The Changing Jewish Family:

Shifting Representations of the Jewish Family in America in Film

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

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Graduate Rabbinical Program,

New York, New York

February 1, 2010

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Introduction

Family has played a significant role in shaping the Jewish experience wherever Jews have found themselves in the world. Whether responding to the tragic destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the resulting dispersal of early Jews, or to the impact of a major world war, or to the new opportunities a migration created, or to increased affluence, the family has been an important unit. This research looks at the Jewish family in America and at three key points in Jewish history. The understanding of the family is rooted in the framework of a post-destruction rabbinic Jewish text, the Talmud. This study of American Jewish history, specifically the experience of the Jewish family, comes following the 350th anniversary of the arrival of the first Jews in America.

The history of the Jewish family in what would become the United States of America dates to 1654 when a group of Jews, including several families, fled persecution in Recife, Brazil and came to New Amsterdam, which would later become New York City. From the beginning of Judaism in America, the Jewish American experience was situated around families. While other early migrants came to America for short periods of time in order to gain wealth and return home, since the earliest days of Jews in America, most Jews came with the idea of finding a safe place to live as a family. From those humble beginnings, Jewish families have, over the course of several centuries, built a life for themselves in a place known to many as ~~"t~~he land of opportunity." One of the things that made the Jewish community in America unique is that they are an American minority defined by religion and not by country of origin.[1] For the Jewish faith, the family is the central organizing factor in Jewish life and the primary source of Jewish

[1] Erens, Patricia. *The Jew in American Cinema*. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ Pr, 1988), 7.

identity following religion.[2] The key historic features of a Jewish family, marriage and children, are legislated by religious texts. The Talmud's representation of the family acts as a useful frame to identify key family members and relationships. These family members and relationships then reappear in American Jewish history. American Jews are the inheritors of the rabbinic legal tradition, whether or not they choose to live their lives according to those guidelines.

In their lives in America, Jewish families have been impacted by a number of historical phenomena which have shaped their very fabric. In each time period we see the Jewish family struggle with three main things: assimilation, Americanization and success (which is generationally defined). This research uses popular film to give insight about what is happening to the family in each time period. The films both reflect the realities of life in addition to offering an idealized portrayal of people's lived experiences. By studying modern film ~~–te~~xts" as cultural signifiers in their own right, as well as in relation to classical Jewish sources, this project will attempt to answer the following essential questions: How has the Jewish family been viewed and represented at three different points in American Jewish history? and Are the representations of the Jewish family realistic, idealistic, nostalgic or a little of each? These questions are asked in order to get a sense of the history of the Jewish family in America, which for many may help situate their own experience as part of Jewish American families in America.

In my initial chapter I will explore key Talmudic passages related to the family and the relationships between its various members. The Talmud text acts as a frame which is used as the basis for exploring the Jewish family in America. The rabbis writing

[2] Ibid., 9.

the Talmud could not imagine the family as it came to exist in the interwar years, the postwar period and the contemporary era in America. And the Jewish families in America, as portrayed in contemporary films, do not purport to be Talmud-true. Rather, the Talmud can be read as a literary text, which informs our understanding of the family. Just as there is value in reading a historic piece of literature, so too do we find the Talmud as a useful text. The family, as outlined in the Talmud is understood in terms of several key figures, each of whom have responsibilities to and derive benefits from the other family members. This then can frame our study of Jewish families in America. This is not to say that these situations are analogous. These families are divided by hundreds of years and thousands of miles, in incredibly different social and cultural milieus. And yet, Jewish families in America are impacted by the burden and benefit of the Talmud as an influential Jewish text. Studied around the world in a variety of settings, the Talmud is both a historic artifact and a living document. It is important to keep in mind that the Talmud does not necessarily reflect the entire lived experience of family life and includes a unique agenda which may need to be unpacked in order to fully understand its usage. Classical Jewish texts provide an idealized representations of the family that continue to resonate on some level for Jews for centuries to come, and that on some level, these films are in dialogue with these representations.

Popular film acts as the subject for this research. Just as the Talmud text offers an idealized and perhaps simplified view of the family and inter-family relations, so too do films. Some films reflect dominant norms of their times, while others seek to shape perceptions and bias. In both cases, they are a helpful text through which to understand the Jewish family in their time period. Each film was selected to reflect dominant

phenomena in the time period that it was set. Films that were chosen were considered contemporary films for their release date, no nostalgia films which reflect back on an earlier era were used, as they more reflect the time period they were made than the time period they purport to focus on. Each film, including the early Yiddish films, had a viewing audience beyond the Jewish families they sought to portray. These films each have subtle agendas which are explored and unpacked as relevant to the study of the Jewish family in America.

Following the Talmud text study, this project focuses on the changing Jewish family in America, particularly as it is represented in film. The next three chapters study the changing face of the Jewish family in America through the phenomena affecting them during different points in American Jewish history: the immigrant experience and the impact of the Americanization project during the Interwar years; suburbanization and embourgeoisement in the postwar era; and, unprecedented Jewish inclusion in American society expanding the definitions and configurations of Jewish family in the contemporary era. The film texts address the question of what makes a family, and the orientation and obligations of the family. By using a gender studies, Jewish studies and film studies lens I will explore and analyze the texts in light of my essential questions. As with Talmudic texts, film often reflects an idealized or exaggerated version rather than a mirror of reality. In light of this, I plan to explore the ways that these exaggerated versions reflect essential truths about the way that the Jewish family is seen by society at large. Given the plethora of materials and potential directions for this project, I limit my research parameters by studying some key films as representative of their era.

In a brief study of materials available, it became clear that while there are many scholars involved in the study of the Jewish family and there are scholars involved in research surrounding the image of Jews in film, there had not been a far-reaching study combining the two disciplines. This investigation aspires to add to both areas of research by offering new insight into the field. The use of the Talmud as a framing lens also offers a new component to the research. While modern scholarship is influenced by historic texts, it is not always explicitly employed as a framing tool. In the case of this work, it is. By combining these seemingly diverse elements, this research aspires to inform readers about the experience of the Jewish family in America as explored through film.

The project culminates with a synthesis of the research and a comparison between the different periods of Jewish history and the changing models of the Jewish family. The noted sociologist Marshall Sklare wrote ~~–O~~f the making of books on Jews there is no end."[3] This research only scratches the surface of the rich history of the experience of the Jewish family in America. But hopefully it will serve as a useful introduction for those interested in an analysis of the American Jewish family.

[3] As quoted in Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, 1.

Chapter 1:

Mamas and Papas, Husbands and Wives, Sons and Daughters:

Representations of the Family in the *Talmud*

Introduction:

The *Talmud,*[4] the written record of Jewish oral law, purports to be the conversations and debates of the rabbis over the six centuries following the destruction of The Temple in 70 C.E. The Talmud's two parts are the *Mishnah* (200 CE) and the *Gemara* (500 CE). The *Mishnah* is a written collection of Oral Law and the *Gemara* is a discussion of the *Mishnah* and other rabbinic writings which relate to areas of daily life. It is viewed by traditional Jews as the "completion' of the written Torah or as the completion of study itself".[5] Though some contemporary scholars may see the text as archaic, heteronormative, and patriarchal, the rabbis outlined an entire legal system which was followed by the Jewish community as it expanded around the world. Many Jews see the legal structure of this text as binding for contemporary life. Others see it as a static historical document. While a common religio-scholarly reading of the Talmud may elevate it as a timeless text, a more nuanced reading sees it as a product of and a reflection of its time period. Scholars H.L. Strack and Günter Stemberger instruct readers to integrate rabbinic texts into a larger history.[6] Scholar Daniel Boyarin addresses the contemporary scholarly view of the stories of the Talmud as "essentially literary, that is,

[4] From the root, *lamad*, meaning 'to learn' or *lammad*, to teach.
[5] Strack, Hermann Leberecht & Gunter Stemberger. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 165.
[6] *Ibid* 46

fictional, accounts about men and (occasionally) women who probably lived but functioned primarily as signifiers of values within the culture, as exempla."[7] Boyarin also acknowledges ~~t~~he notion of literature as a process integrally connected with other social processes."[8] Through this approach, a reader can gain an understanding of how the social meanings produced in the *halakhic* discussions and innovations that the documents preserve are reproduced in the text. In this case, we see, life imitates art and art imitates life. Through this technique, one can view the Talmud as a literary text. And as a literary text, it is quite useful for this research.

The far-reaching nature of the text has the potential to make it relevant for many readers. The Talmud has something to say on nearly every aspect of everyday life, including family. The dynamic text outlines the responsibilities between the different members of a family. The system included financial and emotional responsibilities between parents and children and between spouses as well as sexual responsibilities for married couples. The texts took everyday aspects of relationships and elevated them by including them in the *halakhic* framework. In addition to the legal language, Talmudic literature is replete with stories of the family including the tale of Rachel, the daughter of a wealthy Jerusalemite who disowns her for marrying Rabbi Akiva and the story of Beruryah, the wife of Rabbi Meir who must tell her husband that their two sons have died.[9] These literary narratives also inform readers of the rabbinic view of the family.

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[7] Boyarin, Daniel. *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 11. References Frankel 1981.
[8] Ibid., 12.
[9] Schneid, Hayyim. *Family*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), 15. Referencing *Ketubot* 62b, *Nedarim* 50a.

This chapter presents a careful and in-depth reading of selections from the Talmud as a literary text with a critical eye and yet also an awareness of the texts' usefulness as a tool for exploring the period. Much like the films of the 20th and 21st centuries which provide a perspective of life at the time without actually reflecting the entire experience of each individual person, this reading of the Talmud allows readers to gain a sense of this historical period and the roles and relationships within the family as a distinct unit. While the understandings of and implications for family have changed considerably since rabbinic times, this close reading of Talmud texts about families will be a useful frame when exploring Jewish life in the United States in the last 200 years in subsequent chapters.

This initial chapter focuses on defining family relationships. The Talmud identifies two main types of family relationships: relationships between spouses and relationships between parents and children. Given the complex text of the Talmud, this section will attempt to outline some guiding responsibilities between each of the parties in both of these types of relationships. It will focus on primary source documents, translating and explaining sections of the Talmudic text. The body of rabbinic literature is expansive and there are many potential methods of study. This research has focused primarily on the text of *Ketubot* and *Kiddushin* which fall in the third order of the *Talmud*, entitled *Nashim*.[10] The study of these two texts focused on a relatively narrow chunk of material in order to go more in-depth. Primarily the texts have been read in order to understand the responsibilities and roles of each member of the family. The nature of this text, which has been studied across the generations in Jewish communities

[10] Literally –~~w~~omen"

around the world, has resulted in it having the potential to serve as a foundation for the norms and values surrounding the family for generations of Jewish families.[11] Even when the Talmud text does not present the lived reality, but rather an idealized version of reality, it has significance as a value-asserting text. The ideas expressed are therefore useful in understanding how the Jewish family evolved in America in the last several hundred years. Just as Jewish life has evolved, so have Jewish texts.

Family in the Talmud:

In order to explore the nature of family relationships in rabbinic literature, it is crucial to first define families during this period. After the destruction of The Temple in Jerusalem, the social and legal norms of early Judaism shifted. The written text of the *Talmud* reflects the effort by the rabbis to legislate holy and mundane areas of life. While in modernity we can deconstruct family to include many different structures, in antiquity it would be anachronistic to try to suggest that ―family" refers to all modern models. The Talmud's primary focus on families is on heterosexual married couples (a man and a woman) who have multiple children. In addition, the text focuses mainly upon men, so many comments outlining obligations to children are actually focused on sons. For the rabbis, daughters were temporary family members, only present until they left to join their husband's family as wives. While other family models may have existed historically, the Talmud text focuses on what it considered the ideal situation and acknowledges some less idea situations such as the needs of the widow and the orphan.

[11] The volume of modern work by a number of scholars seems to suggest that the Talmudic texts offer continued relevance for modern Jews.

