

A Multidimensional Model of American Jewish Identity

Lewis Z. Schlosser, PhD, ABPP
Seton Hall University

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Dedication



Kimberly Edelson Schlosser

Emma Claire Schlosser

Lindsey Nicole Schlosser

Why this matters...



Acknowledgements

A decorative header image featuring a menorah, a Star of David, a scroll, and a couple.

Julie R. Ancis

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Lisa A. Goodman

Antisemitism vs. Anti-Semitism



- Anti-Semitism first coined by Wilhelm Marr in 1879 to express anti-Jewish feelings
- Many now use “antisemitism” to prevent co-opting of this word for anything other than its original intent: Jew-hatred
- For example, some Arab groups claim they cannot be “anti-Semitic” since they themselves are Semitic
- Hence, eliminating the hyphen takes the focus away from the term “Semitic”

American Jews vs. Jewish Americans



- Emphasizes the primacy of being Jewish through use of *American* as a descriptor of *Jew*
- Acknowledges the nomadic heritage of Jews as a Diaspora people who often needed to flee when antisemitism reached dangerous levels
- Of course, within-group differences exist, and some may prefer Jewish American

Jewish Semantics 101



- Some Jews omit the “o” in spelling G-d
 - This is done because of prohibition against erasing or destroying any Hebrew name of G-d
 - This is not a typo
- **Shoah:** “Catastrophe” from Hebrew, referring to the catastrophic destruction of European Jewry during WWII by Nazi Germany (i.e., the Holocaust)

A Place to Start



Schlosser, L. Z. (2006).
Affirmative Psychotherapy for
American Jews. *Psychotherapy:
Theory, Research, Practice,
Training*, 43, 424-435.

Put yourself in our shoes...



- Imagine that we are having a discussion on diversity and culture. You are asked about your religion – both the religious tradition in which you were raised and your current identification (if it is different).
- For those of you who are Christian, you are told that this identity is all that matters. If you talk about any of your other identities as a person of color, woman, and/or LGBT individual, you are told to stop skirting the issue of Christian privilege – all that matters is your Christianity. Other identities are only offered up in a defensive posture to owning up to your privilege.

Jews in Cultural Discourse



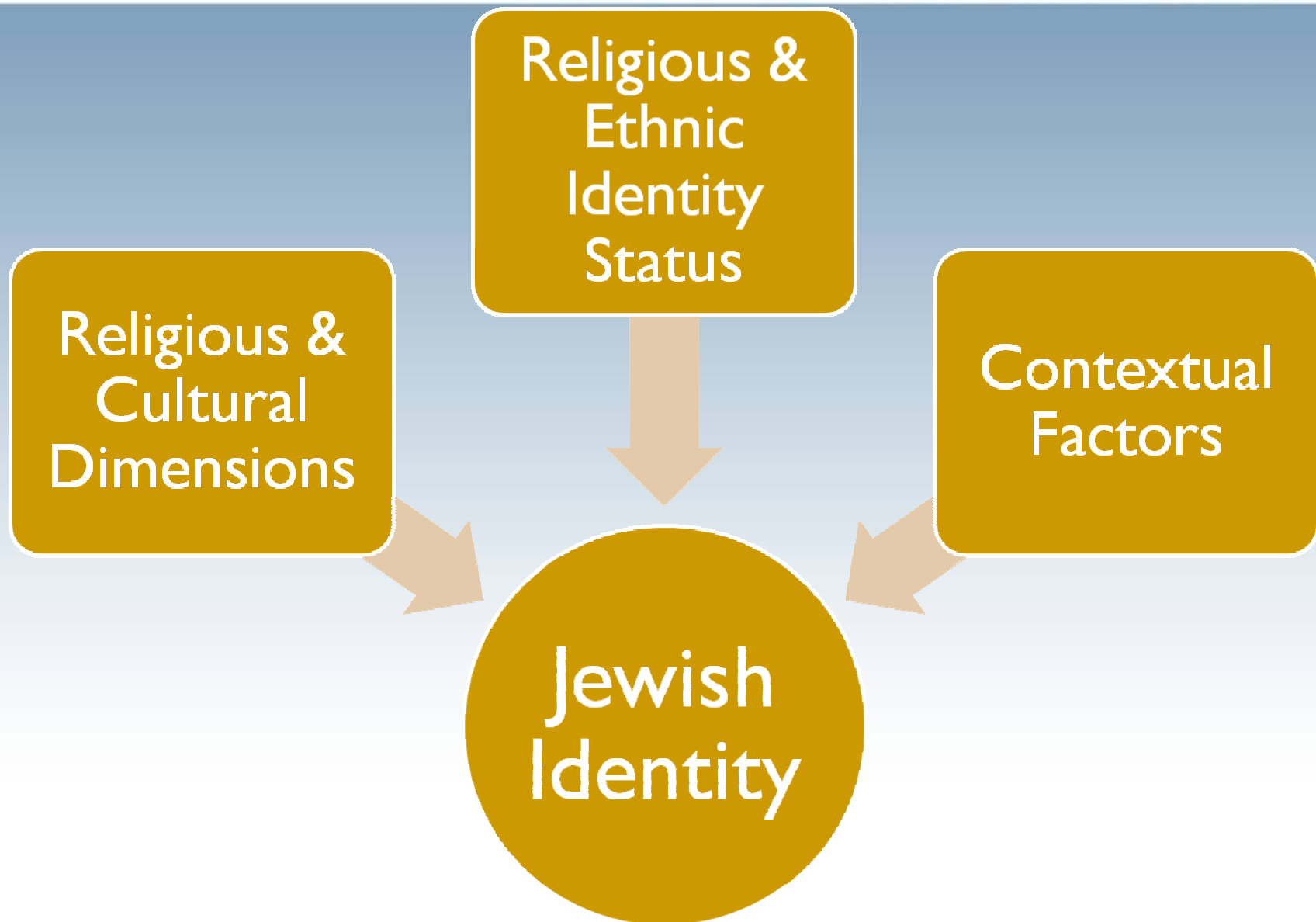
- American Jews often experience marginalization during discussions of race and culture
- Although many American Jews enjoy White privilege, identity is often proscribed for Jews with White skin – with White as primary and everything else as defensiveness
- Neglects Jews as a distinct cultural group who have endured centuries of oppression and discrimination – and inappropriately categorizes Jews as all being universally financially successful

