

Jewish Identity in a Deep Southern City

WILLIAM L. SMITH & PIDI ZHANG

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ABSTRACT A recent national Pew Research Center (PRC) study noted the changing nature of Jewish identity. Research indicates that ethnicity and religion have less influence in determining Jewish identity than in previous decades. For some, Jewish identity is constructed/chosen not necessarily inherited. The present study used survey data gathered from Jewish members and friends affiliated with a local Jewish community center to understand the nature of their Jewish identity. Our sample is substantially older, much more likely to belong to the Conservative and Reform denominations, and much less likely not to be affiliated with a denomination than the PRC sample. Our sample is less likely to report being Jewish as mainly a matter of ancestry or culture/ethnicity, but much more likely to report it as a matter of religion, ancestry, and culture/ethnicity. Ancestry combined with religion or culture/ethnicity plays an increasingly important role in defining Jewish identity as age increases. A very small number of Jews in our study consider their Jewishness as chosen. Overwhelmingly, most consider it inherited or inherited and chosen. The issues of symbolic religiosity and symbolic ethnicity are addressed.

AUTHORS WILLIAM L. SMITH & PIDI ZHANG Georgia Southern University

INTRODUCTION

A current profile/portrait of Jewish America can be found in a Pew Research Center study (the most recent national survey of American Jews since the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey). Lugo et al. (2013) found that the data revealed, "Jewish identity is changing in America" (p. 7). Sixty percent of U.S. Jews identified, "being Jewish is mainly a matter of culture or ancestry, compared with 15% who say it is mainly a matter of religion" (Lugo et al., 2013, p. 47). Twenty-three percent of U.S. Jews, "Say being Jewish is a matter of religion as well as ancestry/or culture" (Lugo et al., 2013, p. 54).

The present study is important because the sociological literature has focused on Jews in the Northeast and on the West Coast neglecting Jews, regardless of place of birth, who reside in the South (Cutler, 2006; Lavender, 1977b). It is also important because it will contribute to the discourse about Jewish identity. We will create a profile/portrait of the Jewish members and friends of Savannah, Georgia's Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA) and compare and contrast this profile/portrait with the one presented in the most recent Pew Research Center study of Jewish Americans. Our key research question for this paper is: How do Jewish members and friends of the JEA in Savannah, Georgia determine their Jewish identity?

The subject of Jewish identity in the United States has intrigued scholars for many decades (Elazar, 1999; Goldstein, 2006; Sklare, 1971) and there is a prodigious body of scholarship addressing this topic (Alper and Olson, 2013; Brodtkin, 1998; Cohen, 1998; Cohen and Eisen, 2000; Cutler, 2006; Dashefsky, Lazerwitz, and Tabory, 2003; Davidman, 2007; Diner, 2004; Evans, 1993, 2005; Gitelman, 2009; Goldscheider, 2009, 2010; Hartman and Kaufman, 2006; Hartman and Sheskin 2012; Kelman, Belzer, Hassenfeld, Horwitz, and Williams 2016; Klaff, 2006; Kotler-Berkowitz, 2015; Lavender, 1977c; Lipson-Walker,

1989; Lugo, Cooperman, Smith, O'Connell, and Stencel, 2013; Magid, 2013; Rebhun, 2004a, 2016; Sheskin and Hartman, 2015; Silberstein, 2000; Thompson, 2014). The interest in Jewish identity is generated partly by its fluid or changing nature, thus making it more difficult to characterize American Jewry and its future (Cohen and Eisen, 2000).

There is also much debate among scholars about the meaning of Jewish identity and how it is constructed. Alper and Olson (2013) and Magid (2013) have summarized these debates concluding that for growing numbers of Jewish Americans, ethnicity and religion no longer serve a major role in determining their Jewish identity. Magid (2013) argues that much of the debate/interest in Jewish identity is because "postethnic America has challenged Jews to consider whether Jewishness can exist beyond Judaism" (p. 5).

Identities are "tied to social structure" and forged through social interaction with others (Vryan, Alder, and Alder, 2003, p. 379). Sociologists use social constructionist and narrative frameworks to study identity and contemporary identities are viewed as malleable and contingent (Greil and Davidman, 2007). Identity theory is useful for explaining the connections or linkages between society, self, and social behavior (Stryker and Serpe 1982). Stryker and Burke (2000) noted "the relation of social structures to identities influence the process of self-verification, while the process of self-verification creates and sustains social structures" (p. 284). For example, Gans (1956a, 1956b) suggested that shortly prior to World War II, as an outcome of assimilation, traditional Judaism started to evolve or transition into a symbolic Judaism for growing numbers of American-born Jews. Symbolic Judaism facilitated the process whereby Jews could choose to "feel and express their Jewishness" in a nostalgic, less pervasive way, while still maintaining some semblance of Jewish identity (Gans, 1956a, p. 427).

Gans (1979, 1994) later argued that ethnicity and religiosity (the quality of being religious) became mostly symbolic identities for white Americans of European ancestry who have the ability to choose whether or not to identify with a specific ethnic/religious group. Alba (1990) interviewed a wide range of European Americans in upstate New York and Waters (1990, 1998) interviewed white Catholic European Americans from California and Pennsylvania. Their studies supported Gans's symbolic ethnicity thesis, while Kivisto and Nefzger's (1993) study of a midwestern Jewish community did not support Gans's symbolic ethnicity thesis. Winter's (1996) study based on data gathered from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey did not support either Gans's symbolic ethnicity thesis or his symbolic religiosity thesis. Rebhun's (2004b) study used data from the 1970-71 and the 1990 National Jewish Population Surveys and mostly supported Gans's symbolic ethnicity and symbolic religiosity theses. In their study of Jewish Americans, Cohen and Eisen (2000) noted, "They showed signs of far less ethnic commitment than was common a decade or two ago" (p. 10). Additionally, Cohen and Eisen (2000) stated, "We are not sure that Gans's concept of merely "symbolic religiosity" adequately characterizes the practice of those we interviewed and surveyed" (p. 198).