In the *Tanaitic* period, the society was based around a patriarchal structure in which the husband/father was the recognized head of household. The husband/father was the main salary earner and his job was to provide monetary support for the household. In *Ketubot* 6:1, we learn that, for the rabbis, the man is the financial backbone of a couple and that the woman is financially dependent on him. There are some extreme situations where a woman might have some independent wealth, but ultimately her husband has control over the use of her money. The wife was primarily the housekeeper, as evidenced by the text of *Ketubot*[12] where the household responsibilities of a wife are outlined. Even a wealthy woman with many servants was ultimately responsible for overseeing all household affairs.

Financial obligations are one major lens through which to see marital relationships. Another is physical obligations, particularly around sexual relations. There is a reciprocal element to these obligations. Both financial and physical obligations are seen as crucial components for any sustainable relationship. The relationship of a married couple is fixed for the most part, anchored through the *ketubah*, the marriage contract.

The texts pertaining to parents and children focus on the evolving nature of this relationship. Financial responsibilities are also important, but in this category, there is a recognition that while a parent is responsible for a child financially (and then the text goes into great detail to clarify the details of this responsibility), eventually a parent becomes the responsibility of the child and the child may have to assume some financial responsibility for the parent. Still, the text works to help the parent maintain dignity,

[12] *Ketubot Perek* 7.

even when the roles are reversed. Parents also have ethical responsibilities towards their children, to raise them as Jews and to make sure they are taken care of in adulthood, either through a trade or through marriage. Not surprisingly, the roles and responsibilities of male and female children are understood differently in the text and have different obligations towards their parents, which will be explored further in the body of this paper.

Spouses: The Responsibilities of Husband to Wife and the Responsibilities of Wife to Husband

The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* explains that ~~–in~~ Jewish teaching, marriage is the ideal human state and is considered a basic social institution established by God at the time of creation".[13] While there were ascetic groups during the Second Temple period, they disappeared post-destruction. Over time, marriage and the sanctification of *kiddushin* became even more significant.[14] Later, scholars in the mid 20th century comment that ~~–m~~arriage in Jewish life is so fundamental that it was only natural that the rabbis of the Talmud dealt with it extensively."[15] Recent research, such of that by Judith Romney Wegner, explores the history with a feminist lens, reflecting the development of feminism and feminist scholarship. Wegner notes in her work that the prevalence of marriages and the volume of pre-modern scholarship suggests that marriage did play an

[13] *Encyclopedia Judaica*. 2nd ed. Vol. 11. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1976) 1026. In each of the two creation narratives, a help-mate or partner is created for the first human. This is understood as the foundational marriage by later commentators.
[14] Goodman, Philip, and Hanna Goodman, eds. *The Jewish Marriage Anthology*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1965), 77.
[15] Ibid., 24.

important societal role. Still, she wrestles with the question of whether or not it rendered women as ~~"e~~hattel"[16] in order to gain a sense of whether marriage itself was a positive or negative societal institution.

The Palestinian rabbis in the first centuries of the Common Era saw marriage as the creation of the household and as a method of bringing social respectability to a man. In contrast, the Babylonian rabbis saw marriage as a necessary evil, required to legitimate the sexual urges and perpetuate the people, but also distracting from the important work of text study.[17] Despite the rabbis' struggles with the institution of marriage, they went to great pains to describe the responsibilities between the members of the marriage. Later scholarship analyzes these texts and offers a nuanced reading, but it would be anachronistic to deny the important role of marriage in Talmudic-period Judaism even if the image of marriage in the Talmud is more of an idealized version of the institution than may have been practiced by Jews of the time. Through a careful reading of specific passages of Talmudic text, one can understand the basic structure of marriage and how it was designed to offer both certain protections and specific responsibilities.

Within the Talmudic ideal of marriage, the husband and wife are each bound by specific obligations and benefit from certain areas of care by their spouse. A husband's responsibilities towards his wife are outlined in the tractate *Ketubot* because the guiding document for marital relationships is the *ketubah*, the legally binding document that is signed as part of the couple's nuptials. While it is a crucially important document in a

[16] Wegner, Judith Romney. *Chattel or Person: The Status of Women in the Mishnah*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6.
[17] Satlow, Michael L. *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 2001), xvi.

marriage, many rights and responsibilities are required, even if there is not a written *ketubah*. While the *ketubah* is not mentioned in the Bible, it does appear in Second Temple literature in *Tobit*. The *ketubah* functions as a monetary agreement between the groom and the bride (represented by her father or other male relative).[18] While the *ketubah* is the economic basis of the marriage but, as a document, it goes beyond finances and includes relationship issues, including marital relationship requirements. Some would argue that it allows for the empowerment of women because while women historically were in a place of vulnerability, the *ketubah* was an escape clause, as well as a guarantee of care.[19] In the institution of marriage, women were given an upper-hand through the *ketubah* which discouraged divorce and served to protect the woman's interests. Wegner simultaneously argues two seemingly contradictory points: that a woman is rendered as chattel because she is acquired as part of the marriage contract,[20] yet is rendered a person due to specific rulings within the *ketubah* itself, which provide for her.[21] This contradiction reflects the subjective nature of the text. One must read the Talmudic text with an eye both towards the obligations and the benefits which are a part of both a husband and a wife's experience of idealized marriage in the Talmud.

In asserting that both the woman and man are persons in the texts of the Talmud, through an equalizing statement, the rabbinic text explains that whether a woman is a virgin or not, whether she is an adult or a minor, whether she is a born-Jew, a convert or a freed slave, the husband has ten obligations to his wife and his wife has four obligations

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[18] Ilan, Tal. *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine: An Inquiry into Image and Status.* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995), 89.
[19] Conversation with Dr. Michael Chernick during Independent Study course Spring 2009
[20] Wegner, *Chattel or Person*, 42.
[21] Ibid., 74.

to him. Out of the ten obligations a husband has towards his wife, three are mandated by Torah and reflect the physical and emotional needs of the wife: 1) food, 2) clothes, 3) *onah* (sexual relations). The Talmud text outlines seven rabbinic requirements[22] which were established by the rabbis: 1) [A woman] is entitled to the worth of the *ketubah,* 2) [A husband must] provide medical care if [she is] sick,[23] 3) [A husband must] redeem her if she is taken captive, 4) [A husband must] bury her when she dies, 5) [A husband must] allow her to be supplied with a food allotment, 6) if she is widowed, [the woman] has the right to live in [her late husband's] house (until she remarries), and 7) her daughters that were fathered by him also receive a food allotment until they are engaged and her male children that were fathered by him inherit the value of her *ketubah*. These conditions reflect the responsibility of her husband to provide for the security of her money and property and for the security of her children, in addition to the emotional/physical responsibilities outlined in the Torah. A husband's responsibility, we can deduce, is to make his wife feel emotionally and financially secure. The potential benefit for the husband is that he receives money from his wife both through her labor and through her inheritance.

Rabbinic enactments require four reciprocal responsibilities from the wife for her husband: 1) whatever the wife produces belongs to her husband, 2) whatever the wife finds belongs to her husband, 3) during [the husband's] lifetime, he gets the rights to [his

[22] The text notes that these are required even if there is no *ketubah.* If there is no *ketubah*, then mathematical formulas employed in order to compute the amount a woman is due. It is particularly significant that a *ketubah* is so powerful, it is binding even when it doesn't actually exist, because it is so valuable to both marital partners.
[23] The husband has long-term responsibility for caring for his wife, in sickness and in health.

wife's] property and 4) if [the wife] dies during [the husband's] lifetime, he is the primary heir. These responsibilities are primarily financial and could be seen as potentially helping to pay for the responsibilities her husband has for her (such as clothing and food). Still, these obligations take away a measure of her autonomy, linking her securely to her spouse. There is an understanding that these responsibilities might not be in the best interests of a woman, and, therefore, there is an exception to be made. If a woman opts not to accept her food allotment, she is entitled to not turn over her profits from her work. The converse is not true. The husband cannot force his wife to take the same agreement, because it is not guaranteed that this arrangement would allow her to make enough money to be self-sufficient. In this case, the wife has the agency to feel secure and to opt out of the arrangement but a husband cannot make a wife feel insecure by altering their relationship and the conditions surrounding it.

In *M. Ketubot* 5:5, the list of responsibilities a wife has towards her husband is expanded. One of the significant additions is that if she is a slave-holder, due to the financial wealth of her father's household, she is able to give some of her required tasks to her slaves. But, Rabbi Eliezer makes it clear that a woman with many servants should not be idle, because idleness leads to fornication. The rabbis were concerned that women left with nothing to do would take part in negative behaviors. And the glosses at the end of the *Mishnah* point to the virtuousness of an industrious wife.[24] Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel even goes so far as to suggest that it is good for a woman's health to keep busy with work. So while some women might have had the means not to work, it was seen as

[24] Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 220.

important that they be kept busy, lest the act in ways unbecoming of a married woman, like adultery.

In *Ketubot* 7 the *mishnayot* explore different aspects of how a husband must care for his wife and the reciprocal responsibilities she has to him. *Mishnah* 1 talks about how as a guardian he must care of his wife, particularly her material needs, even if he takes a vow to the contrary. *Mishnah* 2, in addition to exploring a manipulative vow, one designed to embarrass or unfairly limit a woman's actions,[25] teaches us that a husband cannot be manipulative or restrictive of his wife's choices. *Mishnah* 3 which looks at dress for a wife and ensures that both a woman will remain attractive to her husband and that she will take pride in her appearance. *Mishnah* 4 allows for visits home for a wife, which both means that a husband cannot imprison his wife and that she cannot leave him for extended periods of time. *Mishnah* 5 continues on this theme, not allowing a husband to jail his wife, to make sure she is allowed out so that she can have community and opportunities, though her physical safety is still his responsibility and he must protect her. This also speaks to the expectations of a husband to maintain a wife's safety and honor, his failure to do so allows for divorce since he needs to protect her image in public. *Mishnah* 6 reflects the expectations of a wife that she follow the laws of Moses and the customs of the Jews, which have an impact both on the wife and the husband. The husband is concerned about appearances and the wife should help him with the observance of *mitzvot*. The customs of modest behavior are designed to maintain the

[25] In the case of this Mishnah, the vow is that a husband would forbid his wife from eating fruit. This vow is manipulative because it denies the woman the right to do something that has no impact on the husband purely because he wants to exert control in the situation.

honor of the household, in order to protect her husband's image. These *mishnayot* texts help us understand aspects of a couple's relationship, the reciprocal responsibilities they have to each other and to each other's position in the larger world.

Reading *Ketubot* 50b expands on how a husband is responsible for the physical care of his wife, including the need to give her clothing appropriate to the season (IE no new clothes in the rainy season nor old clothes in the spring). While leftover food belongs to the husband, any old clothes belong to the wife. Why would she need these rags? To cover herself during *niddah*, so that she will not become repulsive to her husband. Clearly maintaining physical attractiveness to one's husband is a responsibility of a wife towards her husband. Meanwhile the husband has financial obligations towards his wife. A husband is required to give his wife money, though it should be according to his stature. The rabbis suggest 50 *zuzim* as a minimum payment, an amount equal to mere pennies.[26] This amount isn't necessarily meant to be offensively little, rather it is an equalizing amount that everyone can pay. The rabbis' goal was to create an attainable sum for all men, rather than estimating a self-sustaining amount which some may not be able to afford. It explains that in the context of giving the wife money, "she eats with him," a translation that, when taken literally, means that she eats food with her husband and when taken euphemistically it could be understood as marital relations.[27] The notion that a husband and wife should eat together at least once a week or have intercourse at least once a week both suggest the importance of the closeness of spouses. The text also suggests that a wife is responsible to her husband to remain physically attractive and to

[26] *Ketubot* 65b.
[27] Sex

have physical intimacy, while a husband is financially responsible for his wife including caring for a wife's physical needs including food and clothing and for physical intimacy. While the *Mishnah* is concerned about spousal reciprocity, the *Talmud* text is not focused on that.[28] It shies away from directly dealing with this, instead concretizing the inequality of the relationship.

