The Social Self: Toward the Study of Jewish Lives in the Twenty-first Century

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Abstract This article reviews the conceptual frameworks that have underscored the social scientific study of Jewish identity and experiments with a methodological and analytical approach that aims to respond to contemporary social trends. Beginning with a historical account of the concept's emergence in the study of American Jews, we consider the ways in which scholars and their research subjects have co-constructed the concept of Jewish identity. Based on our analysis of qualitative interviews with fifty-eight post-boomer American Jews, we propose that Jewish identity be understood primarily as a relational phenomenon that is constructed through social ties, rather than as a product of individual meaning-making or assessments of social impact. We set our exploratory findings in conversation with some of the most influential and widely cited qualitative studies of Jewish identity in the past to examine the implications of that conceptual shift for scholars and scholarship on Jewish identity in the 21st century.

He was the kind of guy who was always telling you what kind of guy he was.
— *John Jeremiah Sullivan (2011, 100)*

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Introduction[1]

With the rise of identity studies, researchers and those they study have entered into a reciprocal relationship, co-constructing working definitions of the identities in question. As historian Sarah Igo explained, the spread of surveys, polls, and other social scientific approaches to studying Americans created a situation where "the public could now find out who 'the public' was"(2007, 12). The study of Jewish identity is no different, and its emergence as a central concept in scholarship on American Jews (Krasner 2016) accompanied the expansion of research into the topic of identity across the disciplines (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Fearon 1999; Gleason 1983; Nicholson 2008). The tools of social science not only enabled the study of identity as a subject, but also helped to construct, both methodologically and conceptually, the ways in which people came to understand what identity was and who they thought themselves to be (Berman 2009; Hart 2000).

As the times changed, so did issues and approaches. Identity studies conducted over the first part of the 20th century tended to focus on the tension between a desire for Jewish integration into American society and a concern for retaining Jewish uniqueness. Scholars crafted research programs that investigated the dynamics of the immigrant generation and their children, in which the world of non-Jewish Americans figured as both impermeable and tempting. As a result, these studies measured expressions of Jewish identity along scales of predetermined Jewish attitudes and behaviors, in order to assess how well integrationist or survivalist tendencies were serving American Jews (Liebman 1973). Noting the implications of objective assessment, social psychologist Bethamie Horowitz defined this approach as a response to the question, "How Jewish are American Jews?" (Horowitz 2002, 14–22).

Later in the century, at a time of transition from "the Greatest Generation" to their children, the baby boomers, Horowitz proposed a paradigm shift (Kuhn 1970) in Jewish identity research that would focus on research guided by the question, "How are American Jews Jewish?" (2002, 22). She formulated the rationale for this shift in explicitly generational terms, asking, "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?" (2002, 22). Framing her work as a departure from previous models of study, Horowitz gave this explanation: "[T]his 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" (23). Her turn toward a more inductive approach characterized much of the research on American Jewish baby boomers, often framed in terms of investigations into the ways in which people make Judaism and Jewishness personally meaningful (Charme et al. 2008; Cohen 1983, 2003, 2010; Hartman 1997, 2014; Himmelfarb

1982; Horowitz 1999, 2000, 2002). For example, this emphasis was central to the Pew Research Center's 2013 "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," which stated that one of its "key aims" was "to explore Jewish identity: What does being Jewish mean in America today?" (Cooperman and Smith 2013, 14).

We sought to understand how notions of Jewish identity might be different for post-boomers. Does the model formulated by Horowitz and others maintain its analytic purchase, or, given significant sociological and demographic changes in the American Jewish community, might we be ready for another shift in the conceptualization of Jewish identity? How might a new generation of American Jews, whose lives are intertwined with non-Jews in unprecedented ways, articulate and express Jewish identity?

Our analysis of data collected from fifty-eight qualitative interviews with post-boomer American Jews enabled us to begin to explore the ways in which they spoke about being Jewish and to reflect upon how emergent sociological and demographic conditions might factor into strategies and practices of identity construction. We found that the prevailing conceptions of Jewish identity do not capture the highly relational nature of post-boomers' construction of the self. Our research subjects relied on other people quite heavily in the construction of their own Jewish identity, suggesting the need for an analytical approach that more closely attends to the social dimensions of selfhood.[2]

How Jewish Are American Jews?

Coincident with the emerging fields of social work and sociology, studies of American Jews in the first half of the 20th century tended to focus on questions of integration (Herberg 1956; Kennedy 1944; Wirth 1928). Acculturation and assimilation were seen as secularizing trends that would culminate in the eventual absorption of distinctive ethnic groups. Assimilationist theorists constructed a linear model that predicted a decrease in the importance of ethnic ties for later generations of Americans as they grew further removed in time from the immigrant generation (Dashefsky and Shapiro 1974; Goldstein and Goldscheider 1968; Gordon 1964; Cohen 1983; Waters 1990, 4). The concern for incremental and generationally correlated cultural loss motivated much scholarship and helped to birth a variety of counter-theories, including that of historian Marcus Lee Hansen (1938) and social philosopher Will Herberg (1956), both of whom posited the possiblity of "third generation interest," which Herberg saw as a core element in the "search for identity" (40–44). Herberg explained that ethnicity did not disappear but that it transformed, demonstrable by the "upswing" in religion (see also Glazer 1957, 106–126). The theories of Herberg and Hansen have been challenged and refuted (Glazer 1957; Sharot 1973; Gans 1994), yet Herberg's work became one of the first to mobilize concepts of identity and identification as central to the analysis of ethnic and religious communities (Gleason 1983, 912).

Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum's *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier* (1967) epitomized this approach, thrusting the concept of Jewish identity to the forefront of Jewish communal discourse. They oriented their research toward an investigation of "the nature and level of the Jewish identity of the American Jew" (6). Supported by the American Jewish Committee, Sklare and Greenblum undertook an ethnographic study of a suburban Jewish community, "Lakeville," that followed the model of the 1937 Middletown studies of sociologists Robert Staughton Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd and paralleled the publication of Herbert Gans' *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (1967). They employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine generational changes among 432 Jewish men and women according to a variety of measures, including levels of ritual observance, synagogue attendance, organizational involvement, friendship ties, concerns about Israel, and beliefs about the definition of "a good Jew." Their measures became part of the social scientific apparatus deployed to both investigate and explain American Jewish life, coalescing into what sociologist Rela Mintz Geffen has called the "typology of home ritual observance" (Geffen 1997, 335).

Sklare and Greenblum's primary concern was the persistence of group-oriented behaviors amid increasing social mobility and diffusion. They wondered whether or not American Jews could survive as a distinct group, given the extent of earlier efforts at social integration. Their primary concern lay not with individual expression or the meaning of Jewishness, but with the sum of those individual parts, which, they hoped, could save American Jews from the allure and the threat of broader, largely non-Jewish American society. In this way, they blurred the distinction between *identity* as an individual expression of self, and *identification*, which bears overtones of collective belonging (Dashefsky 1971, 36–37, 1972).