Symbolic Judaism, symbolic ethnicity, and symbolic religiosity are essentially forms of compensatory identity (Gans, 2007). According to Gans (2007), "Acquiring a compensatory identity is not difficult; it is also entirely compatible with an assimilated way of life. All it really required is experiencing that identity—feeling Russian, Mexican, or Korean, or for that matter Asian American" (p. 106). For example, feeling Jewish and identifying with key symbols becomes more important than physical and social ties or connections to established ethnic and religious social structures where one maintains ethnic/cultural/religious practices and behaviors. The symbols therefore compensate individuals for distancing themselves from ethnic and religious social structures. What Gans described is an example of the malleable and contingent nature of identities (Greil and Davidman, 2007). In recent years Gans (2007, 2009) laments the shift in focus among researchers from that of studying ethnic social structure and culture and how they are impacted by assimilation to the more psychological concept of identity or ethnic identity. Nevertheless, Gans (2007) concluded that if he had conducted his research on white ethnics later in his career he might have substituted the concept symbolic identity for symbolic ethnicity.

Cohen and Eisen's (2000) findings revealed what Hollinger (1995) referred to as a postethnic perspective. Jewish identity has diminished as ethnic boundaries have waned. For example, Cohen (1998) found no differences between younger and older Jews in their level of religious commitment or identity, but younger Jews were "considerably less ethnically defined than their elders" (p. 3). The following point is informative. Since the theme of this paper is about Jewish identity in the South, Lipson-Walker (1989) concluded that Southern Jews differed from Northern Jews in that "Southern Jews have acted out their Jewishness in a religious way rather than an ethnic or cultural way" (p. 13). This pattern fits two trends among American Jews, more attention is being placed on religiosity and less on

ethnicity (Dashefsky, Lazerwitz, and Tabory, 2003).

Goldscheider (2010) noted, "In the twenty-first century the boundaries that make Jewish identity distinctive and mark Jewish communities off from others are porous. Since they are not fixed or rigid, individuals move in and out of the Jewish community" (p. 110). Similarly, Magid (2013) concluded that Jewish identity in the United States is now more likely to be constructed instead of inherited (passed on by ancestors/family). For example, Davidman (2007) found, "My respondents (unsynagogued Jews) show us that lived culture is not a logical syllogism. It may not be rational for people to claim that certain characteristics are innate at the same time that they are consciously choosing how to define them...My respondents are capable of moving easily between the discourses of ascription and achievement" (p. 65).

Cohen and Eisen (2000) acknowledged that contemporary Jews understand their Jewish identity to be inalienable (similar to Davidman's findings) no matter "what they choose to do and not do Jewishly" (p. 185). Whitfield (1999) and Dawidowicz (1977) concluded that Jewish identity in the United States is influenced by a myriad of choices not by fate. Identities are socially constructed and "are learned rather than given, contingent rather than secure, historically positioned rather than inherent" (Whitfield 1999, p. 10). Kelman et al. (2016) determined that for the post-boomers they studied, their Jewish identity was constructed relationally. Nevertheless, many Jews struggle with the meaning of Jewishness. Thompson (2014) found that among the intermarried couples she studied they had difficulty explaining, "why they had committed themselves to religious practices about which they were ambivalent" (p. 174).

The discourse on Jewish identity has expanded to include not only essential or inherent conceptions of Jewish identity such as "predetermined attitudes, beliefs, and behavior patterns" (Silberstein 2000, p. 1) but also non-essentialist concepts of Jewish identity that reflect "becoming rather than being" (Silberstein 2000, p. 12). Jewish identity is characterized by the elements of "definitional instability" and "liminality" (Itzkovitz 1997, p. 185). Kotler-Berkowitz (2015) argued that the discourse on Jewish identity lacks a "well-defined conceptual framework" and proposed a structural model based on three key concepts: cohesion, assimilation, and division (p. 1). Kotler-Berkowitz (2015) used this model to interpret data from a recent Pew Research Center study of Jewish Americans and concluded, "American Jews will always find themselves somewhere between maximal cohesion and maximal assimilation on one continuum, and between maximal cohesion and maximal division on another" (p. 13). Jewish identity in the future will rely even less on religion, while intermarriage and lack of denominational membership will contribute to more assimilation and less cohesion (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2015).

SAVANNAH'S JEWISH COMMUNITY

Savannah, situated in the southeast corner of Georgia along the coast bordering South Carolina to its north, is the county seat of Chatham County. Savannah is considered a mid-size city and it is the largest city in the county with a population

of 144,352 (U.S. Census Quick Facts, 2016a). Chatham County is the fifth-most populous county in the state. Of the county's population of 283,379 (U.S. Census Quick Facts, 2016b), approximately 3,000 individuals are affiliated with one or more of three Savannah synagogues: Congregation Bnai Brith Jacob, Orthodox, founded in 1860; Congregation Agudath Achim, Conservative, founded in 1902; and Congregation Mickve Israel, Reform, founded in 1735 and is the third oldest Jewish congregation in the United States (City-Data.Com, 2014). The Berman Jewish DataBank (2015) estimated Savannah's Jewish population at 1,000-4,999.

