As They Are:
A Sociological Examination of Modern American Jewry Through Jewish Marriage, Identity, and Engagement

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Abstract:

What it means to be a Jew in America today is qualitatively different from past conceptions of Jewish life and living. Consequently, the Jewish community confronts new challenges and opportunities in trying to respond to the questions, concerns, and needs of American Jews. In recognition of these challenges and opportunities, sociologists, historians, demographers and psychologists are all involved in determining how to help American Jews thrive as Americans and as Jews. This thesis provides an analysis of multiple quantitative and qualitative studies of American Jewry as a means to understanding the modern American Jewish experience, and makes suggestions for current and future communities through the knowledge gained. Further, as a product of an interfaith home and my own 21st-century upbringing, I work to utilize my own experiences as a means of adding nuance and color to the conversation.

Acknowledgements:

First, I want to thank my family for providing the sort of interfaith home that would lead me to push back against traditional conceptions and stereotypes of “unconventional” Jewish homes and lifestyles. Moreover, a special thank you should go to my father for the concessions and patience he displayed in agreeing to have his children raised in a religion other than his own. Different does not mean lesser, and my spiritually rich interfaith home illustrated that from a young age, ultimately inspiring this paper.

Thank you to all those who supported this project, whether through formal interviews, proof-readings, edits, or any number of conversations on the topics contained within. Whether big or small, all contributed to the completion of this thesis.

Thank you to the Zelikow School of Jewish Nonprofit Management and Professor Phil Liff-Grief for formally introducing me to the study of Jewish sociology.

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Table of Contents:

Chapter One:
Introduction

To the surprise of many, against a backdrop of stereotypes that my life could be less Jewish with only one Jewish parent, I often credit my interest in Judaism to being a product of an interfaith home. The fact that my upbringing could produce such positive Jewish results, while also serving as a surprise, illustrates a common gap between traditional understandings of the Jewish community and how a significant percentage of Jews live and engage with Judaism. This is not to say that all interfaith homes will produce a rabbinical student by any means, but instead that modern Jewish life may be more complex and nuanced than traditional understandings might suggest.

Perhaps due to my interfaith upbringing, I have always had an interest in Jewish peoplehood and community, always fascinated by the variety and diversity within such a relatively small people. While most of my time in rabbinical school has been spent studying Jewish text, I have always been most interested in Jewish people. While in classes at the Zelikow School in Los Angeles, I was introduced to works of Jewish sociology and I hoped to find a thesis topic which would allow for study of modern American Jewry. My eventual thesis advisor, Rabbi Jan Katzew, helped me understand that this pursuit could be a thesis itself, and I began studying the community through topics of American Jewish intermarriage, identity, and engagement. My goal was to obtain a better understanding of the overall community through research and significant reading in each subject, but another layer was added when recognizing the timing of my study with the publication of the 2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study. Commissioned by the Jewish Foundation and Federation of Cincinnati to provide a textured portrait of the community through accurate methodological study, the study allows for the community to intentionally steer itself moving forward through the knowledge gained. It is rare to have such an up-to-date and thorough study of a

community the size of Cincinnati, and given my own learning in the city, I have utilized the community study as a lens to compare national studies and theory to a specific community's data and circumstance. The thesis's overall focus is broader in nature, but the Cincinnati study helps to add nuance and perspective.

Regarding my thesis's specific aims, I believe common understandings of the Jewish community are often out of touch or inaccurate to the experiences of modern Jewry today, and through this thesis, I hope to obtain a more current conception of Jewish life through which to make thoughtful and constructive recommendations. If our underlying beliefs of a community are inaccurate, we risk serving them incorrectly, losing their interest, and ultimately the sustainability of our institutions. If the American Jewish community wishes to have a growth mindset and ensure its future, it must seek to understand itself and respond accordingly.

Chapter Two:
Methodology

From a deep personal interest in Jewish community and sociology, perhaps stemming from my own non-traditional and interfaith family, my thesis seeks to understand the American Jewish community through contemporary Jewish sociology. The American Jewish community is a massive, ramified, and daunting subject. In composing a thesis manageable in scope while daring to make a meaningful contribution to the field, I elected to ask fundamental questions about contemporary Jewry and their lived experiences by examining Jewish marriage, identity, and engagement. I chose particular works for their recency (21st century and forward), cogency, and advancement of their subject matter. I did not seek out literature that pushed against conventional conclusions for their own sake, but instead sought contemporary findings for the sake of obtaining an up-to-date understanding of the field of study.

One foundational text for use in each chapter was the 2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study, which provides invaluable local data to contrast against the monumental and nationally based 2001 *National Jewish Population Study* and the 2013 Pew Study, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*. Through the dual use of national and localized studies, popular conceptions of the Jewish community may be tested broadly.

Traditionally, the overarching themes of American Jewish life in the 21st century have suggested a dilution from a more traditional Jewish past, especially among those who identify with any type of Judaism other than Orthodoxy. I have tried to offer a different vision of an American Jewish community that must accept and embrace itself by understanding its non-traditional changes as nothing more than evolution and understanding the present as an opportunity for reinterpretation, and if necessary, reinvention. My study is

primarily structured through three central topics and chapters in American Jewish intermarriage, identity, and engagement.

Marriage:

After considering multiple approaches to American Jewish intermarriage, I decided to align my thinking with that of Dr. Bruce Phillips. In particular, Phillips', *Intermarriage in the Twenty-First Century: New Perspectives* which challenges and expands the traditional conversation through the use of traditionally non-Jewish sources. Through teasing-out traditional understandings against modern theory, nuance is added to the intermarriage conversation, grounding the life choice in rationality and helping to explain the long-term consequences of American Jewry's demographic future.

Identity:

The study of American Jewish identity is more varied and has been longer pursued than Jewish intermarriage and engagement studies. As a result, I sought to both detail the history of the study while also seeking to present modern studies with forward-thinking and thoughtful analyses of the modern community. A variety of journals and writings were utilized to produce a nuanced depiction of modern Jewish identity and its processes of construction. In particular, I relied heavily upon *The Social Self: Toward the Study of Jewish Lives in the Twenty-first Century* by Ari Y. Kelman, Tobin Belzer, Ziva Hassenfeld, Ilana Horwitz, and Matthew Casey Williams for its up-to-date methodology and contributions to the field and focus on identity construction as relational meaning-making. Moreover, I additionally utilized another work by Dr. Bruce Phillips, *Accounting for Jewish Secularism: Is a New Cultural Identity Emerging?* for its creative use of demography in explaining predictors of Jewish identity formation.

Engagement:
In this chapter I made use of multiple surveys, journals, and studies on Jewish engagement, seeking to understand the subject in its traditional and modern conceptions. In particular, the studies *Unlocking the Future of Jewish Engagement Study* and *Synagogues That Get It: How Jewish Congregations are Engaging Young Adults* are utilized for their analysis of currently successful Jewish engagement practices.

Interviews:
In addition to sociological writings and demographic studies, I also conducted several interviews with local Cincinnati Jewish professionals and community members. Through a mixture of professional and personal experiences, those interviewed help to add nuance and expertise to my understanding of the local Jewish community.

Relevant Terms:

Inmarriage/Endogamy: Marriage within one's community, race, religion, or nationality.

Intermarriage/Exogamy/Outmarriage: Marriage outside of one's community.

Interfaith Marriage: Marriage to one of another faith community.

Jewry of Single-Ancestry: From the writings of Dr. Bruce Phillips, those with two Jewish parents, i.e., coming from a single ancestral background.

Jewry of Mixed-Ancestry: From the writings of Dr. Bruce Phillips, those raised in interfaith homes with parents of differing religions.

Engagement:
Jewish engagement is varied and often challenging to define as its definitions may be personal as much as formal. On the Jewish individuals' level, I believe a Jew engaging with Judaism to be any Jewish interaction one has, whether explicitly Jewish or aligning with Jewish values. On the level of Jewish organizations, engagement may be the efforts to bring community members to interact with Jewish or Jewish-aligned activities, practices, and individuals.

Chapter Three:
Marriage: Dilemma, Opportunity, Status Quo

In 2016, as a student at the University of Texas, I took part in an alternative spring break trip to assist Jewish communities in Hungary and Romania with the JDC (Joint Distribution Committee.) While meeting at a Romanian Jewish community center, our group began discussing European Jewish intermarriage and the future of European Jewry. Despite a focus on European Jewry, the conversation quickly shifted to intermarriage as a whole and in our own lives. The majority of participants came from single ancestry homes (homes consisting of two Jewish parents) but expressed an openness to dating and marrying non-Jews. The conversation was mostly uneventful until two others and I expressed a belief that Jewish marriage should be the ideal because it would best guarantee a Jewish future and present life partners who might fully understand our religious and cultural backgrounds. A further surprise was had when we realized the three of us were also the only participants from interfaith homes. We explained our pride in our interfaith families and our admiration for our non-Jewish but always supportive parents. However, we also recognized the additional effort needed to maintain our identities and recognized the potential advantage that our peers possessed.

The conversation left a lasting mark on my understanding of American Jewry and its relationship to intermarriage, primarily that popular conceptions of American Jewry were either incorrect, outdated, or out of touch with our current reality. What could it mean that around fifteen students from fully Jewish homes could be so indifferent to intermarriage, while three from interfaith families could be so set on inmarriage? What experiences could have driven those preferences into existence? It was traditionally assumed that children of intermarriage would have lesser Jewish identities, but could it be that they were only different identities? Moreover, could the Jewish identities of Jews from inmarriages be much

more comparable to those of intermarriages in 2016, and beyond? Although I could not fully articulate these questions, in that brief moment, I could tangibly feel the gap between the assumptions placed upon those in or from intermarriages and the lived experiences and identities shaped by them. I could feel the subject and its implications were far more significant than I had previously understood. I continue to grapple with these implications in my own life and this essay.

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Unfortunately, within Jewish American history, the complex identities of American Jews in or from interfaith relationships have largely been ignored or oversimplified. Instead, intermarriage has been treated as a disease or viral threat to the community's growth and existence. As the intermarriage rate increased throughout the 20th century, many even wondered if American Judaism could erase itself through outmarriage. Most often, treatment of intermarriage was reactionary, choosing to fix a perceived issue rather than adding nuance, context, or understanding of the subject matter. When intermarried couples are seen as incompatible with communal ideals, they will not be better understood and instead will be pushed away from their communities. To be adequately understood, intermarriage must be studied as a legitimate social phenomenon instead of a disease, irrational outcome, or existential threat to American Judaism and Jewry's future.

In this chapter, I will rely on Dr. Bruce Phillips' article, *Intermarriage in the Twenty-First Century: New Perspectives* from the *American Jewish Year Book 2017* as a lens to better understand American Jewish intermarriage and to contextualize intermarriage within the 2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study. The writing introduces three non-traditional

frameworks to the Jewish intermarriage conversation and also pushes for the inclusion of single versus mixed ancestry as a consequential marker for understanding today's Jewry.