Social psychologist Simon Herman argued in 1977 that this conflation was typical in investigations of American Jewish life: "Almost any study of Jewish attitudes is pretentiously called a study of Jewish identity," he wrote. "A glance at most studies of Jewish communities in the Diaspora shows that they are at best studies of Jewish identification."

Herman went on to note that such studies may deal with the process by which individuals come to see themselves as part of the Jewish group. Or, he wrote, "they may describe the extent to which and the circumstances under which Jews in a particular community are prepared to stand up and be counted as such or prefer to throw their lot in with the majority. But very few of them are studies of Jewish identity, of what being Jewish means, of what kind of Jew and what kind of Jewishness develops in the majority culture" (1977, 28).

Writing around the same time as Sklare and Greenblum, sociologist Ralph Segalman (1967) corroborated this assertion in his meta-analysis of social scientific instruments designed to study "Jewish identity." He reviewed survey instruments deployed in both large and small studies of American Jews, and found no fewer than twenty-five different "scales" for measuring Jewish identity (92). He uncovered two crucial findings. First, "scholars concerned with Jewish survival in the diaspora" have paid a great deal of attention to the question of Jewish identity. Second, there was no agreement about what constituted either "Jewish identity," or about how to

empirically document its existence.[3] Writing some fifteen years later, Jewish philosopher Michael Oppenheim (1984) offered a similar, if more direct assessment of the field, which, he discovered, had changed very little. He found few commonalities among scholars beyond their shared interest in subjects both "modern" and "Jewish" (218). Referring to the diversity of meanings attached to the term "identity," Oppenheim wondered whether "the scholar who is well acquainted with the vast literature on modern Jewish identity is inevitably haunted by moments of doubt, wondering whether the innumerable authors of studies of this subject are really studying the same thing" (215).

The conflation noted by Herman, Segalman, and Oppenheim tracked alongside an emergent conceptual shift toward approaches to the study of Jewish identity through an account of personal meaning. Sociologist Steven M. Cohen (1983) concluded that the entire question of "Jewish identification" may "be subsumed under the larger issue of discerning the meaning(s) of Jewishness to most American Jews" (178). Though he wrote appreciatively of the utility of quantitative data to address questions about the broad contours of American Jewish lives, he acknowledged that the new focus on meaning would require a greater mobilization of qualitative research to more effectively uncover what he called the "most crucial questions" concerning "Jewish expression" (1983, 178). Two years later, Cohen and social activist Leonard Fein advocated for a reorientation of the American Jewish communal agenda away from a primary orientation around "integration" and "survival" and toward one concerned with "meaning and purpose" (1985). Cohen and Fein's advocacy for a change in communal policy came at a time when the study of Jewish identity was also moving toward a greater concern with personal meaning as a fundamental dynamic of Jewish identity.

How Are American Jews Jewish?

Extending Cohen's insights, American studies scholar Riv-Ellen Prell posited that a more deeply qualitative approach to the study of Jewish identity could "turn away from the great social categories of social science inquiry and toward the specificity of local and life course experience" (2000, 39). Coincident with Prell's call, such research was already underway. Moshe Hartman and Harriet Hartman (1999) opened their quantitative analysis of denominational mobility among American Jews by acknowledging the significance of subjective meaning-making in studies of Jewish identity: "It is most instructive to turn to the available empirical data on how Jews consider themselves Jewish, what it means to them that they are Jewish, how they express their Jewish identity, and what their Jewish identity shares in common with each other" (1999, 279). Around the same time, Steven M. Cohen and scholar of modern Jewish thought Arnold M. Eisen completed their research for their

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[3] Segalman's use of the term "identity" is itself anachronistic, as it is unclear as to whether or not the studies that constituted his data set used the language of identity in their examinations of American Jews. Nevertheless, the studies he reviewed included similar questions about attitudes and behaviors, exploring the range of American Jewish life that later came to be understood as comprising the category of "Jewish identity."

landmark study of Jewish baby boomers, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America* (2000), and, roughly simultaneously, Bethamie Horowitz undertook her study of Jewish identity among New York Jews, "Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity" (2000; see also Horowitz 1998, 2002). The latter two studies used a mixed-method approach, complementing quantitative findings with rich narrative portraits of individual accounts of conceptions, formulations, and applications of their Jewish identities (Horowitz 1998, 77).

These investigations aligned with and corroborated the emerging conceptual frameworks in social scientific scholarship on American religion, exemplified by the work of Robert Bellah et al. (1996), Wade Clark Roof et al. (1994), Robert Wuthnow (1988, 1998), and Robert Putnam (2000). Such research explored how and the extent to which individuals navigated traditional religious boundaries, practices, and authority at their own discretion. Bellah et al.'s *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1996) illustrated how the rising tide of individualism trumped adherence to religious traditions and precepts, leading many Americans to chart their own religious journeys. Through numerous books and articles, Roof and Wuthnow described American religious life as increasingly disconnected from religious institutions and ever more reliant on the discretion of individual actors. Putnam's contribution, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,* situated this "voluntaristic" approach to religion within broader social trends to illustrate how American society at large had become increasingly fragmented and less cohesive during the latter half of the 20th century. Together, these works shaped both scholarly and mainstream audiences' understanding of American religious life.

These accounts of American religious life were based largely on research on baby boomers. Roof's *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (1994) and Wuthnow's *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (1998) explicitly highlighted this generational aspect of their work and offered some of the most cogent and insightful observations about new and emerging patterns in American religious life. A paradigmatic archetype for both scholars was the religious "seeker," who, Wuthnow argued, replaced religious "dwellers," as the predominant American religious subject (1998, 3–9). Rather than following well-trodden paths to established churches or synagogues (as previous generations of "dwellers" had), Wuthnow's seekers were more likely to forge their own religious way. For Roof, religious seeking was a hallmark of members of that generation, who were more interested in following their own religious needs than in following those of prior generations. The quintessential example of the "seeker" phenomenon was Robert Bellah's pseudonymous interviewee, Sheila Larson, whose self-styled religion, "Sheilaism," came to represent the baby boomers' rampant individualism (1996, 221).

A similar current was then underway in the study of American ethnicity, as sociologists Herbert Gans (1979), Mary Waters (1990), and Richard Alba (1992) established the notion of "ethnic options" for Americans of European descent. They argued that "white ethnics" could choose whether or not to affiliate or identify with their ethnicities of origin, or to elect to diffuse into an undifferentiated "white"

America without much social cost and with a modicum of social capital (Jacobson 2008). With particular attention to American Jews, Gans argued that ethnicity, regardless of outcome or intent, had become merely "symbolic."

