The Search For Childhood in Rabbinic Literature

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This rabbinic thesis asserts that the experience of childhood is present within Rabbinic texts. The thesis consists of three chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. Through the analysis of contemporary anthropological and sociological scholarship, it is determined that the experience of childhood is characterized by the presentation of a child as an innocent, vulnerable, asexual being in the midst of transition. Using these characteristics as a guide, the reader searches for childhood within rabbinic texts that consider significant life cycle events within a child's development. Chapter 1 examines the death of a newborn and breastfeeding of an infant. Chapter 2 is concerned with rabbinic representations of education of children. Finally, Chapter 3 presents marriage as a coming of age ceremony that formally ends the experience of childhood.

The experience of childhood is not one of the primary concerns for Rabbinic texts. However, when Rabbinic texts enter into a discourse regarding the birth of a child, the education of a child, or the marriage of an adolescent childhood emerges. The presentation of childhood in rabbinic texts exists as a cultural construct consistent with some of our contemporary conceptions of childhood. The thesis posits that the existence of childhood within rabbinic texts sheds light on our interpretations of the experience of childhood. Additionally, this thesis demonstrates that rabbinic presentations of childhood are consistent with contemporary representations of childhood within sociological and anthropological scholarship.

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Conventions regarding the existence of childhood posit that childhood is a modern invention based upon contemporary ideals. This norm took shape in Philippe Aries' 1962 groundbreaking sociological survey, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life. Within it, Aries made claims that changed the way contemporary societies would perceive, describe, and understand the complex social experience of childhood in pre-modern cultures. The book's most famous conclusions posited that in pre-modern society, childhood did not exist. Aries writes that children were basically small adults. Children in pre-modern societies were not a separate protected class; in their homes, children were an unpaid labor force. Outside of their domicile, they were a vulnerable subsection of society subject to the dangers of the public sphere. Before child labor laws, juvenile courts, and developmental theory emerged childhood simply did not play a role in society at large. Aries writes plainly, "it is hard to believe that this neglect was due to incompetence or incapacity; it seems more probable that there was no place for childhood in the medieval world."[1]

These conclusions have persisted as the primary structure with which one may enter into the discourse about childhood before the modern period. However, over the past 30 years, these claims have been consistently and conclusively refuted. Famously, Nicholas Orme's Medieval Children, written in 2001, works to fundamentally disprove Aries' claims. Orme and scholars like him (Pierre Riche, Daniele Alexandre-Bidon, and Sally Crawford to name a few) have used copious amounts of material documents to

[1] Aries, Philippe (1962) Centuries of Childhood. Translated by Robert Baldick. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

effectively prove that childhood did in-fact exist in the medieval period in Europe, and Aries' central claim is generally false.

The impact of Aries' conclusions, however, has not been limited to the study of medieval Europe. Across diverse fields of academia, scholars have sought to prove or disprove Aries' conclusions about the existence or absence of the experience of childhood within their area of study. Scholarship of Jewish texts is no exception. Scholars of Jewish literature have been pushed to ask whether or not the experience of childhood appears within the vast compendium of Jewish text and history. This thesis exists within that continuum of scholarship. In the pages that follow, I seek to assert whether or not the experience of childhood appears within the pages of rabbinic literature.

Before we enter into this discourse, we must ask essential questions of definition and process. First, why study childhood? Given that we all were children, it should be a relatively simple question to answer. Nevertheless, the differences in our childhoods exist as an obstacle to our study. Each of our experiences of childhood was unique and fleeting. We have no contemporary record of the lived realities of our childhood, as they exist only as a memory. Queer theorist Katryn Bond Stockton writes beautifully,

> “the child is precisely who we are not and, in fact, never were. It is the act of adults looking back. It is a ghostly unreachable fancy, making us wonder: Given that we cannot know the contours of children, who they are to themselves, should we stop talking of children altogether? Should all talk of the child subside, beyond our critique of the bad effects of looking back nostalgically in fantasy?”[2]

[2] Stockton, Katryn *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Duke University Press, 2009.

To these questions, I answer, no. The description, presentation, and analysis of the social phenomenon of childhood are valuable because of its diversity and universality. The child is a ubiquitous member of every culture that has ever existed. The child, if nothing more than a potential adult, is an essential component of the human experience. The way that we choose to represent childhood is a reflection of our understanding of our own adult lives. If we exclude childhood, we exclude a truly universal experience.

The way that a particular culture or literature speaks about children provides insight into the way that that literature conceives of society as a whole. If we fail to analyze a literature's presentation of childhood, we miss an opportunity to construct a more complete understanding of that literature's presentation of society at large. We consider Stockton's questions and continue forward undeterred. While we may not ever be able to consider the experience of the child from a first-hand perspective, we can and should consider the presentation of the experience of childhood by adults. The description of childhood by adult writers of literature can provide a tool that we can employ to enter into a discourse about children and childhood within a larger societal context. Within Jewish texts, the independent child is amongst the most vulnerable classes in society. The orphan (often accompanied by the widow) is mentioned consistently as a member of society who is deserving of protection.[3] As a vulnerable class, a study of the presentation of the child will shed light on the presentation of other vulnerable classes within Jewish thought.

[3] Ex 22:22, Deut 10:18, Deut 14:29, Deut 16:11. Deut 24:17, Deut 24:19 etc

Secondly, we must define childhood. Generally speaking, the experience of being a child lacks clear boundaries. Biologically one might be referred to as a child beginning from birth and lasting until the onset of puberty. However, the physical experience of puberty begins and ends at different points for different people and genders. Some certain rights and responsibilities are available to adults within a society that are not yet available to individuals who have recently begun or finished puberty. Additionally, the terminology available naming the social categories of childhood such as baby, toddler, teen, and adolescent work to muddy the waters of definitive definitions for a child and childhood.

In this thesis, we will employ the presentation of the child used by childhood anthropologist David Lancy and the definition of childhood provided by David C. Kraemer of the Jewish Theological Seminary. In his book, *The Anthropology of Childhoo*d Lancy writes that throughout time children have been thought of as Cherubs, Chattel, or Changelings. As cherubs, children are elevated to a place of distant reverence. The child, as cherub, is generally innocent, vulnerable, and asexual. As chattel, children interact with their society as utilitarian facets of their cultural context. The child, as chattel, has limited rights, privileges, or protections. As changelings, children are left in a period of limbo.[4] “The difficult or unwanted child might be dubbed a “changeling” or devil-inspired spirit”[5]. Kraemer provides a concise and useful definition of childhood regarding Rabbinic texts. He writes;

> “I will consider childhood anything that comes before adulthood, and I will only consider someone an adult who has attained the age of marriage and

[4] Lancy, David F. *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
[5] Ibid pg 33

> family responsibility. It is at this point that people generally establish their own homes, and it is only then that they can be spoken of as being adults in an adult society. This definition is useful for two reasons. First, it enables us to consider the full developmental continuum if there is one. Second, it offers us the opportunity to see whether or not the Talmudic literature admitted an adolescence"[6]

Kraemer's definition partnered with Lancy's trilogy of childhood presentations provides a useful heuristic with which we may enter into our discourse. With these standards in mind, this thesis searches for the experience of childhood within rabbinic literature.

Regarding process and purpose, I have focused primarily on Talmudic texts as they have provided a practical boundary for research. However, when advantageous, I have drawn from *Aggadic, Midrashic* and *Halachic* material. To a high degree, the language of this corpus of material is legal in nature. There are many references to a minor*,* but minors are not children. David Kraemer explains, "minors are a legal category-that category of people (in this case, usually Jewish people) who are exempt from observing commandments and who cannot be held responsible for their actions."[7] Minors are not the individuals who will be considered in our study.

On the contrary, we are looking for representations of the child, which closely resemble one of our contemporary notions of childhood experience. In other words, we are searching for Lancy's trilogy of representation (Cherub, Chattel, or Changeling) within the library of rabbinic literature. In order to concretize that intention, I have included several contemporary anthropological and sociological studies that further explain or create modern parallels to representations of the child in rabbinic literature.

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[6] Kraemer, David. "Images of Childhood and Adolescence in Talmudic Literature." *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory*, by David Charles. Kraemer, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 65–80.
[7] ibid

Regarding my own intentions, I question whether or not we should apply our contemporary perspective onto the literature of pre-modern societies. How can we judge a society based on rules and regulations that they did not share nor conceive of? This thesis has not set out to pass moral judgment on the culture that produced rabbinic texts, nor is my goal to assert historical truths about the ways that the rabbis lived or the ideas they thought. What I have attempted to do in this thesis is read rabbinic literature with a particular perspective and mission; to read this ancient literature with the hopes of sussing out a rabbinic presentation of the child as we know it. The conclusions that I reach are only valuable to a point. We can not say what the authors of these texts truly believed nor what they intended their readers to ascertain from their work. All I can do as a reader of this literature is seek to create meaning from their written words. The search for childhood allows the reader to search for their own experience as a child in this text. I believe that my reading of this text with the image of the child in mind will bring new meaning and appreciation to this ancient literature. This thesis has been an exercise in meaning-making, and in that way, it has been productive.

Throughout my reading of contemporary childhood anthropology, three primary life cycle events emerged as significant descriptors of a culture's presentation of the experience of childhood; the death of an infant, the education of a child, and the end of childhood at marriage. Of course, these are not the *only* milestones of the experience of childhood. For instance, the end of childhood may be noted by the onset of puberty or personal acceptance of legal responsibility. However, the instances of infant death, childhood education, and marriage are culturally pervasive to a degree at which the

analysis of these processes yields particularly significant conclusions. In this thesis, I attempt to analyze the particular markers of the experience of childhood stated above as they appear in rabbinic literature.

This thesis is presented in three chapters. Chapter 1 - Burial and Breasts is an analysis of rabbinic texts relating to the death of an infant and the breastfeeding of a baby. Chapter 2 - Toddlers and Torah is an examination of the image of a child as they begin their formal education. Chapter 3 - Minors and Marriage is a study of the end of childhood in relation to the cultural institution of marriage.

My work on this thesis has been a pursuit of meaning within the rabbinic textual tradition. I hope that by reading the pages of this project, one will be able to connect more fundamentally to this corpus of literature by way of its presentation of childhood. In many ways, rabbinic texts do not describe the world in which we live, or apply to our cultural conceptions of what a child is or should be. While that may be the case, the analysis of the presentation of childhood in rabbinic literature is an opportunity to engage with this literature in a new and inviting way. There have always been children, there will always be children, and all of us were children at one point. The existence of *childhood* is a more complicated question. The search for childhood within rabbinic texts allows us as readers to consider our own contemporary experiences as a child in relation to the presentation of children in this indispensable corpus of Jewish literature.

