could persist for generations, as long as it offers psychic benefits with few attendant costs. In the case of symbolic ethnicity, group identity arises from personal choice based on meaningfulness to the individual, rather than emerging out of shared communal ties based on common fate, history and ancestry. Gans sees symbolic ethnicity as becoming the dominant form of ethnicity among American whites, leading him to predict further declines in ethnic organizations and cultures.

The implication is that eventually individuals' ties to ethnic groups will become diluted to the point of being unrecognizable or completely idiosyncratic. Gans' ideas have received empirical support in the investigations of Waters (1990) and Alba (1990).

In sum, the overall empirical trend for white European ethnic groups in America is one of "bumpy-line" assimilation, where a watered down, personalized ethnic identity may endure, even when the ethnic group's structural distinctiveness does not.

In the case of the Jews, however, Gans' himself saw a need to revise his views. After all, there are other social structural supports besides the old neighborhoods that lend support to American Jewish ethnic identification–most notably the Jewish religion. Gans has granted that the religious or sacred culture of ethnic groups is less

readily affected by acculturation and assimilation, although he also writes about "symbolic religiosity" (Gans, 1994). A number of analysts have examined how symbolic ethnicity applies to American Jewry (Sharot, 1997; Kivisto & Nefzger, 1993; Amyot & Sigelman, 1996; Winter, 1996), with a consensus emerging that the religious aspect of Judaism provides a more enduring framework for Jewish identity than old-style ethnicity.

Jacobson (1995) criticizes Gans' notion for being limited to the American milieu, lacking historical and transnational perspectives needed for understanding the inner meaning of being Jewish. Instead, he proposes that Jews of different generations can be seen as members of "transnational communities, which their forebears created through myriad acts of migration and memory" (p. 242). All in all, symbolic ethnicity does not fully capture the complexities of contemporary Jewish identity, although it may be an apt characterization of the most peripheral segment of contemporary American Jewry.

In general, we can say that the American Jewish experience parallels those of other European ancestry groups in America without fully following them. Clearly Jews have dispersed geographically, socially and culturally since Wirth's study of the Ghetto (1928), yet compared to the descendents of other immigrant groups from the same period (1880-1924), American Jews as a group have remained more structurally distinct.

Goldscheider (1997) has examined American Jewish patterns of educational and occupational attainment, diversification and self-employment compared to those of non-Jewish whites from 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).

Similarly, 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, with the result 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).

The arguments put forth separately by both Waldinger and Goldscheider are especially important in light of the organized Jewish

community's focus on Jewish identity. They are suggesting that individual Jewish identity is less relevant to the perpetuation of the ethnic group than the persistence of Jewish occupational niches and other forms of social cohesion. Of course, the niche is merely a setting and guarantees nothing about the cultural forms Jewishness will take, and it is these cultural forms that appear to be of interest to the communal organizations that have adopted the "continuity agenda." But the niches do help maintain a certain level of group interaction, shared experience and similarity in class position, all of which serve as structural bases for group solidarity. The economy structures people's lives and leads many Jews to live their lives in a Jewishly populated milieu. The content of that Jewish milieu, however, may not conform to traditional norms of Jewishness.

Goldscheider and Zuckerman (1984), and Goldscheider (1986) have examined the structural bases of American Jewish cohesion, which they view as a necessary condition from which group culture and identity may flow. They view ongoing Jewish community and continuity as the products of the continual interaction of Jews with other Jews–wherever that occurs. Moreover, Goldscheider (1986) views the commonality of social class characteristics among the most recent generations of American Jews as an additional factor, moderating the effects of assimilation. For instance, most American Jewish children are not getting significantly more general education than their parents, whose educational attainment is already very high. This is a new pattern to be contrasted with the more dramatic socio-economic differences in educational attainment between earlier generations of American-born Jews and their parents and grandparents, who were typically immigrants or the first generation born in America. In other words, because parents and children have similar levels of class attainment in the more recent generations, the inducement of each subsequent generation of American Jews to shed the practices of its parents has diminished. (See also Cohen, 1988 on this point).

Like Goldscheider, Ritterband (1995, 1997) emphasizes 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. In his view, assimilation and integration have been good for Jews as individuals, but at the same time they have been 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 concern as the decline in a sense of transcendent community, thus raising the issue of the quality of Jewishness or community. In contrast, Goldscheider and Zuckerman take an explicitly non-normative stance and refrain from judging the content or quality of the Jewishness. 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.