The first Jewish community in the South was established in Savannah in 1733, although there were a small number of Jews living in Charleston, South Carolina from as early as 1695 (Dinnerstein and Palsson, 1973; Lavender, 1977a). Frey and Kole (2002) stated, "Along with the synagogues, the largest influence on the Jewish community has been the Jewish Educational Alliance, also known as the J.E.A. or the Alliance" (p. 7).

METHOD

A forty-eight question web-based survey (Survey Monkey) was sent out on October 18, 2015 as an e-mail attachment to 1,632 Jewish members and friends of the Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA) of Savannah, Georgia. Jewish friends of the JEA are not officially registered as dues paying members but frequently use the facilities (swimming pool, etc.) and partake in the various programs offered at the JEA. These members and friends had previously identified themselves as Jewish and were on an e-mail list compiled by the JEA. According to the executive director of the JEA this e-mail list or sampling frame contained virtually every address of adult Jews in Savannah. The JEA is also known as Savannah's Jewish Community Center and its focus is primarily cultural rather than religious. One of the advantages of studying the Jewish members and friends of the JEA is that this group consisted of a mix of religious Jews and cultural/secular Jews. If we had only studied members of the three synagogues in Savannah we would not have had access to those whose Jewish identity is cultural/secular. One of the goals of the JEA is to provide programming and services that contribute to enhancing Jewish community life and strengthening relationships with the broader Savannah community.

Respondents had to be at least 18-years-old to participate in the study. Six hundred and twelve recipients opened the e-mail sent by the director of the JEA and 187 opened the link to the survey. On October 25, 2015 a follow-up survey and reminder letter was sent to the same 1,632 members and friends. Five hundred and eighty-one of the recipients opened the e-mail and 148 opened the link to the survey. A total of 335 surveys were completed online. Fourteen paper copies of the survey were completed by individuals who did not have access to a computer or who preferred to complete a hard copy of the survey. Data from these 14 surveys were entered on the online survey. Three hundred and forty-nine members and friends of the JEA completed the survey for a response rate of 29%. We believe this is a more accurate way to report the response rate since only 1,193 of the 1,632 e-mail recipients opened their e-mails and were aware of the link to the survey. The response

rate is 21% if it is calculated using the number of e-mail messages originally sent (1,632) instead of the 1,193 that were opened.

We cannot say with any degree of certainty that this sample is representative of Jews in the South, or the United States. Nevertheless, these respondents are representative of Jews in Savannah and have provided us with very valuable data about themselves and their beliefs and practices. Savannah is a good case study to contribute to the existing scholarly literature on Jewish communities since it has not been studied, even though it was the first Jewish community established in the South. One important source is *How Jewish Communities Differ: Variations in the Findings of Local Jewish Population Studies* (Sheskin, 2001). This resource discussed Jewish community studies done from 1982-1999 and has been updated online in 2012/2013 in the *Comparisons of Jewish Communities: A Compendium of Tables and Bar Charts* (Sheskin, 2013). The report did not mention the Savannah Jewish community.

MEASURES

Respondents were asked a variety of demographic questions, questions that assessed their identity (ethnic, religious, and regional) as well as their Jewish identity, and a series of questions designed to determine their levels of religiousness and spirituality. Some of the questions were previously used on the Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews (Lugo et al., 2013). The questions on religiousness and spirituality were developed by Rohrbaugh and Jessor (1975) and Niederman (1999).

The results from the following and other (not included due to space limitations) questions will be discussed in the remaining sections of this paper: (1) What is your present religion, if any? Are you: Jewish (Judaism); Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, et al.); Roman Catholic (Catholic); Atheist (do not believe in God) or none; Agnostic (not sure if there is a God); Other (Please specify: __), (2) IF NOT JEWISH IN RELIGION: ASIDE from religion, do you consider yourself Jewish or partially Jewish, or not? Yes; Yes, partially Jewish (includes "half Jewish"); No, do not.; NA. I am Jewish in Religion, (3) To you personally, is being Jewish any of the following? Check all that apply. Mainly a matter of religion; Mainly a matter of ancestry; Mainly a matter of culture/ethnicity; NA. I am not Jewish; Something else (Please specify: __), (4) Is your Jewish identity primarily ____? inherited; chosen; a mix of inherited and chosen; I no longer consider myself Jewish; I have never been Jewish, (5) How important is being Jewish in your life? Very important; Somewhat important; Not too important; Not at all important; NA. I am not Jewish, (6) How important is religion in your life? Very important; Somewhat important; Not too important; Not at all important; NA. I am not religious, (7) Thinking about Jewish religious denominations, do you consider yourself to be primarily ____? Conservative; Orthodox; Reform; No particular denomination; NA. I am not Jewish; NA. I am not religious; Something else (Please specify: __), (8) How important is your ethnicity (cultural background) to your identity? Not at all important; Somewhat important; Important; Very important, (9) How important is your religion to your identity? Not at all important; Somewhat important; Important; Very

important; NA. I am not religious.