The research of Horowitz, and Cohen and Eisen aligned closely with this paradigm. Cohen and Eisen situate their work explicitly in conversation with that of Wuthnow and Roof, while Horowitz adapted the notion of the "seeker" to her conceptualization of Jewish "journeys." More pointedly, their research drew explicitly on surveys of and interviews with baby boomers. Cohen and Eisen focused explicitly on baby boomers (5) and Horowitz's sample drew on people born between 1945 and 1974, which, if the ages of her interviewees distribute evenly, would comprise a sample that is roughly two-thirds baby boomers and one-third post-boomers (Horowitz 2000, xv). Cohen and Eisen focused on "moderately affiliated Jews: those who are neither firmly committed to active Jewish life, nor firmly ensconced in non-involvement" (2000, 6). Similarly, Horowitz sampled individuals who "had some sort of sociological connection to Judaism" (2000, iv) and lived in New York or Westchester (13).

Congruent with Prell, Cohen, and Fein, and with Horowitz's calls for a new approach to the study of Jewish identity, both "Connections and Journeys" and *The Jew Within* emphasized the role of subjective, voluntaristic expressions of Jewish identity that placed individual agency and meaning-making at the center. In 1998, Horowitz formulated this approach around "an alternative conceptualization of Jewish identity [that] looks directly at people's internal, self-understanding of what being Jewish means in their lives, in addition to examining their actual behaviors" (1998, 74). In the full report (2000), she elaborated, "[It] is clear that a person constructs a sense of Jewishness from his/her own mix of experiences, engagements, interactions and contexts" (7). Cohen and Eisen extend this line of analysis further, concluding, "the meaning of Judaism in America transpires within the self. American Jews have drawn the activity and significance of their group identity into the subjectivity of the individual, the activities of the family, and the few institutions (primarily the synagogue) which are seen as extensions of this intimate sphere" (183–184). Together, their research captures a version of Jewish identity that has "turned inward" (Cohen and Eisen, 2), that largely "takes place in the private sphere" (3), and that is overall a "more overtly subjective definition of Jewish identity" (Horowitz 1998, 75).

"What matters to the Jews we interviewed," Cohen and Eisen wrote, "are powerful individual memories and experiences, the personal stories in which these figure, the personal journeys that they mark, and the people who share the most meaningful moments on these journeys with them" (16). Their subjects insist on "individual autonomy" as the crux of Jewish identity, practice, commitment, and meaning. Similarly, Horowitz organized her approach around subjective accounts of Jewishness, foregrounding the questions, "What does being Jewish mean to them and how do they relate to their Jewishness? In what ways, if at all, do they identify as Jews?" (1998, 75). She argued that the "Connections and Journeys" study "adds a new dimension to the outwardly observable manifestations of identity considered in previous studies, exploring the internal, subjective aspect of what being Jewish means to the individual" (2000, 11). Horowitz's emphasis on internal dimensions of

Jewishness rather than solely on measures of externalized behaviors aligns with the shift away from supposedly objective metrics and measures, and toward an account of individualized, personalized, internalized meaning.

Though Cohen and Eisen found no evidence of Jewish "Sheilaism" (39), they nevertheless offered the figure of the "sovereign self" as the paradigmatic American Jewish baby boomer. Horowitz formulates no such model of Jewish subjectivity, but her conceptualization of Jewish identity that is characterized by changing "connections" and lifelong "journeys" relies on an individual empowered to make connections and direct their journey.

In much research that has followed, social scientists have critiqued, extended, and established new paradigms for understanding the operationalization of Jewish identity among both baby boomers and post-boomers (Charme et al. 2008; Cohen 2010; Cohen 2003). With her studies of both boomers and post-boomers, sociologist Debra Kaufman (1999, 2005) has argued that identity is best understood as a social construction, emerging in relationship with other, fluid social categories that include "religion" and "secularism" (2010). Jewish feminist sociologists Shelly Tenenbaum and Lynn Davidman (2007), who also take this approach, found that some Jews deploy the language of genetic Jewishness as a mode of articulating their Jewish identities. Elsewhere, sociologist Wendy Cadge and Davidman (2006) describe how their interviewees articulated their Jewishness using explanatory language of both agency and ascription. Taken together, these smaller-scale studies have elaborated on the approaches of Horowitz, and Cohen and Eisen, and they have expanded our understanding of the variety of ways in which American Jews formulate, articulate, and conceptualize their notions of Jewish identity that focus largely on subjective accounts of Jewishness. This article intends to contribute to this body of scholarship.

Methodology

We entered into this research with the reflexive awareness that our investigation, like those that preceded us, is bound to its historical context. Sklare and Greenblum, given their proximity to the immigrant generation, were preoccupied with questions of integration and diffusion. Horowitz and Cohen and Eisen, while focused on individualism, positioned themselves in conversation with Sklare and Greenblum. Likewise, we locate the current study both within the context of the tradition of scholarship with which we are in conversation, and also within the sociological and demographic conditions of American Jewish lives in the 21st century. This investigation, therefore, is as much about the conditions under which scholars construct Jewish identity as it is about the ways in which our subjects articulate their experiences.

Our approach follows the work of social scientist Riv-Ellen Prell, who has long called for new directions in research on American Jews that examines "the study of the construction of Jewishness in personal narratives" (2000, 39). By emphasizing the "construction of Jewishness" rather than using interview subjects as reporters about Jewish identity, Prell advocated for a different way to understand American

Jewish identity. She sought to shift methodological conventions from what social scientist Jane Elliott (2006) calls the "naturalist view," in which "the social world is in some sense 'out there,'" to a more constructivist one, in which "the social world is constantly 'in the making' and therefore the emphasis is on understanding the production of that social world" (18).

With this in mind, we conducted fifty-eight semi-structured interviews designed to encourage our respondents to share an autobiographical narrative (lasting between sixty and ninety minutes). The purpose of our inquiry was to understand the ways in which our respondents' narratives might reveal an interior logic for the construction of identity (Clandinin and Connelly 1999; Lieblich et al. 1998). Our method was guided by the work of social psychologist Dan McAdams, one of the leading theoreticians of the narrative-based, qualitative interview. McAdams has argued (1997, 2001, 2005) that the act of turning information into a story is fundamentally social, allowing a person to make sense of their life and render it understandable to others. Interviewees, he explains, construct their narratives with both "internalized" and "external" audiences in mind (1997). For McAdams, people do not tell stories about themselves; they tell themselves through stories. Identity, therefore, is not revealed in a testimony; it is, as McAdams explained, "an internalized life story" (2001, 101). We rely on narrative because, as philosopher Louis Mink notes, "narrative is a primary cognitive instrument" for rendering "comprehensible" changes over life course or historical time (2001, 213).

We used open-ended interviews to enable us to create occasions to observe how our interviewees construct their Jewish identities with little direct prompting. In the spirit of Prell, Horowitz, and Cohen and Eisen, we sought to give our interviewees as much subjective control over the articulation and formulation of Jewishness as possible. With this, we hoped to hear, with greater fidelity, how they formulated their own Jewishness without our providing explicit direction. So, our protocol did not inquire about specific "Jewish" events, people, or experiences. Instead, we asked to hear the stories of our interviewees' lives, organized as if in a memoir or an autobiography. We identified ourselves as a research group interested in post-boomer American Jews, which prompted some of our interviewees to ask if we wanted their "Jewish stories." We encouraged them to tell the stories that they wanted to tell, focusing on important moments in their lives regardless of the domain in which they took place. We took this approach because we wanted to observe the ways in which the interviewees constructed themselves, and what normative categories (such as religion, ethnicity, race, class, gender, and sexuality) they introduced of their own volition.