An issue explored in the Talmudic text is the taking of vows.[29] Partners in a marriage may make vows which would be in conflict with the *ketubah*. Depending on what the vow is and for how long the vow is expected to last, there are different potential outcomes. Some vows cannot be taken. There are three types of vows that a person can not make because they would be invalidated: 1) a vow denying sexual rights, or 2) the value of the *ketubah*, or 3) his right to inherit her estate. In looking closer at these three areas of obligation, we see that it would potentially detrimental to the wife if a husband altered his obligations towards her as outlined in the *ketubah*. A husband is always responsible for the sexual fulfillment of his wife, even if there are certain conditions surrounding the frequency based on his occupation. A husband is obligated to the certain value of his wife, depending on her status (virgin/non-virgin, etc), and he can't change the value, which protects the wife from being treated as a prostitute. The third condition regarding inheritance is considered by Maimonides as a rule without a rationale, but these rules are still followed and considered valid. The Raavad[30] asks how someone can make a decision about something that hasn't happened yet (i.e., the wife has not died yet, so how can you say you won't inherit her?) and then disagrees with Rambam's rationale.

[28] Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 221.
[29] *Ketubot* 70a-70b.
[30] Rabbeinu Abraham ben David, a rabbi and commentator on the Talmud

The condition could work with food or clothing but not with inheritance according to Maimonides, but the Raavad and others disagree and say that if the husband does not wish to inherit his wife‘s estate, he may forfeit it. The ultimate idea here is the important element of balance within the relationship.

For the Talmud, marriage is a balancing act between responsibilities and benefits. Both people are able to benefit from the care of another and simultaneously are bound to provide certain things for their spouse. Because the Talmud offers an idealized portrayal of marriage, as it does with most social structures, it relies on the people themselves to actualize what is written about. By offering a number of hypothetical situations and legislating the actions of the fictional parties, the Talmud attempts to guide practitioners in the nuanced nature of real life. It is not that the rabbis were unaware of the difficult realities of marriage. Rather they were acutely aware of the challenges it might pose, and therefore tried to offer solutions and structures.

While modern marriage is influenced by the Talmudic ideal of marriage, it is not to say that modern marriage is like what was outlined in the Talmud. The historic institution of marriage functioned primarily on an economic level, while modern marriage reflects the development of the notion of romantic love. The modern condition is a function of the continued evolution of the world over the course of centuries and the myriad of social developments. However, because modern Judaism is influenced by the Talmud and the text itself is still read and studied, it could be asserted that aspects of the Talmudic view of marriage could be useful for understanding modern marriages. Modern Jews are the inheritors of the *Talmudic* tradition as well as the tradition of *Talmud* study. This study has influenced Jewish life throughout the generations.

Specifically, it has influenced the Jewish understandings of marriage and family. In the case of this thesis, the study of Talmud text informs scholars about institution of marriage as based on a system of responsibilities and benefits. Even as the social reality of married couples have evolved, the Talmuidic text is useful for study and reflection by modern scholars.

Parents and Children: Responsibilities of Parent to Child

In order to understand the obligations of parents to children, one must first understand that each Jew is commanded to fulfill the biblical proclamation by God: "Be fruitful and multiply."[31] *Yevamot* 6:6 goes into greater detail about what that means, explaining in the *Mishnah*: "A man should not cease from [attempting to fulfill the commandment] of procreation unless he has children." The School of Shammai suggested that fulfilling this commandment meant having two sons, while The School of Hillel specified a boy and a girl, reflecting Genesis 5:2.[32] Given the high infant and child mortality at the time of the rabbis, many families had more than the two proscribed children, in hopes that some children would survive to adulthood. According to the Talmud, children are a Divine trust.[33] As such, parents are given strict guidelines for how to deal with these gifts from the Almighty.

The *Talmud* text explains the relationship between fathers and sons in terms of obligations. There are several key obligations of a father towards his son, outlined in *Kiddushin* 29a. A father is obligated to his son to circumcise him, to redeem him (if first

[31] Genesis 1:28, 35:11
[32] Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 4.
[33] Schneid, *Family,* 20. Referencing Gen 25:28, Is. 49:15, 66:13 and Prov. 4:3.

born), to teach him Torah, to take a wife for him and to teach him a craft. Some say even to teach him to swim. Why these responsibilities? The first several are focused on initiating a son to Jewish life (through *brit milah* and *pidyon ha"ben*). Finding a spouse for a son could potentially both show care for him by making sure he had a companion and could also ensure a future generation. Teaching him a craft makes him self-responsible and independent. Teaching him to swim may seem like the most surprising. But teaching him to swim again makes him independent and better able to handle different and potentially dangerous situations. This task could also be read as a metaphor for teaching survival skills. The responsibilities of a parent to a child in the above text could be seen as fitting within three categories 1) the parent handles spiritual affairs and initiates the child into religious matters, 2) the parent provides the child with means to live an adult life by (both in terms of family and self-support) and 3) survival skills. R. Yehuda responds to the list of obligations and says that ~~a~~nyone who doesn't teach his child a trade teaches him highway robbery." Of course this is not to be understood literally, but rather metaphorically, a parent who doesn't train a child for a trade leaves him with no other option to make money other than to steal. The obligations of a father to a son as outlined in the text ensure his future Jewishly, economically and physically.

These obligations of a father do not extend to his daughters[34] and scholar Rachel Biale goes as far as to explain that ~~n~~ot only are [women] exempted, they are excluded."[35] This relates to the different expectations for men and women in terms of

[34] *Kiddusin* 29a.
[35] Biale, Rachel. *Women and Jewish law the essential texts, their history, and their relevance for today*. (New York: Schocken Books, Distributed by Pantheon Books, 1995), 31.

commandedness for *mitzvot*. However since women's primary domain in the family is in the home, she is responsible as a wife and mother to care for the physical needs of her child. For the rabbis there were different parental roles and responsibilities, located along the binary lines of gender and of commandedness.

Rabbinic texts suggest that child can only expect parental support until age six and after that they are on their own. Parent obligations are short-lived, though most parents of six-year-olds were not kicking them out of their household. Based on the above texts, it is clear that parents have other obligations to their children that extend past age six, such as teaching a trade and finding a spouse. Teaching obligations extend longer. But this age specification may suggest that the children that are older than six are obligated to help-out with household tasks or business tasks in order to merit continued support.

Parents and Children: Responsibilities of Child to Parent

As briefly addressed above, one of the key features of the responsibilities of a child towards a parent is the reversal of roles that potentially occurs over the course of time. While a parent cared for the physical needs of a child when they were small, when the parent is aged and the child an adult, a child has a responsibility towards ones' parents. The *Tosefta* explains that a child's obligation to his parents is to ~~h~~help them eat, drink, clothe them, cover them, bring them out and bring them in and to wash their face, hand and feet." In the case of these responsibilities there is no difference if the child is a son or a daughter.

The Differences of Obligations for Sons and Daughters

One question that immediately emerged for the Rabbis is the potential gendered nature of the obligation for a child to a parent. If there are time-bound and non-time-bound obligations, if there are negative obligations and positive obligations, are any of these affected by the gender of the child? In *Kiddushin* 29a, the *Mishnah* clarifies that all of the obligations of a son upon the father, men are obligated and women are exempt. This seems to reflect the general policy of the Rabbis surrounding *mitzvot*, being more stringent for men and more lenient for women. The *Mishnah* continues that for all of the obligations to the father upon the son, both men and women are obligated (obligations of child to perform for parent- IE honor and revere). The egalitarian nature of this decision is not surprising. The Exodus and Deuteronomy text, while gendered-masculine as part of the grammar default, is clearly egalitarian in focus. A child's obligation for their parent is not limited by their gender. However, if it is a positive time-bound commandment, men are obligated and women are exempt (just like any time-bound mitzvah). But positive non-time-bound *mitzvot* are required for both men and women (again, similar to other positive non-time-bound *mitzvot*). And negative non-time-bound *mitzvot* are required for both men and women except for: not to round corners of one's head (*peyot*), not to destroy the corners of one's beard (same) and not to become *tamei* to the dead (*cohanim* related—but does not include the daughters of *cohanim*). All of these exclusions are non-time-bound but are limited with regards to gender (assuming that women don't grow *peyot* or that the laws of *cohanim* are limited only to men). Obligations for a child towards their parents are limited by gender in the ways that all obligations are limited by gender, but are not limited in any surprising ways.

The *Gemara* seeks to clarify the statement that ―all obligations of the son [are] upon the father." Is this a gendered statement? Referencing the Torah text, which begins in the masculine ―*vayahi*", the Rabbis infer that this means that the requirement is limited to men, but then clarify that the line actually refers to every man in a plural construct, therefore expanding the requirement to include women. But R. Yehuda argues that the obligations are for a son to his father just as a father has obligations for his son, therefore only including men under the obligation. Limiting these obligations for a son to a father and a father to a son makes sense in that they both occupy the same *halakhic* category of obligation, while a father and daughter do not occupy the same *halakhic* category. The text is therefore able to protect itself, by using the categories that it itself created; it is able to explain why there is a difference between sons and daughters without having to change the system itself. Perhaps these differing obligations are liberating for women. If they are married with children, they are responsible for another household, the household of their creation, and might find it difficult to be responsible for time-bound aspects of their parents' care. The *Shulhan Arukh* clarifies this in *Yoreh De"ah*240:17 that a woman may not be able to perform all of the obligations of ―honor your mother and father" when she is married, but if she is divorced or widowed (and therefore no longer primarily committed to her husband's household), she is obligated.[36] In this case, the different roles and responsibilities, based on gender, could be seen as beneficial for both sons and daughters, rather than detrimental or demeaning. It doesn't expect more than is possible for a woman who is supposed to primarily be a wife and mother and only secondarily be

[36] Ibid., 30.

a daughter. A son is primarily a son for his entire life. In this way, the roles and responsibilities of sons and daughters differ.

Conclusion:

This study of the different dynamics and relationships outlined in the Talmud only begins to scratch the surface of what rabbinic literature has to teach us about representations of the family. The text informs us about how the financial and emotional responsibilities between parents and children and between spouses as well as sexual responsibilities for married couples were needed to create, maintain and sustain family structures. Both parent-child and spousal relationships are based on a system of obligations and benefits. The relationships are mutual and symbiotic. The requirements are not temporary; rather they last throughout the lives of the two people. Through a *Halakhic* framework, family relationships can be better understood. By utilizing a close-reading of the legislative text, it is possible to gain an understanding and appreciation of the legal system set-up by the rabbis overseeing the family.

The *Talmud* makes some strong statements. Women and men, wives and husbands, mothers and fathers, daughters and sons were each expected to have different roles. The text suggests that there is a sense of connectedness to the previous generation and to the forthcoming generation. Children are required to honor their parents and this not only includes the abstract idea of honor but also the concrete care of an aged parent. Husbands were commanded to care for their wives, both their physical and their emotional needs, and wives were required to care for their husbands in certain ways. The Talmud offers an idealized view of life. It tries to anticipate some of challenges of real

life. It offers big authoritative statements designed to help provide order for a community of people sent into chaos by the destruction of the Temple. The *Talmud* has both a functional and an idealistic legislation role; it seeks to guide life but also offers a lofty ideal. The *Talmud* begins to set the norms for Jewish life in exile and the family as a unit acts as a sustaining support system. As a result, both big and small edicts are made about most areas of family life. These sweeping generalizations can then be used as a lens to frame a study of the lived reality of Jewish families living in America as reflected in films of the time period. It is not to say that there are perfect parallels. Clearly life changed during the Talmudic period and also has changed since the time period of the rabbis. But because the Talmud is a continuously read and studied text by a segment of the population and is the basis of post-destruction Judaism, it is still relevant. The Talmud can be used as a guiding literary text, but not as the definitive text. Still, by using rabbinic literature as a framing text, we can see how the Jewish family shifted and changed in later periods.

