Judaism, Jewishness, and Being Jewish:

The Construction and Intersection of Culture and Religion in Reform Jewish Families

by

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, William and Margaret, who have stood by my side

and supported me in everything I have set out to do. I owe all of my achievements and

accomplishments to you.

Biographical Sketch

The author was born in Rochester, New York on July 20th, 1981. He attended Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York, from 2000 to 2004 and graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and a minor in Religious Studies. In 2000, he was inducted into *Psi Chi*, the national honor society in Psychology. Working full-time at the University of Rochester from 2004-2014, he held positions in Psychiatry, Psychology, and Pediatrics. In 2014, he transitioned to Washington, D.C. to assume the role of Director for The Health Management Academy, a knowledge-based organization that provides peer learning, research, and advisory services to C-Suite executives of the nation's leading health systems. He began doctoral studies in Human Development at the University of Rochester in 2008, focusing on how culture and religion shape the beliefs, values, and customs of individuals and families. Bryan received a Master of Science degree in Education from the University of Rochester in 2009. He has pursued his research in the field of Human Development under the direction of Professor Dena Phillips Swanson in the Department of Education at the University of Rochester's Margaret Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development.

## Acknowledgements

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the intersection of culture and religion in Reform Jewish families. Using symbolic interactionism and identity theory as frameworks, the following research question guided this study: How is culture and religion constructed in Reform Jewish families? Three families and three successive generations within each family (n=12) participated in three focus groups, individual interviews, and participant observations as data collection methods. Analysis within a grounded theory approach indicates that individual and family experiences placed the value of family traditions and practices as an important component in how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families. Family traditions and practices helped to frame cultural and religious contexts for participants. They provided the opportunity to create social networks that resulted in social connectedness to culture and religion. Families also valued and provided opportunities for choice across generations. Participants consistently endorsed changing or altering a concept in their life if it did not meet their needs.

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independently by the student.

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**Chapter 1: Introduction**

Lee (2002) notes that religion is not a fixed framework; it can be influenced by environments, experiences, and peers. Likewise, members of Jewish groups and cultures use a variety of methods to construct their understanding of the world they live in. Yet, little is known about how Jewish individuals form their beliefs and values and how their influences are interpreted by other generations. Moreover, little is known about how culture *and* religion may influence these effects.

Past empirical studies that have informed the discipline of culture and religion as it relates to Judaism have also created a significant research problem regarding knowledge in this area. First, there have been few studies examining the role that the family has on the construction of Judaism. Those that have been conducted cluster those who identify as being Jewish into one unified group, rather than examining a particular movement of Judaism (e.g., Himmelfarb, 1980). Second, Judaism can be a religion *and* a cultural way of life. Relatedly, Reform Judaism subscribes to the notion that much of the Jewish culture and religion can be modernized and compatible with participation of other surrounding cultures. This provides a nice juxtaposition of Jewish and American culture and their relationships with one another, and is especially interesting considering Himmelfarb's (1980) observation that after three generations of foreign-born Jews have been in America, many of them only consider themselves to be culturally, and not religiously, Jewish. With some members often considering themselves not *religiously,* but *culturally* Jewish, this is a relevant area for exploration, and an important one in that it includes those who do not identify with the religion.

A recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that while Jewish individuals feel a strong connection to belonging of the Jewish people, roughly 22%, or one-in-

five Jews, state they have no religion ("A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 2013"). Furthermore, 93% of Jews classified in the "Greatest Generation" (born 1914-1927) identified as being Jewish through religion, yet only 68% of the "Millennial Generation" (born after 1980) also stated they were Jewish by religion ("A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 2013"). The study also notes that the Reform movement of Jews accounts for roughly 35% of Jewish Americans, the largest self-reported denomination of Jews in America ("A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 2013").

Prior research has identified several methods for which learning processes, specifically those that instill and generate belief systems, occur. Many scholars agree that where culture and religion intersect, and in some cases become enmeshed, has a large impact on the development and construction of those systems (see Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff et al., 2003; Nelsen, 1981; Hoge et al., 1982; Cornwall, 1988; Myers, 1996; Cohen & Eisen, 2000; Fishman, 2000). Yet, scholars have had a difficult time delineating specific processes and methods members of a particular culture and religion use in order for construction to take place.

Furthermore, empirical research that informs this area has been limited by: (a) largely outdated findings, few recent advances in the field, and antiquated data; (b) quantitative findings that fail to capture detailed personal histories, experiences, and life cycle/generational heritages; and (c) the clustering of those who identify as being Jewish into one unified group rather than examining the various movements of Judaism. This final point assumes that the group has homogeneity.

The notion that these points have largely been neglected within the discipline creates a large gap in the literature and knowledge base. Wieting (1975) states an important observation as to why research in this area is warranted – "if a society is to continue its existence beyond one generation, the members must transmit what they consider to be necessary knowledge and

values. The continuity of a social system by definition requires transmission between generations" (p. 137).

This observation, as well as Himmelfarb's (1980) noted previously, suggests the increasing need to qualitatively examine these processes in order to broaden knowledge in this area. Cohen and Eisen (2000) identified several important considerations for future researchers to explore related to the self and family, rituals, the waning of "public" Judaism, and spirituality and the synagogue. This study seeks to further explore and expand upon these important domains.

While the limited, delineated research exploring Jews as opposed to other groups has already been discussed, the decision to examine the specific movement of Reform Judaism was guided by many considerations. First, the few, and older, studies that have centered specifically on Judaism and its ability to "transmit" beliefs and values intergenerationally have used Reform Jewish families (see Lazerwitz, 1973; Cornwall, 1988). The rationale for selecting this particular group in these previous studies is somewhat unclear and ill-defined; however, by grounding this study in prior research, this creates a solid base to confirm or challenge past claims, and build upon already established knowledge. Second, the decision to focus on Reform Jewish families was important because Reform Jews are equally and collectively allowed to participate in Jewish services and rituals regardless of gender, sex, or sexual orientation. This is a stark contrast to Conservative and Orthodox Jewish movements and allows for the chance of equality to each member within the larger cultural group.

Moreover, Reform Judaism subscribes to the notion that much of the Jewish culture and religion be modernized and compatible with participation of other surrounding cultures. Reform Judaism in the United States is also unique in that it allows intermarriages and accepts gay and

lesbian members into the congregation even though some rabbis may not officiate at these weddings. Furthermore, while Conservative and Orthodox Judaism subscribe to traditional Jewish law in that a child is only considered Jewish if it is born of a Jewish mother, Reform Judaism accepts the child as Jewish if either the Jewish father *or* mother raise it with a Jewish identity. This is especially important given this dissertation and its focus on the construction of culture and religion within a multi-generational Jewish family.

This dissertation uses two complementing theoretical frameworks. The first, Blumer's (1969) notion of symbolic interactionism, helps to elicit the processes Jewish individuals use to create, sustain, and mediate meaning. Because a large amount of Judaism is centered on these forms of meaning making (i.e., synagogue participation, communal events, high holidays, seders), it is appropriate to use this theoretical framework as a way to examine how being Jewish is constructed through active and reflective processes.

A second useful framework that will be used is James Gee's (2000) work conducted on identity theory and development. While there is a wealth of empirical knowledge on identity, Gee's (2000) work and formulation of identity theory is especially important to this undertaking because it views identities as "multiple, changing, and fluid." This also allows for individuals to each have their own form or type of identity, and creates the ability to either distinguish between members of an interrelated group or culture, or view them as a collective.

**Researcher Positionality**

I grew up in a Protestant, Lutheran family that went to church most Sundays, was well networked with other families and individuals in the congregation, and celebrated all of the major Christian religious holidays. Religion, at least to me as a child, seemed like something that

occupied about three hours of my life on Sundays and ended, until the following Sunday, when the television was turned on to watch football after church services. The cultural side of being a Lutheran never clicked for me, whatever that might entail or look like. The activities and events I participated in as an individual and a member of a family were more about doing things together as a family and less about doing them because we were a family that was also Lutheran with cultural or religious undertones.

Growing up as a child without siblings, my small immediate family was juxtaposed by relatively large extended family. My mother's side consisted of one brother and parents that were Catholic. My mother left the Catholic Church when she married my father because she believed the messages were rooted in hypocrisy. My father was raised in a religious and observant family (much more active than my immediate family) and is the youngest of four brothers. Two of his three brothers had children, who had more children, and now their families are large and continue to grow. They are all what I would classify as very religious – they attend Sunday services, read the Bible in their free time, make Christ's message their life work, and it is obvious that they are grounded in religion and it is a central part of their lives and who they are as people.

The initial motivation to explore the intersection of culture and religion stems from observing how my immediate family and my extended family functions when it comes to involvement in Christianity. It was clear from an early age that my immediate family was and is different from my aunts, uncles, and cousins. With the extended family placing a heavy importance on religion and how it defines you as a person, I became interested in how they became that way while my immediate family was almost nonchalant about it. What happened along life's path that caused such a dramatic difference between people that came from the same

family? Even more intriguing was how the knowledge and importance of being religious and leading a religious life was passed successfully between generations of my extended family.

My interest in this area grew deeper when I was an adolescent and teenager. In high school, I had Jewish friends and dated Jewish girls. As I became better friends with them and met their families, it was clear that their families were similar to mine; there were some families that were not very religious, but participated in the holidays, and there were other families that were religiously devout. However, I also noticed that individuals in these Jewish families would identify more so with the cultural side of being Jewish as opposed to Judaism, the religion. This was intriguing to me as I considered how life was in my family compared to my Jewish friends who self-identified as culturally, not religiously "Jew-ish." This interest followed me to college where I completed a minor in Religious Studies with coursework in contemporary Judaism. In graduate school, I pursued my interest of culture and religion and researched the intersectionality of each in Amish and Old Order Mennonite communities. With regard to this study, I am not converting to Judaism, nor did I marry a Jewish girl. I am simply interested in learning more about culture and religion based on my life experiences.

**Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

Several scholars have noted that religious systems, in one form or another, are found in essentially every facet of human existence (Atran & Norenzayan, 2004; Boyer, 2003). Equally abundant are attempts to define what exactly religion is (Martin, 1987; Pyysiäinen, 2001). Similarly, the notion of culture, as noted by Williams (1999), is "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language, primarily because of its use in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought" (p. 3).

In spite of the multitude of definitions for religion and culture, and their use across many disciplines and fields of study, scholars generally agree that the central tenants of religion include some form of "highly committed, ritualized practices and beliefs shared within a community and centered on the supernatural or divine" (Sasaki & Kim, 2011, p. 1). Sasaki and Kim (2011) also note that, "in studying the phenomenon of religion, it can be conceptualized as a specific form of culture or a way to categorize distinct cultural practices" (p. 1). Likewise, Nasir, Rosebery, Warren, and Lee, (2006) suggest that culture is "the constellations of practices historically developed and dramatically shaped by communities in order to accomplish the purposes they value" (p. 489). Nasir et al. (2006) further state that individuals become accustomed to "repertoires of cultural practices," which "represents a particular point of view on the world, characterized by its own objects, meanings, purposes, symbols, and values" (p. 489). An important part of this particular definition is the reference to culture being an entity that is "historically developed and dramatically shaped," suggesting its processes can be fluid and not static.

Regardless of these observances, there are still variances in the way a single religion can develop and change as a result of non-static cultural contexts. This justifies and warrants future research in this field for several reasons with, perhaps, the most important being related to requiring a better understanding of how culture might construct individual experiences as well as communal manifestations of religion. It is here that the intersection of culture and religion occurs – in individual and communal experiences.

Several studies have attempted to capture and comprehend this intersection and the many processes that work to inform and sustain what religion and culture mean to people. Barry and Nelson (2006) studied how young adults in three different types of colleges view religion and also the criteria necessary to achieve "adulthood." Participants were recruited from a Mormon, Roman Catholic, and public college with their participants falling between the ages of 18 to 20. Barry and Nelson (2006) also studied their participants within multiple contexts that have the ability to influence a person's development. This study is important to the field because Barry and Nelson (2006) study the upper end of adolescence, something lacking in other research.

Barry and Nelson's (2006) 445 participants completed questionnaires and rated four aspects of their spirituality: religious culture, religious practices, religious curiosity, and religious importance. The authors found a general difference between institutions in the criteria deemed necessary for adulthood, the extent to which college students believed these criteria had been achieved, differences in aspects of spirituality, such as practices and beliefs, and behaviors in which emerging adults engage in. Females rated family capacities as more important for adulthood than males. The Mormon group placed a greater importance on interdependence than the public group and the Roman Catholic group. The Mormon group also rated the importance of

family more important that the Roman Catholic group. Overall, females rated their belief in God stronger than males.

A similar study concerning adolescents conducted by Potvin and Lee (1982) examined the relationship between belief and experience among adolescents from several religious backgrounds. Potvin and Lee (1982) distinguished adolescence as three age brackets; ages 13-14; 15-16; and 17-18. They interviewed over 1100 adolescents in 1975 within the participants' homes. Children aged 13-14 who came from families with practicing parents from more conservative denominations participate in the rites and rituals of their religious group, which define their beliefs and their experience of God. This in turn reinforces their participation (Potvin & Lee, 1982, p. 142). The authors see individuals in this "stage" as submissive to authority and participation in a particular religion; that is, people experiencing these feelings will generally "go along" with prescribed familial or community "norms" when it comes to religious practice as opposed to critically thinking and taking action regarding their own beliefs or values.

At ages 15 to 16, Potvin and Lee (1982) noted some separation and differentiation. The initial influence of parents and authority figures continued, however adolescents begin to influence their own experiences and beliefs directly. Here, adolescents co-construct with their peers their own "world-view" and a system of meanings, eventually breaking away from "conformity" (Potvin & Lee, 1982, p. 142). Potvin and Lee (1982) also found that the practice of religion is more autonomous at ages 17 and 18 in the sense that a religious lifestyle has been constructed with peers. This process confirms beliefs and also generates new beliefs and experiences (Potvin & Lee, 1982. p. 142).

Examining the influence of social circles and networks, Markstrom (1999) examined if religious involvement was associated with psychosocial maturity of adolescents. Markstrom (1999) used three forms of religious involvement; attendance at religious services, participation in bible study group, and finally youth group involvement. These factors were examined in relation to self-esteem and forms of identity, such as hope, will, trust, and autonomy (Markstrom, 1999, p. 209). The sample included 62 African Americans and 63 European Americans in ninth grade that completed questionnaires. Markstrom (1999) found that African Americans attended religious services more than European Americans.

Markstrom (1999) also found that adolescent "hope" is a precursor to adult faith. The highest levels of hope were among males who attended religious services frequently. She also found that a higher degree of "will" was associated with more frequent religious attendance (Markstrom, 1999, p. 213). Many of the results were not significant, including gender interactions, yet this is still an important study regarding the inclusion of different ethnicities and provides a foundation for future research concerning subject of identity.

A theme consistent within the literature published on culture and religion is that of viewing the individual, family, and community as entities that are always changing and being renegotiated. Smith and Denton (2005) conducted several in-depth interviews with adolescents involved in the larger National Study of Youth and Religion (NYSR) and examined the issues adolescents face when dealing with religion and spirituality (conformity), being able to develop their own views of religion, and how and why some drift in a different religious and spiritual direction than that of their parents or other authority figures.

Smith and Denton (2005) found that close to 84% of adolescents report being religious; that is they endorse spirituality, go to worship services, and pray. Close to 75% of religious adolescents consider their own religious beliefs similar to their parents, and only 6% consider their religious beliefs very different. (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 87). The authors provide several noteworthy conclusions regarding the religious lives of American teenagers, the first being that adolescent religious activity is still very important in the formation of lives. Most remain active in the religious congregations in which they were raised (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 260). Secondly, most teenagers are not rebellious when it comes to religious involvement. There are many who do not mind following in their parents' footsteps. Finally, there are few who are "spiritual but not religious" and many who are happy to accept the religion in which they were raised (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 260).

Smith and Denton (2005) also note that a vast majority of teenagers in America identify themselves as Christians. This goes against what the common misconception that America is becoming more religiously diverse (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 261). In terms of cultural significance, the researchers believe that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents are parents (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 261). Further, Smith and Denton (2005) note that "it also appears that the greater the supply of religiously grounded relationships, activities, programs, opportunities, and challenges available to teenagers, the more likely teenagers will be religiously engaged and invested" (p. 261). Smith and Denton (2005) also see the importance social and institutional contexts have on developing the lives of adolescents, and believe an analysis that does not take this into account will not adequately explain their lives sufficiently:

It is not sufficient to focus only on teenagers' individual psychological issues or moral character or smart or poor choices and behaviors, for those are often themselves powerfully shaped by the social and cultural forces of therapeutic individualism, mass-consumer capitalism, the digital communication revolution, residual positivism and empiricism, the structural disconnect of teenagers from the world of adults, adults' own problems, and other relevant cultural and social contradictions and tensions. (p. 263)

**Historical Background of Jews in America**

It is widely known that an individual is considered Jewish if he or she is born from a Jewish mother (Katz, 1961a). Cohen and Eisen (2000) take this notion further and state that, "religion [is] inseparable from nationhood. A Jew [is] born simultaneously into a people and a faith, both of which entitled a regimen of lifelong obligation" (p. 29). Moreover, "Jews are a people, a nationality, an ethnic group, and a religion, and some Jews affirm their Jewishness but not Judaism…hence the story of Jewish history (the Jews) and the story of Judaism (the Jewish religion) have been inseparable in Jewish history" (Raphael, 2003, p. 10).

In order to attempt to understand the intersection of culture and religion in Reform Jewish families, we first need to recognize their history. Since Judaism has roots dating back roughly 3,000 years ago, and the fact that the Reform movement began in Germany in the early-mid 1800s, as well as indigenously in South Carolina in the mid-1800s, I will only focus on the brief history of the Reform Jewish experience in America.

Sarna (2004) notes that many Central European and German Jewish immigrants arrived in America between 1820 and 1880. This relocation was the result of many factors, including European governmental disapproval of Jews' right to marry, the onset of the industrial revolution

(which immediately made their primary profession of peddling outdated), an increasing number of people who "could not be absorbed into productive sectors of the society, economic aspirations of a person whose occupational advancement was limited…, and America's favorable image" (Raphael, 2003, p. 51-2) at the time.

American democratic ideas and social reform movements during this period had a profound influence on these new Jewish immigrants. In turn, Central European Jewish immigrants wished to "modernize" Judaism by means of shortening the synagogue services, introducing English sermons, utilizing a choir and organ, and making it into a family affair (Wertheimer, 1987). This was the beginning of the Reform Jewish movement in America (Sarna, 2004) and occurred in concert with what Neusner (1994) describes as, "when world religions come to America, they become American" (p. vii).

Eastern European Jewish immigrants began arriving in the United States between 1880 and 1910. Unlike their predecessors, these Jews left Russia and other Eastern European countries in order to escape pogroms and other forms of discrimination. An important point to consider with this wave of emigration was the family and its function as a tightly-knit economic unit. Many members of this group migrating to America were of lower socioeconomic status, thus the strength of the family and collective forms of Jewry became an absolute necessity in order to survive.

Eastern European immigrants also contributed a great deal to the creation of the Reform movement in America by adjusting the roles and responsibilities of each individual in the family. While the women of the household were responsible for the economic survival of the family, the men were charged with spirituality, religion, and ensuring that Jewish tradition and history be

passed on to future generations. As a result, women tended to be less involved in the religious side of Judaism, and general assimilation into larger American culture tended to be more difficult, as Eastern European Jews preferred to hold on to many traditions formerly practiced in Europe (Hyman, 1997). This made other "public" methods, or the part of Judaism that "conceives the Jew as part of a collective entity – the Jewish people – with obligations and responsibilities toward other Jews and toward the collective interests of the Jewish people" (Liebman, 2005, p. 141), outside of the immediate family to "do Jewish" important for the survival of Judaism in America at this point in time. Moreover, the Jewish community had to come together as one in order to ensure their existence in the wake of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in the years to come.

Raphael (2003) notes some particularly interesting points regarding this time in history and states:

We know most everything we wish to know about the cultural, economic, philanthropic, and social life of these Jews, except how to appropriately label their religious life. It is a truism in the history of Judaism to point out that before circa 1800 there was (very generally speaking) just rabbinic Judaism, the religious system formulated by the rabbis of the first few centuries of the common era and developed during the following millennium and a half. Although this system faced attacks earlier, it was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that central and western European Jews began to create alternatives and, following the creation of institutions, formulate ideologies. To do so they had to negotiate a complex set of interlocking ethnic, linguistic, national, regional, and religious identities. (p. 46)

Jewish identity post World War II emerged as something very complex, "with religious and ethnic elements intertwined" and the notion of Judaism as "an ethnic commitment more than a transcendent faith" (Kaplan, 2005, p. 75). Moreover, "despite the emphasis on Jewish ethnicity, religiosity has played an important role in how Jews identified themselves: as individuals, Jews identified themselves as belonging to a religious community. As a group, they acted like an ethnic minority" (Kaplan, 2005, p. 75). However, as we will see, "life in an open society means that group boundaries are weakened and transgressed" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 130) as "the development in America of many distinctive Jewish customs and rituals was accompanied by a marked decline in Jewish religious sophistication" (Chiswick, 2005, p. 319).

Onomatology also played an important role as Jews transitioned to life in America. Like many that arrived before them, Jews sought to ease the assimilation process by Anglicizing their names. These names were more than just a simple identifier. Benzion Kaganoff (1996) suggests that:

> Jewish names can serve as clues for deciphering the cultural patterns of Jewish history. From them we can determine whether people's sentiments inclined toward religious separateness or assimilation or Jewish nationalism. We can tell when Jews are loyal to the Hebrew language and when indifferent. And names also reveal something about the political and economic situations of Jews throughout the centuries. (p. 40)

**Transition to the Modern Era**

As previously touched upon, American culture is not static. Take for example the transitions that occurred in our country throughout the 1950s through the 2000s. Yet, even though these instances are part of our past, they inform the present and future. As a direct result

of these historical events, our society has enacted stricter gun control laws, created government programs to protect our homeland, and have made significant strides in ensuring fair and equal treatment for all. The same can be said for Jewish culture and religion. Since its appearance in America, Judaism has altered its course and adapted to meet current needs. And like larger American culture, Judaism, too, is shaped by its past as it advances though time.

Cohen and Eisen (2000) suggest that, "…Judaism remained until the modern period the religion of the people, the 'children of Israel.' Its adherents regarded themselves – by virtue of their *faith* – as members of 'a *nation* that dwells alone,' and so they were regarded by others" (p. 100). This is especially important to consider, as Cohen and Eisen (2000) suggest this *had* been true up until the early 1990s. Now, scholars are noting shifts within Judaism, suggesting that the Jews are "the one American collectivity which sees itself, and qualifies, as both a bona fide religious group and as a full-fledged ethnic group" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 101). This intertwining of culture and religion is complex and difficult to decipher (Fein, 1988; Glazer, 1972), as many Jews take on this notion of a "dual identity" that describes the inseparable qualities of Judaism and Jewishness – religion and culture. Several past quantitative studies that have focused on Jewish identity have used the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) to study individuals from diverse and multiple backgrounds (see Lorenzo-Hernandez & Ouellette, 1998; Roberts et al., 1999; Sinclair, 2001).

Both Judaism and Jewishness are found within members who subscribe to the Reform movement, or as Cohen and Eisen (2000) put it, "moderately affiliated Jews" (p. 114). This connection or relationship Reform Jews have with each other can be thought of as "belonging to a group that extends 'vertically' through time and 'horizontally' through space" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 114). Furthermore, "in this sense, we may speak of 'transcendent belonging,' a feeling

of deep connection to previous generations and future generations as well as to Jews of today who are scattered around the globe" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 114). These observations, collected though Cohen and Eisen's (2000) qualitative work, spark an interesting connection to the notion of "dual identities" noted earlier. This suggests that ethnicity, or the "cultural stuff" can be learned. Values, rules, responsibilities, and obligations can be practiced regardless of whether or not an individual is a member of a particular group. The boundaries of religion, or "faith," appear to be more complex.

**The Self and Family**

Consistent with what other scholars have found with regards to individuals holding a more independent view of the self in more individualistic cultures, such as in America (Sasaki & Kim, 2011), the qualities of Judaism and Jewishness – religion and culture – have adapted to a point where the self is now unique and separate from social surroundings (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and a strong emphasis is placed on personal choice (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Savani, Markus, & Connor, 2008) and self-focused agency or control (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). This is notably different from when Jews first arrived in America and needed to "stay together" in order to ensure the survival of their religion and culture. Cohen and Eisen (2000) take this point further and state:

> Personal journeys and experiences, especially if shared with other family members, are the stuff out of which their Judaism is now imagined and enacted, a Judaism constructed and performed by one individual at a time. The spaces in which it transpired are predominantly intimate and private – homes and families, friendships and romances –

and some of the most important Jewish action transpires deep inside the self, where meaning is registered, reflected on, and imposed. (p. 16)

As a result of this shift to a more private form of Judaism, individuals began to take certain aspects of the religion and culture they liked or felt strongly about, and adapt and shape them into something meaningful to them. This process is somewhat unique within the Reform movement, as "each person interacts with Judaism in ways that suit him or her. No one is capable of determining for others what constitutes a good Jew" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 36). Moreover, the construction of these various, private ways to "do Jewish" (e.g., celebrating holidays, engaging with other Jewish families in a neighborhood) is usually negotiated within the family – a marked change from the "public" domain (see p. 5-6 in this text) and a "one size fits all" community viewpoint that dominated the religion and culture when Jews emigrated to America in the 1800s and the early 1930s.

This notion is captured well by one of Cohen and Eisen's (2000) interviewees who said, "I always felt family comes first, not religion" (p. 39), and touches upon what Thomas Luckmann (1967) described as "invisible religion" or "a private affair, something to be worked out within the boundaries of one's life experiences, each individual fashioning, from the sources available, a system of sacred values and meanings in keeping with personal needs and preferences" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 40). This explanation does, however, stop short of what Wade Clark Roof (1983) describes as a religion "so privatized, it knows little of communal support, and exists by and large independent of institutionalized religious forms" (p. 132).

The cultural and religious aspects of identification in American Jews was examined by Friedlander et al. (2010) in a study that tested the psychometric properties of a 33 item measure

called the American Jewish Identity Scales (AJIS). It is a short, self-reporting measure that examines cultural and religious identification as separate entities, as well as addresses public vs. private concepts of daily life. Important to note is Friedlander et al. (2010) observation of no found or published research from a psychological perspective on the interrelation of what it means to be a religious Jew in America, what it means to be a cultural Jew in America, and the intergroup differences and similarities. Findings from Friedlander et al. (2010) suggest that participants who were more traditional in their religious observance of Judaism reported a stronger Jewish personal identity. Furthermore, reflecting on their minority group status, participants rated the public image of Jews as significantly lower than their private image. Finally, participants who identified most strongly as Jews reported greater private collective self-esteem, but felt more stress in relating to non-Jews as reported by experiencing more discrimination directed toward themselves and other Jews.

Examining more into how religion can be viewed as culture, Cohen and Hill (2007) conducted four separate quantitative studies on religious individualism and collectivism among American Catholics, Jews, and Protestants. Study 1 showed that religion for Jews is about community and biological descent, but about personal beliefs for Protestants. Studies 2 and 3 found that intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity were intercorrelated and endorsed differently by Jews, Catholics, and Protestants in a pattern that supports the theory that intrinsic religiosity relates to personal religion, whereas extrinsic religiosity stresses community and ritual. Finally, Study 4 found that important life experiences were likely to be social for Jews, but focused on God for Protestants, with Catholics in between. Cohen and Hill (2007) note the importance of individualism as regulated by religious and spiritual ritual and tradition, and the influence these practices have on communities.

These findings are important in understanding the individual and collective life of someone who practices Judaism. Cohen and Hill (2007) suggest that the conceptualization of religion and spirituality, with Cohen and Hill (2007) noting that spirituality, at least in the literature, has been proposed as being both more universal and more individualized than religiosity. This can have interesting implications when examining Judaism from a community-based and assimilation perspective. The growing American emphasis on spirituality could be the result of the cultural development of religion as increasingly privatized, personal, and experiential-expressive. Cohen and Hill (2007) suggest that more work needs to be done regarding the different denominations they explored (e.g., Reform Jews), instead of lumping everyone together.

So where do the self and the family merge to form an intersection of culture and religion? This is a complex and multifaceted process with many significant layers and directions. Scholars believe that various aspects of a family system influence many dimensions of Jewish behavior. This can include a family's ritual practice, synagogue attendance and affiliation (though this has declined markedly over the last 20 years), organizational membership and activity, and friendship patterns and Jewish population density of one's residential neighborhood (Cohen & Eisen, 2000). All of these ritual behaviors, however, have been found to be more meaningful in family contexts (Cohen, 1983c, 1988, 1989a; Sklare & Greenblum, 1967; Pinkenson, 1987; Wall, 1994) and "because the cohesiveness of the Jewish Community has diminished, the impetus to makes one's household into a Jewish home – regardless of marital status – now more than ever before arises from within the individual" (Fishman, 2000, p. 117).

An especially interesting finding when examining the self and the family is the influence of family members on younger generations. Cohen and Eisen (2000) note that several of the

participants in their qualitative studies have suggested that their descriptions of their parents were "more nuanced and less uniformly positive than were those of their grandparents" (p. 47). Cohen and Eisen (2000) explain this phenomena in psychological terms:

> Clearly, the grandparent-grandchild relationship is less filled with ambiguity and tension than that between a parent and child. Grandparents are generally free of the responsibility of disciplining their grandchildren. Their relatively greater physical and emotional remoteness from the grandchildren (as compared with the ever-present parents) means that the grandchildren have less of a need to differentiate themselves from their grandparents than from their parents. Therefore, years later, respondents can express feelings of unqualified love for and romanticized memories of their grandparents. Their feelings – and statements – about parents are far more complicated. (p. 47)

Clearly, this is an interesting relationship that can have implications on the survival of Jewish beliefs and customs, to name a few. This also presents a significant gap in the literature, as Cohen and Eisen (2000) might describe *why* this may be happening, but not *how*. Research in the future should focus more on generational factors, especially considering the ever-changing face of Reform Judaism and American culture.

