



Territory Continues to Matter: Response to Sheskin's Marshall Sklare Award Address 2023

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Received: 7 February 2024 / Accepted: 8 February 2024
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First, let me extend my congratulations to both Bethamie [Horowitz] and to Ira [Sheskin] for the honor bestowed on each of you as Sklare awardees this year. You are each eminently deserving of the award, and I am honored to be included in this session. I am also honored to be following in the footsteps of both Riv-Ellen [Prell] and Shaul [Kelner] who responded to Bethamie's Sklare address. Riv-Ellen's comments were, as always, elegant; and Shaul's reminded me of an AJS Conference many years ago when a much younger Shaul (who has not really changed) offered insightful comments on a paper I delivered and had coauthored with my husband, and then as well as now Shaul impressed me with his thorough and precise comments. So thank you both for preceding me this session and establishing a high bar for respondents.

I learned from Ira's talk today that I probably owe a thank you to Ira's wife Karen—either you transferred your editing talents to Ira, or you yourself were helping with many of the excellent edits of our joint work, or both. I learned from Ira the importance of paying attention to details, which is not usually my strong point.

Our joint work has a lot to do with the concept of deterritorialization, or rather, it queried how much territory still matters. Regarding that work, let me first, offer thanks to Arnie Dashefsky for bringing us together. I had applied for support from the Jewish Data Bank to research Jewish identity by putting several community studies together and analyzing them in aggregate, but I actually had little real understanding of how much work that could or would involve. Ira had already been working on aggregating the data set of his community studies of 2000+ [the "Century 21" dataset], and it made for a good partnership. Ira did (or managed) the grueling work of putting together the aggregated data set, the first of its scope among community studies. The aggregated sample had several advantages, the most obvious that it enabled the analysis of subpopulations that in individual studies

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lacked a sufficient sample size to analyze reliably. But also there was a level of detail that was not always accommodated by the national surveys, including the factor of geography. Community studies also provide a time frame between national studies and when we began our work together there was no national survey planned for the near future.

But of course there also is the reverse, that community surveys have their own limitations. For example, they do not always ask the same questions as in the national surveys or in other community studies if the community does not see the relevance.

My recommendation has been and is that there be a common core of questions among all community studies, even across researchers, perhaps half of the questions being common, with room for individual community preferences for the rest—picking, perhaps, from a common core of modules, e.g., for communities with seniors, communities with a high proportion of immigrants either international or internal to the US, communities with high intermarriage, communities with young adults, or high proportions of Orthodox individuals. We do have the Jewish Survey Question Bank accessible from the Berman Jewish Data Bank site (<https://jewishquestions.bjpa.org/jsqb>), which is a good start. But there needs to be incentive to the communities to build surveys with this in mind—perhaps a fund for communities managed by the Data Bank itself.

Ira, your work has not been without its own controversies, perhaps the most well-known recently was yours and Arnie Dashefsky's publication of *Statistics on Jews of color (JOC)* (cf Sheskin and Dashefsky 2020a, b) as Ira has already mentioned. This, indeed was not received well. It did, however, have a silver lining, clearly revealing the lack of consensus on what JOC means for us as scholars of contemporary Jewry and the extent to which analysis of this concept was intricately related to motivations for the analysis and opportunities for applying the research.

More recently, you have been in direct competition for community studies proposed by close colleagues. When I edited a special issue of *Contemporary Jewry* on Jewish Community Studies (v36:3), I learned much from Ira's and others' methodological approaches and their careful analysis of how methodology matters. But I strongly believe in keeping options open: Competition often improves quality and provides choices.

I do have a research agenda for you, Ira, if you can manage to continue your work and expand your community studies. I would like to see the aggregate data help us with more understanding of the effect of transnationalism. You and I (together with Daniel Altman) used your aggregate dataset for understanding more about Former Soviet Union (FSU) immigrants and it showed nonintuitive results—FSU differing from non-FSU Jews less than expected in terms of Jewish identity, even after many years in the US.

Other uses of the data that I would like to see include (but are not exhaustive): There are also pockets of, for example, Israelis in the US—in Miami, in New York, especially in big cities. Israelis seem to have their own brand of Jewishness outside of Israel. In Adina Bankier-Karp's paper presented at this conference (Association of Jewish Studies, December 2023, San Francisco, CA: "Believing, Bonding, Behaving, and Belonging: Is it Time to Bury Denomination?"), she uses Latent Class Analysis (LCA)

to analyze different types of Jewish engagement in four Anglo-Saxon populations (using Pew 2020 for US in comparison with data from Australia, the UK, and South Africa). One of the five LCA groups of Jewish identity is characterized by being high mainly on Israel engagement (visiting Israel, attention to news)—my guess is that they are Israelis. This demonstrates the importance of analyzing this subset of the Jewish population separately at times, and understanding their unique type of commitment to the Jewish community and identity.

But it is not only Israelis in the diaspora that are of interest. Other immigrants and their ties to their home countries (e.g., parents and other relatives there, visits, and news) characterize many immigrants and other transnationalists. This type of lifestyle is, I suspect, unusually characteristic of Jews more generally. It would be good to document and understand it better, especially on a local level. But it will take communities willing to invest in gathering this knowledge.

To study assimilation (and de-assimilation) with community studies, we also need more information on contact with other religions and ethnicities, cultural activities, philanthropy, and volunteerism, during crises and not. We also need more information on second and third generations from any particular origin or identity. Aggregated community study datasets can certainly help us attain such answers; thank you, Ira, for your pioneering and continued work on this.

I would like to conclude with a strong thank you to Ira for his service to our profession: 10 years of voluntarily editing the ASSJ newsletter (I will take credit for a bit of skillful arm-twisting to start the newsletter and to continue editing it for such a long time); countless speaking engagements on a variety of topics in academic, community, and other public venues; reviving and continuously editing the American Jewish Year Book together with Arnie Dashefsky; and we are delighted to have him join the *Contemporary Jewry* editing team as research editor. He can always be counted on to give serious thought to his commitments.

I wish him long life and many more years of continued service and research in the interests of the social science of Jewry.

Funding Open access funding provided by Rowan University. The author has not disclosed any funding.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author has no conflicts of interest associated with this manuscript.

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