Our entry point into the conversation about childhood begins at the end of a life. An infant death within the context of a Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic (WEIRD) society[8] is an unspeakable tragedy. These WEIRD cultures have raised the child to the top of their societal hierarchical structures. Religious holidays have become an opportunity to indulge a child with gifts[9], and moralists sling insults at mothers who work rather than stay at home and dote on their children.[10] The American Pro-Life movement, at times, will seek to uphold the rights of a fetus over that of their mother's.[11] In these cultures, a child, and all the more so the infant, is to be respected. The life of the potential child is of utmost importance and should be protected regardless of the child's quality of life, or the readiness of the family or society to care for that child. The infant represents potential life, and the removal of that life is shocking and concerning.

Within the context of Childhood Studies, the death of an infant provides a worthwhile case study of the treatment of childhood within a particular culture, or in our case, a particular literature. The child is a vulnerable member of any society. This critical participant in our culture is physically small, intellectually inferior, economically unviable, etc. The infant, and more, the still-born fetus, represents the most vulnerable sub-group of this already marginalized community. The way that a literary community

[8] Henrich, Joseph, Heine, Stephen J., and Norenzayan, Ara (2010) The weirdest people in the world? Behavioural and Brain Sciences 33:61-81
[9] Cross, Gary (2004) The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
[10] Eberstadt, Mary (2004) Home ALone America: The Hidden Toll of Daycare, Behavioral Drugs, and Other Parent Substitutes. New York, NY: Penguin.
[11] "What's Wrong with Fetal Rights." *American Civil Liberties Union*, 2019, www.aclu.org/other/whats-wrong-fetal-rights.

treats the infant who has died is a useful heuristic with which one may yield a particular sense of meaning from the text. If a literature treats the death of an infant with honor and reverence, the same may be true about how that literature would treat the life of a child. In contrast, if one finds that a particular text neglects the death of an infant, it may be extrapolated to explain the social neglect of the child as they emerge as a character within this literature.

If a child survives past the initial stage of life outside the womb, that child may or may not begin to experience a sense of childhood. This chapter attempts to mark the beginning of said experience by asserting that identity formation is crucial to childhood within rabbinic literature. To be presented as a child, an individual must first be accepted as a person. Through the analysis of textual evidence, I will present two stages of childhood that represent the attainment of personhood. The chapter will begin with an exploration of the death of an infant and will end with a discourse on breastfeeding within rabbinic literature.

The Death of an Infant

Infant death rates remain low in contemporary WEIRD societies[12], however infant death rates were high amongst ancient cultures. It has been said that "the history of childhood is a history of death."[13] Infant death and worse infanticide were seemingly commonplace in the ancient world. The Greeks considered infants, being speechless

[12] According to the CDC in 2017, the infant mortality rate in the United States was 5.8 deaths per 1,000 live births.
[13] Vok, Anthony A. and Atkinson, Jeremy A. (2013) Infant and child death in the human environment and evolutionary adaptionation. Evolution and Human Behavior 34:182-192.

and spastic, little better than animals.[14] “Plato believed that, in an ideal society, parents should keep only those children that they could personally afford; the poorest should remain childless.[15]” (Lancy, 33) Additionally, Roman society in Antiquity engaged in the abandonment of children daily at the public *lacteria* or “nursing column.”[16]Generally, attitudes towards infanticide changed very slowly in Antiquity.

Infant death in Antiquity did not limit itself to Roman or Greek society. The rabbis of the geonic period also encountered the realities of their time and were forced to ask questions regarding the mortality of infants. Would the texts they wrote provide us with an indication that an infant had a degree of social status? Would these texts suggest shielding the family from the anticipated sadness of the death of an infant? Do the authors depict the death of a child as an unemotional experience? When answering these questions with different presentations of the child, we may better understand how this literature represented the experience of childhood.

Of the most significant halachic rulings relating to the death of the infant is the prohibition against mourning for a still-born or a child that dies within 30 days of being born.

> “We do not mourn for fetuses *(nefalim)*[17], and anything which does not live for 30 days, we do not mourn for it.” - *Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Aveilut 1:6*

[14] Kleijueqgt, Marc (2009) Ancient Mediterranean world, childhood and adolescence. In Richard A. Shweder, Thomas R.Bidell, Anne C. Dailey, Suzanne D. Dixon, Peggy J. Miller, and John Modell (Eds.), The Child: An Encyclopedic Companion. Pp 54-56. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
[15] Boswell, John (1988) The Kindness of Strangers. New York: Pantheon Books.
[16] ibid
[17] Interestingly, the hebrew word for fetus, *nefal* shares it’s root with *nafal* the hebrew word for something that is dropped, or stumbling

> "The infant (תינוק *tinok)*, for 30 days, even including the full 30th day (if it dies), we do not mourn for it." - *Shulchan Aruch Yorah De'ah 374:8*

Maimonides and Karo suggest that an infant who dies within 30 days of birth, is not yet an independent person, and therefore undeserving of mourning rituals. Jewish Studies Scholar Susan Knightly explains,

> "The reason for the limit of thirty days appears to derive from the fact that thirty days is the age at which [jews] are commanded to redeem the firstborn (*pidyon ha-ben)*. For the rabbis this marked the point at which a fetus becomes fully viable."[18]

Such a practice reads as cold and removed within a WEIRD context. However, it may align with similar societies where infant death was commonplace. The deceased fetus, referred to as נפל *(nefel)* in Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah,* assumes a different role than an independent child. A distinction must be made between the rabbinic legal categories of נפל (fetus) and a תינוק (baby or infant). These two rabbinic classifications will be treated differently throughout the literature. The נפל *(nefel)* may not yet be a person, and therefore the legal category of נפל (*nefel)* operates under a different set of guidelines regarding mourning rituals.

The *nefel* is a newborn who is not viable and who's mourning is not required, the *nefalim*'s identity as an independent person is non-existent. The *tinok* is a viable infant whose mourning is required even if the baby dies on the day it is born. While rabbinic literature does not prescribe the mourning for a deceased נפל *(nefel)* the treatment of a deceased תינוק *(tinok)* is noticeably different within rabbinic text. The legal separation

[18] Knightly, Susan. "Neonatal Death." *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort a Guide to Jewish Bereavement*, by Ron Wolfson, Jewish Lights Pub, 2005, pp. 33–39.

between mourning regulations for a fetus and an infant is significant and points to similar cultural practices in contemporary societies.

The halachic conception of a legal difference between נפל *(nefel)* and a תינוק *(tinok)* fits comfortably with contemporary notions of "delaying personhood." The delay of personhood until a child reaches a state of independent viability repeatedly appears in non-western culture. "By treating infants as existing in a liminal state and not fully human, the community erects a large shelter or cognitive comfort zone within which several problems can be worked out." [19] It is evident that an infant *is* different from a child; their lack of speech, controlled movement, constant crying, and screaming can be seen as frightening in some cultural contexts.[20] By delaying the child's personhood, communities can stave off the painful realities of infant death. Anthropological scholarship submits that this tactic is used throughout contemporary non-WEIRD cultures.

> "A decision had to be made within four days after parturition, for by that time an [Inuit] infant had to be named. And, once named, the disposal of a child would be an act of murder because a named infant was regarded as a social person.[21]"

> "During this period no one is very certain whether the [Ashanti] infant is going to turn out a human child or prove, by dying before this period has elapsed, that it was never anything more than some wandering ghost.[22]"

[19] Lancy, David F. "'Babies Aren't Persons': A Survey of Delayed Personhood." *Different Faces of Attachment: Cultural Variations of a Universal Human Need.*, edited by Keller et al., Cambridge University Press, 2013.
[20] *ibid*
[21] Balikci, Asen 1970. *The Netsilik Eskimo.* Garden City, Ny: The Natural History Press.
[22] Rattray, Robert S. (1927) Religion and Art in Ashanti. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

> "Two [Fulani] folk illnesses regarded as supernaturally caused, *foondu* and *heendu* were important final diagnoses of the cause of death [which, when applied] to a dead child's last illness shifts accountability for the death to the community as whole, rather than leaving the individual mother personally responsible.[23]"

> "The dead child is thought to have been the soul of someone to whom the [Hong Kong] parents owed a debt. When the debt is paid in terms of care invested in the child, it dies.[24]"

Despite the propensity of these rituals in a diversity of cultures around the world and throughout time, the lived reality of the parents who lose an infant is a palpable emotional experience. While it is true that customs of delayed personhood are presented within the rabbinic textual tradition, one certainly finds differing opinions within Talmudic sources as it relates to the mourning of an infant. There are some texts that state that a dead infant should be mourned, Talmud scholar Susan Knightly explains,

> "In *Mishnah Niddah* 5:3, we find this statement: "A one-day-old infant, (תינוק בן יום אחד *tinok ben yom echad)* if he dies is considered to his father and mother like a full bridegroom," and therefore the child would be mourned. In The Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Shabbat* 136a, we read that the sons of Rav Dimi and Rav Kahana mourned for their newborns who died. Even Maimonides states: "If a man knows for certain that the child was born after a full nine months, even if it dies on the day it is born, we mourn it" (*Aveilut* 1:7). [25]

[23] Castle, Sara E. (1994) The (re)negotiation of illness diagnosis and responsibility for child death in rural Mali. Medical Anthropology QUarterly 8(3): 314-335
[24] Martin, Diana 2001. The meaning of children in HOng Kong. In Soraya Tremayne (Ed.) *Managing Reproductive Life: Cross-Cultural Themes in Sexuality and Fertility*. Pp. 157-71. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
[25] Knightly, Susan. "Neonatal Death." *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort a Guide to Jewish Bereavement*, by Ron Wolfson, Jewish Lights Pub, 2005, pp. 33–39.

Further representations of the deceased newborn deserving of a degree of mourning can be seen in the *Shulchan Aruch,* which mentions that an infant boy who was not circumcised at the time of his death should be circumcised at the burial (*Yoreh De'Ah* 353:6-7). Similar texts state that if the boy was buried before he was circumcised, then the body should be exhumed to perform the act. These texts do not use the word נפל (*nefel)* and importantly, *Niddah 5:3* and *Yoreh De'ah* employ the word תינוק (*tinok)*. In doing so, the halachic literature acknowledges the difference between fetus and viable infant. One entity (תינוק *tinok*) was to be mourned; the other (נפל *nefel*) was not. This legal fact alludes to an assignment of personhood at the stage of תינוק *(tinok).* If the deceased infant was not considered a person, then why perform the act of circumcision? The commandment to circumcise the child is the father's, but the *brit,* that the act symbolizes is between God and the child. The openness to perform circumcision on a deceased infant suggests that the rabbis treated such an infant with particular reverence. *Halachic* dictum that says that one should not mourn the death of a fetus suggests that נפלים *(nefalim)* within this literature are positioned short of true personhood. In contrast, texts such as *Niddah 5:3 and Shabbat 136a* point to a more nuanced approach to the personhood of an infant. Additional rabbinic texts continue the notion of an early assignment of personhood more explicitly.

In *The Anthropology of Childhood,* David Lancey posits that throughout time children have been thought of as *Cherubs, Chattel, or Changelings.* As cherubs, children are elevated to a place of distant reverence. As chattel, children interact with their society as utilitarian facets of their cultural context. As changelings, children are

left in a period of limbo. “The difficult or unwanted child might be dubbed a “changeling” or devil-inspired spirit, thereby providing a blanket of social acceptability to cloak its elimination” (Lancy 13). Some rabbinic texts that discuss the death of a newborn point to representations of the Jewish child as innocent cherub.