SAMPLE

Most of the respondents were Jewish (91.0%), married (72.2%), and white (98.4%). Only those who identified themselves as Jews were included in the statistical analyses. There were more females (51.0%) than males (49.0%). The average age was 62.2. The age range was 73, from 18 to 91. Forty-two percent identified with Reform Judaism, 33.7% with Conservative Judaism, and 12.5% with Orthodox Judaism. Thirty-one percent had earned a bachelor's degree, 9.9% had attained some graduate/professional education, and 48.7% had earned a graduate/professional degree. Eighty percent were or had been engaged in art, science, engineering, finance, law, medicine, social work, or management. About 14% were or had been in sales, 2.3% in service occupations such as administrative assistants, 1.4% in blue-collar occupations such as machine operators, and another 1% in other occupations. Forty-seven percent were retired. Sixty-two percent had family incomes of \$100,000 or more annually. Jews in Savannah from our sample include those who were born in the South or other states but who currently reside in Savannah. Thirty-seven percent were born in Georgia, 6.5% in another southern state, 37.7% in New England, and 19.0% in a non-southern state other than in New England. Thirty-three percent had lived in the Savannah/Hilton Head area for more than 20 years, while 20.6% had lived in the area all of their lives. Only 1.7% (four) considered themselves a Southerner first and Jewish second, while 43.2% identified themselves as Jewish first and a Southerner second. Not surprisingly since the Savannah/Hilton Head area is home to many retirees/transplants, 40.7% indicated that they were Jewish but not a Southerner.

VARIABLES AND ANALYSIS

Two identity measures were used as dependent variables: Jewishness as religion, ancestry or culture/ethnicity, and Jewishness as inherited or chosen. The first identity variable was adapted from the 2013 Pew study in part for comparison purposes. The two variables were recoded into two sets of dummy variables. The first set included a total of seven dependent dummy variables, they were recoded from three questions that respectively collected information about being Jewish as a matter of religion, ancestry, or culture/ethnicity, or a combination of all three or any of two of the three. Information from the three questions were first recoded into a single variable that contained the seven categories, which were then recoded into the present seven dummy variables. The second set of dependent dummy variables was recoded from the single question about Jewishness as inherited, chosen, or both. Binary logistic regression was used to examine associations of the two sets of dummy variables with three groups of independent variables: denomination dummy variables included Conservative, Orthodox, Reform, no particular denomination, and other. Various measures for meanings of being Jewish were also adapted from the 2013 Pew study in the form of a Likert scale for remembering the Holocaust, leading an ethical and moral life, observing Jewish law, having a good sense of humor, working for justice and equality in society, being intellectually curious, eating traditional Jewish foods, caring about Israel, and

being part of a Jewish community. The demographic variables included age, gender, state of birth, years living in the South, years of education, and Jewishness of spouse. Jewishness of spouse was recoded into dummy variables: Jewish spouse, partially-Jewish spouse, non-Jewish spouse, and no spouse. It should be noted that although the variables are labeled as dependent or independent, the regression analysis results should be interpreted with care as they may or may not reflect strictly causal relationships.

A third set of dependent variables was created to assess the extent of symbolic religiosity and symbolic ethnicity displayed by the sample. The reported importance of religion to one's identity was used as a baseline. The difference of the practice of prayer or religious meditation from the baseline was used as a proxy for symbolic religiosity regarding prayer and meditation, and the difference of attending religious services from the baseline was used as a proxy for symbolic religiosity regarding religious services. By the same token, the reported importance of ethnicity to one's identity was used as a baseline. The differences of eating traditional Jewish foods and leading an ethical and moral life from the baseline were used respectively as proxies for symbolic ethnicity regarding foods and symbolic ethnicity regarding ethics and morality. It should be acknowledged that the variables used to create the proxy measures were originally designed to investigate the importance of ethnicity or religion in the respondents' identity, to measure religiosity regarding prayer and meditation and participation in religious services, or to assess the meanings of being Jewish regarding eating traditional Jewish foods and leading an ethical and moral life. Although they were all ordinal measures, the number of categories were not identical. To minimize the measurement discrepancies, the standardized z-scores of the four proxies were used as dependent variables in OLS regressions with the same independent variables for the first two sets of dependent variables, excluding the variables that reflect meanings of being Jewish. These variables were excluded because two of them were used to create proxy measures for symbolic religiosity and symbolic ethnicity. Jewishness as inherited, chosen, or both were added to the list of the independent control variables.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides a description of variables. In contrast to the 2013 Pew study where large percentages of the national sample report being Jewish mainly as a matter of ancestry (27.5%), culture (24.5%) and religion (16.2%), our sample shows a strong tendency toward combined selections. Only 18.8% of the Pew sample report being Jewish as a matter of all three indicators. In comparison, nearly 50% of our sample report being Jewish as a matter of all three indicators. Only 6.2% of our sample report being Jewish as mainly a matter of ancestry, another 6.2% report as mainly a matter of culture/ethnicity, 13.1% as mainly a matter of religion. Our sample also shows slightly higher percentages of respondents reporting being Jewish as a combination of two of the three. In contrast to Magid's (2013) conclusion that Jewish identity in the United States is now more likely to be constructed instead of inherited, Those with Jewish spouses are less likely than those with

partially-Jewish spouses ($p < 0.01$, Column 3 of Table 3) and those with non-Jewish spouses ($p < 0.10$, Column 3 of Table 3) to report being Jewish as a matter of both ancestry and culture/ethnicity. JEA members are more likely to report being Jewish as a matter of culture/ethnicity ($p < 0.10$, Column 3 of Table 2).

