A DIFFERENT KIND OF FAMILY: JEWISH COLLECTIVITY AMONG POST-BOOMER JEWS IN BROOKLYN

MATTHEW LASSER GREEN

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinical Program
New York, New York

January 29, 2018
Advisor: Rabbi Lisa D. Grant, PhD

Acknowledgments

I am especially grateful to Rabbi Dr. Lisa Grant for stewarding me through the process of writing this thesis. Whether in her office at HUC-JIR, over coffee at Root Hill Café in Brooklyn, or even virtually from Europe in the last week of thesis crunch time, Lisa has been an extraordinary thought partner and friend. I am certain that the ideas explored herein are just the beginning of a conversation that she and I will continue for many more years to come. I must also thank Dr. Steven M. Cohen for advising me through the beginning phases of this project, and for helping me to craft a meaningful interview-based study. His guidance paved the way for the bulk of this research and his own scholarship has proven invaluable throughout this project.

I am indebted to Rabbi Rachel Timoner, who took a chance on me three years ago, shifting the course of both my rabbinate and my life. This thesis would be inconceivable without my experience directing Brooklyn Jews, and indeed much of this work will go back to benefit Brooklyn Jews and the wider Congregation Beth Elohim family. My gratitude extends especially to Rachel for funding the transcription of these interviews from her discretionary fund. Thanks as well to Rabbi Marc Katz, Cantor Josh Breitzer, Cantor Shanna Zell, and Sarah Grabiner for being my clergy teammates and my partners in reimagining Brooklyn Jews over the past three years. I'd like to thank the whole CBE community for trusting an intern with oh so many responsibilities.

To Jeff and Nora, Candice and Wayne, thank you for supporting me throughout these almost five years of rabbinical school. And of course, a huge thank you to Jacob Nussbaum, my sparring partner, *chevruta*, confidant, and love. You know I can't smile without you.

Contents

"Brooklyn is a funnel through which much of the U.S. immigrant world has whirled. This dwelling place, often temporary, of so many newcomers to the United States becomes in time a locus of memory, a place to look back at from elsewhere."
- Ilana Abramovitch[1]

Introduction

I have lived in Brooklyn for nearly four years now. Like so many of my peers, I moved here from points west, part of a Millennial migration toward a borough that seemed increasingly at the center of American pop culture. My choice to live here would have shocked my grandfather, who spent his childhood during the Great Depression working in an uncle's kosher butcher shop in Williamsburg. He was symbolic of his generation of American Jews, many of whose memories of Brooklyn would eternally recall the immigrant experience: Yiddish-inflected politics, news and culture, transitioning between Old Country folkways and a new existence on these shores. Yet for the bulk of today's liberal Jewish Brooklynites, whether transplants themselves or longtime residents, Brooklyn is an altogether different place, and being Jewish is an altogether different experience.

When I moved here as a second-year rabbinical student, I started a *chavurah* of young gay Jews whom I had met on the dating app, Grindr, which I called "Grindr Shabbat." My intention was to gather together like-minded people who happened to be Jewish and happened to live within a half-mile radius of my apartment in Crown Heights. It was my first attempt at building an alternative Jewish community for a set of peers who did not seem to fit the molds of the various existing Jewish communities. A year later, through my internship at Congregation Beth Elohim, I dove even deeper in this pursuit. I shifted my energy toward strengthening a project of Beth Elohim called Brooklyn Jews,

[1] Abramovitch, Ilana, and Seán Galvin. "Introduction." *Jews of Brooklyn*. Hanover (N.H.): University Press of New England, 2002, 2.

which the synagogue described as its experiment in crafting meaningful Jewish life for young adults in Brooklyn. Since then especially, I have explored what "meaningful Jewish life" might look like for this demographic, talking to people, understanding the ways in which they are Jewish, and attempting to build Jewish experiences that reflect their sensibilities.

One immediately obvious trait of the young Jews I have met in Brooklyn is their deep ambivalence about religion, Judaism or otherwise. In this sense, they are reflective of their age cohort nationally across the religious spectrum.[2] According to a 2012 Pew study of American religion, almost a third of Millennials were found to be unaffiliated with any religion—the highest proportion of any age group.[3] This number continues to grow, with younger Millennials even less likely to affiliate religiously than older Millennials. Focusing on Jews in particular, a 2013 Pew Study found that sixty-two percent of American Jews think of being Jewish as "mainly a matter of ancestry/culture," as opposed to fifteen percent who answered "religion," and twenty-three percent who said it was a mix of the two.[4] This attitude was somewhat more prevalent among younger Jews than older age brackets.

The above research may not suggest a Jewish shift away from religious affiliation so much as it bespeaks the reality that all living generations of Jews are less religiously motivated than the rest of the American population. Only a quarter of American Jews of all ages say they attend religious services at least once a month, compared to half of the

[2] ter Kuile, Casper and Angie Thurston, "How We Gather" (2016) https://caspertk.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/how-we-gather.pdf
[3] "Nones on the Rise." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C., (Oct. 9, 2012), http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/
[4] "A Portrait of Jewish Americans." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C., (Oct. 1, 2013), http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/, 8

broader American population.[5] Especially in the neighborhoods of Brownstone Brooklyn, where many of the post-boomer newcomers live, and where the population trends significantly more liberal and more educated than the national population, this reality is more pronounced. According to an in-depth 2011 UJA-New York Federation study of New York City demographics, Brownstone Brooklyn represents the most self-described "secular" Jewish community of any area in the metropolitan area (43 percent) and has the lowest rate of synagogue affiliation (25 percent) of any location in the eight-county study.[6] Pairing the broader religious trends of Millennials with these findings about the Brooklyn Jewish community specifically, it appears that describing Judaism in primarily religious terms is not an especially useful way of making Jewish collectivity relevant for these young Jewish adults.

If Judaism is not primarily a religion for these Jews, then what is it? The Pew study hints at an answer when it reports that Jews are more likely to see their Jewishness as mainly a matter of ancestry. Nonetheless, the same Pew study found that Jewish ethnic attachments, as they are conventionally understood, continue to wane with each successive generation of American Jews. Pew reports that the number of Jews who have a majority of Jewish friends gets smaller in each successive age cohort,[7] as does the number of Jews with a high level of "emotional attachment to Israel,"[8] and the number of Jews who marry other

[5] "Portrait," 71
[6] Beck, Pearl, and Steven Cohen, Jacob Ukeles, Ron Miller, "Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011 - Geographic Profile," UJA-Federation of New York, Jan 1 2013 https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/15987, 129. This data is the best and most recent data available, although because of the changing nature of the borough, a new study of Jews in Brownstone Brooklyn is especially necessary. By and large, the findings of this study regarding basic major trends are still relevant for us here.
[7] "Portrait," 62
[8] *ibid.*, 82

Jews.[9] This, too, may be even more pronounced in the neighborhoods of Brownstone Brooklyn. In 2011, only 18 percent of Jews in this catchment area reported a "high level of attachment" to Israel, compared to 44 percent in all eight counties in the study. These Jews also reported the lowest number of mostly Jewish social milieus (20 percent), and the highest rate of intermarriage (59 percent) in the New York metropolitan area.[10]

Based on these findings alone, we might reasonably surmise that a connection to Jewish collectivity should be especially thin among liberal Jewish post-boomers in the neighborhoods of Brooklyn where they have most settled. If these Jews have little interest in religion, and yet do not express ethnic Jewishness the way their forebears did, then how are they Jewish and in what ways do they relate to any sense of Jewish collectivity? This thesis seeks to explore precisely these questions, in a manner that is more formal than merely having beer or coffee dates with Brooklyn Jews participants. From those informal conversations, and from my prior relationships with what we might call outsiders to Jewish life, I had a hunch that there was a thicker feeling of Jewish connectedness than these figures imply. This project attempts to locate and articulate precisely what that feeling is.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I detail the relevant literature describing how American Jews have expressed both their Jewishness and their relationship to Jewish collectivity in the past century. I focus on notions of ethnicity, race, and peoplehood as a way of elucidating what, if anything, might help us understand the beliefs and behaviors of post-boomer Jews in the 2010s. I highlight David Hollinger's notion of post-ethnicity as a particularly salient paradigm for understanding Jewishness in America today. With this as a backdrop, I rely heavily on the work of Noam Pianko, who has demonstrated the

[9] "Portrait," 9
[10] "Jewish Community Study," 129

extent to which the concept of Jewish Peoplehood is a relatively recent American construction, and indeed one that may have outgrown its usefulness for American Jews in relationship to other Jews. I suggest that Pianko's "neighborhood" hypothesis, which states that Jews in the 21st century are best served by creating numerous thick, local collectivities, is a helpful philosophical frame for the rising generation of American Jews.

The second chapter of this thesis details the original research that I pursued for this project. I interviewed fourteen non-Orthodox Jews between the ages of 24 and 37 who represent what I understand as the new "Jewish Middle" after Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen's description of the "Jewish Middle" of Baby Boomers in the late 1990s. These individuals are not members of synagogues or formal Jewish communities, yet they participate at least once a year in organized Jewish life, which I define expansively. All of them live in the neighborhoods of Brooklyn where young adults have moved in recent years, and some of them have participated in the Brooklyn Jews community. Through semi-structured interviews, I explored to what degree and in what ways these individuals related to other Jews, to organized Jewish communities, and to collectivities more broadly. The findings depict a population of post-boomer Jews in which each individual locates him or herself on a hierarchy of Jewishness, whereupon some Jews are "more Jewish" than others. Most important of all, the research shows that indeed these Jews do have a significant connection to other Jews across time and space, although they lack a vocabulary for describing this connection.

In an attempt at providing such a vocabulary, and to respond to the findings of the interviews, I offer a series of policy suggestions for the Brooklyn Jews community in my third and final chapter. I begin by suggesting a metanarrative that offers these Jews both a

philosophical and practical frame for engaging with a Jewish collective in the 21st century. The chapter includes a number of practicable proposals devoted to helping these Jews articulate for themselves what it means to be Jewish, and which help expand the social networks by which they relate to Jewish community.

As a rabbinic thesis, this work seeks to build an intentional strategy toward better serving Brooklyn's population of post-boomer Jews as a rabbi. Indeed, after my ordination, I will continue working with the Brooklyn Jews community and I will put this research into practice. This project includes significant insights for liberal rabbis that seek to craft meaningful Jewish life for post-boomer Jews in other places, but it is especially designed with Brooklyn in mind. In this way, its form reflects its philosophical frame of the "neighborhood" hypothesis, whereby its local orientation allows it to thicken Jewish collectivity most fully for the rising generation of American Jews.

Chapter 1: Learning to Read American Jews

In roughly every decade for the last half century, a major quantitative study of American Jews has made headlines.[11] In each of these studies, researchers have sought to answer questions about how many American Jews there are, whom they are marrying, or what American Jews think about a given issue. Inevitably, in a manner befitting a Borscht Belt joke, each of these questions has yielded more questions. In 1990, for instance, when the National Jewish Population Survey famously found that among then-recently married Jews, roughly half had married non-Jews, an onslaught of questions ensued ranging from how and why this happened, to how might the Jewish community best include non-Jewish partners within organized Jewish life.[12] In this thesis analyzing post-boomer American Jews, I turn to the findings of the most recent quantitative study, the 2013 Pew Study of Jewish Americans, and wonder: What does it mean that 94 percent of American Jews are proud to be Jewish?[13] Does this have a bearing on American Jews' attitudes toward other Jews or to organized Jewish communities? In the pursuit of fleshing out answers to these questions, I conducted fourteen in-depth interviews with post-boomer Jews in Brooklyn, NY, ultimately leading to the policy suggestions at the end of this thesis. Together, these interviews constitute a qualitative snapshot of liberal Jewish Brooklyn that will inform my professional life after rabbinical school.

In the past two decades, a number of researchers have released qualitative studies seeking deeper answers to the various questions that broad national surveys have posed. In

[11] Here I refer to the 1971 National Jewish Population Survey, 1990 NJPS, 2000/1 NJPS, and 2013 Pew Study.
[12] Goldstein, Sidney, and Ariela Keysar, Barry A. Kosmin, Nava Lerer, Jeffrey Scheckner and Joseph Waksberg, "National Jewish Population Survey," 1990
[13] "Portrait," 13

2000, Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen examined the Jewish identities of baby boomers in their study, *The Jew Within*. As its name suggests, their study found that many boomers espoused an individualized attachment to Judaism that broke with many of the mid-twentieth century conventions of organized Jewish life. Cohen and Eisen pointed out that the "sovereign self" fuels the religious commitments of most individual boomer Jews. Importantly, they noted that, "the labor of fashioning a Jewish self remains deeply significant to moderately affiliated American Jews...the quest for Jewish meaning is important to our subjects just as the search for meaning is important to contemporary Americans more generally."[14] Their breakthrough study demonstrated that for American Jewish boomers in the late 1990s, Jewish identity existed predominantly within the "self," and "at home," and much less so in conventional communal structures.

Around the same time that Cohen and Eisen completed *The Jew Within*, Bethamie Horowitz called for new ways of assessing American Jews. For most of the twentieth century, as sociologists attempted to understand American Jews' hybrid identity as both American and Jewish, the question they sought to answer was, "How Jewish Are American Jews?" Recognizing that this did not adequately approach the needs and experience of twenty-first century Jews, Horowitz suggests that researchers seek to answer, "How are American Jews Jewish?"[15] She wrote, "Viewing and measuring Jewishness as if it were a static 'original' culture is problematic if we are to come to terms with contemporary American Jews and how they express their Jewishness (i.e. their relationship to whatever

[14] Cohen, Steven M, and Arnold Eisen. *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*, Indiana University Press (Bloomington, IN), 2000, 8.
[15] Horowitz, Bethamie. "Reframing the Study of Contemporary American Jewry" in *Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (December 2002), 14.

they see as Jewish)."[16] True as this point was in 2002, it may be even truer amidst today's notably diverse post-boomer Jewish population. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, previous articulations of what it means to be Jewish are less helpful when assessing post-boomer Jews.

Ari Kelman and others address this newer reality by seeking to answer another question, formulated even more recently to address the identities of post-boomer Jews: "How might a new generation of American Jews, whose lives are intertwined with non-Jews in unprecedented ways, articulate and express Jewish identity?"[17] By reframing the question, Kelman's team found that post-boomer Jews create their Jewish "selves" by way of their social interactions. Where prior research focused on the influence of certain people on the Jewish identities of American Jews, Kelman's team argues that, "interviewees characterized others instead as *constitutive* of their Jewish identities."[18] In other words, relationships not only have an influence on a person's Jewishness, but indeed a relationship with someone like a family member or partner can define how a person is Jewish. Kelman's work suggests that there is more work to be done exploring the "social selves" of post-boomers, especially vis-a-vis the organized Jewish community. Indeed, the importance of relationships appeared throughout the interviews I conducted.

This thesis draws heavily from the research and methods of the above scholars, honing in on the matter of Jewish collectivity. In seeking to understand the ways in which Jewish post-boomers relate to notions of Jewish collectivity and Jewishness, this project includes a basic overview of race, ethnicity, and peoplehood, replete with the relevant

[16] *ibid.*, 26
[17] Kelman, Ari et al. "The Social Self: Toward the Study of Jewish Lives in the Twenty-first Century," in *Cont Jewry*, 2016, 3.
[18] *ibid.*, 12, italics mine.

categories and conversations that come out of those spheres. Put differently: if we are to create new understandings of who Jews are in relation to one another, it is necessary for us to explore the different constructions that informed Jewishness in the past. What follows is a brief analysis of those topics as they have appeared in important conversations about American Jews from the twentieth century until today.