Single vs. Mixed Ancestry

Adding ancestry as a necessary marker of categorization is not an invention by Phillips, but he may be the first to recognize its full significance in the study of modern Jewry. Historically, individuals of mixed ancestries, ethnicities, or races have been difficult for researchers to classify as they may complicate analysis through potentially inhabiting multiple categorizations. However, the category's importance in studying intermarriage is not about whether one identifies with their Jewish or non-Jewish parents, but the type of Jewish experience (and in turn, preferences) the upbringing will produce. Phillips will illustrate in his third framework how Jews of single and mixed ancestries have vastly different conceptions of Jewish life based on their respective upbringings. Recognizing this helpful distinction, we may seek additional nuance in qualitatively studying Jewry, but may also better understand our communities' needs by better understanding their populations' makeup. As will be explained in greater detail, single ancestry Jews are more likely to find meaning in informal Jewish experiences and Jewish religion, whereas those from mixed ancestral backgrounds most often relate to informal experiences. If the demographic make-up of American non-Orthodox Jewry comes to consist of a majority of Jews of mixed ancestry, as rising intermarriage rates may indicate, our communities needs and interests will change greatly. Phillips uses this categorization in each of his three frameworks.

Description of Phillips' Three Non-Traditional Intermarriage Frameworks

(1) The first framework, by Dutch demographer Matthijs Kalmijn, seeks to understand the demographic processes behind intermarriage and organizes intermarriage predictors into three factors; preferences, third-party influences, and the constraints of specific marriage markets. (2) The second framework, from economist Laurence Iannaccone and his article, "Religious Practice: A Human Capital Approach," situates interfaith partners as rational actors and seeks to understand their interfaith life choices better. (3) The third and final framework, the emerging field of mixed-race studies analyzes products of intermarriage to understand their perspective and better meet their needs. (Note: Phillips uses the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS 1990) and the Pew survey, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* (Pew 2013) for demographic data and grounding.) Before touching on how Phillips' work may be read into the Cincinnati community, I will now detail the three frameworks, their implications, and Phillips's most significant findings through them.

Framework #1: Matthijs Kalmijn and Predictors of Intermarriage (Preferences, Third-party Influences, and the Constraints of Specific Marriage Markets)

The first framework, a study by Dutch demographer Matthijs Kalmijn, uses three categories (preferences, third-party influences, and the constraints of specific marriage markets) to understand factors leading individuals to interfaith marriages. Through this framework, Phillips explains demographically how intermarriage should be viewed as an expected behavior. He explains, "Using intermarriage as the dependent variable asks the wrong question. It is not intermarriage that needs to be explained, but rather why Jews in-marry at all. To be consistent with existing conventions, I have used intermarriage as the

dependent variable; but in my discussion, I have emphasized that in-marriage is the unexpected outcome in the American context."[1] I will now detail Phillips' use of Kalmijn's predictors on American Jewish intermarriage.

A. Preferences

For the first factor, preferences, individuals evaluate partners for what they may bring to a relationship, ranging from socio-economic security to cultural similarities or shared educational background. Phillips notes how higher education attainment often leads to intermarriage, opening one's dating pool to those who share educational background beyond one's ancestral community.

While factors like culture and socio-economics are more explicit preferences, others like "social distance" also play a role in one's ability to marry within or outside of a community. Despite our current collective moment in time, social distance is not the ability to maintain a six-foot separation in fear of COVID-19. Instead, as introduced in 1924 by urban sociologist Robert Park, the term conceptualizes a society's willingness to interact with its minority communities. To fully understand the Jewish community's relationship to intermarriage, we must understand our relationship to our communities surrounding dominant cultures. As social distance decreases against American Jewry, the opportunity to meet non-Jews increases, increasing intermarriage possibilities. With the normalization of Jewish life in much of America, social segregation is often replaced with acceptance, a positive outcome with different but significant consequences.

[1] Phillips, "Intermarriage in the Twenty-First Century", 114.

B. Third Parties

Following preferences, the second segment of Kalmijn's categorization is "Third Parties," or parties potentially influencing intermarriages. Often concerned with group cohesion and homogeneity, "Third-party influences operate both negatively through group sanctions and positively through group identification."[2] Through pressure or support, third parties factor into an individual's ability to intermarry in knowing they may keep or lose friends and familial support accordingly. With social distance and negative social sanctions against Jews on the decline, Phillips focuses his analysis of third-parties on the study of positive Jewish socialization experiences. For instance, what is the association or correlation between socialization within a community and chances of intermarrying? Suppose one attends Jewish summer camp every summer and participates in Jewish youth groups and Birthright, are they any more likely to marry within the Jewish community?

Phillips examines intermarriage rates for both formal and informal Jewish experiences to understand the correlation between third-party influences and one's likelihood to marry Jewish. Perhaps surprisingly, Phillips finds little association between formal Jewish education and endogamy beyond Jewish day school attendance in the teen years. Worth noting, almost all formal Jewish experiences were based on single ancestry Jews as there are significantly lower rates of formal Jewish education for those from interfaith marriages. So while formal Jewish education does not greatly change one's likelihood to inmarry, the cumulative intermarriage rates for those of single ancestry homes are already low. (This trend will be discussed in greater detail in Phillips' third framework and its accompanying analysis

[2] Phillips, "Intermarriage in the Twenty-First Century", 58.

of the Cincinnati community) Conversely, those with high participation in informal Jewish experiences often had a positive correlation toward endogamy. For example,

> *"Jewish camp had no impact on Mixed Ancestry respondents, in part, because so few went to a Jewish camp. Among Single Ancestry respondents, however, the impact of camp was significant: Less than one in five (18%) had intermarried compared to more than one in four (27%) of those with no or only one summer of camp."*[3]

Phillips finds group socialization and teen experiences as corollaries towards low intermarriage rates through helping to form a greater sense of peoplehood.

C. Constraints of Specific Marriage Markets

Finally, as one's ability to marry within their community is directly affected by the opportunity to do so, the third segment of Kalmijn's framework focuses on marriage markets and their structural constraints. Such factors include group size, geographic dispersion, population shifts, and region of residence and birth. Engaging with this framework, Phillips details how the American Jewish intermarriage rate is actually quite low compared to what it could be. As a collective of only 2% of the overall American adult population,

> *"…the observed rates of 18% cumulative and 20% current intermarriage in NJPS are far below the ceiling of 98% potential intermarriage based on size of the Jewish population. Even the higher Pew intermarriage rate for Single Ancestry respondents of 42% is still below that ceiling. Controlling for population size, Single Ancestry respondents are less likely to intermarry than Single Ancestry Asians and Hispanics (Phillips 2013a), and these are groups with a much higher percentage of immigrants."*[4]

Any intermarriage percentage will appear high if the desired percentage is zero, but the Jewish community should understand the current intermarriage rate as significantly lower than it statistically could or even statistically ought to be given the number of Jews in our nation. Instead of feeling paralysis from rising intermarriage rates, we are better served

[3] Phillips, "Intermarriage in the Twenty-First Century", 64.
[4] Phillips, "Intermarriage in the Twenty-First Century", 71.

understanding its contributing factors and the offspring of such homes to understand our communities moving forward.

Framework #2:
Bringing Rationalism to the Intermarriage Conversation

Phillips utilizes economist Laurence Iannaccone's article, *Religious Practice: A Human Capital Approach*, as a second theoretical framework. The article explains how intermarriage must be engaged and responded to as a rational choice, seeing the rationale, personal nature, and social forces at play in intermarried couples' choices instead of working to dismiss them for incongruity with traditional values.

Iannaconne's work coined the term "religious capital," or one's "...familiarity with a religion's doctrines, rituals, traditions, and members."[5] As Phillips explains, if religious capital is an input, then the output would include behaviors like prayer, synagogue attendance, and choosing to live in a religiously dense area. Exogamy typically produces lower religious capital and in turn, produces lower religious production and participation as the two partners' faiths compete for the same time and resources. Through this lens, we may do better than assuming a lack of membership or involvement from an interfaith couple implies a lack of interest. As Phillips details,

> *"The rational choice dynamics behind lower synagogue membership among intermarried couples is easy to infer: The non-Jewish spouses are unwilling to spend what can amount to thousands of dollars for a religion not their own. They are also less willing than in-married couples to limit their housing choices to Jewish neighborhoods (Phillips 2017) and are more likely to live in low Jewish density suburbs far away from Jewish residential concentrations (Phillips 2015). Attributing low synagogue membership rates on the part of intermarried couples primarily to the "welcoming" demeanor of synagogues (or lack thereof) ignores the role played by the cost of synagogue membership."*[6]

[5] Phillips, "Intermarriage in the Twenty-First Century", 71.
[6] Phillips, "Intermarriage in the Twenty-First Century", 76.

Iannaccone introduces, and Phillips demonstrates how lacking synagogue membership is a rational choice in the example of intermarried couples. Even with low religious identification and interest, religious efficiency input is automatically higher for an endogamous couple due to shared identification. In an exogamous couple, with finite resources but two separate religious identities, religious choices are often competitive and naturally more complicated.

Similarly, in a separate but related article, *The Religiously Inefficient Family Revisited: The Case of Interfaith Marriage among American Jews* (2013), Phillips uses Iannaccone's writing to explain differences in housing choices between inmarried and intermarried couples. Responding to the notion that intermarried couples choosing to live in low-density Jewish areas implies a lack of interest. Instead, Phillips demonstrates how high-density Jewish areas are often more expensive than low-density regions. It may not make sense to allocate resources to live in an area most geared towards only one half of the partnership for a couple with only one Jewish partner. Using Iannaccone's writing, Phillips expands the intermarriage conversation to help readers ground their understandings in rationale and give intermarried couples the honor they deserve.

Framework #3:
Mixed-Race Studies and the Future of American Jewry

Finally, Phillips's third theoretical framework utilizes the field of mixed-race studies, examining the offspring of interfaith relationships to understand their perspectives and relationships to Jewish community and religion. As both the Jewish intermarriage rate and the Jewish community's proportion from such homes increases, our communal structures and standards of engagement will have to adapt to their conceptions of Jewish life. Notably, Phillips pushes two points that may run counter to traditional thinking. Traditional Jewish

intermarriage fears contained a base assumption that children of Jewish intermarriage would be unlikely to be raised Jewish or to remain Jewish in their adulthoods. However, in reality, a high percentage of those from intermarriages are raised and remain Jewish. Instead, products of intermarriage identify and engage with Judaism differently than their peers with two Jewish parents. We should not understand such differences as inherent or biological, but rather reflective of their upbringing's experiences. Single ancestry homes with two Jewish parents are more likely to exhibit ethnically Jewish behaviors and will have less struggle to allocate religious capital, producing a more explicitly Jewish experience. Even in non-religious homes, children of Jewish inmarriage are more likely to experience Jewish religious practices, whereas children of interfaith homes are more likely to have to split religious experiences and will likely experience more universal religious practices. Furthermore, as shown in Iannaccone's writing on religious capital, children of Jewish inmarriage are also significantly more likely to have both formal and informal Jewish experiences because the endeavors serve both parents' background. The differing conceptions of Jewish identity and childhood religious experiences may be seen in both figures 2.18 and 2.19 below. (Note: The "Christian Jew" column may be ignored for our purposes)