Cadge and Davidman (2006) attempted to examine this through narratives of third-generation born Jews, as a group with strong inherited religious identities, in order to show how ascription and achievement are used around practice outside of their participation in religious organizations. Cadge and Davidman (2006) also use Thai-Buddhists as participants to contrast the answers from each group. The authors build upon the wealth of sociological knowledge surrounding the relationship between identity and modernity and the discourse within religion

that maintains a distinction between modes of religious identity. The overall goal of the study is to examine ascription and achievement in order to see if they are conceptually distinct and dichotomous ways of constructing religious identities. Cadge and Davidman (2006) discuss Judaism as a culture, a heritage, and an ethnic category. Unique in many of the narratives is the highlighting of individuals being non-religious, yet having Judaism as a central part of one's worldview. Still, there are many narratives that discuss the importance of growing up in a community of traditions, rites, and rituals, and how those traditions contribute to an individual's notion of understanding themselves and "being comfortable" with who they are. Yet, the overwhelming majority of narratives ascribed "being Jewish" to the Jewish birthright.

Cadge and Davidman (2006) found that Jews clearly are aware that their religious or ethnic identities are a matter of birth. Nevertheless, almost all of the participants also emphasized that they needed to choose to enact religious or cultural practices in order to actually be or feel themselves to be members of their communities. Of note is the fact that individuals' own senses of personal membership, rather than external recognition of membership by others, were at the center of their conceptions. Cadge and Davidman (2006) suggest that despite the participants' openness to other traditions, however, it is interesting to point out that the Jews, probably because of their unique history, hung on to their identities as Jews even when they were not believers and did not choose to affiliate.

Another, perhaps unconventional, intersection between culture and religion within the self and family concerns the notion of food. The combination of food, family, and festival or holiday gatherings plays an important role in ensuring recollection in the years to come (Cohen, 1991b; Cohen & Eisen, 2000). One participant in Cohen and Eisen's (2000) qualitative study delivers an especially poignant picture:

We started something called grandparents' school where my daughter will go over once a week to my mother's house for a couple of hours. They will be engaged in Jewish stuff which, to this point, has involved reading Bible stories, talking about the Jewish holidays, learning Hebrew around holiday cooking, and learning much about traditional foods. (p. 49)

The connection between food, religion, and culture is further expounded in this example, also from Cohen and Eisen (2000):

The survival of distinctive ethnic cuisines long after the disappearance of other markers of difference has made food a near-universal link to ethnic identity; its special prominence among Jews may have something to do with its particularly salient role in the Jewish religious calendar. Specific dietary practices are tied to almost every one of the holidays. Shabbat has its classic Friday night meal. Rosh Hashanah has its apples, honey, and circular challot. Yom Kippur centers around a solemn fast bracketed by two feasts…family affection, ethnic attachment, and religious meaning, then, are all associated with food, and their ties to each other are embodied in their connection with food. (p. 50)

These connections aside, the family can still be a source of turmoil, disagreement, and overall Jewish detachment. Several research studies have consistently shown that conventional Jewish practice declines throughout the generations, starting with the immigrant generation, followed by the second and third generation (Cohen, 1983c; Goldstein & Goldscheider, 1968). This decline seems to stabilize by the fourth and later generations (Cohen, 1983c, 1988). While tradition can be passed from one generation to the next, it is also important to note that conflict

and ambivalence can be transmitted as well (Cohen & Eisen, 2000). Furthermore, "unlike religious systems that emphasize faith, belief, personal prayer, meditation, and other highly privatized forms of religious involvement, Judaism encompasses a variety of practices that enjoin familial and communal participation. These have to be negotiated" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 59). It is curious to think about how many observances of Judaism do not take place as a result of negative thoughts, feelings, or memories, or as a consequence of what Phillips (2005) describes as "religious switching" or "when an individual's current religion or denomination is different from that of his or her family of origin" (p. 402). This is often a result of intermarriage.

In 2012, the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) formed a task force to research how Jewish families were learning Jewishness, Jewish education, and Jewish identity. The results of several qualitative and quantitative studies conducted by the JPPI yielded interesting results concerning social networking, cumulative educational programs, and significant intervention time points during the Jewish life course.

Social networks are an area identified by the JPPI as being under looked in research and policy planning. Yet, research recently conducted by the JPPI suggests that while American Jews state they feel disconnected from other Jews, they are, in fact, influenced by their Jewish social circles. This notion is especially important during the teen years for young Jews, as friends and social networks during this age have a large influence on decisions regarding Jewish schools and other educational programs. The JPPI suggests that, "this new understanding of the power of social networks suggests that the direction of influence in the teen years is from friendships to education to family involvements" (p.3). Cumulative education programs (e.g., Jewish supplementary school complemented with Jewish summer camp), as well as Jewish family connections, formal and informal Jewish education and travel programs, and Jewish social

networks and friends have also been shown to aid in the formation of a strong Jewish identity (JPPI, 2012).

The JPPI suggests there is an important time point in a Jews' life that is especially significant in predicting Jewish connectedness – the teenage years. This point is important for the individual as well as the family. Feldman's (1987) research showed the Jewish observance level for a household increased as children attended Jewish nurseries as a result of the child's schooling. Similarly, Beck's (2002) research focusing on 9 Jewish preschools and 90 families found that, while initially the families were ambivalent regarding providing a Jewish education to their child, 68% of the children continued their education in Jewish day schools or synagogue-affiliated schools. The effect was also felt throughout the family, as Beck (2002) noted that roughly 70% of the families interviewed were "doing something different" because of their child's educational experience, and that synagogue membership rose from 40% to 80% amongst families involved in the study.

Kelner (2007) helps explain these transitions through the results of a study that examined the impact of early childhood Jewish education. Kelner (2007) found that enrollment in a Jewish school fosters connections to important Jewish social circles and networks within the larger community. This includes other families and caregivers that share similar ideals and values that work to support and strengthen their own family's Judaism and Jewishness. This makes Phillips (1997) results not all that surprising – that family is the ultimate predictor of Jewish identity in children, yet contradicts Amyot and Sigelman (1996) who found that religious faith is the driving force of Jewish identity when assessing the role of religion and social context on Jewish identification in America. However, Amyot and Sigelman (1996) also found that Jewish

identities are able to exist without religious faith or social contact with other Jews. This suggests that the foundation for Jewish identity is deeply rooted in childhood experiences.

A comprehensive qualitative study by Sinclair and Milner (2005) examined many domains related to Jewish identity, including early influences on identity, and friendships, relationships, and marriage. Sinclair and Milner (2005) used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a process that, "starts with and develops analyses from the point of view of the experiencing person (Charmaz, 1995, p. 30), it is also a psychological approach to qualitative analysis that is well matched with grounded theory. Participants included British Jewish men and women between the ages of 18 and 27 years old that self-identified as being Jewish. Five participants were Orthodox, ten were "middle of the road" (moderate to low degree of religious involvement and Jewish social life), and three were described as "both religiously unaffiliated and socially distant from the community" (Sinclair & Milner, 2005, p. 98). Interviews consisted of two semistructured pilot interviews and 18 semistructured research interviews focusing on the past (childhood and adolescence), the present (emerging adulthood), and friendships, relationships, and marriage with each interview lasting around one hour.

Sinclair and Milner (2005) found five major themes present within their data. They included a sense of kinship and connection, an awareness of being different from the majority, a feeling of attachment to Israel, a religious dimension of personal faith and observance, and a commitment to learning (p. 111). Many of these themes are consistent with other findings that highlight the need for Jewish individuals to feel a sense of security and belonging to a community, partly mediated by the larger Jewish social and spiritual network. Moreover, Sinclair and Milner (2005) found that most of their participants expressed a strong sense of "social identification with other Jewish people and felt themselves to be members of an ethnocultural

group, even in the absence of any religious feelings" (p. 112). This notion takes on an interesting perspective when we consider Jewish onomatology and the personal responsibilities and ability required to protect and sustain identity and history. While important to the area of Jewish identity, Sinclair and Milner's (2005) study lacks an American, as well as an intergenerational, perspective. More research is needed on how Jewish identities change or adapt throughout the life course.

**Rituals**

To some extent, we have already seen how holidays inform and influence the interplay between Jewish religion and culture. After all, Jews value rituals because it brings them closer to grandparents, parents, partners, spouses, children, and grandchildren, and makes them feel connected to generations before and after (Cohen & Eisen, 2000). Raphael (2003) notes that, "Judaism is much more a religion of doing than believing…American Judaism makes practice a higher priority than belief" (p. 27). Sherwin (2005) agrees and states, "American Jews have tended to understand Judaism as a religion primarily concerned with doing things rather than thinking things, as a religion of action rather than doctrine, as an ethnic commitment rather than adherence to a transcendent faith" (p. 177).

However, rituals and ritual observance is another important crossroad where "the Jew within steps outside the self, in the company of family" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 73) to express their Jewish commitments and offer Jews a tightly bound community and a set of ritual practices which together structure and sanctify everyday life (Heilman & Cohen, 1989). Once again, we see with ritual observance the ability of Reform Jews to pick and choose Jewish rituals and

observances they see fit to practice and accept. Cohen and Eisen (2000) expound upon this point by stating that:

> Moderately affiliated Jews are not committed to a package or detailed behaviors that is set out in code and sustained by communal pressures. Nor are they committed to the wholesale rejection of observance on grounds that it is premodern superstition or that they lack the sort of faith that the practice requires. (p. 75)

This entertains the notion that a Jew can be religious even if he or she is not particularly observant. This idea can also be true if translated to larger American culture as well. The concept of "selected observance," or the idea that individuals have the right and ability to pick and choose what works best for them, could be argued as a universal freedom in this country. However, the personal meaning that is ascribed to rituals within Reform Judaism often takes place when the individual learns something – whether it is something to think about or some type of lesson to learn (Cohen & Eisen, 2000). This allows Jews to engage in meaningful acts that connect them with their ancestors and maintains and enhances a type of "collective consciousness" emphasized by Durkheimian theory. The freedom of choice also enhances the personal meaning individuals assign to certain rituals, thus perpetuating Erving Goffman's (1967) concept of the self as, "in part a ceremonial thing, a sacred object which must be treated with proper ritual care and in turn must be presented in a proper light to others" (p. 91).

As a result of ritual meaning and observance being assigned by the individual, occasionally with the help of the family, it is no surprise that these entities ebb and flow with the changing social climate of American and Jewish customs. Rituals are constantly being retooled, rekindled, replaced, and rejuvenated. Within the last 20 years, many of these rituals have also

shifted from a focus on God, to a focus on community (Cohen & Eisen, 2000). Furthermore, Cohen & Eisen (2000) also note that these rituals are now better described as ceremonies as opposed to commandments and that, "the 'commandments' became 'customs' performed by Jews as expressions of Jewish culture and commitment rather than of belief in a divine commander" (p. 97).

**The Waning of Public Judaism**

We have seen how Judaism and Jewishness have changed since its inception in America in the 1800s. Beginning with a primary focus on forming and sustaining a collective identity in order to survive, within the last 20 years, Jews have begun to focus less on the "public" sphere of their religion and culture and more on the intimate, private sphere of self, family, and what it personally means to be Jewish. This paradigm shift has also signaled a change in the way Judaism and Jewishness is practiced and carried out. In addition, it also opens up new, changing pathways for the exploration of how Jewish religion and culture intersect. During the 1950s through the 1970s, Jews in America were largely identified by and lived in what Cohen and Eisen (2000) describe as the "Jewish public sphere," which includes living in a world dealing with anti-Semitism, America's social and political agendas with the state of Israel, the Holocaust, and other various Jewish organizations. This is how Jews were generally defined and identified within the U.S., and, to some extent, how Jews defined and identified themselves (Cohen & Eisen, 2000).

While, to a certain extent, these were times of social and political unrest, Cohen and Eisen (2000) note that this time was important for Jews because it gave the people a sense of shared obligation, or "sticking together," when they would come to one another's aid throughout

these times of danger. It was during this time that Jewish identities also began a transformation of attitude and practice. Perhaps the largest transformation related to attitudes concerning American Jews' growing alienation from Israel.

Cohen and Eisen (2000) suggest that this is the result of religious and political events that contradict the priorities for American Jews, which surrounds individual Jewish meaning: "Israel carries little real import in the private sphere of Jewish identity, the part that is closest to the inner core" (p. 143). This, combined with Reform Jews' wishes to distance themselves from the ultra-Orthodox, goes hand in hand with Cohen and Eisen's (2000) finding that "fear for Israel's (i.e., Jewish) survival has abated. American Jews no longer feel that Israel needs their help to the same degree, and feel less compelled to offer it" (p. 144). Likewise, "Reform Judaism in the United States [is a] major source of self-definition for American Jews" (p. 147) and "Israel is not central to who American Jews are as Jews" (p. 152).

In 2000, Sylvia Barack Fishman, a well-known contemporary scholar on American Judaism, introduced a term to describe what is happening to Jews in America. The term is "coalescence" or, "a pervasive process through which American Jews merge American and Jewish ideas, incorporating American liberal values such as free choice, universalism, individualism, and pluralism into their understanding of Jewish identity" (Fishman, 2000, p. 1). Fishman (2000) elaborates and states that coalescence:

Builds upon and supersedes adaptation, a process of acculturation in which the individual or society, and whereby 'original and foreign traits are combined …with either a reworking of the patterns of two cultures into a meaningful whole to the individuals

concerned, or the retention of a series of more or less conflicting attitudes and points of view which are reconciled in everyday life as specific occasions arise.' (p. 9-10)

While these ideas may not seem particularly earth-shattering or anything uniquely novel, it reminds us of the multidirectional relationship American and Jewish ideals have on one another, and that as, "Judaism is Americanized, and America is Judaized, the permeable boundaries signifying Jewish ethnic identity are reframed" (p. 1). Furthermore, Fishman (2000) suggests that, "external boundaries have become increasingly indistinct; internal aspects of Americanness and Jewishness – the contents of liberal American and Jewish cultures – appear to many American Jews as almost identical" (p. 179).

This, again, validates the idea that work in this area is not only justified because it changes constantly, it also has important implications for other dynamics, such as family processes and generational shifts rooted in the larger human development discipline. Fishman (2000) notes that, "younger American Jews as a group have a different relationship with their own Jewishness than their elders, and those differences are reflected both statistically and in qualitative and cultural materials" (p. 3).

However, gathering this information becomes more difficult with each generation for a number of reasons. Fishman (2000) describes this dilemma by noting:

Ethnic boundaries, as quantitative and qualitative data and cultural artifacts demonstrate, are blurred not only externally but internally as well. Unlike Jews in earlier eras of American history, who were all too aware of what it meant to be a ghettoized Jew, for the vast majority of American Jews, as for the majority of ethnic white Americans, ethnicity is not a limiting factor of life. Jewishness and Judaism, for most, is not a daily, pervasive,

defining condition of existence. As a result, when American Jews import Jewishly unprecedented ideas, attitudes, and behaviors from externally cultures to their concept of Judaism, these elements are not being merged into an otherwise clearly defined Jewish culture, but instead into a culture that is already overwhelmingly Americanized. (p. 183)

This is an important point to consider, as well as a crucial and noteworthy concept to grasp between the difference of assimilation and coalescence, and why I prefer the later. Aside from the earlier point about how Jewish and American culture is multidirectional and reciprocating, if we think of this process as coalescence instead of assimilation, we keep the multidirectional pathways each group uses to define and identify themselves open. Thus, coalescence allows Jewish individuals to "bond to, rather than separate from, their Jewish ethnicity" (Fishman, 2000, p. 190).

Similarly, Sherwin (2005) noted that what American Judaism "needed was a more 'organic,' comprehensive view of Judaism than was then being offered by Jewish nationalism, culturism, secularism, or the religious movements of American Judaism. This need could be best fulfilled by understanding Judaism as an 'evolving religious civilization'" (p. 123). This suggests that Judaism is a total civilization, including religion, culture, and nationality. It is developing and evolving; hence, it is not static. It is religious, whereby religion can be viewed as not its totality, but its core, where "the current generation…knows more than any previous generation, and consequently has the knowledge and hence the authority to reform the teachings of past traditions" (p. 123).

**Spirituality and the House of Worship**

The synagogue for Reform American Jews is an interesting place where a multitude of events, feelings, emotions, and beliefs are mediated and moderated, yet it is not the main "place" for Jewish life among Reform American Jews. Originally consisting of models brought over from Europe when the Reform movement was just beginning, "the synagogue served as the focal point of the community, the hub from which the spokes of other organizations radiated" (Raphael, 2003, p. 45).

Also noteworthy is how Jewish faith has shifted within the synagogue since its introduction in America in the 1800s. Sherwin (2005) describes how Jewish faith has been substituted by, "worshipping the Jewish people rather than exclusively worshipping God, making Jewish survival the ultimate goal of Jewish existence rather than the service to God, and replacing the Torah with Jewish culture" (p. 119).

Of particular importance is Cohen and Eisen's (2000) finding that Jews "do not make any straightforward connection between God and the synagogue," but "they [Jewish study participants] told us time and again that they do not come to synagogue expecting to find God there, or stay away because they do not" (p. 155). This is an interesting point considering the overall purpose of a synagogue, or any house of worship for that matter, and its general mission to connect people to a deity or higher power. It also makes delineating the process Jews use to mitigate the intersection between religion and culture somewhat more complicated.

The synagogue also perpetuates the notion of a more privatized form of Judaism and Jewishness where a sort of "spiritual outlet" is created which Cohen and Eisen (2000) describe as "far more positive, and so more potent, than 'religion' or 'faith'" (p. 165). This is a common

finding in many Reform synagogues across America – people using a public or communal space, attending as much or as little as they wish, to find and explore personal meaning. Often times, personal meaning and reflection is sustained and created through the use of music, as well as thought-provoking sermons and the feeling of preserving a community for family, friends, and future generations – in short, brotherhood and sisterhood. This notion is perpetuated by classes offered at synagogues, as they, "create communities within the congregation, building and sustaining networks of friends who provide institutional leadership as well as a tangible reason for attendance at services. More important, the teaching of texts roots moderately affiliated Jews in history and tradition" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 177).

These processes Jews use to seek God and other personal requirements in a synagogue constitute a relatively new trend, especially concerning the "expressive individualism" that satisfies emotional and cognitive individual wants and needs (Roof & McKinney, 1987). Furthermore, this change that has taken place in America over the last half century is described by Robert Wuthnow (1998) as a move from, "a traditional spirituality of inhabiting sacred places" to a "new spirituality of seeking," with the later exchanging "spiritual dwelling" (e.g., a synagogue) for the "new spiritual freedom" of focusing on the individual and inner self.

Cohen and Eisen (2000) note that Wuthnow (1998) sees selves, like institutions, are far more fluid than before:

Respondents who grew up before 1960 were more likely to center their spiritual lives on a particular congregation, and they also more often said that their closest friends were members of their own faith, indeed of their own congregations. Individuals now are much more 'free-floating' and much less inclined to ground their self-esteem in their relation to

God. Wuthnow argued in an earlier study that such findings hold across denominations among the boomer generation. Indeed, he has argued, the diversity in American religion is now found largely *inside* the various mainline denominations rather than between them – or *outside* these denominations altogether…. (p. 178)

These findings and ideas are important for several reasons. First, they suggest that Jewish spiritual life is alive and well, but somewhat hidden in each individual as each person assigns meaning and purpose, or "informed choices" (Raphael, 2003), as they see fit. Second, and on a somewhat similar note, because Jews pick and choose from the multitude of resources available, and use them at their own will in order to define and identify themselves, there are endless combinations they can use to express who they are, both from a religious and cultural standpoint. Third, as a result of this constant negotiation between religion and culture, and the generational changes that take place, it is an area consistently ripe for exploration in order to track the similarities and changes in Judaism and Jewishness. Finally, "no more than half the Jews in the United States consider themselves 'religious,' and less than half the Jews in America are affiliated with a synagogue" (Raphael, 2003, p. 3). This not only confirms what most of the literature states, it suggests that researchers and scholars in the future will have to focus largely on the individual, family, and private life of Jewish families, as opposed to a more public one, and be open to new interpretations of Jewish life that consider a complicated interplay between religion and culture. Interestingly, this statement by Raphael (2003) contradicts a study by Winter (1996) that suggests a resurgence of religious participation in American youth when compared with their parents and grandparents and further precipitates calls to examine these changing trends.

**Conclusion of Jews in America**

As we have seen, the interplay between religion and culture, and the crossroads and intersections between the two, are multifaceted and intermixed with one another. In some cases, questions are raised more frequently than answers are solved. Cohen and Eisen (2000) agree with this notion, and suggest that these factors, "make the present estate of American Jewry somewhat hard to characterize, and the American Jewish future difficult to predict" (p. 183), which is why Hollinger (1995) "urge[s] more attention to religiously defined cultures and suggest[s] some of the consequences of looking upon religious groups as 'ethnic' and upon ethnic groups as 'religious'" (p. 14). If one thing is for certain, Reform Jewish Americans are in the midst of a constantly changing religious and cultural milieu, with the focus of meaning transpiring within the self. Thus, the intersection of Reform Jewish religion and culture lies within the behavior of the people, as they become more individualistic and less collectivist.

Even so, it is important to realize the importance of the family in relation to how individuals assign meaning and form and negotiate identities. As we have seen, "the self does not operate on its own, but rather in ongoing conjunction with intimates," (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 186) particularly with regards to relationships between children, parents, and grandparents. Kaufman (2005) notes that future research will, "have to 'tease out' the religious aspects of Jewish ethnicity as well as the ethnic aspects of Jewish religiosity in order to understand better this ethnoreligion [because] ethnicity and religion are in a relationship of symbiosis or complementarity" (p. 173).

In about a span of 50 years, formal theologies of the religion of Judaism have declined, as individuals now see little need for a system that assigns meaning for them and rationalizes their

beliefs and values. They require something that is much more mobile and autonomous. In this sense, "tradition functions as their 'god-term'" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 197) and theology becomes largely irrelevant as Judaism and Jewishness experience unending alteration.  At the present time, there appears to be no distinction "between religious and secular, individual and group, consumption and participation, 'symbolic' and 'real'" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 198). This study addressed the question: how is culture and religion constructed in Reform Jewish families?

**Theoretical Frameworks**

In order to address my primary research question, I will focus on two complementing theoretical frameworks, then branch off and address various approaches and ideologies related to the theories. The first theory, Blumer's (1969) notion of symbolic interactionism, which is defined as "the theoretical perspective where people construct selves, society, and reality through interactions" (Charmaz. p. 189, 2006), helps to elicit the processes individuals use to create, sustain, and mediate meaning. Since a large amount of culture and religion is centered around these forms of meaning making (i.e., synagogue participation, church attendance, communal events, seders, music, etc.), it is appropriate to examine this theoretical framework as a way to observe the intersection of culture and religion through active and reflective processes.

A second useful framework is James Gee's (2000) work conducted on identity theory and development. While there is a wealth of empirical knowledge on identity, Gee's (2000) work and formulation of identity theory is especially important within this discipline because it views identities as multiple, changing, and fluid – a theme that is consistent with the notion of culture already expounded upon. Gee's (2000) work also takes into consideration power dynamics and

relationships, which could be important given the potential intergenerational patterns and relationships that might come into play in many cultures and religions, as he cites issues of access, networking, and experience as tantamount to defining, constructing, and adjusting identities. This also allows for individuals to each have their own form or type of identity, and creates the ability to either distinguish between members of an interrelated group or culture, or view them as collective.

Both frameworks aim at understanding how individuals construct their own realities and world views as a result of their relationships and experiences with other individuals, and their participation in rites, rituals, or responsibilities. They complement each other nicely in that they attempt to understand the individual as the one who is experiencing and constructing meanings and processes, rather than the external factors that may define these meanings for them.

**Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism has roots dating back to 1937, when Herbert Blumer introduced it as a new concept in an emerging field dealing with behaviorism, and advances in sociology and psychology. Blumer's (1969) influential book notes that symbolic interactionism can be understood as "research that considers the meanings that objects, people and activities have for group members, and the processes whereby these meanings are sustained [or] transformed" (Manning & Smith, 2010, p. 41). This description, along with the title of Blumer's (1969) work, "reaffirms that symbolic interactionism is both a perspective, a way of looking at the social world and a method, a way of gathering data about the social world" (Manning & Smith, 2010, p. 37).

Utilizing symbolic interactionism to examine the intersection of culture and religion shifts a theoretical focus from an image of society to an image of human behavior and agency. By focusing on humans instead of society, "interactionists," or the individuals who utilize this framework, can understand how individuals change, alter, or adjust their behavior as a result of other people. It is people, not society, who are active contributors that create and sustain their social world. These people often form what Blumer (1969) notes as "primary groups," or the forming of relationships with family members and friends. These groups, Blumer (1969) argues, consists of "common symbols and common understanding" (p. 158). Manning and Smith (2010) take this idea further and state that "group members receive extensive training as they are socialized into the group's culture. Later, this produces co-operative behavior and symbolic understanding. Symbolic interactionists should study the symbols and meanings that operate in a specific group and setting" (p. 37).

This suggests that researchers interested in this framework should focus on the importance group members assign to others' actions. Manning and Smith (2010) point out that this type of behavior involves a "stimulus-interpretation-response, metaphorically akin to a game of tennis, as meanings are batted back and forth and thereby interpreted, reinterpreted, and modified" (p. 38). Related are the three foundational ideas and "root images" that Blumer (1969) describes as being central to symbolic interactionism. The first proposes that "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). The second suggests that, "these meanings are derived from social interaction and group life" (Manning & Smith, 2010, p. 38). The third notes that "these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [or she] encounters" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

Related to these ideas are Blumer's (1969) six "root images." The first, he suggests, is that social life "exists in action" and should be examined this way in defined and tangible groups. The second image relates to group member social interaction and the need to study interaction in and of itself. The third argues that social worlds are comprised of different types of "objects" – physical (i.e., a basketball), social (i.e., a partner), and the abstract (i.e., judgments and opinions). The fourth paints the picture of an individual as the "possessor of a self or an identity" since "humans can be objects of their own reflection [and] can interact with themselves" (Manning & Smith, 2010, p. 39). Blumer's (1969) fifth image "presents the person as the interpreter of a flow of situations [where] meanings are produced as continuing and contingent achievements, [thus] the social world is made and remade continuously" (Manning & Smith, 2010, p. 39). The sixth and final image suggests that all of our actions are pieced together to form "joint productions," or repetition or routines. Within Blumer's (1969) work, he notes the mental imagery of a religious service where the clergy and congregation are well aware of the pattern of the service, their role within the service, and how they are to behave and act.

Scholars that have used symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework have also explored activity theory as a basis for explaining their findings. Activity theory as a tool for understanding human behavior has received much attention in recent years, but an interesting component to this theory is how scholars have interpreted and applied the theory's ability to explain factors related to the human condition. As described by Fjeld, Lauche, Bichsel, Voorhorst, Krueger, and Rauterberg (2002), activity theory is:

based on the concept of tools mediating between subjects and objects. In this theory, an individual's creative interaction with his or her surroundings can result in the production of tools. When an individual's mental processes are exteriorized in the form of tools –

termed objectification – they become more accessible to other people and are therefore useful for social interaction. (p. 1)

Ratner (1999) believes that within activity theory, "psychological phenomena are formed as people engage in socially organized activity" (p. 10). This is what I believe Fjeld et al. (2002) allude to when mentioning "creative interaction" and the "production of tools." Creative interaction happens when individuals communicate and engage with one another. As a result, tools, or psychological phenomena, are created and formed. Several noteworthy scholars have conducted research in this area, including Cole (1995), Rogoff (2003), Scribner (1997), and Vygotsky (1997a; 1998).

Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chavez, and Angelillo (2003) describe how learning through participation can help individuals understand their cultural beliefs. Of particular interest are the historical changes that have segregated American youth from what they deem as "mature activities." What Rogoff et al. (2003) discuss is also relatable to individuals and their day-to-day chores and responsibilities, especially when introducing the role of the child in certain culturally-bound communities, such as Old Order Mennonites. Instead of focusing primarily on school work, youth become enmeshed with learning "mature" skills that cannot only, for example, run a dairy farm, but also their family's business, as well as having the responsibility of taking care of their siblings, setting the table for meals, and doing laundry and household chores. Here, family life, religious life, and cultural life are intertwined as individuals are exposed to "mature activities" and community social events on a regular basis.

An important point to consider regarding the literature is the overwhelming use of the phrase "transmission." This study, while seemingly examining many of the same entities and theories as previous studies, instead prefers the word "construction" to describe the processes

and pathways at hand. "Transmission," while it is unclear how various authors intended to use and define the term, can represent processes and pathways that are static, reflect little change, and are unidirectional as they migrate intergenerationally across time. This understanding is inconsistently related to the definitions of culture previously expounded upon and used in this study, and fails to acknowledge and extrapolate how cultures and group members change and alter as a result of social or environmental factors, or vice versa. Conversely, examining how culture and religion is *constructed* vis-à-vis theory allows for fluctuation within cultural, religious, and familial systems, and views the processes at hand as fluid and ever-moving, transforming, adjusting, and multidirectional.

Often times, we see the intergenerational "transmission" of values and beliefs that are passed down through generations. This is found throughout various cultures, but also in many religions. There are many empirical works that suggest parents use this "transmission" hypothesis to instill values and belief systems that can have religious meaning and undertones. Myers (1996) states the importance of examining family life on the transmission of religious inheritance to youth. Myers (1996), like other researchers (e.g., Nelsen, 1981; Hoge et al., 1982; Cornwall, 1988), suggest parents use "channeling" or parental influence on children's peer selection, social and religious activities, and friendship networks to regulate and control their environments. This process suggests that parents' socialization practices guide their children toward specific experiences and relationships that are consistent with the parents' beliefs.