Our approach is grounded in the classic works of sociologists Herbert Blumer (1969), Anselm Strauss (1959), and Erving Goffman (1959), which built on the legacy of George Herbert Mead (1913, 1934) and Charles Horton Cooley (1912). We understand that language and communication are instrumental to the expression of identity and that its expression is necessarily an interpretive process, making "self-objectification essential to self-realization" (Mead 1934, 160). We also draw upon the work of Anthony Giddens (1991), whose recognition of the importance of socio-historical context to identity formation creates an important theoretical bridge from symbolic interactionism to standpoint theory, which illuminates the existence

of multiple versions of reality that are grounded in positionality within hierarchical social structures (Haraway 1988; Hill Collins 1991). We sought to collect narratives to explore, "the reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised biographical narratives [that] take place in the context of multiple choices as filtered through abstract systems" (Giddens 1991, 5). While doing so, we remained aware that individuals simultaneously possess several different, sometimes competing, but nevertheless authentic identities that continually develop and unfold as individuals move through social institutions and internalize social ideologies.

We approached Jewish identity as a case of this larger phenomenon, and we followed Charles Selengut's acknowledgement that "Judaism must now face the radical possibilities of the postmodern age, where identities can now be self-consciously constructed and re-configured through an individual's lifetime" (1999, 1). In this, our approach takes an explicitly anti-essentialist perspective (Silberstein 2000; Glenn and Sokoloff 2010), elaborating on accounts of Jewish identity in multiculturalism (Biale et al. 1998), or within the broader literature on intersectionality (Rich 1986; Crenshaw 1991; Cantarow 1988; Brettschneider 1996; Kaufman 1999; Hartman and Kaufman 2006). Each of these efforts, too, seeks to construct a notion of Jewish identity in conversation with broader social conditions, and this investigation follows suit.

In this effort, we posit that grounded theory is a useful methodological and analytical tool for understanding Jewish identity. The theoretical underpinnings of grounded theory, a research method developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), are pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (Corbin and Strauss 1990). The grounded theory method is a set of comparative analytic procedures by which a theoretical model is inductively generated from data. Data are closely examined and compared for the influence of structural conditions, both at microscopic and macroscopic levels. Through the systematic application of coding procedures, substantive regularities are transformed into conceptual categories. These conceptual categories then constitute the framework of the emerging theoretical model. Grounded theory provides a framework for engaging with "theory as an ever-developing entity, not as a perfected product," in order to illuminate the "reality of social interaction and its structural context" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 32).

Our fifty-eight interviewees included people who: (1) self-identify as Jewish, (2) spent a significant portion of their childhood in North America, (3) were not currently enrolled in an undergraduate degree program, and (4) did not have children. In setting these sampling parameters, we intentionally sought out a segment of American Jews who have drawn a significant amount of attention from Jewish communal organizations for their apparent reluctance to participate in traditional modes of Jewish life. American Jews who are between college and the birth of their own children are less likely to join synagogues or engage regularly with other Jewish institutions than those on either side of their demographic (Sheskin 2013, 16, 22. See also Wuthnow 2007; Cohen and Kelman 2008). Furthermore, McAdams (2001) argues that people do not typically develop the capacity for the kind of narrative practices we were hoping to explore until they

enter what has come to be known as "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2000). By attending to this segment of the American Jewish population, who are, according to Arnett, deeply involved in processes of identity formation and articulation, we hoped to hear vivid articulations of how they see themselves as Jews.

We transcribed and coded all interviews using an "open coding" approach (Emerson et al. 1995, 151), which allowed for the inductive development of themes and trends across the interviews. Since we encouraged our interviewees to select the stories they wished to tell, their narratives were illustrative of a particular "self" they wished to share. As a result, our coding did not reveal the systematic presence of particular events or experiences (e.g., b'nai mitzvah or travel to Israel). Instead, this mode of analysis allowed for more nuanced attention to the dynamics of identity construction.

Following the scholarly conventions of the work with which we are in conversation, we contacted respondents through a referral sampling approach: We mobilized our social networks, comprised of both Jews and non-Jews, to identify individuals who would, in turn, identify subjects from their networks. We attempted, whenever possible, to include individuals who were at least two degrees from our research team, so as to mitigate the influence that our immediate social circles might bear. We spoke with thirty-four women, twenty-three men, and one person who does not ascribe to a single gender. Eight of our participants described themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer. About half of our interviewees live in the Bay Area or Los Angeles, and 17% live in or around New York City. The remaining respondents live in major cities throughout the United States and Canada. Though most of our interviewees live on the coasts, they hail from a diverse range of cities, towns, and small communities. Three interviewees emigrated as children from either Israel or the former Soviet Union.

While our sample is not representative, our respondents' demographic characteristics and behavioral patterns reflect broader trends among American Jews. Just over one quarter (n = 16) of our interviewees spoke about their experiences as students in a Jewish day school. Nearly 40% (n = 23) told stories about their experiences in Hebrew or religious schools. Almost one-third (n = 18) spoke about attending Jewish overnight summer camps, and about half (n = 26) have traveled to Israel. These numbers are just slightly higher than national averages for Jews of this age range (as established by the Pew Report), which may have led to the emergence of certain commonalities among the interviews and the absence of others.

We limited our data collection to qualitative interviews for pragmatic reasons. Our aim was to offer provisional insights that might inform our and others' methodological and analytical approaches moving forward. With the next phase of research, we will consider whether it would be possible to extend the breadth of the research and the validity of the findings through survey data (without forgoing the nuance and analytical power of qualitative data), or a more expansive sampling methodology that could afford greater opportunities for comparison.

Findings

Our data revealed fundamentally relational expressions of Jewish identity. Our respondents told us about themselves by telling stories about others who featured in every imaginable account of their lives (Bruner et al. 1994). Parents, siblings, school principals, teachers, camp counselors, rabbis, friends, roommates, and lovers all played powerful roles in the stories people told about themselves, figuring centrally in their presentations of self (Thorne 2000; Gregg 1991; Plath 1980). Our respondents brought these others into their accounts to explain moments of particular change or growth, to describe formative experiences, and to demonstrate how and why their lives had unfolded along particular paths. They constructed narratives of their Jewish identities that were inseparably linked to both Jews and non-Jews from their past and present (Kadushin et al. 2012). Whether representing instances of social connection or disconnection, others played a powerful role in respondents' expression, description, and construction of self.