Table 4 provides results of logistic regressions for the second set of dependent variables: Jewishness as inherited, chosen, and both. Conservatives are less likely to report their Jewishness as a choice than Reform Jews ($p < 0.05$, Column 2 of Table 4) and Jews of denominations other than Orthodox and Reform ($p < 0.10$, Column 2 of Table 4). The difference between Conservative Jews and Jews with no particular denominational affiliation ($n = 15$) is not statistically significant probably because of the small sample size. It is not surprising that Conservative Jews are more likely to report their Jewishness as inherited than Reform Jews ($p < 0.05$, Column 1 of Table 4). Our data analysis only shows differences between Conservative Jews compared with others about whether their Jewishness is inherited or chosen. There is no significant difference among other denominations.

Those who regard observing Jewish law as essential for being Jewish are more likely to report their Jewishness as chosen ($p < 0.01$, Column 2 of Table 4), but less likely to report it as inherited ($p < 0.05$, Column 1 of Table 4). Those who consider eating traditional Jewish foods as essential for being Jewish are more likely to report their Jewishness as inherited ($p < 0.01$, Column 1 of Table 4) but less likely to report their Jewishness as inherited and chosen ($p < 0.01$, Column 3 of Table 4).

Age also has a strong relationship with the dependent variables. Older Jews are more likely to report their Jewishness as inherited ($p < 0.05$, Column 1 of Table 4), but less likely to report it as inherited and chosen ($p < 0.10$, Column 3 of Table 4). A regression analysis with different controls for state of birth (born in the South versus other) shows a significant negative relationship between age and chosen (not reported in table). The positive relationship between age and inherited confirms the finding in Table 3 about the central role of ancestry combined with religion or culture/ethnicity in defining Jewish identity. Jews born in New England are more likely to report their identity as chosen than those born in Georgia ($p < 0.05$, Column 2 of Table 4) and those born in other non-Southern states ($p < 0.05$, Column 2 of Table 4), but less likely than the two groups to report their Jewish identity as inherited ($p < 0.05$, Column 1 of Table 4).

Table 5 provides the result of OLS regression analysis with the four created proxies for symbolic religiosity and symbolic ethnicity. Positive regression coefficients indicate higher symbolic religiosity or symbolic ethnicity. Having no spouse is the only variable that reaches statistical significance in the model of symbolic religiosity regarding prayer and meditation. Jews without a spouse display higher symbolic religiosity regarding prayer and meditation ($p < 0.05$, Column 1 of Table 5). The model of symbolic religiosity regarding attending religious services shows the largest number of statistically significant variables (see Column 2 of Table 5). The variables that make the greatest difference

include Jewishness as inherited or chosen, gender, and having a non-Jewish spouse. Jews who report their Jewishness as chosen are far less likely to display symbolic religiosity regarding attending religious services than those who report their Jewishness as inherited or inherited and chosen ($p < 0.01$). In other words, Jews who report their Jewish identity as chosen display the smallest gap between their behaviors regarding religious services and their perceived importance of religion in their life. Females are far more likely than males to display a symbolic religiosity regarding religious services ($p < 0.01$). In other words, males are far more likely than females to attend religious services relative to their perceived importance of religion. Jews with non-Jewish spouses display a larger gap between their behaviors regarding religious services and their perceived importance of religion in their life ($p < 0.01$). Orthodox Jews display a lower level of symbolic religiosity regarding religious services than Conservative Jews ($p < 0.10$). It is interesting that Jews born in other Southern states display a lower level of symbolic religiosity regarding religious services ($p < 0.10$). The more years living in the South, the more likely to display a lower level of symbolic religiosity regarding religious services ($p < 0.10$). JEA members display a higher level of symbolic religiosity than non-members ($p < 0.05$) and the higher the household income, the higher the symbolic religiosity regarding religious services ($p < 0.05$).

The models of symbolic ethnicity regarding foods and regarding ethics and morality include more significant variables than the model of symbolic religiosity regarding prayer and meditation, but fewer significant variables than the model of symbolic religiosity regarding religious services. Jews who report their Jewishness as chosen display a lower level of symbolic ethnicity regarding foods than Jews who report their Jewishness as inherited and chosen ($p < 0.05$, Column 3 of Table 5). Years living in the South ($p < 0.05$, Column 3 of Table 5) and JEA membership are positively related to symbolic ethnicity regarding foods. Reform Jews display the lowest level of symbolic ethnicity regarding ethics and morality among the denominations, but the only statistically significant difference is in comparison with Orthodox Jews ($p < 0.05$). Again, Jews who report their Jewishness as chosen display a lower level of symbolic ethnicity regarding ethics and morality than those who report their Jewishness as inherited and chosen ($p < 0.01$). Jews born in New England display a higher level of symbolic ethnicity regarding ethics and morality than those born elsewhere, but it is interesting that the only significant difference is in comparison with Jews born in other non-Southern states ($p < 0.10$).

The fact that 41.8% of our sample report religion to be very important, 30.8% report important, and 23.1% report somewhat important to their identity, and that 9.0% attend Jewish religious services more than once a week, 12.3% once a week, and 19.7% two or three times a month (not reported in table), suggests a large gap between attending religious services and the perceived importance of religion to their identity. However, 38.4% of our sample report prayer or religious meditation as a regular part of their life, 20.5% report prayer or religious meditation in times of stress and need, and another 25.3% report prayer or religious meditation in formal ceremonies (not reported in table). There seems to be a smaller gap between prayer and meditation compared with the perceived impor-

tance of religion.