In *Sanhedrin* 110b, we read about the death of an infant from an entirely different perspective. Rather than considering the death of an infant from the point of view of the mourning parent, this text explains what happens to the soul of the child who has died. In this long passage we read

> “As it is taught [in a *baraita*:] The minor children of the wicked of the Jewish people, do not come into the World-to-Come, as it is stated: ”for behold the day is coming; it burns like a furnace, and all the arrogant and all who do wickedly shall be straw; and the day that is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch” (Malachi 3:19)...Rabbi Akive says: They come into the World-to-Come, as it is stated: “the lord preserves the simple *petai’im”* (Psalms 116:6), as in the cities overseas [the residents] call all children *patya.* And [the verse] states [with regard to Nebuchadnezzar:] “Hew down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump of its roots in the earth” (daniel 4:20)...But everyone agrees that the minor children of the wicked of the nations of the world will not come into the World-to-Come. And Rabban Gamliel derives from the verse “And you have caused all their memory to perish” (Isaiah 26:14).”
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> It was stated: [with regard to] a minor [who dies] from when does he come into the World-to-Come? [There is a dispute between Rabbi HIyya and Rabbi Shimon bar Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi]. One [of them] says: From the moment that he is born, and one says: From the moment that [he begins to] talk...It was stated Ravina says: From the moment that [the child] is conceived, as it is written “Their seed shall serve Him (Psalms 22:31). Rabbi Nahman bar Yitzhak says: from the moment that he is circumcised, as it is written: “I am poor and close to death from youth; I suffered your terrors, I am numb (Psalms 88:16). [It is] Taught in the name of Rabbi Meir: From the moment that [the child] will say amen, as it is stated: “Open the gates so that the righteous nation that keep faithfulness may enter” (Isaiah 26:2) rather, [read it as] That says amen.

Within this dense text, we see several different representations of the recently deceased child. First and foremost, there is an underlying recognition of the innocence of a Jewish child. Secondly, not *all children* are seen as innocent because “everyone agrees that the minor children of the wicked of the nations of the world” will not enter into the world to come. Lastly, the reader witnesses five markers for the stage of childhood when the child merits the World-to-Come. We cannot say that the moment that the text is describing is the beginning of childhood, only that that the text is explaining when an individual merits this particular destiny. Whether it be conception, birth, circumcision, speech, or the ability to say “amen,” the text suggests that a Jewish child warrants a seat in the World-to-Come at a very young age. The Jewish child in this text is seen as a uniquely innocent character whose life after death is predetermined by their identity as a Jew rather than their deeds in the physical world.

This passage from *Sanhedrin* 110b affirms the fact that there are representations of the child as an innocent individual within the rabbinic textual transition. While a particular image of the Jewish child as cherub emerges, it is paralleled by a cloudier depiction of the experience of childhood as a whole. This text elevates the experience of the Jewish child while diminishing the experience of the child of other nations. It is not the experience of childhood that makes an individual innocent, but rather that child’s identity as a jew. That being the case, we must consider the beginning of identity formation as a marker for the beginning of childhood within the rabbinic textual tradition. That beginning takes place at the breast.

Breastfeeding

For those infants who survived past the initial 30 days of their life, their identity within the halachic construct was still largely dependent on their parents. Their life remains in the hands, and the breasts of their mother. The connection between a baby and their nursing mother is linguistically evident in that the Hebrew word for infant, תינוק is based on the root ינק, to nurse.

For the rabbis, the fact that breast milk is a quaffable human substance yields a great deal of thought and debate. Within rabbinic texts, breast milk is closely linked to blood and is thought explicitly of as transformed menstrual blood.[26] Blood, as a liquid, often eliminates purity, but breastmilk, in contrast, is essential to the survival of infants, and is therefore considered kosher and pure. Furthermore, "a nursing woman is one of the few categories of women (including pre-menarchal and post-menopausal women) that the rabbis consider to hold the status of presumptive purity (חזקת טהרה)."[27] Jordan Rosenblum reminds his readers that within the Talmud breastmilk serves as an important vehicle for the transmission of knowledge and wisdom.

> "B. Berakhot 10a describes King David praising God for placing a woman's breasts opposite her heart ("the place of understanding" במקום ערוה, i.e., her vulva. But this option was rejected, "so that [her infant] will not suck from an impure place" [ממקום הטנופת]. This clearly implies the impurity associated with menstrual blood. The location of a woman's breasts, therefore, functions to provide physical distance between the source of menstrual blood and the source of breast milk - that is, transformed menstrual blood. Removed physically and substantively from its previous form, breast milk imparts understanding to the infant."

[26] "B. Niddah 9a; n. Bekhorot 6b

[27] Rosenblum, Jordan. "'Blessings of the Breasts': Breastfeeding in Rabbinic Literature." *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 87, 2016, p. 145., doi:10.15650/hebruniocollannu.87.2016.0145.

The baby receives knowledge and understanding from the breast of its mother, and in this way, the beginning stages of the baby's identity are held within their mother's breast milk. Additionally, breast milk is held up as a metaphor for transmitting spiritual orientation and as a metaphor for learning and experiencing Torah.[28]

A close reading of the laws of breastfeeding on Shabbat yields an intriguing message on the importance of the life of a baby within halachic material. The Rabbis enter into this conversation as it relates to the practice of wet-nursing. Wet nursing continues to be practiced throughout contemporary non-WEIRD societies[2930], and was certainly an area of concern for the authors of the Talmud. Regarding breastfeeding on the Sabbath, we learn in tractate *Shabbat* 9:22:

> [A] A woman may not squeeze her breasts and lactate into a cup or into a dish, and then nurse her child.
>
> [B] They may nurse neither from a non-Jewish woman nor from an impure beast.
>
> [C] But if it was a matter of danger, absolutely nothing stands in the way of preservation of life [פיקוח נפש]

Regarding the case of Shabbat, an infant may be nursed by a non-Jew or an animal if it ensures the preservation of life.[31] However, this desire for the preservation of life does not extend beyond the Jewish community. *Avodah Zarah* 2:1 reads

> [A] A Jewish woman may not nurse the child of a non-Jewish Woman;

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[28] For an extended conversation see chapter 1 of Ellen Davina Haskell's *Suckling at My Mother's Breasts, the Image of a Nursing God in Jewish Mysticism*
[29] Edward Z Tronick, Gilda Morelli, and Steve Winn, "Multiple Caretaking of Efe (Pygmy Infants," *American Anthropologist* 89 (1987): 96-106
[30] Amal Gottlieb, *The Afterlife is Where We Come From: The culture of INfancy in West Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 202-204.
[31] *Ibid. Rosenblum*

> [B] but a non-Jewish woman may nurse the child of a Jewish woman in her own premises.

Why may a non-Jew serve as a wet nurse for a Jew but not the reverse? Rosenblum suggests that it is a case of simple supply and demand. Breast milk is of limited supply, and infancy is a time of great need, it is a moment of vulnerability where constant access to breastmilk is a matter of life and death. “By allowing non-Jews to serve as wet nurses for Jews, this legislation vastly increases the number of available wet nurses for Jewish infants.”[32] The fact that the rabbis believed that breastmilk was the vehicle of Jewish understanding for the infant leads one to conclude that this law is more about the preservation of Jewish knowledge than it was about the preservation of the life of an infant. Life is important, but Jewish life is most important.

Conclusion

Within the *halachic* literature, the infant is a significant feature of the textual tradition. When an infant died or was still-born, the treatment of that now deceased component of society demonstrates how a particular corpus of literature presented a child. In our own lived experiences, we know that children are different than adults, and infants are different than children. What marks this separation is the assumption of personhood and the inculcation of identity. Additionally, in the halachic material presented, the death of a Jewish infant was treated in stark difference than the death of a non-Jewish infant. With this evidence, one can conclude that the non-Jewish, still-born, or the dead fetus was not a child deserving of mourning or the World-to-Come, and all the more so, was not yet a person.

[32] *Ibid.*

In contrast, through analysis of the presentation of breastfeeding and nursing, one may begin to recognize that the real beginning of childhood within Jewish *halachic* tradition begins with the transmission of Jewish knowledge and understanding. The non-Jewish infant's life is of little concern to the rabbis. Yet, the life of the Jewish infant overrides the precepts of Shabbat! The most important feature to the rabbis was not the child itself, but the child's identity as a viable Jewish person. In this way, the beginning of childhood in rabbinic texts starts to take on Lancy's presentation of the child. The jewish child takes form as a cherub, an innocent being worthy of sustenance and the world to come.

In conclusion, through the study of mourning practice and breastfeeding laws and regulations, one may mark the beginning of Jewish childhood. Within the *halachic* tradition, childhood and personhood did not begin at birth. Rather, childhood begins at the assumption of Jewish identity. Then, and only then, would an infant's death be mourned, and a child's life be preserved.

In the previous chapter, it was established that within rabbinic literature, childhood begins with the assignment of Jewish identity in infancy. In this chapter, we continue our survey of representations of the child in חז״ל *(chazal).* When the child is weaned from their mother, they enter into a new stage of identity formation. No longer solely dependent on their mother for their sustenance, the child begins to function differently within the rabbinic textual tradition. The child is cared for in new ways, acquires new roles within society, and is described in new ways by the authors of rabbinic literature.

Age or developmental stage is not our primary mode of classification for the child. Therefore I choose to denote this next stage of childhood using the terminology of the social categories of a toddler or young child. While not biologically precise, social categories of childhood (such as infant, toddler, child, or juvenile) allow for more plasticity in the description of a child's experience. Due to the fact that an individual may matriculate from one category to the next at different ages and different speeds, we may recognize these social categories as descriptive rather than prescriptive of social reality.

There are few descriptions of the home lives and activities of toddlers and young children within rabbinic literature. Yet, many sources describe young children and toddlers at the beginning of their formal education. Through an analysis of rabbinic texts related to the education of toddlers and young children, the reader will witness rabbinic society's expansion and recognition of the experience of childhood.

Formal education has always been an essential component of the identity formation of an individual. The primary motivation for a society's education of its

children has always been to prepare the child for their life as an adult. Childhood anthropologist David Lancy builds upon this notion and suggests that a young child's motivation for education is two-fold "One, the child must strive to understand or make sense of all that's going on around her, and this begins in infancy. And two, the child strives to be accepted, to fit in." (Lancy, 164) Through one's education (be it informal or formal pedagogy), a member of a particular society begins to understand their own identity as it relates to their culture. Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget expands upon the point of individuality in *The Origins of Intelligence in Children* saying, "the principal goal of education should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done."