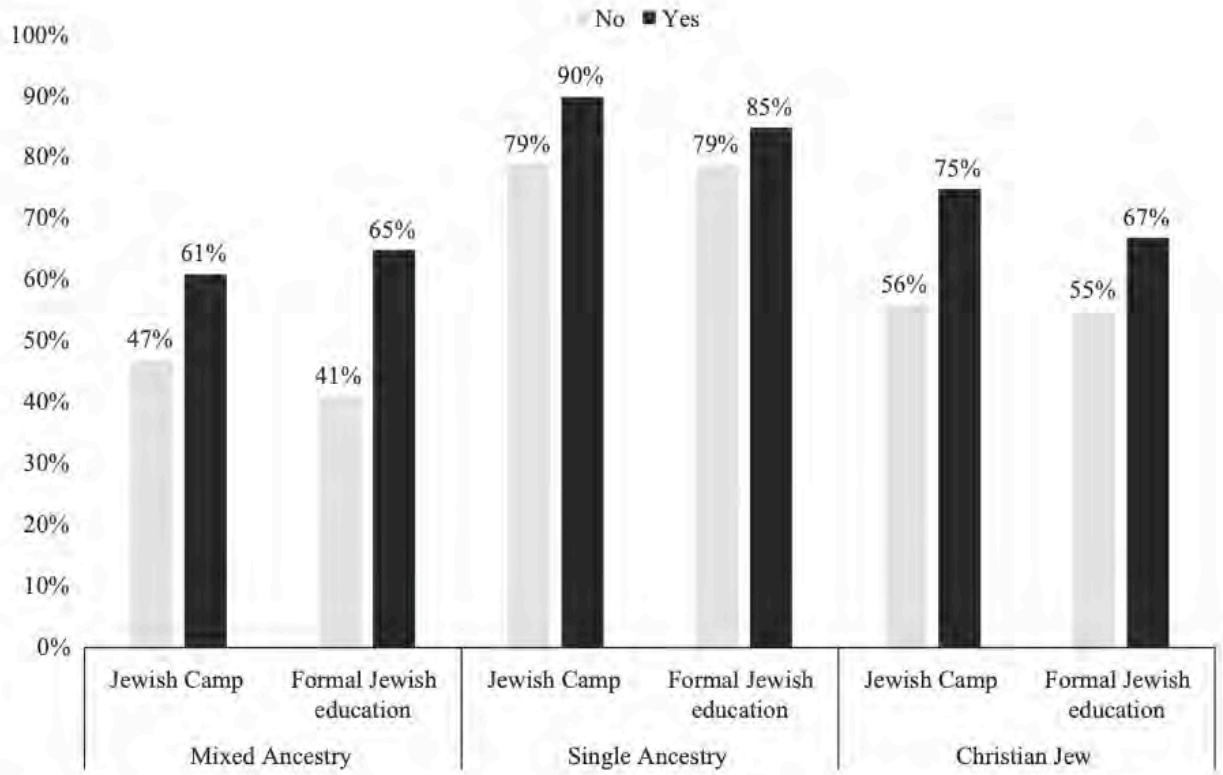

Fig. 2.18 "I have a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people" by formal and informal Jewish education and ancestry (% agree), Pew 2013

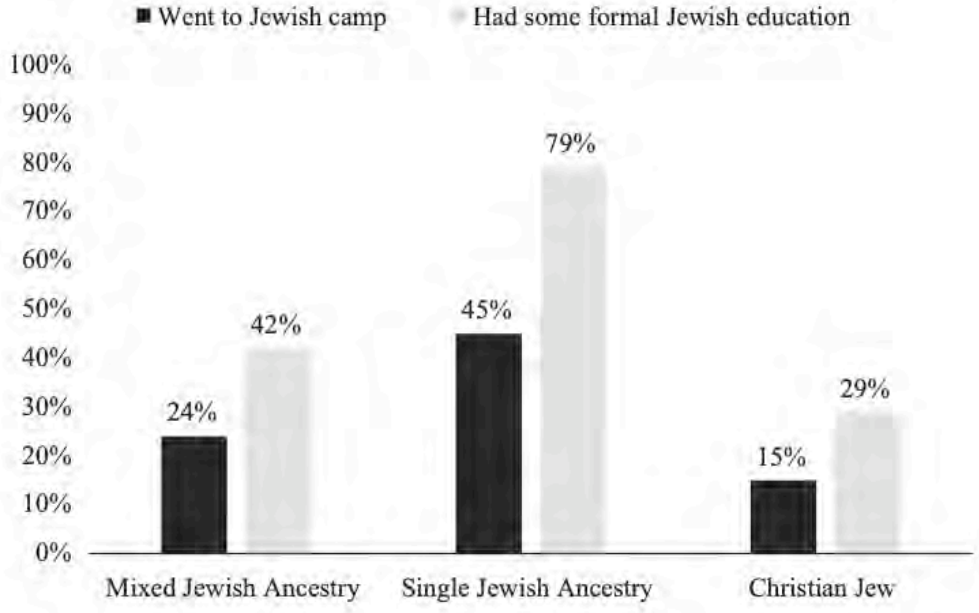

Fig. 2.19 Formal Jewish education and Jewish overnight camp by ancestry (% who had that experience), Pew 2013

With these experiences in mind, Phillips notes the inevitable and current impact intermarriage will have in reshaping American Jewry. He concisely explains how, "Adults of mixed parentage intermarry at rates of 80% or more; and the children of intermarriage, especially Mixed Ancestry intermarriage, are less likely be raised in Judaism and less likely to be exposed to either formal or informal Jewish education."[7] With a Pew Jewish intermarriage rate of 58% in 2013, coupled with the knowledge that adults of mixed parentage intermarry at rates of 80% or more, we may be certain that mixed ancestry Jews will eventually come to form the majority of non-Orthodox Jews. We must avoid internalizing this change in judgement, and must rather work to understand this growing population, better ensuring the health of our institutions, and the growth of mixed ancestral Jewry.

Changes could be as small as creating Jewish programming and engagement more attuned to the interests of Jews of mixed ancestry. Or, in a religious program, understanding the backgrounds of participants and knowing the ideas that likely need to be introduced rather than assumed. Perhaps even greater though, the Jewish community will have to internalize what it means to truly be a diverse and mixed community as a result of intermarriage.

At its best, the Jewish community is diverse in its whole, and between Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Mizrahi Jewry, our people contain a multitude of backgrounds, colors, and hues. At the moment, 12-15% of American Jews are Jews of color, but despite the richness of American Jewish diversity, our spaces are often disproportionately Ashkenormative and

[7] Phillips, "Intermarriage in the Twenty-First Century", 98.

outwardly White. As intermarriage pushes our traditional markers beyond race and ethnicity, we will have to broaden our understanding of Jewish ethnicity, race, and identity.

With Phillips' article and three theoretical frameworks detailed, they will now be applied to the 2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study in the order of their placement within Phillips' writing. First, using Kalmijn's analysis, we may better understand Cincinnati's relationship to Jewish intermarriage through a demographic lens.

Intermarriage in the Twenty-First Century: New Perspectives and the 2019 Cincinnati Community Study

(**Note**: My initial hypotheses and thoughts on the relationship between Phillips' work and the 2019 community study were significantly affected by interviews with local Cincinnati Jewish community leaders. I have left my initial writing for examination, followed by the suggestions and knowledge which changed my analysis.)

The most provocative piece of data from the community study is the knowledge that the Cincinnati Jewish intermarriage rate is 55% compared to the national rate of 44%, and a Midwest rate of 49%.[8] Using Phillips' writing, we may understand how such a percentage is conceivable through understanding and internalizing the history of Cincinnati's Jewish community. The city was among the first Jewish communities established in the United States, and Jews held high standing in Cincinnati earlier than in most American cities. I suspect that such an early acceptance greatly benefitted the Jewish community and predisposed it to higher secularization and intermarriage rates.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Cincinnati was one of the central hubs of liberal Judaism worldwide. In 1875, the rabbinical school of the Reform Movement, The

[8] Aronson, "2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study", 31.

Hebrew Union College, was founded by its leader Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise in Cincinnati, marking the city as one of the central markers of liberal Jewry. In a country and era where Jews were often subject to discrimination for their faith, Cincinnati became acculturated to the Jewish community at quite an early stage. While speculative, it may not be far-fetched to presume that the community's success would allow the surrounding dominant culture to slowly view them as not so different from themselves, making relationships and friendships increasingly achievable.

As noted earlier, Kalmijn describes personal preferences and identifications like money, taste, and education as significant factors in one's search for a partner. In a well-integrated Jewish community like Cincinnati, those factors would likely be shared between many Jewish and non-Jewish communities and would likely decrease social distance between them. Moreover, such similarities would also reduce the likelihood of the non-Jewish community serving as a negative third-party influence against intermarriages to Jews. With shared cultural and communal preferences between Jews and non-Jews in Cincinnati and a lack of external negative reinforcement against marrying Jews, it is not surprising that Cincinnati's intermarriage rate is higher than its neighbors.

Beyond preferences and third-party influences, the city must also be analyzed in terms of its marriage market. We must ask, are the Jews of Cincinnati placed in a position where they might be more likely to marry a Jew than a gentile? To what degree are Jews of the community in relationship or proximity to one another? Are Jews likely to remain within the community or to look to move elsewhere for a Jewish spouse? When removed from the shadow of its historical past, Cincinnati still possesses an impressive, active, and supportive Jewish community. However, based on various reports, it is no longer one of America's

larger Jewish communities, containing 32,100 Jews and consisting of 1.5% of the greater Cincinnati community. Despite the community's large stature within the greater community, it is very much a minority int is relation to the larger community.

While 1.5% is not insignificant when trying to factor for those within the community who are likely looking to find a partner, then splitting through gender and age cohorts, the number only decreases. When analyzing the Cincinnati Jewish community with the full context of its history, current population size, and status, one should not be surprised to see Cincinnati's possession of a higher intermarriage rate than its neighbors.

Moving forward into Laurence Iannaccone's analysis of intermarriage through religious capital and efficiency, we may better understand Jewish intermarriage and its relationship to synagogue membership in Cincinnati. In terms of synagogue membership, membership trends are slightly low for the overall Jewish community of Greater Cincinnati compared to other parts of the country.

> *"In Greater Cincinnati, 28% of households (approximately 5,300) include someone who belongs to a synagogue or another Jewish worship community of some type (Table 5.1). Thirty-five percent of Jewish adults live in synagogue-member households, comparable to that of the rest of the country (39%), but lower than among other Jews in the Midwest (47%). Among those who are not currently synagogue members, 38% were members at some time in the past."*[9]

However, specific to interfaith couples in Cincinnati, 29% of intermarried couples with children belong to synagogues compared to 54% of inmarried couples with children. For intermarried couples without children, 12% possess synagogue membership than 51% by inmarried couples without children.[10] While these differences between inmarried and intermarried couples may seem stark, when viewed through lenses of Iannaccone's religious

[9] Aronson, "2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study", 55.
[10] Aronson, "2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study", 56.

capital/efficiency and mixed-race studies, we may come to better understand the difference in affiliation.

As noted, while negotiating religious capital, interfaith couples are less likely to affiliate formally with religious institutions. This is reflected in the community study, particularly through rates of synagogue membership and participation of intermarried couples wherein only 29% of intermarried couples with children possess synagogue membership, alongside 12% of intermarried couples without children.[11] When further compared to rates of 54% and 51% for synagogue membership of inmarried couples with and without children, these percentages can appear relatively low. However, I would argue these rates are not entirely low when considering how these couples identify with Judaism. According to the community study, only 39% of intermarried couples with children attended High Holy Day services, alongside 27% by intermarried couples without children. Further, only 38% of intermarried couples with children participated in synagogue programming at any point in the year compared to 27% by those without children. This illustrates that membership is not the full picture. For many, a lack of membership is not about formal disinterest but reflects their mixed-ancestral backgrounds and religiously inefficient homes. For many couples, synagogue membership is discouraged from a need to balance both partners' needs, and for many who come from intermarried families themselves, formal Jewish experiences like synagogue affiliation and religious worship may feel foreign or not of interest.

