Working Paper No. 507

Who's a Jew in an Era of High Intermarriage? Surveys, Operational Definitions, and the Contemporary American Context

by

Joel Perlmann
The Levy Economics Institute of Bard College

July 2007

The Levy Economics Institute
P.O. Box 5000
Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504-5000
http://www.levy.org

ABSTRACT

The old ways in which surveys of Jews handled marginal cases no longer make sense, and the number of cases involved is no longer small. I examine in detail the public-use samples of the two recent national surveys of Americans of recent Jewish origin—the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) and the American Jewish Identity Survey (AJIS)—and also explore the implications for the American Jewish Committee annual surveys of Jewish political opinion. When Jews are defined by the question "What is your religion, if any?" the effect is *not* primarily to eliminate secular or culturally oriented Jews. However, large majorities of the children of intermarriage will fail to reply "Jewish." Accordingly, the paper turns to two competing procedures for treating respondents of recent Jewish origin who do not report themselves to be Jewish by religion. The core Jewish population includes respondents who answer that they have no religion. I find this procedure problematic because the meaning of the "no religion" response has also changed: it no longer captures people with close connections to the Jewish world who deny the religious connection out of principle. Yet two out of three are the products of intermarriage. I tentatively suggest an alternative principle: self-identity. Americans of recent Jewish origin who are not Jews by religion should be asked (as they were in the 2000–01 the NJPS) whether they consider themselves Jewish for any reason. Those that reply in the affirmative should be counted as Jews. The paper examines the proportions of people affected by limiting surveys of American Jews to Jews by religion, and the results of using one or another procedure for deciding who else is a Jew. As an example, some demographic outcomes are tabulated using different definitions, as are responses to the question "How close do you feel to Israel?"

I began this paper as a way to set the context for a study of the surveys that the American Jewish Committee (AJC) conducts annually on American Jewish political opinion. One issue raised by those surveys is the quality of the sampling; and part of the question about sampling, in turn, concerns the fact that the AJC samples are limited to "Jews by religion." Respondents are asked their religion and those who answer "Jewish" are eligible for the sample. As with any sample, there are other concerns to raise about the AJC sample design and its formulation of questions for respondents. I will address these, as well as substantive findings from those polls in a later paper. Here I am concerned with the challenge of defining "who is a Jew?" in recent surveys, and particularly with the answer "Jews by religion." Who is left out of this definition, what difference does it make, what are the alternatives? The answers have been radically transformed in recent decades by high rates of Jewish intermarriage; the offspring of those intermarriages are far less likely than the offspring of two Jewish parents to identify as Jewish by religion. In this sense, the issue is far from merely a matter of methodology; it derives from the most important transformation in American Jewish social life over the past half century, and on a central pattern of American ethnic life. Likewise, all surveys of Jews, national and local, will have to confront the definitional challenge; I mention the AJC surveys only as an example.

While the AJC polls are limited to Jews by religion, the major national surveys of Jews have cast a wider net. These are the NJPS (National Jewish Population Survey 1970, 1990, and 2000–01) and the AJIS (American Jewish Identity Survey 2001); they, however, probe relatively few political opinions and none about the Arab-Israel conflict. And so I was drawn to the AJC surveys, and to the issue of limiting a sample to Jews by religion.[1] Since public use samples are now available for both the NJPS and AJIS dataset, as well as for the AJC datasets for a half-dozen recent years, it is possible to explore the

[1] Americans for Peace Now, together with the Arab-American Institute, have produced several recent political polls, but relatively little evidence on how those polls are conducted is publicized and there is no breakdown by American Jewish subgroups (how Orthodox and Reform Jews might differ, for example). Also, the datasets have not been placed in the public domain. The many national polls of American opinion, such as the General Social Survey, often ask respondent's religion, but the number of Jews in a typical national survey will be small (roughly 30 in a 1,500-person sample) and the number of questions relevant to the Israel and American policy will be few.

composition of the samples in detail and with precision. We will not be obliged, in other words, to rely on published tables that were constructed to answer other questions.

* * *

A helpful Brandeis research report from 2002 deals extensively with the substance of the AJC reports (Phillips, Lengyel, and Saxe 2002). Its authors first caution readers that "Jews were defined as people who said their religion was Jewish, so secular Jews, who tend to be less attached to Israel, were not included." The authors no doubt mean to define "secular Jews" here in empirical (indeed tautological) terms alone—as Jews who did not say "Jewish" when asked their religion. However, the empirical accuracy may convey conceptual misunderstandings. And it will be well worth our time to look more carefully at these empirically defined "secular Jews" who did not say "their religion was Jewish."[2]

The answer to this question meant one thing before, let us say, 1950. It has come to mean something radically different in the recent period, since roughly 1990. Yet survey research on American Jews has not caught up with the change. That change is a result of intermarriage patterns. To make any sense of the data we will have to distinguish conceptually between Americans born to two Jewish-born parents and other Americans of recent Jewish origin. The distinction is not theological of course: in principle, how a person reports attachment to things Jewish today has nothing to do with whether one's parents were both Jewish or only one was, or neither were. But the distinction turns out to have enormous sociological power in predicting who will chose to report certain kinds of attachments. I refer to those with two Jewish-born parents as having "*single origins*" and to the others as having "*mixed origins*." Of course, there will also be a small number who converted into Judaism, and there are also other anomalous

[2] One sometimes hears that we can learn about secular Jews by glancing at the Canadian census. Unlike the U.S. census, it asks about both religion and ethnicity, and Jewish is a category of both questions. Those who reply that they are Jewish by ethnicity but not religion are thought to be culturally but not religiously Jewish. Perhaps so. But quite apart from the differences between the Canadian census questions and the relevant NJPS or AJIS questions, the social context of Canadian Jewry (more recent Jewish immigration, more segregated education of Jews, etc.) differs from that of United States Jewry. We cannot, I think, interpret the outlook of NJPS and AJIS respondents who said they were not Jewish by religion from the Canadian census categories.

cases such as those who report mixed-origin *parent.* I will have a word to say about these others later.