Chapter 2: The Jewish Family during the Interwar Period:

Struggling to be American

(1918-1939)

Introduction:

The American Jewish community, only about 200,000 people on the eve of "The Great Migration," was transformed by a mass-migration of Jews from Eastern Europe, roughly from 1881-1924. The interwar period, between the end of The Great War (World War I) in 1918 and 1939, the outbreak of what would later be known as World War II in Europe, was deeply impacted by the earlier mass-migration. During that time, the children of those first immigrants began to come of age, struggling with the pulls of their parents' traditionalism and the modernizing forces pushing them to become forward-looking Americans. Similarly spouses struggled with what it meant to be married in the new world of America.

This chapter focuses on the struggles surrounding Americanization by Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their children, as reflected in film. The key focus is the struggles related to the impact of Americanization on the Jewish family, which was so significant that it became the focus of many movies from the time period. The relationships between spouses, and between parents and children, which were often fraught with conflict, reveal the tensions between acculturation and tradition and the struggle with contested identities. Films act both as reflections of reality and idealized versions of the reality they seek to reflect. Therefore they can be a useful tool in understanding history, though they must be read as complex texts, ones which have many layers and potential meanings. They tend to be both prescriptive and descriptive, shaping

the reality that they claim to reflect. And when the films are viewed in relation to each other, subtle agendas on the part of the film makers can also be revealed. In the interwar period, the films selected reflect both the mainstream film makers and Yiddish filmmakers offer another layer of depth into the Jewish American family experience.

Film Overview:

While there were many films made during the interwar period that explored the general experience of Jews in America, this research focuses on three historically significant films focusing on the Jewish family during this era. These three films shed valuable light on the historical phenomena that impacted the Jewish family as they struggled to Americanize. When the films reflect slightly back to the experience of immigration, these historic films refract the past through the prism of the present. These films act as case studies about the relationships between spouses and between parents and children during the interwar period.

I Want to Be a Boarder (*Ikh Vil Zayn a Pensyoner*), a short comical surrealistic 1937 American-made Yiddish film[37], explores the troubled relationship between a husband and wife. The spouses argue, but then role-play as an amorous boarder and his landlady, revealing the tensions that often emerged when boarders joined a household. *The Cantor"s Son* and *The Jazz Singer*, showcase the tensions between parent and child but each film offers a different resolution. *The Cantor"s Son* (*Dem Khazns Zundyl*) is a 1937

[37] A distinction is made between American-made Yiddish films and Yiddish films made elsewhere in the world. American-made Yiddish films were more open to discussing the tensions between modernity and tradition and often presented an over-idealized image of life in the European *shtetl*. For more see Hoberman.

American-made Yiddish film in which a cantor's son initially rejects his father's profession and Jewish tradition by traveling to America to be an entertainer but ultimately reconciles with his traditionalist parents, becomes a cantor and marries his old world childhood sweetheart. *The Jazz Singer* is a 1927 English-language film, considered the first "talkie,"[38] and was made for a general American audience. In the film, the son of a cantor rejects his father's profession and Jewish tradition by becoming a jazz singer and though pulled back by tradition and his family, ultimately is able to be a modern man in a relationship with a non-Jewish woman and profess his love for his beloved mother, his "Mammy." Through viewing these films, one learns about the tremendous impact of immigration on the Jewish family in America in the interwar period, how historical forces may have led the family to evolve and change as they began to Americanize during this period and how later stereotypes and characterizations may have already begun emerging during this time. These films reflect on the process of Americanization as much as they are products of and reactions to Americanization.

Immigration: Setting the Scene for Interwar Years Films

Between 1881 and 1914, approximately 2 million Eastern European Jews from Russia, Romania and Austria-Hungary (mostly Galicia) landed on America's shores. It was part of an epochal migration during these years that redistributed the world Jewish population, sent 35 million Europeans of different faiths and nationalities across

[38] *The Jazz Singer* marked a change in film technology and ushered in an era of sound film. However most of the film is silent and only punctuated briefly by segments of sound.

international borders, and brought almost 22 million newcomers to the United States".[39] It is fundamentally important to understand the immigration experience of Jewish immigrants in order to fully grasp the family dynamics of the interwar years as seen in film.

There were a number of "push" and "pull" factors that encouraged emigration from Europe and immigration to the United States during this historic period. Many potential immigrants believed in the pervasive "Myth of America," which described a country with limitless possibilities. In *The Cantor's Son*, the entertainers hope to go to America in order to continue their theater in an economically viable environment. America was disproportionately chosen as a destination for Eastern European Jewish immigrants of the period. Unlike other migrant groups where large numbers of young men stayed a few years in America in order to earn money and then returned home, Jewish immigrants by and large stayed in America. Between 1908 and 1914, the rate of return to Europe for Jewish immigrants was only 7.1%, regardless of their country of origin, (compared to 32.2% for non-Jews).[40] While some Jewish migrants did return to Europe, often in order to find a spouse, as conditions there worsened and anti-Semitic violence intensified, more stayed in America, bringing their families with them. Jewish immigrants disproportionately included women and children, statistics unique among other immigrant groups who were predominantly adult males who remained in America only temporarily, which reflects an ultimate goal of immigration for Jewish families.

[39] Sarna, Jonathan D. *American Judaism : A History*. (New York: Yale UP, 2005), 151-152.

[40] Ibid., 154.

From the 1880s until anti-immigration legislation was passed in 1924,[41] waves of Eastern European Jewish immigrants came to the United States, constantly replenishing the pool of ―Greenhorns."[42] It was only after the number of immigrants dramatically diminished and connections to the Old Country frayed that the community was forced to turn inward and face challenges which had been pushed aside. This is why the films of the interwar period deal with intergenerational and spousal challenges in ways unlike the very early films from the earlier period.

For most Eastern European Jewish immigrants, New York City was the port of arrival. 85% of Jewish immigrants coming to the United States during this time period came through New York.[43] The ―Jewish Ghetto," the area in New York City which would later be known as the Lower East Side was a transitional neighborhood which was often a first stopping point for Jewish immigrants and quickly became one of the most densely populated places on earth. The living conditions on the Lower East Side were difficult with overpopulation, numerous health threats and rampant crime. Later, once they had gained economic stability, many immigrants moved to other predominantly Jewish neighborhoods elsewhere in New York City. While in 1892, 75 percent of Jews in New York City lived on the Lower East Side, in 1903 only 50 percent of Jews lived there and by 1916 only 23 percent lived there. In contrast, the Jewish population in the

[41] The National Origins Quota of 1924 dramatically reduced the number of Eastern European immigrants allowed entry into America, limiting the number admitted to 2% of the number of people from a country living in the U.S. in 1890. Because relatively few Eastern Europeans had immigrated to the United States at that point, the quota numbers were quite small, particularly when compared with the number of potential immigrants. The quota system would also have a deeply felt impact during the era preceding World War II.

[42] ―Greenhorn" was a name given to new immigrants

[43] Sarna, *American Judaism : A History,* 153.

Bronx grew to 49 percent and in one neighborhood in Brooklyn, Brownsville, was 95 percent in the 1920s.[44]

Nevertheless, the Lower East Side was a significant site in the history of American Jewish popular culture in America. Beginning in 1920, the Lower East Side became a popular location for Hollywood productions. Despite the fact that many Jews had moved from this area, there were a number of films were made that were set in the Lower East Side and which focused on the tensions between maintaining a cultural identity and the desire to assimilate and become more American. For example, in *The Jazz Singer,* Jackie's cantor father runs through the streets of the Lower East Side to remove his son from singing secular music in a club. For many, ~~t~~he neighborhood help to frame their collective experiences as American Jews, helped them make sense of change, and to create a narrative history and a physical context for locating Jewish communal origins."[45] Living in predominantly Jewish areas through the Second World War kept Jewish communities relatively isolated and inwardly focused, but the dangers of assimilation, as perceived by some, were still palpable, due in part to the number of other spaces that Jews and non-Jews had the potential to interact.

The Emerging Image of Jews in Film:

Ethnic images were present in early film, beginning in the first years of the 1900's with German characters and expanding to include Italian, Irish and Jewish characters by

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[44] Merwin, Ted. *in their own IMAGE: New York Jews in Jazz Age Popular Culture*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006.) 6-7.

[45] Wenger, Beth, ~~I~~ntroduction: Remembering the Lower East Side- A Conversation" in Hasia Diner, Jeffery Shandler, and Beth Wenger, eds. *Remembering the Lower East Side: American Jewish Reflections*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 2.

1908.[46] The first American films with Jewish content, including *Old Isaacs the Pawnbroker* (1908) and *Romance of a Jewess* (1908), allowed mainstream American ~~m~~moviegoers who may never have met or even seen Jews in daily life [to encounter] them on local movie screens. Celluloid Jews appear in a variety of shapes and sizes: sinister shysters, pathetic victims, baffled buffoons, sympathetic workers, struggling students, gallant warriors, star-crossed lovers, and sadistic gangsters being just a few."[47] By 1907, there were about 4,000 small ~~n~~ickelodeon" cinemas in the United States and a large number were in the predominantly Jewish neighborhood of the Lower East Side of New York. For Jewish audiences who flocked to these movie-houses, the image of Jews on the big screen was a chance to see their story being portrayed in a universal medium. A 1914 *Forward* article about the movies explains ~~e~~veryone loves the movies. Our Jews feel very much at home with the detectives, oceans, horses, dogs, and cars that run about on the screen."[48]

The early history of the image of Jews in American film has moments of richness and absence. While some scholars argue that Jews are unrepresented or underrepresented in the early movies,[49] particularly given the presence of Jews in the emerging movie industry, others see Jews as disproportionately represented in film, at least in the first

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[46] Mullins, Patrick. "Ethnic Cinema in the Nickelodeon Era in New York City: Commerce, Assimilation and Cultural Identity." *Film History* 12.1 (2000): 115-24. (*JSTOR*. Web. Aug. 2009. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3815273>.) 121.

[47] Friedman, Lester D. *Hollywood's image of the Jew.* (New York: Ungar. 1982), 3

[48] Howe, Irving. *The World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made*. (New York: Simon and Schuster. 1976), 213.

[49] Friedman, *Hollywood's image of the Jew,* cites Stuart Samuels, ~~T~~The Evolutionary Image of Jewish in American Film" in *Ethnic Images in American Film and Television*, ed. Randall Miller (Philadelphia: The Balch Institute, 19780), p 23.

twenty-nine years of the 1900s.[50] However, legislation in the 1930s severely curtailed the number of ethnic images in film and therefore limited the images of Jews in film for the next twenty years. But in this early period, J. Hoberman argues that, "Eastern European immigrant Jews came to personify the drama of the immigration- particularly after the United States effectively halted the inflow of foreigners in 1924."[51] Cohen notes that the first talkie, *The Jazz Singer,* was about the Jewish immigrant experience.[52] However a critique of the images of Jews in early films is that "mainstream movies did not necessarily show the middle ground of Jewish assimilation – maintaining tradition but not confined to the ghetto, socially branching out but not accepting intermarriage."[53] One of the responses to this problem was the development of the genre of Yiddish film.

Jews in Yiddish Film:

> "Yiddish cinema in America was the product of a changing world and a desire to hold onto traditions and ideals that were being questioned by the majority of Jews."[54]

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[50] Lester Friedman argues that, "Between 1900 and 1929 alone, approximately 230 films featuring clearly discernable Jewish characters- a figure far surpassing the number of films featuring other ethnic types- and certainly enough to draw some general conclusions about how Jews were depicted in this one medium so heavily influenced by Jewish audiences" in Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew,* 9.