Research by Okagaki and Bevis (1999), as well as Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, and Gorsuch (2003), provide overwhelming evidence that parents are one of, if not, the most

important influence on the beliefs and practices of their children. This finding is in concert with many studies already discussed. In addition, Regnerus (2003) points out that:

> parental influence is displayed directly through socialization – from exemplifying behaviors to commanding them – but also through mechanisms such as the relationship quality between parents and children, the autonomy accorded children, parenting style (e.g., authoritarian, authoritative, democratic), and influence on their children's friendship selection. (p. 406)

This has interesting implications when it comes to individuals' learning through participation and interaction within their own cultural or religious context, even if it does not necessarily involve the transmission of beliefs that have religious undertones.

Other scholars have also highlighted the importance of interaction in order for "transmission" to occur. Strahan (1994) discusses "regular rituals of togetherness," which allows members of a family or community to share, discuss, and confirm the collective emphasis placed on beliefs and values. This is a process that utilizes language and communication, what Wieting (1975) states are "quintessential aspects of human behavior" (p. 147). Bandura's (1986) Social Learning Theory, which notes that individuals learn partly through copying the behaviors of others, is also applicable here.

Lee, Rice, and Gillespie (1997) take Bandura's Social Learning Theory further, and note that "actual or symbolically modeled behavior is more likely to be learned when it is repeated, when modeled by multiple sources, when attention is high, and when the target of the modeling engages in reproductions of the modeled behavior" (p. 373). This helps to explain how cultural or religious beliefs may be "transmitted" to children, why parents or caretakers are most often

the most significant influence on children, how these aspects can be applicable to a child's daily life, and how they construct their religious and/or cultural identity. Furthermore, Muller and Ellison (2001) suggest that this type of participation and modeling of behaviors that promote togetherness also instills a great deal of social capital.

Scholars using symbolic interactionism to explain processes and pathways also gain insight from what is known as the symbolic approach. This is the preferred method for understanding culture for several prominent scholars, including Shweder (1996) and Super and Harkness (1996). Their insight into cultural mechanisms assists in explaining how the theories and approaches expounded upon in this study can help to understand the intersection of culture and religion. A main assumption the approach shares with symbolic interactionism is that culture is a network of "shared symbols, concepts, meanings, and linguistic terms" (Ratner, 1999, p. 8). One might argue that a similar statement would be relevant for religion. Shweder (1996) adds that culture, as viewed within this approach, is a worldview that is made up of values and beliefs. A strength of this approach is that it "offers a specific description of culture. Culture is collective symbols or concepts which have specific content" (Ratner, 1999, p. 8).

Olson's (1981) examination of child abuse in Turkey provides a good example of using the symbolic approach to understand the construction of cultural beliefs and how that might relate to religious beliefs. The country of Turkey, particularly communities that are located in more rural areas, have exceptionally low amounts of reported cases of child abuse. Olson (1981) concluded that this is due to the Turkish people's cultural viewpoint or "reality" that humans have no control over their own destiny. Ratner (1999) expounds on this and states:

Since humans have neither the power nor responsibility to control life, they do not seek to control their children. Nor do they set expectations for children's physical and emotional capabilities. Caretakers accept and indulge children's behavior. As a result, most misbehaviors of children are not punished, but tolerated as childish naughtiness. Thus, parents' benevolent treatment of their children is mediated by beliefs about the causes of events, the powers and responsibilities of people, and the capabilities of children. (p. 8)

This cultural expectation and belief is then passed down through Turkish generations, which explains why this trend has continued for several decades.

Issues of power are also apparent within the symbolic approach. Shweder (1996) denotes two differences within power structures. The first is what is referred to as "legitimate." These might include elders, certain elected officials, or other members of a culture or religion who use their power to benefit the community in a positive way. "Illegitimate" forms of power are created when individuals or people that are predominant turn against the community or religion and use their importance in order to form oppressive movements that can be hurtful, vindictive, and oppressive.

Culture and religion are both social enterprises. Within each of these systems are interactions between social actors. Since symbolic interactionism focuses primarily on the interactions between individuals, researchers wishing to use this framework can examine how individuals and society are created and sustained through interaction. This is in direct opposition to theories that suggest individuals are a byproduct, or passive observers, of society. Moreover, this theory also allows researchers examine the interactions within and between the thinking self,

depending on how each individual interprets and defines their surroundings. Each is an active participant in their own environments and use past experiences to form and inform their actions.

**Identity Theory**

While many scholars in different fields have conducted research on identity, it is James Paul Gee's work that is the most relevant and important for this study. Gee (2000) recognizes identities as "contextually specific ways in which people act out," (p. 99) which, in turn, "allows a more dynamic approach than the sometimes overly general static trio of 'race, class, and gender'" (p. 99). In simpler terms, what you do is who you are. This notion perpetuates the ideal of culture and religion as being ever-changing, fluid, non-static entities. Moreover, approaching identity from this angle allows for a deeper examination of groups where ethnic and religious minorities coexist. It also allows us to view what Gee (2000) describes as various "kinds of people" (p. 99). This "'kind of person' one is recognized as 'being,' at a given time and place, can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and, of course, can be ambiguous or unstable" (p. 99). This idea, while not necessarily novel, is still important to recognize, as individuals of cultural and religious groups may alter their identities depending on their current surroundings or the individuals in their presence.

Considering the many historical changes in various cultures and religions throughout time, this view of identity is appropriate, especially when taking into account immigrant populations in the United States, as they adjust and coalesce in American society. Gee (2000) notes four complementing perspectives to view identity. These include nature identity (N-identities), institution identity (I-identities), discourse identity (D-identities), and affinity identity (A-identities). Gee (2000) expounds upon these identities and suggests that:

Western society has moved historically from foregrounding the first perspective (we are what we are primarily because of our "natures"), through the second (we are what we are primarily because of the positions we occupy in society), to the third (we are what we are primarily because of our individual accomplishments as they are interactionally recognized by others) (p. 101).

Once again, it is important to recognize that the perspectives Gee (2000) notes are not stages, nor are they separate from one another, as they "interrelate in complex and important ways" (p. 101). Just like many cultures and religions, they are somewhat woven together given their contextual environments. Also woven together are the four ways Gee (2000) suggests viewing identity. While these observations are all important in their own ways, identities are of particular interest for understanding the intersection of culture and religion because they deal with identity as an individual trait with the power stemming from the person, rather than from nature, an institution or "authority," or from a larger group. Consistent with themes described elsewhere, exploring discourse identity might capture an individual's "core identity," or the identity that follows us regardless of context, while also appreciating the other "kind of person" an individual may be, either in the past, present, or future, based on their lived experiences and interactions. In simpler terms, "the discourses are social and historical, but the person's trajectory and narrativization are individual (through an individuality that is fully socially formed and informed)" (Gee, 2000, p. 111). Thus, a person's "core identity" may be "being Jewish," for example, while their discourse identity may be an actively religious Jewish individual.

The progression of Western society Gee (2000) describes above is an interesting one considering the history of the United States and its people, especially when introducing the idea of culture and religion. Consistent with prior research, individuals that belong to culturally bound

religious groups in the United States are placing more emphasis on the importance of individuality and moving away from the notion of collective importance. Thus, the obligations or responsibilities towards others in a larger collective cultural or religious group appear less prevalent than historically documented, as individual and familial bonds become stronger and more central. This suggests that individuals see their religious and cultural identities as intertwined yet distinct, with the cultural aspect perhaps being stronger than the religious aspect (see Cadge & Davidman, 2006).

This observation is in concert with what Gee (2000) describes as becoming "modern" or coming to "mean discovering or fashioning [your] own achieved D-identity" (p. 113) (also see Bauman, 1995, 2000; Giddens, 1992). While Gee (2000) is certainly a proponent of flexible, multiple identities, several other scholars (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000a, 2000b; Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Knobel, 1999; Lankshear, 1997) have also focused their attention on how individuals build identities "through networking with others in joint activities, causes, virtual communication, shared consumption, and shared experiences" (Gee, 2000, p. 120).

The notion of power is present within most cultures and religions. Framed within an identity theory context, Gee (2000) discusses power, or what he describes "authorization," as "laws, rules, tradition, or principles of various sorts [that] allow the authorities to 'author' the position…in terms of holding the rights and responsibilities that go with that position" (p. 102). Two religious groups that can be examined using the symbolic approach with regards to power are Old Order Mennonites and radical Fundamental members of Islam. Each of these cultures and religions has beliefs that are grounded in reality and concepts, meanings, and symbols, although they are vastly different when compared to each other. They also each represent

dichotomous beliefs, values, practices, and power relationships that can be obtained and assigned by religious subscription and adherence.

Old Order Mennonites' beliefs are transposed into their practices, which stem from the teachings of Christianity. Within this structure, members of Mennonite families work together to enhance (e.g., erecting buildings, forming business alliances, shared responsibilities of childrearing) the larger Mennonite community. These practices may include selling quilts, agricultural products, or providing hired labor. Also within the Mennonite community is a structure of "legitimate" power, where the male of the family is considered the authority figure. While some may argue this as exploitation, the male's power is further endorsed by the females being required to wear a bonnet - a symbol of submissiveness (see Gingrich & Lightman, 2006). As a result of their tight-knit community and their beliefs being carried out in actual practice to create and form their reality, individuals are exposed to the movement's belief systems at an early age, and are reinforced by constant exposure to family and community values.

Conversely, members of radical Fundamental movements of Islam can utilize "illegitimate" forms of power. While their beliefs are also carried out through their practices, they can exploit members of their own community or village in order to gain an upper hand and promote their agenda (see Etzioni, 1993; Lukes, 2006; Sivan, 1985). Here, individuals are sometimes recruited to join their forces, not by choice, but because of the illegitimate power an individual or group has over them. They often join because they are afraid or fearful they or other members of their family may be killed if they choose not to (Miller, 1992).

Identity theory is also related to concepts found in what scholars have called an individualistic approach, or "the outcome of a negotiated interaction between an individual and

social institutions-conditions. In their negotiations, interpretations, selections, and modifications of institutions-conditions, individuals 'co-construct' culture. Each individual constructs a personal culture out of his own experience" (Ratner, 1999, p. 14).

Ratner (1999) describes this as a foundation for understanding how the individual takes culture and makes it his or her own. It could be said that Ratner (1999) is arguing that a collection of uniquely individual constructs makes up culture, whereas within the previously mentioned approaches and theories, culture makes up the individual. Ratner (1999) defines this approach as, "This can have many implications on various individuals within a cultural and/or religious system. Valsiner et al. (1997) state that parent-child relationships, by nature, give too much authority to primary caregivers, which reduces a child's "self-actualization." Ratner (1999) offers a solution to this dilemma and states:

> Children can mentally distance themselves from parental guidance, they can co-construct their culture by imagining their own goals which they may implement at a later time. Social asymmetry, like other social problems, is dissolved by an individual thought or behavior. (p.20)

This relates to larger frameworks and concepts within the disciplines of cognitive development and child development, which are beyond the scope of this study. The individualistic approach also provides a good bridge to connect disciplines within psychology and anthropology because of its ability to combine symbolic and individualistic approaches, as well as examine culture and religion as an entity which is "partly shared and partly personal," as Lightfoot and Valsiner (1992) point out.

This approach also helps to understand individuals' behavior within a particular context. Lightfoot and Valsiner (1992) argue that a person is only influenced by social life according to what they deem as appropriate; that is, they have a certain amount of control regarding the extent to which social life has an effect on them. There is a wealth of research that attempts to understand why individuals, particularly those who have been raised in a culture or religion that has strict rules, regulations, and beliefs, such as Amish groups or branches of conservative Judaism, stray from the familial beliefs and values that were imposed upon them. Often times, as some research alludes to, these people engage in risky behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use. In other cases, individuals renounce certain aspects of their religion, but retain a large amount of their cultural beliefs, values, and practices. This framework could be a possible explanation for these types of behaviors.

Other researchers attempt to comprehend the individuals' role within a framework such as this, and how cultural and religious construction works within this system. Ratner (1999) describes the individual "actively expressing themselves in the culture" (p. 9), but is careful to note that "culture does not function apart from the individual" (p. 9). This is an important point. It suggests that regardless of how the individual believes or operates, culture and the individual, and in some instances religion, consistently work together in order to create ideas, symbols, and concepts. The two cannot be separated. This is evident in numerous cultures and religions around the world, such as within communities of Old Order Mennonites, Jews, and the Turkish people expounded upon earlier.

The concept of power also has interesting applications to identity theory and the individualistic approach. Ratner (1999) states, that the individualistic approach "postulates society as intrinsically alien and harmful or infectious to personal culture and then seeks to

protect the individual from deleterious social influences by exaggerating his ability to invent his own psychological reactions on a personal or interpersonal level" (p. 15). Ratner (1999) continues and suggests that this can create an individual who "is more powerful than society and can act toward it in any way he desires" (p. 15). While this approach affords the opportunity for someone to grow and develop based on a particular set of cultural norms or expectations, it can also have a dangerous effect if the powerful become corrupt and use their influence to regulate communal or religious beliefs and actions to their liking.

Situated within the larger realm of identity theory are three other useful viewpoints. They include Cultural Identity Theory (Moss & Faux, 2006), Multiracial Identity Theory (Renn, 2000), and Multiple Identity Theory (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The importance of culture as a social construction is important when discussing Cultural Identity Theory, and the hierarchies present within a cultural system. As a result, identities are often viewed as enacted, then challenged, and finally reinforced. Within this framework, public vs. private identity is discussed. Public identity could be shown through activities, such as participation in organizations, and private identity could be shown through home-based holiday practices. This theory on identity challenges the notion that individual identities inform society, as discussed above.

Multiracial Identity Theory examines how and why people may find common ground as a result of their similar identities. This could be the relationships and togetherness that is promoted through common knowledge of food, language, religion, cultural views, and so on. This particular theory could be useful when examining a culture that is both religious and ethnic, yet scholars note that advancements have been hindered by historical interpretations regarding race and group membership, among others (see Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009).

Finally, Multiple Identity Theory examines identity from the perspective that it is externally defined, internally experienced, and influenced by a variety of concepts. While somewhat useful, this framework is weak in that it only examines identity at one point in time and whose meaning is assigned by an outsider. This builds a stronger case for the need to examine generational patterns and shifts and predicates calls for a larger view of identity development rather than a snapshot of one point in time.

**Chapter 3: Design and Methodology**

In a first attempt to learn more about the processes and pathways families use in constructing religious and cultural knowledge, this dissertation asks the following research question:

**How is culture and religion constructed in Reform Jewish families?**

In order to examine how culture and religion is constructed in a multi-generational Reform Jewish family, this qualitative study includes twelve total participants. There were no sex and gender selection criteria, but the study includes an equal representation across the generations. Since this study included members from three generations, and prior research has indicated the need to include participants from a variety of age ranges in order to delineate the processes of cultural construction (e.g., Himmelfarb, 1980; Strahan, 1994), the age range for participants is between 10 and 94. Utilizing a qualitative approach for this study provided the opportunity to capture detailed personal histories, experiences, and life cycle and generational heritages or changes.

Participants were included if all family members are considered Jewish by birthright *or* family members personally identify with Judaism, as the latter is especially important in Reform Jewish identification. Not included in this study were persons with serious learning or developmental delays, as well as neurodegenerative diseases that could impede their understanding and comprehension of the assent and consent process. Also, because the focus of this study aimed at learning more about how culture and religion become constructed, individuals with these types of conditions might not be able to fully articulate, convey, or express themselves in a way that would accurately inform the data. For example, an individual who has

been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease has the potential of providing inaccurate information that could skew or negate emerging themes and patterns.

Participants were recruited through a network of religious and community resources in Western New York via local religious leaders with whom I had developed relationships. Families were also recruited through approved resources, such as synagogue newsletters and community bulletins.

Once a family expressed interest or was recommended, I contacted them and explained the project's aims and purpose to all participants, they had an opportunity to ask questions or voice concerns, and approved assent and consent forms were completed if the participants agreed to participate. Details about participants are presented in Chapter Four as an introduction to the findings. The study's research design and procedures utilized three forms of data collection – in-depth interviews, focus groups with family members, and observations of family engagement in a religious holiday or celebrated family activity. The order of data collection varied for each family based on availability and timing and involvement in the study relative to the Jewish holiday calendar. For the Reynolds[1] family, participant observation occurred first, followed by individual interviews, and finally a family focus group. For the Nelson and Lewis families, individual interviews occurred first, followed by a family focus group, and finally participant observation. The time needed to complete data collection also varied by family schedule and participant. The youngest and oldest participants required more time in order to elicit and confirm their responses during individual interviews. Data collection occurred between March and May of 2014 with approximately ten hours spent with each family.

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[1] First and last names were changed to pseudonyms. Detailed family descriptions can be found in Chapter 4.

**Interviews**

In-depth interviews were used to gain valuable historical and personal insight into the customs of the family. I conducted one individual interview with each of the twelve participants, each lasting between 45-90 minutes. Individual interviews for the Reynolds and Nelson family took place in person at their homes as well as over the phone for family members that lived out of town. For the Reynolds family, all individual interviews were completed in 5 days. For the Nelson family, all individual interviews were completed in 3 days. For the Lewis family, individual interviews took place in person at a Jewish Community Center and at their homes. Individual interviews for the Nelson family were completed in 7 days. Individual interviews were conducted together as close as possible to minimize the likelihood of family members discussing the questions with each other between the interviews. The interview and questions centered on and explored perceptions about self and family, rituals and traditional practices, and networks (see Appendix E for the full interview protocol). Cohen and Eisen (2000) identified these areas as lacking in understanding and important considerations for future researchers to explore. They are also important domains related to understanding how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families as each can play a unique role in shaping experiences for individuals and families (see Cohen & Eisen, 2000; Friedlander et al., 2010; Cadge & Davidman, 2006; Cohen, 1991b; Kelner, 2007).

**Focus Groups**

I conducted a family interview (i.e., focus group) to discuss culture and religion collectively among family members. The individual interviews, as well as the focus groups, were audio recorded. Subjects were interviewed at a time and place that was mutually convenient and private. The one focus group per family lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours. Two successive

generations (e.g., parents and grandparents, or parents and children) needed to be present for the focus group to occur. For the Reynolds family, Cheryl and Steven were present for the focus group. Mary, Joseph, Brad, and Elizabeth were present for the focus group from the Nelson family. For the Lewis family, Jon, Lindsay, and Becky were present for the focus group. A comfortable or "safe" environment for the youngest generation to be open and forthcoming was sustained by asking questions specific to each generation using questions raised in the individual interviews. Each focus group opened with the following two questions: "What does being Jewish mean to you?" and "Describe the customs and traditions that are important to your family." These questions and others raised during the focus group sessions, explored how the family (in contrast to the individuals) defines being Jewish, their important traditions and how they have changed over time, and how the family describes their social network (see Appendix F).

**Family Engagement**

Observations of family engagement were carried out as an additional tool for data collection in order to learn more about and understand the activities surrounding culture and religion, and to observe family members in a natural setting. A traditional family event was used for observation. For this study, they included observing and participating in Purim celebrations with the Reynolds family (a holiday that commemorates the saving of the Jewish people from execution), observing and participating in Passover with the Nelson family (an important holiday celebrated to commemorate Jews' liberation from slavery and ensuing freedom), and observing and participating in a family gathering celebrating a birthday with the Lewis family. While the family gathering was not explicitly a religious event, there were religious values imbedded in the birthday the family honors collectively.

Two successive generations (e.g., parents and grandparents, or parents and children) needed to be present for the observations. For the Reynolds family, the observations focused on participating in a religious service and networking at their synagogue. Observations for the Nelson family centered on two areas:  Family traditions and values and the cultural and religious side of Reform Judaism during Passover in their home. For the Lewis family, observations at a birthday celebration focused on rituals and practices of a family unit. The observations were used to corroborate or discredit themes that emerged from the data, as well as findings from previous research conducted in this area. Two generations were present for Purim celebrations, which took place at the Reynolds' family's synagogue and lasted approximately 2 hours. All three generations were present at the Passover gathering at the Nelson house, which lasted approximately 3 hours, as well as the family celebration for a birthday with the Lewis family, which lasted approximately 3 hours.

**Chapter 4: Findings**

This chapter details the finding from this study, which explored the intersection of culture and religion in Reform Jewish families. Data was gathered through focus groups, individual and family interviews, and from participant observation. Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory process was utilized for data analysis, and initial coding, focused coding, theoretical coding, and sampling were used to analyze the data and develop an emerging concept that served as an understanding of culture and religion in Reform Jewish families. In the first phase of data analysis, the data were transcribed and coded based on concepts and themes that emerged from the literature, as well as from examination of the interview data itself (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I was particularly interested in the similarities and differences in how each generation defined "Judaism" and "Jewishness." Additionally, I was interested in examining how individuals create a private sense of what it means to be Jewish, and how that relates to the complex set of interlocking ethnic, linguistic, national, regional, and religious identities (see Raphael, 2003). In the second phase, the coded data were compared across subjects (by generation and family) for detailed analysis of concepts and themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The interviews and focus group audio recordings were transcribed by a university staff member who was on the IRB approved protocol for this study. I related analysis to the research questions and was able to draw conclusions based on these findings. I was also interested in exploring how rituals, or ceremonies, may shift from a focus on God, to a focus on community.

This study addressed the overall research question: How is culture and religion constructed in Reform Jewish families? This chapter is presented in the following format: 1) setting the context of participants and families, 2) data collection and coding process, and 3) introducing an emerging concept highlighted by the individuals and families enrolled in the

study. Additionally, this chapter will cover emerging themes from the study, which were 1) opportunities for choice, 2) opportunities to create networks, and 3) social connectedness. This chapter concludes with a discussion about the intersection of culture and religion in Reform Jewish families. First, I will begin the chapter with an overview of the participants and their families.

## Setting the Participant and Family Context

This section provides an overview of the organizations involved with recruiting families, as well as an overview of the families and individuals, to serve as a reference point for the study. Adults in this study were currently or had previously been in professions that included being a teacher, psychologist, architect, and medical doctor, to name a few. As previously expounded upon in Chapter 3, three families with three consecutive generations represented were enrolled into the study. They are each described as follows, with the names changed to neutral names to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

*Family 1 – "The Reynolds Family"*

The Reynolds Family was identified through a common intermediary known to both the family and the investigator. The family consists of the following individuals:

1. Eric is a 72 year-old man who is the oldest patriarch of the Reynolds family. He has been married to Rachel for over 50 years.. He indicated that he is not religious, and went so far to say he believes he is Agnostic, but enjoys the cultural aspects of being a Jew.

2. Rachel, Eric's wife, represents the oldest matriarch of the Reynolds family. She and Eric have two daughters, Cheryl and Kathy, each of whom have their own families that identify with different movements of Judaism. This has caused some turmoil amongst

and between the Reynolds family. Rachel considers the spiritual and cultural aspects of Judaism important to her.

3. Cheryl, Eric and Rachel's younger daughter, represents the middle generation of the Reynolds family and lives in a densely Jewish populated suburb in Western New York with her husband (who converted to Judaism from Christianity and did not participate in this study) and two children, an infant girl and a 10 year-old son, Steven. Cheryl expressed frustration with the synagogue choices in the area, but was happy she has been able to provide adequate Jewish educational opportunities for Steven.

4. Steven is the youngest member of the Reynolds family involved in this study. He attends both public school in a suburb in Western New York, as well as Jewish after school activities and occasional events over the weekend hosted by the synagogue the Reynolds family belongs to. Steven mentioned he was excited to learn more about his family's Jewish history, and commented that he enjoyed being the only Jewish child in his public school classroom.

As part of the participant observation session with the Reynolds family, I was able to participate in Purim with both Cheryl and Steven at their synagogue.

*Family 2 – "The Nelson Family"*

The Nelson family was identified by a friend of the investigator and consists of the following individuals:

1. Elizabeth is a 94 year-old woman and is the matriarch of the Nelson family. She lives by herself in an assisted living community in a large metropolitan area of Western New York. Although the onset of Alzheimer's and dementia has unfortunately started to set in

for her, and she needed help from other family members recalling parts of her past, she was able to describe her family as being exceptionally poor when she was growing up and her involvement in the Zionist movement and Hebrew school as a young woman. She often had trouble noting specific aspects of her life she could attribute to Jewish culture or religion and regularly said that she just simply, "felt Jewish in my heart."

2. Mary is Elizabeth's daughter and lives with her husband, Joseph, in a suburb in Western New York. Like her mother, Mary has spent her entire life living in this area and fondly remembers celebrating Jewish holidays with her family growing up. She expressed that, in her opinion, the religious and cultural aspects of Judaism could not be appropriately separated into two distinct entities.

3. Joseph and Mary met when they were children and in the same temple youth group. He mentioned the importance of family for him, and his connection to Jewish traditions, but stated a disdain for Hebrew school when he was younger, and felt he was currently Agnostic.

4. Melissa is Joseph and Mary's daughter who is married to an Orthodox Jewish man and currently lives in a state in the South. She indicated that since she's been married, she has been more involved with weekly Shabbat and has appreciated growing up in a house where family and religion shaped her idea of community, charity, and giving back to others.

5. Brad is the youngest member of the Nelson family, and currently lives in a large metropolitan area in the Mid-Atlantic. Although he has a girlfriend, he is not married and has no children. Brad remembers being forced to go to Hillel school when he was younger and also stated his dislike for it. He shared with me that his personal connection

to Israel has grown stronger in the last few years after a positive experience with a tutor as an adolescent and two trips to Israel.

As part of the participant observation session with the Nelson family, I was able to participate in Passover with them at their house.

*Family 3 – "The Lewis Family"*

The Lewis family was identified through networking with the staff at a local Jewish Community Center. They consist of the following individuals:

1. Becky represents the oldest generation of the Lewis family and has many relatives, most of whom (around 50) live in the Western New York area. As such, their family gatherings tend to be large. Becky lives by herself in a townhouse in a suburb after the recent death of her husband. She mentioned her dissatisfaction with several area temples and their rabbis, considers herself "a temple hopper," used to consider Israel important to her until a recent visit tarnished her view, and is "still looking for [her] spiritual home."

2. Lindsay, one of Becky's daughters, represents the middle generation of the Lewis family. Lindsay is extremely involved in Jewish life. She also works as an employee at a local Jewish Community Center. Recently divorced, Lindsay tried dating men who were not Jewish, something she hadn't done since high school, but found it did not work for her. She cited family and traditions as being especially important to her.

3. Jon is Lindsay's 18 year-old son who attends a college in Western New York. Jon believes strongly that he and people in his family should only date Jewish people. He indicated a personal importance of carrying on Jewish religion and culture in his family.

Most of his life and friends revolve around two Jewish summer camps where he was a camper when he was young and is now a counselor.

As part of the participant observation session with the Lewis family, I was able to participate in a family gathering celebrating a birthday with them at a relative's house.

The varying age ranges and experiences from the participants provided a detailed account of Jewish life from several angles, which provided an opportunity for a broad analysis of individual and family experiences.

## Data Collection and Analysis

This study explored the intersection of culture and religion in Reform Jewish families. During the study, I conducted one focus group with each family, twelve individual interviews, and one unique participant observation session with each family. Merriam (1988) utilized a process involving observations, field notes, and physical and emotional elements a researcher can pick up on. I adopted this process by observing the setting and environment and providing a detailed account of the context. This was followed by a thorough description of the participants, their interactions, and activities. I was also interested in examining and documenting how frequent the interactions were, as well as "other subtle factors, such as informal, unplanned activities, symbolic meanings, nonverbal communication, physical clues, and what should happen that has not happened" (Merriam, 1988, p. 43). Merriam's other work (1998) also suggests "observing the conversation in terms of content, who speaks to whom, who listens, silences, the researcher's own behavior and how that role affects those one is observing, and what one says or thinks" (Kawulich, 2005, p. 11).

During data analysis, each interview and focus group transcript were initially coded, which resulted in 230 individual codes for individuals and families. These initial codes were then grouped into 20 focused codes, an approach detailed and suggested by Charmaz (2006). The units of analysis for this study were the self and family, rituals and traditional practices, and networking experiences for families and individuals. An example of the merging from initial codes to focused codes is provided in Table 4.1. The full document is listed in Appendix G. From these focused codes, six emerging themes were developed, which formed the basis of an emerging concept. These six categories are listed in Table 4.2. Jewish individuals overwhelming expressed the belief that Reform Judaism allows them to have personal control over how they participate and express their own interpretation of Jewish culture and religion. As a result, how culture and religion is constructed within these families can be described as having similar outcomes or "conclusions" amongst and between them, but the experiences of each family are independently unique.

**Table 4.1** *Examples of Focused Codes from Initial Codes*

| Categories | Codes |
|---|---|
| Hebrew School | 1. Being with other Jewish people<br>2. No bullying<br>3. Safe<br>4. Boring<br>5. Not involved in religious aspect<br>6. Being an outsider<br>7. Not being allowed to play with Christians<br>8. Jewish fraternity<br>9. Being a rebel-spitballs, paper wads, squirt guns<br>10. Bad, poorly prepared teachers<br>11. Takes away from personal time<br>12. Interferes with sports<br>13. Family influences<br>14. Enjoyment of learning Hebrew<br>15. Boys vs. Girls experiences |

| Synagogue | 16. Purely social |
| | 17. Center of Jewish community |
| | 18. "Temple hopping" |
| | 19. "Too 'churchy'" |
| | 20. Dislike of rabbi |
| | 21. Dislike of Cantor |
| | 22. Rites of passage |
| | 23. Celebrations |
| | 24. Youth group |
| | 25. Teaching kids what it means to be Jewish |
| | 26. Purpose changes as you get older |
| | 27. "Platform for Jews coming together" |

**Table 4.2** *Themes from Focused Codes: Constructing Jewishness*

**Categories**                    **Codes**

| Experiences as a child | 1. School |
| | 2. Youth groups |
| Purpose of the synagogue | 3. Center of community |
| | 4. Social networks |
| | 5. "Temple Hopping" |
| | 6. Spiritual home |
| Beliefs and values | 7. Education |
| | 8. Helping others |
| | 9. Culture v. religion |
| | 10. Family and generational influences |
| Spirituality | 11. Connections |
| | 12. Prayer & God |
| Importance of holidays, customs, and traditions | 13. Food |
| | 14. Passover |
| | 15. Family time |
| | 16. Discord & conflict |
| | 17. Rites of passage |
| Thoughts about Israel | 18. Cultural identity |
| | 19. Politics |
| | 20. Trips |

The themes highlighted in Table 4.2 describe an overarching concept consistently

reflected throughout the interviews and observations – that Jewish families and individuals use a

multitude of resources available to them to create and construct their own understanding and interpretation of what it means to be culturally and religiously Jewish. Individuals and families described experiences and thoughts, personal and collective beliefs and values, the importance of holidays, customs, and traditions, the purpose of the synagogue, and spirituality as vehicles for how they construct their own understanding of what it means to be Jewish. The findings presented in this chapter begin with details surrounding early life and experiences as a child that participants deemed formidable to their own Jewish identity. From there, the chapter will then discuss the themes outlined in Table 4.2 as they relate to experiences in adolescence and adulthood.

