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**MIDDLE CLASS, INVISIBLE AND DISPERSED.  
ETHNIC GROUP CONTACT, ETHNIC AWARENESS  
AND ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONG SWISS-GERMAN  
IMMIGRANTS IN CALIFORNIA**

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*Foreign professionals and technicians seldom migrate because of unemployment back home [...] Because they do not come to escape poverty, but to improve their careers, immigrant professionals seldom accept menial jobs in the United States [...] An important feature of this type of immigration is its inconspicuousness [...] Professional immigrants are among the most rapidly assimilated – first because of their occupational success and second because of the absence of strong ethnic networks that reinforce the culture of origin. However, assimilation in this case does not mean severing relations with the home country. On the contrary, because successful immigrants have the means to do so, they attempt to bridge the gap between past and present through periodic visits and cultivating family and friends left behind. During the first generation at least, a typical pattern is the attempt to juggle two different social worlds. Although this is a difficult and expensive task, many foreign professionals actually succeed in it.*

Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*,  
1990, 18–20

## **1. Introduction**

An assessment of the sociopsychological impact of immigration usually involves an examination of ethnic identity, a sense of membership to a group or groups with particular national, cultural or racial characteristics. In this study on Swiss-German immigrants in California, I explore the ethnicity of a group that has not attracted much interest from American scholars. The Swiss as an immigrant population, unlike many other ethnic groups in the United States, is relatively small, dispersed, white and therefore largely invisible. Furthermore, compared to more disadvantaged immigrants, the Swiss tend to be of relatively high socioeconomic status. Those who have left their home country in the latter part of this century usually have not done so in order to escape economic

or political hardship, as many have come to the US for professional reasons. Nonetheless, the Swiss hold a long tradition of immigration to California, and in the latter half of this century, most of them have come to represent “new immigrants,” people who are “pulled” toward the US for professional reasons, rather than “pushed” out of their home country to seek out better living conditions. My analysis of Swiss-German immigrants and their ethnic identity provides insights into behavioral and sociopsychological dynamics in the light of acculturation and assimilation to American society.

In this article, the term *Swiss immigrant* refers to a Swiss-born and Swiss national who settled in California on a permanent basis, including immigrants who later became naturalized American citizens – what is emphasized is the fact that birth and socialization occurred in Switzerland. In order to keep cultural backgrounds relatively constant and make individuals more comparable, this analysis is limited to Swiss-Germans. *Ethnic identity*, the dependent variable of this study, refers to the preservation of a part of personality that is influenced by group membership. The concept does not simply refer to a form of self-categorization, but attitudes pertaining to the preservation of Swiss identity in the context of life in the United States.

The nature of the Swiss immigrant population raises very fundamental questions about the construction and maintenance of Swiss identity among the members of a small, dispersed and well-integrated ethnic group. Answers to these questions are approached by highlighting subjective aspects of ethnicity, such as ethnic awareness and ethnic identity, and objective or behavioral components, represented by ethnic group contact, including the native language. The purpose of this research is to test statistically the contributions of two main variables as determinants of ethnic identity: the “ethnic group contact” variable, representing a “positive-behavioral” dimension of ethnicity, and the “ethnic awareness” variable, depicting a “negative-subjective” dimension. Finally, on a more individual or social interaction level, ethnicity is described qualitatively in the context of “situational ethnic identity”.

Research questions are approached in a mixed-methods format, based on survey data obtained from professional (technical/scientific) Swiss-German immigrants in California and interview data from a more general sample of Swiss-German immigrants in the San Francisco Bay Area. The findings of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the nature of Swiss ethnicity, while only partially supporting major hypotheses about the phenomenon of ethnic identity. They will thereby pose partial challenges to the applicability of some hypotheses about ethnic identity to the immigrant group in question and perhaps to ethnic groups similar to the Swiss. In particular, some difficulties in finding significant relationships between objective and subjective variables

of ethnicity will be demonstrated and the importance of “cultural group content” established.

## 2. The Literature

In recent decades, ethnic identity research has provided a tool to assess the social, cultural and psychological forces leading to the preservation of ethnic orientations in the United States. Ethnics of the first generation, with their task of adjusting to American society and culture, most dramatically illustrate these dynamics. While much research has been done on ethnic identity, the immigration from western Europe to the United States in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been neglected, most likely due to a perceived lack of theoretical challenges or programmatic needs. To be sure, the attributes of these populations indicate that their motivations for immigration, their socioeconomic status, small number, dispersion, invisibility, as well as perhaps a lack of conflict or competition would make them easy-to-assimilate elements of American society. A closer look at ethnicity among first generation Swiss-German immigrants can tell us to what extent this is also true on a subjective level, and what the role of relatively loose ethnic networks may be. In order to put this study into a proper context, the following literature review is an extensive examination of the relevant theories and research about identity and ethnicity.

### 2.1 *Identity and Ethnic Identity*

Ethnic identity can be conceived of as a form of social identity. In a process of “social comparison” (Tajfel, 1981, 256; Abrams and Hogg, 1990, 43–45), it entails perceptions of sameness and contrast vis-à-vis social groups or “categories” (Tajfel, 1981; Hogg and Abrams, 1988, 21). Among migrants, the maintenance of social identity evokes especially complex and dynamic processes, including personal and collective histories (Bahr, 1979, 288) and the capacity and endurance of “being oneself” over space and time (Condor, 1996, 303).

Immigration usually results in an ethnic group membership, such as a national minority. *Ethnicity*, as defined in this article, encompasses objective and subjective characteristics (Edwards, 1985). The objective part of ethnicity includes aspects of “behavior patterns specific to an ethnic group,” while the subjective elements of ethnicity comprise ethnic self-categorization, ethnic awareness and ethnic attitudes (Leets et al., 1996, 13). On a subjective level, then, ethnic identity can be defined as “a sense of group identity deriving from

real or perceived common bonds” (Edwards, 1985, 6) such as culture, nationality or race. Among immigrants with varying citizenship statuses, however, self-categorization may become problematic, as “self-assigned categorical labels may, partly, be externally-imposed” (Leets et al., 1996, 15). Most ethnicity research, thus, are concerned with multiple dimensions of identity, particularly *attitudes* about the *preservation* of immigrants’ national or cultural heritage, as stressed in this article. Anny Bakalian (1993), for example, in a survey-based cross-generational analysis of contemporary Armenian ethnicity in the US, confirms that identity tied to nationality and cultural traditions is more central to the self-conception of Armenian immigrants than to their descendants.

Since recruitment into an ethnic group can occur either by birth or socialization (Bakalian, 1993, 322), it has been concluded that ascribed identity is relatively resistant to change (Scheibe, 1995, 120), and that western European immigrants in the US have traditionally come with a somewhat clear national identity, a mostly ascribed identity based on ties to a group with the same national origin, regardless of culture or race (Perlmutter, 1996, 63).

In the sociological discourse about immigrant ethnics, consequently, the concept of “traditional ethnic identity” – ascribed identity by birth and socialization as a salient part of the self-concept – has been used (Bakalian, 1993, 322). Yet, groups with characteristics such as those of the Swiss immigrants have found virtually no interest among American scholars. Perhaps the most notable research of white American populations, supposing a change of ethnic identity across generations (or “ethnic cohorts”), has been conducted by Mary Waters (1990). Her findings – based on in-depth interviews conducted in San Jose, California, and Philadelphia with descendants of white catholic immigrants – demonstrate how ethnic identity in individuals may remain in later-generations in the form of “symbolic identity” (a more “voluntary/emotional” than “ascribed/traditional” identification), partly due to the preservation of cultural traditions within the ethnic group and a favorable pluralistic American society. Waters’ study alerts us to fundamental cross-generational changes in ethnic identity among whites by virtue of an easy structural assimilation of these groups. Since both the nature and salience of ethnicity in well-integrated groups, such as the Swiss, may change rapidly over generations, this study is restricted to Swiss-German ethnics of the first generation whose members share an ascribed and socialized Swiss identity. Hence, this article focuses on variations in ethnic identity across individual immigrants rather than generations.

## 2.2 *Ethnic Assimilation and Enclosure: "Positive-Behavioral" Ethnicity*

Behavioral explanations of the maintenance and construction of ethnic identity have typically included group contacts as an explanatory variable. The assimilation perspective (also referred to as the "melting pot" model) can be illustrated by Milton Gordon's writings, incorporating a model with several stages between initial "cultural or behavioral assimilation" and eventual "identificational assimilation," based on increasing social integration (1964, 71). Assimilation theories emphasize more contact to the majority group as a force away from ethnic identity toward feeling American. Waters (1990), introduced earlier, demonstrates the importance of intermarriage, for example, in ethnic groups' shift away from traditional identity.