[51] Hoberman, J. *Bridge of light: Yiddish film between two worlds*. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, Schocken Books, 1991), 114.

[52] Cohen, Joseph. "Yiddish Film And The American Immigrant Experience." *Film & History* 1998 28(1-2): 30-44. 33.

[53] Cohen, "Yiddish Film," 33.

[54] Goldman, Eric Arthur. "*The Jazz Singer* and its reaction in the Yiddish cinema." in: *When Joseph met Molly: a Reader on Yiddish film.* Sylvia Paskin, Ed. (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 1999), 81.

During and after the mass migration of Eastern European Jews, Yiddish[55] was the *mame-loshn* (mother tongue) for most Jews in America and there was a demand for films that would appeal to the Yiddish-speaking audience. In the Yiddish film genre, the directors are virtually all Jewish and the actors are Yiddish-speaking Jews, the films often have Jewish images and the content avoids or negates racism and anti-Semitism.[56] Because the emergence of Yiddish film in America coincided with the development of sound technology, there were relatively few American-made Yiddish silent films made in the pre-World War I era.[57] Mainstream films made in America during the interwar period that had Jewish characters or Jewish subjects were focused on intermarriage and assimilation, with the main character often achieving the American Dream at the price of leaving their Jewishness behind them, such as in *The Jazz Singer*. Yiddish films were a direct response to that phenomenon, with many of the Yiddish film characters maintaining a connection to tradition, for example, the cantor's son in the film of the same name, ultimately chooses to be a cantor, rather than a nightclub singer. These movies were very popular and the field continued to grow. During the main "Era of American Yiddish Sound Film," 1929-1937,[58] the movies produced reflected both the adaption of Yiddish theater for cinema and the attempt to transform earlier silent films into a sound market. These movies did not reflect the most cutting edge technology nor

[55] Yiddish is the vernacular of the Ashkenazim, Jews originally from Eastern Europe. Many of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants who arrived in America during the period of immigration spoke Yiddish at home and brought their language and associated culture with them to their new home.
[56] Cohen, "Yiddish Film," 36.
[57] Hoberman explains that in America Jewish movies competed with assimilationist "melting-pot" films during this time period. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light,* 6.
[58] The "Era of Yiddish Sound Film" is in contrast to the short "Era of Yiddish Silent Film" and the later "Golden Age of Yiddish Cinema"

the large budgets and grandiose sets of Hollywood, rather they were often small budget, and filmed in locations in the Lower East Side. Many of these movies depicted life in Eastern Europe and included stories that were close to the hearts of film-viewers.

During the "Golden Age of Yiddish Cinema," 1937-1940, a relatively short period dramatically ended by the outbreak of war in Europe and the decimation of the European Jewish audience of Yiddish film, "the Yiddish pictures in America largely dealt with the changes taking place in the fabric of the Jewish family, usually portrayed by the rebellion of the new generation against the ways of their parents."[59] Other films of the period drew from the classics of Yiddish theater and literature and often dealt nostalgically with Jewish life in Eastern Europe, the birthplace of many American Yiddish-speaking Jews. While Yiddish film only has a relatively short history, from 1910 to the late 1940's, the approximately 130 feature films and 30 short films are a rich text through which one can better understand the experiences of Jews in America and Jewish families in America. Two films from this genre were therefore selected for this research, because they reflect both the popular culture of the Jewish community in America at the time, which had a Yiddish-dominance, and also focus on the changing face of the American Jewish family, the focus of this paper.

Family Relationships in Film: Two Case Studies:

For those who had brought family with them to America, "the family remained the major element of stability in this strange and unpredictable land. The vast majority of Jews lived in family units, and regardless of the problems of adjustment many of them

[59] Goldman, "*The Jazz Singer* and its reaction in the Yiddish cinema," 97.

faced, the family was the heart of immigrant life and crucial to the survival of many of its members."[60] While the presence of family was a comforting support system, there were numerous challenges that presented themselves within the family itself. For many immigrants and their children, the dissolution of the family was the terrible consequence of immigration. The films that are discussed here demonstrate both the importance of family for immigrants and the ways in which the family had the potential to fall apart. The changes that impacted the Jewish family during this time period would have a deep effect on the family in later periods, as many stereotypes and characterizations first began to emerge during this point in history. These creations of ~~"J~~ewish characters" in movies reflect the way in which film often generalizes character traits or characters as a whole. These generalizations were often based on reality, but exaggerated in film.

Immigrant parents and Greenhorn children struggled to deal with generational conflicts reflecting differing expectations and goals related to tradition and modernity. They struggled over assimilation, intermarriage and career aspirations, working to discover the correct balance for each individual and each family. For spouses, the pervasiveness of divorce and abandonment as well as the common presence of boarders had the potential to deeply affect relationships.

Changing Family Relationships: Parents and Children: Tradition, Modernity and Assimilation, and the Struggle for a Balance of Both

The immigration of Jewish families to America preceding this time period often resulted in a generational divide between parents and children. Parents, part of the older

[60] Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers,* 89.

generation, often held fast to tradition, including professions, religion and notions of family. Children, in contrast, were often "free-thinkers" who were open to the modernity that America promised including unlimited possibilities for professions, movement away from or rejection of religion and the idea of romantic love. The difference of worldview led to conflicts in many families. A 1933 letter to the beloved Yiddish newspaper *The Jewish Daily Forward* in the Help column, the *Bintel Brief*, talks about the struggles between "immigrant parents and their American-born children."[61] In other *Bintel Brief* letters, parents bemoan how their children have left the Jewish faith and children complain about how their parents seem stuck in the old world. These tensions also played out in the movies of the period which presented generational conflicts. "Early Jewish screen families often find themselves enmeshed in bitter conflicts between love and tradition. Inevitably, the younger generation's thorough indoctrination into democratic values of romance and marriage clash with the older generation's traditional beliefs in religious values and old world customs."[62] When this battle was portrayed in film, the outcome depended on the film maker and the intended audience.

In Yiddish theater, which was the parent of Yiddish cinema, the archetypal Yiddish stage performer was a cantor's son or daughter.[63] Therefore it is not surprising that a number of Yiddish films and films with Jewish characters in the late 1920's and early to mid-1930's highlighted the generational conflict by including a cantor's child as their film's main character. "The polemic of tradition's integration into America was

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[61] Metzker, Isaac. Ed. *Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the "Jewish Daily Forward."* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc. 1971), 158-159

[62] Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, 26.

[63] Hoberman *Bridge of Light,* 258. Hoberman lists a number of key figures in Yiddish theater who were the children of cantors.

played out by the role of the cantor, as he followed the path of American immigration: he turned from a public figure in the Jewish sphere to a public figure in the universal sphere."[64] Cantors and the sons of cantors, who were presumed to seek their father's profession, struggled to find their place between tradition and modernity and assimilation. In film, the cantor is a key figure in Jewish modernization because of the pull of show business, including vaudeville, opera and secular Yiddish music, and the pull of traditional religious synagogue music. Because the cantorate was ~~a~~ major site for the struggle between the sacred and the secular,"[65] when a cantor on film was able to integrate the modern and the traditional, he became a symbol for film viewers who were similarly struggling with such a conflict. The choice to focus on the sons of cantors, rather than the sons of rabbis may have been a cinematic one, as a filmmaker could showcase the transgression of religious or cultural norms, by having the cantor's son sing in a particular venue, while it would be more difficult to explain to an audience how a rabbi's son had rejected his father's profession.

The challenges faced by the cantors' son highlights the conflict between tradition and modernity playing out on the family. J. Hoberman referred to *The Cantor"s Son* as ~~t~~he anti-~~J~~azz Singer'" because, despite their initially sharing a common storyline, they have diametrically opposed endings.[66] In *The Cantor"s Son* the title character ultimately embraces tradition, while in *The Jazz Singer*, the cantor's son chooses modernity and assimilation. In both films the relationship between the father and son is significant, as the father represents tradition and the son, at least initially in both cases, represents

[64] Cohen, ~~Y~~iddish Film And The American Immigrant Experience," 36.
[65] Hoberman *Bridge of Light,* 115.
[66] Hoberman *Bridge of Light,* 262.

modernity and assimilation. Additionally the mother characters are at least partially open to change, perhaps in an effort to hold onto a relationship with their sons. As the father character is committed to tradition at the expense of the relationship with their child, this exacerbates existing tensions between spouses. Through careful exploration of both films, one can see the family tensions that resulted from conflict between tradition and modernity in America. One the reasons for the different ultimate outcome was the different audiences for the films; one was made for nostalgic Yiddish-speaking audiences while the other was for the more progressive modern English-speaking audience.

In *The Cantor"s Son*, the title character, Shloimele, walks a careful line between respecting European tradition and moving into a more assimilated and modern life in America. Initially it seems that Shloimele is rejecting tradition, when as a child in the European *shtetl* he runs off with a group of entertainers. His mother had advocated for tradition, declaring ―I am his mother. His father is a sterling Jew, a cantor!... He is a cantor‘s son!"[67] For his father, openness to modernity is a slippery slope, increasing the chance that he will reject religious tradition, ―Next he‘ll start smoking on the Sabbath. He‘ll become a criminal. One day he‘ll even raise a hand to you [his mother]! Can you imagine what he‘ll grow up to be?" This dialogue puts the audience in a difficult position, do they identify with the cantor, holding on to old world tradition and worrying that his son will not only reject his religion but also his family? Do they side with the young son, who only wants to perform, just not in the way his father wants him to? Ultimately Shloimele rejects his position as a cantor‘s son and sneaks out of the house,

[67] All film quotes are the author‘s transcription except in the case of silent film when the captioning is quoted as it appears on the screen.

joining the entertainers in their travels of Europe and their eventual immigration to America. For many immigrants, the casting-off of some traditional observances led to the eventual rejection of other observances, while for others a balance between modernity and traditional observance was achieved.

The audience of *The Jazz Singer* is shown competing images representing modernity and tradition. For example, as the film opens, there is a traditional Jewish image of an older man with a long beard and wearing a *yarmulke* which is contrasted with the modern American image of children playing on merry-go-round with American flags on it. Even the main characters are presented as in opposition to each other. "Cantor Rabinowitz, [the father is a] chanter of hymns in the synagogue, [he] stubbornly held to the ancient traditions of his race." These words are followed by the image of a Jewish star stained glass window and candle sticks which introduce the image of the traditional father, with a *yarmulke*, a long beard, glasses, and old-looking, traditional clothes. It is clear to film viewers that he represents tradition and traditional Judaism.

The mother character, in contrast, is somewhat ambiguous in terms of tradition and modernity. Generationally she should represent tradition, but her role as a mother mitigates her ties. She is "Sara Rabinowitz. God made her a woman and Love made her a mother." Her representative image is a flower, not a particularly Jewish image, though her character is wearing a white scarf, has an older looking face, and wears her hair in braids wrapped around her head.[68] After she does the traditional act of lighting the holiday candles, she advocates a nontraditional position, explaining to her husband that

[68] Author notes: though she does cover her hair, which would be more traditional, she also does not have the short modern bob of the late 1920's.

–Maybe our boy doesn't want to be a Cantor Papa --" The father character, fiercely traditional, uses a conventional answer, calling on history: –What has *he* to say? For five generations a Rabinowitz has been a Cantor – he *must* be one!" For the father/cantor, lineage and family responsibility overrides personal autonomy.

This first scene reflects one of the biggest conflicts to emerge within immigrant and first generation families: tradition vs. modernity. In this case, the divide within one generation, reflects the tensions between spouses who had different views of how their children should be raised and conduct themselves. For the father character, tradition is ultimately the most important thing. Even in America he has maintained his Jewish identity and a traditional Jewish lifestyle. Viewers can infer that the more modern Jackie is not interested in tradition or in a traditional life. The mother character has maintained most of the vestiges of a modern life for herself, but is more open to change for her child. Aviva Cantor argues that often –the mother also had to facilitate the son's assimilation as a prerequisite for his material success (as did the mother in the semi-silent 1927 film, *The Jazz Singer*)."[69] In America, the Jewish mother had two roles handed to her by American society and Jewish tradition: she was simultaneously the initiator of the Americanization of the child and the guardian of Jewish tradition in the home. In *The Jazz Singer*, the mother struggles with the delicate balance of those two jobs, never keeping both her modernist son and her traditionalist husband fully happy.