Jewish communal leaders and those who identify closely to Jewish religion and formal experiences may see synagogue membership as a critical factor to their own identity. Still, they should understand affiliation and membership as often neither relevant nor

[11] Aronson, “2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study”, 56.

straightforward for many interfaith couples. Lastly, Cincinnatians should know that these factors are further complicated by the community's history of identifying with the Reform Movement, which tends to poll low on affiliation, and formal practice. Through objective data points and study of the backgrounds of interfaith couples and their Jewish partners, combined with Cincinnati's subjective nature as a community that tends to trend Reform and liberal religiously, the community's low synagogue membership numbers should not be shocking. In fact, low synagogue membership is only a partial reflection of the more significant discussion on engagement and communal participation more broadly.

Table 6.6[12] of the community study, polling for "Types of programs attended at all in the past year," details how only 51% of intermarried couples with children and 32% without children attended any Jewish communal program over the year studied. When polled to observe "Desired level of connection to Jewish community"[13], 58% of intermarried couples with children desired greater connection to the community and 31% believed their level of connection was about right. Similarly, 46% of intermarried couples without children desired a greater connection and 51% with children felt their connection to be about right. Finally, it is worth juxtaposing these numbers with the results of table 8.5[14] that polls for "Conditions that limit involvement in Jewish community." Among intermarried couples, feeling unwelcome, lacking Jewish knowledge, lacking interest in activities, and not knowing others polled high, either slightly below 50% or much higher. With both polls under consideration, we may generally view Cincinnati's interfaith couples (with and without children) as having low involvement in communal programming, but as also generally desiring a greater

[12] Aronson, "2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study", 68.
[13] Aronson, "2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study", 88.
[14] Aronson, "2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study", 89.

connection despite a lack of familiarity with other community members, a lack of interest in many of the activities, and a low level of Jewish knowledge. These results illustrate a divide between the Jewish community's assumed traditional nature in both interests and identifications against a bloc of the community raised with different experiences and interests in Judaism and community. When examined without context, we may understand nontraditional Jewry and those in intermarriages as disinterested or moving away from Judaism, but with a full conception, we may understand that our traditional communal setup may be slightly outdated and need upkeep.

In viewing intermarried couples and their Jewish offspring as complex and rational individuals, instead of walking stereotypes of Jewish disinterest and disaffiliation, we may better work to create opportunities and programs to serve their interests and needs. As Jewish community is historically rooted in Jewish religion, Jewish communities are often inherently geared towards religious formal experiences. However, we must recognize that Jewish individuals' lives, unlike communal structure and institutions, are not necessarily based in Jewish practice and may have different interests or identifications. With this in mind, we must create an infrastructure and set of experiences to facilitate the type of Jewish identities and lives these individuals would find attractive, even if they do not run alongside traditional Jewish religious life. We must hold interfaith marriages and the diverse Jewish identities they often produce as legitimate and not peripheral, both in number and value. The Cincinnati Jewish community may be predisposed to higher rates of Jewish intermarriage as a result of their place within the history of Reform Judaism, however, the specific lifestyles and experiences of Jews within those relationships are not predetermined, and the community

may do a better job of serving such individuals and families with a more informed and understanding perspective on interfaith Jewry.

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Interviews with Dr. Gary Zola, the Executive Director of the American Jewish Archives, Brian Jaffee, the Executive Director of the Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati, and Kim Newstadt, the foundation's Director of Research and Learning, helped me to understand where my writing jumped from research to assumptions and where I may be mistaken.

Dr. Zola explained that if there were a higher rate of intermarriage in Cincinnati compared to the national average, it would have less to do with the city's Reform Jewish past and more to do with early Jewish desires for acceptance and success. As the oldest Jewish community west of the Allegheny Mountains, Jewish communal institutions began to appear as early as the 1820s. The consistency of Cincinnati's Jewish population was predominantly German historically and reflected the more western and reformed style of Jewish practice that endorsed the Reform movement. These Jews would seek to Americanize themselves and become a full part of the American experience. While I had assumed these trends were reflective of a historic Reform Jewish past, I can now see how they may reflect the community's German Jewish ancestry and early Americanization.

Similarly, Brian Jaffee pushed that from a conversation of his with the Pew Research Center, it was unlikely that Cincinnati held a greater intermarriage rate than its neighbors and would be reflected in the upcoming Pew Study. Moreover, Kim Newstadt noted from a conversation of hers with Rosov Consulting, an outside agency used for further analysis of the 2019 community study, that Cincinnati's past as a hub of Reform Judaism was unlikely to affect long-term intermarriage rates.

The results of these interviews do not dismiss my initial findings entirely, but instead add depth and additional discussion. I believe Brian Jaffee and Kim Newstadt will likely be correct, and the next Pew Study's national and midwestern intermarriage rates will likely be closer to if not higher than Cincinnati's. Nonetheless, we must still seek to understand the factors leading to high intermarriage rates and seek to better understand and serve a community that will increasingly consist of individuals from intermarriages.

Chapter Four:
Identity: From Religion to Relation

‘‘If Jews are not Jewish the way their grandparents were supposed to have been or the way they themselves ought to be, how, if at all, do they relate to anything Jewish in their own lives?’’ -Bethamie Horowitz
(*Reframing the Study of Contemporary American Jewish Identity*, 2002)

In 2016, as a first-year student at the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, I found myself one morning attending Shabbat services at a Sephardi Orthodox synagogue. Hoping to make use of my limited time in the city, I worked to attend services in spaces harder to come by in the United States. I chose the particular community for its lively but traditional services and hoped to obtain a better understanding of Sephardi prayer as an Ashkenaz Jew. The service was as energetic and passionate as advertised, but it would ultimately be a message delivered by a community leader that would stick with me most strongly. While I cannot remember the Torah that inspired his teaching, I will never forget his message. The speaker passionately pushed for full observance of Shabbat and charged all of us to keep the Sabbath, no matter the circumstances. Specifically, he proclaimed, “If your mother is in the hospital, I am deeply sorry, and I hope you will visit her. But, if she is sick on Shabbat and you will have to drive to see her, then you are not truly prioritizing our holy day.”

I was stunned. I could understand the speaker’s charge to keep Shabbat, even as a non-observant Jew. However, his message to avoid seeing one’s sick parents to avoid breaking Shabbat was not an idea aligned with my conception of Judaism. My identity placed my family above observance. Sitting in the audience, I began to think how perhaps the speaker and I were not only practicing Judaism differently but that perhaps our entire world views of Judaism were different. Despite coming from different ethnic backgrounds, neither religion nor ethnicity would serve as our primary difference, but rather identity. Despite having come to services that day to experience a space religiously and ethnically different

from myself, it would ultimately be a difference in identity that would produce the most significant difference.

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In the Jewish world you may hear the phrase “Jewish identity” around every corner, and helping to create a strong Jewish identity may seem like the goal of every program. This ever mysterious and desired identity is spoken of as the glue holding one’s Jewish life together and the fuel behind its experiences, but ultimately, Jewish identity is simply how one perceives and relates to oneself as a Jew. In the formal study of Jewish identity, we seek to understand both how individuals form their Jewish identities and how those identities come to influence them in return. By understanding how Jews construct and make meaning out of Judaism, we may craft effective programs and relevant structures, creating a Jewish community truly built to its participants' needs and interests as they are rather than how they may be perceived.

Despite the popularity of studies on Jewish identity today, historically, traditional conceptions of Jewish membership prevented Jewish thinkers from recognizing the creative process and depth to Jewish identity. Classically, Jewish membership reflects the Jewish covenant or *brit* provided to the Israelite community in Deuteronomy 29 when they stood collectively, entering themselves (and their descendants) into a covenant with God. Moreover, in observant Jewish living, covenantal life means adherence to formal halachic living, so traditionally, Jewish identity was an assumed element of formal Jewish life. If one lived Jewishly, one might assume a strong Jewish identity. If one chose to live outside of the community’s precepts, they surely had a weak Jewish identity. It was only after Jewish

emancipation and the further development of Jewish liberal denominations that Jewish membership, and in turn identity, became more complicated, varied, and recognized.

Despite the formality of identity studies today, as explained in, *The Social Self: Toward the Study of Jewish Lives in the Twenty-first Century*, by Ari Kelman, Tobin Belzer, Ziva Hassenfeld, Ilana Horwitz, and Matthew Williams, historically, the subject was often reflective of the perceived issues facing the community by its authors. For instance, identity study for the Greatest Generation reflected fears of assimilation through over-integration into American society, pushing researchers to try to understand the gravity of their perceived predicament. The authors of their day, understanding Jewish identity as inherently tied to Jewish practice and covenantal living, measured expressions of Jewish identity on scales of predetermined Jewish attitudes and behaviors "… to assess how well integrationist or survivalist tendencies were serving American Jews."[1] Overly focused on the questions of their day, such studies made little headway into how Jewish meaning is formed, how one chooses identification with Judaism, or how said identity shapes lives. However, as time passed, shifts in Jewish demography and the Baby Boomer generation's maturation would necessitate new Jewish identity studies and updates to methodology.

Responding to societal increases in individualism and intermarriage rates, studies on the Baby Boomer generation sought to understand their more personal brand of Judaism, beginning to recognize identity as an exercise in meaning-making. Two studies in particular, Bethamie Horwitz's *Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity*, and Arnold Eisen and Steven Cohen's *The Jew Within* would push the study of Jewish identity through a shift in methodology that would facilitate

[1] Kelman, "The Social Self", 2.

personal responses reflective of individualized identities. The studies used "...a mixed-method approach, complementing quantitative findings with rich narrative portraits of individual accounts of conceptions, formulations, and applications of their Jewish identities." Using formal data *and* individual accounts, these studies could better determine the process of identity construction while also recognizing the individual identities of its participants. As Horowitz notes, her study added, "...a new dimension to the outwardly observable manifestations of identity considered in previous studies, exploring the internal, subjective aspect of what being Jewish means to the individual."[2] Eisen and Cohen would go even further, stating a belief that "...the meaning of Judaism in America transpires within the self. American Jews have drawn the activity and significance of their group identity into the subjectivity of the individual, the activities of the family, and the few institutions (primarily the synagogue) which are seen as extensions of this intimate sphere."[3] Ultimately both works are most exemplary of the Baby Boomer generation, but in updating methodology within identity study and illustrating identity formation as a process of personal meaning-making, they provided much-needed advancements to their field.

Despite the contributions of any study, the passing of time and the maturation of young generations into adulthood will always necessitate further research and a need for methodological advancements. Thus, recognizing such needs, the authors of *The Social Self: Toward the Study of Jewish Lives in the Twenty-first Century* sought to update Jewish identity study to the maturation of post-Boomer Jewry and build upon the methodological advancements of Horowitz, Eisen, and Cohen. Methodologically, the team held an even greater emphasis on interviews than their predecessors, allowing participants to self-guide

[2] Kelman, "The Social Self", 7.
[3] Kelman, "The Social Self", 7.

their Jewish stories "...to explore the ways in which they spoke about being Jewish and to reflect upon how emergent sociological and demographic conditions might factor into strategies and practices of identity construction."[4] In doing so, the team would conclude "...that the prevailing conceptions of Jewish identity do not capture the highly relational nature of post-boomers' construction of the self," and that "...research subjects relied on other people quite heavily in the construction of their own Jewish identity, suggesting the need for an analytical approach that more closely attends to the social dimensions of selfhood."[5] The data revealed identity formation to be fundamentally relational, suggesting a conception of Jewish identity as personalized through relational interaction, rather than overly individualistic through others' exclusion. While Eisen and Cohen believed influences to identity were external and, therefore, lesser, *The Social Self* sees external influences as necessary foundational elements to identity construction.