Influence Versus Inherence

Rather than describing others as influences, we posit that interviewees' character-ized others instead as constitutive of their Jewish identities. This framing of the role of others in relation to the formation of Jewish identity differs from previous scholars' characterizations. Documenting the role of other people as external influences has been a ubiquitous feature of scholarship on Jewish identity. In this vein, most studies of Jewish identity have characteristically included analyses of individuals' familial and peer relationships. For example, Sklare and Greenblum's friendship networks led them to characterize "associational Jewishness" as a mode of Jewish identification.

Though she contrasted her approach to Sklare and Greenblum, Horowitz nevertheless conceptualized Jewish identity in a similar way. Drawing on survey results (N = 1378), she identified nine "key influences on Jewish identity" including "possible 'exposures' in a person's life" (2000, 93). She determined that each "key influence" exerts a force ("positive or negative") on her research subjects, drawing them toward or repelling them from Jewishness. She uses verbs like "enhance" (94, 124) and phrases like "exert a diluting effect" (95) to characterize the effect of some external influences. Horowitz concludes: "a person's Jewishness can wax, wane, and change in emphasis …[and] is very responsive to social relationships, historical experiences and personal events" (2002, 27). Elsewhere, she explains, "the journeys described in this report are 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" (2000, 181). Her version of the "self" is malleable and subject to environmental forces, but still distinct from those forces and, at its core, "voluntary."

Cohen and Eisen similarly deploy a framework that positions individuals' identities as subject to external forces. They recognize the family as the "principal

site at which … Judaism is being constructed" (42). To depict familial relationships, they use the language of "influence" (45) and "impact" (54), explaining that families play "roles in shaping their children's Jewish identities" (56). For example, one of their research subjects makes a "concession" to her husband with respect to the observance of dietary laws (61), and they describe another who, concerned "with his children's Jewish identity, prevails upon" his wife to a similar end (63). Each of these accounts describes the significance of families on the formation of Jewish identities in terms of their "influence" (204). As with Sklare and Greenblum and Horowitz, they construct a sovereign or journeying self that is subject *to* social forces, but not constituted *by* them.

The difference is subtle but significant. The "sovereign self" model of identity involves a conception of self that is empowered and volitional and that is acted upon by external influences. To imagine such a self is to imagine that it exists, in some measure, beyond the reach or influence of social relationships. Our conception of self seeks to account for the fundamentally social qualities of identity. In the "social self," other people do not merely appear as external influences, but as necessary elements in the very construction of the self in question. This framing corroborates the work of anthropologist David Plath (1980), who argues that people tell autobiographical stories by enlisting "convoys" of people "empaneled as a special jury to examine and confirm the course of [their] being and becoming" (8). In this latter model, which we are calling the "social self," there is no self and thus no identity without other people.

In what we hope will be one of many more studies that draw upon this or similar analytical approaches, we uncovered three narrative modes by which people constructed their Jewish identity relationally: through connection, comparison, and conflict. These are non-discreet and often overlapping categories for organizing the narrative logic of identity construction. The terms did not emerge from the language of those we interviewed, and they evolved as we encountered patterns of narrative logic that seemed to reveal different ways of making sense of one's self in relationship with others. They should be understood as heuristics for organizing our analysis and as registers for the formulation of their relational identities.

Narratives of Connection

Jonas,[4] a twenty-eight-year old entertainment industry professional, articulated the extent to which others have been foundational to his sense of self through his decision about where to start his autobiographical narrative:

> The first chapter would probably begin with my grandparents on both sides, and it would be called, "Roots." In that chapter, there would be some kind of description and sense of how my parents came into being. So starting with my grandparents, [and] what their lives were like that lead up to my parents, and then it would include my parents' lives up until the creation of me. That chapter would be called "Roots," that would be the first chapter of the book.

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[4] This and all other names are pseudonyms.

He began his narrative decades before he was even born, with his grandparents' story. This signified the magnitude of Jonas' family to his own story, which continued throughout his interview. By placing his own life story within the broader arc of his family's narrative, he stressed the extent to which his parents and grandparents shaped his sense of Jewish identity.

David also referenced a significant cast of supporting characters spread across a number of settings from his past: from the yard of his elementary school to his religion courses at a large, Midwestern university. When David was growing up, his non-Jewish mother played a crucial role in his Jewish engagements. "She's the one who has always made sure that Hanukah celebrations happen. He's the one who made sure that we all had bar mitzvahs. I think it was probably her motivation that we joined the temple in the first place." After David experienced a difficult emotional period in high school, his mother suggested that he speak with the rabbi of their Reform temple, who, David said, "put Judaism into my mind more strongly." He credited his connection with the rabbi with his decisions to minor in religious studies in college, to live in a Jewish co-op, and even to entertain the prospect of becoming a rabbi. Similarly, Mark mentioned that he had long been absent from any form of organized Jewish community, and he spoke with his non-Jewish wife about his motivation to become more engaged in Jewish life. "It's actually funny," he noted, "because my wife is not Jewish, but she's [the one who] actually encouraged me to celebrate holidays more than before I met her and she's happy to celebrate with me."

It is possible to read David and Mark's interviews as evidence of "sovereign selves," whose "journeys" were inflected by parents, clergy, and partners. Yet, these other characters in their narratives play central roles in their development. To relegate them to the narrative margins places the author in the foreground, but it also diminishes the narrative strategies that enlist other people in telling one's own stories.

Other respondents described how relational disconnections shaped their sense of self as Jews. Sarah mentioned how both her marriage to a non-Jewish woman and the death of her Jewish mother informed her sense of Jewish connection. She offered this recollection:

> For me, Judaism is so connected to family and Jewish community is so much about family. After I lost my mom, I stayed with my [non-Jewish ex-wife] for a couple of years or so and … I lost a lot of my Jewish connections while I was with her… After I left her, it felt like a relief and I spent a lot of energy first getting back into Jewish community.

Relationships figured centrally in Sarah's story and she constructed her narrative using those relationships as constitutive elements —her mother's passing, her ex-wife, and her desire to rejoin a Jewish community all played central roles in her construction of her Jewish sense of self. She offered no description of her Jewish identity outside of those social relations.

Robert and Jeff both described a heightened sense of their own Jewishness that was engendered by their experiences in non-Jewish social contexts. Robert, who grew up in Philadelphia, explained that he felt a deeper sense of connection to Jews

when he moved to Tokyo after college. "No one cares if you are Jewish in New York or Philadelphia," he asserted, "but in Tokyo or Singapore, you're enough of a minority that the fact that any kind of person ends up being Jewish—you're like instant friends." Jeff also moved to Asia after college, where his positive experience of difference provided a platform for social connections. He told a story about cooking "Passover dinner" for ten friends and putting together a Haggadah that he felt would be "interesting and fun" for his guests. "These are people who weren't familiar with a lot of the traditions or food or anything, so it's important to me to share that," he asserted. Jewishness provided both Jeff and Robert with occasions to connect with others, and the experiences that emerged became important elements in formulations of their Jewish identities.