Robert Park and Ernest Burgess (1969), by contrast, represent theories of "ethnic group separation" based on the social distance associated with geographical and social isolation. Correspondingly, in a historical analysis of the development and maintenance of Czech and Moravian identity in 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas, Kevin Hannan (1996) points out the significant role of a close-knit community. Waters' (1990) explanation of why ethnic identity has become "voluntary" in many white ethnic groups, on the other hand, rests in part upon the geographic dispersion (i. e. diminishing isolation) of these populations.

The same logic suggests that relatively dispersed group members maintain their identity as they interact with one another and "the persistence of ethnic groups in contact implies not only criteria and signals for identification, but also a structuring of interaction which allows the persistence of cultural differences" (Barth, 1969, 15–16). The argument that more contact to the ethnic group is positively related to ethnic identity has been labeled the "ethnic enclosure hypothesis" (Portes, 1984, 385). In this tradition, an integral part of Bakalian's (1993) findings, outlined earlier, involve ethnic networks in relationship to the strength of ethnic identity among Armenians. What does this mean for the Swiss? Although the latter twentieth century Swiss immigrant group is relatively dispersed, there are Swiss networks consisting of 28 Swiss clubs in California with approximately 5000 registered members.<sup>1</sup> Based on the characteristics of the Swiss immigrants, then, social contact may become particularly relevant for understanding "positive-behavioral" ethnicity issues, including contact to Swiss clubs and friends.

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1 Source: pamphlet published by the Swiss Consulate General of San Francisco.

### 2.2.1 *Cultural Group Content*

Among contact and group boundary theories, there has been disagreement about the role of “cultural content”. Barth (1969) argues that the critical characteristics of ethnicity are not so much cultural features, as the construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries, and Sollors (1986) maintains that ethnicity is not a matter of content but the importance that individuals ascribe to it (Barth, Sollors in Zéphir, 1996, 17). Other scholars contend that “ethnic identity is created on the basis of group boundaries *and* cultural group content” (Edwards, 1985, 7).

Language has been widely acknowledged as one of the most salient dimensions of group identity and cultural content. As a means of communication (a practical function) and a cultural expression (a symbolic function), it can serve as the glue for ethnic identification (Edwards, 1985, 17; Wetherell, 1996, 281). Due to a practical necessity, assimilation along linguistic lines has been noted as pervasive, especially in public spheres (Edwards, 1985, 104,146), whereas the use of native tongues may reinforce ethnic identifications.

The ethnic significance of a native language is most dramatically illustrated by Flore Zéphir (1996): Haitian immigrants in New York consider English a necessity, while the use of their native language becomes an essential element to distinguish themselves from black African-Americans. Despite their contrast in social status and race, among the Swiss-German immigrants the use of their native language may have implications on for “cultural content” of their ethnic group. Indeed, some scholars suggest that practical and symbolic considerations of language may be particularly pertinent to the Swiss-German identity in general.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, a practice of the native language requires interactions with other Swiss, which in turn reinforces the necessity of a group contact variable as used in this research.

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2 This is based on the fact that Swiss-Germans may be socialized into a smooth acculturation and situational ethnic identity due to their patterns in language use. First of all, Swiss immigrants exhibit a familiarity with cultural pluralism due to degrees of linguistic pluralism at home (Schelbert, 1967), and it is customary for educated Swiss-Germans to learn foreign languages (including French and English). Second, this occurs because of the Swiss-Germans’ use of standard German for situations of formality, while standard German is taboo for all other situations (Watts, 1988, 327). As a result, standard German becomes an instrumental need, while Swiss-German may reflect group solidarity (Edwards, 1985, 151). The first implication of this is that Swiss-Germans may represent a unique population with a predisposition toward easy linguistic acculturation. Secondly, the use of Swiss-German may become particularly significant with respect to ethnic identity.

### 2.3 *Economic Aspects of Immigration and Ethnicity*

Economic and motivational factors, especially economic “social pushes” vs. “social pulls”, socioeconomic status and social mobility in the host society, may explain why, among well-to-do professional immigrants, “ties to the home country” are often noted as ethnically relevant contacts (Portes and Rumbaut, 1990, 18–20). This has been applied to Swiss foreign populations in different European countries of residence by Kurt Lüscher (1961) who implies that the ability to stay in touch with home is essential in understanding the Swiss identity of young immigrants. Both Waters (1990) and Bakalian (1993) point out *social mobility* among ethnics in the US as a major factor in the transformation of ethnic identity. In research on a largely middle class professional Swiss immigrant population, then, while ties to Switzerland have to be included, social mobility and socioeconomic variations themselves may be relatively insignificant variables. Indeed, thirty years ago – perhaps at the height of Swiss professional immigration to the US – the Swiss historian Leo Schelbert (1967) described the “Swiss immigrant type” as socioeconomically very homogenous, a fact confirmed by more recent data on immigration to the US.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.4 *Ethnic Resilience and Ethnic Awareness: “Negative-Subjective” Ethnicity*

Economics are also a key element in the tradition of theories highlighting a competition for social resources. Historically, these views have been applied to large, highly visible or well-organized ethnic groups (Greeley, 1971, 45–46). Under certain conditions, ethnicity attains a particularly “instrumental” character, flourishing in conflict situations, including clashing cultures and perceived or genuine competition among dominant and minority groups (Gonzalez and McCommon, 1989, 139).

Related to the conflict hypothesis is the “ethnic resilience” view, a perspective revolving around the concept of *ethnic awareness*, which includes the perception of stereotypes by ethnic group members, social distance to the dominant group, and discrimination (Portes, 1984, 384). These perceptions lead to “ethnic solidarity,” entailing both “the conscious identification with a given ethnic population” and “the maintenance of strong ethnic interaction networks” (Olzak, 1983, 356). Alejandro Portes suggests that the unfavorable treatment of Cubans in Florida, together with a lack of ethnic communities, contributed to the rise

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3 See for example US Immigration and Naturalization Service (1997), *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1995*, Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office.



of ethnic awareness and mobilization among Cubans. He furthermore implies the reverse of assimilation theories, that “more-educated minority-group members, those more competent in the language and more informed about social and economic conditions, will have higher levels of awareness” (1984, 385).

The concept of ethnic awareness has not been applied to relatively advantaged immigrant groups. As Lüscher (1961) illustrates, however, perceptions akin to ethnic awareness may be the result of individuals’ immigrant status. He specifies feelings of advantage or disadvantage of the Swiss abroad to be a determinant of individuals’ feelings toward Switzerland. Hence, while the ethnic competition perspective should have little bearing on the Swiss, ethnic awareness, in the form of perceived social distance, stereotypes, or even disadvantages, exemplifies the *subjective* “culture clash” often forming the basis for the experience of ethnicity. As individuals who have experienced a short or long-term status as foreigners can probably attest, perceived cultural and social contrasts can lead to various subjective feelings of “difference”.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.5 *Situational Ethnicity Theories*

By virtue of its subjectivity, ethnic awareness signifies a high degree of pervasiveness, as it partially results from perceptions tied to real or perceived group relations. Recently, however, a model of ethnicity has emerged, which is based on a more individual level of social interaction. Consequently, it is more relativistic and dynamic. Especially for the immigrant, it is argued, ethnicity can also attain a *situational* character:

*In the new setting, however, [immigrants] are likely to become tied to the larger social whole in ways different than those they had known in their home settings. [...] Cross-cutting ties develop as the newcomers become absorbed in multiple activities and groupings. This, in turn, creates the context for what we call “situational” ethnicity, in which individuals identify with one ethnic group for some purposes or under certain conditions, but with others or with only the national culture when that suits them better .*

Gonzalez and McCommon, 1989, 4

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4 Interviews illustrating this point with Swiss people who were former residents of the US can be found in Eigenheer, Susanne and Alice Baumann (1997), Ein Himmel, in dem sogar die Kühe sauber sind, *Die Schweiz und die Welt*, 2.