## Childhood Experiences

Remembering and reflecting upon experiences as a Jewish child, participants were able to discuss how these experiences were formidable in constructing their own understanding of what it means to not only be a Jewish person, but also a Jewish person situated within a larger Jewish family. Childhood, roughly defined as occurring between the ages of five and twelve, is an important developmental period where learning through participation can help individuals understand their own culture and its associated beliefs (see Rogoff, 2003). This was no exception for this study, as many participants recalled memories centered on life as a young child in a Jewish family and Jewish-centered educational experiences. In fact, some of these experiences were so profound and lasting, multiple individuals from different families raised similar points without even being prompted.

**School**

The concept of school was a dominant theme consistent throughout my discussions with the individuals and families in this study. Out of the twelve participants involved in the study, nine, or 75%, recalled and depicted a profoundly negative experience, both in the public school system, as well as a student in Hebrew school. These negative feelings were shared by both men and women from several generations in each family. Lindsay from the Lewis family described her Hebrew school and how she wanted to make sure her children would not have similar memories when they were adults:

> Hebrew school was boring and everybody used to get in trouble there. I remember coming home and saying to my mom "I've got a headache" and "I don't want to go." She used to tell me, "everybody is going." It just was not pleasant. Not only was it boring, we had these women that worked there. It seemed as if they weren't trained as teachers. It seemed that they were Israeli women who didn't really necessarily want to be there and who couldn't handle teaching kids that didn't want to be there. They would stand out in the hall and talk in Hebrew about us. They just yelled at us all the time and everybody was just in trouble all the time. I was a relatively good kid, so to sit there and get yelled at was upsetting. I didn't learn anything.

Brad from the Nelson family also described teachers in Hebrew school that seemed to be inadequate.

> The programming was pretty bad. The average teacher was pretty bad. I wasn't engaged at all. It was on Wednesdays after school or Sundays in the morning. So it didn't have momentum behind it anyways. I didn't want to be at temple after school on a Wednesday

or on a Sunday. I wanted to be playing sports or hanging out with friends. Even looking back on it, they were pretty low quality teachers; it's sort of bound for failure.

Brad's dislike for Hebrew school because it interfered with his social life or sports was a common theme expressed by many of the men in this study. Even Steven, a 10 year old from the Reynolds family who mentioned that although he currently enjoys Hebrew school, stated that, "it can ruin your weekend." Joseph, Brad's father, recalled that when he was a child in Hebrew school, his lack of interest and boredom resulted in his bad behavior in the classroom. He noted one instance in 6th grade when his use of spit wads and squirt guns resulted in a phone call to his parents from the rabbi.

Participants also described transformative experiences in the public school system that had profound influences on their Jewish life. Cheryl, a member of the Reynolds family, discussed how her family lived in a rural area in the Northeast when she was young. As a result of their remote location, her graduating high school class had a total of 80 people. Her family was the only Jewish family in the town besides her cousins who lived down the road. Cheryl remembered that when she was in 1st or 2nd grade, she started to realize that she and her family were "different" compared to the other predominately Christian families in the area.

My mom would come to school and talk about Chanukah and bring a book and we'd bring donuts, or we'd bring a Menorah and she, I think, thought of herself as educating other people. So I guess I always felt sort of different than the way most kids were because sort of the way the world is, the world is Christian. But I really felt it growing up because we were the one family that was different.

Cheryl also mentioned that her family had a Christmas tree when she was 4 or 5 years old and they attended a Unitarian church for a few years, which contributed to her confusion about her family's culture and religion. To complicate matters, she recalled attending a Christian bible school when she was in 1st grade and having a birthday party where one of her classmates could not come.

> There was a very observant Christian family and they could not come to my birthday when I was in 1st grade. It's one of those things that you remember your whole life that somebody couldn't come. I remember my mom talking to me about it, and she'd say 'yeah, because we're Jewish', and I was like 'what does that have to do with anything?' But those things stick with you. You remember that.

Interestingly, a similar situation is panning out for Cheryl's son, Steven. Although they live in a densely populated Jewish town, Cheryl mentioned that Steven is the only Jewish child in his class at the local public school. She believes that most Jewish parents send their children to Jewish day schools as opposed to public schools. Nevertheless, she took her school experiences as a child and made sure to tell Steven because they happened when she was his age, and she wanted him to "appreciate living in a multicultural town" where people are "used to kids being different and they talk about diversity a lot."

Cheryl was also able to reflect upon her own upbringing as it related to school and make changes so her children would not be brought up in a similar way. She mentioned that she "hated going to Sunday school, and hated, hated, hated going to Hebrew school" mostly because it was twice a week, a half-hour drive, she could not play softball, and she believed Sunday school was

too cliquey. She also recalled resenting her mother, Rachel, for a long time for forcing her to go even after she told her how much she disliked it. Cheryl wanted a different life for her family.

> I think he's [Steven] lucky in that respect that he's not going to be an outsider [at school]. That was really important to me. My parents didn't think about it when we lived where we did. They wanted to live in the country. But for me, it was important to live where the other Jews are because if we lived out in [the country], that would be like living where I grew up. There aren't any Jews there probably, maybe there's one, but you know, I guess it did play into our decision about where we were going to live. Or where we were going to be so that he would feel like kind of a part of the community more and it seems to have worked, even though he doesn't realize it. He doesn't know. He definitely has a Jewish identity, so I feel like my job is done even if he does complain on Sunday. He's proud of it, so that makes me feel good. I feel like we did the right thing.

It is important to note that although many Jewish educational and school experiences were described in a negative light, several of the participants described informal learning opportunities that had a lasting impact on their Jewish identity. Two such individuals were Brad and Jon. These informal experiences came at a point in time where both Brad and Jon were "down" on Judaism, and they can be traced to specific persons they each credit for helping them. They were not learning much in the classroom and were distracted by the missed opportunities taken away by their Hebrew school attendance. Brad's experience was with his tutor as he prepared for his bar mitzvah.

> I would say the bar mitzvah thing was a very strong moment in my Jewish life, and that was a really positive Jewish experience. I was really negative on learning Hebrew in

Hebrew school and just Jewishness in general, and then I had a great tutor for my bar mitzvah. He was just a great man, he was a great teacher; he just made it fun. I enjoyed learning the Torah in that setting. I studied really hard for my bar mitzvah, and that strengthened my bond with the religion. So that was a pretty important moment in my contributing to my Jewishness outside of what my family had provided.

Similarly, Jon credits a rabbi at his college for helping him to think about Jewish life in a different way. Essentially fed up with his temple at home and his Hebrew school experiences as a child, Jon described his newfound interest.

I pledged to a Jewish fraternity this past fall and when we were pledging, we had to go to Habad. It's basically a free synagogue for college students and it's run by Hasidic Jews. So when I was pledging, we had to go Friday night for Habad and I mean I really don't know what's going on during the services, but I enjoyed being there for the culture. I also enjoyed the idea of observing Shabbat, of just going and being in services. And also the rabbi of Habad hangs out at our student union, and he's very close with all of the guys in our fraternity and he sits there with tefillin and encourages people to wrap tefillin. The first time I ever wrapped tefillin was with him, and I actually really enjoyed doing that. Spiritually, I like doing that. It makes me feel good about myself. So I think I became more observant from a religious standpoint this year because of Habad and the rabbi.

**Youth Groups**

While many participants from the younger generations credited a specific individual for helping them understand their own Jewishness better, several members from the oldest generation reminisced about their involvement in Jewish youth groups and social organizations that were

integral in shaping Jewish life for them. Becky, from the Lewis family, recalled her involvement in Young Judaea and the JY (Jewish Young Men's and Women's Association) in the 1940s and 1950s. She explained that Young Judaea and JY was very popular then, but many kids today either are not involved, or just do not talk about it. Becky described her experience vividly.

> I think that's where my love of Judaism revolved, and I began to evolve and that's where it came from. Then I joined a high school sorority that was a Jewish sorority and we met at the JY. It was the center of Jewish life for teens. It was a little utopia because you were safe to go there even though you were walking down the street from a bus and going home at night on a bus. It was a whole different era and all the Jewish teenagers from [many different schools], came to the JY on Wednesday night, which was sorority/fraternity night. Sunday, we had teen dances and I don't think there's a [local] who was part of that era who wouldn't remember that fondly. It had nothing to do with religion, but everything to do with religion. Nothing was taught religiously, but you got something that you carried with you the rest of your life.

Although Elizabeth from the Nelson family was 94 years old and suffering from early Alzheimer's during her involvement in this study, she was still able to recall her time in various Jewish youth groups when she was younger. The political landscape was much different when Elizabeth was young, and as such, she described a need to become a Zionist and be involved in Libra Zion because "Israel was the big thing in my mind." She was also able to briefly describe her time in Yeshua organizations and as president of junior Habonim, a Jewish Socialist-Zionist youth movement founded in the early 1900s. Her involvement in these youth organizations contributed to Elizabeth's "feeling Jewish in [her] heart."

# The Purpose of the Synagogue

Participants expressed that the synagogue plays an important part in larger "public" Jewish life, but many hesitated to say it was significant in their own personal lives. While this may not be all that surprising within the Reform movement, it is noteworthy to mention the degree to which the synagogue's role has changed when taking into consideration the generational changes that have occurred within these families. Interestingly, many members from the older generations remember attending services with extended family members and not their own parents. This occurred for a number of reasons (financial, geographic). Additionally, these individuals also recalled going to Orthodox or Conservative temples and not Reform temples. Some suggested this was a result of not living close to a Reform synagogue. For others, the reasons were financial, as some Orthodox synagogues offered free Sunday school, a perk for families that were having a hard time making ends meet. Many, however, suggested Orthodox or Conservative temple attendance was a direct result of their family's European heritage, and their parents or grandparents attended simply because their parents or grandparents did.

Carrying on that "legacy" of multi-generational family attendance at one synagogue seemed to be lost as participants in this study grew up. Many told stories of parents exercising autonomy in choosing which temple would suit them or their family best based on the programming and personal relationships, and not because of family history or lineage. As a result, many indicated that the synagogue went from being an important part of the Jewish religion, to being a somewhat important part of the Jewish culture. Joseph from the Nelson family suggested this might have happened as a result of the size of synagogues now.

When I was a little kid, you would go from, in Yiddish the word for synagogue or

Temple is shul; you go from shul to shul. They weren't big buildings like they are now.

They were a house that they cleared out the first floor and turned it into a synagogue that

maybe housed 100 or 150 people, not 500.

**Center of Community**

Although its religious importance has seemed to wane for the families in this study, the

synagogue still plays a role as a social center for Jewish activity. Joseph said it succinctly but

powerfully when he mentioned that "the synagogue is a platform for Jews coming together."

This was true for other families as well. During observation and participation in Purim at the

Reynolds' synagogue, the celebration took the form of a fair with games, activities, and costume

decorations for children to help them understand Jewish history. Cheryl mentioned several times

that Purim is now geared more towards children. This statement was supported by my

observations of many families with kids, including Cheryl and Steven, engaging in activities

with Jewish religious and cultural undertones, such as loudly booing when Haman's name was

said aloud during the service and bringing in non-perishable food items for donation to a local

food cupboard.

Several individuals also commented that when they moved from one town to another,

usually one of the first things they did was become involved at the local synagogue. Whether or

not they stayed or liked it is another story. Joseph also described an experience when he was in

6th grade where his father decided to switch the family to a Reform synagogue from an Orthodox

synagogue, which was a better fit for his family.

The services had more English, less Hebrew.  There was more focus on social action. The rabbi we had marched with Martin Luther King and he was jailed with Martin Luther King, so he would speak about going on freedom rallies.  So you heard about the Civil Rights Movement; his sermons weren't about Jonah and the whale, they were about social justice, against the war in Vietnam, pro Civil Rights, ending poverty, health, and so on.  I'm sure if he were here now, he'd be talking about why we need Obama care or something like that, and a very liberal left wing social movement.

The notion of bonding with the rabbi or mission of the synagogue is an idea that was consistent amongst many individuals, even if that bond was not faith based. Even Joseph mentioned that his participation as a member of his temple's congregation and as president is not faith based as he is a self-described agnostic. Eric from the Reynolds family is another self-described agnostic that has a limited relationship with the synagogue, although his wife Rachel has recently become more involved. Eric grew up in a Reformed synagogue and described it as a "social experience rather than a religious experience" for him. He mentioned that he would likely not attend any synagogue functions if it were not for his wife Rachel, but he still enjoys the traditional and cultural aspect.

Rachel originally joined as an independent member and I would drop her off and pick her up.  Drop her off before 10:00am and pick her up at noon, and the first time she asked me to come in because they serve a light lunch there, so I had lunch and liked the people. This was about 40 years ago. And the next time, two weeks later, I dropped her off and went to pick her up and she said 'well why don't you stay for lunch' and at that point I decided I better join because I felt guilty eating lunch and not being a member.  So I have a lunch membership at the synagogue. We joined as a family membership but you know

it's social for me. There's a nice group of people. Now Rachel has gotten very involved. There are often classes before the services, so sometimes I drop her off at 8:30 in the morning and she attends a class and then services are at 10:00. I'll come back about 11:30 and stay for the last half hour of the service. At that service, what they tend to do after they read the portion of the Torah, there's no sermon, the clerk sort of discusses things that have come up and how it might apply to life. I'm not much of a discusser, so I'm really not that interested in that aspect. I enjoy after services quite a bit. There are a lot of nice people. So my relationship to the synagogue is purely social.

Eric's opinion of the purpose of the synagogue and his description of the types of activities that his family partake in were similar when compared to other families in this study. The synagogue has long been a place where Jews meet, interact, and socialize. That being said, participants indicated that although they view it as a house of worship, they overwhelmingly described it as primarily a social place that Jews use to supplement their connection to Jewish religion and culture. This, again, was supported by my observations of Purim with the Reynolds family. Mary from the Nelson family noted that although the synagogue has "become a more important part of why I feel Jewish," she believes that the synagogue has helped her strengthen her own personal connections to family celebrations and holidays. Mary's daughter Melissa, who lives in a Southern state and is married to an Orthodox Jew, also independently noted that the synagogue's purpose is to form a "connection to the Jewish community and other Jewish people." Melissa currently does not belong to a synagogue in the South because of the small Jewish population there, but indicated that she and her husband plan on actively seeking one out when they have children. When asked about what kind of synagogue she would look for, she said:

I'm not sure. I think we'll have to see where we're living and kind of get a feel for the congregation. Then, if we're joining as a family, we'll probably want to join with other adult families, so I guess we'll have to see.

Melissa casually raises an interesting point that was also consistent considering the other participants in this study. The synagogue is seen as a crucial part of Jewish culture and community, and people do not feel they need to attend a temple that is Reform just because they grew up or were raised in one. Jewish individuals seek out synagogues where they feel like they can belong and form important connections. Cheryl from the Reynolds family also mentioned the importance of forming connections at the synagogue and mentioned that, on a larger scale, its purpose is to help her son Steven learn more about what it means to be Jewish. Cheryl also said:

> I feel like I really want him to have a strong Jewish identity so [the synagogue's purpose is] to educate him about what that means so we can get a little bit more connected to people who are Jewish in the community. It would just be nice to know more people who are Jewish, but I didn't grow up that way. I really didn't have any Jewish friends growing up, but it's different here because we're in [a densely populated Jewish town].

Lindsay from the Lewis family described the synagogue as a place for rites of passage such as baby namings, weddings, and bar mitzvahs. She noted that many of her family celebrations have occurred at the synagogue, as well as meetings and youth groups. Lindsay also described the synagogue as "a home away from home" because of the time she spent there as a child, and a comfortable building with a lot of memories – both happy and sad. Becky, Lindsay's mother, exclaimed "nothing!" when I asked her what the purpose of the synagogue was to her. Although Becky has had a difficult time finding a synagogue she feels comfortable in, she noted she does

go to temple on a purely social basis for music groups that come into town and does occasionally go to the movies with other women she knows through the synagogue.

For some, the purpose of the synagogue has changed as they have aged. Rachel from the Reynolds family described her experience as purely social when she was young. She would attend events at the synagogue in high school and she recalled enjoying the service, but was never involved more than that. Now she is retired, living in a community with older adults, and belongs to a small reconstructionist synagogue, Rachel said she is involved more and enjoys having it be more personal and close knit where people know her name. She described her synagogue as very social and cultural:

> There's a lot of singing. We have a lot of classes. We had a Jewish history class this year, we had a Jewish literature class on short stories, and then we have a reading. It's called 'books and bagels' and we read a book a month. I'm also taking a bat mitzvah class because I was never bat mitzvahed. I'm going to be bat mitzvahed next year with a group of 16 other women. So I'm restudying, relearning Hebrew with a couple of other women in the group. Women did not get bat mitzvahed back in the day. Things have changed. Mostly our synagogue is not geared for young people.

**Social Networks**

A large number of participants also had Jewish social networks they were active in, which can be seen as a "replacement" for the synagogue as the center of community. Rachel from the Reynolds family splits time between her house in the Southeast and a house in the Northeast. When spending time at their home in the Southeast, she discussed socializing outside of the synagogue with people from the congregation, going on cruises with them, eating out at

restaurants, and engaging in book club. Eric, Rachel's husband, described his social circle being made up of people solely from the Southeast. The congregation he and Rachel joined keeps him active with a men's group that meets for lunch on alternate Saturdays to discuss various topics.

Joseph from the Nelson family talked about how his social networks were defined by other couples that had children that were similar in age to his. He said, "we all had kids at the same time and it turned out they were all Jewish. We lived on this street in [a suburb in Western New York] where probably over half the street was Jewish." Now that he is older and his children are adults, Joseph said that a primary social network is working out at the local Jewish community center and running into a lot of people he knows. Cheryl from the Reynolds family also discussed how "kids are kind of the connection to my community" and although she has a lot of Jewish acquaintances, she said she does not have many good Jewish friends. Mary from the Nelson family goes to the Jewish community center and it is her primary social network.

> I play Mahjong, which I guess is a culturally Jewish thing. It has nothing to do with religion, but it's a game that Jewish women seem to mostly play. I do that with a few different groups. I go to the JCC every day. Not that everybody is Jewish at the JCC, but a large percentage of the people there are Jewish, so even in my leisure time, I exercise and do things with mostly Jewish people.

**Temple Hopping**

Most of the participants in this study described at least one point in their life when they would "hop" between synagogues. For some, they had no choice since they went to synagogue with their older family members as children and then decided to "hop" once they were older. There were several individuals that mentioned the reason they "hopped" was because their

synagogue became too large and impersonal for them. In these instances, it was hard to make friends and sustain relationships. Others described disagreements with temple leadership and personal frustrations with where the direction the synagogue was headed. These instances of "temple hopping" were, perhaps, the most intriguing concept to emerge from the data – at least from a personal standpoint.

Becky from the Reynolds family stated that she was a "temple hopper" and that she was currently on her third temple. When Becky was young, she remembers attending an Orthodox synagogue with her grandmother. Much of her current dissatisfaction comes from temple leadership and their interpretations of what can and cannot be done. Becky described her daughter's bat mitzvah experience as her personal awakening. During the ceremony, she recalled not being allowed up to the Torah, yet her husband, "who could care less," was. Becky went to talk to the rabbis about her concerns and hopes to change the "rules" with little success. She recalled one particular troubling meeting that made her decision to leave that temple, which is Conservative.

> I remember sitting [the rabbis] both down and telling them this has got to change. Then, when they finally were going to allow women to have Aliyahs, there was a meeting. It was the most disgusting meeting. Men came out with statements that were absolutely nauseating. There were people saying they were going to leave. I'm a very strong feminist, so I couldn't stay there.

Becky's attempt to find a temple that suits her needs lead her to a Reform temple. While she noted that she found some of the prayers to be meaningful to her, she does not enjoy the service because of the constant standing and sitting, or as she put it, "up and down, up and down." She

said that sometimes she does not bother getting up because she thinks, "it is a little ridiculous." Becky did discuss her appreciation for a Jewish renewal group and her hopes that it would take off in her area. She described a service she and a few other women put together, but lamented that it was always her that had to organize everything and wished others would step in "to make it happen because I'm tired of it."

Cheryl from the Reynolds family also described her experiences in several different temples. As a child, she remembers attending a Conservative synagogue because "my mom was conservative and my dad was reformed. It changes every year in every family. So we ended up joining the conservative synagogue by the time I was in 1st grade." Although Cheryl's family belonged to a Conservative synagogue, she attended an Orthodox Sunday school with her sister. Now as an adult, Cheryl has tried a Conservative synagogue, but currently belongs to a Reform synagogue (her sister is Orthodox) and was steered that way because "I don't ever feel pressured to be more observant and there's a lot of social action and community involvement." She described a Conservative temple in her area as "really, really large" that "felt very impersonal. You felt really obscure because of the old families [from the area] and it's kind of hard to be a newcomer." When it came down to choosing between two Reform temples, Cheryl chose a larger synagogue, which she dislikes along with the organ because it sounds "too churchy," but appreciates the temple's "long history of social action… and there are a lot of intermarried couples and there's a lot of pressure to be involved in the community, but not so much pressure to feel like you need to be more religious, which is exactly what I want."

**A Spiritual Home**

Becky and Rachel both described having spiritual mentors and leaders in their life. Both credit these mentors for them becoming more active in Jewish organizations. Although Becky mentioned, "I haven't found my spiritual home yet," she discussed how important spirituality is to her and said, "that's who I am. I am a spiritual person. I want to experience that in my religion." Becky also described a trip she took.

> I was at Versailles walking with a friend and I looked over and saw a huge open field of trees that came together and I had a true spiritual experience.  I felt the closest to God that I probably have ever felt.  So I experience my spirituality in a lot of different ways, not necessarily going to Temple to a normal service getting up and down and up and down.

Becky also mentioned a Seder she organized where 500 women came. Many of the women were not Jewish. In fact, she remembers seeing nuns dancing and eating. She credits that as also being a formidable spiritual experience.

> The band started playing. There's a service they wrote, the band started and almost 500, I wouldn't say every single person, maybe 300 stood up and we all started dancing around and she [the band leader] let it go for about 10 minutes. She didn't stop.  What could be more spiritual and wonderful in Judaism than that?

### Beliefs and Values

Participants in this study stated that beliefs and values were an important component contributing to Jewish life for themselves and their families. While many of the beliefs and values mentioned were not specifically grounded in Judaism, that is, you do not have to be

Jewish to appreciate them, participants believed they were common amongst Jewish people. The beliefs and values most commonly discussed were the importance of education, the need to help others, the significance of family, and finally the difference between cultural and religious beliefs and values.

**Education**

Brad from the Nelson family remembered his parents instilling in him and his sister the importance of education. Brad clarified that education's importance is "not just a Jewish thing, but it is incredibly important culturally to Jews." Eric from the Reynolds family alluded to the importance of education when he said, "My mother was a reader and probably encouraged her children to read a lot and to do as best they could in school." Cheryl, Eric's daughter, remembers the significance of education being instilled in her at a young age.

> Often, our [the Jewish people] priority is education and learning, and that was always emphasized growing up, and that was the most important thing. The priority of most Jewish families is education. You'd be watching something on TV and your parent goes and pulls out what used to be the world book, or the encyclopedia instead of the internet to know more about X, or we need to know more about Y, so there's always a connection. You always need to learn more, so I think that's really important for Jewish families - higher learning. So, we end up in lots of fields and academic institutions because it's really engrained in us.

Although not expressly stated as an important belief or value, Jon from the Lewis family described his own informal Jewish educational experience at two Jewish summer camps.. It was clear that these summer camps have influenced his beliefs and values and is a direct example of

the influence of Jewish education. His mother Lindsay, who also attended the same Jewish summer camp, said, "sitting at the lake having services is huge." Jon started attending camp when he was 10 years old. He still attends during the summer, but now as a counselor.

> I'd say that camp [number 1] had more to do with me being involved with the religious aspect of Judaism than camp [number 2] did, but they also contributed to me being involved in the culture. I made best friends when I was a little kid in preschool that I'm still close with today at camp [number 1], and camp [number 2]. Camp was definitely what shaped the culture for me. I don't know much about the religion. I think I'm still learning. Camp [number 2] is my favorite place in the world. I love Jewish girls because of it.

Throughout the interview with Jon, many of the examples he gave and his discussions seemed to center around camp and his relationship with the people he knows from camp. It was clear this informal educational experience deeply contributed to constructing his Jewish identity.

**Helping Others**

Lending a helping hand to others was also an important value that was raised by many study participants. Many discussed the need to find a synagogue where social action and community involvement were at the forefront of its mission. Brad from the Nelson family remembers completing several community service projects as a child, as well as volunteer opportunities, which were typically organized through the synagogue. Mary, Brad's mother, echoed his statements and said being good and kind to other people were traits she and her husband Joseph tried to instill and pass on to their children. She recalled the importance of being an example to your children by volunteering and being role models for that type of behavior.

Melissa, Mary and Joseph's daughter, remembers her parents teaching her, through Judaism, to care about others and value charity and giving.

Cheryl from the Reynolds family discussed Tikkun olam, a Hebrew phrase that means "healing or repairing the world," a shared responsibility of making the world a better place, or an act of love that fixes something broken in society. My observation of Cheryl, Steven, and the rest of their synagogue donating non-perishable food items to a local food cupboard during Purim supports this claim. Cheryl described what she does to help others.

> Every time you go to synagogue, you're supposed to bring some food for the local food cupboard, or they have what they call mitzvah day, which is like doing a good deed where you go out in the community in May and everybody gets involved in some project. There are also some more long-term things with certain schools such as teaching kids to read, or with other various projects in the community. That I feel like is really intrinsic to Reform Judaism. Feeling like you're contributing things. Then there's this idea about taking care of the world, Tikkun olam, where you learn more about 'pollution', and doing good with the world, but there's a lot about how you treat other people.

In the Lewis family, being a "mensch," or a good, kind, considerate person, was brought up several times by various individuals at different time points. Jon noted that since his mother Lindsay works at the local Jewish community center, she often hears about him while he's at camp. Jon said, "when she hears something good about me, then she'll tell me what someone said and that usually comes back to one of the values she was teaching - be a good person, make good choices, and so on." Lindsay teaches a creative Jewish parenting class where she uses a "mensch tree" as a behavior management technique. For every good thing someone does, they

get a leaf on their tree that outlines their good deed or behavior. It was clear that "being a mensch" was an important belief and value for Lindsay, as well as passing that along to her children.

> If you see someone sitting alone, go sit with them, help them. I talk to my kids about being able to read someone, if you see someone is having a hard day. And other things like walking your company to the door, and shaking people's hand, and eye contact.

Becky, Lindsay's mother, also mentioned she tries to be a compassionate person and to "try and help make the world a better place." Through my observations with the Lewis family at a birthday celebration, family members, including Becky, Lindsay, and Jon, were constantly asking how they could help cook food, set the table, fill drinks, and so on. It was clear they all wanted to support each other.

**Culture vs. Religion**

Consistent throughout my conversations with the individuals and families was the topic of culturally Jewish beliefs and values and religiously Jewish beliefs and values. In essence, I asked if they were personally able to distinguish between Judaism, the religion, and being Jewish, the culture. This was a difficult question for many participants because they viewed their Jewishness as being intertwined. Mary from the Nelson family associated the religion with the temple, the reading of the Torah, and bible study. The culture, she said, is "a lot about the foods and just hanging out with people that are Jewish." She does not think the two – Judaism and being Jewish – can be separated and said, "it kind of fits together because even when I'm at temple, part of it is the culture. It's not just the religion." Melissa, Mary's daughter, agrees with her and said, "if you look at it in terms of Judaism the religion as being a real strict form of

adhering to every rule, but the Jewish culture as celebrating holidays, feeling Jewish, and going to Israel, I guess there is somewhat of a difference." For Mary's son Brad, the religious side of Judaism "never really connected" for him. He mentioned he does not believe anything in the Torah, but that Judaism is still important to him because of its history and that "the identity of being Jewish has always been really important to me even from a pretty young age."

Joseph from the Nelson family had a very intricate and elaborate answer for this question. He believes that Jewish culture and religion are meshed together.

> They're interwoven and they're connected; it would be like looking at a cloth. Your shirt has red, white, and blue. So they're all in one shirt but you could also look under a microscope and see the red threads, the blue threads, and the white threads. So the culture is about how you do holidays, food is also a huge part, certain customs, and even mindsets. Tonight we're going to see a thing on Jewish humor - Old Jews Telling Jokes, so there's Jewish humor. Now you could listen to all the jokes and most of them won't be anything about Judaism, but there's a Jewish attitude in the humor.

The idea of interconnectedness is a concept also shared with Jon from the Lewis family. Jon even described Judaism as "very close to its own race or ethnicity." He mentioned, "the religious aspect is the boring part of Judaism. That's the part where you're connected with God. Religion can be totally limited to temple and the holidays, whereas the culture is inside the temple and in the holidays, and then everywhere else outside of those things. I'd say that culture is more encompassing of Judaism as an ideal." Cheryl from the Reynolds family struggled with the question.

In my brain, they're very similar even though I feel more culturally Jewish than I do religiously Jewish. I guess it's the belief in one God and not the trinity, those sorts of things, but I'm not very religious, so I don't really think about it very much. I guess it's more I feel different in my beliefs. Maybe more than just that we're different than 90% of the population, but culturally I feel that way too. That's a really hard question.

Rachel from the Reynolds family has a different take on Jewish religion and culture and believes the two cannot be separated.