Similarly, Fran included an account of her experience of moving from a Jewish elementary school to a non-sectarian private high school where Jewish students made up about one-third of the population. No longer part of the majority, she described the sense of connection with other Jewish students that resulted:

> All of a sudden, my being Jewish gave me this connection with people because we were different, and it was the first time I'd experienced that. And I started to embrace my Judaism because it felt special and it felt different.

Finding strength in her new-found minority status, Fran invited forty classmates to her house and prepared "traditional Jewish Ashkenazi dishes" such as "honey cake, kugel, stuffed cabbage, challah, and rugelach." Sharing her heritage with non-Jewish friends heightened her appreciation for that part of herself. "I started to feel like, 'Yeah, being Jewish is awesome,'". Food became a venue for Fran's presentation of self (Goffman 1959), in which sharing elements of Jewish culture connected her to Jewish and non-Jewish peers, all of whom proved pivotal to her ability to construct her Jewish identity.

These accounts demonstrate some of the ways in which our respondents shaped their Jewish selves through their connection with others. They described the ways in which others created the foundation for their self-understanding, offered guidance at important moments, modeled behaviors they chose to emulate, and influenced their life paths. Others—whether parents, grandparents, or partners—played a fundamental role in their lives. They were not merely external influences.

Narratives of Comparison

Our subjects also expressed their social selves by drawing contrasts between themselves and both Jewish and non-Jewish others. This feature of relational narratives emerged as our respondents distinguished themselves using frames of comparison and contrast. Many of our subjects described how changing social contexts raised their awareness of themselves in relation to others, which, in turn, shaped their sense of self.

Shira's story is exemplary in this respect. Shira attended a Jewish day school from kindergarten through eighth grade and then graduated to a large public high school. When describing her experience of high school, Shira characterized her religiously observant background as "a divider" between her and her new friends.

She opted out of organized Jewish life when she started college. "I was interested in being Jewish," she explained, "but I think [after] nine years of Jewish day school, I was ready to chill. I didn't want to be a leader. I didn't want to have to carry the Jewish community in college." Though she had Jewish friends, she explained that she was not interested in engaging with the organized Jewish community and instead pursued other social avenues and activities. After graduating, Shira moved to a large, Southern city for graduate school. There, too, Shira explained herself in relationship to her peers and her city:

> I think that my friends [in this city] think that I'm practically a rabbi because I have nine years of Jewish day school and I'm always interested in doing Jewish stuff. So, for me, sometimes that means going to or hosting a Shabbat dinner…. They view me as "Super Jew," which is hilarious, because back when I was in New York, I was like the least Jewish person you knew.

Shira constructed her Jewish identity in contrast to others as she moved through various social contexts.

Rebecca, a resident of the Bay Area, described her upbringing quite differently, but nevertheless she employed a contextually based narrative of comparison and contrast that echoed Shira's.

> I didn't have Jewish friends until I got to college. Then it became this kind of struggle with not feeling Jewish enough. I don't think it was until I moved out to California and had some distance from my family and just my ideas of what it means to be Jewish, that I actually started picking up traditions on my own.

Her Jewish friends provided a kind of scaffold for her emerging Jewish identity, and separation from her family enabled her to conceptualize and embrace elements of being Jewish. Using the language of contrast, Rebecca employed relationships with family and friends in the construction of her Jewish identity. This description of how her Jewish identity changed over time relies on these other people. Without them, it falls apart.

Rebecca's story about traveling to Israel for the first time illustrated a third dimension of this comparative framework. She gave this explanation:

> It was this beautiful experience for me to be in Tel-Aviv. And I remember asking my friend Dave…. we were sitting on the beach, and [I would] just be like, "So everyone is Jewish?" And he'd be like, "Pretty much, everyone is Jewish." I'm like, "Really? Everyone is Jewish?" And he'd be like, "Yep, pretty much." And it was this feeling I've never had in my life before of seeing all of these Jews that all look different. It was like… People have their ideas about what a Jewish person looks like, and it just wasn't like that. It's all different, skin and hair colors. And it was this crazy feeling of just being able to relax in a way that I've never been able to relax.

Rebecca described the novel sense of belonging induced by her experience of a diverse Jewish context that challenged her own understanding of who Jews are and what they look like. In this story, Rebecca focuses on difference to quite dramatic

effect, attributing her own ability to "relax" as a consequence of this encounter with intra-Jewish difference.

Often, stories about changing social contexts manifest in narratives about relocating to a new city as a child. Miles, who was born in the Bay Area and who moved to Albuquerque as an adolescent, also described a shift in perspective when he found himself in a largely non-Jewish community:

> Growing up in the Bay Area…you don't get the sense that you're different. You don't understand or have appreciation for what separates being Jewish from not being Jewish… Growing up, I would say I was given this identity, but it wasn't in a context where I could really gauge or judge it. Then I moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, maybe twelve months before my bar mitzvah and the contrast was stark. Almost 95% of it is Catholic. My Jewish identity became more apparent to me…I got a greater appreciation for what it meant…When you're one of many, it's hard to gain appreciation of it. But when you're one of few, it's a much easier thing to grasp, even at a young age.

The contrast between himself and his new peers created the conditions for Miles to reflect on and embrace his Jewish identity in a new way. Becoming a member of a minority gave him a new perspective on his Jewishness and this experience became part of the way in which he constructed his Jewish identity.

Similarly, moving to the United States from Israel at the age of five was a formative Jewish experience for Bob. He described a sense of invisibility that comes from feeling neither fully Israeli nor American:

> Those caught in between the Israeli community and the American community have their own stories that have kind of been overlooked. I feel like the new generation of Israeli Americans… they are growing up in this "between world"—they don't really want to be part of Israeli society, but they feel something missing in American society.

Bob's narrative revolved around moving back and forth between two Jewish communities, never feeling quite at home in either, but claiming membership in both. For Bob, as for Shira and Miles and others, the experience of not fitting in figured prominently in his narrative and thus, in the construction of his Jewish identity. Feeling disconnected or out of place, Bob could not disentangle his sense of self from both the contexts in which he found himself and the familial threads of connection that led him to feel dislocated.

Steve, too, recalled moving to New Jersey when he was nine years old, an event in his life that raised his awareness of class differences between his family and that of his new community:

> We moved to a more affluent area with a much more pronounced Jewish community. It was pretty much Jewish, and Italian, and Irish, but very Jewish. [It was] a lot more materialistic, a lot snobbier, frankly. My parents were kind of like common class but they didn't really feel the need to have to fit in. They had their friends from the other town, which was only fifteen minutes away, but it was a world away.

The different communities became touchstones in his narrative representation of self as he formulated his own preferences and values by contrasting them with those of others. Each neighborhood held a different inflection point for his sense of Jewish self, and only in that comparative framework did he begin to formulate a Jewish identity that aligned with one and differentiated from another.

Approaching narratives as processes of identity construction rather than as testimonials about the presence of identity affords a perspective on identities as social phenomena. Our interviewees offered comparative accounts of themselves in relation to individuals and social contexts, reflecting on feelings of exclusion and inclusion and using lenses of difference and sameness to formulate their sense of self.