Consider first single-origin adults (age 24 and older, with two Jewish parents). Nearly all defined themselves as Jews by religion—84% and 88% in the AJIS and NJPS, respectively. A notable proportion of these people probably do not believe in anything much related to Judaism as a religion, and indeed many might qualify as "secular," given any reasonable definition of the term. In particular, a notable minority (13% and 19% among the single-origin adults in the AJIS and NJPS, respectively) refused to define themselves in terms of any Jewish religious denomination, and have been classified as "just Jews." Many of these apparently chose that term to describe themselves; others simply said they had no denomination. For some reason, the former were much more common in the NJPS, the latter in the AJIS. In both surveys, however, there is good reason to think that many of these people have strong doubts about any theological teachings of Judaism. For example, in the NJPS, the great majority of single-origin Jews by religion said they believed in God: 79% in the sample as a whole, including 97%, 87%, and 77% among the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jews. But among "just Jews," the proportion is 63%. In the AJIS dataset, the comparable figures are not as striking, but they still point in the same direction: 77% for the sample as a whole, 89%, 86%, 75%, and 69% for the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and just Jews.

The AJIS asked Jews whether they think of themselves as secular or religious—and defining secular for those who asked as nonreligious. Among all single-origin Jews by religion—Jews by religion!—43% replied religious and another 9% "somewhat religious," while no fewer than 28% replied secular and another 16% "somewhat secular." Among just Jews, the latter two proportions were 23% religious, 4% somewhat religious, 48% secular, and 17% somewhat secular.[3]

[3] Other possible, but uncommon, responses were "a little bit of both" and "unsure."

Table 1. Single-Origin Jews by Religion: The Subgroup Classified as "Just Jews": AJIS and NJPS, 2000-01

Detailed codes for answers to the denomination question found for respondents classified as "just Jew"	Percentage by survey	
	AJIS	NJPS
"Just Jew"	15	84
"no denomination," "none"	52	2
"Nonpracticing"	19	6
"Agnostic," "atheist"		1
"secular," "ethnic," "cultural," "humanistic"	10	5
other	5	2
total (all classified as "just Jew")*	100	100

Notes:
1) Limited to respondents 24 years of age and older.
2) Single-origin respondents are those who reported having two Jewish parents.
3) Among all single origin Jews by religion 24 and older, 13% and 19% of AJIS and NJPS respondents, respectively, were classified as "just Jews."
4) Respondents who reported themselves Jewish by religion but did not affiliate themselves with a Jewish denomination (e.g,: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform) have been classified as "just Jews." In the NJPS, most such respondents were so classified by the surveyer, whereas in the AJIS most were classified by the surveyer as having no denomination. However, in both surveys, an appreciable minority of respondents gave other responses, which are detailed above.

Moreover, especially in the AJIS, an appreciable minority of the respondents classified as "just Jews" actually gave more explicit answers than that phrase when asked about their denomination. These are all answers that place the respondent outside the religious denomination system—even as they defined themselves as "Jewish" by religion. They all are consistent with a skepticism or alienation from things religious: nonpracticing, agnostic, atheist, secular (Table 1). And, in a few cases, they went beyond those negative replies to state explicit alternatives to a Jewish religious attachment: they said they were culturally or

ethnically Jewish, Zionist, or gave similar responses. We cannot, of course, be sure that the majority who merely say "just Jew" or say "none" when asked denomination mean to negate religiosity the way the minority who are more explicit did. And yet, it does seem probable that the majority must indeed mean something close to one or another of the range of specific alternatives mentioned by the minority. That is, it seems probable that those who simply said "just Jew" or "no denomination" meant to convey that they were defining themselves *in opposition* to any familiar description of their religious practice and probably about their religious beliefs. Some probably meant to go farther and indicate that they explicitly reject religious beliefs, a handful also indicating alternatives to a religious conception of Jewishness. It is not unreasonable to think of all these responses as positioning respondents, however vaguely, along a spectrum between religiosity and secularism—which any mention of a denomination would not do.

Thus, it is certainly true that there are "secular Jews" out there. But many of them respond to the religious question by saying they are Jews, probably because they know that the description of a religious affiliation need not have anything to do with beliefs and has much to do with origins. Moreover, at least for Jews, those origins are not limited to communities of religion.

Still, there have always been a small number of single-origin Jews who would answer "none" to the religion question. Some of these people insist on their affiliation to Jewish peoplehood in some way, and some others will insist on their *non*-affiliation with any kind of Jewishness. We can find such people today among the respondents of our surveys: 11% and 7%, respectively, of AJIS and NJPS single-origin respondents reported that they had no religion (Table 3). These people only ended up in the surveys of Jews because subsequent screening questions probed further, particularly by asking whether the person had a Jewish parent or upbringing. The NJPS went on to ask respondents who had *not* declared themselves Jewish by religion but *did* report a Jewish parent or upbringing a further question: did such respondents consider themselves Jewish in any way.

Just over half of these people (56%) answered that they did consider themselves Jewish in some way.[4]

Notice now the magnitudes of the single-origin NJPS respondents I have been describing. First, we found that 19% who did answer the religion question by saying they were Jewish later said they were "just Jews," and some of these elaborated with more explicitly nonreligious answers. By contrast, only 7% of the single origin respondents had *not* said they were Jewish by religion had made it into the sample based on the other screening questions. And among these people, about half said they considered themselves Jewish in some way; half of 7% is under 4%.

Thus, we have several groups to consider when we ask about "secular Jews" of single origin. A large, but unknown, fraction of the 19% who said they were "just Jews" and then the 7% who did not report themselves Jewish by religion. Of this latter, we should consider both the half who said they considered themselves Jewish in some way and the half who said they did not.