Yeah, there is definite difference. Religion involves to some extent I think a belief in God and spirituality. You can be somewhat more intellectual and rationalist as a Jew. Looking at religion doesn't do that and to some extent when we read something or analyze something and discuss it, we're looking at it with our heads more than our hearts. But to me, I'm not as spiritual as some people in the reconstruction synagogue that I belong to. I'm not really… I don't know how to say it. I'm not into yoga and taking breaths. That's the way some people look at religion. I'm more agnostic in terms of my beliefs. Culturally, it's a religion. The point of religion is also ritual. Judaism has, from the time you're born, when it comes to a boy, you're circumcised and you have a Bris. A girl now has a baby naming and then there's bat mitvahs and there's holidays. There are all the different holidays and there are rituals that are part of you as they enhance your life. So religion is partly cultural. A lot of Jews don't follow the synagogue, but they go to a Seder. It's a very cultural thing that people do.

**Family and Generational Influences**

Many participants commented on the role their family has had in helping them understand what it means to be Jewish. Similar to thoughts about and trips to Israel, not every experience and influence was a positive one. Family influences were described in generational terms, and participants recalled who in their family has been significant in reinforcing and shaping their understanding of being Jewish. Some of these relationships have caused discord and conflict amongst family members. In some instances, family influences has created and sustained the social networks participants are involved in and consider close and important.

Participants were able to directly recall people in their family that had a direct influence on their life as a Jewish individual. Mary from the Nelson family said, "I know my mother was a strong believer in Israel and she was involved in youth group type things when she was growing up. I think that influenced my Judaism. She felt very Jewish and I think that value got transmitted down to me." Brad, her son, remembers more about the "subtleties" growing up such as Jewish jokes and that all of his parents' friends were Jewish. Eric from the Reynolds family remembered that his grandfather used to read The Daily Forward, a Jewish (Yiddish) newspaper that is also published in English. Eric said that he also reads The Forward and that many of his father's friends were made "either through the business he had or through the synagogue he belonged to. It was a social experience. So that sort of has influenced the way I lived."

Melissa from the Nelson family brought up an experience she had when she was younger which instilled in her the importance of family and community.

When I was a kid, my dad and I went to Washington, DC to march for the freedom of the Soviet Jews. I think what my parents instilled in me is that Judaism really teaches you to

care about others and teaches you that charity and giving and all those things are important. I guess that piece is really important to the community, Jewish or not. You're doing the same thing that our parents did, that your grandparents did, that your great grandparents did. That thing connects you all together generation after generation after generation. Essentially it's something that connects all of us. Then future generations. We're all connected through traditions.

Melissa said that because of these traditions and importance of heritage, she knew she would want to pass them down to her children and it was important to marry someone who was Jewish. She wanted to raise a Jewish family and, "I guess all that stems from it being instilled in me as a kid." Cheryl from the Reynolds family also talked about the importance of heritage. She remembers hearing stories from relatives when she was younger about the Holocaust and concentration camps and mentioned a filmmaker that captured Holocaust survivors' experiences through interviews.

> He interviewed people who survived the Holocaust and so they were part of that interview. They were the children of a sister of my grandfather. So just knowing that is part of our history I guess influenced my growing up in a lot of ways. Just the idea that this is a really important religion to carry on because there are so few of us, so that sort of feeling of kind of rarity that made us important.

Lindsay from the Lewis family also discussed the role her grandparents and father played in helping her understand life as a Jewish woman.

> My grandma made me a lot of who I am in terms of a Jewish woman. I think I probably asked her a lot of questions. I just think about things my grandma has taught me. You

know, that it's a pleasure to buy things for people, the connection I had with her and the
smells when she would cook. She epitomizes what I think is a Jewish mother. My
grandma was someone who always did the right thing.

Throughout our conversations about her life as a young adult, Lindsay remembered one instance
when she was dating someone who was not Jewish. Although her father never flat out said he did
not approve of the relationship, she understood by his actions of not allowing her partner to visit
the home on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, and said, "I just really respected him [her father]
and I always knew that I wanted to be with someone Jewish and that was important to me."

## Spirituality

Spirituality was raised as also being a part of Jewish life for these participants. Some
considered spirituality as a connection to their emotions, mostly void of any religious
undertones. Others mentioned being connected spiritually to family members that have passed
away. The Nelson family discussed prayer and God and the uncertainties they have about each.
Most of the participants agreed that their own spirituality is largely experienced outside of the
temple, but had a difficult time explaining the overall concept of spirituality for themselves. The
notion that participants did not necessarily equate their spirituality with their synagogue serves to
again highlight the idea that the synagogue's purpose is to foster a sense of community – the
"public" domain of Jewish life – whereas spirituality encompasses the "private" side of Judaism.
Here, we see that the synagogue and spirituality are thought of as two different and unique
themes.

**Connections**

When asked about spirituality, Brad from the Nelson family struggled with putting his thoughts into words. At first, he said, "for me, spirituality is more of a feeling or emotional connection to the faith," but then backtracked and eliminated the word "faith" and simplified his statement and said, "it's just something that's more emotional. Faith would just be the literal beliefs." Brad mentioned several times that he does not carry much, if any, of the Jewish religion with him and does not see its relevance to his own life.

Jon from the Reynolds family mentioned that he did not think he was a very spiritual person in the sense of being "controlled by a higher God," but felt a spiritual connection to his grandfather.

> My grandfather died when I was much younger, and I feel like I can feel his presence sometimes. I feel spiritual in that sense, and I believe in karma, Buddhism, I don't know what it is. I just believe that if you do something good, then maybe you'll get rewarded and if you do something bad, you're going to face the consequences at some point.

Jon's view on spirituality was influenced by his mother, Lindsay. Lindsay's teachings of "being a mensch" to her children took hold in Jon as he tries to be a good person in his daily life. When prompted about spirituality, Lindsay had a long answer that involved both God and spiritual connections to family members that have passed on.

> I think believing in God sort of gives a feeling of comfort. I think about difficult times. I remember when my kids were little and September 11th happened and we talked about how could God allow something like that. We talked about how God allows all of us to have free will and sometimes people make some pretty horrendous choices, but then look

when people die, people come together and help each other. So out of all of this awful stuff, God wants us to be there for each other. After my father died and it was my son's birthday, rays of light were coming out of a cloud. I said 'look, grandpa is wishing you a happy birthday.' They'll say that all the time now.  Recently I started dating a guy and his dad just died. We were somewhere the other night it rained and then it stopped and I go 'look, both of our dads are smiling right now,' so it's like that kind of thing. Obviously I'm not necessarily saying God is actually smiling, but I think I would look at it as whoever you connect with that might have died and might be watching over and protecting you. I say things to my kids, when you think about how you're going to behave and what choices you make, if grandpa's watching, would he be impressed or would he be disappointed. There's a little Jewish guilt in there, too.

**Prayer and God**

Mary and Joseph from the Nelson family discussed prayer and God throughout their conversations during this study. Each agreed that they were not spiritual. Mary said spirituality is "a feeling about your religion and where you get those feelings. In the temple, I have that feeling of spirituality when I'm sitting and participating in services. Spirituality is your relationship with prayer and God, but I wouldn't say I'm especially spiritual." Melissa, Joseph and Mary's daughter, struggled with elaborating, but mentioned, "I guess when I go to services and everybody is there and we're praying together, I feel something. I don't know what it is, but I guess that's the spiritual side. You don't really know what it is that you feel, but you feel something."

Joseph's response tied in his occupation and his spirituality into one.

The modern take on it and also the Chassidic take on it is we're all slaves in some ways, so how do we become more free. How do we become more aware. Now as a psychologist, a lot of the people I worked were slaves to habits, urges, and impulses. Part of my therapy was to help them act out of choice and awareness rather than habits and impulses. When I looked at my work, I said 'that's the exact same thing I believe religiously.' It's like begin to act out of free choice rather than out of habits. So I looked and my work and my spirituality were connected, and because Judaism allows such a wide latitude, spirituality could be all over the place.

Joseph also mentioned an experience when he was younger and how his view of God has changed now that he's an adult. As a child, Joseph viewed God as an entity that was watching over him, so if he did something bad, God would notice and he would be in trouble.

I remember when I was in an Orthodox Temple as a little kid, the rabbi said 'if you drop the Torah, you will die.' So you know, I was like oh my God. Recently, I was helping to move the Torah and I said to the rabbi 'when I was a kid, the rabbi told me if you dropped the Torah you died.' He said, 'well you will, but it doesn't mean you're going to die right away because we're all going to die.' I have a hard time with the prayers and reading someone else's prayers because they're all praising God, thanking God, asking God. I don't know if I'm really praying to anybody, but maybe the prayer is just for your own self. Maybe there is a God within each of us in that when we really spend time to meditate, to think or to go to a better place, we touch base within.

Joseph went on to talk about God more in-depth and stated he had mixed feelings if there really was a God and said, "I guess I'd be kind of agnostic on that one. That's okay within Judaism."

He also discussed his doubts on an afterlife and said, "once you are in the ground, you're bones and decay," but also believed that there is some type of "energy that you're made up of," but is unsure what happens to it.

## Importance of Holidays, Customs, and Traditions

Participating in and observing Jewish holidays, customs, and traditions were identified as being important and strong ways the participants in this study constructed their sense of what it means to be Jewish. Cohen and Eisen (2000) suggest these entities have become crucial in helping define what it means to be Jewish. Although their significance has always been high, they are now vital as an increasing number of Reform families and individuals practice a more "private" form being Jewish, which can also mean becoming less involved in the religion and more in the culture. Food was described amongst the participants as being a cultural component of importance. In some cases, it was described as also linking generations of family members together. Additionally, Passover, while still retaining religious components, is now mostly seen as an important to also discussing family. These discussions, as well as physical items such as tables and dishes, are often used to foster connections to previous generations. Family time, both as a child and as an adult, were seen as being important in solidifying the importance of holidays, customs, and traditions.

### Food

The smells, sights, and sounds of Jewish food was discussed heavily amongst the participants in this study and it was obvious it is very important in the Jewish world. Many stated that memories and recollections of food were more prevalent than the religious components of Judaism. Eric from the Reynolds family remembers the holidays he had with his family when he

was a child because "certain foods are related to each of the holidays." Although Eric stated that he could not remember which foods corresponded with each holiday, he said food is the vehicle he uses to form memories about the holidays when he was young. As an adult, Eric and mentioned that although he does not consider himself observant in the religious sense, culturally he likes Jewish food and enjoys being "an observer" and participate "that way in Jewish traditions." He has taken up baking Jewish foods to bring to synagogue because, "since I'm eating, I might as well bring things, too." Cheryl, his daughter, said, "he believes in Russian coffeecake and Jewish food."

Mary from the Nelson family recalled a similar experience when she was younger. She told me that when there was an important holiday, many family members came to her house to celebrate. She also remembers being an active participant in helping her mother and other women put meals together in the kitchen.

> I think what I remember more than anything is probably the food. My mother and my Aunt would be cooking for days and it would be all the traditional Jewish foods. I guess the foods are a lot of my memory of celebrating Jewish things at our house. Friday night too, my mother made chicken soup or something and roasted chicken and matzo balls, so a lot of my associations with being Jewish in my family revolve around the foods more so than going to Temple.

Mary also mentioned at a point during our conversation that one of the ways she distinguishes Jewish culture from Jewish religion is that the culture is "a lot about the foods." Joseph, Mary's husband, had vivid memories of food and its importance in his family when he was younger. He mentioned a Jewish joke and said, "most holidays start with the idea of someone tried to kill us,

we fought back, we won, let's eat." Being president of his temple, Joseph also described food at many Jewish meetings, and mentioned, "Jews have weight issues." Rachel from the Reynolds family also talked about food and its role within the larger Jewish community. She described when her daughter, who is modern Orthodox, had each of her children, someone from the synagogue brought her food. A similar action happened to Lindsay from the Lewis family after a friend's father passed away and "the [Jewish] community came together and [brought] them food." Additionally, Rachel discussed Shabbat at home, where one of the synagogue members opens up their home for Friday night services, and she brings food to share with the host's Challah. Becky from the Lewis family recalled her grandfather "in the morning with his bagel and his herring" and her grandmother making Challah and deserts. She said, "I can see her at the stove. She was always at the stove. I don't think she ever left it."

Keeping kosher and not keeping kosher was a topic that was also raised by participants. In some cases, this causes some logistical issues when families that are non-kosher host families or relatives that are kosher. Melissa from the Nelson family is married to an Orthodox Jew who eats kosher, Brad, Melissa's brother, said that when they visit, they bring kosher food into the house, but Melissa "eats non-kosher" and will "eat whatever she wants when she's out." Elizabeth from the Nelson family also mentioned that keeping kosher is "gone as I get older" because she no longer is capable of cooking for herself and does not think about it when she orders food from a menu.

> When I eat, I don't realize 'gee this is milk and meat that I'm eating together.' I don't think about it. I just eat it. We don't even have a kosher store. It doesn't even enter my mind that being Jewish enters what I'm eating, that maybe I shouldn't be eating meat and milk together. That doesn't even enter my mind.

Eric from the Reynolds family recalled that his parents and grandparents "kept a kosher home, so we had different sets of dishes in the house. We observed kosher laws, but we were not religious. It was just a tradition that we participated in." Keeping kosher during the holidays is a challenge for the Reynolds family. Cheryl's family does not keep kosher, but her sister and their family does.

> We keep one drawer of kosher pots and then we eat on paper, so when she comes, we can kind of pull it off. My mom can transform her kitchen into a kosher kitchen. It's pretty amazing when they come for the weekend, you have to keep separate dishes. So she [Cheryl's mother] has to have separate dishes for milk and meat, but they have to be separate than the regular dishes, because those regular dishes aren't kosher. She keeps those separate. Separate pots and pans and a whole silverware drawer of milk, dairy, and meat things that we don't usually use.

Although Cheryl did not grow up keeping kosher, she mentioned that around Passover, she and her family try to keep "semi-kosher" by not eating bread and wheat during the week. She described an interesting change of events regarding food from when she was a child as she now, "eat[s] differently than I ate growing up." When she was growing up, Cheryl's family had separate dishes for Passover. She mentioned that she does not do that anymore and "just uses the same dishes" as she would if it were a regular dinner. She believes that part of the reason "we've kind of slid" is due in part to marrying a man who converted to Judaism. She described how he grew up with pork, bacon, and beans and, "we've kind of melded a little bit of our cultures together." Joseph from the Nelson family described how his father "rebelled" against his Orthodox parents and although he remembers keeping kosher in the house, they would eat bacon, ham steak, or shrimp when they ate out.

Joseph also described an interesting story regarding his father and how "things change" between generations even as a result of food. Joseph's father, in need of money, decided to work at a distant relative's egg business where he would go out to egg farms, collect the eggs, and bring them into restaurants. He would work on Saturdays, the Sabbath, which upset his father's parents so much, they ended up kicking him out of the house (the mother would eventually bring him back in). Joseph also described his father's experience serving in the Army during WWII and him breaking kosher rules because, "well, serving in the Army, they didn't give you kosher food, and while you're fighting a war, they don't say 'well, you could stop for the Sabbath and take a day off.'" As a result of his father "doing things a little differently," Joseph became interested in how other people looked at keeping kosher. After a funeral of a family member, he approached some of his relatives to ask if they had ever "cheated" and ate non-kosher foods.

> I said, 'do you remember the first time you had eaten non-kosher food?' They all did. It was like if you asked most people if they remember their first sexual experience, well yeah, everyone has a recollection of that. I said, 'what was it like for you?' and they all said, 'you know, I was so wanting it and then afraid. Afraid lightning was going to come down.'"

It was also interesting to see the opposite of Joseph's experience happen to Jon from the Lewis family. Jon mentioned that he remembers his father always "joking around" during the holidays and that he "wouldn't take it seriously." Although he adopted this view on Judaism as a child, now that Jon is in college, he "want[s] to be more observant" and has started keeping kosher, "because I don't like eating non-kosher food in the student union in front of the rabbi." He discussed how his dad has started to make fun of him for keeping kosher, but that he wants to become more respectful as he gets older.

**Passover**

Throughout the discussions with participants, a majority of them brought up Passover as being a holiday and celebration they know and remember the best. Passover is the most observed Jewish holiday and it should be noted that most of the interviews, participant observations, and focus groups occurred in March and April – the time of year when Passover occurs, so this may have influenced their responses because of it being on people's minds. In fact, Steven from the Reynolds family told me he was learning about the four questions and Passover in Sunday school when he was interviewed. This aside, Passover marks an especially important occasion for Jewish families and individuals as it commemorates their liberation from slavery over 3,000 years ago. Every family involved in this study celebrated Passover, but each did so in their own ways. Mary from the Nelson family mentioned she considered Passover "very important to pass down and think positive feelings of being Jewish." Her wishes seem to have taken form as Brad came into town for Passover and Melissa remembered Passover as being "a big deal – we always had people at our house, so I remember spending time with family." When Melissa was in college and could not make it home for Passover, she would go to her friends' houses to celebrate.

It would be safe to say that family Passover celebrations involves a number of people. Brad from the Nelson family recounts that "family from all over the country would visit, and we'd all do it [Passover] together." Becky from the Lewis family has celebrations that are so large, they typically have to rent a room, but for Passover, she said it is not uncommon to find between 45 and 50 people at her mother's house. Although that number was uncommonly high amongst families that participated in this study, inviting others into your home and celebrating with relatives was the norm.

Eric from the Reynolds family recalled that although his family was not very religious, they celebrated Passover every year when he was a child, and his father would read the Passover service in Hebrew and Yiddish because he did not speak very much English. He also described how some changes occurred generationally within his family.

> I think the most Jewish related thing is a Passover that is a family event. For as long as I can remember, I've always had a Passover. From my earliest recollection as a little kid. Passover is when the family sat down, you got through the first half of the dinner. After he passed [Eric's grandfather] away, my father read it and introduced some of the English passages. Then, after I met Rachel, we'd have Passover at her house with her family and then we would have it at our house and would have my brothers over. It's always been a family event. So Passover is the most of important of the holidays. I think Passover is a special holiday because it has been years of this and it sort of attaches you to a long tradition of doing this over and over again every year.

Joseph from the Nelson family mentioned how Passover has changed is his family as well. As a child, he remembers his grandfather "going through every word and the Seder would go on until midnight…literally." Although lengthy, he has fond memories of Passover when he was a child because of being able to spend time with his cousins and "drinking four glasses of wine and acting goofy under the table." When his grandfather passed away, his father took over leading the Seder. Joseph said, "he did what we like to call 'speed Seder,' like let's get through this in 20 minutes or less." Joseph described a Passover that was quick in length, but with little discussion about the prayers and overall meaning of the holiday. Now that Joseph leads Passover for his family, he "moved to more of a discussion about freedom and slavery." When asked about this change, he had a very insightful response.

I don't want to read all that stuff [the Haggadah contents]. It's arcane, and boring, and repetitive, and it doesn't hold much meaning to me. It's someone else's words and it's like religion and relationships with God's spirituality, a very personal thing. Someone else's poem, you know, doesn't fit for me. It would be like if someone was dating a girl and wants to write her something, you wouldn't go to Hallmark and pick out a card and say that writer's writing expressed the feelings. You'd write your own feelings. The holidays also connect me with the other generations; generations that are no longer alive. When I sit in that room [Joseph's dining room in his house], the table we have in there was my grandparent's and when they died, we took it. They wanted us to because they wanted us to have the holidays. So every time I sit in there, I kind of think back to 1956 or whatever. I mean, I try to spend most of my time in the present, but a little bit of very good memories of that intergenerationally.

I spent Passover with the Nelson family and observed that many of the selected readings were indeed chosen to elicit conversation and dialogue about how to be better people and what needs to change in order to make the world a better place. As Joseph led Passover, he did so with the help of an iPad. He preloaded text and questions he wanted to read and chose songs to play from the device as we sat around the table. As this happened, I thought of the juxtaposition between reading ancient text during a celebration that has been occurring for thousands of years on a highly advanced electronic device.

Lindsay from the Lewis family employed a similar strategy to Joseph's in order to take undesirable aspects of a Passover Seder and make them more enjoyable and relevant to her and her family. Lindsay describes her Passover's format as something that always changes based on her kid's ages. She remembered how "painfully boring" Passover used to be when she was a

child and how most people complained, constantly asked when they would eat, and described it as "not pleasant." Lindsay told me how she decided she wanted to do things differently when it came to her children because she, "wanted them to be excited about Judaism." She told me about her Passover holiday.

> When my kids were little, I had a short Haggadah that I put together myself and I had the plaques as centerpieces, so I had dead cows on the table which were little toys and my kids got a kick out of that and how funny is that that there's frogs on the table and cows. They just thought that was the funniest thing ever. And I made place cards and they all had a little note to each person and a frog on it. That came from me remembering what I thought was not fun and I made it so that it was a fun holiday that we looked forward to. Now, instead of sitting and reading the story, I do it in a play form and everybody gets a kick out of that. People will see pictures of our Seder like and say, 'we want to come to your Seder' and 'your Seder looks so fun.' I do it because I want my kids, and the cousins and everybody to know that being Jewish is fun.

It seems as if Lindsay's actions have taken root in Jon, her son. He recalled his mom being a large influence in teaching him about Passover, and as a result, he wants to learn more. He independently remembered the toys on the table, which he said contributed to him knowing Passover well. Lindsay also remembered a particularly important Passover when she was in her late teens when it was just her and her two grandparents. She credited it as being "the best Passover" because she had quality time with her relatives and she "had my grandparents all to myself." She tries to teach her children about doing their best to get quality time with their grandparents because it could be "our last Passover together."

**Family Time**

We have seen how food and Passover fosters a connection to generations of family members and carries on traditions. Participants in this study overwhelming agreed that time together as a family is an important contributing component to holidays, customs, and traditions. Reflecting on his childhood, Brad remembers doing holidays with his family more than "anything religious" and mentioned that while Passover and the high holidays were unimportant to him as a young child, "Passover, because of the family, became more important to me as an adult." Eric from the Reynolds family described that now that he is older, certain traditions have changed in importance because as an adult, he values a holiday as "a time for family to get together, that's what is important to me." Mary from the Nelson family had a similar opinion and said, "I think Jewishness as a family revolves a lot around the holidays. Sometimes we will observe Shabbat by lighting the candles and having the challah, so I think the family a lot of it is the holidays." Melissa, Mary's daughter, recalled the holidays as a child as being a time to be "a community."

> When I think about the major holidays, my memories are me and all my cousins getting together. I had cousins that lived in Connecticut, cousins that lived in Detroit, so we didn't get to see each other at all. For me, Judaism and family are very intertwined. Your own family traditions and that togetherness that the holiday brings makes you feel connected to the religion.

In the Lewis family, family time is taken seriously, especially around the holidays. This is a concept that is engrained in Jon. He listed spending the holidays with his family as one of his

most important beliefs and values. His mother Lindsay described the process her family needs to take because they are such a large unit.

> Every holiday is celebrated in a way that we have family traditions, so the first night of each holiday, our family, which is about 50 people, breaks up into small family which is about 20. So it's like me, my brother and sister's families, my mom, my grandma, my aunt, my uncle, family cousins, first cousin family, and we're 20. So we do that the first night and then the second night is the big family where we're 50'ish. So everyone knows that what we do. If you get invited to your friend's, too bad. It's family time. That's what our family does.

The idea of family time in the Lewis family is viewed as fun and exciting to younger generations. Becky described to me that each time the entire family gets together for a holiday or celebration, the more frequently the youngest generation requests for it to happen and the more important it becomes to them. She said the time spent together and the bonds and relationships that are made and strengthened "speaks to Judaism."

**Discord and Conflict**

The families that participated in this study were not immune to discord and conflict. These themes offer negative case examples of family time related to customs and traditions. On several instances, participants were able to identify people that were not supportive of Jewish choices or described scenarios that had caused conflict within the family. While Cheryl from the Reynolds family identifies with Reform Judaism, her sister is Orthodox. Cheryl discussed their relationship.

My sister and I kind of don't talk about it [not being supportive]. It's tricky because we're so different. We're at the opposite ends of the spectrum and it may be a little bit hard for us to understand each other's choices. The stuff that I call piffle, which is like these ridiculous rules for things…that hard for us to understand each other.   She has never said anything negative about the religion, but it's interesting when a boy is born and they get circumcised, the person carrying the baby is sort of like their godfather, or their godparents. Those are the people that are going to take care of that baby if you're not around. My husband and I have never been chosen to do that for any of my three nephews, so it's always been curious to me that I think she wouldn't want us raising her kids because we wouldn't raise them in the way that she is, whereas her husband's siblings are all Orthodox, so she would pick them probably over us.

Lindsay from the Lewis family said, "my sister thinks that I put out my Jewish self too much." She discussed her sister's frustration with Lindsay "announcing that you're Jewish the minute you meet someone" and how "it's not right." Jon, Lindsay's son, talked about his cousin and how he and Becky, his grandmother, think he needs to change.

She was the one that actually made me start thinking about it and said 'Jon we should talk to Brett, he should be more Jewish.' That's weird to say, maybe it's wrong, but we want him to be more Jewish. My grandma has a big problem with it because he's celebrating Christmas. I have nothing wrong with Christmas, but Jews shouldn't be celebrating Christmas. You should be proud to be Jewish. My grandma has made me feel passionate about how the people close to me feel about Judaism.  It's important to me.

Becky also said that, "sometimes, the values bother me of Jewish people. Being materialistic, not involved in anything other than Jewish organizations, not thinking that the world is bigger. I have some very strong opinions on that."

**Rites of Passage**

Individuals in this study also discussed how rites of passage, such as bar or bat mitzvahs, were important moments in their life as a Jewish person. Brad from the Nelson family said, "I would say actually the bar mitzvah thing was a very strong moment in my Jewish life and that was a really positive Jewish experience." Mary, Brad's mother, credits her bat mitzvah as being "key" in helping her contribute to her understanding of being a Jewish girl. Joseph recalled his bar mitzvah in 7th grade right after his father moved their family to a reformed congregation. He remembered his grandfather was not happy, and even though "it was a stretch," his grandfather still came to his bar mitzvah ceremony in the Reform synagogue.

Rachel from the Reynolds family never had a bat mitzvah as a result of her attending a Conservative synagogue when she was younger and said, "they did not have bat mitzvahs for girls back in the day." She mentioned that her other daughter, who was not involved in this study, could not read from the Torah during that time, but could have a Friday night bat mitzvah, which she did. Cheryl was bat mitzvahed two and a half years later and while she was able to read from the Torah, she still could not have a morning service – it had to be in the afternoon. Rachel described with enthusiasm the class she is taking in preparation to be bat mitzvahed in next year with a group of women. Rachel also described some other rituals and rites of passage that are important to her family.

The bat mitzvahs of my grandchildren have been wonderful so far. We've had two and we have the one in June and then someday we'll have Steven's and Mandy's, which is something to look forward to. The boys had bris and that was hard for grandma because it's a circumcision and it's difficult.  Then my oldest grandson had something called a pidyon haben, which is when you have to buy your child back from God for a silver dollar or something. It's for a male child; it's a very male thing.  But the first male grandchild, especially a young child in the family, has a pidyon haben. It might come from Samuel in the Bible, but I'm not sure. I think these rituals, these traditions make life very interesting. They're lots of fun.  It would be very bland without them.

Much like some other things in her childhood, Lindsay's bat mitzvah experience was "horrible and I didn't want that" for her children.

## Thoughts About Israel

For many participants, Israel was a central piece in defining their lives as a Jewish individual. Most described a need for Israel, but also discussed their opinions and criticisms on politics. While many had visited the country to see sights such as the Western Wall and spend time with relatives, some talked about the trip as a negative experience. Reform Jews distancing themselves from Israel is seen as a growing transformation amongst the movement's landscape (see Cohen & Eisen, 2000). As Reform Jews become more private and value entities such as family time and a personal form of spirituality, the need for Israel, or the larger Jewish community of which they have no ties or relationship with, becomes less important. To some extent, this was true amongst the participants in this study. Younger participants discussed travelling to Israel on birth right trips and talked about that experience as igniting an interest in

learning more about Israel and Jewish history. Some older participants told stories of visiting Israel as adults and the trip being soured by Orthodox Jews and their strict rules and interpretations of Judaism.

**Cultural Identity**

The concept of Israel as a state for Jewish people was discussed as being important to many younger participants in this study. Brad from the Nelson family and Jon from the Lewis family, both of whom are young adults, described each of their birth right trips as being formidable in creating their Jewish cultural identity. Brad said, "Israel is a big part of the culture, for the, the cultural identity of being Jewish. I feel very connected to Israel, the people of Israel, the land of Israel." Brad also mentioned that although he feels Israel is the central part of defining his connection to Judaism, he does not believe it defines who he is as a person. Part of this connection to Judaism was instilled in him by his parents and grandparents, who he mentioned always talked about Israel when he was a child. As a result of this exposure at a young age, Brad became interested and engaged in following news about Israel and reading about it heavily since he was an adolescent. After his Birthright trip in college, he discussed how travelling to Israel made him more interested.

> It was my first time in Israel. I went with friends from college, so definitely part of the trip was very social, but I got to see all the cultural sights. We had a great guide. It really made me more passionate about Israel. Seeing all the sites, learning more about the history, and learning about it when it's right in front of you, it was a pretty important moment for me.

Brad's birth right trip occurred more than 10 years ago, and he mentioned that he still keeps in touch with a few of the friends he made. Jon from the Lewis family described a similar experience on his birth right trip. He went with three of his best friends from the Jewish summer camp he is so heavily involved and invested in. Jon said, "I didn't feel religious out there, but going to the Western Wall I felt was the coolest thing. I went there three times. Not because I felt connected with God, but because it was such a big piece of history. It was just cool to look at for me, and I made great friends on that trip. For me, the culture is all about the people." Jon also described Israel's importance to him when it comes to defining himself as a Jewish individual.

> I think after I spend more time in Israel, the answer will be different. I want to say it's very important to me, but I was only there for two weeks, so I would be pissed if they took it away from us - if we didn't have a Jewish homeland anymore. I'm not going to go there and join the army and defend it, I don't think. I would consider moving there. I think that it's an awesome place. It's like camp, but on a much more macro level. It's a country where you can just be yourself. No one is making fun of you for being Jewish.