From Melting Pot to Multiculturalism

On October 5, 1908, Israel Zangwill's play, "The Melting Pot," premiered in Washington, D.C. President Theodore Roosevelt, who was in the audience that night, reportedly expressed only the highest approbation for the play's depiction of races coming together in America.[19] Against a backdrop of dramatically increased immigration to the United States, "the melting pot" became a popular metaphor for understanding the potential for ethnic mixing in American society. This notion suggested that ensuing waves of immigrants could add their ethnic character to the broader pool of ethnicities of America, creating a new ethnicity cast in an Anglo-Saxon mold.[20] Critics of the melting pot premise, like Horace Kallen, suggested that human nature promoted differences between people, and that therefore the idea of an Americanized, ethnically unified populace was impossible. In his 1915 essay "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," Kallen wrote, "the 'American race' is a totally unknown thing."[21] Kallen's critique of the melting pot played a role in the overarching thesis of cultural pluralism, which suggests that different groups could coexist

[19] Szuberla, Guy. "Zangwill's The Melting Pot Plays Chicago," *MELUS*, Vol. 20, No. 3, "History and Memory" (Autumn, 1995), 3

[20] Hollinger, David A. *Postethnic America : beyond multiculturalism*. New York: BasicBooks, 2017. 92.

[21] Kallen, Horace M., "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," 1915, reprinted at http://thenewschoolhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/kallen_democracyvmeltingpot.pdf

in a democratic American civil society akin to a salad of component ingredients as opposed to a homogenized whole.

Writing four decades after Kallen, Will Herberg shifted the focus of the melting pot thesis in his advocacy for a religious pluralism. In his 1955 *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, he observed that people in 1950s America were likely to treat their religion as their primary identity. According to Herberg, the American assimilatory project of the first half of the century resulted in a "triple melting pot" that subsumes ethnic identities into the three categories of Protestant, Catholic, and Jew. Herberg stated that, "however important the ethnic group may have been in the adjustment of the immigrant to American society...the perpetuation of ethnic differences in any serious way is altogether out of line with the logic of American reality."[22] Once ethnicity melts away, in Herberg's view, individuals are left with religion. Key to the relevance of religious pluralism was the fact that it reflected an American context in which Protestants, Catholics, and Jews affiliated with houses of worship in growing numbers.[23]

By the 1960s and 70s, a spirit of ethnic attachment resurfaced in American life, limiting the usefulness of a religious pluralist view. Studies such as Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1963 *Beyond the Melting Pot*, and Michael Novak's 1972 *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics,* ushered in a spirit of multiculturalism that celebrated precisely the ethnic and cultural difference that early Americans attempted to conceal.[24]

---

[22] Herberg, Will. *Protestant, Catholic, Jew : an essay in American religious sociology.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 2017, 23.

[23] For more information on this history in particular, Harvard University's "pluralism project" is a particularly useful resource: http://pluralism.org/encounter/historical-perspectives/a-three-religion-country/

[24] Magid, Shaul. *American post-Judaism : identity and renewal in a postethnic society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017, 16.

This sort of ethnic attachment, however, was markedly different from the ethnic attachment of earlier generations of Jewish immigrants to the United States. In 1979, Herbert Gans' article, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America" addressed this difference directly. "While ethnic ties continue to wane for the third generation [Americans]," Gans asserts, "people of this generation continue to *perceive* themselves as ethnics, whether they define ethnicity in sacred or secular terms."[25] Gans' italics here speak volumes. He suggests that rather than having the same sort of ethnic attachments to occupation and political organizations as their grandparents, this new generation of Americans understands their ethnicity based on terms they themselves create through symbols. Thus, the Jewish ethnicity that Jews in the late 1970s and early 80s *perceived* was based on symbols like food and music as opposed to an essential Jewishness ascribed to them by the outside world.

The Hebrew Race

The subject of race has run through the above analysis like a scarlet thread, and it demands our explicit attention. To be sure, it is impossible to explore questions of Jewish groupness or ethnocultural identity in America without discussing the ways in which Jews have fit into the American racial structure throughout history.

Before the turn of the twentieth century, Jews in America occasionally called themselves Hebrews or Israelites, but were neither referred to as white nor referred to themselves as such.[26] With the influx of immigrants that began in 1880, a race panic befell

[25] Gans, Herbert, "Symbolic Ethnicity: the Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," in *Ethnic and Racial Studies Vol. 2 No. 1*, January 1979, 7.
[26] Pianko, Noam. *Jewish Peoplehood : an American innovation*, 2015, Rutgers University Press, (New Brunswick, NJ), 30

white, Protestant America, mostly fueled by religious animus.[27] Karen Brodkin points out that, "in the nineteenth century, anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism overlapped and fused with racial stigmatization of southern and Eastern Europeans."[28] In her 1998 book, *How Jews Became White Folks*, Brodkin details how the white mainstream used religious, linguistic, and especially class differences to separate Jews and other European immigrant groups into distinct racial categories. Absent a century before, by the 1920s, Protestant America had developed a more specific racial logic that insisted that "real Americans were white and that real whites came from northwest Europe."[29] Important to note here is that this racial stratification relied on the economic position and role of new immigrant groups. Brodkin takes pains to demonstrate that the brief period in which Jews were considered non-white in America was intimately linked with their working class status.[30]

The Second World War and its aftermath changed that. Many Jewish servicemen returning from overseas took advantage of the 1944 GI Bill, which enabled veterans to afford a college education. Within a generation, the number of Jewish men in white color jobs dramatically increased. Between newfound professional jobs and a broader upward economic climate, the majority of American Jews were able to move from working class to middle class, mirroring the population at large. In response to this newfound economic stability, and as a result of the massive suburban housing boom in the postwar era, many Jews were able to purchase relatively inexpensive homes. From a class perspective, then, the Jews had unmistakably improved their social standing. Brodkin illustrates the ways in

[27] Brodkin, Karen How Jews became white folks : and what that says about race in America. New Brunswick, NJ. 1998, 349 Kindle Edition.
[28] *ibid.*, 659 Kindle Edition
[29] Brodkin, 379
[30] *ibid.*, 895

which these trends toward education, certain careers, and suburban homeownership benefited Jews while remaining off-limits to African Americans.[31] Insofar as the GI Bill did not benefit black men as much as it did other ethnic minorities, and inasmuch as suburban developments, restrictive covenants and other housing practices limited African American homeownership, Jews were able to achieve a new social standing in postwar America while black people were not. In her reading of this history, Brodkin persuasively demonstrates that these factors allowed Jews to blend more fluidly with other ethnic groups in a process of becoming white, in contradistinction to a black underclass "other."

By the twenty-first century, American Jews became fully entrenched in white America. Notwithstanding the growing number of Jews of color, and the fact that a large number of Jews come from backgrounds other than Ashkenazi, according to the 2013 Pew Study, 94 percent of American Jews identify themselves as white.[32] The Steinhardt Social Research Institute reports that the number of Jews of color may actually be closer to 11 percent, perhaps signifying that Pew's method of classifying race was not sufficiently broad.[33] Whether the number is 94 percent or somewhat lower, though, this number shows that there is no longer a contradiction between Jewishness and whiteness in the mainstream American racial imagination.

Towards Postethnicity

[31] *ibid.*, 615
[32] "Portrait," 46
[33] Religious Action Center, https://rac.org/embracing-racial-diversity-our-synagogues-who-are-jews-color-joc. The organization B'chol Lashon suggests that this number should be closer to 20 percent if we include the roughly 10 percent of American Jews who come from Sephardic backgrounds. http://www.bechollashon.org/population/north_america/na_color.php

Understanding how Jews came to be considered white is critical for an understanding of how Jews and Jewishness operate in the broader scheme of American ethnic groups, especially given the late twentieth century tendency to categorize ethnic groups in terms of color. David A. Hollinger refers to this as the "ethno-racial pentagon," whereby groups of Americans are lumped into the categories of white, black, yellow, red, and brown.[34] Hollinger points out that by the 1980s and 90s, a movement toward multiculturalism had propped up the idea of an ethno-racial pentagon in its advancement of cultural diversity along these color lines. In this paradigm, Ashkenazi Jews are among other white groups. Offering his own critique of whiteness in this paradigm, Hollinger wryly suggests that however much Jewish Americans might feel different from other white people because of their Jewishness, from an African-American perspective, "it is the whiteness of the whole lot of them that counts."[35]

In his 1995 classic, *Postethnic America*, Hollinger presciently describes a world in which the framework of multiculturalism no longer advances the aim of promoting diversity and equality. He proposes a "postethnic" perspective, which:

> "favors voluntary over involuntary affiliations, balances an appreciation for communities of descent with a determination to make room for new communities, an promotes solidarities of wide scope that incorporate people with different ethnic and racial backgrounds. A postethnic perspective resists the grounding of knowledge and moral values in blood and history, but works within the last generation's recognition that many of the ideas and values once taken to be universal are specific to certain cultures."[36]

Writing nearly two decades after Hollinger, Shaul Magid uses *Postethnic America* as the point of departure for his analysis of American Jewry in the 2010s. In *American Post-*

[34] Hollinger, 8
[35] Hollinger, 28
[36] Hollinger, 3

Judaism, Magid posits that since the United States has entered an era of postethnicity, then the ways in which Jews promote and ensure the survival of Judaism have to move beyond the assumption of Jewish ethnicity. Echoing Hollinger's suggestion of what a postethnic America might look like, and honing in on the Jewish experience, Magid asserts that, "the success of Jews in America, and America's own turn from inherited to constructed identity, has created a challenge that is distinct if not unique in Jewish history."[37] The tension between assimilation and continuity has existed for Jews in other places and at other moments, yet America's especially vigorous assimilatory impulse--especially for white ethnic minorities--makes the American Jewish case distinct. Magid addresses David Biale's understanding of this tension as a "double consciousness" of American Jews between maintaining traditions and fitting in.[38] He points out that without a self-consciously ethnic identity, however, the dialectic of assimilation-continuity or innovation-survival is no longer as useful in understanding the identities of American Jews. To be sure, Magid's observation here marks an important departure from prior Jewish experiences in the Diaspora, underscoring the need for a new articulation of Judaism in the United States.

Throughout *American Post-Judaism,* Magid returns to the case of Jewish Renewal, a decentralized Jewish movement that began in the 1970s commonly associated with the thought of Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. With regard to Schachter-Shalomi's "Paradigm Shift," a foundational Renewal idea that advances a universalized form of Judaism, Magid shows how Renewal approaches Judaism as a world religion instead of a movement geared toward particularist, nationalist aims.[39] Magid posits that, "Renewal's critique of Judaism

[37] Magid, 2
[38] Magid, 25
[39] Magid,128

and its constructive alternative reach down to the very roots of Judaism and Jewishness, offering various ways to reconfigure Judaism for what [he calls] a post-Judaism age, an age where Judaism remains related to but is no longer identical with Jewishness."[40] In this way, he explores the potential of Jewish Renewal to gain traction in a postethnic paradigm. The question remains, however: if young Jews reject religion outright, how does a new American Jewish religion reflect the needs of what young American Jews actually seek?

Historical Familism and Rooted Cosmopolitanism

Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen discuss the tensions inherent in a traditional religious approach to Jewish groupness. Describing a pre-modern paradigm of Jewish collectivity, they point to exclusivity, covenant, and mission as the three pillars of the religious Jewish self's relationship to the world.[41] Returning to an idea that Cohen coined with Charles Liebman in 1990, called "historical familism," they write:

> "*Historical* expresses the extent to which the religion, the culture, the myths, and the symbols of Judaism centered on the historical memory (factually accurate or not) of one particular people. *Familism* points to the several senses in which this people regards itself as unified by ties of blood, with far-reaching consequences that extend from the most abstract theological speculation to the most mundane everyday behavior."[42]

Presenting this paradigm in the context of pre-modern Jews, historical familism is an instructive metaphor for those who understand Jewishness as a family experience. Indeed, throughout *The Jew Within*, Cohen and Eisen emphasize that they consider the family to be "the principal arena for the expression of contemporary Jewish identity."[43] This is

[40] Magid, 2
[41] Cohen and Eisen, 29
[42] Liebman, Charles S, and Steven Cohen. *Two Worlds of Judaism : Israeli and American Experiences*. Yale U.P, 1992. Print., as quoted in full by Cohen and Eisen, 29.
[43] Cohen and Eisen, 72

especially important insofar as "the sovereign self" of these American Jewish boomers relies upon the private sphere of home life to express Jewish identity. Ultimately, despite the growing tensions between liberal, universalistic values and the particularism inherent in Jewish groupness, Cohen and Eisen found that among their interviewees, the three pillars of exclusivity, covenant, and mission remain intact, albeit tailored to accept modern and perhaps secular sensibilities.[44]

Historical familism offers one way of accepting Jewish particularity within the universalistic framework of multiculturalism, specifically the kind of pluralist multiculturalism that allows for a salad bowl of different identities. David Hollinger points out that within multiculturalism, however, the pluralist camp exists in tension with a cosmopolitan camp that may be less compatible with Cohen's notion of historical familism. In contrast to pluralism, which presumes distinct boundaries between groups, Hollinger writes that cosmopolitanism "favors voluntary affiliations. Cosmopolitanism promotes multiple identities, emphasizes the dynamic and changing nature of many groups, and is responsive to the potential for creating new cultural combinations."[45] This cosmopolitan orientation, like the paradigm of postethnicity, does not reject ethnicity outright, but rather recognizes that one can choose to emphasize ethnicity among other socially constructed identities.[46]

The cosmopolitan paradigm responds to the fluidity of contemporary American identity-formation, offering individuals a maximal amount of choice. David Hansen writes that cosmopolitanism emphasizes "what communities and individuals are in the process of

[44] Cohen and Eisen, 134
[45] Hollinger, 3
[46] Magid, 23

becoming through the experience of reflective openness to the new fused with reflective loyalty to the known."[47] The operative word here is "reflective," suggesting that in a cosmopolitan framework, Americans reflect on the various threads in their lives and ultimately choose which threads they like, and how to sew them together. By referring to the "reflective loyalty to the known," Hansen hints at a type of cosmopolitanism known as "rooted cosmopolitanism." As a cheeky counterpoint to the epithet, "rootless cosmopolitan," rooted cosmopolitanism offers a way of sewing together an identity with the various threads at hand, with particular attention to those threads that are inherited.

Kwame Anthony Appiah's 1997 article, "Cosmopolitan Patriots" offers an insight into one way of reconciling universalism and particularism by way of rooted cosmopolitanism. He writes, "you can be cosmopolitan--celebrating the variety of human cultures; rooted--loyal to one's society (or a few) that count as home; liberal--convinced of the value of the individual; and patriotic--celebrating the institutions of the state (or states) within which you live."[48] Appiah understands this rooted cosmopolitanism as a chance for liberals to connect to groupness because it affirms the liberal sensibility of choice while likewise speaking to the liberal appreciation for the freedoms of a specific democratic state, namely the United States. He also points out that both cosmopolitanism and patriotism are distinct from nationalism insofar as they represent "sentiments more than ideologies,"[49] and are therefore better equipped to address the needs of the new millennium. In a Jewish context, then, we might understand rooted cosmopolitanism to be a recognition and

[47] Hansen, David.Hansen, David T. *The teacher and the world : a study of cosmopolitanism and education.* London: Routledge., 2013, 86
[48] Appiah, Kwame Anthony, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," Critical Inquiry, Vol. 23, No. 3, Front Lines/Border Posts (Spring, 1997), pp. 617-639, 633
[49] Appiah, 619

appreciation of the broad menu of identities, Jewish and otherwise, with a special fondness for those identities that "root" Jews in a particular history or experience.