Narratives of Conflict

For Molly, who grew up with one non-Jewish parent, encounters with difference left her with a number of unpleasant memories about being Jewish. She shared a story of conflict with other Jews to illustrate her sense of self as an outsider:

> I don't know what it is, but I always felt really on the outside of [the Jewish community]. Actually, for years, it broke my heart because I'd be hanging out with all my friends and we'd be feeling so homey and familiar like Jewishly. Then I'd go to services with them and they'd start doing things and I'd be like "what is happening?" A lot of people at the shul [synagogue] I go to have thought that I was my partner's Christian girlfriend because I didn't know what was going on. I never could say the prayers. It felt so awful and I would even cry. I was like— no one thinks I'm a real Jew; this is horrible.

Though explaining that she felt "on the outside," Molly nevertheless spoke about the *shul* she attended, using the colloquial Yiddish term for synagogue typically used by American Conservative Jews (Benor 2009). Ironically, Molly chose this term, which typically signals a level of Jewish commitment and familiarity, to describe her sense of alienation and discomfort in a Jewish setting. For Molly, this sense of alienation and difference played a central role in her narrative and she constructed her Jewish identity in the context of conflict.

Penelope's experience of conflict was related to her changing social context. She gave this explanation:

> Growing up [where I did] there were so many Jews that being Jewish wasn't different or out there so I never really identified. It was just something that a lot of us had and did, and it was much more of an ethnic thing than a religious thing. And then, moving to the South, I experienced a lot of shocking anti-Semitism, and I realized it wasn't something that I wanted to be super apparent about.

Penelope responded to an encounter with anti-Semitism by "being more selective" about when and how she publicly expressed her Jewishness, turning it from a public aspect of her identity to a "more personal" one. Julie deployed a similar narrative strategy in her story of growing up in an area on Long Island that

she described as "predominately white, Irish, and Roman Catholic." In high school, she "didn't look like everybody else" and recalled feeling different and being treated differently because she was Jewish:

> In my childhood, [being Jewish] definitely played a role in me feeling "othered." I felt really embarrassed. There was a lot of anti-Semitism in my school, a lot of racism, a lot of sexism. Kids were really mean. I always tried to pass as being anything but Jewish. I remember people would ask me what I was, and I would always be very conscious of telling them my ethnicity because being Jewish was so different. My friends would chime in and be like, "She's Jewish." And I would say, "When someone asks you what you are, you don't say you're Catholic. Why do you say I'm Jewish?" It was such a pet peeve of mine. I think it was because I felt like they were outing me.

Dahlia had a different reaction when faced with a conflict. She recounted being singled out as Jewish by her sixth-grade teacher, an experience that she said made her "more proud to be Jewish." Prior to that, she explained, being Jewish had not been particularly important to her. She described the impact of that experience with these words: "That interaction made a very early impression on me and kind of cemented my pride." After that, she expressed her difference defiantly by wearing a Star of David necklace to school.

With these stories, respondents illustrated how moments of conflict contributed to the construction of their identities as Jews. These interactions were some of the stories that our interviewees told about themselves, and they demonstrate the significance of social context in the formulation of those stories.

Discussion

We present this analysis with the understanding that our data could easily be analyzed using prevailing conceptions of Jewish identity that emphasize individual meaning-making and external influence. Some of our subjects' narratives could be understood as evidence of Jewish cultural capital or the successes of Jewish education, and our data could be used to illustrate many of the prevailing trends outlined in "The Pew Report on Jewish Americans" (2013). Approaches to measuring identity could be used to characterize our subjects on continua of being more or less Jewishly engaged, or to determine the relative strength or weakness of interviewees' Jewish identities. Scholars could find evidence of the positive impact of Israel trips, Jewish day schools and Hillel experiences on our subjects' expressions of their Jewish identities. Analyses could focus on familial, organizational, and peers' influences. We also see how these narratives could be read as "Jewish journeys" or evidence of "sovereign selves" and how, within those frameworks, such interpretations would not necessarily be inaccurate.

Just as we recognized that our data could be interpreted differently, we wondered if we could read previous analyses through the lens of the social self. Following Gary Gregg (1991), whose research included a re-analysis of a few classic studies of identity, we revisited analyses from both "Connections and Journeys" and *The Jew*

Within. Using extensive excerpts from her interviews, Horowitz presents a typology of individual approaches to Jewishness, marshaling her interview data to demonstrate "multiple ways of relating to being Jewish in America" (92). The qualitative interview data presented by Cohen and Eisen similarly highlights individual accounts of Jewishness, emphasizing the volitional nature of the self and generally situating their subjects as influenced by any number of social forces, people, or institutions. They present testimonies regarding decisions about marriage or child rearing and attitudes toward "tribalism" or Israel as evidence of the sovereign nature of the self. Nevertheless, a search of their findings can reveal evidence of "the social self" there, too. Their analyses repeatedly illustrate how research subjects render themselves through narratives that are densely populated by and inextricably bound to constitutive others.

In the context of scholarly and social trends that focus on the primacy of individuals and the decline of civic, social, associational, and political life, it is easy to understand why this aspect of Jewish identity stood out prominently for Horowitz and Cohen and Eisen. Yet, from our perspectives, subjects' sociality emerges as more conspicuous than their individuality. The conceptual framework of a "social self" attends socio-historical shifts that inform how we understand the self as indebted to, engaged with, and produced in relationship to others. We borrow the phrase from George Herbert Mead, who first used "the social self" to describe "the nature of the self as revealed by introspection and subject to our factual analysis" (1913). According to Mead's theory, the self is fundamentally social because it requires the ability to see one's self as one might be seen from another subject position. While our use of the phrase "the social self" is consistent with Mead's conception of the self as socially constructed and rendered in language, we use it differently. For Mead, the very notion of a "self" is social, because conceiving of the "self" requires seeing one's self from the outside and turning the "self" into an object. For this study, we use the term to illustrate how our respondents formulate their Jewish selves through social relationships.

This conceptualization is particularly productive in light of current socio-cultural trends related to the changing nature of identity and relationships across the social landscape. Our social worlds have been transformed by the nearly ubiquitous access to one another brought about by mobile technologies and social media platforms. Likewise, the mainstream media abounds with stories highlighting the contested and increasingly fluid quality of identities in the 21st century. Unquestionably, social relationships are changing and new conceptual tools are needed to understand how people conceive of themselves and how they conceptualize relationships within the context of this new reality.