Elizabeth from the Nelson family grew up in a time when Israel's importance and survival was at a turning point. Being 94 years old, she lived through the point in history when Israel was recognized and declared a state in the late 1940s. She had a difficult time expressing how Israel was important to her, but said, "I hear the word 'Israel' and I kind of open up my ears." Elizabeth also showed me her Star of David necklace she was wearing under her sweater during our interview. In addition to helping her define her Jewish identity, she also described that it linked her to Israel.

Eric from the Reynolds family discussed a need for Israel, but not on a personal level. He described anti-Semitic experiences as a child and as an adult where "people made remarks and you heard them" and also said, "there were properties as late as 1968 we were not going to be sold in some parts of our county because they were not available to people who were thought to be Jewish." Eric believed that Israel is important because Jewish people "need a place," although he does not have any great need personally to visit. Cheryl, Eric's daughter, said that Israel was not very important to her, but believed, "I think it's important as a country to have a place for Jews to feel safe" and added "it hasn't really been a big part of my growing up."

Over the last few years, Mary from the Nelson family said that Israel has become more important to her because trips to visit relatives has made her more interested in the state. She also mentioned that, "Israel is an important part of my association with being Jewish" and talked about feeling connected to extended family that lives there. Mary is a retired schoolteacher and said in a teacher exchange, "we had four teachers from Israel come and stay at our house for a week. That also strengthened my ties to Israel." Melissa, Mary's daughter, described a connection to the history, the religion, the culture, and the people strengthened by trips to Israel and visiting family and feels "attached to the people as well as the culture" because "you're tied to them."

Some participants also discussed missed opportunities for connections to Israel. Cheryl and Lindsay mentioned that birth right was not available to them when they were growing up. Cheryl said, "I think that if maybe that had existed, it would be something I would have wanted to do out of curiosity." Lindsay has visited numerous times as an adult and discussed Israel's importance to her.

I've always said and thought, if someone said to me you have ten days to live, the first thing I would do is get on a plane and go to Israel. So I guess that says that Israel is very important to me. I don't know if it's a life or death thing anymore, but Israel is very important to me. It was always very important to me. I can't say it made me a more observant Jew, a better Jew, you know, more moral or ethical. They were just wonderful experiences. It taught me things that I didn't know. In America, we worked very hard to be Jewish, so many of them [secular Jews in Israel] are not observant. It just taught me things I didn't necessarily know.

## Politics

Amidst the discussions of Israel, some participants discussed politics and Israel. The two most outspoken participants on this topic were Joseph and Rachel. Rachel stated that although Israel is important for her, "it doesn't mean I cannot criticize Israel for some of the settlements." Rachel shared others' sentiments about needing a "homeland" and a place "where they can have their own army and defend themselves," but also said, "I strongly support Israel, but I also feel I can criticize Israel for some of the things they do." Part of Rachel's frustration was a result of Israel not being able to be independent from aid from the United States.

I mean, the United States can put some pressure on Israel, but they really have to do it themselves. I hope they do because otherwise I think it's a disaster. If you look at the long range, the demographics, it has to be a two stage solution I think. But we can't impose it on them. They really have to come to these decisions.

Joseph said that although he supports the Israeli people and the state of Israel, he does not always support the government. Joseph commented several times that he pushes for left-wing ideology,

and his frustration with Israel is due in large part because of their "right wing government." He described Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs, as well as Muslims and Christians in Israel, and the government giving these groups more religious freedoms.

**Trips**

Many participants discussed trips to Israel to visit family and see important cultural and historical sites. As previously mentioned, some of these trips were through the Birthright program. Others were arranged on their own. Becky from the Lewis family described two trips she took that ended up being negative experiences. With regards to Israel, she said, "it was very important to me until I went there. I think if I had the opportunity to stay in a kibbutz, I would have a more positive feeling about it. The Orthodox Jews – I had a terrible experience with them the first time I was there." Becky's experience started to sour after lunch on day one when she "had to listen to these people telling me if I don't work on Saturday, something like a miracle was going to happen" and "everything is in the book," meaning that Jews should live their lives according to what is written in scripture. The following day, Becky was taken to a holy site unannounced and was not wearing the proper clothing. "Everybody gave me dirty looks," she said. She also recounted a stop at a glass blowing store where she watched people purchasing Christmas ornaments, which she thought was bizarre to get a "Christmas ball from Israel."

On her second trip, Becky described walking around the slums because the cab could not drive on Shabbat. She said, "nobody is looking at us, nobody is saying hello, nobody is saying anything. The whole two weeks were there, these people didn't look at us, talk to us, say anything. We're Jewish! Don't do that to me." Becky also discussed her frustration with a new

mall that was being built near the Western Wall, and how it was insulting to the old city and important historical sites.

> The only people who were shopping in the mall were these gorgeous Arab women. Those are the ones who have the money probably. So then when I go into Tel Aviv, I could have been in New York City. They're not interested in what the Americans think. They're interested in having a life and having a good life. As an American going there, it's not the life that I would go to Israel for.

In spite of these negative experiences, Becky did mention that she donates money to an organization called Peace Now and other organizations that want to make peace. She recalled at one point during her trip having an Arab cab driver that told her he wished to have a better life, but "he can't get better life because he can't serve in the Army because he's an Arab."

### An Overarching Theme: The Value of Family Traditions and Practices

The main concept that emerged from individual and family experiences placed the value of family traditions and practices as an important component in how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families. Family traditions and practices helped to frame cultural and religious contexts for participants. They provided the opportunity to create social networks that resulted in social connectedness to culture and religion. Families also valued and provided opportunities for choice across generations. Participants consistently endorsed changing or altering a concept in their life if it did not meet their needs. This was seen in many of the domains that were discussed. In some cases, choice, or the decision to change or alter an activity or practice, had implications on immediate family members, as well as for future generations. Several participants discussed how their family made the change from adhering to Orthodox

beliefs and lifestyles to a Reform way of life and thinking. Joseph's recollection of how this shift or movement happened in his family was particular poignant. His grandfather, he said, had a very literal interpretation of the Bible and was certain it was written by God and planted in Moses' mind, and then Moses wrote it down. "My father would have said to me, because he did, 'that's all bullshit.' But, he probably had some beliefs in it, because he followed some of the customs. So he picked and chose" [which ones he would and would not follow.] Another area where Joseph's family exercised choice related to traditions and practices was related to the Sabbath. He told a story about his father and how he rebelled against his Orthodox upbringings.

> I learned a respect for what my grandparents were doing, but we were doing it differently. We saw the Kosher rules, Sabbath rules, and all that as 'you can't do this, you can't do that,' and it was all prohibitions where maybe a more enlightened, matured, modern look is looking at Sabbath [as a chance to] stop, reflect, sharpen the saw, think about what you're doing. So instead of acting and living out of habits and routines, you give thought to what's important and what's the best way to spend my time. You take some time to reflect, which I find is really of great value. So growing up, I had that initial look that I inherited from my father.

We can see through Joseph's story how his father's interpretations of what it meant to be Jewish had a lasting impact on Joseph, which in turn influenced how Joseph handles his family. The choice his father made created his interest in social action and, perhaps, a transition away from being a religious Jew to an agnostic Jew.

It is also easy to see how social connectedness and networks are used inside and outside the synagogue. Many participants endorsed the primary purpose of the synagogue as being the

center of the Jewish community. Absent from many discussions I had with participants was the synagogue being a religious home. It is now mostly seen as a place to socialize and "catch up" with people, which is vastly different from what would have likely been said about it even as short as 50 years ago. Some participants also discussed changing synagogues or "temple hopping" across movements in order to find a congregation they felt comfortable in. This freedom of choice to move around carries important undertones especially for families with young children, as the synagogue's Sunday school is likely to influence children's Jewish beliefs and values.

Perhaps the largest and most apparent way family traditions and practices help to frame cultural and religious contexts comes in the form of how Jewish families and individuals conduct holidays, customs, and traditions. Peppered throughout the conversations were instances of participants discussing something their family did when they were growing up they did not like and wanted to change so the experience was different for their children. Lindsay was the most outspoken of the participants, and described how she wanted to change the way Passover was carried out to make it less boring and more important for her children. Likewise, Joseph's Passover seder moved into more of a discussion about freedom and slavery and less about "someone else's words" that "don't hold much meaning to me." Each of these situations showcased how families provide opportunities for choice.

I was fortunate enough to spend Passover with Joseph's family and witnessed this firsthand. His seder not only included important discussions about freedom and slavery, but also current events. Preceding Passover in 2014 on April 13th, a lone gunman outside of Kansas City opened fire at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Kansas City, killing three individuals. Although the three victims were all identified as being Christians, the gunman was a self-

described Neo-Nazi and claimed, upon arrest, that his motivations were anti-Semitic in nature. This event prompted a discussion around the table about several topics, such as motivations, Jewish and non-Jewish relationships, and larger American opinions on Jewish individuals and how to bring about peace. There were also more lighthearted conversations about Jewish humor, Jews and baseball, and the serving of food that resembles bricks and mortar, all of which were family traditions and practices that helped to frame cultural and religious contexts.

The focus of this study was exploring how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families. The value of family traditions and practices within Reform Judaism is not new, but as we have seen, families use traditions and practices to help frame cultural and religious contexts. Imbedded in this is the construction of social networks and connect culture and religion. As previously noted, families also create the opportunity for choice, and past studies have suggested this freedom of choice - that is, taking a part of Judaism or "being Jewish" and making it your own or special to you - seems to now be a significant tenet within Reform Jews. Obviously, the freedom of choice you have as a child (as it relates to culture and religion) is somewhat limited and usually directed and controlled by parents, family members, or others in positions of power, but it was surprising and noteworthy to see that the families and individuals involved in this study exuded authority and ownership over their decisions. If something did not work for them, there was little hesitation in fixing it. This notion seemed to be consistent within and between the generations of the families based on the stories that were shared during interviews and focus groups.

**Summary of Findings**

This chapter presents the findings from this study, which explored how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families. This qualitative study explored findings using a grounded theory methodological framework. The data was transcribed and analyzed by utilizing a framework employed by Charmaz (2006). As previously discussed, initial codes were analyzed to create focused codes. From those codes, theoretical codes were formed. These codes were linked directly to family and individual responses during interviews and focus group sessions, as well as through participant observation.

Credibility was sustained throughout the study using various components. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss prolonged engagement as a method to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. This study involved prolonged engagement via individual interviews, family meetings, and observations. Interview questions that examined values, beliefs, customs, and traditions were also explicitly asked by each family member, which provided triangulation. In terms of data validation for this study's findings, Cohen and Manion (1986) note that triangulation is "an attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint" (p. 254). Several efforts were made in an attempt triangulate this study. First, I obtained multiple sources of data, which allowed for data triangulation across time, space, and persons. Second, this study also used more than one theoretical scheme in order to interpret the data. This accounts for theory triangulation.

This chapter also introduced an overarching theme that Reform Jewish family traditions and practices help to frame cultural and religious contexts. These traditions and practices also aid in the construction of social networks that connect culture and religion for participants and

families. Families also provide opportunities to create social networks, social connectedness, and value choice. This was consistent across generations. The next chapter will discuss these findings, relate them to the theoretical frameworks of symbolic interactionism and identity theory presented in Chapter 2, and address recommendations, implications, and limitations of the study design.

**Chapter 5: Discussion**

This chapter discusses the findings from a qualitative study that explored the intersection of culture and religion in Reform Jewish families. This study answered the following question: How is culture and religion constructed in Reform Jewish families? Twelve participants from three different families representing three successive generations in each family participated in individual and family interviews, one focus group for each family, and were observed during a family gathering. Analysis within a grounded theory approach indicates that participants placed the value of family traditions and practices as an important component in how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families. Family traditions and practices helped to frame cultural and religious contexts for participants. They provided the opportunity to create social networks that resulted in social connectedness to culture and religion. Families also valued and provided opportunities for choice across generations. Individuals' however consistently endorsed changing or altering a concept in their life if it did not meet their needs.

This study was framed within symbolic interactionism and identity theory. By utilizing these frameworks, Reform Jewish families and individuals' experiences helped inform how they approached and thought about themselves within their religious and cultural experiences. Participants described experiences, social networking, and holidays and traditions as mechanisms for symbolic interactionism with family members and elaborated on how families provide the space and opportunities for constructing the meanings they associated with being Jewish. Another result of utilizing these theoretical frameworks was the ability to examine how public and private experiences of Reform Jewish families and individuals informed how participants thought about themselves as people that have a culture and religion. In exploring these aspects of

their experiences, I was able to understand how participants assigned meaning to public and private experiences and how those experiences become internalized.

A comprehensive qualitative study by Sinclair and Milner (2005) examined many domains related to Jewish identity, including early influences on identity, friendships, relationships, and marriage and found five major themes present within their data. They included a sense of kinship and connection, an awareness of being different from the majority, a feeling of attachment to Israel, a religious dimension of personal faith and observance, and a commitment to learning (p. 111).

In this chapter, I will discuss each of the major thematic findings from the study and also highlight the extent to which the thematic findings are consistent and distinct from the themes found in Sinclair and Milner (2005). Incorporated in the themes are relevant findings from the literature. Also included is the role of symbolic interaction and identity theory concepts within the presented themes. I conclude the chapter with a discussion regarding the limitations and implications of this study, and close with suggestions for future research.

### Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer's (1969) notion of symbolic interactionism is defined as "the theoretical perspective where people construct selves, society, and reality through interactions" (Charmaz. p. 189, 2006) and helped to elicit the processes participants in this study used to create, sustain, and mediate meaning. Blumer also notes that symbolic interactionism can be understood as "research that considers the meanings that objects, people and activities have for group members, and the processes whereby these meanings are sustained [or] transformed" (Manning & Smith, 2010, p. 41). This description "reaffirms that symbolic interactionism is both a perspective, a

way of looking at the social world and a method, a way of gathering data about the social world"
(Manning & Smith, 2010, p. 37).

Participants in this study described how a large amount of Reform Jewish culture and
religion is centered around forms of meaning making (i.e., synagogue involvement, common
beliefs and values, and holidays, customs, and traditions). Utilizing this theoretical framework
provided a way to observe the intersection of culture and religion through active and reflective
processes.

**The Synagogue is a Platform for Jews Coming Together**

The participants in this study endorsed the synagogue as a focal point of Jewish
community. This was consistent across generations and also apparent in the stories participants
told about generations of family members that have passed. This was especially interesting when
participants from the oldest generation recounted attending a synagogue that was not Reform
when they were growing up. During the Central European and Eastern European Jewish
immigrant periods, synagogue services in America "became American" (Neusner, 1994, p. vii)
with English sermons, choirs and organs, and a focus on the importance of family. This historical
shift was also raised by the participants in this study as an important time for the synagogue in
America as it began to change from being an important part of Jewish religion, to a somewhat
important part of the Jewish culture. From the standpoint of symbolic interactionism, Blumer
(1969) notes that all of actions are pieced together to form "joint productions," repetition or
routines. Blumer (1969) alludes to the mental imagery of a religious service where the clergy and
congregation are well aware of the pattern of service, their role within the service, and how they
are to behave and act. Although the synagogue held more cultural importance than religious

importance for participants in this study, it was clear through interviews, focus groups, and observations that each was aware of the repetition and routines associated with being a member of a synagogue.

Study participants described personal experiences, as well as ancestors' experiences, as they exercised autonomy and chose a synagogue not necessarily based on movement, but based on fit. Thus, the religious elements seemed to be less important than the cultural elements for them. This notion was endorsed by participants as they described synagogue selection and attendance based on financial and geographic reasons, as well as the synagogue message, size, and the personal relationships that were fostered as a result of synagogue affiliation. This finding is consistent with research conducted by Cohen and Hill (2007) that suggests religion, for Jews, is about community and biological descent, and important life experiences are more likely to be social.

Activity theory, a perspective closely related to symbolic interactionism, suggests that creative interaction happens when individuals communicate and engage with one another. Utilizing symbolic interactionism to examine participants' autonomy and personal fit of the synagogue shifts a theoretical focus from an image of society to an image of human behavior and agency. By focusing on study participants, we can understand how they change, alter, or adjust their behavior as a result of meanings developed through interactions with other people. It is people, not society, who are active contributors that create and sustain their social world. Here, we see where learning through participation and interaction can help individuals understand their cultural, and perhaps, religious beliefs. As participants described hopping from an Orthodox to a Conservative to a Reform to a Reconstructionist synagogue, they remained within Jewish

communities of worship. In essence, they did not stop attending a synagogue nor did they indicate worshiping outside of Judaism.

The synagogue was also described as a center for Jewish activity. During Purim observations with the Reynolds family, the games and carnival-like atmosphere that took place in the synagogue, but after services in an adjoining wing of the facility, assisted with Jewish children's informal learning about the holiday and allowed for parents to catch up with each other, network, and socialize. Several participants also noted that when they relocated to a new town or area, one of the first things they did was become involved at a local synagogue in order to form new social networks and circles amongst other Jewish people. Joseph and Eric each described their reasons for synagogue participation as non-faith based and more for social and cultural, not religious, experiences. It is about forming personal and social connections with yourself and others, and using the synagogue to foster and mediate those networks. Interestingly, all families in this study were either involved or seeking involvement in a synagogue. In contrast to Raphael's (2003) statement that "less than half the Jews in America are affiliated with a synagogue" (p. 3), participants in this study saw the synagogue as a vital connection to Jewish culture and community, and the opportunities provided by being involved and affiliated (and attending) in a way that worked and made sense to them. Future research should continue to examine synagogue influence in these areas as it relates to social networks and connections as it was obviously important to study participants.

While the synagogue may not foster a direct connection between study participants and God, it was seen as a vehicle for participants to find and explore personal meaning. This was most obvious in the stories Becky told, but specifically about organizing the Seder where 500 women came and 300 people were dancing; she described it as a formidable spiritual experience.

Robert Wuthnow (1998) describes this trend as a move from, "a traditional spirituality of inhabiting sacred places" to a "new spirituality of seeking," with the latter exchanging "spiritual dwelling" (e.g., a synagogue) for the "new spiritual freedom" of focusing on the individual and inner self.

**Common Beliefs and Values**

Participants endorsed several consistent beliefs and values that were found across and between the families involved in this study. For study participants, beliefs and values were rooted in traditions. Traditions can change and adapt over time to meet current needs. Thus, beliefs and values can be thought of as constantly evolving. The collective beliefs and values that were identified by participants centered on the importance of education, the need to help others, and the significance of family. From a theoretical perspective, this is in concert with symbolic interactionism, which suggests that culture is a network of "shared symbols, concepts, meanings, and linguistic terms" (Ratner, 1999, p. 8). Participants shared their world view that is made up of values and beliefs that help to inform how they approached and thought about themselves as religious and cultural. Participants also discussed what they thought the difference was, if any, between Jewish cultural and religious beliefs and values. Learning more about how Jewish individuals form their beliefs and values, and how culture and religion may influence this, is an important first step in advancing knowledge in this area and future research should also focus on this topic.

Several participants noted that education, in general, is important to Jewish people. Brad noted that education is "incredibly important, culturally, to Jews." Cheryl mentioned that learning and education is prioritized as a child, and Jewish families engrain and place great

importance on higher learning. A possible explanation for this phenomenon dates back to the Eastern European Jewish immigration period in the United States between 1880 and 1910 when Jews were forced to leave Russia and other Eastern European countries to escape pogroms and forms of discrimination. Possessions and material goods would be looted from them, but one thing that could not be taken was their mind. Many saw this as an opportunity noting education and learning as still important to Jewish individuals and families today.

An interesting aspect that emerged from this study was the focus and importance of Jewish informal learning and educational experiences and opportunities as they related to beliefs and values. Many participants, most notably Jon, reflected on their time at a local Jewish summer camp and the influence it had on their life. The informal Jewish education that occurred at the camp reinforced Jewish culture and identity. The same can be said for Brad's Birthright trip or Steven's involvement in Purim – they are all Jewish experiences with educational undertones. Interestingly, when Jewish education, in general, was portrayed in a negative light, as in the cases of Jon and Brad, there were other educational leaders that emerged and stepped in to supplement Jewish learning in positive ways. These are examples of experiences for participants that were symbolic to them. Previous research suggests these programs, and formal and informal Jewish education, aid in the formation of a strong Jewish identity (JPPI, 2012; Kelner, 2007) and this study supports that claim.

Helping and assisting others was another identified core Jewish belief and value. It also had ties to the synagogue as many participants discussed seeking a temple that had a strong foundation in social action and community involvement. Participants endorsed being involved in various volunteer projects and charity and giving drives with their family and others in their social circle through the organized efforts of their synagogue. These activities and involvement

are in concert with what Cheryl described as a shared Jewish responsibility to make the world a

better place by fixing what is broken in society known as tikkun olam. Examples of this are

giving food to the needy, teaching others how to read, being involved in various improvement

projects, and treating others with kindness and being a mensch.

Beliefs and values as cultural and religious components of being Jewish were somewhat

harder to distinguish as many participants believed the two are intertwined. Participants were,

however, able to decipher between some of the elements that had personal meaning. For

example, Mary, Jon, Brad, and Cheryl all noted the religious beliefs and values of Judaism had

something to do with the Torah as a sacred text, God, synagogue liturgy (not the synagogue

itself), and bible study. Rachel mentioned something intriguing when she said that religion is

something you experience in your head and culture is something you experience in your heart.

This suggests that beliefs and values from a religious perspective might be thought of more as

adhering to religious doctrines or rules – something that can be analyzed and has prescriptions

and limitations. Jewish culture, on the other hand, if it is experienced in your heart as suggested

by the participants in this study, can have multiple interpretations based on personal meaning

where the importance is centered on family, food, holidays, customs, and comradery with other

Jews. As Joseph put it, he does not want to hear a story about Jonah and the whale. His beliefs

and values are rooted in traditions; the same was true for other participants. This observation

supports the claim by Cohen and Eisen (2000) that "traditions function as their 'god-term'" (p.

197). As a result, Judaism (the religion) and Jewishness (the culture) experience unending

alteration, which supports claims for and warrants future research in this area.

Central to beliefs and values was the importance of family and the generational

influences on those beliefs and values. The noted influences also had effects on participants'

social circles and other domains like community involvement. Participants that belonged to the middle generation in this study noted several aspects that were passed down to them from their relatives. Mary credited her mother for her strong belief in Israel. Eric said his grandfather read the same newspaper he reads now and that synagogue was thought of more as a social experience – a stance he also takes. Brad, a member of the youngest generation in this study, recounted Jewish humor and jokes as an important value he learned, and Melissa, Brad's sister, recalled going on marches and rallies that connected her to generations of family members before (and after) her. Families in this study are connected through traditions and the value of the importance of heritage. The results of this study suggest how beliefs and values are conveyed intergenerationally which aligns with the research conducted by Lazerwitz (1973) and Cornwall (1988) that found Jewish religious and ethnic identification and socialization is created and sustained through agents such as social networking and family experiences.

## Holidays, Customs, and Traditions

Participants in this study expressed that holidays, customs, and traditions were central to being Jewish and contributed significantly to their understanding of Jewish culture. These experiences helped to form their identity and were supplemented by family time and activities that tied and bonded families and generations together. It is important to note that most major and widely celebrated and observed Jewish holidays (Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, and Passover) take place at home with the family. Participants in this study described aspects of holidays, customs, and traditions that were symbolic experiences for them. While each family had their own personalized ways of carrying out and participating in holidays, customs, and traditions, it was clear that the religious side of Judaism was largely lost or not identified as being particularly important for participants in this study. This finding is consistent with

Chiswick (2005) who suggests that as Jewish customs and rituals become ever more important and varied as a result of their presence in America, this trend is "accompanied by a marked decline in Jewish religious sophistication" (p. 319).

Holidays, customs, and traditions were more about spending time with family and enjoying each other's company and less about religious scripture, attending synagogue, or Judaism. As a result, the families in this study provided the space and opportunities for meaning-making opportunities, consistent with symbolic interactionism, to occur. Furthermore, as Fishman (2000) notes, "because the cohesiveness of the Jewish Community has diminished, the impetus to make one's household into a Jewish home – regardless of marital status – now more than ever before arises from within the individual" (p. 117). This is consistent with other domains in this study that note the shift to a more "private" side of being Jewish.

Important to discuss, considering the responses by the participants in this study, is the notion of the tools they use to connect the present with the past. Several study participants suggested that food and the memories surrounding it were more vivid and important to them than recollections of the religious side of Judaism. To many, it was the food that corresponded to the particular Jewish holiday they used to associate with and connect to the celebrations, not the religious importance or undertones. As seen in Cheryl's family, Jewish identity and symbolic associations were fostered and strengthened more through food than going to Temple. Several participants also discussed how keeping Kosher has changed and evolved in their families, and the issues some face when a Kosher family celebrates with a family that does not keep Kosher. These experiences within families also serves to again note the importance of individual choice and the freedom to adopt and adapt to customs and traditions that work for each person or family – the "private" side of being Jewish. The importance participants placed on holidays and

traditions are mechanisms for symbolic interactionism with other family members. Several other scholars (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000a, 2000b; Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 1999; Knobel, 1999; Lankshear, 1997) have also focused their attention on how individuals build identities "through networking with others in joint activities, causes, virtual communication, shared consumption, and shared experiences" (Gee, 2000, p. 120).

Passover was one holiday study participants noted as being especially important for Jewish culture, family time, and linking past and present generations together. Even for families, such as Eric's, that were self-described as not very religious, Passover was an important time to come together as a family to perpetuate traditions, even if those traditions might change and evolve as time goes on. Joseph and Eric each described how their Passover celebrations have adapted to meet the needs of their families; Eric's Passover used to be conducted in Yiddish and now it is only in English. Joseph's Passover used to involve the entire Haggadah and go until midnight and now his family only reads a few sections of the Haggadah and focuses the celebration more on a discussion and dialogue about freedom and slavery.

The personal meaning that is then ascribed within holidays and traditions occurs when an individual learns something, as Cohen and Eisen (2000) note, whether it is something to think about or some type of lesson to learn. As seen with the participants in this study, they take aspects of Jewish culture and make it their own – whether it is changing the celebration to make it more relevant to the family, or altering a holiday to place more emphasis on particular ideals and values. Cohen and Eisen (2000) note that "unlike religious systems that emphasize faith, belief, personal prayer, meditation, and other highly privatized forms of religious involvement, Judaism encompasses a variety of practices that enjoin familial and communal participation. These have to be negotiated" (p. 59); Jewish families and individuals "are not committed to a

package of detailed behaviors that is set out in code and sustained by communal pressures"
(Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p.75). This notion is also apparent when framed using symbolic
interactionism as "meanings are batted back and forth and thereby interpreted, reinterpreted, and
modified" (Manning & Smith, 2010, p. 38).

This is consistent with previous research that suggests holidays, customs, and traditions
are constantly being retooled, rekindled, replaced, and rejuvenated and the notion that rituals are
now better described as ceremonies as opposed to commandments and that, "the
'commandments' became 'customs' performed by Jews as expressions of Jewish culture and
commitment rather than of belief in a divine commander" (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 97).
Additionally, it appears that the shift from the importance of God to an importance of community
and Jewish culture in Reform Jewish families occurred at some point during the Silent (1928-
1945) and/or Boomer (1946-1964) generations as suggested by the participants in this study.
From a symbolic interactionism standpoint, Blumer (1969) suggests that "human beings act
toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them…these meanings are
handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with
the things he [or she] encounters" (p. 2). With the participants in this study, we have seen the
importance group members assign to others' actions, especially when it comes to the
continuation and survival of familial holidays, customs, and traditions to meet the needs of past,
present, and future generations.

## Identity Theory

Identity theory is important to this study as it suggests identities are multiple, changing,
and fluid. Gee (2000) recognizes identities as "contextually specific ways in which people act

out" (p. 99). In simpler terms, what you do is who you are. This notion perpetuates the ideal of culture and religion as being ever-changing, fluid, non-static entities. Moreover, approaching identity from this perspective allowed for a deeper examination of where ethnic and religious minorities coexist, as described in some participant experiences during trips to Israel. Utilizing this framework also created the ability to examine participants as each having their own form or type of identity, and allowed for the opportunity to either distinguish between members of a Reform Jewish family, or view them as a collective. Present within the themes of childhood experiences, spirituality, and connections to Israel that produced reflective thoughts about who the participants were as people, participants showed how experiences became internalized and taken on as Reform Jewish individuals.

**Childhood Experiences Create a Formidable Understanding of Jewish Life**

Early Jewish experiences for participants in this study created a lasting foundation upon which they based their life. Regardless of whether these experiences were positive or negative, it was clear their interactions and experiences with family members, peers, and others in their social network have carried over into adult life and influenced their behaviors and actions. Lindsay from the Lewis family and Brad from the Nelson family each described their own negative experiences in Hebrew school as a child. In addition, Steven from the Reynolds family stated that Hebrew school, "can ruin your weekend."

One possible explanation for this phenomenon is noted in Potvin and Lee's (1982) analysis in working with children from families with practicing religious parents. Potvin and Lee (1982) suggest that as parents attempt to influence and guide their children into participating in the rites and rituals of their religious group, children are generally submissive to authority and

participate even though they may not enjoy it. As Potvin and Lee (1982) note, children generally "go along" with prescribed familial or community "norms" when it comes to religious practice as opposed to critically thinking and taking action regarding their own beliefs or values. In addition, Smith and Denton (2005) found that close to 75% of religious adolescents consider their own religious beliefs similar to their parents, and only 6% consider their religious beliefs very different. (p. 87).

Work by Myers (1996) and other researchers (see Nelsen, 1981; Hoge et al., 1982; Cornwall, 1988) also found that parents use their influence to guide their children towards experience and relationships akin to their own beliefs. This was seen in the present study, but with a caveat. Lindsay and Cheryl's negative experiences as children instilled in them the need to provide a better experience for their children to learn about their Jewish history. Furthermore, although Brad and Jon also described negative experiences as children, they also each credited their family, specifically their parents, for being a significant influence when they were younger, which has followed them into adulthood. This is consistent with the findings of several studies on parental influence, parent/child relationships, and parenting style (see Okagaki & Bevis, 1999; Spilka et al. 2003; Regnerus, 2003) and also aligns with Ratner's (1999) suggestion that children are able to create their own understanding of culture by "imagining their own goals which they may implement at a later time" (p. 20).