Peoplehood and Its Discontents

In addition to these categories—and perhaps in response to them—many contemporary Jewish leaders discuss global Jewry in terms of being a people. Speaking of Jews as a people allows for a measure of semantic flexibility while discussing Jewish collectivity that each of the above categories does not. Given how hard it can be to define or describe "the Jews" in English, this flexibility is one of the main forces behind the term's ongoing popularity. The idea of Jewish peoplehood, that is, "the process of explaining the condition of being the Jewish people, and the consciousness of being a people," has become especially popular in the language and imagination of Jewish leaders since the turn of the millennium.[50] In 2000, UJA-Federation of New York created a Commission on the Jewish People, followed by a number of similarly named initiatives by other Jewish philanthropic organizations. In 2005, Beit Hatfutsot in Tel Aviv was renamed The Museum of the Jewish People and Center for Peoplehood Education, and in 2011, a Basic Law proposal came before the Knesset to define Israel officially as, "the nation-state of the Jewish People."[51]

Given its prevalence in contemporary Jewish discourse, one might assume that Jewish collectivity has always been understood in the language of peoplehood. Yet, in his 2015 book, *Jewish Peoplehood: An American Innovation*, Noam Pianko demonstrates the ways in which the notion of Jewish peoplehood emerged only in twentieth-century America. Prior to that point, Jews in the United States frequently used the terms Israelites and Hebrews to describe themselves, two words which suggest a vaguely racial or national

[50] Pianko, 8
[51] Pianko 1687 Kindle Edition

character.[52] As Zionism and nationalism became more prevalent after World War I, a growing number of Jews identified themselves as part of a Jewish nation, consonant with the Zionist project. Against this early twentieth century backdrop, Pianko points to the early use of peoplehood to illustrate how the word offered a softer alternative to nationalism and nationality in an era marked by accusations of American Jews' dual national loyalties beyond the United States.

The work of Mordecai Kaplan exemplifies this trend toward peoplehood as well as the subtle nationalist tendencies undergirding it. Kaplan's 1934 *Judaism as a Civilization* argues for a new kind of Jewish expression, recognizing the limitations of religious denominationalism in the American Jewish community. Kaplan critiques Reform Judaism as "trying to have the Jewish religion without the living entity to which that religion belongs--without a living, functioning Jewish people."[53] He proposes a new kind of nationalism, which is based on the Jews being "exemplars of a more progressive type of nationalism that separated the historical bonds of national groups from the political ties of citizenship."[54] Kaplan promotes a type of cultural nationalism that is distinct from other nationalisms, yet the connection to other nationalisms persists. In his critique of Conservative Judaism, Kaplan divides the movement into two separate camps, and suggests that neither of them fully approximates the type of national revival he seeks, deriding the movement for "[deprecating] as secularism the tendency to have the Jews develop a sense of nationality that has anything in common with the nationality of other

[52] Pianko, 30
[53] Kaplan, Mordecai M, and Mel Scult. *Judaism as a civilization : toward a reconstruction of American-Jewish life.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1934. 125
[54] Pianko, 790 Kindle Edition

people."[55] Kaplan, whose name is now synecdochic of the peoplehood paradigm, settled on the word peoplehood only in 1942.[56] Prior to that, he used the word nationalism, and indeed a current of nationalism runs through his philosophy of peoplehood.

Pianko argues that peoplehood reflects a nationalist paradigm in its "rigid boundaries between national groups, the assertion of a shared essential national quality, and the shift to grounding collective narratives in secular history rather than religious narratives."[57] Insofar as peoplehood is a framework reliant on nationalism, then, it may be less useful for a rising generation of American Jews who are increasingly disconnected from (and turned off by) Jewish nationalism. Shaul Magid makes this point explicitly, suggesting that the American Jewish community will inevitably have to grapple with the fact that an ethnically-driven paradigm of peoplehood is "becoming obsolete."[58]

Post-Peoplehood?

Whether or not peoplehood continues to be relevant is the source of much debate. In their 2006 *Commentary* article, "Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?," Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer point out that even in 2000, "younger adults [were] significantly less likely than their elders to agree strongly that 'Jews around the world share a common destiny' or that 'when people are in distress, American Jews have a greater responsibility to rescue Jews than non-Jews."[59] There is no reason to believe that this number has gone up since, and indeed this trend has likely advanced in recent years. The

[55] Kaplan, Civilization 137 and 160 for chapters; 168 for this precise quote.
[56] Pianko, 710 Kindle Edition
[57] *ibid.*, 451 Kindle Edition
[58] Magid, 32
[59] Cohen, Steven M and Jack Wertheimer, "Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?" *Commentary*, June, 2006, pg 34

2013 Pew Study of Jewish Americans reflects a similar, if less extreme, generational shift insofar as "eight in ten Jews 50 and older (80%) say they feel a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people, compared with 70% of Jews under age 50."[60]

Cohen and Wertheimer intriguingly suggest that the success of non-Orthodox Judaism in America has also played a role in separating American Jews off from the rest of global Jewry.[61] This is likely as true today as it was in 2006, especially with the rising public consciousness of Women of the Wall and other hot-button Israeli social issues of importance to non-Orthodox Diaspora Jews. Yet even more striking is the way in which American non-Orthodox and Orthodox Jews are increasingly distant from one another. The 2016 U.S. presidential election drew to the fore the socio-political fissure between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews, which had existed prior to that election and which represents a shift away from the unity inherent to a peoplehood paradigm. The Jewish People Policy Institute's 2017 Annual Report hones in on this particular fissure. Pointing to social and political differences, the report illustrates overarching differences in worldview that mirror the increasingly polarized right and left in the broader American population.[62] This polarization may be distinct from other Jewish trends away from peoplehood inasmuch as it is at least partially fueled by Orthodox Jews' behaviors and beliefs. Nonetheless, it is critical to acknowledge that this cultural context stands to undermine American Jewish comfort with the concept of the Jewish people writ large, especially on the left of the religious spectrum.

---

[60] "Portrait," 53
[61] Cohen and Wertheimer, 36
[62] Fischer, Shlomo and Barry Geltman, Rami Tal, "Annual Assessment: the Situation and Dynamics of the Jewish People, 2017, 5777," The Jewish People Policy Institute, 2017

Pianko's Neighborhood Hypothesis

Recognizing that peoplehood is a relatively modern construction, and keeping in mind the contemporary ambivalence of American Jews toward peoplehood, it is worth considering the extent to which the organized Jewish community ought to continue promoting a focus on peoplehood. Noam Pianko makes this point directly, arguing that, "there is a practical need for an English-language concept and a vocabulary for Jewish identity and collectivity that overcomes the dichotomy of religious versus secular modes of identifying as Jewish and being part of the Jewish people."[63] He argues that as American Jews increasingly identify as something other than religious, such a term is becoming more and more necessary for explaining the Jewish American experience. Pianko follows Ari Kelman in suggesting that even basic quantitative studies like the recent Pew Study are particularly lacking in their approach, since they do not have adequate language to interrogate and understand the idea of a non-religious Jewish life.[64] Per his persuasive argument that peoplehood as a concept masked an overarching nationalist impulse, Pianko argues for a language of collectivity that moves beyond the framework of nationalism. Recognizing the need for a new paradigm that celebrates choice, he points out cleverly that Judaism has always been multivocal, and has never offered only one source of meaning to Jews. Echoing Shaul Magid, Pianko writes that contrary to a peoplehood paradigm, "it might, in fact, be more continuous with the sweep of Jewish history—and in that sense, more authentic—to embrace postethnic trends rather than to reject them."[65]

[63] Pianko, 2642 Kindle Edition
[64] *ibid.*, 2655 Kindle Edition
[65] *ibid.*, 2681 Kindle Edition

Pianko suggests an entirely new approach to Jewish collectivity based on three pillars. First, rejecting Jewish peoplehood's emphasis on "people" over "Jewish," Pianko suggests returning "Jewish" to the center of Jewish collectivity. "By focusing on either Jews or Judaism since the 1950s," he asserts, "peoplehood and religion have internalized a secular/religious split...that reflects two very distinct paths of fitting into Western nation-states: as a nation and as a religious minority."[66] Practically, this means that the American Jewish community is siloed into two camps, one of which revolves around a nationalist view of the Jewish people, and another which revolves around religious denominationalism—neither of which are particularly resonant for young American Jews. By collapsing the distinction between these two camps, Pianko asserts that Jewish behaviors necessarily foster connections between Jews. In this way, "Jewish peoplehood would be seen as building from individual experiences with Jewishness both public and private, rather than establishing peoplehood as an absolute foundation of Jewish identity."[67]

The second dimension of Pianko's thesis is a pivot toward the most local of Jewish collectivities, a shift "from nation to neighborhood." Though much of the contemporary peoplehood discourse focuses on what binds Jews together across various spectra, Pianko suggests that this is a "race to the bottom," insofar as different groups try to find some small lowest common denominator to share with one another.[68] Rather, by focusing on what binds groups of Jews together in ways that are distinct to each individual group, "neighborhoods" of Judaism could emerge that are full-throated in their Jewishness. Unlike

[66] Pianko, 2721
[67] *ibid.*, 2791
[68] *ibid.*, 2836

the "We Are One" model of organizations like UJA-Federation, "neighborhoods seek to build collective consciousness by recognizing the organizing power of specific groups to develop different, and sometimes even mutually incompatible, visions of what it means to be part of the Jewish People."[69] Peoplehood, then, would emerge from the overarching themes that connect different neighborhoods to one another, yet it would be decentralized and therefore more democratic insofar as no single neighborhood could claim to speak for all Jews everywhere.[70] Pianko claims that "rather than getting stuck on what abstractly united Jews, we should focus on how Jewish neighborhoods can—by addressing and embracing very individual and particular expressions of Jewish identity and Jewish life—in fact generate a sense of membership in something much larger than the local."[71]

The final pillar of this neighborhood approach is a shift "from being to doing, from essence to action." Pianko speaks of moving away from determining what single feature can be shared by all Jews and instead focuses on what he calls the Jewish "project" to show how an individual relates to the collective.[72] Speaking of a "project emphasizes the gathering together of groups committed to particular agendas, ideals, and interest in creating specific communities—building experiences in local communities even when those efforts do not directly contribute to the unity of the Jewish people."[73] Each individual and each neighborhood in this hypothesis contributes in some way to their understanding of the Jewish "project." Recognizing that various neighborhoods could produce diverse and diffuse "projects," then, Pianko offers the metaphor of family to speak of

[69] Pianko, 2862 Kindle Edition
[70] *ibid.*, 2889 Kindle Edition
[71] *ibid.*, 2903 Kindle Edition
[72] *ibid.*, 2909 Kindle Edition
[73] *ibid.*, 2923 Kindle Edition

neighborhoods connections to one another. Unlike biological or essentialist orientations toward family, Pianko points to the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's understanding of family resemblances. Families in this sense "have common features, but no one feature defines all members of a family."[74] Importantly, the metaphor of family offers a nod to rooted cosmopolitanism, by suggesting that family "recognizes the centrality of descent in defining Jewish membership historically and reflects the reality that today's families rarely define inclusion by descent alone."[75]

Where This Leaves Us

Examining Jewish and American attitudes toward ethnicity from the beginning of the twentieth century until today, we see that conceptions of American Jewish ethnicity have been far from static over the last century. This history suggests an arc from the promise of an American assimilatory project, towards a multicultural ideal of remaining different but equal, followed by periods of diminished and then heightened ethnic pride. In the latter part of the twentieth century, that ethnicity became largely symbolic, especially as Jews were among the ethnic groups to assimilate into a white mainstream. Though some Jews today reject this, we see here that Jews operate within a racial scheme that extends far beyond their own racial or ethnic consciousness, and that their whiteness is an ethnic phenomenon with which contemporary American Jews must grapple. Insofar as the United States has entered a postethnic era, Jews must go one step further beyond ethnicity and race and contend with the overwhelming choices of how to be Jewish, or even to be Jewish at all. Is a non-Jewish partner of a Jew somehow part of the postethnic Jewish collective? I

[74] Pianko, 2962 Kindle Edition
[75] *ibid*., 2969 Kindle Edition

will suggest in the third chapter that he or she can be included in a queer, expansive notion of family, which differs from the notions of historical familism and rooted cosmopolitanism, but which learns from each of these examples.

Against a dramatically shifting landscape vis-à-vis Jewish ethnic attachments and young Jews' connection to something called "the Jewish People," Pianko's neighborhood hypothesis offers a creative, new paradigm. From the outset, Pianko self-consciously situates his hypothesis within the broader sweep of history and a century's worth of sociological debate about Jewish identity. It is likewise an attempt at reconciling the idea of peoplehood with postethnic or perhaps cosmopolitan sensibilities. It therefore reflects an America in which Jews are no longer distinct because of racial or ethnic boundaries, and in which they face a host of different avenues for Jewish expression, as well as the choice not to express Jewishness at all. The neighborhood hypothesis offers a paradigm for Jewish collectivity that answers Ari Kelman's question: "might we be ready for another shift in the conceptualization of Jewish identity?"[76]

Whether or not each of the dimensions of Pianko's hypothesis proves fruitful in practice, it is a useful frame for this project facing an individual "neighborhood" of Judaism in Brooklyn. In the coming chapter, I will describe my research into how Jewish post-boomers in Brooklyn understand themselves and their relationship to Jewish collectivities, hanging my findings on a scaffolding of the "neighborhood," in the final chapter.

[76] Kelman, 3

Chapter Two: Connected on a Scale

By conventional measurements, post-boomer Jews in Brooklyn are especially unlikely to relate to any sort of Jewish collectivity. They are less likely to care deeply about Israel, less likely to have mostly Jewish friends or Jewish romantic partners, and less likely to belong to a Jewish organization than prior generations. Despite this, my research suggests that these young Jewish adults do feel a connection to other Jews across time and space. This connection does not appear in a religious context, and insofar as the connection is ethnic, this may be even more tenuous than the symbolic ethnicity of Jews in the late twentieth century. Yet a real connection exists, offering a foundation upon which Jewish professionals might build meaningful communal experiences. The research shows that many in this sample feel like they are part of a sort of club, in relationship with Jews they may not even know. Though they describe a certain membership in a Jewish collective, they also describe feelings of otherness within it. They locate themselves as "more" or "less" Jewish than other Jews, on what I call a "scale of Jewishness." Even if Jewish leadership continues to believe in a pluralistic "spectrum" of Jewishness, these individuals are much more likely to make a value judgment about themselves vis-à-vis the perceived "level" of other Jews. It is thus logical that when these Jews find their ways into Jewish communal experiences, it is often by way of an existing friendship.

This research suggests that indeed there may be a collective consciousness among this demographic of Jews, albeit yet unarticulated. In the final chapter, I will offer a frame for how we might understand this collectivity as a kind of queer family. That is, the

connectedness between members of this Jewish collective is sometimes inherited but also often chosen, based on shared values, affinities, and narratives.

Interview Participants

Isaac is a 37-year-old man who runs a software startup. He was raised in a Conservative synagogue in St. Louis, MO, he attended Carlton College and the University of Chicago, and is currently single. He lives in Park Slope.

Arielle is a 31-year-old woman who grew up in Westchester, NY and attended the George Washington University. She runs her own business in digital marketing and is married to a Ukrainian Jewish emigre. She was raised in a Conservative synagogue. She lives in Greenpoint.

Samantha is a single, 31-year-old newcomer to Brooklyn, most recently from Washington, D.C. where she worked in the Obama Administration. She grew up near San Diego, CA, attended Scripps College and Harvard University, and currently works in the field of corporate social accountability. She lives in Brooklyn Heights.

Maya is a single 27-year-old woman who has gotten involved in the IfNotNow community. She is originally from the suburbs of Philadelphia, PA, where her family attended a Reform synagogue. She graduated from Pace University, and works (for the time being) at a Manhattan synagogue. She lives in Crown Heights.