The message from this body of research about acculturation and assimilation of American ethnic groups is that compared with descendents of other European immigrants, American Jews have retained distinctiveness in their patterns of interactions, reinforced by their social and political patterns, religious structures and historical sensibility (Alba, 1990; Lipset & Raab 1995). 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 (Steinberg, 1989). Jews today are often held up as an example of a group that has retained group distinctiveness even with its very high socio-economic attainment. This is not exactly the image of "straight-line assimilation" that had been predicted sociologically, where higher education was expected to lead to greater structural assimilation and consequent shedding of ethnicity. The question is what is the meaning of this distinctiveness? Are American Jews assimilating (loosing their structural distinctiveness), but at a slower rate compared to other white ethnics? Or, are they somehow on a different trajectory?

Another Story: Declining Levels of Jewish Practice

The "sociological distinctiveness" perspective about "How Jewish are American Jews" presents an image of American Jews as distinctive and robust in their patterns of socio-economic attainment and social cohesion. This image stands in contrast to the more wrought portrayal of American Jewish identity that is decreasing and impoverished, in that characterizes the "declining level of Jewish practice" perspective.

In the approach, which emphasizes generation in America, the result of secularization and acculturation of each passing generation is a decline of Jewishness. The European Jewish immigrants started off strongly Jewish, while their children and grandchildren have sloughed off their Jewishness and become fully Americanized. Thus the Jews who were closer to the European experience appear to evince more "Jewishness" than those who are more removed. In this formulation, European Jewishness, as measured by ritual and other religious and/or communal practice, is seen as more authentic, while the idea of an

American Jewishness seems pale by comparison. Indeed they are set against each other as a "forced choice" between Jewish distinctiveness and assimilation. Elsewhere I have coined this "the erosion model" of American Jewishness (Horowitz, 1998).

One problem with the "declining level of Jewish practice" 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. The only possible outcome of this sort of tracking is erosion, even if new forms of Jewishness are evolving. For instance, a person who does something that s/he sees as Jewishly motivated but unconventionally Jewish (like volunteering in a soup kitchen) is given as little credit as doing nothing Jewish at all.

The "Generation in America" approach addresses the question of why American Jews have weaker Jewish identities (than their forebears). Generational status in America was seen as contributing to the problem of erosion of Jewishness, making the point that without direct contact with the primordial experience of European Jewishness, the bright lights of yesteryear would inevitably dim.

In a similar way, although from a completely different angle, a second set of analyses has been motivated by a concern about weakening of American Jewish identity, asking in effect, what experiences strengthen Jewish identity and practice? This second body of work relates the effects of Jewish education and schooling in childhood to subsequent Jewish identification in adulthood (Bock, 1976; Cohen, 1988; Cohen, 1995; Goldstein, 1997; Himmelfarb, 1984; Lipset, 1994; Rimor & Katz, 1993). Simply put, in this conception longer and more intensive Jewish schooling (along with both the parents' decision to educate a child more fully and the social context which supports that education) 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 image 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 activities, membership in Jewish organizations, lighting Shabbat candles, attending Seder, keeping kosher, 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, like the mode of the analysis of "Generation in America," there is a notion of 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, and summer camp, to name a few.

The story called the "declining level of Jewish practice"–whether it is viewed through the lens of "Generation in America" or related to the intensity of Jewish experience in childhood–revolves around a "normative" conception of Jewish identity. Being Jewish means conforming to the beliefs and particularly the practices that the researchers take to be defining or characteristic of both Jews and Judaism.

Simon Herman offers another example of a normative approach to Jewish identity, although Herman's work is rooted in the discipline of social psychology rather than sociology or demography. Herman (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 the description of "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 (p.55):

> 1) the Jewish group 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.

This is the most clearly normative definition of Jewish identity that has been developed. Herman's definition of the content elements can be seen as providing a maximal definition of Jewishness. These criteria would characterize only a narrow band of the population if applied to the diverse ways of being Jewish of American Jewry. The remainder of American Jewry would be categorized as "less than" this ideal. It is this scalar approach to assessing the Jewishness of American Jews that seems to fall short as a means of assessing the Jewishness of the broader American Jewish population today.

How Are American Jews Jewish?