Thirty-seven percent report culture/ethnicity as very important in their Jewish identity. Another 36.2% and 21.7% respectively report culture/ethnicity as important and somewhat important (not reported in table). Only 5.1% report it as not at all important. In comparison, 24.6% report eating traditional Jewish foods as essential to being Jewish, 53.3% report it as important but not essential, and 22.1% report it as not important (not reported in table). There seems to be a difference between eating traditional Jewish foods and the perceived importance of culture/ethnicity in Jewish identity, but the difference does not seem to be as dramatic as the difference between attending religious services and the perceived importance of religion in Jewish identity.

DISCUSSION

Several of our findings may offer some support to those found in the scholarly literature. For example, Alper and Olson (2013) and Magid (2013) concluded that for growing numbers of Jewish Americans, ethnicity and religion play less of a role in determining their Jewish identity. We found that alone, religion and particularly ancestry and culture/ethnicity are less of a factor in determining Jewish identity than religion, ancestry and culture/ethnicity combined. On the one hand, our findings about the positive relationship of age with religion and ancestry and with ancestry and culture/ethnicity as well as the negative relationship of age with religion and culture/ethnicity should be interpreted as it was in the previous section. On the other hand, it can also be interpreted as, the younger the Jews in Savannah are, the less likely ancestry, not by itself, but combined with religion or culture/ethnicity, plays a dominant role in defining their Jewish identity, and the more likely religion and culture/ethnicity play a role in defining their Jewish identity. In this sense, our findings contradict Alper and Olson (2013) and Magid (2013).

Lipson-Walker (1989) concluded that Jewishness for Southern Jews was primarily influenced by religion rather than culture/ethnicity. Besides the importance of the combined three (religion, ancestry, and culture/ethnicity) indicators, which determined close to 50% of Jewish identity, we found that the combination of ancestry and culture/ethnicity (13%) accounted for as much of their identity as religion (13%). If denominational affiliation reflects level of commitment to religion, and if Savannah Jews are more certain regarding their denominational affiliation in contrast to the Pew sample, then our sample supports Lipson-Walker's (1989) claim.

Our finding about reported causes for Jewish identity differs from Magid's (2013) claim that Jewish identity in the United States is more likely to be constructed instead of inherited. The low percentage of our sample who report their Jewishness as chosen (8%) indicates that it is rare for people to choose to be Jewish in Savannah area. Most of our sample report their Jewishness as inherited (53.8%) or inherited and chosen (38%) which demonstrates the important role that inheritance plays in one's Jewish identity. This may be in part accounted for by

age, which increases the odds of selecting inherited (Column 1, Table 4) and decreases the odds of selecting chosen (Column 2, Table 4), and in selecting inherited and chosen (Column 3, Table 4). Thus, inheritance may be more applicable to older Jews; whereas, choice may be more applicable to younger Jews. In other words, the younger the respondents are in our sample the more likely they are to select chosen. Therefore, our findings do not contradict Magid (2013) but provide an illustration of how age or cohort plays a role in the perception of Jewish identity.

Relating to Gans's (1979, 1994) concepts of symbolic ethnicity and symbolic religiosity, our analysis suggests a smaller difference between the perceived importance of culture/ethnicity and its practice than the difference between perceived importance of religion and its practice. Symbolic religiosity is particularly conspicuous regarding the attendance of religious services.

The differences and similarities between the findings in our study and the others previously mentioned matter and are worthy of discussion because they offer insight into the flexible, changing, and malleable nature of Jewish identity. The present study has brought to light how a certain segment of the Jewish population in a certain city determine their Jewish identity and how that identity's composition is different and similar to Jews in a national sample. These findings are important because, as Kotler-Berkowitz (2015) noted, the influence of ethnic and religious social structures may continue to play a diminishing role in the future on Jewish identity.

CONCLUSION

This paper provides a description of Jewish identity in a Deep Southern city and attempts to compare and contrast certain findings with the Pew study. By doing so, this paper has added to the growing discourse on the changing nature of Jewish identity. The major research question was: How do Jewish members and friends of the Jewish Educational Alliance (JEA) in Savannah, Georgia determine their Jewish identity? They are less likely to report being Jewish as mainly a matter of ancestry or culture/ethnicity, but much more likely to report it as a matter of religion, ancestry, and culture/ethnicity. Older Jews in Savannah are more likely to consider ancestry, not by itself, but combined with religion or culture/ethnicity, as playing a dominant role in defining their Jewish identity, and are less likely to consider religion and culture/ethnicity as playing a role in defining their Jewish identity. A very small number of Jews in our study consider their Jewishness as chosen. Overwhelmingly, most consider it inherited or inherited and chosen. Older Jews are more likely to perceive Jewishness as inherited and less likely to perceive it as chosen or inherited and chosen. Our sample is substantially older, much more likely to belong to the Conservative and Reform denominations, and much less likely to not be affiliated with a denomination than the Pew sample.

Gans's work described an example of the malleable and contingent nature of Jewish identity (Greil and Davidman, 2007). Our sample somewhat reflects this phenomenon. They state overwhelmingly that religion is important to them but the

majority do not attend weekly religious services regularly. They also report that ethnicity is important to them and the majority are supportive of ethnic indicators such as eating traditional Jewish food and caring about Israel. Thus our findings suggest that there is a much larger gap between the importance of religion and its practice and a much smaller gap between the importance of ethnicity and its practice.