Ryan is a 29-year-old lawyer who attended New York University. He is originally from Iowa City, IA, was raised in a split Reform and Conservative synagogue, and he is currently in a relationship with a Jewish woman. His job takes up the bulk of his time. He lives in Boerum Hill.

Jacob is a single 28-year-old comedy writer from Westchester, NY, where he grew up in a Conservative synagogue. He is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. He lives in Fort Greene.

Joseph is a single 24-year-old man who works in television production. He is originally from Portland, Oregon and he attended the University of Oregon. He lives in Fort Greene.

Olivia is a single 26-year-old woman originally from the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. She graduated from the University of Michigan and currently works in Mayor Bill de Blasio's office. She lives in Crown Heights.

Josh is a 29-year-old man who works for a tech company and is also the founder of a satire magazine. He is originally from New Jersey, where he went to a Conservative synagogue. He attended Haverford College, and is currently in a relationship with a woman who is not Jewish. He lives in Fort Greene.

Rachel is a single 37-year-old woman originally from the suburbs of Cleveland, OH where she grew up in a Reform synagogue. She attended Skidmore College, and works as a food writer. She lives in Fort Greene.

Jessica is a single 25-year-old woman who works in brand communications. Originally from the suburbs of Chicago, IL, she grew up in a Reform synagogue, she attended New York University and spent significant time abroad. She lives in Fort Greene.

Will is a single 27-year-old man originally from Michigan, where he attended a Conservative synagogue. He attended the University of Michigan and currently works in prison oversight for the city. He lives in Bed-Stuy.

Sarah is a 32-year-old woman who grew up in New York City. She is recently married to a woman who is not Jewish, and she works in college access for low-income high school students. She attended Bowdoin College. She currently lives in Park Slope.

Jonah is a 28-year-old man who grew up in Westchester, NY where he attended a Conservative synagogue. He is married to a non-Jewish woman from Luxembourg. He attended Hamilton College and works in finance. He lives in Prospect Heights.

Method

The core of this research relies on a set of personal interviews with fourteen Jews between the ages of 24 and 37 who live in neighborhoods of Brooklyn where young Jews have flocked in recent years, namely Brownstone Brooklyn and the Williamsburg-Greenpoint corridor. By Jews, I mean those individuals who identify as Jews and whom others identify as Jews, regardless of halachic status. I specifically sought out individuals who do not have children, and do not belong to synagogues, but do attend Jewish communal experiences at least once a year.

This particular blend reflects what I understand to be representative of the current generation that corresponds to the "Jewish Middle" detailed in Arnold Eisen and Steven M. Cohen's landmark study from 1999-2000, *The Jew Within*. In that study, Eisen and Cohen selected Jews who were not Orthodox, and were largely not leaders in non-Orthodox Jewish institutions, including synagogues. On the other end of the spectrum, they also excluded those Jews who had "no current connection with organized Jewry, or those with

only the weakest connections."[77] Updating my study to reflect the "middle" of post-boomer Jews in the late 2010s, I sought participants who were not *members* of synagogues nor in leadership positions in Jewish organizations, and who had never found themselves in Orthodox religious or social frameworks. I likewise sought individuals who appear in some sort of Jewish communal setting at least once a year, thereby excluding those Jews who had no interest in Jewish community whatsoever. By maintaining only a loose definition of a Jewish communal experience, I allowed participants to suggest what attending a Jewish communal experience meant to them without projecting onto them my own definitions of Jewish community.

Importantly, there are a number of distinctions I made from the start of this study between the Jews I studied and the participants from *The Jew Within*. One of the assumptions of this study is that post-boomer Jews are less likely to affiliate reflexively with a synagogue the way their parents' generation did. For this reason, I excluded even those Jews who are members of synagogues they attend only on the High Holidays, under the assumption that in 2017, belonging to a synagogue reflects a high level of commitment to organized Jewish life. Twenty years prior, this assumption would have been less appropriate. A few of these participants might indeed belong to a synagogue one day if they become parents, according to conventional wisdom. Nonetheless, this may be far less of a given in the late 2010s, with dropping rates of affiliation in religious settings more broadly.[78] The Jews I study here are also younger than the Jews (mostly between thirty and fifty years old) that Eisen and Cohen interviewed. In their study, nearly all of the participants were married, and of those, almost all were in-married to other Jews. In my

[77] Cohen and Eisen, 184
[78] "Nones on the Rise"

cohort, only some are partnered, and of those who are, less than half are partnered with Jews. Jewish parentage was neither a criterion for being part of the study, nor part of the interview questions. It emerged in the interviews that at least three of the participants here have one non-Jewish parent.

I used two distinct methods to locate these participants. In an email to my circle of friends and colleagues in New York, I asked if these individuals might connect me with Jews that they know in Brooklyn who fit the rough demographic sketch depicted above and I offered them a script to use while connecting each of us.[79] This method accounts for eight of my participants. For the additional six participants, I chose to interview people whom I have met over the past two and a half years of directing the Brooklyn Jews community.[80] I specifically chose people who met the same demographic criteria as the people above, ergo people whom I felt to be reflective of the mainstream. Since I aim to use this project to better understand the potential for the Brooklyn Jews community, I felt that having a group of people already connected to Brooklyn Jews might prove especially useful by way of comparison to the rest of the participants.

When seeking participants, I also asked my colleagues and acquaintances to connect me with those Jews whom they did not think of as unusually engaged in any Jewish community. Each of the people selected here were chosen, then, because someone deemed them not especially "Jewishly involved." This is an imperfect method, especially insofar as it relies on the subjective judgment of insiders, but it proved to be a useful mode of

[79] See Appendix B

[80] Brooklyn Jews is the name of the alternative Jewish community I direct under the auspices of Congregation Beth Elohim in Park Slope. The project describes itself as "an experiment in crafting meaningful Jewish life," specifically for young Jewish adults in the borough.

finding participants for this study. The participants described herein could be construed as "disengaged" by the organized Jewish mainstream or perhaps by various studies of American Jews, but this chapter demonstrates the various ways in which they espouse a meaningful connection to Jewishness and Jewish collectivity that many American Jewish institutions have not yet found a way to serve or reflect.

I modeled the semi-structured interview after two distinct approaches to qualitative interviews. Taking a cue from the work of Ari Kelman et al, the first segment of the interviews asked the participants to reflect broadly on their lives from childhood through adolescence and early adulthood to the present day. This method enabled me to see the ways in which the participants constructed Jewishness in their autobiographies without much prompting to go in a particular direction. In addition to asking them to relay this biography, I asked them to reflect on how being Jewish played a role in their stories. From there, I asked a series of questions adapted from Eisen and Cohen's updated protocol from *The Jew Within*. I specifically chose questions from their study that emphasized participants' relationship with Jewish community and collectivity, as opposed to broader questions about how many traditional Jewish criteria they meet. This choice reflects Bethamie Horowitz's famous shift from "How Jewish are American Jews?" to "How are American Jews Jewish?"[81] and likewise reflects an interest in how young Jews relate to Jewish entities beyond themselves.

These interviews took place over six weeks between November, 2017 and January, 2018, some in person but mostly face-to-face via video chat. Each interview was between 30 and 60 minutes. The names produced here are all pseudonyms.

[81] Horowitz, 22

Ambivalence Toward Jewish Religion

Though I purposefully use an expansive definition of "Jewish experiences," to include those communal experiences that happen outside of formal religious services, the subject of religious observance overwhelmingly came to the fore. Importantly, many of these interviewees have an ambivalent relationship with religious Jewish experiences. Even if almost all of these individuals attend at least one formal religious service each year, they do not do so from a place of spiritual seeking or religious obligation. Many of them like spending time with their family, which they often do at holiday services or occasionally on Shabbat. Many more, as we will see, attend religious Jewish experiences because their friends happen to be going. Three of them said they appreciate attending on the holidays because it is a way of marking time.

Some of the interviewees made a point of mentioning their disbelief in or discomfort discussing God, even in the context of going to services. Isaac, a 37-year-old man who attends services on the High Holidays and two or three times throughout the year on Shabbat, said about services that, "it's so much praise of God in a hundred different ways and I really don't feel anything." Even if he tries to reimagine or interpret God in new ways for himself, he said, the language of the prayers is somewhere between boring and off putting. Roughly half of the respondents suggested that they did not believe in God, and even those who might believe have little interest in services. Arielle, a 31-year-old woman who attends High Holiday services with her family, implied that she does feel an obligation to attend services, both as a statement of commitment to her family and to Jewish tradition. Referring to services as "not the most fun, just something you have to do," she said that Jews have to go through "that spiritual, religious part" before relaxing and having

fun with friends and family at a festive meal. This is hardly a ringing endorsement for services, even from those who attend them.

Intriguingly, fully half of the respondents said that they appreciated the extent to which being Jewish does not demand dogmatic belief, and allows for rich debate. Samantha, a 31-year-old woman who works in the field of corporate responsibility, noted that she likes how "you don't have to believe in God or believe in something greater than all of us to feel connected in a much bigger way, to other things that will extend beyond you and started far before you." In and of themselves, these statements about disbelief, or begrudging comments that when it comes to religious observance, "you just do it," are not surprising. Yet they reify this study's interest in determining how Jews express their Jewish commitments in community, when so many Jewish communal institutions revolve around religious services. As Maya, a 27-year-old woman who has gotten involved with the IfNotNow community, put it: "[Synagogue] isn't how young Jews want to spend their Friday night. Like, I would so much rather go to a friend's house for a potluck Shabbat dinner than have to go to services." Maya's comment states explicitly what many of the respondents hinted at.

It is critical to note the way in which this is not merely fueled by disinterest. In Maya's case, she felt actively pushed away from meaningful engagement in conventional Jewish religious institutions. She explained that a rabbi had treated her in a way she did not like at her bat mitzvah, causing her family to look elsewhere for communal meaning. Expressing disillusionment with Jewish institutions has been an especially fruitful tactic for IfNotNow in recruiting new members, which may be part of why Maya is drawn to the organization. Though IfNotNow is primarily focused on social justice, their overarching

criticism of Jewish institutions as unreflective of young Jews may be resonant beyond the scope of politics or social engagement. Other respondents described instances when rabbis or synagogue politics left a sour taste in their mouths about Jewish communal institutions. Even if a minority of respondents said they may one day belong to synagogues, they also said this would be on behalf of any potential children and not because they expect to get much meaning out of the experience themselves. We might say, then, that these interviewees did not express overwhelming affection for Jewish institutions. By and large, these Jews do not find much meaning in prayer or by engaging with "religion," but they appreciate "reconnecting" to a shared experience that has yet to be fully defined. Articulating this experience is a necessary first step for those Jewish leaders interested in engaging this demographic.

Symbolic Ethnicity Persists

As the above findings suggest, many respondents went out of their way to say they are not religious or "not very religious." Trying to assess what they *are*, then, and not just what they are not, the interview protocol included the following: "There are a variety of different ways in which people talk about what Judaism is. What does being Jewish mean to you?" Evocative answers ensued. Jacob, a 28-year-old comedy writer, explained, "I definitely see it as an ethnic people, and more than just a religion. I can understand why people think otherwise, I just don't think they understand the history of the Jewish People when they say that." Picking up on the usage of "the Jewish People," as a common expression, the interview probed this a little further. Jacob explained that he is "Eastern European Jewish," which makes things complicated when he tries to understand his "ethnic" connection to other kinds of Jews who are not. He said that even if Sephardim do

not have the same background that he does as an Ashkenazi Jew, “we’re still both part of the same thing.”

Jacob’s belief that Jews are simultaneously an “ethnic people” and yet ethnically and culturally heterogeneous is not unique to him. Joe, a 24-year-old television writer, commented that some people might not agree with him that his sense of humor or appreciation for debate are expressions of his Jewishness. He said he liked the idea of “culture binding us all together,” but he noted that he “would probably have very little in common with...Jewish people who are living in Brazil or Jewish people living in the Middle East.” He also said it was challenging to explain, because someone who converts is as Jewish as he is. Arielle was a little less genteel on that particular subject. She explained that when she was growing up in Westchester, she believed that Jews were a religion first and foremost. Now that she is married to a Ukrainian Jewish emigre, she explained, that feeling has shifted, and she notes a distinction between people who are born Jewish and those who religiously convert. She pointed to a 23andMe DNA test that she bought for her parents as an explanation that Jewishness is passed down through blood, and used the language of “race” to describe what being Jewish means to her. Maya also mentioned a desire to get a 23andMe test as a way of investigating her Jewish background.

The above comments were particularly overt references to Jewish ethnicity. Yet equally interesting are the ways in which Jewish ethnicity appeared in subtler ways throughout these interviews. Olivia, a 27-year-old woman who works in city government, spoke about the feeling of being “half Jewish,” because her father is Methodist. She said, “I feel like I can pass, because my last name is not a particularly Jewish name. And the way I look, I could be Jewish but I could also easily not be.” Olivia also mentioned that

despite not having an overt desire to marry or date Jewish men, she finds "Jewish features" attractive and has mostly dated Jews. When asked early on if he identifies as Jewish, Ryan said that he did and likewise noted that because his last name is recognizably Jewish, "people kind of make that assumption." Josh, a 29-year-old man who has dated a number of non-Jewish women, also made the connection between Jewishness and appearance. In a comment about one of his friends, he said: "If you saw him, you'd know he's not Jewish. He's got blond hair…It's funny because I think it's that he actually subtly does not have a Jewish sense of humor." Isaac spoke about his experience dating non-Jewish women and a feeling of cultural difference. When pressed about what Jewish things these non-Jews lacked, he said: "There's the humor, the food, some cynicism, and debate, and caring about books and education. You know, I don't want this necessarily but the worrying part of, you know, like the Jewish mother thing." Isaac noted that a non-Jew might be able to have these things and even suggested that an Italian American woman might end up being just as "Jewish" in this way as other Jewish women.

This study did not seek to find the ways in which Jews "still" express forms of ethnicity, as other studies might. Nonetheless, use of ethnic symbols appeared in almost every interview. In addition to describing and alluding to biologically inherited Jewishness, almost all respondents spoke about family and about food while describing what Judaism has meant to them at various moments in their lives. These comments reveal the ongoing relevance of Gans' notion of "symbolic ethnicity" among post-boomer Jews.[82] Ethnicity does not reflect an all-encompassing worldview so much as a loose construction based on

[82] Gans, 7.

symbols. These symbols matter—especially because they appear to matter to young Jewish adults—but they have limited usefulness for expressing a Jewish collective consciousness in the late 2010s.

Mirroring the national and citywide data explored in the introduction, only two of these participants have mostly Jewish friends, and very few mentioned valuing Jewish romantic relationships. None of them mentioned speaking a Jewish language, and only one outlier suggested that she chose to live in their neighborhood because it had a significant Jewish population. Yet, many of them speak about being Jewish in unmistakably ethnic terms. It is possible that the word "culture" resonates with this demographic, insofar as food and "traditions" extend beyond prayer and God and are especially meaningful to these respondents. There is not, though, a fully articulated way of speaking about culture in this way, and perhaps even regardless of this fact, many of these respondents rely on speaking about Judaism with an ethnic vocabulary.

Social Justice and the Trump Presidency

One dimension of this "culture" that appeared multiple times was the extent to which these interviewees connected their Jewishness to their progressive politics and social engagement. We might associate this with Jewish culture more than religion, since no respondent articulated a religiously mandated attitude toward social justice. As Ryan put it, "I think my dad sort of emphasized the social activism part of being Jewish and so not in the *tikkun olam* sense, but maybe more just like Jewish people tended to care more about certain people and certain things, and how proud he was of that." One other interviewee mentioned the concept of "tikkun olam," but neither he nor Ryan expressed a religious

commitment beyond using this familiar phrase as a kind of catchall for Jewish engagement with justice.

