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RESEARCH REPORT

JEWISH IDENTITY IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES 1990-1991

by

BARRY A. KOSMIN

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of
Jewish
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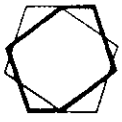

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Canada and the United States are two separate societies with distinct histories and different political systems. In addition, the two nations have differing ethnic and religious population compositions as well as divergent government policies and legal provisions on ethnic and religious matters. Yet, in terms of technology, economy and lifestyle, there are many points of similarity. This is particularly true for the Jewish populations of the two nations which are both concentrated in the major metropolitan centers. Jews in both countries are very highly educated and as a result engaged in professional and managerial occupations.

The Jewish immigration histories of the two countries differ. The Canandian community does not have as deep roots in their country as the American Jewish population. Whereas in 1990, American Jews were as likely to be US-born as the US population as a whole (90.6% vs. 92.1%) in 1991, Canadian Jews were considerably more likely to be foreign-born than average Canadians (70.6% vs. 86.3%). Thus, it is commonly suggested that Canadian Jews are one generation behind American Jews in the process of acculturation or assimilation.

So what hard data do we have available to make such comparisons? On the US side, we have the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. This was a private, Jewish community-sponsored, voluntary, telephone sample survey that required respondents to self-identify as Jews. On the Canadian side, our data source is the official Canadian Government Census of 1991 managed by Statistics Canada. This consisted of a compulsory mail census of the entire national population which asked respondents to self-identify as Jews in answers to questions on both their religious and their ethnic origin, *(see appendix for details).* The NJPS also inquired into whether respondents self-identified as **Jews By Religion (JBR), Jews By Choice (JBC), Jews with No Religion (JNR)** and **Jews of Other Religions (JOR)**, *(see appendix for details).* These systems of categorization, though not a perfect match, allow comparisons to be made between the internal patterns of Jewish identification of the two national Jewish populations.

The attached table provides details of how the two populations compare according to a set of Jewish identity constructs the researchers in each community have created: (Kosmin et al, 1991; Torczyner et al, 1993). Once allowance is made for the substantial difference in the size of the two

populations, the patterns of Jewish self-identification are surprisingly similar. Among the "Core" populations, the proportion of people who identify as Jewish both by ethnic origin and by religion is very similar (76% and 79%).

The US population's proportion of **Jews By Choice** (gentile ancestry) appears to be smaller than it is in Canada. However, it is very likely that this categorization system tends to exaggerate the number of **Jews By Choice** in Canada. This is because even though more than one origin answer is possible, some Jews prefer to identify ethnically with the original homeland of their ancestors (e.g. Hungary, England, Morocco, etc..) rather than as Jews; and also because of the controversy over the "Canadian" preference which surrounded the 1991 census.

The comparison between the "not religious" or secular ethnic identity constructs is probably more accurate. This suggests that Canada has proportionately fewer secular Jews than the U.S.

Part B of the table brings into the statistics the peripheral population of Jews who self-identify as Jewish in terms of ethnic origin or ancestry but presently follow another religion such as Buddhism or Christianity. This population is varied and consists of apostates who have recently left Judaism, as well as children and grandchildren of Jews who were never raised in Judaism and have had little personal contact with the Jewish community in any form. As one might expect given the greater proportion of third, fourth, or more generation American Jews than Canadian Jews, this fringe population is relatively larger in the US. However, the difference is not vast.

In conclusion, this statistical data suggests that the societal processes affecting Jews in both nations are similar and that the resulting Jewish identity constructs run along similar lines and trajectories. Canadian Jewry is indeed presently more traditionally Jewish than American Jewry, but the gap between the two Jewish societies is not as wide as some might have predicted.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Torczyner, Jim L. et al, *Demographic Challenges Facing Canadian Jewry - Initial Findings From the 1991 Census*, CJF Canada and McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social Planning (Montreal, 1993).

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U.S. and Canadian Jewish Populations by Identity Constructs

A.

	Core Jewish Population			Standard Definition		
	U.S. 1990 NJPS			**Canada 1991 Census**		
Jewish Religion & Jewish Ethnic Origin	BJR	4,210,000	76%	JRJE	281,680	79%
Jewish Religion & Other Ethnic Origin	JBC	185,000	3%	JROE	36,390	10%
Jews by Religion	JBR	4,395,000	80%	JBR	318,070	89%
Jewish Ethnic Origin with No Religion	JNR	1,120,000	20%	NRJE	38,245	11%
	CJP	5,515,000	100%	JSD	356,315	100%

B.

	Jewish Ethnic and Religious Preference Population					
	U.S. 1990 NJPS			**Canada 1991 Census**		
Jewish Ethnic Origin with Other Religion	JCO/JOR/JCOR	1,325,000	19%	ORJE	49,640	12%
Core/Standard Jewish Population	CJP	5,515,000	81%	JSD	356,315	88%
		6,840,000	100%		405,955	100%

Appendix 1

CANADA
DEFINITIONS OF JEWISH

The following definitions have been developed for the purposes of analyses. They are derived from the combined **Ethnic Origin** and **Religion Census** variables.

According to Census Canada, respondents to the question on **Ethnic Origin** were asked "To which ethnic or cultural group(s) did this person's ancestors belong?"

For the **Religion** question, respondents were asked to indicate to which religion or denomination this person belongs.