Thus we are led to a new question: If Jews are not Jewish the way their grandparents were supposed to have been or the way they themselves ought to be, how, if at all, do they relate to anything (remotely) Jewish in their own lives? Such a question generates different research agendas and perspectives that may set the tone for the next stage of research about American Jewish identity. In this regard it is possible to use a social psychological perspective to lead to a very different stance about Jewish identity, one in which the normative perspective does not drive the research. A powerful example is Kelman's (1999) theoretical examination of Jewish identity development, which draws on his well-known 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 connection 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. The 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 that his stance is controversial.

> Such a model may not be acceptable to those who are committed to the unity and integrity of Jewish identity in it 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.

This approach to conceptualizing the Jewish identity of individuals moves the discussion away from a notion of Jewishness arising from obligation and towards a more meaning-based orientation where the process of internalization or integration of "the Jewish" into the Self is paramount. The image of Jewishness implicit here is not an unchanging "given;" rather, Jewishness is seen as constituted by the individual living in a particular web of relationships within a particular cultural context. The individual does not simply inherit Jewishness as a whole self-contained package; rather s/he engages with and potentially incorporates elements of Jewishness into the self through a process that anthropologists have termed the reinvention of ethnicity (Fischer, 1986). This approach to the study of Jewish identity emphasizes the

diverse ways of being Jewish, rather than better or worse levels of Jewishness.

In my own research entitled "Connections and Journeys" (Horowitz, 2000), I have investigated American Jewish identity using a number of the concepts that emerge from a more "meaning-sensitive" approach to Jewish 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 have examined the relationship between a person's Jewish background and the extent to which this is a psychologically central (i.e. an integrated) component of a person's identity. Following a grounded theoretical approach in 87 in-depth interviews, I explored people's internal, subjective understanding of the content and meaning of being Jewish in their lives, as well as what they saw as their Jewishly related actions and behaviors. Based on an analysis of these interviews, I developed a survey instrument which incorporated some of these elements and interviewed 1,500 New York based, American-born Jews ages 22-52. In this study Jewish identity was examined separately from Jewish practice, which I 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 the 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 the minimalist form of connection to being Jewish–mere membership in the Jewish category.

In the work exemplifying this new approach to studying American Jewish identity we see that the concept of Jewish identity has changed. It is no longer measured solely by a "canon" of religious behaviors and practices. Instead, the concept of Jewish identity has been expanded to include whatever is personally meaningful for each individual. Moreover, the internal subjective attachment to being Jewish is considered alongside the behavioral enactment of Jewish actions. This meaning-based approach involves (at least) two tasks. First, the contents of "Jewishness" need to be described. We might imagine a

salad bar filled with an array of ingredients that may be used to constitute Jewishness–some are more conventional, recognized, and typical, while others are unique and idiosyncratic. (How this comes to be constructed is a whole area of inquiry waiting to be addressed.) Describing the contents of each person's "plate" is the second task of the researcher. Each person puts a unique set of ingredients on his/her plate, representing the content of the person's Jewish identity or sense of Jewishness.

Redefining Our Terms: Jewishness, Jewish Identity

Scholars of Jewish identity differ about how normative or descriptive a stance to take in defining the content of Jewish identity. On the one hand, one approach to identity described here (in addition to the concept of symbolic ethnicity) 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 (Horenczyck & Bekerman, 1999; Horowitz, 2000). Other scholars have argued 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, their views ought to be weighed with reference to the normative (elite?) understanding of what Judaism is about–the "Good" or "Educated" or "Knowledgeable Jew." The size of the gap between this idealized understanding of "the Jewish" and the actual views of most people will motivate our optimism or pessimism about the condition of American Jewish identity.

Indeed, the issue of how to define Jewishness lies at the heart of our concerns about the state of contemporary American Jewish identity and the research agenda. I am not sure whether our problem is a lack of conceptual clarity (i.e. different units of analysis, differences about what or how to measure) or a disagreement about how to define the content–an ideological fault line. Jewish identity is a contested concept; it involves competing ways of defining Jewishness. Ritterband (1997) wants to abandon the term "Jewish identity" altogether because its meaning has become unclear. He suggests replacing it with "Jewishness."[3] The "sociological distinctiveness" approach looks at Jewishness in a probabilistic way, based on distinctive patterns of association that conceivably could have nothing at all to do with the traditional or normative content of Jewish life. If Jews are likely to buy more books than other people (they are), this could be used as a marker of Jewish social structural distinctiveness. By contrast, in the "declining level of Jewish practice" analysis "Jewishness" is defined in terms of specific behaviors that could be said to be based on an essentialist

vision. In contrast to both of these, a meaning-based, constructionist approach defines Jewishness in a self-anchored way.