The importance of the education of children is a readily apparent value within rabbinic literature. There are a myriad of instances of statements that assert the significance of a child's education. For example, *B. Shabbat* 119b states

> Resh Lakish said in the name of R. Judah [II] the Patriarch: The world endures only because of the breath of schoolchildren. R. Papa asked Abbaye: what about my breath and yours [the breath of men who have given themselves to Torah]? Abbaye answered: The breath of one who now has sin is not like the breath of one who is still without sin.
>
> Resh Lakish said in the name of R. Judah [II] the Patriarch: One may not neglect schoolchildren even in order to erect the Temple.
>
> Resh Lakish also said to R. Judah [II] The Patriarch: I have a tradition from my forebears (according to some, [Resh Lakish said]: from your forebears) that a city that has no children at school will be destroyed.[33]

This text is exceptionally rich in that it alludes towards the child as an innocent; it includes commentary on the essential nature of education and speaks clearly regarding

[33] Bialik, Hayyim Nahman, and Rawnitzki Yehoshua Ḥana. *Legends of the Talmud: the First Complete Translation of Sefer Ha-Agada*. Schocken Books, 1992.

the dangers of neglecting the child. Additional texts that further explicate the value of education include; Song R. 1:4, Gen. R. 65:20, Lam. R. 1:5 and many others. These texts are incredibly important in their description and elevation of childhood education. However, they primarily speak to the experience of adults in relation to children in their community. This essay seeks to analyze texts that speak directly to the experience of children as they begin their education and matriculate through school thereafter.

Furthermore, rabbinic texts teach that the education of children is first and foremost an obligation held by fathers toward their sons. "A *baraita* taught that a father is obligated with regard to his son to circumcise him, and to redeem him, **to teach him Torah**, and to marry him to a woman, and to teach him a trade[34]" (*Kiddushin 29a*). The majority of texts that speak about education position the education of a young child as a religious duty held by a father to his son. The primary relationship in most texts on the issue of education remains father to son. The female child is almost entirely excluded; we will address this detail more fully later in this chapter. We must note that in this society it is the fulfillment of the father-to-son obligation, which ensures the continuity of

[34] Within the Kiddushin text cited above the author makes a clear distinction between the learning of torah and the learning of particular trade. It is worthwhile to note that in recent years the learning of a trade has been considered a form of standardized education. In pre modern cultures and societies the relationship between children and physical labor was a truly integrated facet of societal development. Anthropologist Olga Nieuqenhuys wrote that "the dissociation of childhood from the performance of valued work is considered a yardstick of modernity". This value statement associating physical labor of children with non modern cultures is a powerful assertion of the importance of a western model of schooling. In contrast, in his *The Anthropology of Childhood* childhood anthropologist, David Lancy, brings to light the existence of the chore curriculum as a parallel educational model to the traditional school setting of the contemporary western world. Lancy writes;

> The term "curriculum" in chore curriculum conveys the idea that there is a discernible regularity to the process whereby children attempt to learn, then master and finally, carry out their chores. While the academic of "core" curriculum (of math, English, science) found in schools is formal and imposed on students in a top-down process, the chore curriculum is informal and emerges in the interaction of children's need to fit in and emulate those older, their developing cognitive and sensorimotor capacity, the division of labor within the family and the nature of the tasks (chores) themselves.

the society. If one does not teach their children, it would inevitably lead to the destruction of their community.

> "R. Hamnuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because teaching children at school had ceased, as is said "Pour it [God's wrath] out upon the children in the street" (Jer. 6:11). Why "pour it out"? Because "children [are] in the street" and not at school."[35]

Additionally

> "Every day an angel goes out from the presence of the Holy One to destroy the world and to turn it back to what it used to be. But once the Holy One observes young children in their schools and disciples of the wise in their houses of study, His anger immediately turns into mercy."[36]

The most salient motivation for the education of children seems to be the external societal repercussions of the lack of education. In contrast, what I am searching for in this survey, is the existence of texts that suggest that a function of education is to benefit the child themselves as a particular individual participating in the lived experience of childhood. I hope to identify moments when the child is represented as a unique individual participating in a cultural experience separate and distinct from adulthood. In the following paragraphs I will attempt to prove that while modern conceptions of childhood are not explicit within rabbinic presentations of the child as they relate to education, the rabbinic consideration of **age, gender, and the motivation of a child in the classroom** are signs of the acknowledgment of the socially constructed experience of childhood.

[35] Shabbat 119b
[36] Ka R. 2

Age of the Child being Educated

Rabbinic texts on the whole focus on age as the most critical factor for the beginning of schooling. In Ivan G Marcus' *Rituals of Childhood,* the author notes that

> "Postbiblical sources offer various starting points for the child to begin learning informally at home. For example, a father should begin to teach his son "once an infant begins to talk"[37] or "at age three"[38] and the child is certainly no longer under his mother's authority from age six.[39]"[40]

Perhaps the most famous age-based rubric for schooling appears in *Avot* 5:21

> "Judah Ben Tema used to say: At five years of age the study of Scripture; At ten the study of Mishnah: At thirteen subject to the commandments; At fifteen the study of Talmud; At eighteen the bridal canopy; At twenty for pursuit [of livelihood]; At thirty the peak of strength."
>
> Furthermore
>
> "Yehoshua Ben Gamla came and instituted [an ordinance] that teachers of children should be established in each and every province and in each and every town, and they [would] bring [the children] in [to learn] at [the] age of six [and at] the age of seven"... "Rav said to Rav Shmuel bar Sheilat: Do not accept [a student] before [the age of] six."

Texts like these do not take into account the individual readiness of a child to begin schooling. Instead, they assert the beginning of schooling is a necessary milestone based solely on the age of the child. Age based education should be a concept that we are familiar with; within our own contemporary western educational system, age

[37] Sifre on Deuteronomy, Eiqev 11, sec. 46, Finkelstein, 104; Hammer, Sifre, 98; T. Hagiga 1,2, Lieberman, 375; B. Sukkah 42a and parallels.
[38] See Midrash Tanhuma on Lev. 19:23, Buber, 3:79 and compare B. Nedarim 32a: "Abraham was three years old when he recognized that God was his Creator."
[39] B 'Eiruvin 82a.
[40] "Ancient Jewish Pedagogy." *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in the Medieval Europe*, by Ivan G. Marcus, Yale University Press, 1996.

continues to be the most significant determining factor at the beginning of formal schooling and matriculation thereafter.

While this may be the case, scholarship has shown that age is not inherently linked to intellectual development,[41] and descriptions of early childhood education within *Chazal* point to the fact that the author's of rabbinic literature were aware of this notion. David Kraemer suggests that an experience of transition and change characterizes childhood[42]. Rabbinic texts consistently display an understanding of this feature of the experience of childhood. Some texts take into consideration the intellectual acuity of children during school. B. Hul 24a states, "A pupil who shows no discernible advance in his studies after five years is not likely ever to show it. R. Yose asserted: After three years, for it is said: "To be taught the learning and the language of the Chaldeans...they are to be trained for three years." (Dan. 1:4-5)." Learning styles are taken into account more explicitly in *Pirkei Avot* 5:15 where we read

> "There are four types among those who sit before the sages: a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, and a sieve. A sponge, soaks up everything; A funnel, takes in at one end and lets out the other; A strainer, which lets out the wine and retains the lees; A sieve, which lets out the coarse meal and retains the choice flour."

In these texts, the rabbis differentiate between age and scholastic aptitude, and by doing so, they demonstrate a measured willingness to engage with the child as an individual rather than an entity lacking a unique identity. The acknowledgment of the child as an individual transitioning and matriculating at their own speed is reflective of our contemporary conceptions of childhood.

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[41] https://blogs.ibo.org/blog/2018/03/05/are-multi-age-classes-the-future-of-learning/

[42] Kraemer, David. "Images of Childhood and Adolescence in Talmudic Literature." *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory*, by David Charles. Kraemer, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 65–80.

Gender of the Child being Educated

Identity theory posits that gender as a social construct rather than a biological classification is often determined during an individual's early childhood. Take, for example, the material culture that is associated with particular genders. Dr. Kristine Garroway explains,

> "Picture the following two scenarios: A mother is walking down the street with her small child, who she has dressed in yellow. A woman passing by stops to admire the child and says, "What an adorable little baby-is it a girl or a boy?" In the next scenario, the mother has dressed the little one in pink." A woman stops and says, "Oh, what a cute girl!" The difference between the two scenarios has to do with the signals that yellow and pink put forth. In contemporary American culture, pink is associated with girls. Yellow, on the other hand, is considered a neutral color used for both boys and girls. As the reaction of the person passing by demonstrates, the color of the outfit is the cue for the gender of the child. Studies have shown that color-coded clothing influences the observer; adults who are confronted with one-month-old babies dressed in pink or blue treat the children as girls or boys respectively and offer them "gender-appropriate toys" On the other hand, adults who interact with babies dressed in neutral colors offer the babies gender-neutral toys or guess (usually incorrectly) the gender. The example of color-coded clothing demonstrates on a very basic level that gender belongs to a system of cultural codes generated by society."[43]

Similarly to material culture, education also works to engender children starting at a very young age. Anthropologist David Lancy conflates work and chores as elements of formal education within non-western societies.[44] For example, he writes

> "So central is work in the lives of children that it is often constitutive of their identity.[45] In pre-modern Russia, "our plowboy", "our herd boy", and "our nanny girl" were habitual terms parents used to address their

[43] Kristine Henriksen Garroway, "Gendered or Ungendered? The Perception of Children in Ancient Israel," Journal of Near Eastern Studies 71, no. 1 (April 2012): 95-114.
[44] See footnote 34
[45] Mohammad, Patel H. (1997) Child rearing and socialization among the Savaras. Man and Life 23:173-182)

> children.[46] And among the Tchokwe', "children are identified through the roles they assume [for example] *kambumbu* are children...who help parents in the field."[47]"

The gendered societal roles that individuals play during their childhood are significant to the formation and recognition of a child's unique identity. The rabbinic textual tradition repeatedly uses gender to classify appropriate roles and responsibilities within a community. This gendered classification is representative of an acknowledgment by the authors of these texts to different social experiences of male and female children.

Most rabbinic texts regarding the education of young children speak exclusively to male children. Famously, the *Talmud* and *halachic* literature explicitly forbid women from the study of *Talmud* due to the fact that Torah study is considered a time-bound positive commandment from which women are exempt (*Sifrei D'varim* 46).[48] Additionally, *Kiddushin* 29:b reads

> "[The Gemara asks:] And from where do we derive that she is not obligated to teach herself? [The Gemara answers:] As it is written: "and you shall teach," [which can be read as]: And you shall study [which indicates that] whoever others are commanded to teach is commanded to teach himself, and whoever others are not commanded to teach is not commanded to teach himself. And from where [is derived] that others are not commanded to teach [a woman?] As the verse states: "and you shall teach them to your sons" (Deuteronomy 11:19), [which emphasizes:] Your sons and not your daughters."

Furthermore, in *Sotah* 3:4, we read that Rabbi Eliezier said: "whoever teaches their daughter Torah teaches her promiscuity."