DEFINITION	MEANING
JR	Jewish by Religion
JE	Jewish by Ethnic Origin
JRJE	Jewish by Religion **and** Jewish by Ethnic Origin
JROE	Jewish by Religion **and** Other Than Jewish Ethnic Origin
NRJE	No Religion **and** Jewish by Ethnic Origin
ORJE	Other Religion **and** Jewish by Ethnic Origin
NJ	Not Jewish
JSD	**"Jewish by Religion", or "Jewish by Religion and Jewish by Ethnic Origin", or "No Religion and Jewish by Ethnic Origin"**

The JSD definition serves as the basis for Jewish communal planning. It is the same definition used by the Council of Jewish Federations and the McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social Planning in 1981, thus permitting an analysis of trends and changes during the past decade. The number of Jews who identify themselves in this manner is different from official Census publications where Religion and Ethnic Origin numbers are presented separately.

Appendix 2

UNITED STATES
JEWISH IDENTITY CONSTRUCTS

It was the plan of this study to spread the widest possible net and provide an opportunity for as many people as possible to reveal whatever was Jewish about their identity, even if they did not currently consider themselves Jewish. This study does not therefore arrogate to itself the ultimate definition of who or what is a Jew nor the setting of permanent boundaries to the American Jewish community; it merely recorded and collated answers given by the public. No respondent was asked to document any claim or answer.

The four points of possible qualification in the screener were supplemented in the main questionnaire by questions on 1) each individual's current religion, 2) religion raised, and 3) religion at birth. The data produced the Jewish identity constructs shown in Table 1. It must be emphasized that it is possible to create alternative typologies from these data so that other analysts, if they wish, can create a "Jewish population" in keeping with their particular ideology or purpose e.g. a Halakhic population. The typologies reflect a principal feature of Jewishness, namely that it is an amalgam of ethnicity and religion, and the fact that America allows for choice about one's religio-ethnic identity.

BJR: Born Jews: Religion Judaism - Persons who were born Jewish and reported their current religion as Jewish, clearly belonged in the survey. They constitute the largest component of the population. The other five categories of Jewishness which relate to only one of the two dimensions of Jewishness, either ethnic or religious, present definitional problems at the conceptual and individual or practical levels.

JBC: Jews By Choice - This category comprises persons who are currently Jewish but were born Gentile. Within this group 70 percent have formally converted to Judaism,while 30 percent report that they practice Judaism though they have not undergone a formal conversion, at least as yet. Since we rely upon self-reporting, and no consensus exists among the religious denominations as to the acceptability of these "conversions," the neutral term, **Jew By Choice** has been adopted for the entire group. Children comprise only 10,000 of these persons.

JBR: Jews By Religion - Persons who were born Jewish and reported their current religion as Jewish (BJR) and Jews by Choice (JBC) collectively make up this group.

JNR: Born Jews With No Religion - Included are persons who identify as Jewish when asked but reported "none," "agnostic," or "atheist" to a question on their current religion. They are commonly referred to as "secular Jews".

Together, the above three categories total just over 5.5 million people, which we call the Core Jewish Population, our major focus in this report. The 1970 NJPS estimate for the Core Jewish Population was 5.4 million persons.

JCO: Born/Raised Jewish, Converted Out - This group comprises adults who report that at one time, they were Jewish by religion, but they have rejected Judaism and currently follow a religon other than Judaism. They are a diverse group, most of whom were the children of mixed marriages and are currently Christian. It must be remembered that the whole process is subjective. No precise definition was provided as to what being "born Jewish" or "raised Jewish" meant. Nevertheless what they have in common is a decision to reject Judaism and follow a religion other than Judaism.

JOR: Adults of Jewish Parentage With Other Current Religion - This group consists of adult respondents who qualify for inclusion by reporting Jewish parentage or descent, but were raised from birth in a religion other than Judaism. For instance, they may report a Jewish mother, but also that they were raised as Roman Catholics and report that this is their current religion. Nevertheless, many consider themselves Jewish by ethnicity or background. Frequently the children of mixed marriages, they report an almost even balance of Jewish fathers and mothers.

JCOR: Children Under 18 Being Raised With Other Current Religion - This group is much larger in size than either JCO or JOR. It consists of children under eighteen years of age, who have a "qualified Jew" as a parent (or stepparent in a few cases) but are being raised in a religion other than Judaism. The vast majority are currently Christians of various denominations. Among these children, over 40 percent have a parent in the categories BJR or JNR who is in an interfaith marriage. However, the majority are children of JCO or JOR parents and have one Jewish (BJR) grandparent. Obviously, none of this group has yet had the same opportunity as the adult JCO or JOR group members to identify themselves positively as Jews (by ethnicity) or to reject this identity option. Nor have they had much exposure to Judaism.

CJP: Core Jewish Population The Core Jewish Population (CJP) is an aggregate which reports no non-Judaic religious loyalty. It is comprised of three identities: those who currently report their adherence to Judaism, both Born Jews and Jews By Choice (BJR, JBC), as well as those Born Jews without a current religion (JNR). This population is the one which most Jewish communal agencies seek as their clientele. This population can be subdivided when necessary into the Judaic population (JBR), i.e., currently of Jewish religion, and the secular Jews with no religion (JNR).