Unlike other approaches, situational ethnicity theories maintain that ethnic identity can be a matter of context rather than one of the value ascribed to the ethnic group (Leets et al., 1996). Studies dealing with situational ethnicity often seek to explain identity by means of typologies. For instance, a study by Noels et al. (1996) conveys that Chinese university students in Canada show a polarization around both *separation* (high ethnic identity) and *assimilation* (high Canadian identity), as expressed in a “deculturation – assimilation – separation – integration” typology. The perspective suggests a relationship between “integration” and situational ethnicity in the sense that it means living in different social worlds, leading to an ethnic feeling dependent upon social settings and interaction. Unfortunately, however, this type of research *by itself* de-emphasizes the inherent salience of ascribed group identity among immigrants. By also qualitatively exploring context-specific ethnicity and its meaning to individuals, this study on Swiss-Germans aims at integrating, to some degree, static and dynamic as well as collective and individual aspects of ethnicity.

## 2.6 *Implications of the Literature*

It is suggested that Swiss immigrants to the United States can be categorized as one of the most easily assimilated immigrant populations. They are few in numbers and white (therefore relatively invisible), as well as largely middle class. At the same time, they lack tight ethnic networks or enclaves to reinforce group membership. Nonetheless, we can expect Swiss identity to be the least (and last) “assimilable” part of individuals’ lives – ascribed Swissness and common socialization patterns can preserve part of immigrants’ Swiss identity.

According to theories, research, and the characteristics of Swiss immigrants, it seems that contacts with other Swiss may be a significant “positive-behavioral” factor in explaining Swiss ethnic identity. Interaction can reinforce a common origin, culture and nationality. At the same time, ethnic resilience theories demonstrate that the dynamics of ethnicity involve a negotiation of identity in the form of what we might call a subjective manifestation of “culture clash”: although the Swiss have characteristics favorable to assimilation, can we expect their lives to be void of ethnic awareness? Indeed, ethnic resilience theories suggest that the very dispersion and integration of ethnics in mainstream society is conducive to these feelings and perceptions. More important, even if issues of ethnic awareness are relatively mild for the Swiss, does this also imply that they are poor predictors of ethnic identity and ethnic group contact? In the following analysis, I attempt to discover these relationships among members of a national minority for which cultural background (being Swiss-German), social class, and geographic location (residing in California) are held constant.

### 3. Research Design: Hypotheses, Sampling and Methodology

I propose to test statistically two main hypotheses that emerge from the theories previously reviewed and from research about ethnicity and identity. They can be termed the “positive-behavioral” model, based on ethnic enclosure and assimilation theories, and the “negative-subjective” model, reflecting ideas of the ethnic resilience or the “ethnic awareness” hypothesis. The former indicates a positive link between ethnic group contact and ethnic identity as well as ethnic awareness, while the latter suggests a positive relationship between ethnic awareness and ethnic identity as well as ethnic group contact. Finally, a complementary perspective on ethnicity is represented by the situational view, which emphasizes the meaning of ethnicity in individuals on the basis of social interaction, involving social contexts, roles and situations in immigrants’ lives. The situational aspects of Swiss-German ethnicity are explored not by testing hypotheses, but in a qualitative, descriptive manner.

The data for this study was collected between November 1997 and April 1998. The purpose of using survey questionnaires was a statistical analysis of relationships defined by the two major hypotheses. The aim of conducting interviews was threefold: 1) as an a priori help in the construction of variable indicators in the quantitative sample, 2) to provide in-depth information about the phenomena in question relevant to Swiss-Germans in general, and 3) to depict the situational aspects of Swiss-German ethnicity.

For the quantitative component of the study, a sample was obtained from a “scientific/technical professionals” list compiled in 1986, a directory of Swiss nationals in California in science, research, and technology fields, which yielded 42 cases.<sup>5</sup> Mail surveys mainly consisted of sociodemographic and 5-point scale questions (the range of ethnic group contact was “about daily” to “about yearly”; responses related to ethnic identity and ethnic awareness could range from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”). Questions were adapted from various existing studies, some of which were complemented with (or modified by) issues which crystallized in interviews. The construction of variables for quantitative purposes is discussed later in the section dealing with the testing of statistical hypotheses.

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5 This list was the only publicly accessible directory that allowed sampling for statistical purposes. Nevertheless, due to the presumably initial non-immigrant (i. e. visa) status of many representatives of this population, the use of a list compiled in 1986 allowed for a high yield of individuals who had acquired a *permanent* residence in the US. Those individuals whose California residence could still be established were contacted by telephone, and surveys were sent to them in the mail. Telephone calls preceding the mailing made a response rate close to 80% possible.

A non-random snowball sample (independent of the survey sample) was assembled for interviews. It consisted of subjects with varying degrees of social contact to other Swiss-Germans, educational/professional backgrounds and gender. The sample was made up of 8 individuals.<sup>6</sup> Interviews were administered<sup>7</sup> in a face-to-face setting. Questions (most of which were adapted from previous research) were open-ended. Due to differences in the characteristics of the quantitative and qualitative samples, the latter should be understood as complementary to the former.

#### 4. Research Findings and Analysis

The following section is a descriptive and analytical account of Swiss-German ethnicity, incorporating qualitative (interview) and statistical (survey) approaches. After a general description of the quantitative sample, the nature of each variable or dimension of ethnicity is explored individually. In the process, qualitative data is drawn upon in order to illustrate in-depth and situational aspects of ethnicity that crystallized as particularly pertinent to the Swiss-German immigrants in question. The main hypotheses are then tested statistically and united into a single model.

##### 4.1 *Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

The survey respondents held relatively homogenous characteristics. Motivations for immigrating to the United States were almost exclusively based on professional reasons. Most important, the professional backgrounds of individuals in the sample consisted of middle class occupations. The level of education could be assumed to be accordingly high (i. e. at least on the level of a Master's Degree). 12 (28,6%) were professors or researchers, 24 (57,1%) were professionals (mostly in technical fields, such as engineering, for example), and 3 (7,1%) entrepreneurs. Furthermore, all respondents were male, which most likely was a reflection of the technical and scientific occupations represented in the sample as well as the immigration cohort. This limits the generalizability

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6 The sample consisted of five males and three females between the ages of 30 and 70 years. Two individuals were members of a Swiss club, four had sporadic contacts to other Swiss, and the remaining two claimed to have no significant contacts to other Swiss anymore. Professions included in the sample were: multi-media artist, dental hygienist, teacher, retired chemist, highly skilled technician, homemaker, entrepreneur (transportation, software).

7 In order to increase rapport and reliability (the use of English could have potentially contributed to differences in linguistic interpretation, for instance), interviews were administered exclusively in Swiss-German. Similarly, all questionnaires were written in standard German.

of the findings with respect to Swiss-German immigrants in general, but is nevertheless quite representative of this particular sub-population.<sup>8</sup>

The ages varied from 46 to 78 years and most of the people questioned had lived in the US between 13 and 56 years. The relatively long stay in the country was also reflected in a high rate of American citizens: roughly 80% of those who answered the question about their status were American citizens. Moreover, a great deal of assimilation was evident in patterns of language use, as speaking English with fellow Swiss-Germans turned out to be a common practice. Of all the respondents who were married (90%), however, 63% had Swiss spouses. The remaining third of all respondents intermarried, 43% of these to Americans, the rest to other nationalities.

#### 4.2 *The Nature of Ethnic Group Contact*

The most striking feature of the sample was the virtual absence of individuals without ties to their home country. All respondents claimed to visit Switzerland at least sporadically – contact by phone and mail was, as we would expect, even more frequent. Discrete dimensions of contact to other Swiss *in the US* that were surveyed included “at home” (spouse and relatives), “at work,” “with friends,” “at the Swiss Club” and “other contacts”. Naturally, the frequency of the “home” dimension was most reflective of being married to a fellow Swiss.

While most respondents had no contact to other Swiss in a work environment, contacts to friends and at the Swiss Club were perhaps the most important ones. Interview data shows that they may become particularly meaningful once life in the US attains a permanent character. Renate, 37, a dental hygienist married to an American, confided in our interview that “the first three to four years I didn’t want any contact with other Swiss, but then, when I knew that I will stay here, then I went into contact with the Swiss Club.” Albert – a successful entrepreneur in his fifties with more traditional Swiss roots who also intermarried – mentioned the following about the contacts he maintained:

*That’s very important. What I miss the most here is the “coming together” the Stammtisch-talk where you can say what you please...where I’m from it’s this way: there’s two or three farmers, the butcher and the carpenter – and there you sit at a table and talk, and I miss that.*

The majority of professional/scientific survey respondents indicated several encounters with friends or acquaintances a year. Contact to Swiss Clubs was

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8 The original population was 94% male. The representation of women among the Swiss professional immigrants has, to my knowledge, increased more recently.

even more common, with about one-third of all respondents specifying at least one contact per year and 9,5% of all respondents every month. Yet about half of all cases who had relations to other Swiss in the United States claimed that they engaged in them for no particular reason; the remaining half stated that “having things in common” or practicing cultural traditions motivated them. Thus, a great deal of variation in the *meaning* of these contacts becomes evident.