While previous studies expressed concern over the increasingly personalized construction of Jewish identity, shaped by personal experiences rather than tradition, *The Social Self* found those same relational experiences to be no less powerful. The authors explain,

> *"Our respondents told us about themselves by telling stories about others who featured in every imaginable account of their lives. Parents, siblings, school principals, teachers, camp counselors, rabbis, friends, roommates, and lovers all played powerful roles in the stories people told about themselves, figuring centrally in their presentations of self. Our respondents brought these others into their accounts to explain moments of particular change or growth, to describe formative experiences, and to demonstrate how and why their lives had unfolded along particular paths. They constructed narratives of their Jewish identities that were inseparably linked to both Jews and non-Jews from their past and present. Whether representing instances of social connection or disconnection, others played a powerful role in respondents' expression, description, and construction of self."*[6]

[4] Kelman, "The Social Self", 3.
[5] Kelman, "The Social Self", 3.
[6] Kelman, "The Social Self", 13.

While Eisen and Cohen describe their ‘‘sovereign self’’ model of identity as pushing against external influences because of a focus on individuality, the “social self” depends on externalities to gain the perspective and experiences necessary to build identity. In particular, the study uncovers three narratival modes through which identity is relationally constructed: connection, comparison, and conflict. Perhaps most important in these findings is that identity formation is constant and not limited to only Jewish people, experiences, or settings.

Against past conceptions of identity formation, fearing individualism and new modes of Jewish engagement might hinder Jewish identity construction. Current study of identity produces an exceptionally different picture. Jewish identity is built in all settings and throughout entire lives rather than purely in Jewish spaces, with Jewish people, or limited to the experiences of one's youth. *The Social Self* accurately reflects the increasingly interfaith nature of modern Jewish life. In a world reflective of multiple generations of Jewish intermarriage and an increasingly diverse world, fully Jewish spaces are increasingly rare, and Jewish identity is built through relational interactions of connection, comparison, and conflict with *all* people, not just Jewish people. Meaning, for instance, that the non-Jewish parent of an interfaith home may play as central a role in Jewish identity construction as the Jewish parent in their child's Jewish identity. As Charles Liebman presciently wrote in 1973, "Today, integration is a fact, rather than an option for American Jews. Rather than framing survival in opposition to integration, our task is to understand Jewish lives and communities within the context of integration. As a result, the question of a sovereign identity or journey seems less salient today than understanding the social processes that form the self."[7] In my own life, my non-Jewish father played an invaluable role in shaping my Jewish identity,

[7] Kelman, “The Social Self”, 24.

providing positive opportunities for connection, comparison, and conflict. Despite interfaith families not serving as the preferred traditional setting for identity construction, we should understand identity formation as broader and more all-encompassing than limited only to Jewish spaces or individuals.

While *The Social Self* helps us understand identity formation's processes, its focus is primarily qualitative, producing and studying interviews and first-hand testimony. Such methodology is thorough and positive for our understanding, but also not the full picture. We must also touch on demography to understand how changes in Jewish population numbers, movements, and trends may also affect identity. In his work, *Accounting for Jewish Secularism: Is a New Cultural Identity Emerging?*, Jewish demographer Bruce Phillips illustrates how demographic conditions play a critical role in shaping modern Jews.

In his work, Phillips uses demography to account for a seeming increase in "Jews of no religion" in contemporary Jewish polling. Related to *The Social Self's findings*, Phillips ties the shift to a compositional change in the make-up of Jewish family structures. He explains, "Jews with no religion are overwhelmingly of mixed ancestry; and the number of such Jews increased dramatically between 1990 and 2000 as a result of intermarriage."[8] Phillips explains how Jews of mixed ancestry are inherently less ethnic than single ancestry Jews due to more diverse family units and come to reflect a Judaism less ethnic than their peers. American Jews have long been distinguished by their religious secularity, often comfortable placing their identities solely upon Jewish peoplehood or ethnicity. However, when ethnicity decreases amongst an already religiously secular Jewish population, Jewish identity pillars are suddenly gone. In short, if identities are reflective of interactions with

[8] Phillips, “Accounting for Jewish Secularism”, 63.

other individuals, and those individuals shift demographically, there should, in turn, exist a change in the identities as well. While Phillips' work primarily seeks to dispel claims of increasing Jewish secularism, his work unintentionally builds upon *The Social Self's* claims. *The Social Self* illustrates how individuals come to affect others' identities through relational interactions, which in turn places a premium on the quality of individuals we surround ourselves with. Phillips' work illustrates how changes in Jewish family units affect Jewish polling and identification, further backing *The Social Self's* relational claims.

Phillips' analysis provides a case-specific window into identity formation and its long-term effects. The author explains the effects of intermarriage on identity, explaining,

> *"Jews with no religion are overwhelmingly of mixed ancestry; and the number of such Jews increased dramatically between 1990 and 2000 as a result of intermarriage. Two OLS regressions show that both ethnic attitudes and behaviors are influenced primarily by Jewish background experiences. Jews of mixed ancestry are less likely to have these and thus score lower. A third OLS regression shows that these background experiences strengthen ethnic attachments which in turn influence ethnic behaviors. A logistic regression demonstrates that ancestry does have a direct influence on identification as secular above and beyond Jewish background experiences."*[9]

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Jewish identity study is pursued to understand and serve our Jewish populations more accurately. Phillips' assertions may have us believe that an increasingly large segment of Jewish society, those in or from intermarriages, possesses an increasingly secular and decreasingly ethnic Jewish identity. With this knowledge, we may better engage the community in meaningful ways relevant to their past experiences and conceptions of Jewish life.

In each chapter of this thesis, I seek to use the information gathered as a lens to place upon the 2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study, testing the theories and working to

[9] Phillips, "Accounting for Jewish Secularism", 63.

understand how national theory compares with data on a local community. In this specific case, due to the nature of Jewish identity and the methods chosen within the study itself, I believe the amount we may gather on identity from the survey is limited at best. As illustrated in *The Social Self*, identity construction occurs through relational interaction and personalized meaning-making. While the process does come about through external interactions, it is a primarily internal process and, therefore, difficult to measure in a survey. For this reason, both the *Social Self* team and (in her own work) Bethamie Horowitz utilize self-guided interviews to gain a glimpse into participants' identity construction. The surveying performed through telephone polling in the community study helps gauge interest and participation, but not necessarily identity. Moreover, beyond the broader limitations of studying identity through polling, I believe there are also issues in how the survey classifies Jews through religious identification.

Seeking to facilitate comparison to national studies, the Cincinnati study intentionally makes use of the 2013 Pew Study's terminology for classifying Jews. In particular, the framing fails to capture the differences in secularity between Jews and other religious communities, falsely understanding Jews as “Jews by religion” or “Jews of no religion” with no middle ground. Instead, Judaism is unique in its coupling of religion and ethnicity through peoplehood, allowing Jews to potentially not identify with Judaism religiously while still authentically maintaining their Judaism through ethnic and cultural claims. As Phillips explains, “American Jews have long been distinguished by their ‘‘secularity’’ without having renounced religious identification. Jews by religion are almost as secular in outlook as other Americans with no religion at all.”[10] Noting the limitations of the study is necessary for

[10] Phillips, “Accounting for Jewish Secularism”, 65.

understanding its limitations in accurately expressing the population's identity. The study is still impressively thorough, but in utilizing Pew's framing to allow for comparison to national polls is ultimately a trade-off at the cost of illustrating identity as an exercise in meaning-making rather than a reflection of formal religious observance.

Building upon the 2019 study, I would suggest the community commission an additional long-term study tracking individuals' views and behaviors, while also placing a heavier emphasis upon non-religious Jewish engagement. I believe the community study serves most accurately as a snapshot of itself to be compared to past snapshots by comparing overall membership, participation, and demographic numbers. I would suggest the commissioning of a long-term study similar to *The Social Self*, methodologically focusing on interviews of community members to understand their identities. By repeating such a study, the community may better understand the changes taking place in the identities of their community, rather than only possessing a detailed snapshot of one moment.

Beyond the community study, we may still use national studies' theories to benefit our own communities. Most notably, I believe modern identity study forces the Jewish community to reexamine its judgment and understanding of unobservant or non-religious Jewry. As mentioned earlier in Phillips' work and the limitations of Pew's terminology, given the unique relationship between Jewish peoplehood, religion, and ethnicity, one may be Jewish without believing in Jewish religion. As a result, a Jew may be secular and uninterested in religion while still remaining Jewish. Despite this fact, non-religious Jews are often criticized for their unobservance or treated as lesser than. In particular, there exists a flippant category for non-religious Jews, or "High Holy Day Jews," referring to those who only attend religious services on the holiest days of the Jewish calendar. With the ideas

presented throughout this essay, I believe Jewish communities must seek to remove their judgement of lesser observant Jews. As *The Social Self* and Phillips' *Accounting for Jewish Secularism* suggest, identity is formed relationally, not through prayer services, and an increasingly high number of Jews will be unlikely to find connection to Jewish religion as a result of their familial backgrounds. Despite many criticizing non-religious Jewry as a means of seeking to bring them into more significant observance, in reality, such judgment is inaccurate, believing Judaism to be contingent upon observance and also harmful, alienating individuals out of the community.

As illustrated through the detailing of identity study throughout the 20th century into the present day, the study of Jewish identity is endlessly relevant, regardless of any day's specific issues at hand. By understanding identity as meaning-making rather than a reflection of observance and understanding secularism as compatible with a strong identity, we may also better understand the Jewish experience. By understanding how Jews construct meaning, we may better craft programs and Jewish spaces better suiting relational interactions and increasing the likelihood our ideas reach their intended audience. The future will inevitably present its own unique difficulties, but if we may continue to develop our understanding of Jewish identity, we may continue to make our ancient tradition relevant in an uncertain future.

Finally, I would recommend a heavier focus on facilitating interactions amongst Jews rather than Jewish engagement for its own sake. As *The Social Self* study illustrates, identity builds relationally, so Jewish relational engagement opportunities are critical. I believe Cincinnati already does an excellent job of this, investing heavily in Jewish camping, birthright, youth groups, and Israel *shlichiiim*. Nonetheless, the informal Jewish experiences

should not be taken as any lesser for their lack of formal focus on Jewish religious content. Suppose we are to recognize Jewish identity as relational rather than something to be uncovered, alongside the fact that the Jewish community is increasingly disinterested in Judaism as religion. In that case, we must fund Jewish opportunities that meet participants where they are interested and identities rather than pushing them towards Judaism as a religion they may never embrace. Again, this is not to suggest a devaluation of Judaism as a religion. Instead, we must think more about how we may best place Jews in conversation with one another rather than asking how we might make Jews more religiously Jewish.