A long research tradition, developed in the pre-1950 world, has tended to include respondents who report no religion but come from Jewish backgrounds among the Jews. This procedure seemed sensible and, in any case, of trivial importance when nearly all respondents were of single-origin. Many of the people in question did, in fact, self identify as Jewish culturally. For others, the decision not to self-identify as Jewish was often an ideological one of denying roots in an ethnoreligious group—as, for example, some Yiddish-speaking communists did. Further more, often the younger adults of Jewish origins were the ones most likely not to identify with any religion; researchers were probably right to think that

[4] To be clear: there were actually four screening questions in the AJIS and NJPS: 1) religion?; 2) if not Jewish by religion, did the respondent have a Jewish parent?; 3) if not Jewish by religion or parent, did the respondent have a Jewish upbringing?; and 4) if not Jewish by questions 1, 2, or 3, did the respondent have any reason to consider themselves Jewish? Those who answered the fourth question with a purely Christian reason ("Jesus was a Jew," etc.) were excluded from the NJPS. The great majority of those who had not reported themselves Jewish on the first question but did qualify for the sample on the basis of the later questions came from the second question, relating to Jewish parents. Now, once the screening was complete, the NJPS (but not the AJIS) also asked certain respondents a relevant follow-up question in the course of the main interview. The NJPS asked respondents of no religion whether they had any reason to consider themselves Jewish. Fifty-six percent of single-origin respondents reporting no religion consider themselves Jewish in some way.

many, if not all, of these people were sociologically closest to the Jewish world, and that over time many of them would, in fact, reconsider their refusal to identify as Jews, for example, when they moved to suburbia and raised children.

And in the final analysis, the proportions of respondents involved in these marginal classifications were small, as they are today for the single-origin respondents in the NJPS: only 7% of respondents reported no religion, and another 5% reported that they were now affiliated with another religion (for nearly all, Christianity). Thus, many "secular" Jews fell in among the 88% of NJPS single-origin respondents who had identified as Jewish by religion; among the rest were people who in the past had been routinely classified as Jews despite claiming no religion (and despite only half claiming to consider themselves Jewish in any way). Finally, almost as large a marginal group (5% vs. 7%) claimed to have adopted another religion. Members of this last group, although included in the NJPS and AJIS samples, have routinely been excluded from the actual reports dealing with Jews, and the AJIS and NJPS reports are no exception.

The discussion thus far describes the offspring of two Jewish-born parents. The conventions of Jewish survey research were established during the era when these offspring were the overwhelming majority of people who might be considered Jewish using *any* definition, and consequently it didn't much matter how the marginal cases who were not Jewish by religion were being classified. By contrast, today a large fraction of American adults with recent Jewish origins are, in fact, no longer of single origin. Rather, they are the products of intermarriages between a Jewish-born and a non-Jewish-born parent. The proportion of single-origin Jews in our surveys from 2000–01 reaches only 54% and 62%, respectively, of the AJIS and NJPS samples. Indeed, in much of the country, and among younger adults in much more of it, those with mixed origins comprise the majority among Americans of recent Jewish origin.

The crucial point for our analysis here is that those with single and mixed origin differ radically when they report their current Jewish attachments (Table 2). Still others cannot be classified in either group and are shown separately. However, these last are socially and culturally much closer to those who had only

one Jewish parent and, for conceptual purposes, the crucial distinction is between those with two Jewish parents (single origins) and all others.[5]

Table 2. Current Attachments by Origin Type: AJIS and NJPS 2000–01

Current attachment	Percentage of respondents by origins*							
	AJIS				NJPS			
	single	mixed	other	all	single	mixed	other	all
Jews by religion	84	18	37	57	88	24	28	65
no religion	11	28	20	18	7	25	14	12
other religion	0	2	1	1	1	8	9	4
Christian	4	52	42	24	4	42	49	19
total	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*
percent of adults**	54	28	18	100	62	21	17	100

**Origin types:*
Single: 2 Jewish-born parents
Mixed: 1 Jewish-born parent, 1 parent not born Jewish or partly Jewish
Other: respondents with part-Jewish parents, Jews by choice, and respondents with incomplete origins data
**Limited to adults 24 and older

Some of the mixed-origin respondents, of course, said that they were Jewish when asked to report their religion; however, in both the AJIS and the NJPS, Jews by religion comprise 26% of the mixed-origin respondents—compared to 84–88% of the single-origin respondents. Put another way, 74% of the mixed origin respondents *did not declare themselves Jewish by religion.* And finally, only 37% of all respondents who report no religion are people of single origin. So when we encounter that report, the chances are 2 to 1 that we are observing the new pattern in which the offspring of intermarriage is claiming "no religion," and not the older pattern in which there were strong reasons to suspect that the person giving the response was decidedly Jewish, and may well have considered oneself decidedly Jewish, in various ways. The point, obviously, is not that the offspring of the intermarried cannot be "decidedly Jewish in various

[5] This third group includes Jews by choice (or had two parents who were in this category), and a much larger group for whom relevant data are missing, or who had one or two parents who were themselves the children of intermarriage.

ways," but the offspring of the intermarried are surely vastly more likely to have grown up in a less-exclusively Jewish milieu, and it is simply a matter of common sense to reconsider how we should interpret the larger significance of the answer to a survey question ("no religion") when we know that the social context in which it is now given has changed so much from what it was.

Thus, the AJC surveys, because they are limited to Jews by religion, ignore a small percentage of people who had two Jewish-born parents and report no religion. These surveys also report a huge percentage of those people who had only one Jewish-born parent. And that latter percentage represents a larger number of people every year and a larger proportion of all Americans of recent Jewish origin every year. However, the question remains how many of these people *should* the surveys in any case ignore because they don't fit the operating definition of "Jews."