Echoing Ryan, Olivia suggested that a large part of her Jewish identity comes from "identifying with the Jewish lefty, very politically active side" of her mother's family. She noted with pride that her grandfather "was a volunteer fighter in the Spanish Civil War, and then was a professor at [the University of] Michigan. And he, during all the McCarthy era bullshit, was questioned. And there was a lot of 'Jewish Communist' talk about that, which I think was very much related to his identity." Whether or not this is exclusively why she cares about social justice, Nora said she identifies strongly with progressive politics. She volunteers in a local prison, underscoring her interest in criminal justice reform, and her work in the mayor's office bespeaks her passion for civic engagement. Jessica, a 25-year-old woman who volunteers with a number of racial justice organizations in her free time, also noted the importance of history in her own commitment to progressive politics. She briefly worked at a Holocaust museum, which instilled within her, "the idea of never letting this happen again." She said explicitly that that consciousness of the Holocaust "has played into a really big part of my responsibility or my desire for social justice." Like Olivia and Jessica, a few of the other interviewees connected Jewish history with their social justice commitments.

Intriguingly, some participants mentioned both their awareness of Jewish history and their commitment to social justice as undergirding their critique of the State of Israel. Though the interview specifically avoided asking about Israel, a significant minority of respondents mentioned Israel and Zionism as something they struggle to mesh with their social justice commitments. Will, a 27-year-old man who works for the city in criminal

justice reform, said that in adulthood, he has become "much more radicalized in my political thought which has deeply angered me at Israel's relationship to Palestine and the world." He explained that he is disturbed by the organized Jewish community's ability to champion social justice in certain spheres while ignoring what he understands to be deep injustices in Israel. For him, his Jewishness directly impacts why he cares about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He said that if he were not Jewish, then his critique of Israel would not stand out amidst the rest of his social justice concerns. His thinking is, in fact, quite steeped in his Jewish communal attachments. He said: "It's important to me that we as an American Jewish community don't perpetuate violence on that part of the world and it's important for me to build a base that can counter the forces that control that relationship." Will also mentioned that he appreciated observing the high holidays at the synagogue, Kolot Chayenu, in part because they offered free services for non-members, but also because the community emulated his own passion for progressive politics. Maya, who is a member of IfNotNow as mentioned above, said bluntly: "I really believe that if I were not Jewish I probably would not care as much about Israel and I would probably care about a lot of other countries who need a lot of help, too."

Whether explicitly connected to Jewishness or not, this shared commitment to progressive politics and social justice is clearly an important part of how these Jews experience the world. Many of them also said they donate money to or volunteer with political groups, and that their involvement increased during and after the 2016 election. This involvement took shape even in small ways: Isaac pointed out that he bought more subscriptions to newspapers after the election, and Rachel said she began to donate regularly to Planned Parenthood in Vice President Mike Pence's name. Some of the

interviewees brought up Jewishness directly when speaking about this moment in history. Sarah, a 31-year-old woman who works in college access for underprivileged students, commented that she was concerned about the ways in which the country was beginning to mirror Nazi Germany. She noted that, "for some people right now that line has been crossed, like undocumented immigrants," and suggested that she is hyper vigilant about the country moving in a more racist direction. She also said that she donates to Jews For Racial and Economic Justice, once again highlighting a social justice commitment that arises out of a Jewish identity.

Samantha also mentioned the connection to Nazi-era Germany. Speaking of our current moment in time, she said, "you have the late night conversations of 'are we in Germany in the 1920's?' And what are people doing about it?...There's such a 'now-ness' of what Jews and activists have gone through in the past, in the recent past." She followed this up by suggesting that she is aware that Jews in Brooklyn especially are wondering how this moment affects them as Jews and she is curious to have the conversation more broadly in community.

This overarching passion for social justice, as well as the renewed enthusiasm for political activity post-election, reflects the broader Brooklyn community. The borough itself has long been known as a hotbed of progressive politics, and the Jews of Brooklyn represent this sensibility. What is intriguing is the extent to which this moment in American history offers Jews in Brooklyn an opening for yet more engagement with social justice in Jewish spaces, perhaps even alongside their non-Jewish partners, friends, and neighbors.[83]

[83] One such opportunity is Get Organized Brooklyn, a community organizing initiative of Beth Elohim and city council member, Brad Lander.
https://www.getorganizedbk.org/about-get-organized-bk/

It is critical to understand that much of these individuals' commitments to social causes and progressive politics extends far beyond the Jewish community. Apart from connections to Jewish history or feelings of how one's own Jewishness inspires one to support progressive causes, many of these social justice commitments extend far beyond issues that affect Jews. People's interest and support for racial justice, economic justice, refugee rights, and many other issues bespeak an outward-facing mentality and a certain level of cosmopolitanism.

"It's like a Club"

We might imagine that the universalism inherent in the liberal worldview of many of these individuals stands in contrast to the exclusivity of a defined Jewish club. To be sure, it is quite possible that many of these participants would bristle at the idea of all Jews being connected in a sort of exclusive society. Yet it is remarkable how the word and the idea of a "club" emerged in an overwhelming majority of interviews. More intriguing still is the fact that half of the instances where the "club" dimension of Jewishness appeared was in response to the question: "What do you like about being Jewish?" In other words, respondents spoke about the Jewish "club" in response to a question that did not itself have anything to do with exclusivity, collectivity, or other people at even the slightest level. It appears that something about this club-ness has a significant appeal with these individuals.

This experience appears to be mostly involuntary or subconscious. Maya reluctantly suggested that she would probably feel a connection to someone who was Jewish, even if they turned out to be significantly different from her. Similarly, Arielle said that "most of the time, not a hundred percent of the time at all, but knowing that we grew up doing the same traditions, and we probably have similar values" endears her to Jewish

people that she meets. She expressed self-awareness that after talking to someone for a while, it often becomes obvious that that connection only goes so far. Indeed, if Arielle and Maya were to meet, it is likely that their lifestyles and their politics might clash even if they registered for a moment that they were both Jewish.

This awareness that there is plenty to divide Jews beyond their shared Jewishness arose throughout the interviews, as we will see in greater detail below. Nonetheless, Jacob suggested that even if "there are so many types" of Jews who are involved in a whole host of different cultures and industries, "when you find out that someone's Jewish, there's an immediate kind of kinship I feel, at least. I like that." Jessica spoke of this connection to other Jews as a feeling of warmth when in Jewish spaces such as Shabbat services. She referred to such spaces as places "where people understand you," and while also acknowledging the limitations of connecting to people solely on the basis of shared Jewishness, she said she liked "that concept of coming from that similar place and understanding one another." This thought arose when she was asked specifically how Jewish community could add meaning in her life, suggesting that a feeling of shared past may have ongoing resonance in Jewish communal spaces.

While referring to the sort of club dimension of Jewishness, the interviewees did not suggest that this was particularly unique to the Jewish experience. Jonah, a 29-year-old man who works in finance, suggested that he was not sure if this was purely "a Jewish thing or if any kind of minority group would have the same reaction to each other." Josh posited that Muslims might feel similarly, and pointed to popular culture where examples abound of different groups claiming groupness in some way. "You see stuff on Facebook all the time," he said, "people posting about those Buzzfeed things about ten reasons you

know you were born to a Saudi mom or something." Understanding the Jewish "club" in this way suggests that the "club" of being Jewish is not necessarily unique among groups. In other words, these individuals are not necessarily reflecting a form of "chosenness," but rather expressing a sentiment of being part of a club in an interpersonal and non-exceptional way.

Jewish Encounters Abroad

In addition to naming the club dimension of Jewishness outright, multiple respondents mentioned their experiences traveling, studying, or living outside of the United States. Outside of the familiar context of home, these individuals described a palpable and warm connection to other Jews. Rachel, a 37-year-old food writer, spoke of a particularly poignant high school trip to Prague, where she encountered a local Jewish boy in one of the city's synagogues. She recalled:

> "I just felt like I wanted to have a moment with him, but it was weird because he didn't really speak English. I don't know, just felt strongly. I was like, 'hey, you're my age, but your experience in life is so different than mine. Like you're one of probably not many Jews in Prague or in Europe and you're so visible, you have these payos.'...It just made me think, 'Wow, I could have ended up in Europe. My story could be so different than what it is.'"

Rachel's interest in this boy bespeaks the feeling of membership in the same club, and her comment about how she herself could have "ended up in Europe," implies a sense of shared history, memory, or narrative.

While Rachel experienced a Jewish connection somewhat unexpectedly, Jessica actively sought out Jewish experiences while studying abroad in both France and China. She described experiences going to Shabbat and holiday services in both places with friends who were Jewish, and she said it was comforting to have that community even if they practiced a different form of Judaism than she was used to. Likewise, on a family trip

to Italy, Jacob attended Shabbat services at a local synagogue. “We don’t speak Italian and they don’t speak English,” he said, “Yet somehow we were both speaking Hebrew. There was something really cool about that kind of international like, ‘we’re part of the same kind of group in some respect.’ I kind of liked that.” Understandably, leaving the familiar context of one’s own country opens an individual up to exploring their identity in a new way. Yet what stands out in each of these vignettes is ability to connect in a unique way with different kinds of Jews who express Jewishness differently in other parts of the world. The experience of feeling connected to other Jews while traveling is not new to post-boomer Jews, yet it suggests one way in which young Jews feel a connection to Jewish collectivity like their parents’ generation.

In trying to define this connection, Joe added that whatever unity there might be in this feeling shared by all Jews, “it is not just biology, it is not just belief.” Like the rest of those interviewed, Joe did not suggest a concrete answer as to what it is that ties Jews together if it is neither blood nor religion. The key finding here is that so many of these Jews feel a connection to other Jews in time and space, even to those people whose Jewishness is expressed differently from their own, yet there is no language for discussing it in a meaningful and complex way. It is not a religious connection, and it is not a blood connection. The words “ethnic” and “cultural” present limitations as well, since, as a few people noted, there may not be so much ethnic or cultural connection between Ashkenazi Jews in North America and, say, Middle Eastern Jews in Israel or elsewhere. The word and idea of a unified “people” also has its limitations, as we will see, although this term does resonate more than the idea of a unified “religion.” This research suggests a need for new vocabulary around what this Jewish “club” is, and implies that there is an overarching

warmth toward finding one's place in the world among Jews, even if that warmth is not the only feeling associated with it. Ultimately, as Rachel put it: "it just feels comforting to feel like there's this great big world and we're just part of something that's on a much smaller scale. I don't know, it's like being in a club." For Rachel and for the interviewees like her, a new vocabulary of connectedness might be useful.

"Inside and Outside": a Scale of Jewishness

Olivia also mentioned a clublike connection to other Jews whom she meets. She said she feels an "immediate connection," when she finds out that someone is Jewish. Yet she added an important qualification immediately thereafter: "I sometimes have this fear that I'm not Jewish because I don't have the religious experience, and even as we're talking now, I realize how insecure I often feel about it." She thought for a moment and then reflected on a time when she felt particularly insecure about her Jewishness. While swimming at a recreation center in Crown Heights, an awkward conversation with an Orthodox woman made her question her own claim to Jewish identity. More broadly, she says, she feels unwelcome when walking through Hasidic neighborhoods in Brooklyn. As she tried to explain this feeling, she searched for the right word and stopped herself:

> "That's when I feel very uncomfortable. I feel uncomfortable when I don't know, when I feel like I fucked up a Jewish term, and then that makes me not Jewish. Do you see what I'm saying?...I'll Google to make sure I spell 'Hanukkah' right, even though I know there's like a million ways to spell it. And I'll want to make sure that I got the most common spelling. I'll really think through those things, just because I want to feel part of the group in that way."

In this scenario, Olivia makes clear that her acceptance by "the group" hinges on how the group perceives her level of Jewish literacy. Yet the subjective benchmark of Jewish literacy alone may misrepresent the awareness that Olivia actually seeks to project. It seems that literacy is less important for acceptance than some other recognizable quotient of

Jewishness. If Olivia's case is any indication, it is important to determine what that measurement is insofar as it may be the barrier to a meaningful engagement with Jewish communal life.

In many of these interviews, the respondents ranked themselves and other Jews on a scale of Jewishness. Many understand Jewish diversity in hierarchical terms. Raised in a small synagogue with both Reform and Conservative populations, for instance, Ryan said that he opted to have a Conservative bar mitzvah, since "the smarter kids tended to have Conservative bar mitzvahs." In the same breath, he noted that he might not even qualify to have a bar mitzvah by Conservative standards, but he chose to do so because "you had to show you were more dedicated so you'd do the longer service with more Hebrew." Representative of many of the interviewees, Ryan implied that there was an assumed scale of Jewishness with Conservative Jews representing more seriousness than Reform. Before we assume that this scale has only to deal with ritual observance, Ryan added that in the Jewish community in Iowa City where he was raised, "there was like seventy percent of half-Jew/half-not kids, and then there was like this Hasidic group [nearby in Postville], which was a very strange upbringing for me." Ryan's second comment suggests that "half-Jews" and Hasidim represent opposite sides of some continuum, adding a whiff of ethnicity to the hierarchy already stated.

In Samantha's case, the underpinnings of this hierarchy was made more explicit: "There's always the 'you weren't bat mitzvahed and your mom's not Jewish thing.' That never goes away. There's still the feeling of [being] a little bit of a fraud." She noted that as an adolescent, she was aware that she would not have a bat mitzvah like her cousins. While remaining close with her Jewish extended family, she said she felt a perpetual feeling

that “we weren’t Jewish enough” in comparison to them. On the other side of the same coin, Jacob pointed out that when he was growing up, other Jewish students in his public school viewed him as “one of the more Jewish kids.” In his mind, this was because he went to extracurricular Hebrew school, had a bar mitzvah, and kept kosher in the home. In these interviews, words like “more” and “less” and “enough” emerged as almost every interviewee constructed his or her own rung on a scale of Jewishness.

Arielle came closest to defining that scale when she spoke of occasionally going to Hillel in college with her “super-Jew friends,” who had attended Jewish day school. For her, the idea of attending a Jewish day school felt like a novelty, and she noted that it was peculiar to imagine these friends studying Bible and math in the same high school. Instead of maintaining close ties with these Jews, Arielle’s friends in college were “Jews at my level.” She elaborated: “I wouldn’t have been friends with a super religious Jew because we all went out on Friday nights and Saturday and no one was Shomer Shabbos or anything.” Intriguingly, Arielle was the only respondent to say that almost all of her friends were Jewish. She made a point of repeating, though, that at least when she was in college, these Jewish friends “were all Jews at my level, from all over the East Coast.” In this case, it is likely that class and economic background played another role in defining her “level,” which is an important consideration. Nonetheless, Arielle and others’ use of the word, “level,” bespeaks a scale of Jewishness, wherein some Jews are positioned higher than others based on relatively undefined criteria.

Suggesting that people are “positioned” rather than positioning themselves in a hierarchy is critical for two reasons. First, as much as these individuals appear to be locating themselves on a kind of scale of Jewishness, they articulated that other Jews

perceive them to be at a given level. It is therefore a passive designation. Moreover, since this scale emerges out of the way in which these people were raised, it seems just as fair to refer to their "level" of Jewishness as the place in which their parents positioned them. The aforementioned language of "scale" is an important shift away from understanding Jewish diversity along a "spectrum." Though many of these respondents and indeed many Jewish thought leaders tend to use the word "spectrum" to describe a Jewish collective with many different modes of expression, there is a value judgment inherent within this conversation that "spectrum" does not convey. By contrast, the language of "scale" conveys the belief that some Jews are at a higher, and therefore better, level of Jewishness than others. Virtually all of the respondents compare different Jewish groups in this way.