Viewing and measuring Jewishness as if it were a static, "original" culture is problematic if we are to come to terms with contemporary American Jews and how they express their Jewishness (i.e. their relationship to whatever they see as Jewish). It is important to differentiate between this normative, essentialist position of Jewishness as static and unchanging, and a more dynamic idea of Jewishness as socially constructed, emerging out of and responsive to particular societal and historical conditions. The essentialist view does not allow for the sociological fact that the Jewish population has diversified, and Jewish content and social patterns are both changeable and changing. The main thing we have learned about American Jewry in the past fifteen years is that it is rapidly diversifying beyond the old categories used to describe it. Some people are more involved, some less involved; denomination and affiliation have become much less effective means of typifying the population (Horowitz, 1998; others). For many American Jews, Jewishness appears to be grounded less in religion or in ethnicity/peoplehood. Rather it is expressed in personally meaningful terms (Liebman, 1999; Horowitz, 1998, 2000; Cohen and Eisen, 1998).

New Directions for Research

Two lines of inquiry come immediately to mind (though others will no doubt emerge as well). The first concerns the ways that a person's experience of Jewishness evolves over the life course. The second is about the circumstances and conditions under which Jewishness comes to be seen as a central feature of one's life.

Jewish Identity Over the Life Course

We used to think of Jewish identity as a fixed quantity that one either had or lacked as a result of socialization. Recent findings suggest a more dynamic process of identity formation for many people, based on serendipity, choice and invention. In the "Connections and Journeys" study (Horowitz, 2000) a significant portion of New York Jews (40-60% depending on the measure) report changes in their relationship to being Jewish from childhood to adulthood. This important finding suggests that Jewish identity is not a fixed aspect of their lives but a matter that parallels growth and personal development.[4]

The "Connections and Journeys" study yielded five types of "journeys" or patterns of individual change, based on a combination of perceptual and behavioral indicators. Two of these were stable patterns and three 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. Together the steady journeys accounted for 40% of the sample. 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.

The journeys (patterns of change) were related to people's current patterns of Jewish engagement. The findings about journeys proved to be essential in fleshing out the various current ways of being Jewish, especially for those with mixed patterns of Jewish involvement. Indeed, the journey concept makes the biggest difference in our understanding of the middle patterns of Jewish identity, while it has the least impact at the extremes of Jewish identity–assimilation or intensive Jewish living. The people who are most intensively involved in Jewish life, as well as those who are least connected typically have steady patterns of socialization in these directions. Of course, they could still have the all-important idiosyncratic positive experience that comes from a relationship, an encounter or an unexpected experience.

In contrast, change and variation in Jewishness over time typify the middle identity or engagement patterns. The most dramatic journeys are those of people who move appreciably from where they began. In examining these patterns, baseline appears to be a significant factor. For instance, there are those who start off high on all dimensions but who lower their observance and heighten their emphasis on the value dimension (an interior journey). There does not seem to be a strong pattern of going completely from one extreme to the other (from "all" to "nothing") among those who started off intensively engaged. Also among those who started off highly engaged there was a significant subgroup of people whose Jewishness had intensified over their lives, which is a form of an increasing journey.

The concept of journey appears to be especially apt and also necessary for accurately portraying the nature of contemporary American Jewish identity. The notion of journey is about how Jewishness unfolds and gets shaped by the different experiences and encounters in a person's life. Each new context or life stage brings with it new possibilities. A person's Jewishness can wax, wane, and change in emphasis. It is very responsive to social relationships, historical experiences and personal events.

It is worth noting how the concept of journey differs from the more typical Jewish self-image of the "wandering Jew." That image is one where the Jewish people are forced to wander from place to place, holding fast to its own fixed identity through a changing environment. In contrast, the journey is about the voluntary movements of a continuously evolving self interacting with a changing environment. A person may intensify the Jewish nexus of his/her life, or by contrast, may make it weaker and shallower, and these changes may come about intentionally or by the coincidence of human encounters and changing circumstances.

Meaning Making and American Jews

A second area for future research is about the ways that people come to find Jewishness meaningful. A number of researchers have undertaken qualitative, often narrative explorations (Cohen and Eisen, 1998, Horowitz, 1998, 2000; Schuster, 1999), which have begun to yield some rich hypotheses to pursue in the future. We need to examine the sources of Jewish meaning and the process by which meaning is discovered. An exploration into the "ecology of meaning" is needed to investigate the life spaces–the patterns and regularities (if any) in the contexts, settings and interactions–that enhance Jewish meaning-making.