When it is revealed that their son Jackie, absent from the first scene, is –singing raggy time songs" in a bar on the eve of Yom Kippur, his father races to pull him out of

[69] Cantor, Aviva. *Jewish women/Jewish men the legacy of patriarchy in Jewish life*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995) 210-211.

that profane space, first switching hats from a *yarmulke*-type to a more modern bowler. In this way, the father's clothing is like a costume, signifying his movement from the Jewish private domain to the American public domain. When father and son return, the mother is in the kitchen cooking, demonstrating her role as a homemaker, a food provider, and a hard worker. While the father threatens a violent punishment, the mother consoles her son with hugs, offering conflicting messages about the acceptability of Jackie's behavior. The father plans to ~~t~~each him better than to debase the voice God gave him!" but the mother tries to placate by explaining ~~B~~But Papa – our boy, he does not think like we do." This acts as a statement about difference between generations. The mother is open to a different viewpoint, in spite of the generational divide, in order to preserve peace in the home, while the father, holding on to tradition, is willing to use violence to compel his son not to forsake the things the previous generation found important. As the disciplinarian father plans to whip his son, and the loving mother tries to stop him, the son speaks up in his own defense and threatens a terrible potential consequence. ~~I~~If you whip me again, I'll run away—and *never come back*" Jackie says and indeed runs away. Because the film is ultimately affirming of modernity, the narrator asserts a message equating elements of tradition with the more evolved modern music of jazz, as if jazz is the logical outcome of traditional music. The film's narrator suggest that ~~I~~In every living soul, a spirit cries for expression—perhaps this plaintive, wailing song of Jazz is, after all, the understood utterance of a prayer."[70] This is to imply that Jackie's Old World father is too blind to see the connection between his son's music and

[70] While the use of black-face and the themes of African American and Jewish co-identity are significant, they do not directly deal with the focus of this research. More information on the topic, see Michael Alexander and Michael Rogin.

the liturgical song that he has dedicated his life to singing. Jackie heads off into the night and into the unknown, while his parents pray in the synagogue.

The first part of each movie shows the cantors' son rejecting tradition and striking out alone, breaking up the Jewish family. The films revisit the two cantor's sons again years later when they are both singing professionally. Both cantors' sons crave modernity and work to be seen as authentically American, at least for a short while.

While Shloimele had rejected tradition by immigrating and by embracing a secular music career, it is through his music that he comes back to Jewish tradition. Shloimele gets a job as a custodian at a Yiddish club, but later is given a job as a singer there. He acknowledges that in addition to having sung in the Yiddish theater, he is a cantor's son. This moment can be considered a significant one for the film, as it marks the first time the title character takes on a sense of ownership over his identity as a cantor's son, a traditional role he had previously rejected. At the same time, he asserts a modern Americanized identity by changing his name to Sol Reichman. While he makes a secular and "American" choice to sing a duet with a female American singer, a woman named Helen, they sing a traditionalist song, the nostalgic "*Beltz, Mayn Shtetele Beltz*" (My Little Town Beltz). The song recalls Shabbat and Bible reading, markers of religious tradition, in the "home where I spent everyday of my childhood years." Sol's entry into the modern world of American music is through Yiddish song and through tradition. With the promise of a big career, Sol is given a check for $100 and immediately decides to send a portion of the money home to his parents so that his father can buy a new *tallis* (prayer shawl). Again, in this way, Sol is supporting tradition, telling his parents in a letter, "beloved parents, although I am thousands of miles away

from you, I never stop thinking about you for a minute. Until recently, things have been very difficult. But, thank God, I've suddenly become successful. I am, thank God, healthy, and I earn a living. Since the holidays are approaching, I am sending $25.00, so that father can buy a new prayer shawl and wear it in good health, as he prays for a good year for all Jews." His mother is thrilled to learn that "he didn't forget us" and his father is touched that his son wanted to give him a prayer shawl. The religious language that Sol uses in the letter also suggests his lingering commitment to tradition and his unbreakable connection to his parents. The letter and financial gift enables Sol to reconcile with his parents, which will have a significant impact later in the film.

Sol continues to pursue a music career in America, but he seems conflicted by the pressures to be modern or to be Jewish. The club owner wants him to sing "Figero," a secular song, while Sol explains that he wants to sing Jewish songs. Again he claims the identity of a cantor's son, a role that he rejected in Europe. Now, he wants to sing liturgical pieces, Jewish prayers. Sol gets a unique big break when a congregation on a search for someone with a "one with a true Jewish voice" hears Sol sing "*Av HaRachamim*" on the radio and decides that he needs to be their new cantor. Sol is recruited by the synagogue and then given an opportunity to tour America singing cantorial pieces. Sol has found an impressive way to balance tradition and modernity, singing traditional music for a modern American audience.

"Years later—and three thousand miles from home… Jakie Rabinowitz had become Jack Robin—the Cantor's son, a *jazz singer*."[71] He too sings in a modern club where there is mixed dancing and modern-dressed patrons. He sings secular songs such

[71] From *The Jazz Singer.*

as –Dirty Hands, Dirty Face" and –Toot Toot Tootsy."[72] Lester Friedman writes that *The Jazz Singer*'s predominant theme of the bitter conflict between old ways and new ideas remains symbolically apt for the role it played in replacing silent film with sound film."[73] In this way, the very film itself, beyond the technology it utilized, reflects the transitionary nature of the time period. In the club Jack meets modern Mary Dale, who will become his girlfriend. She is independent, a performer in her own right and as her name suggests, is of the Christian faith. In a letter home to his mother, Jackie explains that he is making lots of money ($250 a week), that he has met a –wonderful girl, Mary Dale," and that she helped get him his –big chance." He reminds his family that –Jack Robin is my name now." His name change, to a more –American" name can be seen as a rejection of his father and his family lineage. His father had been proud that –For five generations a Rabinowitz has been a Cantor" and now his son was neither a cantor nor a Rabinowitz.

Similar to *The Cantor"s Son*, a modern woman helps the main character get into show business, but what is different in *The Jazz Singer* is the issue of intermarriage. This symbolizes the different approach of the film towards the tradition-assimilation conflict in the two cantor's son films. Many films of this era presented –some form of generational conflict arising from a Jewish child's desire to marry a non-Jew."[74] In the case of this film, Mary Dale's name stands out to Jack's parents who announce –Maybe he's fallen in love with a *shiksa."* While intermarriage had long been a taboo in Jewish

[72] This is part of the groundbreaking nature of the film as the musical numbers are performed using sound technology.
[73] Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, 48-49.
[74] Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, 24.

tradition, the socially-isolated lives that many Jews lived in the Pale of Settlement prevented them from encountering non-Jews in a primarily social context and limited intermarriage. In America, despite the choice of many Jews to live in ethnic neighborhoods, the intermarriage rate began to grow, albeit at a low rate. The *Bintel Brief* responded to a 1908 letter regarding an interfaith relationship by explaining "We can only say that some mixed marriages are happy, others unhappy… it is true, however, that in some mixed marriages the difference between man and wife create unhappiness."[75] Jack's relationship with Mary may also seen as symbolic. David Biale argues that "*The Jazz Singer*… conflated the hero's desire to make it in the entertainment world with his relationship with Gentile dancer, Mary Dale, explicitly labeled a *shikse.*"[76] At this time, interfaith relationships were often viewed as a method of rejecting tradition and *The Jazz Singer* seems to agree with this position, using Jack's relationship with Mary Dale as a way of showing how far he has come from his traditionalist family. It has been argued that *The Jazz Singer* is "the hallmark of the Hollywood 'assimilationist' film" because "Jakie Rabinowitz son of a cantor, not only rejects the traditional way of life by becoming a vaudeville entertainer but also takes up with a Gentile woman."[77] But yet Jack seems to suggest you can have it all; you can be a Jazz singer and love your Mammy, you can respect tradition and be romantically involved with a non-Jewish woman. Intermarriage would become a larger historically significant phenomenon in the

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[75] *Bintel Brief* 83

[76] Biale, David. "The Body and Sexuality in American Jewish Culture." *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism (Cambridge Companions to Religion)*. Ed. Dana Evan Kaplan. (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005), 256.

[77] Rivo, Sharon Pucker. "Projected Images: Portraits of Jewish Women in Early American Film" in *Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture.* Edited by Joyce Antler. (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 42.

final decades of the century, but was already a concern of many in the period of immigration. A number of films including *The Jazz Singer* and the Irish-Jewish *Abie"s Irish Rose* were made in the interwar period, showcasing that interfaith relationships were already an area of concern. While the pro-assimilation message of *The Jazz Singer* allows for an interfaith relationship, the more anti-assimilation message of *The Cantor"s Son* is reflected not only through the use of a Jewish American romantic interest, but through her ultimate reject in favor of a Jewish Old-World woman.

After Jack‘s big break, he returns home on the eve of his father‘s birthday. He has a joyous reconciliation with his mother, the character who was always much more accepting of her son‘s break with tradition. He showers her with gifts and sings songs, but when his father comes home and discovers Jack‘s return and his commitment to modernity, he is incensed saying ―You dare to bring your jazz songs into my house! I taught you to sing the songs of Israel - to take my place in the synagogue!" Jack tries to help his father to understand his modern viewpoint: ―You're of the old world! If you were born here, you'd feel the same as I do - - tradition is all right, but this is another day! I'll live my life as I see fit!" Ultimately, however, Jack is banished again. His father is unable to make the connection that Jack sees, that his love of music on the stage has a parallel to his father‘s chosen profession of religious music. As Irving Howe observed: ―If conflicts between generations are central to the experience of all immigrant groups, among the Jews these became especially severe because of the persuasion that, at almost any cost, it was necessary to propel sons and daughters into the outer world- or, more precisely, to propel them into the outer world as social beings while trying to keep them

spiritually within the Jewish orbit."[78] It seems as if Jack has been cast out of the Jewish world; destined to be a modern jazz singer.

But ultimately, Jackie, both the jazz singer and the cantor's son, cannot fully renounce his family and his religion. After his internal struggle, the blackface is set aside and he reconciles with his father on his father's deathbed. Though Jack had professed that his career was more important to him than anything else, he cancels the opening night of his first big Broadway show to sing *Kol Nidre* in his father's place. ~~"~~Like Hank Greenberg a few years later, Jackie Robin (nee Rabinowitz) reconciles with his religion on the most solemn day of the Jewish year, making a statement that the price of acceptance in America need not be total assimilation."[79] Many Jewish families who had immigrated to America were aware that while *di golden medina* offered economic opportunities, it also provided a less religious environment for Jews than their homes in Eastern Europe."[80] Yet, many immigrant parents believed that ~~"~~the sons- *they* would achieve both collective Jewish fulfillment and individual Jewish success."[81] The scene showing Cantor Rabinowitz's last words suggests that Jack has ultimately chosen his traditional Jewish identity over modernity. The cantor says ~~"~~Mamma, we have our son again." But it is the non-Jewish Mary Dale who explains to the film viewers that Jack is ~~"~~a jazz singer -- singing to his God." The film version of *The Jazz Singer* does not conclude with Jack becoming a cantor like Shloimele in *The Cantor"sSon*. Instead, Jack returns to the stage after his father's death, singing his last song not to God and not to

[78] Howe, *The World of Our Fathers,* 180.
[79] Biale, ~~"~~The Body and Sexuality in American Jewish Culture," 256.
[80] Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, 70.
[81] Howe, *The World of Our Fathers*, 252.