In and of itself, this observation is not so surprising. It matters for our analysis, though, when this feeling of inferiority detracts from potentially meaningful Jewish communal experiences. Olivia, who had spoken of her anxiety spelling the word "Hanukkah," described her discomfort at attending Shir Hamaalot, a "traditional egalitarian havurah" in Prospect Heights[84]. She explained that she felt like she was "flubbing" and "faking" the prayers, and that in a conversation about a Jewish topic with one of the other participants that evening, she felt like "my sentiments [were] just so much more general than hers." Ultimately, she noted that she enjoyed the service, which she described as "cathartic and helpful." Nonetheless, it is important to consider what the experience might have been like had Olivia felt equal to the other participants in that community vis-a-vis this yet-unarticulated Jewish quotient. These interviews suggest that

[84] This is how Shir Hamaalot refers to itself, according to its website: http://www.shirhamaalotbk.org

Jewish communal leaders need to understand the ways in which feeling Jewishly othered or Jewishly inferior dissuade Jews from engaging in Jewish community.

Orthodoxy

Enter Orthodox Jews, the ultimate insiders in this perceived club. Remarkably, twelve of the fourteen respondents mentioned Orthodox Jews, frequently in relation to their own "level" of Jewishness. Jessica, who had sought out Jewish experiences while studying abroad, explained that some of the experiences she found were Orthodox. While she appreciated the experiences, she said, "I definitely still felt like a little bit of an outsider there, just not knowing a lot of the Orthodox traditions, and some of the melodies, and how things worked. So there was still some of that inside, outside feeling." Sarah noted a similar experience working as an extracurricular basketball coach to a team of adolescent Orthodox boys. On the one hand, Sarah felt connected to them because of their shared identity, which made her feel "really at home, and like it's my community." Yet on the other hand, she described feeling alienated and judged for not knowing more about Judaism. She expressed this same feeling in other non-Orthodox Jewish spaces, while noting that she still wanted to feel part of the community despite a lack of familiarity.

In some cases, the connection to Orthodoxy appeared through extended family. Jacob explained that his sister became more observant as an undergraduate and is now living an Orthodox lifestyle married on Long Island. He said he has spent holidays with her and has concluded that Orthodoxy does not make sense in his life. Rachel's aunt married an Orthodox man, whose family "wouldn't come to my bat mitzvah and that feels fucked up." She puts it succinctly that her familial unit "wasn't Jewish enough for them to

come to my bat mitzvah...I don't know much about it, but it feels like a very sort of like, not progressive and misogynistic culture. Yeah, not into that."

Family connections notwithstanding, it is likely that Orthodoxy is especially resonant for these individuals because they live in Brooklyn, where there is a high visibility of Hasidic Jews in particular. Most notable is Chabad Lubavitch, with its aim to reach out to non-observant Jews. Olivia explained that she sometimes gets stopped by Lubavitchers as well, and she noted that she has "seen them purposely not choose blond people, so it's kind of funny to sit back and watch." Arielle, who is married to a Jew who emigrated from Odessa, Ukraine, mentioned that she visited the Chabad world headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway with her husband who developed a relationship with the movement upon immigrating to the United States. Though she appreciates her husband's connection to it, she announced, "I went once, I won't go again."

Joe, who had the least experience in Jewish communal spaces of all the interviewees, found himself at 770 as well for a Rosh Hashanah gathering with an Israeli couple whom he had met by chance while trying to navigate the New York City buses. He was surprised to learn that Chabad Jews "partied" and ended up staying at the event until early in the morning. Joe explained that he likes "that I had access to that spontaneous experience just because I was Jewish. You know all the Chabad guys are super into just being friendly and making Jewish people feel welcome no matter what. It's this unconditional love they have for Jews. I appreciate that when it comes." He offered this insight in a lengthy explanation of Jews as a club, which itself was a response to what he likes about being Jewish. It is therefore worth noting that as someone who only occasionally finds himself in organized Jewish settings, Joe is self-aware about the access

he has even as a relatively disconnected Jew. The "unconditional love" he felt from Chabad in this scenario may have something to do with that.

Local Ties

The proximity and visibility of Orthodoxy makes the Jewish experience in the borough distinct, yet Jewish life in Brooklyn is distinct for many more reasons than this alone. Brooklyn itself and New York City more broadly emerged throughout these interviews as an important dimension in these respondents' lives both Jewishly and otherwise. Indeed, many of these reflect the unique status of New York City, and Brooklyn more specifically, in both the American Jewish imagination and in the reality of Jewish family histories.

Joe explained that New York City loomed large in his childhood imagination. Growing up with Brooklyn-born Jewish parents among predominantly non-Jews in Portland Oregon, he recalled "feeling a sense of relief that Jewish people have such a presence," during his first few trips to New York. Comparing life in the city to his upbringing, Ryan also pointed out that "in New York, all these shows [like Seinfeld] feel like they could be people that you know, whereas in Iowa, these shows were about people who were unlike the people around." Maya stated this even more explicitly, by explaining that her grandparents instilled within her a love for Judaism by way of New York Jewish culture. She even said that the city's Jewish history was one of the reasons why she moved to New York in the first place.

Even Sarah, who was born and raised in New York City, commented on the unique New York mode of Jewishness, exemplified for her by being around "New York Jews" at the Park Slope Food Co-Op. When asked to define this group, she described them as

"passionate, smart, connected, like the joke of being in therapy because of course we're all in therapy, [we're] honest—not like WASPY pretending." Fascinating though these comments are, it is even more instructive for us to note that Sarah said she liked feeling rooted in the Park Slope community by way of her membership in the food co-op. In this way, she mirrored Jessica, who mentioned that when she moved to Brooklyn, she did "a very Brooklyn thing," and also joined a food co-op. She said she liked synchronizing her financial decisions and her daily behaviors with her philosophical beliefs, rooted in a local community.

Jessica presented a similar attitude when she spoke about volunteering with a local organization committed to racial justice. She said she "realized that doing that work in my neighborhood would be a little more inspiring and would also create more community and allow me to be more involved in the place where I live." Though she explained that she does not expect to become close friends with her neighbors, she noted her belief that neighbor-to-neighbor interactions are a critical component of the social justice work she pursues. In addition to donating money to a couple of national organizations, Jessica made clear that she prefers to donate her time to various causes, which ends up having more of a local impact.

Local, interpersonal and familiar relationships emerged throughout these interviews as a key dimension of how these individuals donate both their money and their time. Samantha, Joe, and Jonah all mentioned specifically that when they make charitable donations, they generally do so based on various causes in which their friends are involved. Jacob described volunteering at a soup kitchen run by a comedy troupe in which he is involved both professionally and socially. Though each of these respondents might be

inclined to donate to other causes they care about, it is important to note that a feeling of familiarity and maybe even social connection guides them towards these particular modes of involvement. While there may be some social pressure to contribute to friends' causes, it is equally likely that donating to a cause about which a friend is passionate elicits a warm feeling of helping out their friends. In some cases, as Jessica suggested, this may also come from feeling that a donation to a local charity makes an impact that an individual can actually see or feel on a smaller scale, as opposed to donating to a large organization like the ACLU or Planned Parenthood, two national organizations favored by many interviewees.

Especially significant for our analysis is the ways in which this kind of interpersonal connection likewise has had a significant impact on how these individuals find their way to organized Jewish spaces. Describing why he attends High Holiday services, Isaac said it offers him a chance to be with his brother and sister, and another close friend. While acknowledging that he often does not connect with the majority of the participants in Brooklyn Jews programming, Will insisted that there were two or three friends who attend Brooklyn Jews events that he looks forward to seeing each time he participates. Josh and Ryan both spoke of how they attended Jewish services with romantic partners who were more interested in religious services than they were. Importantly, when Jonah got married to a woman who is not Jewish, her interest in his background led them both to seek out more Jewish experiences. Referring to his Jewishness before and after his engagement, Jonah said, "what went from a not important thing...became really important."

Despite each of the above respondents identifying as straight males, with or without romantic partners, a similar phenomenon emerged among both the single and partnered

women in this study. Maya was initially hesitant about getting involved with Jewish organizations until a friend asked her to join him at a training for IfNotNow. Sarah said that meeting and getting married to her non-Jewish partner caused her to think about Jewish identity in new ways, leading her to ask a rabbi to officiate her wedding. She says she is "more Jewish now than I've ever been" as a result.

Finding an entryway into organized Jewish life through friends makes sense, insofar as many of these interviewees commented on the importance of friends in their lives. The vast majority of interviewees responded to the question of how they spend their free time by describing their friends or partners in a number of contexts. This data meshes with the shift from Sovereign Self to Social Self, as Ari Kelman has demonstrated in his analysis of young Jewish adults.[85] It is, therefore, potentially useful for Jewish community builders to grasp the ways in which post-boomer Jews make choices with their time and money based around their existing social networks.

Picking up on her own awareness of how she winds up at various Jewish events, Jessica suggested that Jewish communal events might benefit from a more intentional person-to-person orientation. After describing her experience with intimate relationship-building in social justice organizations, she said:

> I think building some more of that into the Jewish experience is important because even with my friends who I've met through some more Jewish activities recently, happened to be friends for other reasons, but it doesn't seem like they've really connected to people at some of the activities that they've been going to. I don't usually hear like, "Oh, I met this person at Shabbat and now we're hanging out a lot more."

Jessica's comment here suggests that some of the Jewish events she has attended have failed to be fully intentional about whom they are bringing together or thoughtful about

[85] Kelman, 12

how they might build connections between participants. Her comments, among others, imply that though Jewish communal leaders speak of "community," they do not fully follow through in cultivating the one-on-one relationships that form the bedrock of communal structures. Jessica added that "the local aspect is important for that," since she has occasionally gone to Manhattan for Jewish events, but ultimately seeks friendships that are more accessible for her.

Conclusion

These interviews offer us a glimpse of who this population is and how they might relate to one another in community. The respondents more or less mirror the quantitative data about post-boomers and about non-Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn, especially when it comes to religious ambivalence and weakening ties to conventional modes of Jewish collectivity. Yet, as we have seen, they relate to the Jewish collective in a way that even they do not fully understand. They feel a positive connection to other Jews despite frequently feeling outside of the mainstream Jewish community. In some cases, their connection to non-Jewish partners makes them feel "more" Jewish and makes them more inclined to seek out organized Jewish experiences. One of the most important findings of this project is the extent to which these people locate themselves on a "scale" of Jewishness. Many observers of American Jews and indeed many Jewish professionals are rightfully hesitant to speak in the language of a "scale" in hierarchical terms, which can be off-putting against a backdrop of Jewish pluralism. Yet because these respondents understand themselves and others on such a scale, we must address it.

These individuals connect their Jewishness with their social justice commitments, which play a significant role in the ethos of liberal Jewish Brooklyn. Both in social justice

spaces and elsewhere, this research shows how local ties and one-on-one relationships are critical in community formation for this demographic. It is especially important to highlight the ways in which one single individual might be the force that causes someone to get involved with a Jewish experience or community. In the following chapter, I will revisit each of these major themes in hopes of offering a meaningful policy proposal for building new Jewish community in Brooklyn.

Chapter Three: Reframing "The Club" and Making its Members Feel Like Members

The interviews detailed in Chapter Two offer a snapshot of Jews in Brooklyn whom we have described as the new "Jewish Middle." They are somewhat interested in Jewish life, and attend occasional Jewish events, but do not describe being part of a Jewish community as one of their primary commitments. These individuals are highly educated and upwardly mobile, and many of them expressed progressive political leanings. Each of

them lives in gentrifying or gentrified parts of Brooklyn, suggesting certain shared tastes and lifestyle choices.

Beyond the rough demographic sketch above, which we could have imagined prior to this project, a clear typology of Jewish post-boomers in Brooklyn did not emerge from these interviews. Though clusters of participants had certain traits in common, there were not enough for us to divide them into categories that might be useful for policy proposals. Men and women were not significantly different in their responses, and there was no discernible difference between those individuals who had come to Brooklyn Jews events and those who had not. However, three themes emerged that are most important for us in crafting meaningful policy proposals. First, these interviewees experience Jewish life through their social connections. Their Jewish communal commitments are rooted in what their friends are doing more than in feelings of "obligation" or "seeking." Second, people locate themselves on a hierarchy or scale of Jewishness, whereupon some people are "more Jewish" than they are. Finally, despite ambivalence toward organized Jewish life, most of these interviewees expressed a positive feeling of membership in some sort of Jewish collective.

I was especially surprised at the extent to which interviewees spoke about feeling a connection to other Jews across time and space, given communal assumptions that younger Jews care less about "the Jewish People." Most of these individuals do not have exclusively Jewish friends and family, and many of them are either the products of interfaith families or are currently in relationships with non-Jews. Many of them expressed ambivalence toward the State of Israel and lukewarm feelings toward synagogues or the Jewish establishment. Nonetheless, interviewees described a feeling of being in a "club" with other

Jews, even those who are different from them. We learn from this that conventional measures of Jewish attachments to Jewish collectivity—social behaviors, relationships, connection to Israel, synagogue or organization membership, and philanthropy among others—may actually not be so useful when determining if or how young Jewish adults experience or enact a sense of Jewish collective belonging. It is possible, then, that there is not as much of a "problem" of young Jews feeling detached from the Jewish community as many Jewish community professionals tend to think there is. Rather, this opens up the chance to capitalize creatively on the feeling of connectedness that young Jews *do* describe, and develop new avenues for expressing collective belonging. The challenge for Jewish professionals becomes how to craft opportunities for young Jews to actualize their feelings of belonging.

Based off of these findings, this chapter offers a number of attainable policy proposals for building meaningful Jewish community amongst post-boomer Jews in Brooklyn in the late 2010s. Specifically, these proposals are designed for the Brooklyn Jews community, the place where I will continue to focus my efforts after rabbinical school. Brooklyn Jews already engages an estimated 1,400 individuals each year through Shabbat and holiday programming alongside learning and social opportunities. The vast majority of these people are adults under the age of 40, mostly Jews but also many individuals who are connected to Jews. By coming to a single event or program, they demonstrate a baseline connection to Jewish life. Since these people are not traditionally observant and only a handful of them are enmeshed in any other Jewish community, the community as a whole represents the new Jewish Middle.

While Brooklyn Jews has been a resource for many and a caring community for some, it has not yet cohered as a collective. Given its minimal barriers to entry, Brooklyn Jews has a tendency toward being more of a constellation of one-off communal Jewish experiences than a community of people who experience Jewish life together. Yet my hope for Brooklyn Jews is that it can be a laboratory for what Jewish *collectivity* looks like in the 2010s and beyond, and not merely an experiment in Jewish experiences. The goal of these proposals is to craft a local Jewish community that more firmly entrenches Brooklyn Jews participants within a local Jewish collective, by helping them feel more secure in a Jewish space. Responding to the themes that emerged in the interviews, this work offers ideas to help build the Jewish commitment and self-esteem of Brooklyn Jews participants within a collective context. I will outline here a metanarrative for Brooklyn Jews that might help frame Jewish community in the 21st century, and then I will offer discrete proposals for how Brooklyn Jews can thicken the connection Jews feel to the "club" and make them feel like more confident "members" in it.