Note: When choosing sources for this chapter, I hoped to both reflect the development of the field of Jewish identity study alongside the most contemporary conclusions on the subject matter. Unfortunately, I am aware of one author's troublesome actions, in particular, Dr. Steven M. Cohen, co-author of *The Jew Within*. I am aware of his actions and believe his accusers. I am sympathetic and tend to agree with calls to avoid supporting the work of those found to have committed deeply harmful acts. Still, I also believe that when necessary, we must work to separate the work from an author if the ideas contained therein are essential for study. As much as I desired to avoid the use of the author's work, *The Jew Within* made fundamental strides in the field of Jewish identity study, and the study I utilize most in the chapter (*The Social Self*) is in direct conversation with the core of Cohen and Eisen's work. The decision was not made lightly.

Chapter Five:
Engagement: Membership to Independence

In 2016, serving as a youth coordinator for a synagogue, I occasionally found myself staffing youth group retreats at a nearby Jewish summer camp. Over several of these retreats, I struck up a friendship with a youth group advisor, Lance, who also coordinated a summer camp for homeless children in his spare time. One day, we struck up a conversation on what it meant to live Jewishly, and he told me a story of a similar conversation he held with an Orthodox coworker of his. Every morning, seeing this individual with tefillin marks on his arm, keeping kosher, and even seeing him praying after lunch, he would one day jokingly mention how he sometimes felt like a bad Jew when observing him in action. The coworker was shocked and would explain how he felt as if he performed all of these actions out of obligation and actually thought often about how much better a Jew Lance was for his work in the community. Lance explained how positive a conversation it was for both of them, giving them greater confidence in their actions and styles of Jewish observance. I believe the story pushes us to ask what Jewish engagement is, seeking to understand what it means to live Jewishly, and to greater understand the variety of actions that may entail Jewish engagement.

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As illustrated in the vignette, Jewish engagement is varied and often challenging to define as its definitions may be personal as much as formal. On the Jewish individual's level, I believe Jewish engagement is any Jewish interaction one has, whether explicitly Jewish or aligning with Jewish values. As illustrated by the previously mentioned story, both the Orthodox coworker engaging in formal Jewish ritual participates in acts of engagement, but so too was Lance engaged Jewishly through informal work with Jewish youth groups and the organizing of a camp for underprivileged children, almost certainly aligning with Jewish

values. On the level of Jewish organizations, engagement may be the efforts to bring community members to interact with Jewish or Jewish-aligned activities, practices, and individuals. With a more thorough understanding of engagement, we may better understand how Jews prefer to express their identities, using this knowledge to craft more relevant and effective Jewish programs and spaces. The study of Jewish engagement seeks to do just that. This chapter will seek to understand modern Jewish engagement by synthesizing contemporary research and polling on the subject. The knowledge gained will then be used to examine the 2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study through a lens of Jewish engagement, seeking to understand the local community's engagement practices and making suggestions for their benefit.

Today, the study of Jewish engagement is pursued through widespread polling of the greater Jewish community to understand the variety of ways Jews actualize identities through action and participation. However, traditionally, engagement was understood through the actions of a community's most active members, assuming uninvolvement by periphery members as disinterest and in turn shaping the community's programming to the interests of the most involved. This engagement model is most thoroughly detailed in Jewish political scientist Daniel J. Elazar's 1984 work, *The Jewish Polity*. Elazar describes the American Jewish community as a "...series of uneven concentric circles, radiating outward from a hard core of committed Jews toward areas of vague Jewishness on the fringes."[1] Those who inhabit this core, whom Elazar labels as "integrals," can be defined as Jews, "...whose Jewishness is a full-time concern, the central factor of their lives, whether expressed in traditionally religious terms or through some variety of ethnic nationalism or an intensive

[1] Elazar, "The Jewish Polity", 91.

involvement in Jewish affairs."[2] Through this model, the core shapes Jewish life through its actions and preferences, and engagement study more accurately reflects involved members than the entire Jewish community. Moreover, engagement is understood as active involvement in traditional religious practices and communal experiences.

Elazar's traditional model has positive intentions but problematically views the engaged as more worthy or relevant than the unengaged, seeking to understand the greater community through a subset, while also only recognizing traditionally formal Jewish engagements. Elazar's writing illustrates long-lasting conceptions of communal engagement and also reinforces them. Instead, we should seek to understand the practices of those actively involved and uninvolved, recognizing both as full and relevant segments of the community. However, Elazar does correctly present the community as it was most understood in its time and illustrates Jewish members embodying their day's trends. Today, we may seek to understand engagement for *all* American Jews, not only the actively engaged or those possessing synagogue membership. To do so, we must seek to understand both the current milieu influencing modern Jewry and their preferred styles of engagement.

For the sake of ease, we may pursue engagement through the common strategy of analyzing polling by generational cohorts; however, such a pursuit may be misleading. In the 2013 study, *Generations and Regeneration: Engagement and Fidelity in 21st Century American Jewish Life*, seeking to understand engagement through examining actively engaged Jewry, professionals David Elcott and Stuart Himmelfarb note how generational cohorts poll similarly when comparing their unengaged and engaged blocs. They write,

> *"What stands out throughout these survey results is that the ways in which we may well imagine generational cohorts distinguishing themselves was far less evident among a*

[2] Elazar, "The Jewish Polity", 95.

> *population of connected Jews. This is especially true on a deep level, in contrast to the lifestyle choices that people make at different ages as they mature. One expects different priorities for those who are beginning families compared to those becoming empty nesters. Yet, beyond these factors, there are indeed similarities that bridge the generational divide. This parallels a complementary trend, revealed by the present study: disaffected Jews who live more peripherally to Jewish life, engaging in few voluntary Jewish associations—synagogue memberships, philanthropic giving to Jewish causes, participation in Jewish social."*[3]

While younger Jews may most embody the trends of a given time, the same trends are also reflected in older generations living in the same cultural milieu. So, while the studies focus on post-Boomer Jews, reflecting their dates of publication, their results are not solely isolated to younger Jews and are echoed to a lesser degree in older generations as well.

In the 2017 study, *Traditional Judaism: The Conceptualization of Jewishness in the Lives of American Jewish Post-Boomers,* fifty-eight post-boomer Jews are asked to describe their Jewish lives in their own words. From the transcripts, Jewish qualitative researchers sought to understand Jewish self-conception through participants' eyes, paying particular attention to their word choices and manners of self-expression. The results are telling and push against traditional understandings of Jewish engagement and expression. In an analysis of the interviews, the team found a preference in participants to describe themselves as not religious and with a near-total absence of the language of ethnicity. "Instead, interviewees volunteered tradition as a replacement for both and as part of a rationale for the elements of Jewish life that compelled them to participate."[4] This is not to say participants identified as traditional Jews, but rather preferred engaging Judaism as a tradition rather than as a religion or ethnicity.

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[3] Elcott, "Generations and Regeneration: Engagement", 20-21.
[4] Kelman, "Traditional Judaism: The Conceptualization", 134.

The researchers elaborate, "...our interviewees used the language of tradition to describe dimensions of Jewishness that they found resonant. Half of our interviewees described their affinity for Jewishness in terms of tradition. More importantly, all of the 35 respondents who referred to themselves as not religious used either tradition or culture to describe their Jewishness."[5] The results illustrate the changing nature of how Jews may prefer to engage with Judaism and may present us with an optimistic outlook for engaging the unengaged. Jews no longer identifying with Judaism as religion or ethnicity may not necessarily be looking to drop Judaism altogether. Instead, they may be searching for a mode of engagement better fitting their environments and social conditions.

In repurposing Judaism as a malleable tradition rather than a covenantal religion allowed participants to align Judaism with their modern conceptions of the world. The authors explain,

> *"Less exclusive than ethnicity and less restrictive than religion, tradition serves as a powerful modifier of the kind of Jewishness with which post-boomer American Jews can engage. By unmooring their Jewishness from religion and ethnicity, the post-boomers in our study suggest a mode of engagement that captures the power and pull of their Jewishness under the conditions of twenty-first-century sociological and demographic realities. Neither an exclusive commitment to an ethnic group nor adherence to the word of a divine being, tradition suggests a slightly more flexible articulation of commitments to people and practices. Tradition prevails upon its practitioners with seriousness but without guilt or exclusivity and, as a result, allows for greater flexibility and more positively inflected engagements with Jewishness than other ways of framing Jewishness might allow."*[6]

Wherein traditional Jewish engagement structures itself around obligation and the authority of Jewish tradition, a tradition may be tailored to fit the hyper-liberal and self-autonomous nature of the moment. Engaging with Judaism as a tradition, interviewees "tended to formulate their understandings of tradition in two narrative forms: generational connection

[5] Kelman, "Traditional Judaism: The Conceptualization", 149.
[6] Kelman, "Traditional Judaism: The Conceptualization", 162-163.

and getting together. ...Not exclusive of one another, each provided a framework for locating Jewish practice and its meaning and a logic for elaborating on the notion of tradition as they understood it."[7] Whereas more traditional Jews might take-on Jewish practice from a sense of commandedness or obligation, participants instead focused on connecting to generations past or as a meaningful vehicle through which to gather with others.

These claims of a Judaism driven by relationships, gathering, and familial connection are further grounded in the similar study, *Unlocking the Future of Jewish Engagement*. After similarly conducting interviews with young post-boomer Jews, the study presents young Jews as tied to cultural customs and relationships (most often family,) rather than institutional Jewish life. Most telling, when asked, "Which of the following explains why you feel connected to some type of Jewish community right now?" participants' choices were far more self-oriented than might be expected for a question on community. Family as a means to connect to community polled at 75%, and gathering with one's friends/social circle polled at 48%. Beyond these two choices, the next highest would be no higher than 34%.[8] While participants did on average indicate the observance of three to four Jewish holidays each year[9], nonetheless "Their emphasis remains on informality, inclusivity, and ties to shared interests…"[10] As journalist Charles M. Blow is quoted in the previously mentioned *Generations and Regeneration* study, "All in all, we seem to be experiencing a wave of liberal-minded detach-ees, a generation in which institutions are subordinate to the individual…"[11]

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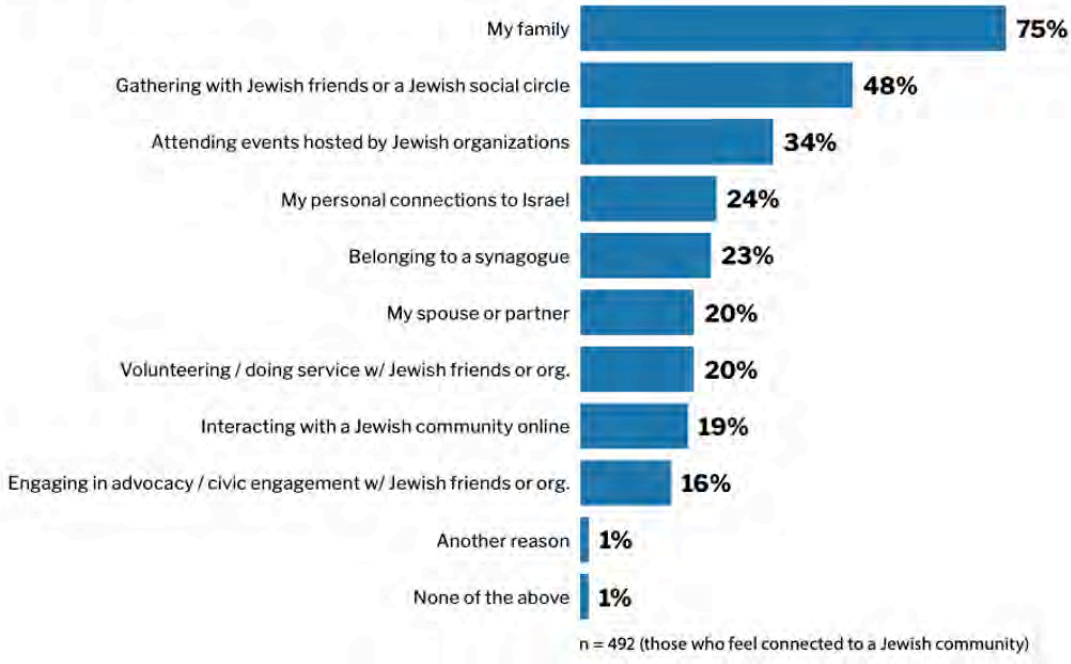
[7] Kelman, "Traditional Judaism: The Conceptualization", 151.
[8] Atlantic 57, "Unlocking the Future of Jewish Engagement", 21.
[9] Atlantic 57, "Unlocking the Future of Jewish Engagement", 22.
[10] Atlantic 57, "Unlocking the Future of Jewish Engagement", 33.
[11] Elcott, "Generations and Regeneration: Engagement", 15.