In order to strengthen our understanding of Jewish life in the American South, further research on a variety of topics related to Jewry, including what determines Jewish identity, may need to be conducted in other locations in the Upper and Deep South. For example, the Charlotte and Atlanta metropolitan areas have experienced substantial population growth in the last two decades and as a result have become more ethnically and religiously diverse and cosmopolitan. Both of these cities are often referred to as part of the New South; whereas, Savannah is still viewed by many as part of the Old South. These two metropolitan areas contain numerous and larger Jewish enclaves/communities than Savannah and thus could provide a potentially different mix of community and individual-level characteristics that determine Jewish identity.

Table 1. Variable Description

Variable	Frequency	%	Mean	std. dev.
<i>Jewish as ... By Single and Multiple Choices</i>				
Religion	38	13.1		
Ancestry	18	6.2		
Culture/Ethnicity	18	6.2		
Religion and Ancestry	11	3.8		
Religion and Culture/Ethnicity	23	8.0		
Ancestry and Culture/Ethnicity	38	13.1		
All three	143	49.5		
Total	289	100		
<i>Inherited, Chosen, or Both</i>				
Inherited	159	55.2		
Chosen	22	7.6		
Inherited and Chosen	107	37.2		
Total	288	100		
Conservative	97	33.7		
Orthodox	36	12.5		
Reform	120	41.7		
No particular denomination	14	4.9		
Other	21	7.3		
Remembering the Holocaust			2.86	0.36
Leading an ethical/moral life			2.90	0.33
Observing Jewish law			1.95	0.67
Having a good sense of humor			2.44	0.71
Working for justice and equality			2.66	0.54
Being intellectually curious			2.68	0.55
Eating traditional Jewish foods			2.02	0.69
Caring about Israel			2.69	0.56
Being part of a Jewish community			2.68	0.55
Born in Georgia	91	36.8		
Born in Another Southern State	16	6.5		
Born in New England	93	37.7		
Born in Another Non-Southern State	47	19.0		
Years living in the South			26.4	19.8
Age			62.2	15.5
Male	119	49.0		
Female	124	51.0		
Married	178	72.7		
Jewish Spouse	156	63.2		
Partially-Jewish Spouse	12	4.9		
Non-Jewish Spouse	38	15.4		
No Spouse	38	15.4		
Years of Education			18.0	2.1

Table 2. Logistic Regressions of Religion, Ancestry, and Culture/Ethnicity

Variable	Religion	Ancestry	Culture/ Ethnicity
Constant	-2.03	30.58	-167.97
Denomination			
Orthodox	0.15	3.77	-14.09
Conservative	-----	-----	-----
Reform	0.77	4.64*	0.73
No Particular Denomination	1.62	4.69	-13.82
Other	-1.39	-0.40	5.02**
Meaning of being Jewish			
Remembering the Holocaust	-1.23*	-2.14	4.12*
Leading an ethical/moral life	-0.48	-0.61	30.46
Observing Jewish law	0.37	-0.80	0.92
Having a good sense of humor	-0.35	-3.23**	0.17
Working for justice and equality	-0.47	-3.08*	1.76
Being intellectually curious	-0.17	5.47**	15.99
Eating traditional Jewish foods	0.56	0.18	-1.99
Caring about Israel	-0.29	2.33	-5.39**
Being part of a Jewish community	0.94	-4.02**	1.20
Region			
Born in Georgia	0.59	2.13	-4.80
Born in Another Southern State	0.40	-----	-27.23
Born in New England	-----	-2.97	-----
Born in Another Non-Southern State	1.23	0.99	0.53
Years Living in the South	0.03*	-0.08	0.05
Demographic			
Age	0.02	0.09	0.09*
Female	1.67***	-2.52	2.10
Jewish Spouse	-----	-----	-----
Partially-Jewish Spouse	0.11	-24.48	6.25**
Non-Jewish Spouse	0.35	-2.92	1.00
No Spouse	0.68	-22.56	-16.96
Years of Education	-0.03	-1.36**	0.49
Household Income in Dollars	0.00	0.00	0.00
JEA Member	-0.10	-2.82	2.62*
N	200	200	200
Hosmer & Lemeshow Goodness of fit	0.21†	0.98†	0.57†
Cox & Snell R ²	0.16	0.20	0.23

Notes: * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

† Goodness of fit > 0.05: Model is significantly different from the null-model.

Table 3. Logistic Regressions of Religion and Ancestry, Religion and Culture, Ancestry and Culture, and All Three