The narrative approach is particularly useful in this regard, because I believe that the "story" told by a person for whom Jewishness has become central and meaningful differs qualitatively from the story told by a person who is indifferent to Jewishness.

Clearly, part of the research agenda going forward should include broadening our questions, and with that, expanding the range of methods and data sources at our disposal.

Conclusion

The 30-year enterprise of studying American Jewish identification and involvement in Jewish life has been based mainly on socio-demographic surveys. 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. The bulk of the research about American Jewish identity during this period has centered on the question, How Jewish are American Jews, whether in comparison to other American ethnic groups (in terms of structural distinctiveness), in comparison to Jews of prior generations, or in comparison to an idealized way of being Jewish.

Yet it is more apparent than ever that the important issues about the nature of contemporary American Jewishness fall along a different frontier. A new question has emerged, How are American Jews Jewish? In what ways, if any do they connect to Jewishness and Judaism? American Jewry is more diverse and dispersed than before, and the Jewish group in America today is characterized by a degree of integration and social acceptance that contrasts sharply to the situation 50 years ago or to Europe in the 18th century. In this new environment no one is either forced to be Jewish or to escape from being Jewish. The dynamic of acceptance versus rejection or belligerence regarding one's Jewishness has been replaced by a dynamic of finding Jewishness to be meaningful or remaining indifferent to it. Jewish continuity of the group as a whole has come to depend on the individual's commitments and decision-making. For this reason, in addition to looking at Jewish practices and involvements in Jewish life, it is essential to examine the subjective, inner experience of being Jewish.

NOTES

* This paper was prepared for the conference, "Establishing a Research Agenda for the Jewish Community," sponsored by the Mandell L. Berman Institute-North American Jewish Data Bank, New York, October 12-13, 1999.

[1] 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."

[2] In contrast to ethnicity of the group, 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, with the ethnic identity of individuals emerging as a topic of interest only more recently. Knowing about how or whether peoples see themselves as members of a particular ethnic group has been less important in the sociological analysis than knowing about the barriers to assimilation or integration.

[3] He defines Jewishness 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."

[4] This study pushes the cross sectional design to the limit in terms of trying to get at the issue of life course change. It is time for a real live longitudinal (panel) design that follows at least one cohort of American Jewish individuals over the course of their lives!

REFERENCES

Alba, R. D. 1990. *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Amyot, R. P. and Sigelman, L. 1996. "Jews Without Judaism? Assimilation and Jewish Identity in the United States." *Social Science Quarterly, 77* (1), 177-189.

Bock, G. 1976. "The Jewish Schooling of American Jews: A Study of Non-cognitive Educational Effects." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University.

Cohen, S. M. 1988. *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press.

Cohen, S. M. 1991. *Content or Continuity? Alternative Bases for Commitment.* New York: American Jewish Committee.

Cohen, S. M. 1995. "Jewish Continuity over Judaic Content: The Moderately Affiliated American Jew." In R. Seltzer & N. Cohen (Eds.), *The Americanization of the Jews.* New York: NYU Press.

Cohen, S. M. 1998. *Religious Stability and Ethnic Decline: Emerging Patterns of American Jewish Identity in the United States.* New York: Florence G. Heller- Jewish Community Centers Association Research Center.

Cohen, S. M. and Eisen, A. 1998. *The Jew Within: Self, Community and Commitment Among the Varieties of Moderately Affiliated.* Los Angeles and Boston: The Wilstein Institute.

Gans, H. J. 1979. "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America." *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 2.* (Reprinted in Yetman).

Gans, H. J. 1994. "Symbolic Ethnicity and Religiosity: Towards a Comparison of Ethnic and Religious Acculturation." *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 17.*

Goldstein, S. and Goldscheider, C. 1968. *Jewish Americans: Three Generations in a Jewish Community.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Goldscheider, C. 1986. *Jewish Continuity and Change: Emerging Patterns in America.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Goldscheider, C. 1997. "Stratification and the Transformation of American Jews, 1910-1990: Have the Changes Resulted in Assimilation?" In S. DellaPergola and J. Even (Eds.) *Papers in Jewish Demography 1993.* Jerusalem: The Avraham Harmon Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University.