Which of the following explains why you feel connected to some type of Jewish community right now?

Select all that apply



Now, with a greater understanding of modern Jewry and their preferred methods of engagement, I will discuss how our communities might actualize the theories in their own spaces. I will first utilize an article studying engagement through analyzing synagogues, mosques, and churches already successful in young adult engagement by Tobin Belzer and Donald E. Miller. I will then utilize a modern response to the previously mentioned community model by Daniel Elazar to theorize how our communities may better structure themselves with coming generations in mind.

In the 2007 publication, *Synagogues That Get It: How Jewish Congregations Are Engaging Young Adults*, sociologists Tobin Belzer and Donald E. Miller study communities successfully engaging young adults to better understand contemporary engagement. As will be seen, most of these communities align with young adults' preferences mentioned earlier, actualizing them through programming and intentional design. The researchers found that most young adults entered their communities on their own accord rather than out of a sense of familial or religious obligation. "Instead, their active involvement is focused on their current realities and interests: what matters to them now."[12] Seeking personalized experiences, rarely are the communities chosen for their denominational or theological affiliation but rather for their ability to facilitate relationships and space to express their "full" and "authentic" selves.[13] With this in mind, most communities successfully engaging young adults are progressive, accepting a spectrum of religious, social, and sexual identifications. Whether intergenerational congregations or a subgroup of a larger synagogue, these communities seek to strike a "...theoretical and practical balance between particularism and

[12] Belzer, “Synagogues That Get It”, 6.
[13] Belzer, “Synagogues That Get It”, 7.

universalism."[14] Playing directly into their preferences and enabling participants to engage on their terms, it should be no surprise these communities attract younger adults. However, we should not consider this light or unserious engagement. The authors explain,

> *"Young congregants have chosen communal involvement purposefully and thoughtfully. They decide how often to attend and how much to participate. They choose how much of the belief system to accept and how much ritual to practice. They choose how to balance their individual autonomy with their identity as members of a community and within a religious tradition. They seek communities with both flexibility and structure, enabling them to establish their personal boundaries. While they respect the religious standards of their congregations, many take pride in making their own choices based on personal factors such as level of knowledge, peer group, and religious upbringing."*[15]

While communities may understandably be concerned with the present state of engagement and membership, the studies offer a path to engaging members through their interests and relevant styles of engagement.

As mentioned earlier, Daniel Elazar's community model presents traditional conceptions of Jewish engagement while also overemphasizing the engaged over the unengaged. Further, it understands itself as *the* model of engagement. In Rabbi Hayim Herring's 2001 work, *Network Judaism: A Fresh Look at the Organization of the American Jewish Community*, the author expresses a model better fitting the present-day, recommending we structure communities as networks, achieving goals through dynamic relationships rather than hierarchical structures. Networks are characterized by a high-degree of real-time communication, enabling organizations to react quickly to environmental changes and are highly collaborative.[16] Herring writes,

> *"In the network model, for those who are accustomed to thinking in terms of pyramids, it is the individual and not the organization that is at the top of the pyramid. (Actually, there is no pyramid at all, just inter-connected networks.) This metaphor recognizes*

[14] Belzer, "Synagogues That Get It", 2.
[15] Belzer, "Synagogues That Get It", 2.
[16] Herring, "Network Judaism", 21.

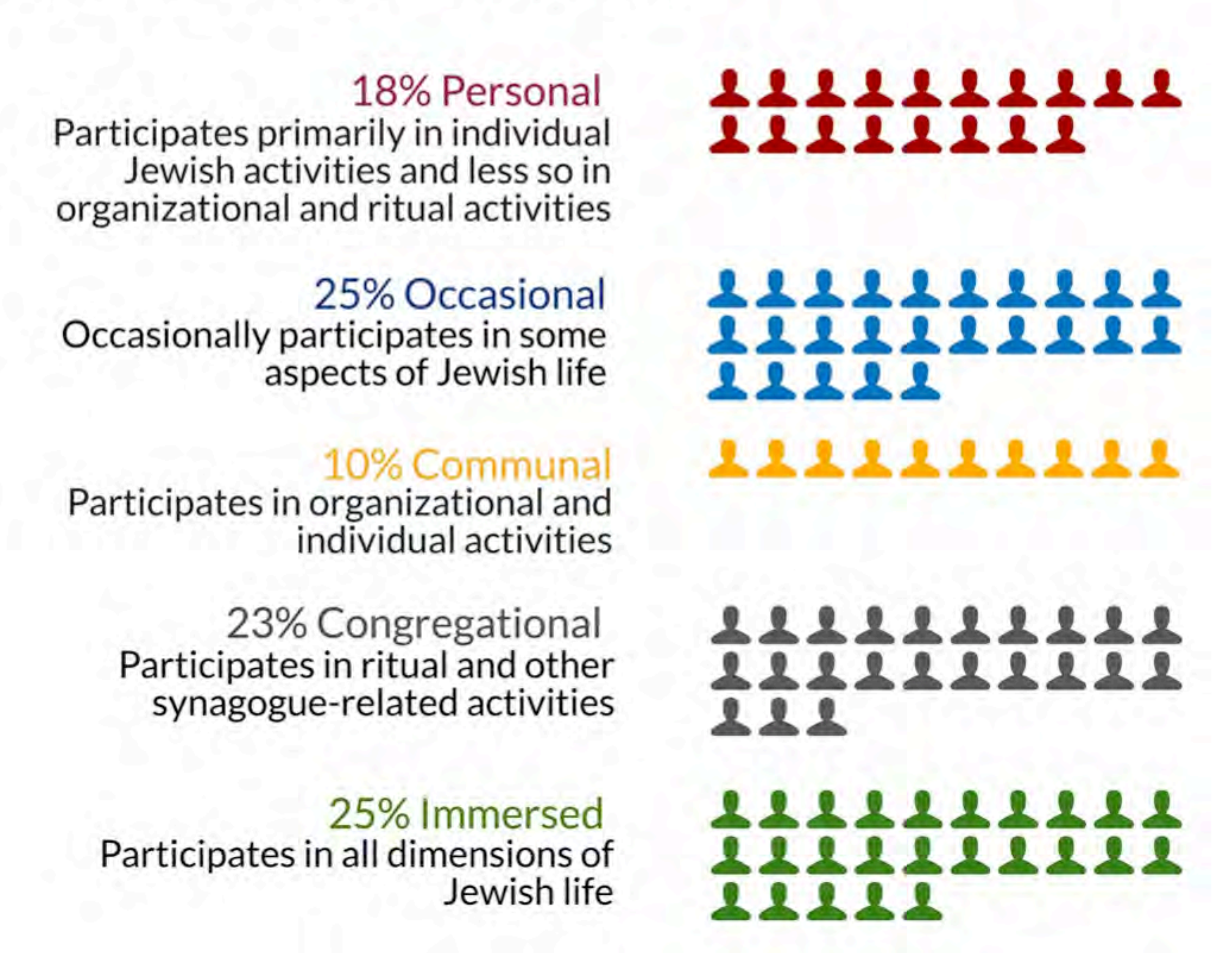
> *that individuals access Jewish life on an as-needed basis. Individuals want to connect to community portals on their own terms and they demand responsiveness. If organizations are unresponsive, they go elsewhere, either in real space or cyber-space. They create their own life cycle ceremonies, their own liturgies and publications, and their unique and idiosyncratic ways of being Jewish (Horovitz, 2000).”*[17]

The Network Judaism model facilitates the self-autonomous, collaborative, and open model of Judaism preferred by young Jews in the previously mentioned studies. Unlike Elazar’s model of community, there is no core or focus of the community. Instead, an institution both serves its most active base while also working to facilitate spaces and programming suited to a wide variety of Jews, including the unengaged. Instead of seeing the unengaged as uninterested and unworthy of outreach, the network model asks what can be done to better service their needs. By shifting focus from hierarchical communal structures to more fluid and open systems, we may maintain our current membership bases while reaching significantly more unengaged Jews.

Finally, after studying contemporary engagement in theory and practice, the 2019 Cincinnati Community Study will be analyzed to see how big-picture theory juxtaposes against a local community. Uniquely, the study develops an "Index of Jewish Engagement," grouping participants into five categories designed to express how people are Jewish, rather than how Jewish they are. Divided into five unique categories illustrating the Cincinnati community in particular (rather than stock categories), the categories and their results are as follows[18]:

[17] Herring, “Network Judaism”, 25.
[18] Aronson, “2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study”, 36.

Figure 3.1. Patterns of Jewish engagement



The study correctly recognizes that Jewish engagement is not necessarily related to denominational, generational, or religious categorizations. Instead, seeking to describe engagement as a reflection of participants' actions, the study recognizes a range of public and private behaviors, including family holiday celebrations, ritual practices, and organizational and individual activities are all included in the typology.[19] Most notably, the study does not illustrate Cincinnati Jewry as unique in its engagement. Instead, it is rather typical, with 43% of Jews falling into personal and occasional practices, describing the highly-individualistic nature of modern Judaism. While every community may desire to be exceptional, the community's typicality should actually be more promising. If the community were overtly unique, national studies' results would not be helpful or relevant. Instead, the Cincinnati community may use the American Jewish community's contemporary theory alongside its recent survey to improve and renovate its structures and engagement strategies.

After having detailed contemporary theory on Jewish engagement, I will detail two institutions whose success aligns with the findings of contemporary studies of Jewish engagement. In particular, I wish to speak about BBYO and Hillel International. BBYO, a pluralistic Jewish teen network, operates through small local chapters and is teen-led. While the organization is explicitly Jewish in nature, pushes for Jewish programming, and often requires prayer services, the programs are primarily based in Jewish values rather than Jewish religion. Moreover, as a result of their teen-led structure, BBYO maintains relevancy through allowing its participants to dictate the direction of its chapters and program, embodying Rabbi Hayim Herring’s Network Judaism model. Similarly, college Hillels are

[19] Aronson, “2019 Cincinnati Jewish Community Study”, 35.

student-led but maintain the Jewish resources of more formal Jewish institutions, allowing students to dictate and actualize their own Jewish paths. While a proponent of Elazar's hierarchical community model may suggest Jews will simply be lost without a formal leader or framework, both BBYO and Hillel have only grown larger over time. Both organizations' structures align with the findings presented in this chapter, and I do not believe this to be a coincidence. If formal Jewish spaces wish to attract young Jews in great numbers, they must be willing to cater to their conceptions of Jewish life.