### 4.3 *Explorations of Swiss Ethnic Identity*

The data confirms that self-categorization may be a poor and inadequate measure of ethnic identity for first-generation ethnics due to differences in citizenship status. In fact, in the survey sample, and regardless of ethnic attitudes, roughly 80% of the individuals who were American citizens considered themselves “Swiss-American,” whereas among the small group of resident aliens (“green card holders”) only 57% labeled themselves hyphenated Americans, the rest identified as “Swiss”. Hence, even though citizenship status and identity may go hand-in-hand, it is conceivable that having attained American citizenship, regardless of motivational considerations, appends the “externally imposed” category of “American”.

Attitudes about citizenship, on the other hand, can be more reflective of traditional ethnic identity. As an attitude toward naturalization, for example, it was mirrored in the question whether people would (or would have) become Americans if they had to *give up* their Swiss citizenship.<sup>9</sup> In response to this question, only half of all survey respondents were in favor of becoming Americans under these hypothetical circumstances, the rest had at best mixed feelings about it, perhaps indicating the symbolic significance of citizenship and national identity.

Similarly, another attitude about identity maintenance is captured by the relative importance assigned by individuals to sending their children to a Swiss school in the US should one be available. Interview responses varied strongly between sentiments of assimilation and identity maintenance. They show some individuals’ strong willingness to pass on cultural, especially linguistic traditions, on the one hand, and sentiments toward greater assimilation on the other. Paul, 48, an artist, best represents the latter attitude:

*It’s more about cultural integration for my daughter, the community we live in. I don’t think we should [send children to a Swiss school], I*

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9 This question is largely hypothetical because it is *not* common practice to renounce the Swiss citizenship with a naturalization in the US.

*don't believe in a "culture outside." My daughter wants to learn French and German, but there are alternatives ... But primarily I want her to feel at home in a place, for her to have friends, so that we are closely connected to the community.*

In the center of this assimilation – identity maintenance continuum, however, some interviewees raised practical considerations: since a main aspect of a Swiss school would be the teaching of Swiss-German, some individuals mentioned the impracticality of passing on this dialect. They agreed that standard German would be a much more useful language. But, as one person maintained, the fact that Swiss-Germans do not speak standard German at home makes the teaching of standard German difficult. At the same time, the identificational or emotional link to standard German was considered missing, and, as Cornelia asserted, it would be “just another foreign language to us.”

These considerations may be part of the reason why also virtually all respondents in the professional/scientific sample claimed that it would be of little or no importance to them to send their children to Swiss schools in the US. By the same token, there was very low agreement and almost no variation in response to the survey question whether maintaining one's Swiss identity necessitates the practicing of Swiss culture or traditions. A more general question (not explicitly tied to cultural considerations) about the importance of maintaining one's Swiss identity in an American life-context (“I want to preserve my identity as a Swiss, even though I live abroad”) produced relatively high agreement and proves to be highly correlated with similar, less culture-based attitudinal items indicating ethnic identity.

What some attitudes cannot convey, however, is ethnic identity in the dynamic context of other social identities and roles. In order to explore the relative importance of being Swiss in people's self-concept, interviewees answered the hypothetical question “If someone asked ‘who are you’ and you were not allowed to tell that person your name, what would you answer?” Being Swiss ranked very highly only among the two interviewees who were Swiss Club members. Others identified more with their profession, or, at best, indicated that their answer would be based on situational considerations. In fact, the relative “invisibility” of their Swiss background in everyday situations was regarded as beneficial by most interviewees. Compared to other items, then, the weight of respondents' origin as part of their personality (“In the US, how important has your Swiss origin as part of your personality become to you?”) emerges as particularly reflective of overall ethnic identity in the quantitative sample.

The every-day life (or “situational”) context of Swiss identity to some extent becomes evident in answers about how important it is that others know about their Swiss origins. There was a tendency for individuals with frequent ethnic contacts to emphasize their origins even among non-Swiss, whereas those with less contact mentioned the significance of “personality” or “the person as a whole” – being Swiss did not rank high enough in their self-conception in relation to others. To these people it was crucial not to be asked the question “where are you from?” Sylvia, 45, a teacher, admitted that she had always been glad when her origin did not come to the surface. To others it may again be a matter of context. Consider Stefan, 48, a software developer:

*What I appreciate the most about the US is that you don't have to reveal anything...that you can determine that yourself. If I get to know a person and like him or her, I like to say that I am from Switzerland ... but when I only deal with someone superficially, such as in business, I want to remain as anonymous as possible.*

He also emphasized the significance of linguistic assimilation and “being in control”:

*Two years ago, I did a six-month “speech derby course” to try to get rid of my accent, and it did get a little bit better, but unfortunately, it didn't go away. I would have liked that the exposition that “I am Swiss” is 100% in my control ...*

Accent, for the Swiss-Germans interviewed, is almost the sole basis for identification or misidentification by others. The classic case of Americans mixing up Sweden/Swedish and Switzerland/Swiss arose in many interviews. To individuals with dispositions similar to Stefan's, however – while being misidentified as Swedish could be a source of mild annoyance and a defensive attitude with respect to identity – misidentification as a European with *English-speaking origin*, such as Irish, is a source of great flattery, rather than a challenge to Swiss identity. To Albert, by contrast, signaling a foreign origin through an accent acquired a different meaning:

*When I was a travel guide, I spoke English very well, practically accent-free, but I lost that now. It isn't important anymore. And it now happens often that I have a strong accent ... What I am bothered by is that [older Swiss immigrants] don't want to speak Swiss-German or say “I can't speak Swiss-German anymore.” Then I say “That's bogus!”*

It should have become evident that “situationality” may be very descriptive of Swiss ethnicity in inter-group relations. In an in-group context, situational ethnicity naturally occurs through contacts to other Swiss. As Cornelia put it,



“being with Swiss,” to her, has more meaning with respect to a Swiss consciousness. “Otherwise,” she said, “being Swiss is more in the background.” In an inter-group contexts, then, it may be desirable to some that Swiss identity would not come to the surface. Consequently, ethnicity in every-day life remains a subjective state, as “becoming visible” or “standing out” has to be regulated or avoided:

*I don't feel that I stand out ... It's very important to me that I adjust here, that I belong, that I don't protrude as a foreigner. I have a problem with people who don't want to integrate. Eight to nine years ago, I had a hard time with my accent, because people always asked if I'm a foreigner. It was more the accent ... it wasn't the fact that I was Swiss. But I felt I didn't fit in completely.*

#### 4.3.1 Ethnic Identity as a Process of Comparison

It is widely recognized that ethnic identity is a concept arising from dynamic forces. As a social identity, it involves the “process of comparison” outlined earlier. What are the degrees to which the contrast to Americans and American culture as opposed to feelings of “being like other Swiss” has an impact on the individual Swiss consciousness? Naturally, interviewees who had virtually no contact to other Swiss in the US answered that they derive their “feeling Swiss” from perceived differences. But, as Stefan claimed, this difference is not necessarily undesirable:

*When I go to Switzerland ... many things are familiar, we have many things in common, such as schooling. I have little in common with Americans: I never was in high school, I never did the usual rituals I now see my kids doing. The best way I could put it: I feel comfortable living in a place where I'm different than others. Maybe even more comfortable than somewhere where all others are like me.*

To Sepp, who was part of the Swiss ethnic network, perceived differences were very much the outcome of a comparison of the Americans to the ethnic group – being with other Swiss in the US marks a distinct sense of difference, based not only on a shared culture, but on a common immigration experience which demarcates the Swiss immigrants from the Americans:

*We think differently [as Swiss immigrants]. In a sense more objectively. Americans are also in a way narrow minded, isolated, thinking America is the best. And we tend to think that's wrong ... this way you distance yourself as a Swiss ... There's a sense of pride. Because we lived in both places ... You are beyond them in that sense, when you're among Swiss.*

In the context of group comparison, the problem of what “American” really stands for also emerged. Based on the belief that this label should automatically elicit responses with respect to a comparison group (or groups) meaningful to each respondent, the definition of this term was left up to individual interpretations. While some respondents may have had an “ideal type” American in mind, a couple of individuals raised the issue of different American cultural groups that may be relevant in this process of comparison. To Marianne, for example, it was clear that the Swiss have much in common with [mainstream] Americans, simply because both cultures are Western, which contrasts with other cultures represented in California.