Interestingly, however, as children get older, Potvin and Lee (1982) described some separation and differentiation between them and their parents. In this study, we see this happening to most of the adult participants, most notably Becky from the Lewis family and Elizabeth from the Nelson family. Becky described her experiences in Young Judaea and the JY (Jewish Young Men's and Women's Association) as an adolescent as being the connection and

source of her love of Judaism. She described the experience as having "nothing to do with religion, but everything to do with religion. Nothing was taught religiously, but you got something that you carried with you the rest of your life." In Elizabeth's example, we see how access, networking, and experience were tantamount to defining, constructing, and adjusting her identity.

Potvin and Lee (1982) suggest that adolescence is a crucial time in a religious youth's life. As children become older, more autonomy is gained and their worldview is co-constructed with their peers to form a system of meanings. New beliefs and experiences are generated, confirmed, and re-confirmed (Potvin & Lee, 1982, p. 142). In Elizabeth's case, her experience with the Zionist movement and Libra Zion can be linked to Markstrom's (1999) work on examining the influence of social circles, networks, and youth group involvement in identity formation. Elizabeth mentioned that, "Israel was the big thing in my mind." Embedded in the Zionist movement was a hope for a nation state. Markstrom (1999) found that adolescent hope is a precursor to adult faith, which aligns with Elizabeth's central point that she, "feels Jewish in [her] heart." Elizabeth also is part of a generation that has strongly inherited religious identities.

A consistent theme regarding childhood experiences that was true for all adult participants is that no matter the experience – positive or negative – they were still engaged in the religious or cultural aspects of being a Jew as an adult. A report by the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) in 2012 noted that the teenage years is an especially important point in a Jew's life in predicting connectedness. While participants noted that their connectedness may have waxed or waned throughout life, they each defined their connectedness in their own unique way. Kelner (2007) suggests that enrollment in a Jewish school fosters connections to important Jewish social circles and networks within the larger community. In Cheryl and Lindsay's case,

they each described this as being important to them and their children, but wanting to ensure – and going to great lengths – their children got a better Jewish schooling experience than they did. The negative experiences that were internalized transformed their own understanding so they could offer an alternative method of learning for their children. This is consistent with what Phillips (1997) and Myers (1996) suggest; the family is the ultimate predictor of Jewish identity in children. Considering Phillips (1997), Amyot and Segleman (1996) and the participant responses in this study, it is clear that the foundation for Jewish identity has roots in childhood experiences.

**Spirituality in the "Private" Side of Judaism**

The theme of spirituality was a domain where many participants showcased the "private" side of Judaism. There was a distinct difference between "public" Judaism, or the part of Judaism that "conceives the Jew as part of a collective entity – the Jewish people – with obligations and responsibilities toward other Jews and toward the collective interests of the Jewish people" (Liebman, 2005, p. 141) and "private" Judaism, or what it means to each individual to be Jewish and where and what they find and assign meaning. This finding is consistent with Cohen and Eisen's (2000) work; however, participants in this study endorsed a distinct difference between religion and spirituality. Joseph was of the opinion that one could be spiritual, but not religious and, "that's okay within Judaism," which conflicts with Smith and Denton's (2005) suggestion that "being religious" and spirituality are not interchangeable – to be religious is also to be spiritual and vice versa. This was distinctly different with the participants in this study as they acted out of freedom of choice. As Joseph mentioned, "because Judaism allows such a wide latitude, spirituality could be all over the place." This is consistent with Gee's (2000) work on identity theory and the notion of power stemming from the person or individual,

rather than from nature, an institution, "authority," or larger group. This also allows for a person's "core identity" to "be Jewish," for example, while their discourse identity may be an actively religious Jewish individual. This is an important point. It suggests that regardless of how the individual believes or operates, culture and the individual, and in some instances religion, consistently work together in order to create ideas, symbols, and concepts. The two cannot be separated, as Joseph alluded to when describing the fabric of my shirt during our interview.

For the participants in this study, spirituality was mostly grounded in the connections they have to family members and opportunities for inward reflections. These inward reflections can be described as reflective thoughts about who the participants are as an individual in order to help shape identity. Jon and Lindsay from the Lewis family each described feeling connected to family members that have passed on who they say look over and watch after them. The patterns of participants regarding the notion of spirituality trends to placing importance on individual meaning, or as Cohen and Hill (2007) note, more universal and more individualized and possibly the result of the cultural development of religion as increasingly privatized, personal, and experiential-expressive. This is also consistent with the concept of finding spiritual freedom by focusing on the inner self and separating this action from the overall purpose of and personal need for the synagogue. As Becky pointed out, she was able to have a "true spiritual experience" during her trip to Versailles by walking with a friend and seeing open fields and trees. Melissa mentioned feeling spiritual in the synagogue, but as a result of praying – a deeply personal experience, not simply because it happened in temple.

**Connections to Israel**

As participants in this study discussed the importance of Jewish history in their own lives, their connections to Israel also came to light. Cohen and Eisen (2000) suggest that Reform Jews are distancing themselves from Israel as the movement continues to transform itself. While participants did describe Israel as important, the significance was placed on the historical context of Israel from the standpoint of it being central to family, identity, and culture, and not necessarily the religious side of Judaism. Cohen and Eisen's (2000) observation holds true if we consider the distancing from a religious standpoint, but participants in this study still felt somewhat personally connected to Israel from a private perspective. This private connection helps to inform identity as thoughts about Israel can be seen as reflective thoughts about who participants are as individuals of Jewish heritage. Even though participants described both positive and negative experiences with Israel, most endorsed it as still being important to them each in their own way. These findings are distinct from Cohen and Eisen's (2000) suggestion that "Israel carries little real importance in the private sphere of Jewish identity, the part that is closest to the inner core" (p. 143), yet consistent with the claim that "Israel is not central to who American Jews are as Jews" (p. 152).

A possible explanation for this interesting phenomenon can be found in Fishman's (2000) work that introduced a term to describe what is happening to Jews in America. The term is "coalescence" or, "a pervasive process through which American Jews merge American and Jewish ideas, incorporating American liberal values such as free choice" (p. 1). As two cultures are reworked, negotiated, and reframed, it would make sense that participants in this study endorsed feeling personal, or private, connections to Israel, yet stop short of suggesting Israel is

what defines them as a person. Gee's (2000) work on identity theory also supports this claim as identities are ever-changing.

From the standpoint of cultural identity, participants said that trips to Israel helped foster those connections. Brad described keeping up to date with news and articles about and from Israel as a way to continue those connections and credited his Birthright trip as both an important social and cultural experience. Jon described similar experiences on his trip where he felt connected to Jewish history and culture, but not with God. It was clear many participants felt that Israel was important from a historical context. With regards to how the various generations in this study viewed Israel, it was interesting to note that individuals from the youngest generation, namely Brad and Jon, each stressed positive experiences that had a lasting impact on them. Members from older generations, such as Eric and Cheryl, talked about the need for Israel as a place for Jews to be safe, but not on a personal level. Cohen and Eisen (2000) state, "Israel carries little real importance in the private sphere of Jewish identity, the part that is closest to the inner core" (p. 143). Findings from this study suggest there may be a rekindling in the youngest generation of Reform Jews where Israel is becoming more important, but not as a result of fear for its survival like previous generations.

While many participants described their connection to Israel from a historical and cultural perspective, several members from older generations expressed their frustrations with Israel. Joseph and Rachel criticized Israel for not being able to be independent from aid from the United States and the "right wing government" in place that gives more freedoms to other religious and ethnic groups such as Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, Muslims, and Christians living in Israel.

The Reform movement of Jews accounts for roughly 35% of Jewish Americans ("A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 2013"), the largest self-reported denomination of Jews in America. Within that 35%, about 77% lean toward or report being Democrat. Additionally, 75% of Jews of "no religion," or those that do not report being a particular denomination, report being a Democrat or lean towards the Democratic Party ("A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 2013"). Joseph and Rachel illustrate a collective point of Reform Jews in America in that they tend to be more left leaning with their ideology. This is consistent with prior research, although Jews of "no religion" and no denomination is a group that is growing in size in the United States ("A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 2013"). This claim is also substantiated by the many participants in this study who claimed to be agnostic.

Becky also expressed frustration with Israel as a result of two trips she made there. For her, Israel was not personally important and was consistent with Cohen and Eisen's (2000) suggestion that, "fear for Israel's (i.e., Jewish) survival has abated. American Jews no longer feel that Israel needs their help to the same degree, and feel less compelled to offer it" (p. 144). Likewise, "Reform Judaism in the United States [is a] major source of self-definition for American Jews" (p. 147) and "Israel is not central to who American Jews are as Jews" (p. 152). Becky's experience was different than other participants in this study and as a result, her views were mostly negative. This could be attributed to generational patterns consistent with someone her age, the idea that she places more emphasis and importance on family, or that she has been plagued with recent experiences that have soured her (the confrontation with the rabbis at her former temple and the power structures she encountered, trying to find her "spiritual home," etc.). Becky also described her experience in Israel as needing to follow many rules pertaining to

Judaism, something she has admitted she does not like to do. Even so, she still contributes to organizations in Israel that want to make peace.

**Implications and Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings from this study can work to guide researchers that wish to explore how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families and the broader intersection of culture and religion. Participants in this study expressed the importance of family and "doing," consistent with a symbolic interaction orientation, rather than "believing" as a component of one's identity, but secondary to the importance of family and social dynamics in this study. This suggests that future research which aims to understand the processes Reform Jewish families use to construct knowledge of culture and religion will continue to be best examined using a qualitative approach to capture personal accounts, histories, and stories. Additionally, this will help researchers interested in this area to best explore the generational shifts. This is significant given reports of Reform Jewish families and individuals moving away from identifying with Judaism, the religion, and increasingly identifying with Jewish culture. Future research can explore the shift from Orthodox practices to Reform practices and also account for and examine the growing shift from identification as a Reform Jew to a Jew of no denomination (see "A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 2013"). Such questions would benefit from taking into account Phillips (2005) consideration of "religious switching" "when an individual's current religion or denomination is different from that of his or her family of origin" (p. 402).

Considering this observation regarding an apparent continuing and ongoing shift between religion, culture, and non-denominational activity, future researchers should also consider partnering and sharing information with other organizations that might be interested in these

patterns. As synagogue membership, participation, and attendance continues to be in flux, and with many participants now viewing the purpose of the synagogue as having shifted from a religious to a cultural role, temple leaders and stakeholders may be interested in this information to offer programs that foster engagement and address the relevance of religion for Reform Jews. This recommendation highlights Raphael's (2003) suggestion that, "no more than half the Jews in the United States consider themselves 'religious,' and less than half the Jews in America are affiliated with a synagogue" (p. 3).

Likewise, other Jewish organizations, such as community centers, could leverage this information to better understand their Reform Jewish populations in order to render needed or desired services. It would also be interesting to involve leaders of these organizations and have them participate in a study in conjunction with Reform Jewish families from their communities and weigh their responses to participant responses in terms of each of their community-based priorities and focus. This may create a safe space for each party to learn from one another in order to collectively build a better community that satisfies each other's needs. A final consideration for future research that may be more difficult because it is more time sensitive is to involve Reform Jewish families in a multi-wave, longitudinal study in order to understand processes over time within single family units.

Concerning future research, grounded in the findings of this study are three recommendations for individuals or organizations that wish to better understand how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families. The recommendations are focused on tangible, structural changes that could conceivably be implemented as a result of critically examining services or programs, or policies or procedures.

The first recommendation highlights the importance of childhood and how experiences during this life stage are the foundation for understanding life as a Jewish individual and a member of a Jewish family. Participants in this study were able to recount with clarity and emotion how childhood experiences have affected them when they were young, as well as how those experiences have influenced their adulthood. Concerning school and education as a child, nine of the twelve study participants depicted profoundly negative experiences in both the public school system, as well as when they were a student in Hebrew school. This finding should raise red flags for religious and educational leaders in general, but is especially alarming for Jewish leaders and organizations, many of whom have an underlying mission to ensure Jewish survival. As participants noted feelings of detachment and being largely nonchalant about Judaism and the teachings of religion, this should concern organizations that work with Jewish children and help them learn about their history. The report conducted by the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) in 2012 suggests that the teenage years are especially important in a Jew's life in predicting connectedness. Furthermore, Kelner (2007) found that enrollment in a Jewish school fosters connections to important Jewish social circles and networks within the larger community. However, the notion that this connectedness has waxed and waned throughout participant lives not only suggests the findings from the JPPI and Kelner (2007) seem to be accurate, but also that Jewish educational systems, organizations, and leaders can and should be doing more to ensure childhood experiences are positive. What methods those are warrants future research.

A second recommendation centers on the synagogue and how participants viewed its importance. Participants noted that the purpose of the synagogue is to serve as a platform for Jews coming together. Many suggested that the synagogue was a somewhat important part of identifying with Jewish culture. Mostly void were participant depictions of it being a central part

of their own Jewish faith and religion. While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the shift of the synagogue from being an important part of the Jewish religion, to being a somewhat important part of the Jewish culture, it is important for religious leaders and organizations to understand why participants feel this way. Participants noted that often times, synagogues felt too large and impersonal for them. Additionally, it was hard for newcomers to network amongst the established families or "cliques" that had been members for several generations. Others described situations where leadership was reluctant to change policies and procedures, or that they did not like the liturgy and programming.

Situations such as these might explain Raphael's (2003) finding that "less than half the Jews in America are affiliated with a synagogue" (p. 3). While this suggestion was largely untrue for participants in this study, synagogue leaders and other stakeholders should consider the implications of serving as a religious and cultural base and which, if either, is associated with changing synagogues. Recognizing the overall declining trend of synagogue affiliation and broader patterns of religious switching in American religion can contribute to understanding the reasons for this pattern and possibly implement the necessary changes. A recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that religious groups in America are experiencing net gains and losses in religious affiliation and high rates of turnover at an unprecedented level never seen before ("America's Changing Religious Landscape, 2015"). While the findings also suggest 75% of those raised Jewish continue to identify with their childhood faith, the study also noted the rapid pace in which American Jewish individuals are becoming unaffiliated (Jews of no denomination) and that 35% of married Jewish individuals have a spouse or partner of a different religion. Future research focusing on Jewish populations should account for and examine

religious switching trends and synagogue hopping, and examine the influence of increased rates of Jewish intermarriage on how Jewish individuals view and use the synagogue.

A third recommendation encompasses several of the remaining areas expounded upon in the findings of this study as they relate to being Jewish and the larger community. Throughout my conversations with participants, they casually described their relationships with the local Jewish Community Center (JCC). Highlighting and examining how participants interacted with the JCC was not an identified aim or goal of this study, but it was obvious they were connected to it. Participants went there to exercise, attend seminars, plays, and performances about all facets of Jewish life, including Jewish humor, and also utilized its relationship with the local Jewish summer camp to indirectly foster informal learning experiences. The JCC was reported to be an integral part of culture for the participants in this study and stands as an important foundation that fosters many different connections and opportunities. Learning more about these connections in order to inform and advance content and programming at the JCC would provide leaders and researchers with a wealth of information on how community members utilize their services to understand Jewish life.

It is important to note that these recommendations are based on my interpretations of the data as someone not of Jewish heritage. For example, the role of the synagogue and the educational experiences suggested may be framed differently by an investigator with "inside" knowledge of these domains of Jewish life.

## Limitations

There are some potential limitations to this study, of which many are generally related to carrying out qualitative research. There are three general limitations associated with this study:

1) transferability of findings to other Reform Jewish families and individuals, 2) reactivity of the participant to the researcher, and 3) researcher subjectivity. Consideration to each of these limitations was accounted for in this study.

Transferability of findings is a common limitation in many research studies. It is, perhaps, more difficult with this study as it relates to domains of culture and religion – areas that can be deeply private, personal, and difficult to understand from a third-person perspective. However, Cziko (1989) notes:

> Considering the complexity of the constantly changing interacting factors influencing human behavior, comprehensive and definitive experiments in social sciences are not possible and that the most we can ever realistically hope to achieve in educational research is not prediction and control but rather only temporary understanding. (p. 17)

Participants in this study expounded on experiences and were able to draw meaning from them. As a result of common cultural and religious beliefs and values amongst Reform Jewish individuals and families, it is possible they also reflect others' experiences. Domains related to social networks, rituals that bring individuals and family members closer together, the connection to the synagogue, and the importance of food are some examples of commonality between participants in this study and other Reform Jewish families that enhance transferability of the findings. In contrast, some differences that might suggest caution in transferability relate to participant perceptions of Israel or other private and personal areas such as spirituality.

In addition, this study only involved Reform Jewish individuals and families from one geographic region of one state in the United States. It would be inappropriate to think all Reform Jewish family and individual experiences are comparable. The intention of the study was not to

suggest complete transferability; however, findings related to the general shift of participants identifying more with Jewish culture and less with Judaism are just one aspect that can be contributed to the field. It is my hope future researchers use the information contained in this study to branch out, extend, and examine other relevant areas where culture and religion are constructed in Reform Jewish families.

As a result of having 12 participants involved in this study, it is also important to address participant reactivity to the researcher, as it may have an influence on the data. Previous qualitative research has suggested guidelines for addressing this concern and decreasing reactivity. More broadly, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest that because there is little researchers can do to regulate the perception of participants, researchers are encouraged to take detailed notes and memos during instances where they think participants are responding and reacting to the researcher. This recommendation was employed for this study. Arber (2006) utilized a method that is particularly useful for graduate students completing a dissertation study and underscored the point that she was a graduate student conducting research that would advance knowledge in the field and also help her complete her degree. I utilized this strategy at multiple points throughout the study to ensure participants I was not using the information they provided to me maliciously. As an individual who is not Jewish, this was especially important for me to remember as I conducted the interviews and focus groups and participated in observations. In an attempt to make participants the most comfortable, I agreed to meet them at a place of their choosing. Often times, the sessions occurred at their homes. I found this strategy to be especially important for Steven as he was only 10 years old. To further address participant reactivity to the researcher, at the beginning of each session and contact point with participants, I discussed the goals and objectives of the study, why they had been asked to participate, and

offered them a chance to ask questions not only about the study, but also about me and my background so they were able to get to know me.

On a few occasions, participants had a difficult time responding to the questions I had posed to them. This occurred most often with Elizabeth, who was in her 90s during her involvement in this study, and Steven, who was 10 years old. As previously mentioned, Elizabeth's family had discussed with me that the early stages of Alzheimer's had unfortunately began to set in for her. Elizabeth was able to recall many events of importance in her life with the help of Mary, her daughter. When participants had difficulty during our conversations, or needed assistance from a family member, I made a note of it in order to further examine if it was a result of the study design, me not explaining details in a way they were able to understand, or as a result of something largely outside of my control, as in the instances of Elizabeth and Steven.

Researcher subjectivity has an interesting place in this study, especially considering my role as an individual (researcher) raised in a Protestant Christian family studying Jewish individuals. Schneider (1999) describes subjectivity as a qualitative researcher's internal understandings of the phenomenon. A recent trend in qualitative research outlined by Hays and Singh (2011) suggests that researcher subjectivity can, and should, be embraced instead of minimized, as it brings researchers closer to their findings. Researchers that attempt to minimize subjectivity, or treat it as a true limitation of the study, align it too closely with quantitative research and "paradigms of 'objective' science" (Hays & Singh, 2011, p. 145). Peshkin (1988) also suggests that research subjectivity should be embraced.

Peshkin, a Jewish man with a liberal political perspective, conducted research on a high school community founded on fundamentalist Christian values. Acknowledging his

subjectivity, Peshkin struggled with the tension between his values and the values espoused by his subject matter. He ultimately reasoned that he was able to write a more nuanced account of his subject matter because he experienced this tension and struggle, acknowledged its impact on the research, and sought to share with his audience how his subjectivity influenced his interpretation of his topic. Yet, Peshkin also acknowledged that a researcher with different values – say, a fundamentalist Christian – would have produced a very different data set and interpretation of the same topic area. He believed that this perspective would be just as valid as his own study's findings. It becomes clear, then, that a researcher's subjectivity paves the road for a study's outcome. This is all the more reason to see subjectivity in qualitative inquiry as "virtuous" – not something to be overamplified or even overindulged, but rather as a critical role of the researcher that becomes the framework for a study's process. (Hays & Singh, 2011, p. 145)

Although Peshkin's (1988) experience was somewhat different than this study because it involved a fundamentalist group, it is important to note the roles in both his study and this one. Each have "outsiders" as researchers attempting to examine values and beliefs of another group. Other strategies that were used to address subjectivity in this study were approaching the study leading with curiosity, rather than with "expertise" as an expert researcher, which allows for asking questions, questioning assumptions, and critical thinking about analyses and utilizing triangulation techniques throughout the research process in order to build trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2011).

**Contributions to the Field**

The findings from this study contribute to the field and literature by examining the intersection of culture and religion in Reform Jewish families and how this is constructed from a qualitative research perspective. Previous studies have attempted to understand cultural and religious domains in families (see Cohen & Eisen, 2000; Himmelfarb, 1980; Friedlander et al., 2010), however, this study advances this knowledge to explicitly examine and present findings from Reform Jewish families and individuals as a movement rather than clustering all Jewish families and individuals together for analysis. Considering the limited research that is available on this topic, this study is unique in that it informs the outdated literature using qualitative methods and analysis to better understand a particular population identified in past empirical studies as deserving of attention.

In addition, this study offers a qualitative generational perspective on Reform Jewish cultural and religious shifts and movement not found in other research. Himmelfarb (1980) found that "the proportion of Jews considering themselves non-denominational increases with each generation's distance from their foreign born ancestors. By the time three generations had been born in the United States, over a quarter of American Jews considered themselves non-denominational" (p. 52-3). Although no foreign born Jewish individuals were directly involved in this study, participants recounted stories of foreign born relatives and ancestors they had contact with, and were able to discuss how culture and religion has changed in their family over time. Himmelfarb's (1980) observations were similar to the findings of this study and it is clear that the participants in this study are largely defining their Jewish selves through identification with the Jewish culture and less so with Judaism. Examining this through a qualitative lens allowed for detailed personal histories, experiences, and life cycle and generational heritages to

be captured, which aids in understanding *why* there is a shift occurring and more Reform Jews are identifying with the cultural identity of being Jewish. The next step in this area is to carry on research exploring how Reform Jews identify themselves, continue to illustrate the shifts occurring as more Reform Jews move between Judaism, Jewishness, and being Jewish, and then use and apply that information to assist various organizations (religious, community, educational, health, etc.) in understanding how they can best serve their populations.

A third contribution is centered on general, broader research that studies religion's ability to "transmit" values and beliefs intergenerationally. This notion of "transmission" is raised frequently in literature examining many religious denominations. Reform Jews are no exception (see Lazerwitz, 1973; Cornwall, 1988) and this study attempted to expand upon previous work and weigh past findings with current analysis. By using a qualitative approach, this study was able to suggest that while identified values (importance of higher education, being a good person, giving to those in need) seemed to fit this pattern of being entities capable of intergenerational "transmission," beliefs generally did not. A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be the importance Reform Jewish families placed on individual choice and the notion that values might encompass the cultural side of being Jewish while beliefs may involve the religious side of Judaism. Future research should take this observation into account.

## Conclusion

The previous chapters examined the intersection of culture and religion in Reform Jewish families for twelve participants from three different families, representing three consecutive generations in each family. A grounded theory methodological framework was used to examine findings in this qualitative research study.

Participants suggested that family traditions and practices helped to frame cultural and religious contexts. This finding was supported by three important themes: 1) opportunities for choice, 2) opportunities to create networks, and 3) social connectedness. Each of these themes connect culture and religion for participants. The main concept that emerged from individual and family experiences placed the value of family traditions and practices as an important component in how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families. Family traditions and practices helped to frame cultural and religious contexts for participants. They provided the opportunity to create social networks that resulted in social connectedness to culture and religion. Families also valued and provided opportunities for choice across generations. Participants consistently endorsed changing or altering a concept in their life if it did not meet their needs. This was seen in many of the domains that were discussed.

In conclusion, this study can work to guide researchers that wish to explore how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families, as well as the broader intersection of culture and religion. Additionally, it is my hope this study will help researchers interested in this area to best explore the generational shifts occurring within Reform Jewish families where families and individuals are moving away from identifying with Judaism, the religion, and increasingly stating they are Jewish as a result of identifying with the culture. As American Jewish families and individuals continue to change and adapt generation after generation, it will be interesting and exciting to see what the future holds for cultural and religious Jewish beliefs, values, roles, and responsibilities.

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**Appendix A: Protocol Submitted by Swanson and Clutz**

Research Subjects Review Board Protocol

Judaism, Jewishness, and Being Jewish : The Construction and Intersection of Culture and Religion in Reform Jewish Families

Dena Phillips Swanson, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Bryan Davis Clutz, M.S., Co-Principal Investigator

Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development

# I. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND BACKGROUND

1      **Purpose of the study**. The Co-PI is conducting this study for publication, and to inform his doctoral dissertation at the Warner School of Education. This study attempts to qualitatively evaluate how Judaism is constructed amongst three (3) generations in a Reform Jewish family.

2      **Background**. Prior research has identified several vehicles for which learning processes, specifically those that instill and generate belief systems, occur, and most agree that culture has a large impact on the development and construction of those systems (see Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff et al., 2003; Nelsen, 1981; Hoge et al., 1982; Cornwall, 1988; Myers, 1996). Yet, scholars have had a difficult time delineating the exact processes and methods members of a particular culture use in order for construction to take place. Furthermore, empirical research that informs this area has been limited by: (a) predominant use of Christian samples; (b) largely outdated findings, few recent advances in the field, and antiquated data; (c) quantitative findings that fail to capture detailed personal histories, experiences, and life cycle/generational heritages; and (d) the clustering of those who identify as being Jewish into one unified group rather than examining the various sects of Judaism. The notion that these points have largely been neglected within the discipline creates a large gap in the literature and knowledge base. Wieting (1975) states an important observation as to why research in this area is warranted – "if a society is to continue its existence beyond one generation, the members must transmit what they consider to be necessary knowledge and values. The continuity of a social system by definition requires transmission between generations" (Wieting, 1975, p. 137).

The significance of parental and generational influence, as well as other understudied cultural processes and pathways that contribute to "being Jewish," suggests the immediacy for research on these topics. An alarming finding by Himmelfarb (1980) states that "the proportion of Jews considering themselves non-denominational increases with each generation's distance from their foreign born ancestors. By the time three generations had been born in the United States, over a quarter of American Jews considered themselves non-denominational" (Himmelfarb, 1980, p.52-3). This observation, as well as Wieting's (1975), suggests the increasing need to qualitatively examine these processes in order to broaden knowledge in this area.

# II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH POPULATION

1      **Number of subjects**. The total number of expected subjects is eighteen (18) – two (2)

from each generation within a Reform Jewish family, encompassing a total of three (3) generations. This would also equate to twelve (12) adult subjects and six (6) child subjects.

2    **Gender of Subjects.**  The intended gender distribution for this study is nine (9) males and nine (9) females from three (3) different families.

3    **Age of Subjects**. The anticipated age range of the subjects is 8-89 years of age. Previous research suggests the importance of generational influence within the Jewish culture (see Background section). Therefore, it is important to include members from multiple generations in the current study proposal.

4    **Racial and Ethnic Origin**. The intended racial distribution of the subjects is not limited. However, due to the study's fundamental focus on Jewish culture and values, ethnic origin is limited to those who are considered Jewish by personal identification with either the culture or religion. Furthermore, the study also requires the oldest generation (two [2] subjects; one [1] male, one [1] female) to be foreign born. This is needed in order to evaluate the claims made by previous empirical work (see Background section).

5    **Inclusion Criteria**. (1) Persons that are considered Jewish by birth rite OR if they personally identify with Judaism. (2) Persons that are members of Reform Jewish families that include three consecutive generations, all of whom live and reside in the Rochester, NY area. (3) The oldest generation is foreign born. The PI and Co-PI anticipate that all subjects are primarily English-speaking and thus, all subjects will have the capacity to understand informed consent in English.

6    **Exclusion Criteria**. (1) Persons with serious learning or developmental delays, as well as neurodegenerative diseases that could impede the understanding and comprehension of assent/consent, as well as the recalling of important historical or personal histories. The PI and Co-PI anticipate that all are primarily English-speaking and thus, all subjects will have the capacity to understand informed consent in English.

7    **Vulnerable Subjects**. This proposal deals with two (2) classifications of vulnerable subjects – children and the elderly. Children and the elderly are included because of the importance of including three generations in the study. The subjects will be observed and interviewed about their beliefs and experiences of "being Jewish." All data will be stored and collected by the Co-PI and any identifying information will be removed in the final analysis.

## III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Participation in this study is voluntary. Subjects can cease participation at any time during the study without any impact on their employment, income, status, health, or reputation. The data will be analyzed to determine how culture and religion is constructed in Reform Jewish families. The Co-PI will remove any identifying material and no subject's name will be used in the reporting of data from this study.

**A: Methods and Procedures.** The Co-PI will personally collect data for this study through audiotaped interviews and field notes.

1. The co-principal investigator (Co-PI) anticipates being able to find three (3) families who meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria in the Rochester, NY area through a network of religious and community resources. The Co-PI will discuss the study with religious leaders and organizations and ask them to contact a potential family (most likely a family

representative rather than the whole family) informing them of the study. The leader/organization will inform them that if they are interested in participating in the study, they can contact the Co-PI. Many religious organizations also send out newsletters to their membership. Some have bulletin boards. A newspaper ad and flier will also be used to recruit potential families. The religious leaders will forward a copy of the flier to families. If a family contacts the Co-PI via the newspaper ad or flier, a meeting will be arranged with family members to explain the study's aims and purpose to all subjects and the same procedures will be followed to consent and enroll the subjects into the study.