I now wish to make several recommendations and comments stemming from the information gathered throughout this chapter. When read together the research presents an image of how modern, effective, and relevant Jewish engagement may appear. Surveys on young post-boomer Jews present largely self-autonomous Jewish people, picking and choosing the elements of Judaism most relevant to their worldviews and who only engage with formal Jewish institutions when aligned with pre-existing values. As shown in Belzer and Miller's work, *Synagogues That Get It*, young adults are increasingly uninterested in formal affiliation unless a space elevates their pre-existing understandings of what Judaism should or ought to be. If communities wish to have growth mindsets, they must be willing to adapt and make structural changes, or risk losing Jews to apathy or other more adaptive institutions. Though only mentioned in passing in Belzer and Miller's work, many communities possessing thriving young adult populations structure these efforts in micro-communities within a larger organizational structure. In doing so, the subset may possess a larger organization's resources and facilities while maintaining the intimacy and flexibility young adults often seek. I believe this intimacy to be a core element of successful modern engagement.

As illustrated in *Traditional Judaism: The Conceptualization of Jewishness in the Lives of American Jewish Post-Boomers*, a significant percentage of Jews interact with Judaism as a tradition rather than as a formal religion. In doing so, they create a hyper-personalized version of Judaism revolving around their own interests and life experiences that may not align well with larger institutions based on shared traditions. In turn, I believe Jewish communities need to place a higher value on intimacy and smaller communal spaces. Whether an entirely independent venture or a subset of a larger community, smaller Jewish spaces allow for more personalized interaction and allow individuals to gather with others in a more personal and social manner than larger religious spaces may typically allow. Moreover, I believe many of these studies suggest but do not explicitly proclaim an underlying issue for many non-Orthodox Jews, a lack of confidence and knowledge in how to live a Jewish life.

Whether a result of secular living, a non-religious home, or past disinterest, many young Jews simply lack an understanding of how one might go about living a Jewish life. Without confidence in knowledge or experiences to bring about familiarity and comfort, many will assume a meaningful secular Jewish life to be an impossibility or simply not know where to begin. I believe we must work to provide role modeling for young Jews on how to live meaningful (secular) Jewish lives that are not entirely dependent on religious observance. This could be done through cohort-based experiences, allowing Jews to experiment with tradition in more personalized groups, allowing both knowledge acquisition *and* a social experience.

I believe another issue to be a lack of informal Jewish experiences for post-college adults. Many Jews fitting within the descriptions posed throughout this chapter build their

Jewish lives through informal and primarily social Jewish adolescent programming. Whether a youth group, Jewish traveling experience, summer camps, Hillel, or any informal social program, many find the ideal Jewish experience to simply be the opportunity to be openly Jewish around other Jews. Such programs provide Jewish support systems and friends, may be deeply powerful, and traditionally disappear after college. We must work to provide more opportunities for informal Jewish experiences targeted at adults of all ages. This could be an adult Jewish social group, a Shabbaton or family retreat, a Jewish book club, sports league, or any variety of experiences. Simply, we need to fill in the gaps left for those aged-out of the informal Jewish experiences that defined their Jewish youths.

The study of Jewish engagement can be daunting. As Elcott and Himmelfarb note in their previously mentioned study, "The challenge is determining how to sustain a minority community that weds itself to tradition and distinctiveness in a world in which change is the only constant."[20] To study and respond to Jewish engagement is to be constantly aware and mindfully reactive to the Jewish base, knowing that a successful project or initiative may become quickly outdated. To successfully be at the forefront of engagement, we must better ascertain community members' identities and engagement preferences, understanding fully who our communities do and do not serve adequately. We must understand and accept the community as it is and wishes to be and respectfully engage and program with this knowledge in mind. For some organizations, the changes will be quick and simple, perhaps only altering specific programs. For others, the changes may be deeper, involving whole changes to structures and organization. We must align our communities and organizations

[20] Elcott, “Generations and Regeneration”, 16.

with modern Jewry, accepting our constituencies for who they are and engaging them accordingly.

Chapter Six:
Conclusion

My thesis work began through attempts to settle on a topic of study. Interested in Jewish sociology, I hoped to produce a thesis whose process would impart a better understanding of modern American Jewry and insight into the changes needed to serve their interests and needs. Rabbi Katzew helped me understand that this pursuit could be a thesis itself, and I began studying the community through the topics of American Jewish intermarriage, identity, and engagement. The process was intellectually stimulating and enjoyable, allowing me to study a topic of deep interest that would not be covered in my formal school studies, but most importantly, allowing me to take ownership of the subject matter. I have always been interested in the Jewish community and how Jews identity and engage with Judaism, but despite my interest I rarely felt comfortable voicing my own opinions or staking claims on the Jewish community. Today, however, from hours spent reading and grappling with Jewish sociology and research I not only feel more confident in my knowledge but as if I am now part of the conversation. I would now like to present some of the knowledge gained, as well as some of my own thoughts and suggestions taken from this process.

American Jewish Intermarriage:

Traditionally, intermarriage has been treated as a disease in the Jewish community, but if we wish to best serve the Jewish people moving forward, we must understand the life choice as natural and even rational. From deep concern for Jewish continuity in the shadow of the Holocaust, American Jews have long held anxieties over intermarriage. This concern contained an underlying assumption that children of intermarriage would either not be raised Jewish or would drop their Judaism in adulthood due to a “lacking” Jewish home. Instead, while the intermarriage rate has only risen throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, the overall

Jewish population has not decreased. As Bruce Phillips illustrates in his demographic work on Jews of mixed-ancestry, children raised Jewish in interfaith homes are not predisposed to dropping Judaism, but rather are set up for a different Jewish life than their single-ancestry peers as a result of a very different Jewish upbringing. Interfaith homes are prone to being less religious and ethnically engaged than single-ancestry homes as they work to provide a religious background while simultaneously trying not to alienate or "other" the non-Jewish parent. Relatedly, Phillips helps to illustrate through demographic data that the national rate of Jewish intermarriage should theoretically be significantly higher as Jews make-up less than three percent of the American population.

Eventually, Jews of mixed-ancestry will come to consist of a majority of non-Orthodox Jewry, changing the nature of what we consider the average American Jew. If a majority of Jews come to prefer informal and non-religious Jewish engagement, our religious institutions may be in peril without significant adjustment. If we wish to serve the interests of Jewry moving forward and ensure the health of our institutions, we must understand the make-up of American Jewry and adapt to their perspective on Jewish life.

Jewish Identity:

Jewish identity construction has long been at the center of Jewish initiatives, but its actual formational process has only been understood in pieces. Traditionally, identity was assumed to reflect Jewish observance, and a lack of practice would indicate a lacking Jewish identity. Similarly, it was also believed that Jewish identity formed exclusively through experiences in Jewish spaces and with Jewish people. Contemporary research now illustrates identity to be a deeply personal matter built through relational interaction with all people. These two points are critical, showing how we may not assume the quality of another's identity through their

observance or outward expressions of Judaism, nor may we assume individuals of interfaith homes to have any lesser Jewish identity than their single-ancestry peers. For example, this would indicate one could form a strong identity in an interfaith home, and one's non-Jewish parent could shape a Jewish identity as much as the Jewish parent.

Jewish Engagement:

Traditionally, Jewish engagement reflected membership and affiliation, assuming that Jewish involvement or absence was reflective of one's desire to be in or out of the greater community. Today, through modern study, we may understand involvement to not necessarily reflect the strength of one's identity but instead may say more about preferred engagement methods. Jews of the present live in a hyper-individualistic world and, in turn, often experience Judaism as a self-guided and malleable tradition rather than as a binding religion. As many Jewish institutions are religious in nature and structured through hierarchy, many spaces will simply not be appealing to a large segment of modern Jewry. While this conception of Judaism may be bothersome to more traditionally minded Jewry, we cannot change the current milieu or how individuals have grown to experience Judaism. However, we may work to understand contemporary Jewry's engagement preferences and needs. The spaces most successfully engaging young Jews most often align their structures and engagement practices with their youngest cohorts' preferences, but many also create subset communities within a larger structure to allow for the creative control they may desire. Nonetheless, a large portion of Jewry still prefers standard methods of engagement. We must come to understand both ends of our engagement spectrum, allowing the traditionally minded to meet their religious and communal needs, and seeking to allow for contemporary Jews of a different nature to feel they can bring their full selves to the Jewish community and engage on their own terms.

The Need for a Unifying Story

Today, the American Jewish community lacks the central unifying and galvanizing stories that once fueled Jewish life. Narratives of the Holocaust, the state of Israel, and Russian *aliyah* once pushed Jews to take pride in their communities and actualize their identities. Today, we lack the central unifying stories and needed to inspire Jews to live Jewishly.

Aligning Modern Interests with Jewish Values

In a hyper-individualistic and self-driven world, many Jews will not simply take on Jewish actions for their own sake and unless aligned with their own interests. When possible, Jewish educators and communal workers should seek to align modern interests with Jewish values to increase the likelihood of successful engagement. In the 20th century, many Jews struggled to express Zionist beliefs for fear of dual loyalty accusations. A solution would come in "Brandesian Zionism," named after Judge Louis D. Brandeis, who charged that Zionist and American values were in alignment and that support for Israel inherently meant supporting the United States. We must seek to do the same in Jewish engagement and programming, helping Jews feel as if their secular and Jewish identities are compatible and complementary.

Informal Jewish Opportunities for Adults

I believe another issue to be a lack of informal Jewish experiences for post-college adults. Many Jews fitting within the descriptions posed throughout this chapter build their Jewish lives through informal and primarily social Jewish adolescent programming. Whether a youth group, Jewish traveling experience, summer camps, Hillel, or any informal social program, many find the ideal Jewish experience to be the opportunity to be openly Jewish around other Jews. Such programs provide Jewish support systems and friends, may be deeply powerful, and traditionally disappear after college. We must work to provide more opportunities for

informal Jewish experiences targeted at adults of all ages. This could be an adult Jewish social group, a Shabbaton or family retreat, a Jewish book club, sports league, or any variety of experiences. Simply, we need to fill in the gaps left for those aged-out of the informal Jewish experiences that may have defined their Jewish youths.

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The knowledge gained from this thesis pushes me toward a conclusion that underscores much of my writing, that the Jewish people are constantly evolving and must be responded to accordingly in every age. While communal and organizational change is often intimidating and may not always appear to be worth the risk, we must continue to adapt our communities towards the future if we wish to be responsive to their needs. We must recognize the opportunities that come with change and the larger audiences we may serve through them. Expanding the walls of our communities to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse, mixed ancestral, and liberal Jewry will not limit our communities but instead will greatly increase their meaning and reach. If we wish to have a growth mindset moving forward, we must recognize the opportunities and needs at-hand and respond accordingly. In doing so, we may work to facilitate Jewish communities that are responsive to their current milieu and the needs of modern Jewry, meeting Jewry where they are instead of where we wish them to be.

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