It comes to no surprise, then, that interviewees’ perceived contrasts to the “Americans” turn out to be not so much about culture itself as about more subtle differences in social character produced by that culture. A few respondents mentioned American openness in contrast to Swiss “narrow-mindedness” and “exactness”, for instance. A good example was provided by Albert:

*I have become very open in my thinking – that’s more American. I accept things. I acquired that well, I also had to for my business. But then, the other thing is Swiss punctuality and “being exact” – I still am that way. I didn’t change there. And I think much of my success with my business can be explained by that.*

#### 4.4 “Ethnic Awareness”

In theory, perceived contrasts or differences can – but must not – produce ethnic awareness. This awareness goes beyond simple beliefs or normative statements rooted in “group comparisons”, as it involves perceptions of social distance and stereotyping. In immigrants, as postulated in this paper, the “negative-subjective” variable in question should also include feelings of disadvantage and difficulties “fitting in”. Ethnic awareness, therefore, becomes more indicative of a subjective manifestation of “culture clash” in immigrants. Nonetheless, the characteristics of Swiss migration and the Swiss immigrant group suggest that these effects may be generally mild. In fact, to many Swiss in the interview sample, life in the US brought forth a kind of freedom that they could not have experienced in what some believed to be a “narrow” and “rigid” Swiss society. The entrepreneurs Albert and Stefan, for instance, claimed that their business success would probably not have been possible in Switzerland.

Nevertheless, adjustment to American life is an issue that immigrants have to deal with, which can be illustrated by Stefan, who made clear that:

*... [adjustment] didn't happen immediately. I remember that very well. It took about two years. In the first half-year it was even very difficult, and I felt repelled by all the usual things that bother Europeans: what I perceived as a lack of respect for knowledge and skill; also tastelessness, such as tacky Christmas cards – well, superficial things, but I read a lot into it.*

Sepp, 62, too, learned to adjust by at least tolerating differences:

*In the beginning, everything seemed a little paradox, since I grew up in a different milieu where everything had to be exact and “in one line.” Then I always thought Americans are strange. Later you start to think differently: it isn't actually all that bad. This way also works. You can deal with it.*

Ironically (but perhaps not surprisingly), however, a couple of interviewees lacked an acceptance of a reality considered favorable for the life of immigrants: Californian multiculturalism. Perhaps, having been socialized at a time Switzerland was still a very homogenous society, and wishing to fit into mainstream America, some Swiss may not have a high degree of understanding or appreciation of cultural pluralism. Hans, 68, a retired chemist, who expressed a great deal of assimilationist sentiments, interpreted the Californian tradition of bilingual education as a “special treatment” which, in his view, could only lead to undesirable social divisions. Sylvia stated similar personal problems with political and racial issues when she proclaimed:

*Sometimes I have difficulties with all this political correctness. Sometimes minorities are given more opportunities, like at public schools. My daughter, she's at Berkeley High, they have a course about tolerance, and there's only two to three whites in the course, the rest are black. They have to document their heritage. And that history teacher thinks that Columbus was a pig anyway ... There it is a disadvantage to be white ... I don't feel that's right ... that affects me somehow.*

As expected, however, general responses to “feelings of disadvantage” were relatively mild. Furthermore, disadvantages were of course more perceived as the result of being a foreigner, than due to Swiss national minority status. Nevertheless, three individuals were – one of them at least initially – bothered by a perceived American tendency to relate to other people only “superficially”, perhaps indicative of feelings of social distance. The professional/scientific survey sample confirms that, compared to other items, there is relatively high agreement on this perception (“Americans maintain rather superficial contacts and relationships with other people”), as well as the stereotyping of Americans

(“During my stay in the US, I realized that stereotypes about Americans are true”), another kind of social distance indicator.

Conversely, interviewees were keenly aware of stereotypes Americans hold about Switzerland and the Swiss. Almost everyone mentioned the “Nazi gold” problem that Switzerland was facing at the time. Sepp remarked that many Americans perceive that “the whole world belongs to Switzerland who has control over the world through banks,” while Paul, the artist, perceived American stereotypes about the Swiss as follows:

*This depends on how far they are informed ... ignorant people know little. Most who know something about Switzerland were there ... If they have been in Switzerland, they speak about it positively. Cleanliness in the first place. But that there are creative Swiss is seldom recognized.*

Along with feelings of social distance, the degree of a general awareness of stereotypes is characteristic of ethnic awareness. Indeed, compared to other items, respondents in the quantitative sample attest to a relatively high ethnic awareness as reflected in perceived stereotypes by Americans toward the Swiss.

#### 4.5 Hypotheses Testing

This study’s three major variables are *ethnic group contact*, *ethnic awareness* and *ethnic identity* for the testing of hypotheses by means of the scientific/professional survey sample. To increase validity and reliability, and to account for the multi-faceted nature of the variables, multiple indicators were applied from which indices<sup>10</sup> were constructed by adding the values of responses to 5-point scale questions, coded by assigning values between 1 and 5.

Based on questions from previous research and issues that arose in interviews, ethnic identity, the dependent variable, is measured by an “ethnic identity index” consisting of 7 items. Individual scale items are highly inter-correlated indicators of the preservation of Swissness in immigrants, including issues of Swiss social character, nationality and assimilation.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the 5-item

10 The use of indices – and subsequently regressions – proves relatively robust and appropriate considering the limited number of cases in the study. It also improves the predictive utility of different models. Nevertheless, the meaning of different dimensions as well as increments within the variables has to be assumed equal, and the addition of several ordinal items is, of course, at best an approximation of a continuous variable.

11 The respective dimensions of the ethnic identity index included scaled answers to (relative agreement with) the following questions: “I consider myself a typical Swiss with respect to my character” (adapted from Waters, 1990; also arose in interviews); “I want to preserve my identity as a Swiss, even though I live abroad” (from Zéphir, 1996); “If you had to *give up* your Swiss citizenship, would you (or would have) become an American citizen?” (from Lüscher, 1961); “In the US, how important has your Swiss origin as part of your

“ethnic awareness index” involves a “negative-subjective” or “culture clash” dimension in immigrants.<sup>12</sup> With respect to the variable of ethnic group contact, factor analysis reveals that dimensions of contact could be collapsed into a few meaningful areas, which we might call “friends and club” (core social networks), “ties to Switzerland” (including visits to Switzerland and contact by phone and mail), “work” and “home”.

Table 1  
Rotated Component Matrix for “Ethnic Group Contact”

Dimension	Component		
	1	2	3
Friends	.775	-	-
Swiss Club	.747	-	.113
At home (spouse, relatives)	.385	-.339	.647
At work	-.373	.459	.503
Elsewhere	-	-	-.836
Phone/mail Switzerland	.486	.729	-.190
Visit Switzerland	-	.899	-

Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. - :  $.10 > \alpha < -.10$

personality become to you?”; “If you get to know someone, how important is it to you that the person is aware of you being Swiss?” (from Zéphir, 1996); “Does it bother you if someone thinks that you are Swedish, i. e. mixes up Sweden and Switzerland?” (arose in interviews); “If you had a name that is difficult to pronounce for Americans, such as “Jacques”, would you change it to a more English sounding one?” (from Waters, 1990; Bakalian, 1993). Despite the multidimensional nature of the variable, a look at statistical inter-item correlations revealed an underlying relationship, indicating an inherent complexity in immigrant ethnic identity if it is measured on an individual level, while the preservation of a Swiss identity remained a basic theme. Due to a low agreement and a lack of variation, two questions could not be included in the index. These were: “How important would it be to you to send your children to a Swiss school, should one be available” and “It is not possible to remain Swiss without maintaining Swiss culture or traditions”. For more on scaling see Goldstein, Arnold P. and Michel Hersen (1984), *The Handbook of Psychological Assessment*, New York: Pergamon.