The significance of this difference in the way people of single and mixed Jewish origins define themselves extends far beyond the AJC surveys, of course. It is at the center of American Jewish life today, and as such, it challenges and complicates every survey of American Jewish life. Moreover, by its nature, this is a problem that can have no clean conceptual solution (Perlmann 2006 and 2007); we will have to specify whom we mean to include when we speak of "Jews" or Jewish opinion. Large and growing differences in whom we mean will hinge on the definitions—in contrast to the past when such definitions were maintained for the sake of precision, but they could be ignored by readers without much being lost. Our best hope, I think, is to try to identify a very few usable alternative definitions of who is included and who is excluded in a discussion of "Jewish opinion," and then to familiarize readers with them.

I feel I should digress here in order to clarify two points. The first point concerns the implication of these proportions for questions of Jewish survival from generation to generation. I do not intend to get involved in these predictions; I simply want to caution readers about using the figures just mentioned—26% vs. 84–88% declaring themselves Jewish by religion among the mixed-origin vs. single-origin adults, respectively.

If our interest is in the reproduction of the group across generations, there is another, and I think, more meaningful way to look at these figures. When two Jews intermarry, they produce one family. When *one* Jew marries one non-Jew, they also produce one family, and the number of children is largely a reflection of the number of families created.[6] Consequently, on average 1,000 intermarried Jews produce very roughly as many children as 2,000 inmarried Jews. And this 2:1 ratio, in turn, implies that the *proportion* of mixed-origin Jews declaring themselves Jewish by religion is actually producing a *number* of Jews by religion which is twice as large as the comparable proportion would entail among those with single origin. To put it another way, the *rate* at which the mixed origin individuals identify as Jews by religion is best captured by the percentage presented—26%. But the *actual number of people* who are identifying themselves as Jews by religion is twice as large among the mixed origin population as it would have been had the Jewish parents who outmarried chosen instead to inmarry. Thus, a better assessment of the numerical impact of intermarriage in the parents' generation upon the number of adults declaring themselves Jewish by religion in the current generation is found by doubling the rate who declare themselves Jewish by religion among those with mixed origin—2*26% = 52%—and comparing this rate to the 84–88% among the single-origin population who make the same declaration.

My second digression concerns the debates between those who respond to the high outmarriage rates with "outreach" programs to cultivate Jewish awareness among those of mixed origin (or the non-Jewish spouse in a mixed marriage), and those who respond by "turning inward" to focus attention and resources on the unambiguously attached Jews. I have no interest in joining these debates; and I think the figures presented could be used by either group—the figure that 26% of the mixed origin report themselves as Jewish by religion and that 84–88% of the single-origin proportion do so. Or rather, the point upon which

[6] That is, differences in fertility rates between all single and all mixed origin couples are but a minor factor in comparison to the difference created by the involvement of only one Jew in an intermarried couple rather than two Jews in the inmarried couple.

I want to insist is that both sides *must* use these figures. It is one thing to applaud or bemoan the rates; it is quite another matter to ignore or deny them. Two surveys of great worth, the AJIS and NJPS, were conducted under different and even antagonistic auspices, and they rest on quite different sampling designs. Yet they have produced information on the relevant point that is virtually identical across the surveys: about three fourths of mixed-origin adults do not, and even higher fraction of single-origin adults do, identify as Jewish by religion.[7]

But ultimately whether or not "outreach" and "inward-focused" organizations can agree on trends in contemporary data is unimportant to my argument, and so, too, is the connection between any data I present and discussions about the American Jewish future. Rather, my interest here is on understanding how Americans of recent Jewish origin define themselves and how surveys define them. I have already argued that we need to be very careful about empirically defining Jews by religion and the rest, since they are not Jews by religion, as the "secular." First, that designation is problematic because, as we saw earlier, many who answer that they are Jewish by religion can as reasonably be thought of as secular Jews. Second, those who report no religion can no longer be treated the way such people were treated half a century ago; today, they are quite simply a different social group and there is no reason to treat the meaning of their statement "no religion" as though it has the same sociocultural content as it did in 1950. Today, some two-thirds of these respondents make their report of no religion from a new cultural vantage point, that of having been raised in an intermarried home.

Where do these observations leave us? Do we want to limit attention to Jews by religion when we define a target group for studying Jewish political opinion (or most other questions about contemporary Jewish life)? I think not, but at a minimum, such a survey must explain not merely that it is limiting the target population in this way, but also something about the numeric and other implications of this limitation. On the other hand, how should people who are not

[7] Published NJPS reports on American Jewish respondents can be confusing for those trying to learn the proportion of adults with mixed origin who identify as Jews. Those reports are limited to "Jews" or "Jewish-connected" respondents; others, notably those who declare themselves Christians only, have been omitted. See Klaff and Mott (2005); Kadushin, Phillips, and Saxe (2005).

Jewish by religion, but have been included in surveys of "Jewish opinion" or "Jewish life," be described (not as secular, I have argued)? Moreover, which people besides Jews by religion would we wish to include in such a survey? All those with recent Jewish origins? Or a more restricted group? And if the latter, what are the criteria for inclusion in that more restricted group?

One method of treating these ambiguities about "Who is a Jew?"—or rather "Who is a Jew in an era of widespread intermarriage?"—would be to include all individuals that have been selected by virtue of a survey's screening questions. This method is clearly problematic because it leads to the inclusion of many people who tell you first that they are Christians and second that they do not consider themselves Jewish in any way. It is worth pausing a moment here to understand how such people come to be included in the AJIS and NJPS samples in the first place. The answer lies with the screening questions asked after a person has been asked "What is your religion, if any?" If one responds "Jewish," no further screening questions are asked; but if one gives any other response, the next two screening questions ask about a Jewish parent or a Jewish upbringing. And that is as it should be: the result is a fine dataset for studying Americans of recent Jewish origin,[8] and for selecting Jews by any reasonable definition. With such a sample, in other words, we can follow the gradations of affiliation and nonaffiliation. However, confusion will set in if, without further reflection, we treat all members of the AJIS and NJPS samples as Jews. Rather, the survey design implicitly assumes that Jews—defined in one way or another by data users—form a subset of sample members. The survey design did not provide this definition.[9] Including all respondents amounts to using a sample of Americans of recent Jewish origin—no matter how completely some of these respondents report that they have rejected those origins. For many purposes, surely, this is too inclusive a way to define American Jews. For example, if our purpose is to assess

[8] I have argued elsewhere that for students of American immigration, ethnicity, and assimilation, the sample of all respondents is invaluable (Perlmann 2006 and 2007).