Starting Off: Towards a Metanarrative for Brooklyn Jews

From the very beginning of these interviews, it became obvious that the participants do not have a useful language for describing their Jewishness or how they relate to other Jews. As described in the previous chapter, people resort to vaguely ethnic terms to describe themselves and others as Jews, yet we know that ethnicity alone has a limited scope for describing American Judaism in the 21st century. We also know that understanding Judaism as a religion has lost much of its currency for this demographic. It is therefore both philosophically instructive and rhetorically useful to offer a grand narrative about who we are and why we do what we do, taking into account contemporary

tastes and beliefs. Existing Jewish American metanarratives that offer grand theories of history and reflections on why we are here, do not work neatly with this community. To name just a few, the grand narratives of Zionism, Reform and Conservative Judaism, and Jewish Socialism do not mesh with the worldview of these young Jewish adults. Many respondents spoke about being in a "club," but they have no sense of where that comes from or what that might mean ideologically or practically.

Against a backdrop that is especially similar to ours, the queer yeshiva, Svara, offers us an example of what a metanarrative is and how it could be used with young American Jewish adults today. Rabbi Benay Lappe's "Crash Talk,"[86] in which she describes the current moment as akin to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, offers a metanarrative by way of three elements. The talk teaches people about a moment in Jewish history; it capitalizes on dissatisfaction with the status quo; and it draws people into the conversation about what to do next. Lappe uses the conceit of "queerness" to describe the Talmudic rabbis and to examine the creative needs of today's Jewish community by way of a poignant and cheeky metaphor.[87] Imagining the rabbis as queerfolk is, of course, completely anathema to a traditionalist Jewish worldview. Yet Lappe's metaphor is useful precisely because it expresses deep truths about the classical rabbis in a way that is both resonant with her desired audience and subversive towards an ailing if not failing establishment.

[86] https://elitalks.org/unrecognizable-jewish-future-queer-talmudic-take

[87] By "queer," Benay Lappe does not refer to the sexual orientation or worldview of the classical rabbis. Rather, she uses the term expansively to refer to people on the margin of a given society who create something new when presented with two unsatisfying options. As I use the term "queer" throughout this chapter, this is what I mean as well.

It would be particularly helpful for Brooklyn Jews to articulate a metanarrative with metaphors that help its participants understand who they are as Jews, and also help them construct a basic ideological framework that enhances a sense of and commitment to belonging in some meaningful way. I offer here three basic metaphors that emerged from this research, which offer the rubric of a metanarrative for Brooklyn Jews.

1. **In organized Jewish life, post-boomer American Jews are somewhat like immigrants**. They have left "the old country" of unpleasant Hebrew School experiences and mediocre childhood synagogues that left them thinking that participating in Jewish life means attending boring and retrograde religious services. That "old country" was also a province of ethnic Judaism, in which intermarriage was reviled and Zionism took center stage. Young American liberal Jews today are leaving that place in droves, leaving us to ask: to where are they headed? Like their mythic and real immigrant forebears, they are headed to urban neighborhoods, specifically in Brooklyn. And like earlier generations of Jewish immigrants to the United States, replicating "the old country" is not an option. The choice now is either to create something new together at a grassroots level or assimilate into the mainstream. This metaphor is particularly resonant because it bespeaks a need to create together, opening up paths of entry and offering people the chance to take part in creating something new and important. It also appeals to a consciousness of Jewish history, popular political sensitivities, and a deep awareness of the immigrant experience in many individual family histories.

2. **In the 21st century, being a Jew means being part of a queer family**. Indeed, as prior generations understood, Jews have a connection to one another, which somehow makes them part of a bigger family story. Yet today that family story is not rooted only in

bloodline. Young American Jews espouse a Jewishness that moves beyond biology, and which includes partners, family and friends who are not Jewish. Importantly, queer families are chosen, not given. Though other generations of Jews might have taken the connectedness between people as a given and as somehow rooted in their literal family, it is up to young American Jews to construct their Jewish families, that may or may not include their family of origin. This metaphor is useful because of how frequently these interviewees and others have described their families when articulating what being Jewish means to them. It also presents the notion of a "club" with new language that is more inclusive. The word, "queer," here is a nod to Svara and to the fact that queerness is a recognizable theme in social justice spaces. Queerness also plays a role in the agenda of this Jewish "family," describing what Jews do and not merely who they are. Insofar as Jews are "different," a consciousness of queerness inspires Jews to play a unique role in the broader American community and in the world vis-à-vis culture and social justice. This corresponds to Hansen's notion of cosmopolitanism and also reflects what Eugene Borowitz referred to as, "creative alienation," that is, "sufficient withdrawal from our society to judge it critically, but also the will and flexibility to keep trying and finding ways of correcting it."[88] In other words, Jewish difference or queerness allows Jews to pursue a specific mission in the world of creating art and advancing the causes of social justice. These two outcomes of queerness become what Jews *do*, then, and not merely what Jews *are*.

3. **Being part of a Jewish community is like joining a co-op.** In the synagogues of the mid- to late-20th century, many Jews fulfilled their felt obligation to participate in

[88] Borowitz, Eugene B. *The Mask Jews wear ; the self-deceptions of American Jewry*, New York. 1973, 209.

Judaism by passively listening to *shlichei tzibbur*, prayer leaders, and by financially supporting Jewish institutions. Despite a number of lay-driven initiatives both in and outside of synagogue life, the growing professionalization of synagogue in the past century has led to an overarching sense that clergypeople create Jewish life on behalf of the people.[89] This paradigm of passivity is no longer helpful. Jewish community will not be built by rabbis alone in the 21st century. Rather, a grassroots, cooperative effort is key to making Jewish life both sustainable and relevant. Indeed, this reflects the shtiebels and shuls of many Jewish immigrants to America, who cooperatively built small Jewish communities with whatever resources they had. Adopting a cooperative spirit today might mean volunteering to set up before an event or it might mean taking on initiative to organize and lead a discussion group. Membership in the "club" or "family" is enacted by owning some action without which the collective cannot exist. Whether or not individuals are members of a food co-op or any other cooperative, the idea of Jewish community as co-op reflects a do-it-yourself sensibility as well as community organizing principles. It is useful because it maximizes people's involvement in Jewish communal life and because it speaks the language of Brooklyn.

Taken together, these metaphors are advantageous because they do the three things that Benay Lappe's "Crash Talk" does. They hone in on a moment in Jewish history (immigration to the U.S.), reflect overarching dissatisfaction with Jewish institutions (the "old country"), and draw people into creating something together (queer chosen family, cooperative). They reflect the vocabulary of progressive Brooklyn, and admittedly might not play as well in other parts of the country—even, or especially, Manhattan. Yet this is

[89] Marcus, Jacob R. and Abraham Peck and Jeffrey Gurock. *The American Rabbinate : a century of continuity and change*, 1883-1983. Hoboken, N.J. 1985, 7-8

precisely the point. In an age of "neighborhoods," as Pianko describes, different Jewish communities need different metanarratives that fully determine for themselves how they express Judaism. He even suggests that two Jewish neighborhoods might end up with mutually exclusive forms of Jewish expression.[90] Though such dissonance would distance the neighborhoods from one another in the immediate sense, this would result in multiple neighborhoods of Judaism that are ultimately stronger, leading to a maximal number of Jews experiencing a thick Judaism as they define it for themselves.[91]

In this conception, Brooklyn Jews itself should become a self-conscious "neighborhood" of Judaism, with its own metanarrative. The Brooklyn Jews metanarrative should appear as much as possible: in one-on-one conversations with participants, on the organization's website and in promotional materials, during events and through *divrei Torah*. Ultimately, Brooklyn Jews participants should be able to internalize this metanarrative and see their own personal narrative within the story and meaning of the broader community.

Membership

By reframing the "club" as a queer family, we automatically give the collective a language of belonging and inclusivity. One belongs to the family for reasons beyond merely biology, and gets to choose the extent to which one wants to have a relationship with other family members. Using the language of "cooperative" implies that everyone has an active role to play in the family, which becomes urgent when we understand this moment

[90] Pianko, 2721 and 2862 Kindle Edition

[91] It is worth wondering how, then, each "neighborhood" could or should relate to one another. By creating tailored neighborhoods of Judaism that offer rich Jewish experiences for their specific adherents, there could be more avenues for people to feel fully engaged in Judaism, thereby offering more chances for committed Jews to interact with Jews from other "neighborhoods"—even those with whom they disagree—in the long run.

as a generation of immigrants fleeing from an old Judaism towards a Judaism yet unbuilt. With all this in mind, "membership" in the family becomes something that is easily attained, yet carries with it an *appealing* imperative for action. Brooklyn Jews already says that anyone who comes to a single event is automatically a member of Brooklyn Jews for that year. It would be useful for Brooklyn Jews to articulate this further, using the vocabulary of this new metanarrative, to help people feel that they are members in this particular family, which is itself related to the broader Jewish (queer) family. What follows are structural and programmatic suggestions for making this happen, both to build the Jewish self-esteem of "members" and to build connections between them.

Understanding and Managing the "Scale of Jewishness"

The participants in this study each exhibited an awareness of their own level of Jewishness in relation to others' Jewish identities and behaviors. On the face of it, this is not all that surprising. The belief that some Jews are more Jewish than others surely predates this generation, yet Jewish professionals have largely overlooked an opportunity to address this belief head on. As we saw explicitly in Chapter 2, this belief can alienate young Jewish adults from participating in Jewish life even when they otherwise want to do so. With this in mind, Brooklyn Jews must seek to make Jews feel secure in their "level" of Jewishness. This research shows that people feel like they are part of the club, but they need to feel like it is a club that would have someone like them for a member. Returning to the metaphor of family, we might say that these people feel like they are members of the family but wonder if they're really good children in the eyes of the family at large.

One part of addressing this insider-outsider dichotomy involves identifying those people who attend Brooklyn Jews events who are generally perceived as "more Jewish."

These are people who feel at home in Jewish spaces, have a basic level of Jewish literacy, and are inclined to participate in Jewish experiences with some frequency, with Brooklyn Jews or otherwise. The leadership of Brooklyn Jews can meet these people one-on-one and engage them in the pursuit of making Jewish experiences accessible to a maximum number of people. Specifically, the leadership of Brooklyn Jews can ask them to brainstorm who in their workplaces, extended social networks, and even families might be Jewish but as yet unengaged in local Jewish life. From there, they can be tasked with bringing these individuals to Brooklyn Jews programming. In so doing, these insiders move from the role of gatekeeper to that of ambassador, simultaneously engaging their peers and developing a consciousness for the insider-outsider dynamic in Jewish communities.

Helping People Feel Secure At Their "Level"

As for those participants who are not insiders, I offer here three programmatic suggestions geared toward making people feel comfortable in their Jewish skin. First, Brooklyn Jews can invite young Jewish adults to define for themselves how to be authentically Jewish. Religious services and text study sessions offer a predetermined way of being authentically Jewish, and there is a need for more programs that allow participants to construct Jewishness for themselves. Brooklyn Jews can host a series of semi-structured storytelling events that allow participants to tell stories from their lives that might not on the surface seem Jewish. By way of framing each of these storytelling events, a facilitator can make this connection to Jewishness more explicit. One way of doing this is to structure this storytelling series around six conversations that correspond to the six orders of the Mishna. An event based on stories about gender, for instance, could correspond to the order of *Nashim*, allowing people to add their lived experiences to a millennia-old conversation

around sex and gender. By starting from a place of sharing their own experiences, the participants begin from the strength of sharing something about which they are exclusively expert: their own lives. The facilitator can then guide them towards understanding this as part of an ongoing Jewish conversation, adding to their sense of ownership over their Jewish self-understanding.

Importantly, these conversations ought to also include some classical Jewish texts, to firmly root the experience in a Millennia-old conversation. In fact, one way of making this modality extend beyond a single event or series of events would be to make it a policy that all Brooklyn Jews events include some dimension of "conversation" between the texts of Brooklyn Jews themselves and the texts of classical Judaism. Doing so would both add heft to the Jewish self-confidence of the participants and would mitigate the extent to which participants viewed each event as an opportunity to overshare about their feelings and life stories.

Second, Brooklyn Jews can offer more opportunities to make "cultural Judaism" and "social justice Judaism" feel both community-driven and authentically Jewish. Though interviewees mentioned an explicitly Jewish connection to culture and social justice, this does not result in feeling secure in their "level" of Jewishness by way of culture or justice work. Brooklyn Jews should invite speakers from local colleges and universities to offer lectures and seminars on Jewish film, food, literature, and art as a way of enhancing participants' confidence in the value of their own "cultural Judaism." Likewise, though Brooklyn Jews already offers a number of different ways to get involved with social justice initiatives, this does not yet translate to a feeling of ownership of Jewish authenticity. Brooklyn Jews should therefore offer explicit Jewish conversations around each of the

themes that it already addresses by way of justice work, notably around race and immigration. Through both cultural and social justice programming, Brooklyn Jews should attempt not only to get people in the door, which it already does, but to develop people's consciousness of their own Judaism by way of explicit Jewish conversations around the relevant topics. The key here is to deepen participants' Jewish self-confidence on the terms that they already recognize as part of their Jewish identity.

In each of these spheres, it may be helpful to partner with non-Jewish organizations. Interfaith opportunities abound in social justice settings, especially those geared toward community organizing. Explicitly working alongside non-Jews could help the Jewish participants understand themselves as Jews in the eyes of another group, and may provide them an opportunity to play the role of Jewish "expert" in conversation with an inquisitive member of another religious or cultural group.

When it comes to boosting confidence in what we might call conventional Judaism, a third prong here is that the Brooklyn Jews clergy can offer workshops for engaging with Jewish practice. When people suggest that they feel intimidated by Jewish spaces, this is partially because they feel they lack sufficient Jewish literacy. Yet the way to help these individuals feel more at home in Jewish spaces is not necessarily to teach them Hebrew or the weekly *parshiyot*. Rather, they need more knowledge of how to actually participate in Jewish life so that they do not feel judged by other people when they show up. Put another way, as much as promoting Jewish literacy means helping people walk the walk, they also want to know how to talk the talk. To that end, the leadership of Brooklyn Jews, both clergy and lay, can offer a workshop on how to attend or host a Shabbat dinner, replete with customary foods and rituals. Another workshop could focus on the prayers of Friday night

services—what they mean and where they come from. Another still could explore the depths of the Jewish calendar and how to get the most out of the High Holiday experience. This is not studying for studying's sake, or for the sake of gaining literacy—it is studying for the sake of gaining confidence in participation.

Approaching Orthodoxy

Given how many interviewees mentioned Orthodox Jews in this study, it would be advantageous to somehow engage with Orthodoxy in Brooklyn Jews programming as well. This is especially true both because Orthodoxy represents for many of these people the highest "level" of Jewish practice, and because Orthodoxy is so visible in Brooklyn. Brooklyn Jews can attempt to partner with a local Orthodox community for certain non-ritual-based programs as a way of demystifying Orthodoxy for Brooklyn Jews participants. The new social justice-oriented Orthodox organization, Hitoreri, may be an especially amenable partner in this effort.[92] Eshel, an organization committed to LGBTQ Orthodox Jews, may also be worth exploring for partnering on various programs.[93] Moreover, Brooklyn Jews can offer more opportunities explicitly to learn about different Jewish communities in the borough, which inevitably puts participants in contact with Orthodox Jews. In one off events like volunteering at the Masbia kosher soup kitchen, there should also be an in-depth conversation about what Orthodoxy is, how Orthodox people can be relatable, and how Orthodoxy is different from the normative Judaism of Brooklyn Jews participants. In light of how prevalent Orthodoxy is in the Jewish imaginations of these

[92] As of January, 2018, Hitoreri only has a Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/Hitoreri/?notif_id=1516564487273158&notif_t=page_invite&ref=notif

[93] According to its website, Eshel's mission is "to create community and acceptance for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Jews and their families in Orthodox communities." http://www.eshelonline.org/about-new/our-mission/

participants, offering more education about Orthodox Judaism could be especially appealing to potential attendees and would also be useful in helping flesh out their Jewish self-esteem.