Variable	Religion and Ancestry	Religion and Culture/ Ethnicity	Ancestry and Culture/ Ethnicity	All Three
Constant	-0.29	-0.12	-1.19	-8.59
Denomination				
Orthodox	-31.60	-2.89*	1.08	0.41
Conservative	-6.78**	-0.68	-----	0.36
Reform	-9.54**	-----	-0.72	0.01
No Particular Denomination	-----	-18.33	-1.53	-----
Other#	-15.18**	-0.90	-0.30	0.30
Meaning of being Jewish				
Remembering the Holocaust	4.45	0.69	0.25	0.61
Leading an ethical/moral life	3.91	-2.02*	-1.00	0.43
Observing Jewish law	-0.37	1.93**	-2.80***	0.44
Having a good sense of humor	2.98	-0.75	1.81**	0.37
Working for justice and equality	-3.30	0.70	0.36	0.08
Being intellectually curious	-4.48**	1.74*	-1.44	-0.21
Eating traditional Jewish foods	1.04	-1.30*	1.43**	-0.41
Caring about Israel	-7.13**	-0.87	-0.14	0.88**
Being part of a Jewish community	6.00*	0.64	-1.27*	0.46
Region				
Born in Georgia	-----	-----	-1.41	-----
Born in Another Southern State	-20.74	-18.77	-19.37	1.57*
Born in New England	-5.08*	-0.61	-----	0.77
Born in Another Non-Southern State	-28.64	-1.01	-1.10	0.57
Years Living in the South	-0.02	0.00	0.01	0.00
Demographic				
Age	0.16**	-0.06***	0.05*	-0.01
Female	-1.62	0.09	-0.56	-0.47
Jewish Spouse	-----	-----	-----	-----
Partially-Jewish Spouse	1.49	-18.89	3.87**	-0.28
Non-Jewish Spouse	0.24	-0.96	1.78*	0.40
No Spouse	-25.00	1.17	1.48	-0.18
Years of Education	-0.78**	-0.05	0.09	0.11
Household Income in Dollars	-----	0.00	0.00	0.00
JEA Member	-3.62	0.56	-0.16	0.24
N	200	200	200	200
Hosmer & Lemeshow Goodness of fit	1.00†	0.28†	0.98†	0.34
Cox & Snell R ²	0.18	0.16	0.24	0.18

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

$b = -8.40$ in comparison with Conservative ($p < 0.10$) in the model of Religion and Ancestry.

† Goodness of fit > 0.05 : Model is significantly different from the null-model.

Table 4. Logistic Regressions of Inherited, Chosen, and Inherited and Chosen

Variable	Inherited	Chosen	Inherited and Chosen
Constant	-1.51	-69.53	0.42
Denomination			
Orthodox	0.15	0.97	-----
Conservative	-----	-----	0.15
Reform	-0.84**	2.35**	0.48
No Particular Denomination	-1.11	2.92	0.56
Other	-0.55	2.74*	0.02
Meaning of being Jewish			
Remembering the Holocaust	-0.05	-1.40	0.32
Leading an ethical/moral life	-0.58	22.29	0.25
Observing Jewish law	-0.73**	2.07***	0.24
Having a good sense of humor	-0.03	0.84	-0.20
Working for justice and equality	0.32	-1.27	0.00
Being intellectually curious	-0.27	0.03	0.32
Eating traditional Jewish foods	1.03***	-0.71	-0.85***
Caring about Israel	0.36	0.78	-0.36
Being part of a Jewish community	-0.04	0.22	-0.08
Region			
Born in Georgia	-1.32**	3.18**	0.59
Born in Another Southern State	0.46	-16.99	-----
Born in New England	-----	-----	0.18
Born in Another Non-Southern State	-0.89*	2.80**	0.42
Years Living in the South	0.03**	-0.06**	-0.01
Demographic			
Age	0.03**	-0.02	-0.02*
Female	0.14	0.35	-0.34
Jewish Spouse	-----	-----	-----
Partially-Jewish Spouse	0.80	-0.52	-0.49
Non-Jewish Spouse	0.78	0.09	-0.56
No Spouse	0.18	-2.52*	0.31
Years of Education	-0.00	-0.09	0.06
Household Income in Dollars	0.00	0.00	0.00
JEA Member	0.19	-1.27	0.09
N	200	200	200
Hosmer & Lemeshow Goodness of fit	0.44†	0.04	0.50†
Cox & Snell R ²	0.22	0.21	0.14

Notes: * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

† Goodness of fit > 0.05: Model is significantly different from the null-model.

Table 5. OLS Regressions of Symbolic Religiosity and Symbolic Ethnicity

Variable	Symbolic Religiosity Regarding Prayer and Meditation	Symbolic Religiosity Regarding Religious Services	Symbolic Ethnicity Regarding Foods	Symbolic Ethnicity Regarding Ethics and Morality
Constant	-0.78	-0.90	-1.32	-0.57
Denomination				
Orthodox	-0.34	-0.39*	0.32	-----
Conservative	-----	-----	-----	-0.40
Reform	-0.21	-0.17	0.14	-0.58**
No Particular Denomination	-0.25	0.53	0.12	-0.52
Other	0.21	-0.02	0.27	-0.16
Inherited or Chosen				
Inherited	-----	0.69***	0.05	0.45
Chosen	-0.12	-----	-----	-----
Inherited and Chosen	-0.12	0.71***	0.63**	0.72***
Region				
Born in Georgia	-----	-----	-----	-0.01
Born in Another Southern State	-0.02	-0.52*	-0.08	-0.14
Born in New England	-0.01	-0.12	0.17	-----
Born in Another Non-Southern State	-0.12	-0.21	-0.25	-0.35*
Years Living in the South	-0.01	-0.01*	0.01**	0.00
Demographic				
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00
Female	-0.02	0.39***	-0.21	-0.07
Jewish Spouse	-----	-----	-----	-----
Partially-Jewish Spouse	-0.14	0.41	0.00	-0.05
Non-Jewish Spouse	0.29	0.59***	-0.08	-0.14
No Spouse	0.53**	0.18	-0.04	0.01
Years of Education	0.05	-0.01	0.03	0.04
Household Income in Dollars	0.00	0.00**	0.00	-0.00
JEA Member	0.09	0.38**	0.34**	0.24
N	201	200	204	205
R ²	0.09	0.21	0.20	0.12

Notes: * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

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