2. Once a family contacts the Co-PI to indicate interest in the study, a meeting will be arranged with family members to explain the project's aims and purpose to all subjects, they will have an opportunity to ask questions or voice concerns, and approved assent/consent forms will be completed if the subjects agree to participate. Potential subjects will not need to sign consent during the initial meeting and will have the opportunity at the initial interview to opt out even if they do give consent at this point.

3. This proposal's research design and procedures utilizes in-depth interviews and participant observation as the form of data collection. The PI and Co-PI anticipate using interviews and observations in order to gain a better understanding of how cultural beliefs and values become constructed through activity, participation, and collective meaning making encounters and environments. The PI and Co-PI anticipate using in-depth interviews and observations to also gain valuable historical and personal insight into the customs of the family.

4. The Co-PI anticipates conducting at least one (1) individual interview with each of the eighteen (18) subjects, each lasting between forty-five (45) to ninety (90) minutes. The Co-PI will also conduct three (3) larger family interviews (i.e., focus group), each with all six (6) subjects of a family in order to examine the interaction and discussion amongst family members. These interview sessions, as well as the focus group, will be audio recorded in order to capture accurate data. Interview transcripts will not contain any references to actual names of the subjects. Subjects will be interviewed at a time and place that is mutually convenient. This could include subject homes. The focus group will take place after the last individual interview and are anticipated to last between 1.5 and 2 hours. Two successive generations (e.g., parents and grandparents, or parents and children) will need to be present for the focus group to occur.

5. Observation of family engagement will be carried out as an additional tool for data collection in order to learn more about and understand the activities surrounding culture and religion, and to observe in a natural setting. Observation of a holiday (Passover, Purim, etc.) will take place, and two successive generations (e.g., parents and grandparents, or parents and children) will be present for the observation to occur. Data will be recorded by using field notes and memoing after the event is over. Field notes will not record any specifics about the individual actions or responses of those not enrolled into the study.

6. The PI and Co-PI expect no hazardous or adverse effects as a result of these methods and procedures. After the interviews are completed, the project will move into the data analysis phase.

**B: Data Monitoring.** This study does not require a data monitoring plan as described in RSRB's Guidance for Investigators document.

**C: Data Analysis.** Data will be coded and analyzed using a grounded theory approach (see Charmaz, 2006), which will proceed in two phases. In the first phase, the data will be transcribed and coded based on concepts and themes that emerge from the literature, as well as from examination of the interview data itself (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In the second phase, the coded data will be compared across subjects for detailed analysis of concepts and themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interviews and focus groups will be transcribed by the Co-PI. Transcripts will not contain any references to the actual names of the subjects in this research study. The Co-PI will remove any identifying information in the reporting of the data from this study. The PI and Co-PI will relate analysis to the research questions and draw conclusions based on these findings. This study is classified as minimal risk and does not involve any type of intervention.

**D: Adverse Events.** This study is minimal risk. The reporting of adverse events is not applicable as described in RSRB's Investigator Guidance document.

**E: Data Storage and Confidentiality**. All data will be kept confidential and stored in the office of the PI in a locked filing cabinet, and all computer files will be password protected. The PI will remove any identifying material, and no subject's name will be used in the reporting of data from this study. Any electronic data, such as audio files, will be stored on a secured "flash" or "jump" drive, which will be encrypted to ensure privacy and kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the co-PI. The audio files will also be downloaded and stored on a password-protected computer. Hard copies of notes and other data-related material will be kept in a secure location in a locked file cabinet. The Co-PI and PI will have access to the stored data. Passwords known only to the PI and Co-PI will be required for log-in on the computer that will be used for this study. Transcriptions may be compiled and transcribed by Shirley Graham in the Warner School. At the completion of the study, all documents related to the subject's consent will be directly available to the Faculty Advisor at the Warner School of Education, University of Rochester. All data will be kept in possession of the Co-PI for three (3) years upon completion of the study and will then be destroyed.

## IV.    RISK/BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

**A: Risk Category**. The PI and Co-PI anticipate this study to be minimal risk because it poses very little potential risk to the subjects, yet is seeking expedited review based on: (1) the observance of children outside of a normal classroom setting or practice; (2) the need to collect data in subject homes; and (3) the recording of possibly sensitive information on audiotape. Subject participation will be voluntary and subjects can cease participation at any time during the study without consequences.

**B: Potential Risk**. There are minimal risks associated with the individuals' participation in the study. There is a possible risk of invasion of subjects' privacy. Data will be reported in a general sense only and no identifying information will be included in the reporting. All data will be stored and only available to the research team. Individual information will be known only to the PI and Co-PI. The research question does not directly impact the daily performance of any of the subjects' daily responsibilities.

**C: Protection Against Risks**. The Co-PI will review assent/consent documents with all subjects prior to their participation to ensure they are aware that their participation is completely voluntary, and that they can cease participation at any time without consequences. To further protect against risks for identification of subjects, all transcripts will be kept confidential, and the PI will leave out any references that could lead to the identity of a participant. All transcripts and data will be locked in a secure filing cabinet in the Co-PI's office. Only the PI and the Co-PI will have access to the stored data. Data will be maintained for a period of three (3) years following the completion of the study, after which time it will be destroyed using secure methods.

**D: Potential Benefits to the Subjects**. The subjects will have the opportunity to reflect and share their experiences with other family members. The opportunities might provide the subjects with valuable insight into the operation of their family and the viewpoints and beliefs of other family members in relation to their own opinions, which could enhance their participation and/or relationships as a larger family unit and system.

**E: Alternatives to Participation.** Participation in this study is voluntary. Subjects can cease participation at any time during the study without any impact on their employment, income, status, health, and reputation. The alternative is not to participate in the study.

## V. SUBJECT IDENTIFICATION, RECRUITMENT AND CONSENT/ASSENT

**A: Method Of Subject Identification And Recruitment**.

**Ai: Identification.** Subjects will be identified with the help of the Jewish Community Federation of Greater Rochester (Larry Fine), Jewish Community Center of Greater Rochester (JCC), and local religious leaders.

**Aii: Recruitment/Screening.** Approved flyers and newspaper ads will be used to recruit families. The flyers will be posted and given directly to potential families by religious leaders; both will explain the study and contain the Co-PI's contact information. Families who are interested in participating in the study will contact the Co-PI. The Co-PI will then arrange a meeting with family members to explain the project's aims and purpose to all potential subjects, they will have an opportunity to ask questions or voice concerns, and approved assent/consent forms will be completed if the subjects agree to participate. Individuals within the family will have the option to opt out even if most members plan to participate for privacy reasons.

1      **Process of Consent**. All subjects will be shown and given copies of assent/consent forms to sign and keep for their records. The assent/consent forms will be presented with adequate time for all subjects to have sufficient time to read through the entire form and ask any questions. As part of the presentation and follow-up discussion, the Co-PI will be sure that the inclusion items are met. For adult subjects, it will be determined that they have sufficient knowledge regarding the study and understand its aims and processes after the consent form has been presented, all questions have been answered to their satisfaction, and they have signed the consent form.  For children, an assent script will be read to them by the Co-PI stating the project's intentions. Parent permission will be obtained prior to obtaining assent from the children. An opportunity for them to not participate even if their parents have agreed to will be discussed without repercussion.

Children will have the choice to participate and will be deemed knowledgeable about the study and understand its components after the assent script has been read to them, all questions have been answered satisfactorily, and the Co-PI signs the assent script acknowledging the reading of the document and the subsequent understanding of their involvement in the study.

2        **Subject/Representative Comprehension**. The Co-PI anticipates that the adult subjects and their children have the capacity to understand informed consent/permission and assent.  Prior to participation, families will be asked a few questions in order to determine eligibility and subjects will have been given consent documents explaining the study and informing them that their participation is voluntary and that they can cease participation at any time during the study. The Co-PI will access capacity to understand and comprehend informed consent based on the conversation during the initial visit with the families and prior to proceeding.

3        **Subject Capacity.** The study subjects are adults and children over the age of 6 and all have the capacity to participate in research.

4        **Debriefing Procedures.** No information will be withheld from subjects, therefore this study does not invoke debriefing procedures as described in RSRB's <u>Investigator Guidance</u> document.

5        **Consent Forms**. All subjects involved in the interviews and larger focus group will receive copies of the assent/consent and permission forms for their records that were reviewed with them by the Co-PI. Participation in this study is voluntary. A copy of the assent/consent forms will be submitted electronically to the RSRB in order for approval prior to enrollment into the project.

6        **Documentation of Consent**. The assent/consent and permission process is described in detail above. Signed copies of assent/consent forms will be kept in a secure file cabinet that is locked. Only the PI will have access to the file cabinet.

7        **Costs to the Subject**. There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

8        **Payment for Participation**. This study does not offer any form of payment for participation.


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**Appendix B: Child Assent Script for Ages 8-12**

Study Title: Judaism, Jewishness, and Being Jewish: The Construction and Intersection of Culture and Religion in Reform Jewish Families

Principal Investigator:  Dena Phillips Swanson, PhD

Co-Investigator:  Bryan D. Clutz, MS

We are doing a research study.

These are some things we want you to know about research studies:
Your parent needs to give permission for you to be in this study.  You do not have to be in this study if you don't want to, even if your parent has already given permission. If you start, you may stop being in the study at any time.  If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this research study because your family is Jewish. We want to learn more about Jewish religion and culture.
What will happen during this study?
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in interviews with the investigator, larger interviews with your family members, and be observed during a Holiday. Other families will also take part in the study. During the interviews, you will be asked questions about your views on Jewish religion and culture. The interviews will be audio recorded.

Who will be told the things we learn about you in this study?
*The information we collect about you will be kept private.  Only the people working on this study will be able to look at the information we collect.*

Will you get any money or gifts for being in this study?
You will not receive any money or gifts for being in this study. Remember, being in this study is up to you and your parents.  If you don't feel like you want to do this right now, just tell us.  Even if your parent says it is all right for you to be in this study, you don't have to. If you start, you may stop being in the study at any time.  If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you. It is important that you understand what you will do in this study.  Please ask us any questions you have at any time.

What questions do you have?

Do you want to be in the study?

Subject Name: _____

(PRINTED BY Person Obtaining Assent)

Subject consents to being audio recorded: ☐

Person Obtaining Assent

I have read this form to the subject and/or the subject has read this form. An explanation of the research was given and questions from the subject were solicited and answered to the subject's satisfaction. In my judgment, the child has demonstrated comprehension of the information. I have given the child adequate time to consider the study before providing assent. My signature below documents the subject's assent to participate in this research study.

_____

Name and Title (Print)

_____          _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent                              Date

**Appendix C: Participant Consent Form**

Study Title: Judaism, Jewishness, and Being Jewish: The Construction and Intersection of Culture and Religion in Reform Jewish Families

Principal Investigator: Dena Phillips Swanson, PhD

Co-Investigator: Bryan D. Clutz, MS

This consent form describes a research study, what you may expect if you decide to take part and important information to help you make your decision. Please read this form carefully.

The study staff will explain this study to you. Please ask questions about anything that is not clear before you agree to participate or at any time. You may take this consent form home to think about and discuss with family or friends.

➢ Being in this study is voluntary – it is your choice.
➢ If you join this study, you can change your mind and stop at any time.
➢ There are risks from participating and you should understand what these mean to you.

Introduction
You are being asked to take part in this study because your family identifies with the Jewish religion and/or culture. This study is being conducted by Bryan Clutz of the University of Rochester's Department of Education.

Purpose of Study
The purpose of this study is to learn more about Jewish religion and culture. Previous studies suggest Jewish religion and culture can be influenced by generational and historical changes. This study seeks to learn more about these changes.

Description of Study Procedures
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in individual interviews with the investigator, larger focus groups with family members, and be observed during a Holiday. The interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and take place at a mutually agreed upon location that is convenient and comfortable to both you and the investigator.

Number of Subjects
Approximately 18 subjects will take part in this study from three (3) different families. There will be two (2) subjects from each generation within a family encompassing a total of three (3) generations. This equates to twelve (12) adult subjects and six (6) child subjects.

Duration of the Study
Your participation in the study will last approximately 6.5 hours. The individual interviews will take between 45-90 minutes. The larger family focus group will last between 1.5 to 2 hours. The observation will take 3 hours.

Risks of Participation
Potential risks associated with this study include, but are not limited to, possible invasion of privacy, as well as a breach in confidentiality due to the limited amount of subjects in this study

and that responses may be easier to identify. However, data will be reported in a general sense only and no identifying information will be included in the reporting. All data will be stored and collected by the PI, and any identifying information will be removed in the final analysis. Individual information will be known only to the PI and Co-PI.

Benefits of Participation
You might not benefit from being in this research study.  The potential benefit to you from being in this study might be learning more about your family and family members.

Costs
There will be no cost to you to participate in this study.

Payments
You will not be paid for participating in this study.

Confidentiality of Records
The University of Rochester makes every effort to keep the information collected from you private.  In order to do so, data will be reported in a general sense only and no identifying information will be included in the reporting. All data will be stored and collected by the PI, and any identifying information will be removed in the final analysis. Individual information will be known only to the PI and Co-PI. Sometimes, however, researchers need to share information that may identify you with people that work for the University, regulators or the study sponsor.  If this does happen we will take precautions to protect the information you have provided.  Results of the research may be presented at meetings or in publications, but your name will not be used.

Contact Persons
For more information concerning this research or if you feel that your participation has resulted in any emotional or physical discomfort please contact: Bryan Clutz at 585-315-9875.

Please contact the University of Rochester Research Subjects Review Board at 265 Crittenden Blvd., CU 420315, Rochester, NY 14642, Telephone (585) 276-0005 or (877) 449-4441 for the following reasons:

- You wish to talk to someone other than the research staff about your rights as a research subject;
- To voice concerns about the research;
- To provide input concerning the research process;
- In the event the study staff could not be reached.

Voluntary Participation
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You are free not to take part or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason.  No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner.

SIGNATURE/DATES
After reading and discussing the information in this consent form you should understand:

- Why this study is being done;

- What will happen during the study;
- Any possible risks and benefits to you;
- Other options you may have instead of being in the study;
- How your personal information will be protected;
- What to do if you have problems or questions about this study.

Subject Consent
I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I agree to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a signed copy of this form for my records and future reference.

_____

Subject Name (Printed by Subject)

_____          _____

Signature of Subject                                                    Date

I consent to being audio recorded:    ☐        Initial: _____

Person Obtaining Consent
I have read this form to the subject and/or the subject has read this form. I will provide the subject with a signed copy of this consent form. An explanation of the research was given and questions from the subject were solicited and answered to the subject's satisfaction. In my judgment, the subject has demonstrated comprehension of the information. I have given the subject adequate opportunity to read the consent before signing.

_____

Name and Title (Print)

_____          _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent                         Date

**Appendix D: Parent Permission Consent Form**

Study Title: Judaism, Jewishness, and Being Jewish: The Construction and Intersection of Culture and Religion in Reform Jewish Families

Principal Investigator: Dena Phillips Swanson, PhD

Co-Investigator: Bryan D. Clutz, MS

This permission form describes a research study, what you may expect if you decide to allow your child to take part and important information to help you make your decision. Please read this form carefully.

The study staff will explain this study to you. Please ask questions about anything that is not clear before you decide whether or not you and your child want to participate. You may take this permission form home to think about and discuss with family or friends.

➢ Being in this study is voluntary – it is your choice.
➢ If you decide to allow your child to be in the study, you can change your mind and stop at any time.
➢ There are risks from participating and you should understand what these mean to you and your child.

Introduction
You are being asked to take part in this study because your family identifies with the Jewish religion and/or culture. This study is being conducted by Bryan Clutz of the University of Rochester's Department of Education.

Purpose of Study
The purpose of this study is to learn more about Jewish religion and culture. Previous studies suggest Jewish religion and culture can be influenced by generational and historical changes. This study seeks to learn more about these changes.

Description of Study Procedures
If you decide to allow your child to take part in this study, they will be asked to take part in individual interviews with the investigator, larger focus groups with family members, and be observed during a Holiday. The interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and take place at a mutually agreed upon location that is convenient and comfortable to both you and the investigator.

Number of Subjects
Approximately 18 subjects will take part in this study from three (3) different families. There will be two (2) subjects from each generation within a family encompassing a total of three (3) generations. This equates to twelve (12) adult subjects and six (6) child subjects.

Duration of the Study
Your child's participation in the study will last approximately 6.5 hours. The individual interviews will take between 45-90 minutes. The larger family focus group will last between 1.5 to 2 hours. The observation will take 3 hours.

### Risks of Participation

Potential risks associated with this study include, but are not limited to, possible invasion of privacy, as well as a breach in confidentiality due to the limited amount of subjects in this study and that responses may be easier to identify. However, data will be reported in a general sense only and no identifying information will be included in the reporting. All data will be stored and collected by the PI, and any identifying information will be removed in the final analysis. Individual information will be known only to the PI and Co-PI.

### Benefits of Participation

Your child might not benefit from being in this research study. The potential benefit to your child from being in this study might be learning more about your family and family members.

### Costs

There will be no cost to you/your child to participate in this study.

### Payments

Your child will not be paid for participating in this study.

### Confidentiality of Records

The University of Rochester makes every effort to keep the information collected from your child private. In order to do so, data will be reported in a general sense only and no identifying information will be included in the reporting. All data will be stored and collected by the PI, and any identifying information will be removed in the final analysis. Individual information will be known only to the PI and Co-PI. Sometimes, however, researchers need to share information that may identify you/your child with people that work for the University, the government or the study sponsor. If this does happen we will take precautions to protect the information your child has provided. Results of the research may be presented at meetings or in publications, but your name will not be used.

### Contact Persons

For more information concerning this research or if you feel that your child's participation has resulted in any research related injury, emotional or physical discomfort please contact: Bryan Clutz at 585-315-9875.

Please contact the University of Rochester Research Subjects Review Board at 265 Crittenden Blvd., CU 420315, Rochester, NY 14642, Telephone (585) 276-0005 or (877) 449-4441 for the following reasons:

- You wish to talk to someone other than the research staff about your rights as a research subject;
- To voice concerns about the research;
- To provide input concerning the research process;
- In the event the study staff could not be reached.

### Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Your child is free not to take part or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason. No matter what decision you and your child make, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you and your child are entitled. In the event that your child

withdraws or you withdraw your child from this study, the information your child has already provided will be kept in a confidential manner.

SIGNATURE/DATES
After reading and discussing the information in this permission form you should understand:

- Why this study is being done;
- What will happen during the study;
- Any possible risks and benefits to your child;
- Other options your child may have instead of being in the study;
- How your child's personal information will be protected;
- What to do if you have problems or questions about this study.

Parent Permission
I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this permission form and have been encouraged to ask questions.  I have received answers to my questions.  I agree to allow my child to participate in this study.  I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form for my records and future reference.

_____

Subject Name (Printed by Parent)

_____

Parent Name (Printed by Parent)

_____          _____

Signature of Parent                                                    Date

I consent to my child being audio recorded:    ☐    Initial: _____

Person Obtaining Permission
I have read this form to the parent and/or the parent has read this form.  I will provide the parent with a signed copy of this permission form.  An explanation of the research was given and questions from the parent were solicited and answered to the parent's satisfaction.  In my judgment, the parent has demonstrated comprehension of the information.  I have given the parent adequate opportunity to read the permission form before signing.

_____

Name and Title (Print)

_____          _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Permission                  Date

**Appendix E: Interview Questions for Individual Interviews**

Introduction

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to learn more about Jewish culture and religion. Even though you have already voluntarily agreed to participate in this study, you can stop at any time and choose to not answer any questions. Additionally, you may choose to opt out of this interview and the focus group with the rest of your family members. Finally, just as a reminder, I will be audio recording our conversation.*

*Do you have any questions?*

<u>Self and family</u>

- What does being Jewish mean to you?
- How do you distinguish between Judaism and Jewish?
    - Probe: How important is Israel to defining yourself as Jewish?
    - Probe: What do you consider Jewish culture? Jewish religion?
    - Probe: What is the purpose of the synagogue for you?
    - Probe: In your view, what is spirituality?
- How does your family define who they are when it comes to being Jewish?
- What experiences have shaped your understanding of what it means to be Jewish?
    - Probe: What has your family's role been in helping you understand Jewish culture and religion?
    - Probe: Who in your family has been supportive of your "personal" Jewish choices? Who hasn't been supportive? Why?
- Describe the values and beliefs that are important to your [parents; grandparents]. How have these impacted your own values and beliefs?
- What traditions, events, and activities were/are used in your family to reinforce the values of your [parents and grandparents]?

<u>Rituals and traditional practices</u>

- Describe the customs and traditions that are important to your family.
- What religious and cultural traditions are especially important to you?
- What about these practices contribute to their importance?
- Have these ever changed in importance to you? Explain?

<u>Networks</u>

Describe your social circle (those you see the most in a 6 month period, or those you would invite to a get-together) – how you met, what activities you do, etc.

**Appendix F: Interview Questions for Focus Groups**

Introduction

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to learn more about Jewish culture and religion. Many of the questions I will be asking may sound familiar. Even though you have already voluntarily agreed to participate in this study, you can stop at any time and choose to not answer any questions. Additionally, you may choose to opt out of this focus group. Finally, just as a reminder, I will be audio recording our conversation.*

*Do you have any questions?*

<u>Self and family</u>

- What does being Jewish mean to you?
- How do you distinguish between Judaism and Jewish?
    - Probe: How important is Israel to defining yourself as Jewish?
    - Probe: What do you consider Jewish culture? Jewish religion?
    - Probe: What is the purpose of the synagogue for you?
    - Probe: In your view, what is spirituality?
- How does your family define who they are when it comes to being Jewish?
- What experiences have shaped your understanding of what it means to be Jewish?
    - Probe: What has your family's role been in helping you understand Jewish culture and religion?
    - Probe: Who in your family has been supportive of your "personal" Jewish choices? Who hasn't been supportive? Why?
- Describe the values and beliefs that are important to your [parents; grandparents]. How have these impacted your own values and beliefs?
- What traditions, events, and activities were/are used in your family to reinforce the values of your [parents and grandparents]?

<u>Rituals and traditional practices</u>

- Describe the customs and traditions that are important to your family.
- What religious and cultural traditions are especially important to you?
- What about these practices contribute to their importance?
- Have these ever changed in importance to you? Explain?

<u>Networks</u>

Describe your social circle (those you see the most in a 6 month period, or those you would invite to a get-together) – how you met, what activities you do, etc.

**Appendix G: Codes**

| Individual Focused Codes | Individual Initial Codes |
| --- | --- |
| School | 1. Being with other Jewish people<br>2. No bullying<br>3. Safe<br>4. Boring<br>5. Not involved in religious aspect<br>6. Being an outsider<br>7. Not being allowed to play with Christians<br>8. Jewish fraternity<br>9. Being a rebel-spitballs, paper wads, squirt guns<br>10. Bad, poorly prepared teachers<br>11. Takes away from personal time<br>12. Interferes with sports<br>13. Family influences<br>14. Enjoyment of learning Hebrew<br>15. Boys vs. Girls experiences |
| Growing Up/Childhood | 16. Foreign-born relatives<br>17. Synagogue attendance<br>18. Holidays<br>19. Food<br>20. Exposure to other religions/cultures<br>21. Physical location/proximity to other Jews<br>22. Extended family<br>23. Doing opposite of what parents did<br>24. Hebrew school<br>25. Negative Jewish experiences<br>26. Positive Jewish experiences<br>27. Rebelling<br>28. Friends<br>29. Youth group<br>30. Rituals, prayer, Yiddish, Bar/bat mitzvah, etc. |
| Synagogue | 31. Purely social<br>32. Center of Jewish community<br>33. "Temple hopping"<br>34. "Too 'churchy'"<br>35. Dislike of rabbi<br>36. Dislike of Cantor<br>37. Rites of passage<br>38. Celebrations<br>39. Youth group<br>40. Teaching kids what it means to be Jewish<br>41. Purpose changes as you get older<br>42. "Platform for Jews coming together" |

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| Israel | 43. Support as a state, but no personal connection<br>44. Bad experiences with travelling there<br>45. Enjoyable trips as an adult<br>46. Birthright trips<br>47. Wanting to go back<br>48. Importance of it continuing as a state<br>49. Part of the "cultural identity" of being a Jew<br>50. Connection<br>51. Alternative to faith<br>52. History<br>53. Social action<br>54. Politics<br>55. Zionist |
| Values | 56. Education<br>57. Being a mensch<br>58. Volunteerism<br>59. Helping people<br>60. Community service<br>61. Honesty<br>62. Hard work<br>63. Connection to family<br>64. Charity & giving<br>65. Being ethical<br>66. Marry a Jewish girl<br>67. Money<br>68. Be compassionate<br>69. Help make the world a better place |
| Jewish Experiences | 70. Hebrew school<br>71. Birthright<br>72. Tutors<br>73. Growing up poor<br>74. Non-religious environments<br>75. Culture<br>76. Food<br>77. Holidays<br>78. Bar/bat mitzvah<br>79. Youth group<br>80. Family getting together<br>81. Foreign-born relatives<br>82. Jewish newspapers<br>83. Importance of traditions<br>84. "Alternative" experiences<br>85. Camp<br>86. Travel to Israel<br>87. Services<br>88. Retreats |

| Jewish Culture vs. Jewish Religion | 89. Interwoven & connected<br>90. Entangled<br>91. Cannot be separated<br>92. Temple (R)<br>93. Torah (R)<br>94. Jewish identity<br>95. Bible study (R)<br>96. Adhering to strict rules (R)<br>97. Belief in God (R)<br>98. Spirituality (R)<br>99. Ritual (R)<br>100.      Religion as partly cultural<br>101.      Religious aspect is boring |
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| Beliefs | 102.      Agnostic<br>103.      Socialist<br>104.      Push for social action<br>105.      Left-wing<br>106.      Is there a God? |
| Personal Conflict | 107.      Intermarriage<br>108.      Relationships with siblings<br>109.      Relationships with cousins<br>110.      Relationships with grandparents<br>111.      Relationships with friends |
| Spirituality | 112.      Connection to people, not God<br>113.      Faith as literal beliefs<br>114.      Disengaged from spiritual side of Judaism<br>115.      Simply "feeling" Jewish<br>116.      Agnostic<br>117.      A relationship with prayer and God<br>118.      Spiritual connection to synagogue<br>119.      Changes from childhood to adulthood<br>120.      Spiritual connection to deceased relatives<br>121.      Believing in God<br>122.      Spiritual mentors<br>123.      Spiritual person, but "I haven't found my spiritual home" yet<br>124.      Connection to history, not God |
| **Family Focused Codes** | **Family Initial Codes** |
|  | 1. Never being asked to be Godparents<br>2. "Too Jewish"<br>3. Intermarriage |

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| Family Discord | 4. Israel <br> 5. Dating Jewish/Non-Jewish girls <br> 6. Keeping Kosher <br> 7. Visiting family members <br> 8. Which synagogue to attend <br> 9. Differences between chosen sects |
| Holidays | 10. Food <br> 11. Relatives in from out of town <br> 12. Smells <br> 13. Doing what works best for the family <br> 14. Dinner plays <br> 15. Boring haggadahs <br> 16. Passover <br> 17. Christmas <br> 18. Kosher vs. non-kosher <br> 19. Jews & baseball <br> 20. Discussion of news and social events <br> 21. Social action <br> 22. Connection to previous generations <br> 23. Doing things different vs. the same <br> 24. Importance of family time <br> 25. Jewish jokes & humor |
| Social Networks | 26. Other Jewish families <br> 27. Book clubs <br> 28. College alumni associations <br> 29. Boards of organizations <br> 30. Work friends <br> 31. Other people with kids in similar ages <br> 32. Synagogue <br> 33. School <br> 34. Neighborhood <br> 35. Family <br> 36. Lunch groups |
| Customs & Traditions | 37. Lighting candles <br> 38. Camp <br> 39. Kosher <br> 40. Inviting non-Jews to holidays <br> 41. Food, cooking, recipes <br> 42. Being around family <br> 43. Ensuring a fun seder <br> 44. Jokes & humor <br> 45. Social action <br> 46. Mezuzahs <br> 47. Making your own choices <br> 48. Interaction has the biggest impact <br> 49. Being observant |

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| | 50. Father reading the haggadah<br>51. Brings back memories of childhood<br>52. Breaking fast together<br>53. Going to services at temple<br>54. Prayers<br>55. Diet<br>56. "Pick and choose"<br>57. Younger generations wants more |
| Family Influence | 58. Brandeis<br>59. Synagogues attended<br>60. Doing things different than parents<br>61. Feeling guilty<br>62. Going to lunch at synagogue<br>63. Conversion<br>64. History<br>65. Heritage<br>66. Continuation of a people<br>67. Children's children |
| Generational Changes | 68. Switching between synagogues/sects<br>69. Poor vs. wealthy<br>70. Language<br>71. Ways holidays are conducted<br>72. Jewish school<br>73. Less involved as generations progress |
| Relocation | 74. Only Jews in town<br>75. Aim to live in a better place<br>76. Longing for sense of community<br>77. Rural areas |
| Israel | 78. Visiting family<br>79. Communication via email, Facebook<br>80. Marriages within the family to Israelis<br>81. Becoming more pro-Israel<br>82. Going on trips with family<br>83. Attending demonstrations as a family (Soviet Jews)<br>84. Younger generations wishing to move there with older generations |
| Synagogue | 85. Too many families<br>86. Picking and choosing as a family<br>87. Trying to be more family & kid focused<br>88. Attendance as family/extended family only<br>89. Relocation due to rabbi<br>90. Center for family celebrations and gatherings<br>91. Not many family friends from there<br>92. Children carrying on/not carrying on importance to their own families |

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| | 93. Bringing food to help other families<br>94. Hebrew school (free depending on the temple)<br>95. "Twice a year" Jews<br>96. Celebrating holidays<br>97. Waiting to have kids to join<br>98. How they have changed over the years<br>99. Male vs. female roles |
| Rituals & Collective Rights of Passage | 100. Bar & Bat Mitzvahs<br>101. Weddings<br>102. Bris<br>103. Lighting of candles<br>104. Funerals<br>105. Baby naming |