[9] The NJPS sample design did, in fact, assume that respondents would be classified as Jews, persons of Jewish background, and non-Jews. However, the classification scheme was judged flawed by the designers themselves, and neither it nor its replacement have gained authority over the field. See Klaff and Mott (2005) and Kadushin, Phillips, and Saxe (2005).

the American Jewish political opinions about Israel and the Arab-Israel conflict, do we mean to include a person who had a Jewish parent but was raised as a Catholic and has never thought of him-or-herself as Jewish in any way? An extreme example? There are roughly 600,000–750,000 American adults of recent Jewish origin who define themselves as Christians and also say that they do not consider themselves Jewish in any way.

Two other methods for settling on a workable definition of "who is a Jew?" for a purpose such as the one before us suggest themselves. The first has been used widely in reports on Jewish surveys; the second has been used widely in studies of American ethnicity over the past two decades. I will describe each briefly, and argue tentatively that the second method produces more meaningful results with contemporary data.

The first method rests on the concept of a "core Jewish population." The core Jewish population excludes respondents to NJPS (or AJIS) who report belief in a religion other than Judaism. Remaining are Jews by religion and respondents who report no religion.[10] Since the great majority of those who report another religion report Christianity, the practical effect of this definition is to accept everyone of Jewish origin as a Jew unless they are Christians. In the entire NJPS sample, 65% and 12% of respondents reported themselves as Jewish by religion and having no religion, respectively (Table 2). Thus, the core Jewish population from the NJPS includes 77% of all Americans of recent Jewish origins. Thus, in the NJPS using the core definition we find that one Jew in six is not Jewish by religion (.12/[.12+.65]=.16). However, notice that in the AJIS that figure is much higher: one in four (57% and 18% of AJIS respondents reported as Jews by religion and having no religion, respectively; and .18/[.18+.57]=.24). In sum: using the core definition, one sixth to one quarter of Jews are not Jewish by religion in the 2000–01 surveys.

[10] Variants include people who report affiliation with *both* Judaism and another religion, or report affiliation with a religion other than Christianity (excepting Unitarianism) and Islam. These variants, however, are not known by the name "core Jewish population." For further discussion of these twists, see Perlmann (2006), and Klaff and Mott (2005). In any case, those affiliated with religions other than Christianity are a small group; in the NJPS, 19% of respondents reported as Christians and only 4% as members of another religion. In the AJIS, the proportions are even more lopsided: Christians 24% and members of another religion 1%.

In a word, defining Jews as those in the core Jewish population would lead us to conclude that the AJC surveys of Jewish political opinion exclude a sixth to a quarter of all Jews. We don't know how the excluded Jews feel about the issues, but it is a safe bet that those who say they have no religion will not have the same distribution of outlooks as those who say they are Jewish by religion. That it is indeed a safe bet can be seen by comparing respondents who report as Jews by religion and respondents who report having no religion in the NJPS and the AJIS. Both surveys, for example asked about issues such as feeling close to or distant from to Israel. Those with no religion are much more distant. And we know from the AJC surveys (of Jews by religion) that those who report feeling distant from Israel have, on average, different political views from those who feel close.

However, I suspect that the concept of the core Jewish population has outlived its usefulness. It was constructed on the basis of assumptions I already discussed: that the "no religion" respondents are secular Jews who identify with things Jewish or are at least living in a Jewish world (think: Yiddish-speaking communist); and/or they are likely in the future to identify more fully with things Jewish (think: when they move to suburbia and raise children). But today only a third of the "no religion" respondents reported two Jewish parents and there is no reason to believe that their religiocultural outlook and social trajectory are what they were half a century ago when a very different group of people were declaring that they had no religion.

Also, in the contemporary scene, the other assumption inherent in the core definition seems problematic: the exclusion of people of Jewish origin who report another religion, particularly Christianity. Once again, the social and cultural meaning of the report has been transformed by intermarriage patterns. The meaning many probably associate with the report is simply wrong—namely a conversion process. Conversion out has been the icon of Jewish betrayal for centuries. But the offspring of intermarriages did not convert, and in many cases their Jewish parent probably did not do so either. So when a respondent of recent Jewish origin reports being a Catholic, it may well be possible for Jewish attachments to remain as well. Recall that these Catholics typically have two

Jewish grandparents and perhaps Jewish first cousins as well; no excommunication has occurred and probably social and intellectual connections to things Jewish have not disappeared.

The second method for defining Jews is suggested by studies of American ethnicity, especially using American census data. Since 1980, the decennial census has included the ancestry question: "What is this person's ancestry?" The purpose of the question is to gauge ethnic attachments that still matter beyond the second generation. Respondents are expected to mention countries or regions that matter to them; in this sense they are self-identifying with, for example, Ireland or Italy. Very likely, most Americans do not mention *all* their ancestries, since widespread ethnic intermarriage across the generations ensures that there are often many. Individual choice in responses is therefore critical.