- 12 This index included scaled answers to the following questions: “During my stay in the US, I realized that stereotypes about Americans are true” (inspired by Eigenheer and Baumann, 1997); “Americans hold stereotypes about us Swiss” (from Portes, 1984); “Americans maintain rather superficial contacts and relationships with other people” (arose in interviews); “In some aspects of life in the US, I feel disadvantaged as a foreigner” (from Lüscher, 1961); “How easy or difficult has it been to you to adjust to life in the US?”. As in the case of the “ethnic identity index”, inter-item correlations among these dimensions confirmed the theoretical idea of such a “negative-subjective” variable of ethnic awareness.

#### 4.5.1 The “Positive-Behavioral” Hypothesis

Theories of “ethnic assimilation” and “ethnic enclosure” suggest that the relative strength of ethnic identity is caused by degrees of contact to the ethnic group. The data of this study consist of several dimensions of ethnic group contact to test this hypothesis. Statistically, however, differences in contact between any of these areas and ethnic identity *cannot* be established, even for the dimension “friends and Swiss club” where we would perhaps most expect this relationship. The same is true for the “work” and “home” dimensions – the latter being almost entirely reflective of marriage patterns. Indeed, since the median age at immigration for the sample is 28, many respondents may have been married before coming to the US, which could have made the *choice* of spouse less meaningful with respect to ethnicity identity.

Interestingly, the “ties to Switzerland” component of contact is negatively related to the dependent variable, though not significantly so from a statistical point of view. Interview data illustrates that the meaning of contact to Switzerland may be problematic. To some Swiss, such as Albert, contact to Switzerland may be a kind of “identificational anchor”:

*I maintain [Swiss identity] perfectly. It's like an anchor to go home. I want to spend time in Switzerland when I'm old. It's very beautiful here, but I don't have the “connection” That's very important to me.*

The same ties can actually heighten the awareness of *difference*, of being an untypical Swiss, in others. Sylvia, for example, maintained that

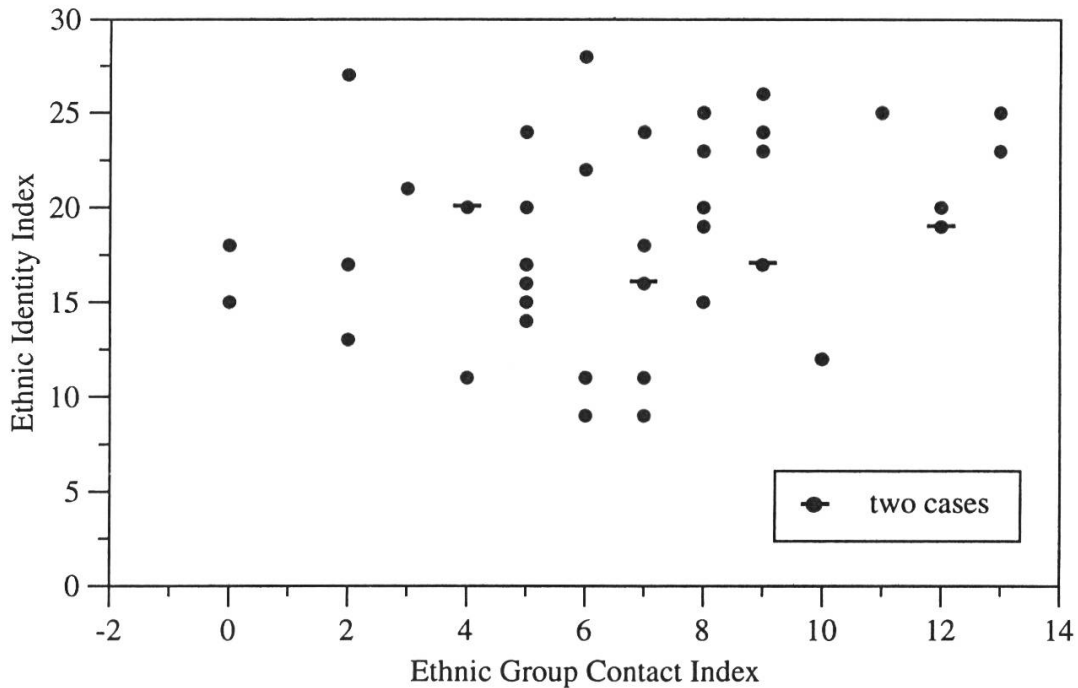
*it's strange, here I feel more like a Swiss than in Switzerland. I could never admit that. There I feel often more like an American. Somehow, many things are so narrow, black and white. I think this is because here we have so many shades ... everyone opens up here – automatically. I think that's very positive.*

Finally, ties to Switzerland are sometimes not entirely of personal but professional nature, which further obscures the meaning of these relationships.

If a continuous “ethnic group contact index” consisting of all contacts to other Swiss *in the United States* is applied, however, it yields the strongest results against ethnic identity.

Although a mild cumulative effect of contact against identity becomes obvious, the frequency of ethnic group contact cannot significantly contribute to an overall model also containing the “negative-subjective” hypothesis (see table 2, model 1).

Graph 1  
Ethnic identity by Ethnic Group Contact



#### 4.5.2 The “Negative-Subjective” (“Ethnic Awareness”) Hypothesis

In order to test the “negative-subjective” hypothesis based on the ethnic resilience perspective, an analysis of the relationship between ethnic awareness and ethnic identity is necessary. As discussed earlier, part of this school of thought suggests that ethnic awareness is the primary determinant of ethnic identity. The sample of Swiss professional immigrants produces a strong relationship between the variables in question.

Compared to the first hypothesis, ethnic awareness by itself proves to be more strongly related to ethnic identity and is a better predictor of that variable. Consequently, it is also able to contribute significantly to the overall model ( $\beta = .408$ ; table 2, model 1).

A link between ethnic awareness and ethnic group contact is another component of the ethnic resilience hypothesis, and it is also an implication of the ethnic enclosure perspective. The former point of view implies that more contact to the ethnic group may heighten ethnic awareness, whereas the latter perspective theorizes that ethnic awareness leads to stronger solidarity or contact with the ethnic group.

Graph 2  
Ethnic Identity by Ethnic Awareness

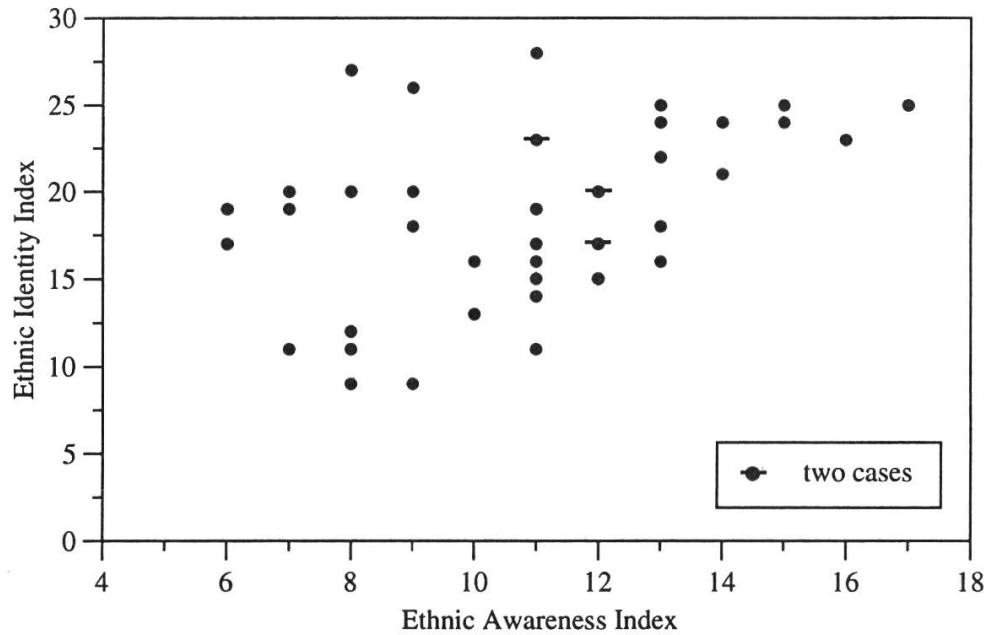


Table 2  
Standardized Coefficients for Regression of  
Ethnic Identity on Selected Independent Variables

Independent Variable	Model 1	Model 2
Ethnic Group Contact Index	.176 (1.182)	
Native Language Ethnic Group Contact Index		.350* (2.401)
Ethnic Awareness Index	.408** (2.799)	.343* (2.425)
<i>Control Variables</i>		
Years in the US	-.075 (-.217)	.036 (.108)
Age	.175 (.504)	.045 (.134)
Number of cases	42	42
R-Square	.230	.309

Note: Numbers in parentheses are *t*-statistics.