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[46] Gorshkov, Boris B. (2009) Russia's Factory Children: State, Society, and Law, 1800-1917. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
[47] Honwana, Alcinda (2006) Child Soldiers in Africa. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
[48] https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/torah-study

There are, however, particular circumstances when a woman would be allowed to study, and when a father would be allowed to teach his daughters alongside his sons. *Sotah* 21b states, "[The mishnah states: From here] ben Azzai states: A person is obligated to teach [his daughter Torah, so that if she drinks and does not die immediately, she will know that some merit of hers has delayed her punishment]." Ben Azzai believes that a daughter should understand the Torah and commandments so that they may better understand the *Sotah* ritual. In this situation, the daughter is taught Torah so that she may understand their punishment if accused of adultery. Moreover, *Nedarim* 4:3 questions from whom may an individual derive benefit. If Person A vows not to derive benefit from Person B, Person B may still "teach Scripture to the sons and **daughters**" of person A. Despite these Talmudic opinions, the prohibition of women from the study of scripture persisted.

Representations of the education of young women are mostly absent from rabbinic literature. The lack of examples of gendering through education points to an underrepresentation of the female childhood experience. This noted absence further obscures our search for depictions of childhood in rabbinic literature. Whereas the lack of a presentation of childhood is reflective of a literature's understanding of the human experience, the absence of an entire gender's experience from a literature is all the more enlightening of a particular literature's approaches to gender dynamics and identity formation. The lack of text dedicated to the experience of the young woman in relationship with education is a telling reminder of the gender bias of the writers of this literature. While rabbinic literature's lack of representation regarding female education is

misogynistic, and perhaps even discriminatory, conclusions can still be made based on the prejudice we read from this text. The fact that differentiation was made between the genders as it relates to education points to a normalization and recognition of gender roles in society beginning during the stage of toddler or young child.

Motivation of the Child toward Education

Within scholarship on children's motivation toward their studies, anthropologists and sociologists tend to fall within two camps, determinism and constructivism. Sociologist William Corsaro explains that within a deterministic model, "The child plays a basically passive role. In this view, the child is simultaneously a novice with potential to contribute to the maintenance of society and an untamed threat who must be controlled through careful training."[49] In contrast, a constructivist model views the child as an "active agent and eager learner. In this view, the child actively constructs her social world and her place in it."[50] The rabbinic literature falls on both sides of this ideological debate. From the perspective of the constructivist, we encounter texts such as;

> "R. Nehorai used to say: when a man learns Torah in his youth, he may be compared to dough that has been kneaded with warm water. When a man learns Torah during his advanced years, he may be compared to dough that has been kneaded with cold water."[51]

and

> "I went down into the garden of nuts" (Song 6:11) - this is the world; "To look at the green plants of the valley" (ibid.) - these are Israel: "To see

[49] Corsaro, William A. *The Sociology of Childhood*. SAGE Publications, 2018.
[50] ibid
[51] Avot D'Rabbi Natan 23

> whether the vine had blossomed" (ibid.) - this is synagogues and houses of study; "and the pomegranates were in flower" (ibid.) - these are young children who sit occupied with Torah and are arrayed in row upon row, like the seeds of a pomegranate."[52]

On the other hand, a deterministic perspective is offered by a number of anthropological studies on the education of young children. The appearance of a reluctant young scholar is a marker of this approach. Reluctance from children towards their studies is an experience that seems to permeate a majority of western-style educational, cultural constructs, and this determinist marker is prevalent throughout the analysis of children's motivation.

Throughout time when the classroom-student-teacher paradigm exists, we see examples of children rebelling against their educational systems. Some of the oldest records of classroom education include the mention of boring lessons, distracted students, and disciplinarian teachers. A clay tablet dated to the third millennium BCE at Mari in ancient Mesopotamia reads, "My headmaster read my tablet, said: 'There is something missing,' caned me. 'Why didn't you speak Sumerian', caned me. My teacher said 'Your hand is unsatisfactory,' caned me.' And so I began to hate the scribal art."[53] In Greece, "The Teacher's badge of authority was the *narthex*...the stalk of the giant fennel [which had] the capacity to hurt more than a hard stick"[54]. The Roman "schoolmaster's didactic tool of choice was the ruler or the whip: it enabled him to keep

[52] Song of Songs Rabbah 6:11
[53] Kramer, Samuel N. (1963) The Sumerians: Their History, Culture and Character. Chicago, IL: UNiversity of Chicago Press.
[54] Beck, Frederick, A.G. (1965) Album of Greek Education: The Greeks at School and at Play. Sydney: Cheiron Press.

order amidst the rowdy crowd with which he was confronted on a daily basis."[55] Perhaps these measures were put in place because "a primary goal of early schooling was to contain the child's natural exuberance and curiosity and create a pious, disciplined, obedient, and teachable child'[56]" (Lancy 331).

Talmudic sources continue to describe this ancient cultural norm to a degree. Noticeably, corporal punishment is purposefully lenient in some cases within the rabbinic literary tradition. In *Bava Batra* 21a, we read that one should begin the education of a child at a young age in order to ensure proper behavior as a teen. Regarding corporal punishment, the same text continues, "When you strike a child [for educational purposes] hit him only with the strap of a sandal." *Sotah* 47a continues this approach "The sages taught: It should always be [the] left [weaker, hand that] pushes [another away] and [the] right, [stronger, hand that] draws him near." Whereas contemporary societies may have used strict corporal punishment to motivate their young students, Rabbinic sources present a more peaceful approach to encourage their students towards study. Again, this presentation of childhood acknowledges a representation of a child as someone who is experiencing change. The young child learner should be treated differently than the adult, in that we should be understanding of their immaturity and protective of their potential. This conceptualization of childhood continues in ritual instruction.

Regarding the participation of children at the Passover seder:

[55] Laes, Christian (2011) Children in the Roman Empire. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[56] Cunningham, Hugh (1995) Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500. White plains, NY:Longman.

> "The Sages taught: All are obligated in these four cups, including men, women, and children. Rabbi Yehuda said: What benefit do children receive from wine? Rather, one distribute to them roast grains and nuts on Erev Passover, so that they will not sleep and also so they will ask [the four questions]."[57]

And into the medieval period Maimonides writes in his *Peirush ha-Mishnah* (Commentary on the Mishnah):

> "Imagine that a little boy is brought to a Torah Teacher. This is a great benefit to him in light of the education that he will ultimately acquire. But because of his age and ignorance, he understands neither the benefit nor the education that (the teacher) will help him acquire. Of necessity, the teacher, who is more educated than he, will motivate him to study by using something which the young child already desires. (The teacher) should say to him: "Study and I will give you nuts or figs or I will give you a piece of candy." Then he will study hard, not for the sake of studying, since he does not know its value, but in order...to get something that he does desire - a nut or a piece of candy"[58]

In texts like the ones above, the reader witnesses Maimonides's willingness to engage with a young child as a particular and unique entity. He speaks to the desires, frustrations, and naivete of young children. We can read into this commentary a reflection of a teacher's approach to pedagogy. Coupled with previous texts like *Sotah* 47a[59], the reader notices that whether it be moments of punishment or encouragement, the child is presented as a unique individual in the midst of a socio-cultural experience.

Some scholars suggest that the child in rabbinic literature does not play a role as a unique individual, but rather serves a utilitarian determinist function on behalf of the

[57] Pesachim 108b-109a
[58] Moses b. Maimon (Maimonides) Perush ha- Mishnah, Introduction to Sanhedrin, chapter 10, 2:134
[59] "The sages taught: It should always be [the] left [weaker, hand that] pushes [another away] and [the] right, [stronger, hand that] draws him near."

community. This utilitarian function of a young child's education is taken to its most extreme point of reference by historian Ivan G. Marcus who suggests that a primary metaphor for the Child in rabbinic literature represents the child Torah student as a redemptive sacrifice. Marcus writes that "the child who studies the Torah diligently, especially at a young age, is like a pure sacrifice with redemptive power as a form of vicarious atonement for the rest of the Jewish community." (Marcus, Kindle Location 1840) In this reading, the study of schoolchildren is not for their own sake, but rather a necessary cog in the pursuit of the ultimate redemption of the community.

As evidence, Marcus asserts that it is their role as innocent representatives of faith that explains the curriculum of the child. This representation posits why children begin their studies with the book of Leviticus and not Genesis. A *Midrash* asks;

> "Why is Torah Kohanim (the Book of Leviticus) read first? As is taught, R. Yose said: the children begin with the Book of Leviticus. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Let the pure ones occupy themselves with purities."[60]

All the more so, Marcus points out that the study of the sacrifices by schoolchildren was seen as the equivalent as the performances of sacrifices by the priests while the temple stood in Jerusalem. "The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Since you study (lit. occupy yourselves) with the sacrifices, I count it as though you offer a sacrifice (*maqrivin qorban*).[61]" Shabbat 119b notes that where sacrifice used to sustain the world, it has been replaced by the notion that the world only endures because of the breath of the child.

> "R. Hamnuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because teaching children at school had ceased, as is said, "Pour it [God's wrath] out upon

[60] Midrash Vayyiqra Rabbah, 7:3, Margalioth, 156: "R.Isi"
[61] Midrash Vayyiqra Rabbah, 7:3

> the children in the street" (Jer. 6:11). Why "pour it out"? Because "children [are] in the street" and not at school."[62]

Midrash Shir ha-Shirim 13a states this notion explicitly:

> ""Why do we start the children with Leviticus (*Torat Kohanim*)?" Because the breath of schoolchildren makes the world exists. Another interpretation: Just as the sacrifices atone, so do the children atone, as it is written, From the mouths of infants and sucklings you have founded strength'"

When one views the study of Torah by children as an instrument of innocence to further the redemptive hopes of the Jewish community, it becomes clear that the education of children can be viewed as a device used by the community to reach their own ultimate redemptive goals. This utilitarian representation of children implies that children are tools of purity to be used by the adult members of the community. Within this representation, a primary purpose for education is that it provides the community a vehicle for the socialization of the child, all the more so a utilitarian image of the child is a highly deterministic socialization model.

Marcus' presentation of a child's education as a purely utilitarian process of society represents an interesting yet provocative description of the education of children in rabbinic literature. When one takes into account the reality of the literary context of the rabbinic period, we see the emergence of children as entities that are cared for and described as individuals moving through a particular socio-cultural stage of development. While extreme, Marcus's presentation of representations of childhood within rabbinic literature that focuses on the purity of the child is a compelling example of the assumed innocence of children. In other words, even if the child is not seen as

[62] B. Shabbat 119b

an individual, the experience of childhood is recognized as one that is characterized by innocence and purity. Marcus's argument is a radical new way of understanding the education of children in rabbinic literature. While his assertion of children as a metaphorical placeholder for temple sacrifice is intense, the concept that children were ascribed a sense of pure innocence is more in line with this thesis' hypothesis.

Conclusion

Within our presented texts, we saw brief moments of the acknowledgment of the potential individuality of young children beginning their education. Regarding the question of age, the moment when schooling began in rabbinic literature was primarily a biological reality rather than a reflection of the experience of childhood (*Avot* 5:21). Meaning, age rather than individual readiness was the primary determinant regarding the beginning of education. Despite this reading, there are certain instances when a child's intellectual ability was taken into account (*B. Hul* 24a and *Avot* 5:15).