One difference between the census and the surveys of Americans with recent Jewish origin is that the latter ask explicitly about one particular origin, namely Jewish. However, here, too, there is a parallel in the recent censuses: the related Hispanic origin question amounts to an ancestry question that focuses the respondent's attention on one kind of ancestry. Each respondent replies yes or no to the question, "Is this person of Hispanic origin?" Responses will depend in part on how distant in time and attenuated the Hispanic origins actually are. Most Hispanic immigration is of recent years, and it stands to reason that few who have an Hispanic immigrant parent fail to declare themselves of Hispanic origin. On the other hand, there are also many people who have a Mexican-born ancestor much farther back in the family tree and some fraction of these people surely respond that they are not of Hispanic origin.[11]

The relevance of the ancestry and Hispanic origin questions to the American Jewish surveys is not in the details, for these vary. For example, in the latter probing about Jewish origins goes back only one generation—to those who

[11] Direction to respondents has varied and has always been imperfect, and the census question has many drawbacks (Perlmann and Waters 2002 and 2007; Lieberson and Waters 1988). For Jews, the census ancestry question works particularly poorly since naming a religion is not an accepted answer (those that nevertheless declare that their ancestry is Jewish are reclassified). Jews are expected to mention "Russian," "Polish," or other references to political entities. Since the ancestry question is supposed to gauge ethnic loyalties past the second generation, the need to provide these answers creates an ironic state of affairs for Jews, few of whom (for example) identify with the Tsarist Russia their ancestors left.

had a Jewish parent or upbringing. But the larger principle behind those census questions remains relevant: to define group membership by respondent self-identification. In the American Jewish surveys, the crucial additional data come from asking respondents who did not declare themselves Jewish by religion but did have a Jewish parent or upbringing, "Do you consider yourself Jewish for any reason?" The 2000–01 AJIS did not ask this question of all relevant respondents, but the NJPS did; future comparable surveys should be sure to include it.

Table 3. Respondents by Origins and Current Attachments, AJIS and NJPS, 2000–01

Origins	Current attachment	% of all respondents in		Respondents other than Jews by religion: Consider oneself Jewish for any reason?		
				NJPS only		
		AJIS	NJPS	yes	no; other	'yes' as % of all NJPS respondents (col. c* col. a)
		a	b	c	d	e
2 Jewish-born parents (single origin)	Jews by religion	84	88	na	na	na
	no religion	11	7	56	44	4
	other religion	0	1	64	36	1
	Christian	4	4	35	65	1
total		*100*	*100*			*6*
not single origin*	Jews by religion	26	26	na	na	na
	no religion	25	20	24	76	5
	other religion	1	9	19	81	2
	Christian	48	45	20	80	9
total		*100*	*100*			*16*
All respondents:	Jews by religion	57	65	na	na	na
	no religion	18	12	36	64	4
	other religion	1	4	25	75	1
	Christian	24	19	22	78	4
total		*100*	*100*			*10*

Note: Two definitions of Jews are discussed in the text. 1) The core Jewish population includes Jews by religion and other respondents who reported no religion. These respondents can be identified for each sample in the first two rows of each panel. 2) The self-identified Jewish population includes Jews by religion and all other respondents who reported that they considered themselves Jewish for any reason. These respondents can be identified only in the NJPS dataset. Column "e" shows the percentage of all NJPS respondents that will be added to Jews by religion using the second definition.

*On origin types, see Table 2 and text; "not single" includes "mixed" and "other."

And since only the NJPS includes the relevant follow-up question, we can only gauge the numeric impact of using the self-identity criterion from that survey (Table 3). We have already seen that of the few respondents of single-origin who report themselves to have no religion (7% of the NJPS sample members), about half (56%) consider themselves Jewish in some way. Of the 5% who reported another religion, two in five (41%) still considered themselves Jewish in some way. But the picture is distinctly different among those who did not report single origins. Of these respondents, 20% reported no religion, fully 45% said they were Christians, and 9% mentioned another religion. And among all these people, 74% of NJPS respondents who did not report single origins, only one in five reported themselves Jewish. Overall, across the entire NJPS sample, 65% are Jews by religion; of the rest, 27% consider themselves Jewish, amounting to 10% of all NJPS respondents. Thus, with the self-identification criterion, about one in eight were people who did not report themselves as Jewish by religion but did consider themselves Jewish in some way (.1/[.1+.65]=.13). This fraction can be compared to one in six using the core Jewish population definition discussed earlier.

Thus, at the moment, the self-identity definition produces a slightly smaller number of Jews than the core definition does. We find 77% of all NJPS respondents (65%+12%) in the core definition and 75% (65%+10%) in the self-identity definition (Table 3). Included in both definitions are 65% of NJPS respondents who are Jewish by religion and 4% who reported no religion but consider themselves Jewish in some way. In addition, the core Jewish population includes another 8% of NJPS respondents who reported no religion and do not consider themselves Jewish in any way. And finally, the self-identity definition includes another 6% of NJPS respondents who reported themselves Christians or (rarely) members of another religion, but nevertheless considered themselves Jewish in some way. As time goes on, and the fraction with mixed origins increases among respondents to such surveys, the two definitions will differ ever more, albeit changing at a slow rate.

Including those who report another religion among the Jews may offend many Jews, Jewish researchers among them. Yet, in an era of attenuated, porous,

and blurry boundaries, these "Jews of other religion" may be regarded as conceptually not unlike "Jews of no religion"; both are among the people who consider themselves Jewish "in some way, and both are heavily made up of the offspring of intermarriages."[12] If the researcher is going to disagree with the self-identification of hundreds of thousands, the disagreement had better be made clear to the reader. One way to make that disagreement explicit, for example, might be to suggest that these respondents are being pushed too hard when asked "Do you consider yourself Jewish?" Perhaps all they mean by an affirmative answer is that they have origins in the Jewish people, and, as such, are simply giving a tautological reply. Pending more work with such respondents, however, and in the context of the ancestry concept which does rest on self-identification alone, it would be rash to assume that the tautology exhausts their view of their Jewishness.