\*\*  $p < .01$  ; \*  $p < .05$



The nature of this potential correlation can once again be illustrated by interview data. As mentioned, one-fourth of the individuals in the qualitative sample mentioned a certain social distance, a persisting inability to establish meaningful contacts to Americans as the reason why they had sought out other Swiss. Albert, for example, stated that he sometimes has had “difficulties to participate,” that “everything is a little superficial,” and that he had felt “a little uncomfortable there [with Americans]” Stefan at first perceived the same social differences, but developed an understanding and appreciation for it over time:

*It was difficult to have closer contact with people in an emotional sense, especially with men ... I had the feeling that the conversational horizon was very narrow, and I would say, I partly got used to it, and partly I realized that Americans act differently in different social situations. For example, I noticed, at parties, that it was almost impolite to talk too long to one person, that this is perceived as excluding others, which was exactly the opposite in Switzerland ... this would have been interpreted as superficial, which I also perceived this way back then, and it bothered me. But after some time, you get used to it, and I found that Americans have a certain way to interact socially which is very different, which also has interesting aspects.*

The relationship between ethnic awareness and contact, as implied by the first hypothesis, may also go in the other direction: contacts to other Swiss might as well reinforce ethnic awareness. Part of this may be analogous to the initial phase of culture shock that travelers and immigrants alike enhance when they compare things to home amongst themselves. Indeed, according to Renate (who also perceived American contacts as “superficial”), a member of the largest Swiss Club in San Francisco, “comparing things to Switzerland” is one of the elements of coming together as Swiss immigrants. It is this process, then, which may heighten perceptions of ethnic awareness.

Both Albert and Renate, however, exhibit common traits: a more traditional Swiss background, immigration due to family reasons (intermarriage), lower educational attainment, and, most important, strong ties to other Swiss. They represent those interviewees who have the least in common with the surveyed professional immigrants. These differences might partially account for the fact that, statistically, mere *frequency of contact* proves *not* to be enough to establish a relationship to ethnic awareness in the survey sample.

### 4.5.3 Incorporating “Cultural Content”: Model 2

The weak connections between objective and subjective types of variables, specifically ethnic group contact and ethnic identity, are most likely due to a lack of *meaning* when frequencies of contact alone are considered. Naturally, contacts to other Swiss in the US can be the means for identity maintenance on a social and cultural level. A good example of the relationship between social contact and maintenance of cultural traditions, of course, is the “Swiss Club.” Among interviewees, Club members regarded the celebration of the 1st of August or an annual Fondue as a vital part of coming together. More important, to almost all individuals, the maintenance of cultural traditions evoked the necessity of using the native language.

It may not merely be the contacts to the ethnic group as ethnic boundaries, but as a cultural aspect (earlier identified as “cultural content”) which gives these contacts a meaning in relation to identity. One way to find a meaningful<sup>13</sup> link between ethnic group contact as a behavioral dimension and the subjective ethnic identity variable, then, is a contact-dependent cultural dimension.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned, *language use* may be particularly consequential in the Swiss-German case.

Unlike ethnic group contact, the variable “native language ethnic group contact” can significantly contribute to a new model ( $\beta = ,350$ ). This new index includes only those contacts during which Swiss-German was predominantly spoken.<sup>15</sup> The model, including ethnic awareness ( $\beta = ,343$ ) as a second independent variable, is able to explain roughly 30% of the variation in ethnic identity and proves to be a better predictor of ethnic identity than the first model (see table 2, model 2).

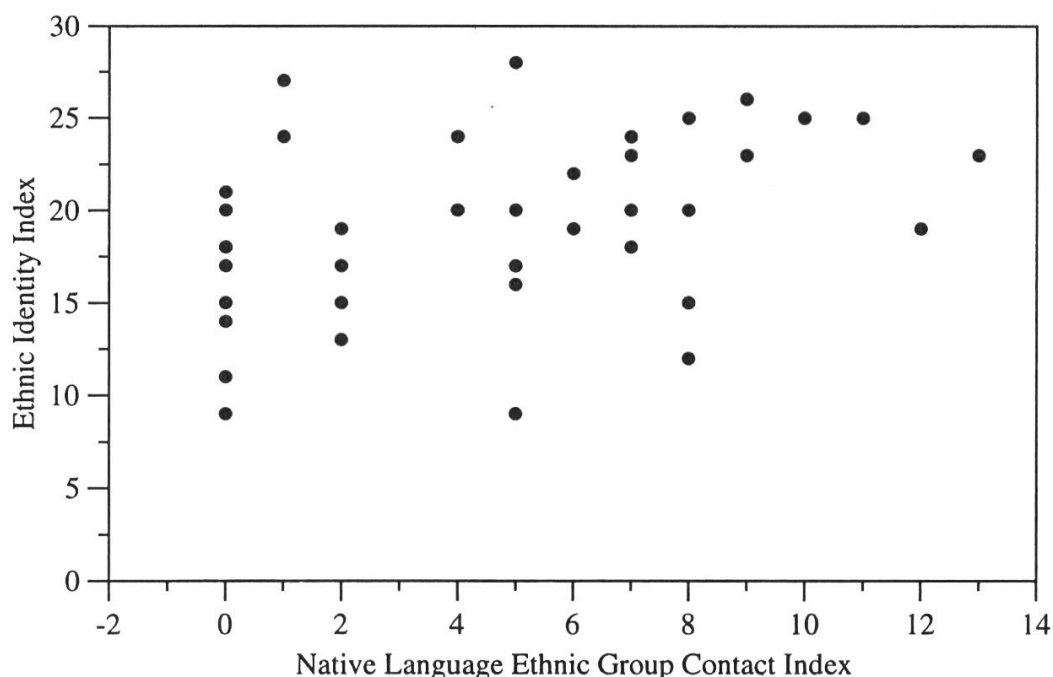
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13 Other research has accounted for “meaning” by considering “quality of social contact,” but those measures do not take into account cultural or behavioral aspects. See for example Liang, Zai (1994), Social Contact, Social Capital and the Naturalization Process, *Social Science Research*, 23/4, 407–437.

14 A distinction can be made between different behavioral (or “objective”) aspects of ethnicity: many cultural practices – such as eating ethnic food, reading foreign newspapers, or even celebrating holidays – do not require contacts to other members of an ethnic group.

15 The variable was constructed in the same manner as the “ethnic group contact” index, but only dimensions of contact during which Swiss-German was spoken most often (as indicated by questionnaire respondents) were counted.

Graph 3  
Ethnic Identity by Native Language Ethnic Group Contact



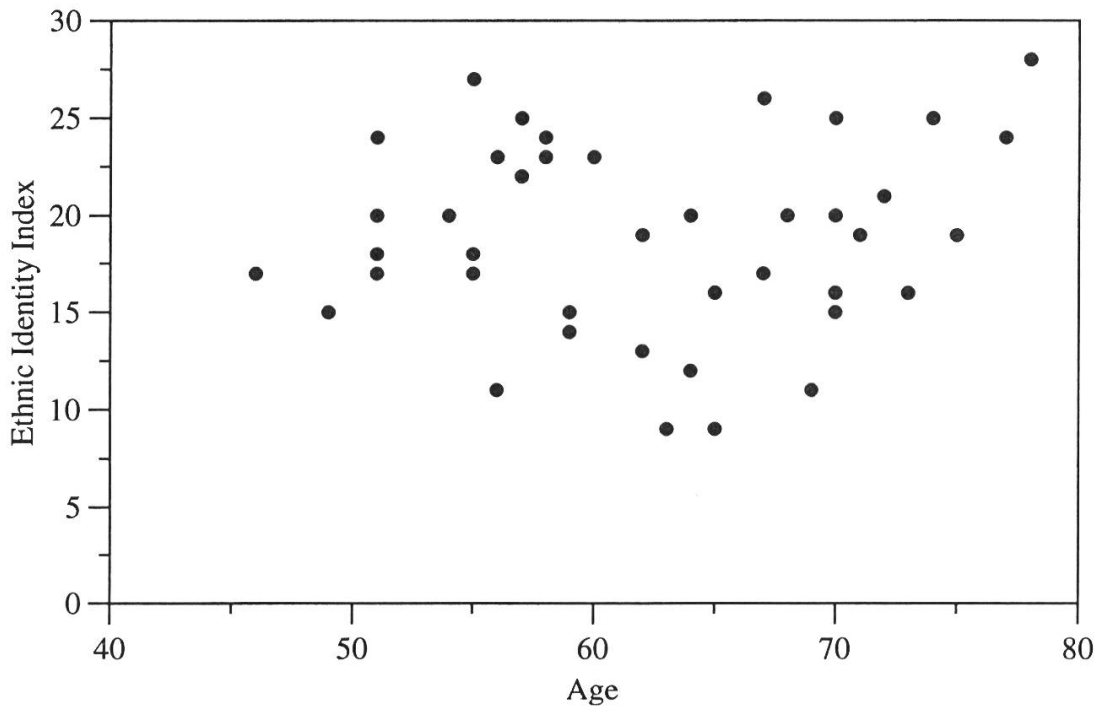
The amount of time individuals had spent in the US – an important factor in assimilation theories – cannot explain any of the variables' variation, although the immigrants in the sample do not include relative newcomers. It thereby confirms theories implying that ethnic identity in individual immigrants is relatively salient, as it is *traditional* by definition and may weaken (or change into a more “symbolic” identity) at best over the course of generations. In fact, instead of a linear connection between years and identity, findings suggest a possible non-linear cohort effect based on age.<sup>16</sup>