Mary Dale, but instead to his mother, returning to blackface and singing ―Mammy." The film struggles to harmonize the images of the Jewish Jackie with the American Jake. ―Rather than suppressing one identity for the other … the film not only juxtaposes the cantor with the entertainer in its final two scenes but also treats the entertainer as a kind of cantor throughout."[82] Ultimately, *The Jazz Singer* attempts to show that in the struggle between past and present, between tradition and modernity, between father and son, there can be reconciliation between each identity and role. However the two films show different interpretations of what that reconciliation looks like, as reflected in the film titles. In the Yiddish *The Cantor"sSon* the title character becomes a cantor, while in the American *The Jazz Singer*, the title character, also a cantor's son, ultimately becomes a jazz singer. Yiddish films, made for an audience holding onto the vestiges of tradition through language as well as culture, focused nostalgically on tradition. American films were made for a melting-pot audience, which were more open to modernity and being American, not just through language but also through culture. Because English-language films had a larger audience and a more far-reaching appeal, the Jewish immigrant experience was used to speak for the broader immigrant experience as many immigrant groups struggled with what it meant to be American.

Generational struggles may have begun soon after individual family's migration, it was the end of the flood of new immigrants due to a change in legislation that shifted the discussion and focus of the community. The films of the interwar period celebrate the

[82] Knapp, Jeffrey. ―Sacred Songs Popular Prices: Secularization in *The Jazz Singer*." *Critical Inquiry*, Winter2008, Vol. 34 Issue 2, p313-335. 318.

Second Generation[83] coming of age, with challenging results.[84] During this period, small rumbles of change disrupted individual families, eventually leading to massive earthquakes of change.

Changing Family Relationships: Spouses: Divorce, Missing Men, Abandonment and Boarders

The _traditional' solidarity of the Jewish family was challenged during this period due to the transitional nature of the period following immigration.[85] While nostalgia regarding the period suggests an idealized image of the Jewish family post-immigration, many families struggled with family disorganization as they were impacted by the social and economic aspects of modern society[86] and discovered that ~~in~~ the turmoil of the American city, traditional family patterns could not survive."[87] As a result of the trauma of immigration, the traditional Jewish family began to break down, sometimes in small ways and other times in large and monumental ways. Life in America was challenging for many immigrants' relationships, and significant strain was placed on many marriages.

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[83] The Second Generation historically refers to the second generation of an immigrant family, those born in America, while the First Generation refers to those who made the journey of immigration. However in this case, the Second Generation also includes those who were born in Europe and made the journey to America at a very young age and were modern-focused in contrast to their traditionalist families.
[84] Howe, *The World of Our Fathers*, 183.
[85] Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, 2.
[86] Ibd., 2 quoting Jeanne Levine, "Jewish Family Desertion in Cases Carried Cooperatively by the National Desertion Bureau and Other Social Agencies in New York City, 1934" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Graduate School for Jewish Social Work, New York, 1939), 3.
[87] Howe, *The World of Our Fathers,* 173.

In the short Yiddish film, *I Want to Be a Boarder*, the two main characters, a husband and wife, struggle with the state of their relationship.

The film opens with the man threatening "divorce me or I'll leave." Divorce and abandonment plagued many couples as the burdens of finance and Americanization divided husbands and wives. American divorce rates rose drastically after the Civil War, a time of rapid industrialization, technological developments and urbanization which tended to weaken the control society had on the individual. Jews, whose religious tradition allowed for a *get*, a Jewish divorce, were not immune from the growing of phenomenon of divorce. Jews in New York City in the early 1900s had the highest divorce rate of any ethnic group.[88] Many marriages dissolved as life in America proved to be distinctly different from Europe, particularly for those who had entered into initially loveless arranged marriages. In some cases, "an aggressive husband went so far as to divorce the wife who represented all that was repugnant to him in the Old World culture, and to marry a woman whose demeanor better suited his newly acquired 'American' tastes."[89] While divorce was a serious topic in films, a character might joke about divorce in order to lighten the mood. When the comical character Yossele in *The Cantor"s Son* meets a divorcee he explains "that's much better than a widow. A widow maybe pestered her husband to an early death. A divorcee is most likely a fine woman who couldn't bear her husband's bad character!" In actuality, that may have been a realistic reason for divorce, as some new Americans became attracted to vices in America that tore their families apart, such a gambling or drinking. For other couples, the

[88] Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, 110.
[89] Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, 3.

challenge was the time they had spent apart when one spouse had travelled to America and the other had remained in Europe. In *The Cantor"s Son*, Yossele explains to a European woman: ―You can't just take a person out of America, nor can you take a European and settle him in America just like that." A common immigration strategy was to send the husband to America first, with the wife and children remaining behind in Europe until enough funds were raised. Spouses often spent years apart due to such arrangements and time apart created differences between spouses. Once reunited, ―only time together could determine the new family relationships that would emerge in the United States."[90] It was not only the geographic distance that affected the spouses but also the cultural distance. The social norms in America differed greatly than the shtetl culture in Eastern Europe. For others, it was the financial concerns that pushed the spouses apart. Many men felt emasculated by their inability to provide for their families as the sole wage earner and their dreams of financial success were deferred. In *I Want to Be a Boarder* the husband quips ―marriage is too expensive." While there was social stigma around divorce, for many couples, it was a way to become free and to start a new life in America.

For those unwilling to divorce, like the wife in *I Want to be a Boarder*, or those unable to afford a divorce, ―the poor man's divorce" or spousal abandonment became a social problem, as wayward husbands, unable or unwilling to care for their families would run away, leaving their wives and children destitute. Abandonment both was a result of and led to a life of poverty and was a sign of the instability of Jewish family life. Institutional data from the period shows that the phenomenon of desertion was largely

[90] Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers,* 86.

confined to the lower socioeconomic classes, in part because formal divorce was an expensive endeavor. "In 1912 [the National Desertion Board] reported 561 cases [of desertion] among Jewish immigrants in New York alone. The reasons given for desertion were: 120, another woman; 47, bad habits; 134, insufficient dowry; 4, wife immoral; 3, another man, and so on. Because many deserted wives, out of shame or fear, failed to report their husbands, many of the men never were in fact discovered."[91] The pages of the *Forward*, the Yiddish-language newspaper, and of other newspapers were full of pictures of fugitive husbands and wives, often wrote to papers seeking their husband's return. In a 1911 letter to the *Bintel Brief*, a deserted wife wrote an open letter to her missing husband:

> "You left us in such a terrible state. You had no compassion on us… You lived with me for six years, during which time I bore you four children. And then you left me… you have made [the children] living orphans."[92]

In "I Want to Be a Boarder, the wife threatens that if her husband abandons her, she will "put your picture among 'the missing men'" as a way of shaming him. However the humorous nature of the movie makes light of this situation as he retorts "put in a nice picture." For those who were abandoned the situation was not comical and required a complex support system in order to guarantee survival.

As a result of the number of abandoned families, Jewish charities were dispatched to care for the deserted families.[93] Many of these organizations were created by "uptown" Jews who were concerned with the new Americans ability to integrate into society and about the burden these abandoned wives and children were putting on social

[91] Howe, *The World of Our Fathers,* 179.
[92] *Bintel Brief* 83-84
[93] Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew,* 1.

institutions. Significantly, they were worried about how that might reflect against the larger Jewish community.

Another challenge to the traditional family structure was the presence of boarders in immigrant households. Literature of the period recounts the detrimental effect the husband-wife-boarder triangle had upon family relationships. Popular in immigrant communities where single men found an affordable place to live by rooming with an intact family, boarders were financially helpful to the family and enabled lone immigrant men to have a safe place to live surrounded in many cases by other *landsmen*. However there was a potential danger with the boarder arrangements: When a man moved in with another family, sometimes the boarder and the wife would fall in love (in other cases, a daughter and a male boarder might fall in love). As much urban legend as historic truth,[94] the love triangle between husband, wife and boarder is parodied in *I Want to Be a Boarder* as the married couple role-plays as a boarder and his landlady. The role-play acts more as a comical device than any significant statement about the use of theater by interwar period spouses. Their relationship is transformed as they change from combatants to an amorous couple. The boarder treats his landlady well, holding the door, giving her flowers and helping her with her dress. This behavior is contrasted with the husband acting rude and dismissive to her. The role play breaks down when suddenly the male character seems to switch back into husband-mode and says angrily –So, you love your boarder, eh? And she says –"And you- you make love to your landlady. As my husband you never made love to me." In this dialogue the marital problems present in their relationship are explored and suggest why the love displayed by the (fictional)

[94] Urban Legends often are rooted in reality.

boarder might have been significant to the woman. The wife refuses a divorce and holds on to the vestiges of her marriage, perhaps in self-interest. In contrast the character of (married) landlady offers to kill her husband as a sign of love, in order to be with the boarder. But this pushes the boarder back into the role of husband, angered by his wife's plans to kill him. While murder may not have been a statistically significant (though marital violence did plague many relationships), the conflicts that emerged between spouses as the result of infidelity or changed values had the power to create irreconcilable differences. The element of comedy in the film enables film viewers to laugh at the characters and the situations while also helping to expose them to social problems and allowing them to confront social taboos.

The Jewish family was irreversibly impacted by immigration, even if the family remained intact. Spouses struggled with a number of social problems. As the films demonstrate, while some spouses shared viewpoints and beliefs about how to raise children or how to deal with modernity, in other relationships the family dynamics were impacted by differences of opinion between husbands and wives. Marital relationships, affected by finance and infidelity, divorce and devotion, time and temper had a tremendous impact on the entirety of the family.

Conclusion:

The Jazz Singer, *The Cantor"s Son*, and *I Want to Be a Boarder* serve as useful social artifacts. The movies reflect the transitional nature of Jewish life in the 1920s and 1930s. Jewish immigrants to America struggled as they figured out how to become ―American." Often, this placed great strains on the family, which was widely seen as a

bedrock and grounding institution to a transitional generation. As both a religious group and an ethnic group, many Jews had a bifurcated identity. They had to labor to find a balance between their strong Jewish identity and the pulls of Americanization. In the films of time period, for parents, being Jewish was of key importance; while for later generations, the multiple identities of Jewish AND American each pulled and led to struggles about how to Americanize one's Jewishness. The ascendancy of the second generation brings to light the theme of Americanization. The generalizations that the films provide, offer a useful historical framework through which to gain a better understanding of the Jewish family in America at this time.

The struggles of the immigrant generation for financial stability and for their own balance of modernity and tradition foreshadowed new challenges for the next generation. The successes of the earlier generations set the stage for new obstacles for their children. As we shall see in the following chapters, many of these issues and struggles reappear with additional concerns and nuances in the post-war and contemporary periods.

Chapter 3: Postwar Suburbanization and Materialism

(1945-1969)

Introduction:

The Second World War and the horror wrought by the Nazis on European Jewry dramatically transformed world Jewry. With the European Jewish community decimated, the American Jewish community suddenly found itself the largest, most powerful and most wealthy Jewish community in the world.[95] The postwar period, 1945-1967, found American Jews living in what historian Lucy Dawidowicz called "The Golden Age in America," a time of "recovery and renewal."[96] The postwar period was marked by a number of significant geographic, social and religious transformations for the Jewish community in America. Jewish individuals left the urban centers and moved to the suburbs, devastating urban Jewish communities and leading to the establishment of suburban Jewish communities. This move reflected new middle-class status and the beginning of wide-spread Jewish inclusion into mainstream American society. For Jewish families living in America, several key historical phenomena had a dramatic impact, as reflected by the films of the period. These films focus on families that had been in America longer, rather than recent immigrants, and depict their struggles with

[95] In 1875, the Jewish population in America was only 5% of world Jewry and in 1933 was just 29%. But in 1945, with European Jewry devastated by the Holocaust, the approximately 5 million US Jews made up 40% of the world Jewish population. Shapiro, Edward S. *Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992), 60.