The self-identification criterion may annoy demographers because it may appear to include a more obvious element of subjectivity than the other definition. The experience with the ancestry question shows that the number of people (in the same birth cohort) who self-identify as members of a group fluctuates over time.[13] Moreover, we will have to consider modifying the self-identity principle in one minor way. Some of the respondents who reported that they consider themselves Jewish in some way were asked *why* they consider themselves Jewish. In a few cases, the answer has been related only to Christian theology, resting on the Jewish origins of Christianity. A common response of this type is "Jesus was a Jew." A purist definition of self-identification would include respondents who self-identify for *any* reason; however, my own view is that these respondents should be excluded if the information is available. After all, the purpose of the question "Do you consider yourself Jewish for any reason?" is to illicit self-identifications based on historical continuity with near-term family origins.

[12] On attenuated, porous, and blurry boundaries, see Alba (2006), Goldscheider (2004), and Perlmann (2006).
[13] Perlmann and Waters (2002 and 2007).

However, often the necessary information for exclusion will not be available; so it is fortunate that the number in question is likely to be very small.[14]

The knee-jerk response of ethnic and religious organizations is to clutch at the broadest definition of the group. Happily, at present, the two definitions produce very similar outcomes, and while the first definition culls 2% more of NJPS respondents (Table 3), the second definition may produce modestly more respondents as time goes on. For almost any question of majority attitudes or behavior, the two can hardly produce very different outcomes when they share 69% of NJPS respondents out of 77% included with the first and 75% with the second definition. On the other hand, such subtle differences as we will find are likely to show the group added by the second definition are more typical of outlooks held by other Jews because it includes only those who self-identify as Jews.

Because of the connection to intermarriage, there are important demographic differences between Jews by religion and other Jews (Table 4). Using the first definition, core Jewish population, we find many more of the younger respondents (24–39 years of age) among those who did not declare themselves Jewish by religion than among those who did: a difference of 16 percentage points in the AJIS (35–19) and of 17 percentage points in the NJPS (41–24). Using the second definition (self-identity), the differences are more muted. The information is available only in the NJPS, but there we find a 7 instead of a 17 percentage point gap (31–24 vs. 41–24). We may be picking up here a stronger tendency among the younger respondents to deny all connections with origins. In any case, there is no such dramatic difference in NJPS outcomes when we examine where the respondents lived. Using either the first or second definitions shows about the same degree of difference in regional location between Jews by religion and other Jews

[14] Recall the distinction raised in an earlier note between the "consider" question used as the fourth screener and the same question used in the body of the interview. My understanding is that routine procedure will exclude those who give an answer based on Christian theological thinking alone ("Jesus was a Jew," etc.) in the screener question. In any case, that is what routine procedure *should be*. If one percent of Christians give this response (and there is evidence in the NJPS that they do; Klaff and Mott 2005), such people (if not excluded) could amount to one-third of respondents in a national survey of Americans of recent Jewish origin. On the other hand, asked in the body of the interview, the question is addressed almost exclusively to those with a Jewish parent.

selected by these definitions. And the difference is appreciable: the proportion living in the five western regions is 13 to 23 percentage points higher than in the eastern regions.

Table 4. Differences between Jews Defined by Religion and by Other Criteria: AJIS and NJPS 2000–01

Demographic or cultural characteristics of respondents	Proportion of sample when Jews are defined in various ways								
	Jews by religion		Others in Jewish population using two definitions of Jews:			Total: all Jews using two definitions of Jews:		
			core Jewish population		self-identity as Jew	core Jewish population		self-identity as Jew
	AJIS	NJPS	AJIS	NJPS (1)	NJPS (2)	AJIS	NJPS (1)	NJPS (2)
All respondents								
in AJIS	76		24			100		
in NJPS (1)		84		16			100	
in NJPS (2)		87			13			100
Age ranges								
24-39	19	24	35	41	31	23	27	25
40-59	44	41	41	36	46	43	40	42
60 and older	37	35	24	24	23	34	33	34
total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Geographic distribution								
Middle Atlantic	40	37	18	25	20	35	35	35
New England, ENC, South	33	37	32	36	38	36	37	36
Pacific and other	27	26	39	42	29	29	18	18
total	100	100	89	103	87	100	90	89
Feeling close to or distant from Israel								
Very	27	33	10	8	20	23	29	31
somewhat	40	38	24	22	31	36	36	37
not very\somewhat distant	18	19	26	27	23	20	20	19
not\distant	15	10	40	43	26	21	15	12
total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Now consider the responses to the question about emotional attachment to Israel (Table 4). This question is especially interesting because the American Jewish Committee also asks it in every one of its surveys; and of the NJPS and AJIS questions it is the one that comes closest to being relevant to political opinions about the Middle East. Among Jews by religion, the proportions who report feeling distant from Israel is relatively low—although it does reach 29% in the NJPS and 33% in the AJIS. However, among

others included in the core definition, it reaches no less than 66% in the AJIS and 70% in the NJPS. Among those others who self-identify as Jews in some way (that is, using the second definition), the figure is 49%, still well above the 29% of NJPS respondents who were Jews by religion, but also well below the 70% of NJPS respondents who were not Jews by religion but were selected by the core definition. Notice also that the greater difference in every case involves those who say they are *very* distant rather than somewhat distant from Israel. But again, the increase is more muted using the second rather than the first definition. However, note, too, that the impact of these large changes on the *total* sample outcomes cannot be very great because Jews by religion comprise such a large fraction of all Jews. In the total sample, the increase in the proportion who feel distant from Israel rises by 8 percentage points in the AJIS, by 6 in the NJPS using the first definition, and by only 2 percentage points using the second definition (and, of course, when the entire sample is considered, the Jews by religion also dominate the demographic outcomes mentioned in the preceding paragraph).