## 5. Summary and Implications

This study attempted to convey and analyze different aspects of ethnicity among a specific quantitative professional Swiss-German immigrant sample in California and a more general qualitative sample. Its goal was not to discover Swiss ethnicity compared to other populations, but to test the assumptions of major theories about ethnicity and identity applied to a small, relatively dispersed and invisible, largely middle class immigrant group. In the process, the analysis

<sup>16</sup> The correlation coefficient between years in the US and age is ,908.

Graph 4  
Ethnic Identity by Age



should have helped to define aspects of ethnicity relevant to the study of similar immigrant groups in the US. While the relative homogeneity of the (all-male professional immigrant) survey sample was useful in discovering these relationships, however, larger-scale research on Swiss or Swiss-Germans is needed in the future, covering the full range of time in the country, age cohort, and gender. More specifically, issues raised about the practical and symbolic functions of language among the Swiss-Germans will require close attention. In any event, the results of this study provide partial challenges to major hypotheses, in this research labeled the “positive-behavioral” hypothesis, based on ethnic enclosure and assimilation theories, and the “negative-subjective” hypothesis, based on the ethnic resilience or “ethnic awareness” perspective.

The former hypothesis rested on the assumption that contact to other Swiss would represent some degree of a preservation of group boundaries and a means of reinforcing ethnic identity, as theorized by Barth (1969), for example. Contacts to other Swiss were hypothesized to depict the way in which Swiss identity is preserved among immigrants, or, in turn, to be an effect of identity to begin with. This research should have made clear that contacts to other Swiss include many dimensions, some of which may be more reflective of identity issues than others.

Surprisingly, core social networks – in the form of contacts to Swiss friends and the Swiss club – by themselves are not significantly related to ethnic identity in this study. The absence of relative isolation of Swiss immigrants would suppose this relationship to be significant, considering the “effort” and identificational motivation involved in seeking out and maintaining such contacts – more research across populations is needed to back up this assertion. Similarly, some writings’ emphasis on “ties to the home country” proves to be overrated, or at best ambiguous, with respect to the Swiss-German identity in this study’s sample.

Still, in a model combining both hypotheses, overall contact to the Swiss in the US makes no significant contribution – a “missing behavioral link” between the contact variable and the more subjective variable of ethnic identity is needed to establish meaning. Hence, contact during which Swiss-German is predominantly spoken proves to be a good contributor to the statistical model. This variable in part represents the “cultural content” of ethnic group contact that some scholars, such as Edwards (1985), consider important to explain ethnic identity. Consequently, this research shows that contact to other Swiss-Germans in the United States may be insignificant in relation to ethnic identity if it is void of *cultural meaning*.

The dispersion of a given ethnic group renders the subjective aspects of ethnicity more consequential. In the process, we can also expect contact theories that de-emphasize “cultural content” to become less useful in explaining ethnic identity. While contacts become more voluntary under those circumstances, dispersion implies that ethnic boundaries (both physical and social) decrease, along with increasing assimilation and a certain loss of cultural content. Thereby, the symbolic or identificational function of a native language, for example, becomes more critical.

The second hypothesis was based on ethnic awareness, which is presumably more subtle among the Swiss than among some more disadvantaged immigrant groups. Again, the aim of this research was to uncover not so much the magnitude of these perceptions, as their relationship to ethnic identity. Indeed, ethnic awareness, in this study, serves well as a determinant of ethnic identity. This finding demonstrates that the mildness of ethnic awareness, evident in a lack of unfavorable treatment, conflict, or competition, for the Swiss, does not mean that it cannot be a good subjective factor affecting ethnic identity. The results thereby partially support the ethnic awareness/resilience perspective and call for its consideration in future research.

The reason for these findings, of course, partly lies in the perhaps inherent congruity among subjective elements of ethnicity. Similarly, this study implies

that subjective aspects of ethnicity, such as ethnic identity, can be more salient than behavioral dimensions, such as ethnic group contact. This is evident in the fact that ethnic identity is ascribed and socialized (“traditional”) in immigrants, as indicated by some individuals’ high ethnic identity despite relatively little contact to other Swiss. More important, it cannot be established, in this study’s sample, that time is a variable affecting the identity of individuals who have been in the country for at least 10 years. Thus this research shows that assimilation theories stressing a behavioral – identificational temporal process, as in Gordon (1964), may be more applicable across generations, even for an immigrant group that meets many behavioral and structural requirements for rapid assimilation.

Another noteworthy result of this analysis is indicated by the lack of a significant relationship between ethnic group contact and ethnic awareness. The ethnic resilience approach to ethnicity, therefore, can only partially be supported. While ethnic awareness and ethnic identity are related in this research, the former has no significant effect on contact to the ethnic group, as theories outlined in Portes (1984) would suggest. Obviously, there is no need for the Swiss to “huddle for self-protection” or to “mobilize”. However, there is also an absence of a causal relationship between group contact and ethnic awareness, as ethnic enclosure theories imply. Considered together, then, these findings could be due to a lack of sufficient isolation of the Swiss immigrant group in addition to an overall weak experience of ethnic awareness. The applicability of both hypotheses, thus, may become limited to particular sociohistorical contexts and ethnic groups that conform to a certain *degree* of isolation or experiences of ethnic awareness.

This analysis has hopefully shown that meaningful *contexts* of contacts to other Swiss may be strongly related to ethnic identity. For highly acculturated immigrants such as the Swiss, then, ethnicity does in part become “voluntary” from a behavioral point of view. In relation to the ethnic group, this is evident in variations of meaning between different contexts of contacts, also reflected in the need for cultural content in the form of language. At the same time, in the public sphere, there is an issue of “being in control” over situations in which being Swiss assumes salience. It is perhaps the desire to “fit in” aided by a “passing” as white Anglo-Americans that contribute to some Swiss immigrants’ emphasis on the elimination of an accent – the last signal of ethnicity. In every-day life, the Swiss are, and usually choose to remain, relatively invisible. In the light of the salience of traditional ethnic identity, then, situational ethnicity should be viewed as a predominantly *behavioral* concept among the Swiss immigrant population in this study. Research from the perspective of symbolic interactionism could further illuminate these processes.

Although this article was based on an oversimplified view of social forces, it should have revealed some of the dynamics of ethnic identity construction. This was not only evident in context-specific ethnicity, but in the combination of both “positive-behavioral” factors, in the form of ethnic group contact and language use, and “negative-subjective” elements, in the form of ethnic awareness, explaining ethnic identity. This research thereby also demonstrates that identity must be viewed as a process of inter-group relations, as evidenced in ethnic awareness, which, in the case of this sample, is especially pronounced in feelings about social distance and stereotyping. With this in mind, more research is certainly needed about the role of other (minority and majority) groups in the construction of Swiss ethnic identity. Should white, middle class Anglo-Americans be the major “reference group” for the Swiss, to what degree does this population also serve as a “comparison group”? What is the role of race and other ethnic groups in the process of constructing Swiss ethnic identity? The exploration of issues raised in this study requires more investigations across immigrant populations.

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