Similarly, when one considers the presentation of the gender of a child as they begin their education, the vast majority of texts do not consider the education and individuality of young women. When a young female's education is considered, it is only in relation to her future as an adult taking part in the *Sotah* ritual, rather than her lived experience as a child. However, the mere separation of the genders points to an understanding of an individual's experience. Lastly, through an analysis of the motivation of a child, we witness a society that pushes a child toward education for the benefit of society as a whole rather than for the benefit of the child. Yet, the appearance of the reluctant young scholar is a cultural phenomenon shared by most

communities that impose a teacher-student-classroom paradigm of education. Furthermore, Marcus's argument and presentation of the child as pure and innocent suggests a particular understanding of the experience of childhood in rabbinic literature. This image parallels Lancy's presentation of childhood in contemporary cultures.

In conclusion, the function of education remains to prepare an individual for their lives as an adult. This concept rings true in rabbinic literature. As we encounter the commencement of education for the toddler or young child, we see that the education of a child serves society as a whole. However, when we consider factors like age, gender, and motivation, we see hints of the acknowledgment of the experience of childhood. In rabbinic literature regarding the beginning of education one may witness the experience of childhood marked by representations of the child as an entity in a transitional social stage, possessing unique non-age dependent intelligence, gendered societal roles, individual agency regarding motivation towards their classroom study, and an ascribed or assumed innocence and purity. In these ways, we have uncovered the acknowledgment of a particular experience of childhood within rabbinic texts that deal with the education of toddlers and young children.

To reflect upon the existence or lack thereof of a presentation of childhood in rabbinic literature, we have examined the beginning of a life and the beginning of education. In hopes of concluding our search for childhood within *Chazal,* we must search for the end of the experience of childhood itself. Throughout this essay, I have presented childhood as a social construction with an indeterminate duration. There is no universal marker for the beginning of childhood, and likewise, there is no single universal marker for the end of the experience of childhood. For our purposes, we will employ the language of adolescence to describe the last stage of the experience of childhood. Thus we will consider the end of adolescence as the end of childhood.

In this chapter, we will define adolescence as the period beginning at the onset of puberty and ending with the cultures' acceptance of an individual with all the legal rights and privileges of adulthood. Childhood Anthropologist David Lancy suggests that "the enduring paradox of adolescence is that when children are biologically ready to claim the rights of adulthood- such as family formation, society is not prepared to grant them." [63] When a particular individual is ready to accept the responsibilities of adulthood, this transition is usually marked by a specific ritual or ceremony.

These culturally imposed transitional ceremonies are not necessarily related to biological or physical changes. In his 1909 major work, *Rites de Passage*, Arnold Van Gennep systematically observed and analyzed ceremonies that celebrated an individuals' transition from one status to another in a given society.[64] Ivan G Marcus summarizes his system of analysis, saying, "Van Gennep posited three characteristic

[63] Lancy, David F. *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. Chapter 8.
[64] https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arnold-van-Gennep

structural elements in rites of passage: separation from a previous situation, a transition or liminal passage between stages, and incorporation into a new phase of life."[65] In a sense, we have already observed two rites of passages within rabbinic literature; the literary culture regarding breastfeeding, and the beginning of a child's education. This chapter presents a third and final rite of passage, marriage.

Several different rites of passages may mark the end of childhood in a wide array of cultures and literature. In rabbinic texts alone, scholars may assert that childhood ends at the age of thirteen with the cultural custom of *bar mitzvah*[66], the onset of puberty [67], or the raising of a child of one's own[68]. Perhaps this chapter should focus on one of these rites of passages. Yet, in the hopes of discussing the culturally created experience of childhood, I sought out a marker of adulthood that was effectively independent of biological or physical changes, and by doing so, isolate the cultural experience of childhood rather than the physical reality of being a child. Each of the markers of adulthood noted above is inherently founded on the physical reality of the individual in question. When a physical change occurs, the individual's legal category is changed. For example, when a young boy reaches the age of 13, they are legally responsible for their actions. Additionally, when a young person begins the physical change of puberty, they attain different legal rights and privileges within Rabbinic literature. Likewise, when an individual has a child, they take on the legal responsibilities of parenthood.

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[65] "Ancient Jewish Pedagogy." *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in the Medieval Europe*, by Ivan G. Marcus, Yale University Press, 1996. Kindle location 1483/4839

[66] Avot 5:21

[67] Kiddushin 16b

[68] Shemot Rabbah 46:5

Marriage stands alone as a culturally created determinant of adulthood that is independent of physical or biological reality. Within rabbinic texts, a wedding is not *mandated* based upon your age or a physical-biological change. The presentation of marriage in rabbinic texts is notable because it is a cultural construct that changes identity concerning legal category, rather than a physical/biological reality affecting one's legal category.

Physical realities such as sexuality, puberty, and age are impossible to ignore during a conversation on marriage, and they will be discussed at length throughout this chapter. However, I found that the discourse regarding these physical realities as they relate to marriage points to a rich understanding of the experience of an individual in transition. Marriage often becomes a priority after physical changes occur, but again, the construct of marriage is not dependent on these changes. The presentation of marriage as a culturally created moment of transition lends this ritual to an in-depth analysis of particular representations of the end of the experience of childhood.

Formal marriage contracts and ceremonies represent a genuinely significant rite of passage in a wide range of contemporary societies. David Lancey offers;

> "In rural Morocco, marriage follows soon after puberty and, with this rite of passage, adulthood is conferred (Davis and David 1989: 59)[69]. Similarly, "Rural India lacks an adolescent culture. The burden of adult responsibilities falls quickly on young people" (Deka 1993: 132)[70]. Copper Inuit girls "would often be married and performing many adult roles even before reaching sexual maturity" (Condon 1987:67)[71]. The following

[69] Davis, Susan S. and Davis, Douglas A. (1989) Adolescence in a Moroccan Town: Making Social Sense. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
[70] Deka, Nalini (1993) India. In Leonore Loeb Adler (Ed.), International Handbook on Gender Roles. Pp. 122-143. Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press.
[71] Condon, Richard G. (1987) Inuit Youth: Growth and Change in the Canadian Arctic. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UNiversity Press.

> analysis of adolescence in a Chinese fishing village fits thousands of villages around the globe…
>
> > "Marriages…[were] arranged when the children were about sixteen years old...the ceremony of marriage conferred adulthood publicly and without any doubt [giving] adolescent usual activity both limitation and legitimation…there were virtually no alternatives offered to adolescents, no choices they could make...no sharp discontinuities at any stage."[72"73]

In each of these cultures, and in many more around the world and throughout time, marriage stands as a fundamental right of passage from childhood into adulthood.

Of course, the transition to adulthood is not the only function of marriage. The ceremony of marriage has served a wide range of cultural functions throughout time. The degree to which the union of two individuals has economic, political, or social consequences differs from culture to culture, however, "marriage is usually tightly controlled as it involves the transfer of wealth between families."[74] The presentation of marriage within rabbinic literature is no different. There are many functions for marriage within the rabbinic textual tradition, and this tightly controlled rite of passage is the subject of an extensive amount of writing. Pages of Talmud are dedicated to the rights and rituals surrounding the legal marriage of two individuals. While the legal functions of the marriage ceremony and contract are particularly interesting, in this chapter, I will be focusing on selected rabbinic texts that reference the experience of childhood and the

[72] Ward, Barbra E. (1970) Temper Tantrums in Kau Said: Some speculations upon their effects. In Philip Mayer (Ed.), Socialization: The Approach from Social Anthropology. Pp. 107-125. Longon: Tavistock Publications.
[73] Lancy, David F. *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. Chapter 8 *Living in Limbo*
[74] Lancy, David F. *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. Pg 22

end of adolescence as it relates to marriage. We will examine two primary functions of marriage, 1) marriage as a tool to subdue or restrain the sexuality of adolescents[75] and 2) marriage as the legal boundary of the end of adolescence.

Restraint of Sexuality as a Marker of the End of Adolescence

Emerging sexuality as it relates to physical, sexual experience, sexual orientation, or sexual identity is a recognized marker of the beginning of adulthood. Likewise, the absence of sexuality is a frequently discussed characteristic of the experience of childhood within our western conception of the child. When an individual's sexuality begins to emerge, it is a noticeable sign that the childhood of that individual is nearing an end. Childhood Sociologist David Cunnigham states rather succinctly, "Today, in popular discourse in the West, we generally associate childhood with such characteristics as innocence, vulnerability, and asexuality." Additionally, writing on the experience of the gay child, queer theorist Lee Edelman writes, "the cult of the child...permits no shrines to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness, for contemporary culture at large...is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end."[76]

Whereas the end of adolescence coincides with the emergence of sexuality, the ceremonial institutions that commemorate the end of adolescence may serve as a commentary on a cultures' perspective on sexuality. This sentiment rings true in

[75] An underwriting question addressed in this chapter is whether or not child marriage is an appropriate demarkation of the absence of the experience of childhood within rabbinic literature. We enter into this conversation with our own contemporary morals in opposition to pedophilia, and child abuse. We choose to apply this moral code to rabbinic texts, questioning whether or not they hold similar standards for the protection of the livelihood of children.

[76] Edelman, Lee. *No Future Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press, 2007. Pg 19.

rabbinic literature, where a significant number of rabbinic texts regarding marriage also reflect upon adolescent sexuality. Rabbinic views on adolescent sexuality generally state that a marriage may be used as a tool to protect a young person from their adolescent sexual urges. By acknowledging a young person's sexual urges before they enter into the legal stage of adulthood, the authors of *Chazal* demonstrate that adolescence. Therefore childhood is an experience with its own cultural norms and societal expectations.

The subduing of adolescent sexuality as a function of marriage in rabbinic texts is reflective of the societal norms of wealth exchange that are associated with marriage within rabbinic literature. The notion that adolescent sexuality is problematic and something that needs to be restricted is a culturally constructed phenomenon. The cultural expectation of virginity and chastity before marriage within rabbinic literature is a noteworthy feature of this discourse. Whereas virginity is important to the rabbis, it should be stated that there is near scholarly consensus to the fact that "it is clear when no property accompanies the marriage, virginity is of little interest,"[77] and in these societies, adolescent stress surrounding sex is almost non-existent[78].

While this may be the case, rabbinic literature was written within a society where wealth exchange *was* an important feature of marriage. Therefore, adolescent sexuality became a point of interest for the rabbis. Of course, this focus on adolescent sexuality is not isolated to the rabbinic tradition. This motif continues to appear in contemporary

[77] Schlegel, Alice (1991) Status, property, and the value on virginity. American Ethnologist 18 (4): 719-734.
[78] Freeman, Derek (1983) Maragaret Mead and Samoa: The making and unmaking of an Anthropological Myth. Cambride, MA: Harvard University Press.

societies. In non-pastoral, patriarchal societies, sexual suppression in adolescence is the norm. When sexual desires become more apparent, non pastoral cultures throughout time have organically or systematically ensured the chastity of their youth.