* * *

How then should we summarize the implications of limiting a survey to Jews by religion instead of including "all Jews?" I have suggested two ways to define those Jews who did not self-identify in the religion question. At present, and for the near-term future, limiting a national sample to Jews by religion will not produce dramatically different results for the opinions of American Jews taken as a whole. That is because such a high proportion of all Jews are Jews by religion. This conclusion has nothing to do with Jews in particular; rather it is a matter of simple arithmetic. To appreciate the point we can return to the preceding example: feelings of closeness to or distance from Israel. In the NJPS, a mere 29% of Jews by religion reported that do not feel close to Israel while 70% of other Jews agreed (by the core definition). A vast difference, surely; yet, in the final analysis, having the data on all Jews only changes the proportion who feel distant by a relatively modest amount, from 29% to 36%. That is because only one Jew in six in the NJPS is not a Jew by religion (again using the core definition). And so the result is affected by the product of the difference in proportions feeling distant and the proportion of relevant sample members: .29*.84+.70*.16=.36.

Of course a rise of 7 percentage points on a base of 29% is appreciable in relative terms. And this observation points towards the second conclusion. To get beyond broad generalizations about *all* American Jews, we want to hear about subgroups, in this case, the subgroup who feels distant from Israel. The AJC not only reports the proportion feeling close or distant every year, it also reports all responses for a number of subgroups, including subgroups defined by their closeness to Israel. Yet the AJC is omitting 19% (.07/.36) of those who feel distant, and so its estimate for the proportion that feel distant should be raised, by 24% (.36/.29=.24). Moreover, many results will be affected by the distinctive features of the omitted group. Thus, they are much more likely than Jews by religion to report feeling *very* rather than *somewhat* distant from Israel. Also, the AJC routinely tabulates all responses by age. But the omitted group of Jews are notably more concentrated among the younger than among all Jews—comprising a quarter, rather than an eighth, of them. Thus, the impact of the omissions on results for young adults are going to be greater (and the impact on those over 60 smaller) than for the sample as a whole. All this, to repeat, is based on the core definition of the Jews; the results would be more muted, but in the same direction, using the second definition for Jews, based on self-identity. The introduction to the AJC 2006 report is typical of its explanation to readers:

> "The data reported here are from the 2006 annual survey of American Jewish opinion, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, detailing the views of American Jews about a broad range of subjects….
> The sample consists of 958 self-identifying Jewish respondents selected from the Synovate consumer mail panel. The respondents are demographically representative of the United States adult Jewish population on a variety of measures." (American Jewish Committee 2007).

I sympathize with the AJC in facing the dilemma of how to present the ambiguities of sampling Jews to a readership interested in the highlights of the responses. And this sympathy is particularly strong when the magnitudes of omitted groups have received so little attention in the past. Also, as I stressed at the outset, these are not problems to be laid at the door of the AJC alone. Nevertheless, to simply say that the sample rests on "self-identifying Jewish respondents" is too vague a summary of the process by which Jews by religion are

being used to proxy all American Jews. That summary is tantamount to a declaration that one in four to one in eight people reasonably defined as Jews have been excluded and that there is every reason to think those omitted differ in important ways from those included.

Future American Jewish surveys will have to struggle with these issues, and better definitions for an age of ambiguous identities may emerge. For the present, I have shown that respondents not Jewish by religion look more similar on one important measure (closeness to Israel) when we use the self-identity rather than the core Jewish population definition to select these other Jews. I suspect the same will be true on other measures as well. However, to my mind, the fact that the second definition produces respondents more similar on average to Jews by religion is *not* a reason to settle on that definition over the core Jewish population one. Rather, I have shown these outcomes partly for the sake of completeness and partly because the second definition is less familiar than the first, and it also produces slightly fewer Jews. So the fact that it produces more comparable responses to those given by Jews by religion may convince some researchers to consider it carefully when they might otherwise have been tempted to ignore it. It is heartening, in any case, to find that both definitions produce intelligible and similar results. My reason for tentatively urging the second definition over the first has to do with the changed social meaning of "no religion" in recent decades, and with the value, given still broader changes also due to intermarriage, of allowing respondents to define themselves.

REFERNCES

American Jewish Committee. 2007. “Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion.” New York: American Jewish Committee.

Alba, Richard. 2006. “On the Sociological Significance of the American Jewish Experience: Boundary Blurring, Assimilation, and Pluralism.” Unpublished paper.

Goldscheider, Calvin. 2004. *Studying the Jewish Future.* Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Kadushin, Charles, Benjamin T. Phillips, and Leonard Saxe. 2005. “National Jewish Population Survey, 2000–2001: A Guide for the Perplexed.” *Contemporary Jewry* 25: 1–32.

Klaff, Vivian, and Frank L. Mott. 2005. “NJPS 2000/01: A Vehicle for Exploring Social Structure and Social Dynamics in the Jewish Population. A Research Note.” *Contemporary Jewry* 25: 226–56.

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

Perlmann, Joel. 2000. “Demographic Outcomes of Ethnic Intermarriage in American History: Italian Americans through Four Generations.” Working Paper #312. Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Levy Economics Institute of Bard College.

————. 2006. “The American Jewish Periphery: An Overview.” Working Paper #473. Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Levy Economics Institute of Bard College.

————. 2007. “Two National Surveys of American Jews, 2000–01: A Comparison of the NJPS and AJIS.” Working Paper #501. Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Levy Economics Institute of Bard College.

Perlmann, Joel, and Mary C. Waters. 2002. “Introduction.” in Joel Perlmann and Mary C. Waters (eds.) *The New Race Question: How the Census Counts Multiracial Individuals.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation Press and the Levy Economics Institute.

————. 2007. “Assimilation and Intermarriage.” in Reed Ueda and Mary C. Waters, (eds.) *The New Americans.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Phillips, Benjamin, Eszter Lengyel, and Leonard Saxe. 2002. “American Attitudes Toward Israel.” Prepared for The Office Of The President, Brandeis University; Cohen Center For Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, November 22. Accessed on May 25, 2007 at http://www.cmjs.org/files/IsraelAttitudes.pdf