Goldscheider, C. and Zuckerman, A. 1984. *The Transformation of the Jews.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Herman, S.N. 1977. *Jewish Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective.* Beverly Hills and London: Sage Publications.

Himmelfarb, H. 1982. "Research on American Jewish Identity and Identification." In M. Sklare (ed.), *Understanding American Jewry.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Himmelfarb, H. 1984. "The Impact of Religious Schooling: The Effects of Jewish Education upon Jewish Religious Involvement." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago.

Horenczyck, G and Bekerman, Z. 1999. "A Social Constructivist Approach to Jewish Identity." Unpublished manuscript. The Melton Centre, Hebrew University.

Horowitz, Bethamie 2000. "Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity." New York: UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.

Horowitz, B. 1999a. "Jewishness in New York: Exception or Rule?" In S.M. Cohen & G. Horenczyck (Eds.), *National Variations in Modern Jewish Identity.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Horowitz, B. 1999b. *Indicators of Jewish Identity: Developing a Framework for Understanding American Jewry.* New York, NY: Mandel Foundation.

Horowitz, B. 1998. "Connections and Journeys: Shifting Identities Among American Jews." *Contemporary Jewry.*

Jacobson, M. F. 1995. *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish and Jewish Immigrants to the United States.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kelman, H. C. 1999. "The Place of Ethnic Identity in the Development of Personal Identity: A Challenge for the Jewish Family." In P. Medding (Ed.) *Studies in Contemporary Jewry.* Oxford.

Kelman, H. C. 1961. "Processes of Opinion Change." *Public Opinion Quarterly, 25* (1), 57-78.

Kivisto, P. and Nefzger, B. 1993. "Symbolic Ethnicity and American Jews: The Relationship of Ethnic Identity to Behavior and Group Affiliation." Social Science Journal, 30 (1), 1-12.

Lieberson, S. and M.C. Waters 1988. *From Many Strands: Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Liebman, C. 1995. "Jewish Survival, Antisemitism, and Negotiation with Tradition." In R. Seltzer & N. Cohen (Eds.), *The Americanization of the Jews.* New York, NY: NYU Press.

Liebman, C. 1999. "Post-war American Jewry: From Ethnic to Privatized Judaism." In E. Abrams & D. Dalin (eds.), *Secularism, Spirituality and the Future of American Jewry.* Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center,7-17.

Lipset, S. M. 1994. *The Power of Jewish Education.* Los Angeles, CA and Brookline, MA: The Wilstein Institute.

Lipset, S. M. and Raab, E. 1995. *Jews and the New American Scene.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Phillips, B. 1991. "The Sociological Analysis of Jewish Identity." In D.M. Gordis and Y. Ben-Horin (eds.). *Jewish Identity in America.* Los Angeles, CA: The Susan and David Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies.

Rimor, M. and Katz, E. 1993. *Jewish Involvement of the Baby Boom Generation: Interrogating the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.* Jerusalem: The Louis Guttman Institute of Applied Social Research.

Ritterband, P. 1997. "Jewish Identity Among Russian Immigrants in the U.S." In N. Lewin-Epstein, Y. Ro'i and P. Ritterband (Eds.). *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement.* London: Frank Cass.

Ritterband, P. 1997. "Geography as an Element in the Historical Sociology of the Jews: New York, 1900-1981 and the United States, 1880-1980." In S. DellaPergola and J. Even (Eds.), *Papers in Jewish Demography 1993.* Jerusalem: The Avraham Harmon Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University.

Ritterband, P. 1995. "Modern Times and Jewish Assimilation." In R. Seltzer & N. Cohen (Eds.), *The Americanization of the Jews.* New York, NY: NYU Press.

Sharot, S. 1997. "A Critical Comment on Gans' "Symbolic Ethnicity" and "Symbolic Religiosity" and Other Formulations of Ethnicity and Religion Regarding American Jews." *Contemporary Jewry, 18,* 25-43.

Steinberg, S. 1989. *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity and Class in America* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Waldinger, R. 1996. *Still the Promised City? African-Americans and New Immigrants in Postindustrial New York.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Waters, M. C. 1990. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America.* Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Wirth, L. 1966 [1928]. *The Ghetto.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Winter, J. A. 1996. "Symbolic Ethnicity or Religion Among Jews in the United States: A test of Gansian Hypotheses." *Review of Religious Research, 37* (3).

Yetman, N. R. (Ed.). 1998. *Majority and Minority: The Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity in American Life* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.