Building the Neighborhood

These interviews also suggest that people are willing to show up for and devote their resources to an experience that feels local. This does not just mean physical proximity, but indeed refers to a feeling of familiarity among the people who participate in a given communal experience. Interviewees were more likely to get involved with a local social justice issue than a national one, and they were more likely to commit to causes and experiences that affect their neighborhoods directly. The fact that Brooklyn Jews is designed to operate in specific neighborhoods is helpful in this regard, but a strategy is necessary for really tapping into what makes a neighborhood feel familiar. The following are three suggestions for capitalizing on participants' relationships to weave together thick local ties to one another.

First, Brooklyn Jews clergy can work with individual participants toward a tailormade learning ritual akin to *b'nai mitzvah*, which we might call a *simchat mishpacha*. Unlike *bar* or *bat mitzvah* ceremonies that happen in adolscence, the *simchat mishpacha* would be a celebration of becoming a Jewish adult designed for Jewish adults both in educational content and in celebratory style. Also unlike adolescent *b'nai mitzvah* experiences so often mandated by parents, the *simchat mishpacha* celebrates choice. The concept of "*mishpacha*," here entrenches the participant in the metaphor of family, and remains gender neutral in the spirit of queerness. The Brooklyn Jews leadership can put out a call on its listserv for people interested in affirming their Jewishness through a process

of learning and ritual. It should be free for the participant to work with the clergy in the process, and in return the participant would agree to both open up the ceremony and party to the whole Brooklyn Jews community and contribute in some way to the party, either financially or logistically. Working with these individuals to learn the blessings, Torah, and Haftarah portions, and to craft *divrei Torah* is surely another step toward increasing literacy and Jewish confidence among this demographic on an individual basis. Yet more importantly, once that *simchat mishpacha* ceremony actually happens, it presents an opportunity for that individual's personal networks to show up for them. This would offer a high intensity Jewish learning experience, overlaid with the thick relationships of a person's social scene, which otherwise exists beyond the realm of Brooklyn Jews. Here we find a chance to celebrate being Jewish in a festive atmosphere while also celebrating a community's relationship to a single person. Perhaps the *divrei Torah* at these *s'machot mishpacha* could entail some sort of personal narrative akin to the storytelling project, which would also introduce people to the depth of individual community members. Some attendees at these events would come because of their relationship to the individual, and others would come for a social event. In either case, this project both draws new people into the community and offers an example of how Jewish community is driven by relationships.

A second way in which Brooklyn Jews can more effectively mine the existing relationships of its participants is by offering programming specifically designed for people in interfaith relationships. These interviews suggested that some Jews become curious about Judaism when they enter into relationships with non-Jews. We already know that a high number of Brooklyn Jews participants are in relationships with non-Jews, but

Brooklyn Jews has not yet addressed that the reason why these Jews sought out Jewish life in the first place might be *because* of these relationships. Brooklyn Jews can offer Shabbat dinners and even workshops like the ones detailed above, marketed specifically for couples that come from two different faith backgrounds. It is possible that such programming could be particularly useful to some participants, capitalizing on their interfaith status as what piques their interest in Judaism. It could also serve to introduce them to similar couples who could become a sort of affinity group for them.

By and large, Brooklyn Jews has not yet built within it enough intentional opportunities for various affinity groups to cohere. A third proposal in this sphere, then, is that Brooklyn Jews can offer small gatherings and meals for people based on shared interests or professions. Multiple interviewees mentioned attending Jewish events with people from work, and others added that their professional aspirations take up the majority of their time and mental energy. Instead of building a "neighborhood" based solely on geography, it might be advantageous for Brooklyn Jews to curate "neighborhoods" based on profession. With these interviews in mind and the professions they reflect, Brooklyn Jews should begin by curating small gatherings for lawyers, people who work in entertainment, social workers, teachers, entrepreneurs, and those who work in city government. Other professions and affinity groups might emerge as time goes on, but we know from this research and otherwise that these six groups are significantly represented among Brooklyn Jews participants.

In Conclusion

Each of the above suggestions is easily attainable within the existing framework of Brooklyn Jews, with little need for additional resources. Ultimately, these policy proposals

seek to do two things within the context of the "club" or "family." They attempt to make people feel comfortable doing something Jewish, owning that their Jewishness is just as valid as anyone else's. Moreover, they attempt to hone in on the social behaviors of what post-boomers in Brooklyn are actually doing, weaving together new and already existing social ties within the family. By way of these programmatic and structural suggestions, "the club" can begin to cohere beyond merely a feeling of attachment to other Jews, and Brooklyn Jews can grow into a neighborhood of Judaism that is defined by the relationships of those within the collective.

Afterword

From 1998 to 2012, the Italian American restaurant chain, Olive Garden, ran television advertisements with the tagline: "When you're here, you're family."[94] In one particular commercial, a woman opens the scene by saying, "in my family, everyone knows more about food than everyone else."[95] As images of a family eating dinner flash across the screen, she continues: "Hey, we're Italian!" The commercial continues with scenes of a boisterous, warm, vaguely Mediterranean group of people eating and laughing and sharing food before ending with the familiar catchphrase. With a wink and a nod, the advertisement seems to suggest that when you spend time at an Olive Garden restaurant with purportedly good food and good people, you feel like you belong to a big, warm Italian family even if your actual family is anything but. Of course the Olive Garden chain does

[94] Stampler, Laura, "Olive Garden Changed 'When You're Here, You're Family' to Something Awful" *Business Insider*, Oct. 5, 2012 http://www.businessinsider.com/olive-gardens-new-tagline-is-go-to-olive-garden-2012-10

[95] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pidn2gi9nFg

not want to appeal only to those Americans whose ancestors had emigrated from Italy—that would be bad for business. Yet the advertisement campaign persisted for nearly a decade and a half precisely because American consumers appreciated the ethnic symbols of food and loud conversation, alongside the universally relatable sentiment that it is nice to feel like you are part of a family.

To be sure, families are complicated. In today's world, families that are not LGBTQ are often queer in some sense; reconstituted over time and connected by ties beyond blood. "Family" no longer implies biology alone. However they are created, families are ways in which human beings locate themselves in relation to the rest of the world. At their best, they are also safe havens and places of warmth. For this reason, gay men and lesbians referred to other gay men and lesbians as members of "the family" throughout the mid-twentieth century, which is why the 1979 Sister Sledge song, "We Are Family," became a recognizable gay anthem.[96] In the gay case, a group of people depended on one another and treated each other with a certain understanding—beyond the inevitable infighting—because it helped them make sense of their world. By speaking the language of family, queerfolks chose a warmer metaphor than being part of a "club," recognizing that a feeling of warmth is especially important in a world that can be isolating and cold.

Understanding Jews as one big queer family helps makes sense of who the Jews are a world in which religion, race, and ethnicity no longer seem to offer much in the way of Jewish distinctiveness. This "queer familism" responds to the seemingly inexplicable ways in which many of us are tied together, and it offers an aspiration: that we will treat one

[96] Crowley, Patrick, "50 Top LGBTQ Anthems (Critic's Picks)," Billboard Magazine 6/20/16 https://www.billboard.com/photos/7408710/gay-anthems-lgbt-pride-top-songs

another with warmth and a feeling of being at home. Many of the respondents in this study mentioned Chabad, the movement that arguably projects the warmest, most family driven image out of all the Jewish movements. From Chabad, we in liberal Jewish leadership should learn that the warmth of family is a potent force against the backdrop of busy, anonymous urban life. Chabad has a problem, though, inasmuch as it does not offer the sort of progressive philosophy that young American Jews espouse. A blend of Lubavitcher *heimishkeit* and liberal Jewish flexibility is precisely what is needed to suit the needs of the Jews in this study. Liberal Jewish leaders do not need to adopt clothing or customs that call to mind Jewish immigrants from Europe in order to claim a feeling of Jewish authenticity. But we might consider adopting an immigrant's ethos when it comes to rebuilding a Jewish home on these shores. Leaving one place for another, each of us must lend a hand.

At Brooklyn Jews' Yom Kippur morning services for the past two years in a row, we have asked all non-Jewish attendees to come up to the *bimah* for the last *aliyah*. Once they assemble near the ark, we ask the rest of the *kahal* to rise and chant the blessings before and after the Torah on their behalf, allowing me as *shaliach tzibbur* to offer these non-Jewish individuals a special *mi shebeirach* prayer in recognition of all their significant presence in our community. I would have them say the blessing themselves if the wording were more appropriate for them to do so. Though this choice was made to welcome non-Jews into our community, the message it sends to the Jews in the *kahal* may be even louder, and it is worth articulating as one last policy proposal for Brooklyn Jews: When people participate in the Brooklyn Jews community, whether they are Jewish themselves or otherwise fellow travelers on a Jewish journey, they should always feel that when they're here, they're family.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

As I mentioned in my email, I am studying the diverse ways of being Jewish among people now between their late twenties and late thirties. I'm trying to learn the various ways in which they experience or express being Jewish and the many routes that brought them there.

In this interview, which should last about an hour, I'd like to hear how you describe your life, feelings, and life journey.

I'll be recording our interviews and they will be transcribed. I promise you total anonymity. I will not use your name in the thesis, and when I use your words, I promise to disguise your identity. Do you have any questions before we begin?

First, let's start with key facts about your life--what do you think is important for me to know about your life right now, before jumping into your life story?

Now, if we may, I'd like to run through your life -- from childhood -- and ask you to give me a running narrative that touches all the high points, thinking about how Judaism connects to your life story. [if confused: social context, religious practices, political action, homebased rituals, learning]

[IF NOT MENTIONED, ASK ABOUT: Parents, Grandparents, elementary school, College, Graduate School, Career]

Concerning your upbringing, what sorts of Jewish experiences most stick in your mind from childhood? (Trips, school, extracurriculars, friends)

What was college like for you socially? What were the kinds of social networks that you built during college?

During or after college, have you been involved in organized social networks of any kind? Who do you think of as your "crew," your social group however you define it?

Now, please tell me about your interests and activities. In what ways do you find meaning in your non-work time?

Do you feel a connection to any organizations and are you involved with them in any way? (for example: alumni events, giving $5 a month to ACLU)

If yes: What's the value undergirding that commitment?

In thinking about your relationship as an individual to other groups, are there particular groups you feel a strong connection to?

At this point I'd like to pivot and focus on Jewish questions. What are some of the things you like about being Jewish?

What sorts of responsibilities beyond yourself do you feel you have as a Jewish person?

What's your relationship to organized Jewish life and at what times in your life have you had such a relationship and what was that like?

There are a variety of different ways of talking about what Judaism is. Some say it's a religion, some say it's a people, a culture...what does being Jewish mean to you?

What draws you now to Jewish community/in what ways might being connected to the J community deepen meaning in your life?

In what ways, if any, do you feel different when you are in a gathering of people who are predominantly Jewish versus a gathering where there is a mixture of people where you are the only or one of a handful of Jews?

How do you feel about going to religious services -- Shabbat, High Holidays? Do you ever go, or not? Why do you go? Do you remember any times in your life when you felt especially good about synagogue services?

Aside from what we've spoken about, what other parts of Judaism or being Jewish are important to you?

Do you have something to add about anything we've said? Anything you want to clarify? Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't?

Appendix B: Suggested Email to Participants from Acquaintances

What follows is the information that participants received ahead of our interviews, by way of emails from our mutual acquaintances:

My friend, Matt, is finishing rabbinical school and is writing his rabbinic thesis on Jews in their 20s/30s and the various ways in which they approach being Jewish. He's looking for people to interview for no more than an hour and I thought you might be a good person for him to talk to. Obviously no pressure but if you're interested, I'm connecting you with him here so you and he can coordinate further!

References

Abramovitch, Ilana, and Seán Galvin. “Introduction.” *Jews of Brooklyn*. Hanover (N.H.): University Press of New England, 2002, 2.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” Critical Inquiry, Vol. 23, No. 3, Front Lines/Border Posts (Spring, 1997), pp. 617-639, 633

Beck, Pearl, and Steven Cohen, Jacob Ukeles, Ron Miller, “Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011 - Geographic Profile,” UJA-Federation of New York, Jan 1 2013 https://www.bjpa.org/search-results/publication/15987, 129

Borowitz, Eugene B. *The Mask Jews wear ; the self-deceptions of American Jewry*, New York. 1973, 209.

Brodkin, Karen How Jews became white folks : and what that says about race in America. New Brunswick, NJ. 1998, 349 Kindle Edition.

Cohen, Steven M, and Arnold Eisen. *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America*, Indiana University Press (Bloomington, IN), 2000, 8.

Cohen, Steven M. and Charles S. Liebman *Two Worlds of Judaism : Israeli and American Experiences*. Yale U.P, 1992.

Cohen, Steven M and Jack Wertheimer, “Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?” *Commentary*, June, 2006, pg 34

Crowley, Patrick, “50 Top LGBTQ Anthems (Critic’s Picks),” *Billboard* 6/20/16 https://www.billboard.com/photos/7408710/gay-anthems-lgbt-pride-top-songs

Fischer, Shlomo and Barry Geltman, Rami Tal, “Annual Assessment: the Situation and Dynamics of the Jewish People, 2017, 5777,” The Jewish People Policy Institute, 2017

Gans, Herbert, “Symbolic Ethnicity: the Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America,” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies Vol. 2 No. 1*, January 1979, 7.

Goldstein, Sidney, and Ariela Keysar, Barry A. Kosmin, Nava Lerer, Jeffrey Scheckner and Joseph Waksberg, “National Jewish Population Survey,” 1990

Hansen, David.Hansen, David T. *The teacher and the world : a study of cosmopolitanism and education.* London: Routledge., 2013, 86

Herberg, Will. *Protestant, Catholic, Jew : an essay in American religious sociology.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 2017, 23.

Hollinger, David A. *Postethnic America : beyond multiculturalism*. New York: BasicBooks, 2017. 92.

Horowitz, Bethamie. “Reframing the Study of Contemporary American Jewry” in *Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (December 2002), 14.

Kallen, Horace M., “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot,” 1915, reprinted at http://thenewschoolhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/kallen_democracyvmeltingpot.pdf

Kaplan, Mordecai M, and Mel Scult. *Judaism as a civilization : toward a reconstruction of American-Jewish life.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1934. 125

Kelman, Ari et al. “The Social Self: Toward the Study of Jewish Lives in the Twenty-first Century,” in *Cont Jewry*, 2016, 3.

Magid, Shaul. *American post-Judaism : identity and renewal in a postethnic society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017, 16.

Marcus, Jacob R. and Abraham Peck and Jeffrey Gurock. *The American Rabbinate : a century of continuity and change*, 1883-1983. Hoboken, N.J. 1985, 7-8

Pianko, Noam. *Jewish Peoplehood : an American innovation*, 2015, Rutgers University Press, (New Brunswick, NJ), 30

Religious Action Center, https://rac.org/embracing-racial-diversity-our-synagogues-who-are-jews-color-joc.

Stampler, Laura, "Olive Garden Changed 'When You're Here, You're Family' to Something Awful" *Business Insider*, Oct. 5, 2012 http://www.businessinsider.com/olive-gardens-new-tagline-is-go-to-olive-garden-2012-10

Szuberla, Guy. "Zangwill's The Melting Pot Plays Chicago," *MELUS*, Vol. 20, No. 3, "History and Memory" (Autumn, 1995), 3

ter Kuile, Casper and Angie Thurston, "How We Gather" (2016) https://caspertk.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/how-we-gather.pdf

"Nones on the Rise." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C., (Oct. 9, 2012), http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/

"A Portrait of Jewish Americans." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C., (Oct. 1, 2013), http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/, 8