20th Century American Jews



- Jews were seen racially as non-White prior to World War II
- Tikkun Olam – Jews have been and continue to be involved with progressive movements
- Jews fought side by side with people of color for Civil Rights

A Multidimensional Model of Jewish Identity



Religious Dimensions (Friedlander et al.)



- Degree of adherence to Jewish religious Orthodoxy
- Observing Sabbath and keeping Kosher
- Reading Hebrew and attending religious services
- Celebrating all Jewish Holidays
- Fasting on Yom Kippur
- Following dietary laws of Pesach
- Observing Jewish rituals (e.g., mourning, Mikvah)
- Keeping head covered for religious reasons

Cultural Dimensions (Friedlander et al.)



- Reading Jewish literature and/or newspapers
- Having pride in being Jewish
- Importance of marrying a Jew
- Listening to Jewish secular music
- Endorsing Jewish values (e.g., *Tikkun Olam*)
- Having a strong connection to Israel
- Contributing to Jewish causes
- Having a *mezuzah* or *ketubah* in the home
- Being active in a Jewish organization/community

Religious and Ethnic Identity Status



- Lack of awareness of one's Jewish identity
- Emerging awareness of Jewish identity
- Assessment of Jewish identity vis-à-vis Christianity and other dominant groups
- Moving toward/from Jewishness
- Integration of Jewish and other identities

Contextual Factors



- Antisemitism
- Christian Privilege
- The invisible nature of Jewish identity
- Race, Ethnicity, and Skin Color
- Geography and Critical Mass
- Jews relationship with other Jews and with non-Jews

Two Jews, Three Opinions



- Jews may disagree with each other for individual differences:
 - Views on Judaism
 - Political views
 - Feelings about and involvement with Israel
 - Views on religious pluralism
- Legitimacy Testing – What constitutes a normal Jew?
 - If you do more than me religiously, you are a zealot
 - If you do less than me religiously, you are a heretic

The Jewish Double Standard



- In 1921, Albert Einstein presented a paper on his then-infant Theory of Relativity at the Sorbonne, the prestigious French university.
- "If I am proved correct, the Germans will call me a German, the Swiss will call me a Swiss citizen, and the French will call me a great scientist."
- "If relativity is proved wrong, the French will call me a Swiss, the Swiss will call me a German, and the Germans will call me a Jew."



Contact Information

Lewis Z. Schlosser, PhD, ABPP

Seton Hall University

316 Jubilee Hall

400 South Orange Avenue

South Orange, NJ 07079

(973)-275-2503

Lewis.Schlosser@shu.edu