David Lancey explains:

> In most societies, boys and girls mingle freely during childhood until the pre-teen years. The Fore of Papua New Guinea are typical: “Up to about the age of seven years, the activities of both boys and girls were much the same” (Sorenson 1976: 191)[79]. However at the beginning of middle childhood, children spontaneously segregate…While a relaxed attitude toward pre-adult sexuality may be the rule in foraging (Hewlett and Hewlett 2013:88)[80] and some pastoralist societies, it is seen as problematic in more complex, patriarchal societies (Hotvedt 1990[81]; Barry 2007[82], Broude and Greene 1976[83])...An extreme case is provided by the Guajio pastoralist peoples of northern Colombia. From toddlerhood, girls are warned to keep their distance from all males and told that sex is evil.[84”85]

Similar ideals are represented in rabbinic literature, seeing that the repression of adolescent sexual urges and licentious behavior was a feature of rabbinic writing on the function of marriage. Biblical ideals assert that female virginity was the standard of Jewish law regarding marriage. Deuteronomy 22:20-21 teaches that at the time of

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[79] Sorenson, E. Richard (1976) The edge of the Forest: Land, Childhood and Change in a New Guinea Protoagricultural Society. Washington, DC: Smithsonian INstitution Press.
[80] Hewlett, Bonnie L. and Hewlett, Barry S. (2013) Hunter-gatherer adolescence. In Bonnie L. Hewlett (Ed.), Adolescent Identity. Pp. 73-1011. New York, NY: Routledge.
[81] Hotvedt, Mary E. (1990) Emerging and submerging adolescent sexuality: Culture and seuxal orientation. In John Bancroft and June M. Reinisch (eds.), Adolescence and Puberty. Pp 157-172. New York, NY: Oxford UNiversity Press.
[82] Barry, Herbert L. III. (2007) Customs associated with premarital sexual freedom in 143 societies. Cross-Cultural Research 41: 261-272
[83] Broud, Gwen J. and Greene, Sarah j. (1976) Cross-cultural codes on twenty sexual attitudes and practices. Ethnology 15:409-429.
[84] Watson-Franke, Maria Barabara (1976) To learn for tomorrow: Enculturation of girls and its social importance among the Guajiro of Venezuela. In Johannes WIlber (Ed.), Enculturation in Latin America. Pp.191-211. Los Angeles, Ca: UCLA LAtin American Center Publications.
[85] Lancy, David F. *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. Ch 8 “Living In Limbo”

marriage if “the girl was found not to have been a virgin, then the girl shall be brought out to the entrance of her father’s house, and the men of her town shall stone her to death; for she did a shameful thing in Israel, committing fornication while under her father’s authority.” Somewhat surprisingly, Rabbinic literature suggests a more significant degree of agency for the young woman concerning her sexuality. In reference to virginity claims and chastity law Social Historian of the Medieval Middle East, Eve Krakowski writes, “Rabbinic law deems virginity charges unprovable in most cases; when they are proven, the wayward bride loses not her life but her marriage payment (that is, her dower).”[86] While the prescription for female virginity before marriage certainly existed within Rabbinic Literature, other texts lend themselves to a more understanding view of female sexuality. Sexual intercourse was prohibited, but sexual urges were acknowledged.

Regarding a young woman’s sexuality, *Sanhedrin* 76a writes, “[a *baraita*]: “Do not profane your daughter by causing her to act licentiously.” Rabbi Eliezer says: this is [referring to] one who marries his daughter to an old man. Rabbi Akiva says: this is [referring to] one who delays [the marriage of] his daughter [who is] a grown woman (*bogeret)* ” Rashi comments that when a young woman reaches the stage of *bogeret,* she is apt to engage in licentious behavior.[87] (We will speak more of the *bogeret* later in this chapter.) The authors of this text acknowledge the sexuality of the young woman and simultaneously suggest that it should be both honored by marriage to a proper

[86] Krakowski, Eve. *Coming of Age in Medieval Egypt: Female Adolescence, Jewish Law, and Ordinary Culture*. Princeton University Press, 2018.
[87] Rashi commentary on this Sanhedrin 76a

spouse, and contained by an early betrothal before the stage of autonomous adolescence.

When we explored education as a marker of the experience of childhood, the vast majority of our texts referenced men exclusively. In the presentation of marriage and discourse on sexuality, the young woman is represented frequently within rabbinic texts. Where the education of young women is sorely missing, the sexuality of young women is prominently presented. This telling observation is a disheartening commentary on the focus and priorities of rabbinic literature. *Chazal* is a literature primarily focused on men and the concerns of men. Where women appear, it is often only in relation to their male counterparts. We do not have any rabbinic texts that speak of women in social relationships with other women. Throughout the rabbinic textual tradition regarding marriage, the experience of the young woman is described from the male perspective. It is thus limited to descriptions of women as they relate to men.[88]

Regarding the sexuality of a young man, rabbinic texts continue to seek restraint in the face of adolescent sexual urges. *Kiddushin* 29b reads

> "Rav Huna [conforms] to his [standard line of] reasoning, as he says: [If one is] twenty years old and has not [yet] married a woman, all of his days [will be] in [a state of] sin [concerning sexual matters. The Gemara asks: Can it] enter your mind [that he will be] in [a state of] sin [all his days?] Rather say, [that this means the following]: All of his days [will be] in [a state of] thoughts of sin, [i.e., sexual thoughts.]"

[88] For an extended conversation regarding women in Midrashic literature see: Baskin, Judith R. *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature*. Univ. Press of New England, 2002. For a feminist approach to Jewish thought see: Adler, Rachel. *Engendering Judaism: an Inclusive Theology and Ethics*. Beacon Press, 2005. And Plaskow, Judith. *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1994.

By getting married by the age of 20, the young Jewish man may control his sexual urges and focus on the pursuit of a livelihood, as referenced in *Avot* 5:21. In this text, there is a clear connection made between the evil inclination and sexual thoughts. There is not a great deal of time dedicated to the inner workings of the adolescent mind in rabbinic literature. Still, where it does appear, the reader sees references to a reality of sexuality.

The authors of rabbinic literature acknowledge the reality of adolescent sexual awareness, and in doing so, recognize that childhood is more than a legal classification. With their inclusion, of commentary on sexual inclinations they present an image of the aging child as one of transition, change, and maturation. The dynamic nature of the maturing child in preparation for marriage in rabbinic literature points to an understanding of childhood as a lived cultural experience, rather than a static legal reality.

Marriage as a Legal Marker of the End of Adolescence

Avot 5:21 offers up a rabbinic standard for an ideal life. We read,

> "At five years of age the study of Scripture; at ten the study of Mishnah; At thirteen subject to the commandments; at fifteen the study of Talmud; At eighteen the bridal canopy; At twenty for pursuit [of livelihood]; At thirty the peak of strength; At forty wisdom; At fifty able to give counsel; At sixty old age; At seventy fulness of years; At eighty the age of "strength" at ninety a bent body; At one hundred, as good as dead and gone completely out of the world."

The Rabbinic tradition marks 18 as the model age for a young person to be married.[89] All the more so, the Rabbis state that any man who remains unmarried by the time they reach the age of 20 is living a life of sin.[90] *Sanhedrin* 76b suggests that a young person should be married right after they begin puberty.

The authors of the rabbinic literature thought that the best time to enter into the covenant of marriage was between the ages of eighteen and twenty[91]. Rabbinic texts are largely self-referential, in that the importance and significance of particular ideas are due to layers of commentary focused on said idea. In this self-referential way, the age of twenty is reaffirmed as the end of adolescence and a traditional age for marriage many times throughout rabbinic literature.

For example, as stated earlier, the rabbis suggest that if a man is not married by the time he is 20, then he will live the rest of his life in sin. Interestingly, according to the Rabbis twenty was also a significant age for young women regarding their ability to give birth. *Bava Batra* 119b writes:

> "Rav Hisda says: [if a woman] marries [when she is] less than twenty [years] old, [she is able to] give birth until [she reaches the age of] sixty; [if she marries when she is] twenty [years] old [or older she is able to] give birth until [she reaches the age of] forty; [if she marries when she is] forty [years] old, [she is] no longer] able to [give birth] at all."

Twenty was also the crucial age of discerning the physical development of a young man.[92] Additionally, *Shabbat* 89b references a Midrash stating that one is not punished

[89] Pirkei Avot 5:21
[90] Kiddushin 29b
[91] For a longer discussion on this topic see: David Kraemer, 'Images of Childhood and Adolescence in Talmudic Literature' in David Kramer 9ed.0 *The Jewish family: Metaphor and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp 65-80
[92] B. Yevamot 80a

for sins committed before the age of 20. Lastly, in a telling description of the maturation of young man *Kohelet* 1 (2) states:

> "At age one, he is like a king, seated in a litter while all hug and kiss him. At two, and three he is like a pig, sticking his hands in the gutters. At ten, he skips like a kid. At twenty, he is like a neighing horse, adorning himself and seeking a wife. Having married, he is like an ass. When he has children he becomes brazen like a dog…"

In this particular passage, childhood historian Colin Heywood comments, "The assumption here is that puberty during the teen years may bring sexual awareness, but not the possibility to act on it so that until marriage the male remains irresponsible."[93] Twenty serves as a marker for the end of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood. Marriage ceremoniously marks that transition for young men within rabbinic literature.

Where marriage serves as a cultural milestone for young men, it serves as a tangible legal turning point for women. Within Rabbinic texts, the marriage of a young woman effectively ends her experience of childhood. The betrothal of a young woman had little to do with their physical or biological development but instead serves as an expression of the prevailing chauvinistic power dynamic present in the literature. The rabbis are primarily concerned with answering the question of who has legal and economic control over any individual woman. As a woman moves from childhood to adolescence, to adulthood, her limited rights remain governed by the male hegemonic power structure. With the exception of one narrow period near the end of adolescence (*bogeret)* a woman's maturation is a carefully regimented experience.

[93] Heywood, Colin. *A History of Childhood Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*. Polity Press, 2017.

The physical maturation of a woman is described succinctly in *Mishnah Niddah* 5:7, in which a maturing woman is metaphorized as a growing fig.

> "The sages spoke of the [physical development of] a woman in a parable: an unripe fig, a gi in its early ripening stage and a ripe gid. "An unripe fig": while she is yet a child (תינוקת *tinokot*); " A fig in its early ripening stage": when she is in her youth (נעוריה *noriah)*. In both ages her father is entitled to anything she finds and to her handiwork and to the right of invalidating her vows. "A ripe fig" as soon as she becomes of majority age (בגרה), her father has no longer any right over her."