The conceptual framework of the social self is particularly germane in light of the demographic and sociological realities in the Jewish lives of post-boomers, the most prominent characteristic of which is the unprecedented rates at which non-Jewish others take part in the lives of Jews. This is one profound way in which the social lives of post-boomers differ from that of their parents and predecessors. Intermarriage has become the most prominent and easily measurable example of this broader phenomenon. The findings of the 2013 Pew Report led demographer Sergio DellaPergola to posit that these changes might signal an "end of Jewish/non-

Jewish dichotomy" (2015, 33). In addition, demographer Barry Kosmin has noted that intermarriage has given even more prominence to a fact about American Jews that has long been true—that "there is no consensus across the Jewish world as to which membership criteria are paramount" (2005, 36). According to Theodore Sasson and his co-authors, "[Half] of all Jews in their [millennial] generation are children of intermarriage" (2015, 5). Additionally, less than one-third of post-boomers say that all or almost all of their close friends are Jewish (Pew 2013, 62). While the implications of such findings remain the source of some debate, the demographic patterns are clear (Cohen and Wertheimer 2006, 2014; Thompson 2013; McGinity 2012, 2014; Phillips 2013). This fact is inevitably changing the nature of Jewish identity, as evidenced by the work of Bruce Phillips (2010) and Sasson (2013) who assert that growing numbers of Jews with one Jewish parent and one non-Jewish parent lay claim to a Jewish identity. More than ever, Jewish identities are socially constructed in relation to both Jews and non-Jews.

This is a significant difference between the worlds occupied by the post-boomers in this study and those of the baby boomers that are the focus of the efforts of Horowitz and Cohen and Eisen. Without our prompting, forty-four of our fifty-eight interviewees' narratives included constitutive non-Jewish others. By contrast, in their analysis, Cohen and Eisen hardly mention non-Jews, who figure occasionally as spouses and less frequently as parents. To illustrate the relative rarity of this phenomenon among their subjects, they use the term "non-Jew" a scant ten times in the book; "gentile" appears forty-five times. These terms are most often used to characterize a generalized world beyond that of their research subjects, and are less frequently used in reference to their research subjects' specific relationships. In Horowitz's analysis, non-Jewish peers, co-workers, and partners appear with somewhat greater frequency but are still largely marginal figures. Only 12% of her survey sample report having a non-Jewish parent, a figure, she notes, that "will rise with the coming cohort" (2000, 95). Our findings bear out her observation and suggest a different story about non-Jewish others' roles in American Jewish post-boomer constructions of self.

The conception of the "sovereign self" as a framework for Jewish identity emerged from an encounter between researchers and their subjects under conditions in which non-Jews generally mattered as a broader social category, only infrequently appearing among intimate circles. This conceptualization of Jewish identity could be organized around personal meaning-making because, in essence, it pertained primarily to subjects in almost exclusively Jewish worlds. In the context of relative Jewish homogeneity, making meaning made sense as the conceptual core of Jewish identity because Jewish identity seemed, in a sense, so pervasive, so obvious a category that what seemed necessary was an effort to paint richer portraits of it.

That formulation of the notion of Jewish identity emerged under conditions shaped by a perspective that saw the world largely divided between Jews and others. To ask, as Cohen and Eisen do, whether "a generation, integrated as never before into the mainstream of America, and attracted as never before to aspects of Jewish religiosity such as spirituality, family ritual, and personal journey, would continue to feel strongly about their membership in the Jewish people" (2000, 101), made

sense within a world organized around a notion of Jewish communities that were populated almost exclusively by Jews. That world does not exist for the majority of post-boomer American Jews.

Given the intimate relationships between Jews and non-Jews, conceptualizing identity such that it takes shape according to individual will omits the significance of relationships between Jews and non-Jews and the role that they, too, play in the construction of Jewish identity. These new conditions require new modes of analysis and inquiry. Both Cohen and Eisen (2000, 2) and Horowitz (2002) make similar arguments about their research with respect to that which preceded them. This article is written in a similar spirit in which we are attempting to respond to demographic, sociological, and generational changes with an appropriately renewed approach to conceptualizing Jewish identity. If Cohen, Eisen and Horowitz advanced our understanding of identity from one organized around external measures to one focused on internal meaning, the "social self" moves from one focused on volitional, coherent individuals to conceptions of self that are more fundamentally social in nature.

This exploratory study suggests that underplaying the primacy of both Jewish and non-Jewish others in the social construction of Jewish identity obscures rather than elucidates American Jews' lived experiences of self and community. We posit that new and emerging sociological realities require approaches, both methodological and conceptual, that can better respond to emerging formulations of Jewish selfhood that are constructed through relationships with both Jewish and non-Jewish others. The construction of Jewish identity could be better understood in the context of the connections that constitute the diverse social worlds in which American Jews live. To provide higher resolution representations of post-boomers' Jewish identities, quantitative methods could be used for social network analyses or other modes of measuring social capital (Granovetter 1973, 1983; Putnam 2000; Wuthnow 1998; Kadushin 2011a). Greater attention to social network analyses could allow for a nuanced engagement with the real relationships that constitute Jewish identity (Kadushin 2011b). We also hope to see an increase in qualitative studies that move away from a focus on individual meaning-making and toward a focus on understanding how research subjects engage, collectively and collaboratively, in the construction of Jewish culture, knowledge, and selves in the context of social interactions.

Conclusion

In the late 1960s, Sklare and Greenblum advanced the concept of Jewish identity as a way to make sense of what they perceived as the declining cohesion of the American Jewish community. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey of the Council of Jewish Federations, with its report of intermarriage rates in the range of 45%, demographically confirmed the prescience of their concerns. Social scientific research served to designate Jewish identity as the core logic and highly sought-after outcome of Jewish educational programming and philanthropic investment, and as one of the central tenets of the "continuity agenda" of the 1990s. It was with this

backdrop that Horowitz and Cohen and Eisen (among others) examined baby boomers' Jewish identities. They framed Jewish identity as a largely internal process, influenced by, but largely distinct from external forces. Within that framework, non-Jews either exerted a "weakening" effect on Jewish identities or served to represent the generalized threat of the world outside.

For post-boomers, the presence of both Jews and non-Jews in their families and peer-networks is the norm. Both featured prominently in our research subjects' construction of Jewish identities as they described three primary modes of social relations in their narratives: connection, comparison, and conflict. Others were not mere influences on sovereign selves who were charting their individual journeys. Instead, social interactions provided the raw material that constituted their Jewish identities.

In 1973, Charles Leibman concluded his landmark study of Jewish identity, *The Ambivalent American Jew: Politics, Religion and Family in American Jewish Life* by asserting this conclusion: "Jewish survival requires a turning against the integrationist response" (197). Liebman's book was published just as scholarly discussions of identity were beginning to gain traction, and this framing of a choice between "survival" and "integration" informed much of the scholarship that followed. Today, integration is a fact, rather than an option for American Jews. Rather than framing survival in opposition to integration, our task is to understand Jewish lives and communities within the context of integration. As a result, the question of a sovereign identity or journey seems less salient today than understanding the social processes that form the self. With this preliminary study, we offer evidence of American Jewish post-boomers' relationally constructed Jewish identities. This, we hope, will expand the range of possibilities for understanding how American post-boomers live, claim, and construct Jewish identity in 21st-century America.

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