Eve Karkowsky explains that with these words, the "the Mishnah defines the biblical term *bogeret*, "maiden," not as a generic word for an unmarried woman, but as a technical term that describes girls who have begun but not yet finished puberty."[94] Similarly, this passage defines a distinct legal period of female adolescence "in which the *bogeret* is an autonomous legal actor free from both her father's and her future husband's authority."[95]

Until a young woman reaches this stage of adolescence, they exist without broad legal rights and privileges. A father may sell his daughter into slavery or marry her off to anyone of his choosing. That being said, the existence of this short but meaningful stage of a *bogeret* implies that there was a limited acknowledgment of the possibility of an independent adolescent period for women. When we see the *bogeret,* we witness a stage in the life cycle of a woman where she is no longer a child but not yet an adult. The inclusion of this period is a window into the conception of childhood that may have been held by the rabbis. We will see in a moment that the acknowledgment of adolescence does not necessarily speak to an inherent valuing of childhood from the

[94] Krakowski, Eve. *Coming of Age in Medieval Egypt: Female Adolescence, Jewish Law, and Ordinary Culture*. Princeton University Press, 2018. Pg 114
[95] ibid

writers of these texts. However, the presentation, description, and realization that a pubescent individual is something other than an adult is a powerful acknowledgment of the lived experiences of childhood and adolescence.

While this acknowledgment of adolescence is exciting, we are aware that *bogeret*, beginning at puberty and ending at marriage, was not a guarantee. Within rabbinic law, a father may marry off his daughter at anypoint before puberty. The arrangement of marriage was not contingent on a woman's transition into adolescence. Additionally, a child could be married, and that marriage could be consummated at the incredibly young age of three years.[96] *Mishnah Niddah* 5:4 states explicitly, "a girl of the age of three years and one day may be betrothed by intercourse and if a yavam had intercourse with her, he acquires her thereby." This alarming sentiment is incredibly problematic by our contemporary standards, and there are undoubtedly rabbinic texts that create a polemic against the notion of child marriage.

Kiddushin 41a reads "Rav says, and some say it was by Rabbi Elazar: it is prohibited for a person to betroth his daughter [to a man] when she is a minor, until [such time] that she grows up and says: I want [to marry] so and so." Other sources disapprove of child marriage because it will not lead to children. We are taught in *Niddah* 13b "those who play with children delay the messiah...but "those who play with children," [to] what is it [referring]?...that they marry minor girls who are not [yet] capable of bearing children". Additionally, *Ketubot* 57b writes

> "Rabbi Abba bar Levi said: One may not finalize [an agreement to marry] a minor girl [in order] to marry her while she is [still] a minor, but one may finalize [an agreement to marry] a minor girl [in order] to marry her when

[96] For an extended conversation on this topic see Krakowski, Eve. *Coming of Age in Medieval Egypt: Female Adolescence, Jewish Law, and Ordinary Culture*. Princeton University Press, 2018. Pg 117-118

> she [becomes] an adult woman. Isn't [that] obvious? Lest you say [that one] should be concerned [that] she might become afraid [of marriage] and from [making plans] now, and [this] will [cause her to] weaken."

None of these texts speak explicitly to our contemporary concerns about pedophilia, but they do suggest a cultural structure that may view child marriage as a negative proposition. Whereas the existence of child marriage creates an unnerving reality for contemporary readers of rabbinic texts, the consistent pattern of waiting for marriage until the biological maturation of an individual stands as recognition of the feelings and experience of the child.

Conclusion

If we are to conceive of the experience of childhood as a culturally constructed phenomenon. One influenced but not determined by physical and biological realities. Then, we must also consider the end of childhood with the aid of a culturally constructed rite of passage, and there is no better ceremony to consider than marriage. Marriage provides for the reader a tangible moment in the life cycle of an individual presented in the rabbinic text. At this singular ceremony, the identities of both the young woman and the young man are changed forever. For a young man, marriage symbolizes a cultural transition as a person in control of their sexual urges and accepting of their societal responsibilities. For a young woman, a wedding is a foundational rite of passage out of adolescence and into formal adulthood. As an individual's marriage is affirmed legally and culturally, the young person makes their transition out of childhood and into adulthood. Within the context of rabbinic discourse surrounding marriage, the rabbinic

textual tradition describes the experience of adolescence as one characterized by the suppression of sexuality and the acquisition of responsibility. This presentation is proof positive of a limited understanding of the experience of adolescence and, therefore childhood within rabbinic texts.

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this thesis was an exercise in meaning-making. Rabbinic literature, while dynamic in its impact and importance, is essentially a static cannon. For large swaths of contemporary jews, the relevance of rabbinic texts only comes in its relationship to our own human experiences. We are pushed to ask ourselves what do rabbinic texts and what does rabbinic literature have to say about me and my life? Given that each of us has experienced life as a child, it is my hope that a search for representations of childhood within rabbinic literature would yield a particularly relevant and personal reading of the rabbinic texts.

The results of this search were nuanced and limited. It was clear from the beginning that depictions of childhood like those with which we have become accustomed to in our contemporary society, did not and would not emerge. The authors of rabbinic literature did not concern themselves with stories of children at play, descriptions of preteen culture, or studies of adolescent angst. The questions that I brought to this text were questions of sociology and anthropology. Rabbinic literature does not speak in these terms, nor should we expect them to. The texts that I surveyed were primarily legal documents whose most salient concern was the legal description of social society. The authors of this literature focused on classification rather than robust description or narrative of cultural experiences.

Despite this truth, it is within the rabbinic literature's struggle to classify individuals where I found the most success in my search for representations of childhood. Lancy, Stockton, Cunningham, Kraemer, Garroway and other scholars that I encountered each claim that the experience of childhood is not one that can be

essentialized. Rather, childhood is a social construct defined by its diversity. Childhood is an experience presented in transition. A child is not merely a non-adult, but instead a dynamic individual subject to constant physical, intellectual, and societal change. These changes are presented and described by adults throughout time, and whenever a literature acknowledges this process of multi-layered unique transitions, a presentation of childhood begins to emerge.

Rabbinic texts begin to describe childhood as the baby is born, lives, and is nursed. In chapter 1, we witnessed the literature struggle to identify when a child becomes a person. Rabbinic texts provide the structure for a Jewish notion of delayed personhood. We have discovered through the study of sociological scholarship how important cultural conventions of delayed personhood may be for the parents who experience neonatal death. For centuries, cultures have created structures that allow parents to cope with the loss of deceased children. When rabbinic texts make a differentiation between *nefel* and *tinok* the reader witnesses a system for the mourning of the death of a newborn. The nuanced difference between the two legal categories *nefel* and *tinok* allows contemporary readers to enter into a sophisticated discourse on rabbinic presentations of the attainment of personhood. In some cases, personhood was ascribed to a child when they are born; in other cases personhood is ascribed when a child takes on the identity of a Jew. A Jewish identity within some texts of the rabbinic tradition comes into form at the breast, and through breastfeeding a child assumes recognition of personhood, and at that moment childhood begins.

That identity as a Jewish child continues as that individual receives an education. In chapter 2, we participated in the reading of rabbinic texts that are concerned with the education of a child. We read that a child's age, gender, and motivation all were social determinants of the style and content of the education they received. These texts posited that children of different intellects, gender, and behavior were treated differently. Rabbinic texts that speak to the differing experiences of dissimilar children teach us of the importance the rabbis placed on treating children as individuals. We learn that even in premodern contexts, varying children were treated as distinct participants regarding their education. There was not a singular representation of the minor, rather multiple presentations of children who were experiencing unique changes and transitions. The child emerges as an innocent and malleable character warranting the care and understanding of educators. Rabbinic texts suggest that the experience of childhood as it relates to education is one that is characterized by individualized educational constructs. Modern societies continue to incorporate the importance of individualized pedagogic structures into our own educational systems.

In chapter 3, we searched for the end of adolescence and childhood and found it in the ceremony of marriage. The rabbinic laws and systems describing marriage, puberty, and sexuality may feel very different than our own understanding of adolescence. That being said, the study of the presentation of marriage in rabbinic texts highlights the experience of adolescence. Furthermore, the culturally imposed expectations outlined in these texts elevate adolescence as a time of great change and maturation. The discourse surrounding marriage in rabbinic texts demonstrates how

significant the period of adolescence was for the writers of these texts. Additionally, the presentation of adolescents as emerging adults encountering sexuality and responsibility poignantly parallels our contemporary experience of coming of age.

In closing, I found no explicit description or presentation of the contemporary experience of childhood within rabbinic texts. However, if we read rabbinic texts while choosing to define childhood as a transitional phase characterized by childhood representations of cherub, chattel, or changeling, a representation of childhood begins to emerge. There are no examples of children playing games, but *there are* examples of children attaining their own identity. There are no examples of rambunctious class clowns, but *there are* presentations of reluctant child scholars. There are no records of teenage cliques or fads, but *there is* an acknowledgement of emerging adolescent sexuality and transition. The experience of childhood is by no means a focus of the rabbinic textual tradition, yet the acknowledgment of a transitional phase experienced by children appears throughout the literature.

Childhood was not a primary concern for the authors of this literature, but it is undoubtedly a primary concern for us today. Children have become central to our understanding of ourselves and of a culture's treatment of an innocent and vulnerable population. We are aware today that the experiences of our childhood have an immeasurable effect on who we are as adults. When we focus on the experiences of the child, we choose to recognize that our childhood is of great importance to our identity. When we shine a light on the child, we illuminate an oft-neglected aspect of our cultural experience. As other intelectual analyses of oppressed and vulnerable sub-sections of

society have sought to redeem such classes of society, so too does the study of childhood. Where feminist theory has sought to uncover and elevate the representation of the woman in contempory thought, so too does the study of childhood seek to discover and celebrate the representation of the child.

So then what can be said about a text that represents childhood so sparingly? Our search for childhood found no distinct prize. Yet the process of searching and the discovery of particular instances of childhood experience was useful in creating meaning from this text. We have uncovered nuanced appearances of childhood within the pages of rabbinic literature. The presentation of the child in this literature allows us as contemporary readers of the text to grapple with our ethics regarding childhood. When we ask “why is the child absent from this literature?” we reaffirm the value we have placed on the child in our modern society. We have learned that the writers of this text did not prioritize the record-keeping of the experience of childhood. We have also learned that the writers of these texts acknowledged childhood repeatedly, and in doing so allude to the existence of the experience of childhood within their community.

Aires’ claim that childhood did not exist before the modern period has been proven false time and time again. The representations of childhood that I uncovered in this thesis demonstrated that childhood certainly existed within the pre-modern context. Not only have we uncovered allusions that point to the existence of childhood, but we have also paralleled those experiences with contemporary sociological and anthropological scholarly literature. Through this exercise, we have begun to uncover a

sense of continuity between the representations of childhood in rabbinic texts and representations of childhood within contemporary cultures.

Furthermore, we have uncovered and acknowledged the persistence and perseverance of the experience of childhood. Like a flower blooming between the cracks of a sidewalk, childhood emerges. Even in a text which has little intention to celebrate and uplift the experience of the child, childhood appears. The representations of the experience of childhood within rabbinic literature may be a window through which we may read our contemporary experiences into this text. When we witness presentations of childhood within rabbinic literature, we see ourselves and our own experiences echoed in Jewish textual tradition. When we can read our own contemporary experiences in relation to this text, we create meaning and connection to this immensely significant corpus of Jewish literature.

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