[96] Goren, Arthur A. "A 'Golden Decade' for American Jews: 1945-1955" in *The American Jewish Experience : A Reader*., Jonathan D. Sarna, ed. (New York: Holmes & Meier, Incorporated, 1997), 294.

acculturation and Americanization. The earlier historical struggles surrounding these phenomena had deepened. The children of the interwar period, who struggled to find their place in America, were now the parents of native-born 2nd and 3rd generation children who felt at home in America but often were materialistic and had different goals than their parents. The role reversal is one of the new challenges facing the Jewish family at this time.

Overview of Films:

The two films at the focus of this chapter are archetypal of the films of the period. They are both films about Jewish families based on books written by Jewish sons. The stories are a reflection of and criticism of their life experiences. The 1958 film, *Marjorie Morningstar*, based on the 1955 book by Herman Wouk tells the story of the modern Jewish-American family. Considered the first work since the ghetto films of 1920s that concentrated on Jewish family life, ~~in~~ *Marjorie Morningstar*, the remaining Jewish elements do not disappear when [she left] the house of mama and papa."[97] The title character in *Marjorie Morningstar* is considered the first Jewish American folk heroine and is historically significant because she is now seen as an early version of the ~~J~~Jewish American Princess" (JAP) character.[98]

Goodbye, Columbus is the story of a working class Jewish boy from Newark who has a summer romance with an upper-middle-class Jewish girl from the suburbs. They are initially engrossed by the other's differences; Neil is attracted to Brenda because of

[97] Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, 204.
[98] Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, 13.

the exotic glitter of her nouveau riche world and Brenda is attracted to Neil because he is outside that world and therefore can be used to bait her snobbish parents. Ultimately it is their class difference that separates them. When Neil realizes that he can never belong to Brenda's world and that she can never escape it, the romance ends. While the Philip Roth book is set in 1956, the 1969 film version is more of a contemporary rethinking of the storyline, with a few minor changes (references to "The Pill" and some "psychedelic" editing).[99] Elenore Lester argues in "*Marjorie Morningstar* Revisited" that *Marjorie Morningstar* and *Goodbye, Columbus* are significant films to compare. "Roth denigrates the suburban Jewish culture that Wouk only a few years earlier held up as an Ideal, and Wouk mocks the Psychiatric culture that was nurturing Roth and his imitators."[100] Each film sheds light on the changing face of the American Jewish family in the postwar period, highlighting the challenges and successes of the family at this time.

Increased Visibility of Jews in Postwar Film:

While there had been a phenomenon of 'de-Semitizing' Jews in many of the movies of the late 1930s and early 1940s, a number of the wartime and post-World War II films presented Jewish characters and Jewish themes including *Crossfire* and *Gentleman's Agreement*[101].[102] In addition to the Jewish social theme movies, there were a number of major literary and film works in 1950s and 1960s that were written by second and third generation sons and reflect the authors' perceptions of life for Jewish

[99] Friedman, *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, 13.
[100] Lester, Elenore. "Majorie Morningstar Revisited." *Lilith.* Vol 1. Issue 1. 1976, 13.
[101] Both films debuted in 1947
[102] Shapiro, Edward S. *Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992), 18-19.

American families. The books and plays penned by Jewish American authors that were later made into films reflected the rise of an American Jewish literary genre.[103] From 1958 and through the 1960s there were a multitude of images of Jewish families in popular film, the greatest number since the 1920s. The visibility of Jewish families in film was a byproduct of the reawakening of ethnic identity in the 1960s which spanned national, racial and religious identity-groups.

An Overview of the Family in Film:

Representations of the Jewish family in film shifted between the interwar years and the postwar period. The films of the earlier era focused on the Stern Patriarch and the Long-Suffering Mother in which the father was the figure of power, the mother was loving and open to change in order to preserve peace in the family and the son rebelled against the father and held tight to the mother. In popular culture in the 1950s and 1960s we see the new images of the Pathetic Patriarch and the Manipulating Mother. The father is a figure of love and pity and is cherished, while the mother is strong force in the family and has a selfish desire to see children succeed. In contrast to earlier films, where the children rebelled against the father, the children now rebelled against the mother. In both films we see the triptych of Jewish life: hard work, personified by the father-producer; the creation of family, personified by the beautiful, sexual daughter; and the maintenance of Judaism, personified by the mother.[104] As the mother was seen as the keeper of the Jewish flame, the negative attention she received reflects a rejection of

[103] Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema,* 198.
[104] Prell, Riv-Ellen, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender and the Anxiety of Assimilation*. (Beacon Press, 1999), 127.

parental Judaism. Children's connection to Judaism seems even more remote that the previous generation. Sons, the focus of the films of the earlier time period, are less significant. The spouses continue to be in conflict, but whereas in the past the husband was the negative overbearing character, now the wife is the overwhelming and overpowering figure. These characters and their relationship with each other reflect the larger historical phenomena that are playing out during this time period.

Fathers as Symbolizing Suburbia

The character of the father in film isn't the focus of the same level of scholarship as mother characters are during this time period. Perhaps that is because many of the fathers are deemed irrelevant as they are overshadowed by the domineering mothers. While in the previous historical period the father character represented tradition, now the mother is carrying out religion in the house. Whereas in the past fathers were all-powerful, now the mother controls the domestic sphere and the children. The significant feature of the father character in the films of this time period is their ability to be the provider. They show love with money and enable their families to migrate because of their acquired wealth. This domestic migration is an important feature of this time period.

During the Golden Decade of 1945-1955, the foundations for the postwar American Jewish community were laid including the exodus of Jews from the cities and into the suburbs. The American Jewish Yearbook observed in 1952 that there was a

–marked influx of Jewish families into the suburbs."[105] Similar to the experience of the earlier generations who had experienced pushes and pulls leading towards immigration, so too did these new domestic migrants experience push, pull and pull-back factors. Between 1945 and 1965, about a third of all American Jews left the big cities and established themselves in the suburbs, suburbanizing at a rate almost four times that of their non-Jewish neighbors."[106] *Marjorie Morningstar* demonstrates that embourgeoisement had a number of variations. The film shows that not all Jews left the cities, but rather some took part in a slightly different migration pattern, a return to the elite city center from the less prestigious ethnic neighborhood. *Goodbye, Columbus* reveals that while some families, like the Patimkins left the city for the suburbs, other families, like Neal's aunt and uncle, have remained in the urban ethnic neighborhoods.

The Jewish migrants, despite being initially slow to leave the protection of the ethnic neighborhoods, were eventually one of the biggest proponents for suburbanization. Jews suburbanized at a faster rate than other populations, –pushed" from the cities for a number of reasons. There was a shortage of housing in the cities, particularly immediately post-war. There was a rising crime rate in urban centers, which was attributed by many to the rising racial minority population in many cities. This led to a phenomenon known as –white-flight" which Jews joined despite their continued not-fully-white status. In *Goodbye Columbus*, Neil works in an urban library setting in a neighborhood that is becoming less white. The other library workers nervous comments about the presence of a young African-American boy showcase their concern about the

[105] Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, 204, 282.
[106] Ibid., 204, 282.

changing racial make-up of the neighborhood. Scenes in the film of the country club in the suburbs show an all-white social scene. For younger migrants, moving away from the ethnic neighborhoods of their parents gave them the same freedoms that the earlier generation had sought by moving across the ocean through immigration. While the distance from the cities to the suburbs was only a car-ride away, it reflected a new world in terms of lifestyle and vision. For Neil, in *Goodbye Columbus*, life in the suburbs was a world away from the urban home of his relatives. For Mr. Patimkin, his ties to the old neighborhood mirror those of the father characters in the interwar period who were still connected to the old country, though they no longer lived there.

The suburbs became the symbol of utopia for many Americans and pulled potential migrants to the Levittowns and other settlements outside of the cities. The population of Jewish suburbanites that Sociologist Herbert Gans discovered in the suburbs were young married couples, highly educated, second generation Jews of Eastern European descent who had already achieved or were likely to achieve upper-middle-class status.[107] For many, the move to the suburbs was an expression of affluence by newly middle-class Jews. There were a number of key reasons for this affluence: entering professions, higher levels of entrepreneurship on wave of postwar prosperity, benefiting from decline in occupational and social discrimination, integrating culturally both in the workplace and in the classroom and pursuing leisure-time activities similar to those of their social-class.[108] New homes were affordable for many, both due to the aforementioned new affluence and thanks to the government assistance programs offered

[107] Gans, Herbert. "The Origins of a Jewish Community in the Suburbs." *Jewish Community in America*. Marshall Sklare Ed. (New York: Behrman House, 1974), 25.
[108] Goren, ―A ‗Golden Decade' for American Jews: 1945-1955," 295.

to veterans. The GI Bill made home ownership affordable for many families. Affordable cars and new roads made commuting to cities for work possible and also allowed migrants to return to the ethnic neighborhoods to visit the older generation who remained there or for men to commute back for work.[109]

Numerous challenges presented themselves as Jews moved to the suburbs. No longer living in ethnic neighborhoods where they were the majority, Jews were dispersed in the suburbs and not fully integrated into the general non-Jewish community. This challenge led young suburbanites to found synagogues and Jewish Community Centers to provide a social setting as well as an educational and religious resource. However in *Goodbye, Columbus*, we never see the Patimkin family set-foot in an synagogue, even the wedding is in a secular social hall. However the Patimkin's social circle remained heavily Jewish reflecting the reality that "Jews moved out of heavily Jewish urban neighborhoods into… the 'gilded ghetto' of suburbia."[110] Families like the Patimkins continued to walk the fine line between their American identity and their Jewish identity.

Beyond the move to the suburbs, many Jews in America also took part in another mass migration, this one from the urban centers of the Northeast and to the Sunbelt of the south and Southern California.[111] For many, the "Golden Cities" of Miami and Los Angeles represented alternatives to suburbanization.[112] This postwar internal migration reflected the creation rather than the transformation of communities. The mobilization of

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[109] Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, 204, 283.
[110] Shapiro, *Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II,* 95.
[111] Deborah Dash Moore writes extensively about "the Sunbelt" and the "Golden Cities" of Miami and Los Angeles. See *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and LA.* (New York: Harvard UP, 1996)
[112] Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and LA.* (New York: Harvard UP, 1996) 317.

the war years pulled Jewish young men from insular ethnic urban neighborhoods and sent them to distant bases in the south and west. During the Great Depression, few had traveled and suddenly they had the opportunity to visit vastly different parts of the country on their way to war. Suddenly the entire country was opened up to Jews in a way it had not be previously. Rapid social change also made the south and west more habitable as the economy, social patterns and cultural styles changed. The younger generation's migration was also encouraged by federal postwar policies especially the GI Bill which aided those buying homes and attending college. This loosened ties with families and the older generation as friends and relatives were no longer needed to finance homes or education or to help with finding a job. ~~J~~Jewish migrants selected themselves to move into Sunbelt cities- to take advantage of the economic opportunities, to bask in the balmy weather, and to escape from the constraining intergenerational intimacies of parents and kinfolk."[113] In *Goodbye Columbus*, Neil's parents moved to the Sunbelt because of health concerns leaving their son, their family ties and their ethnic neighborhood in Newark behind.

For father characters, enabling their families to have a luxurious suburban lifestyle was a symbol of success, even as they often returned to the urban centers for work each day. For these fathers, with the domestic sphere cared for by the wife and the children enjoying the American dream, there was tremendous pressure not to let the carefully balanced deck of cards collapse. In this way, the father is the transitional figure, tied to work in the old neighborhood in order to enable his wife and children to enjoy the bounty of suburbia. In this way, he becomes the symbol of the tensions of suburbia.

[113] Moore, *To the Golden Cities,* 326.

Sons: Questioning the Choices of the Fathers or Following Father's Path

The son characters in the postwar period in the Jewish family films had undergone a transformation from the interwar period. While *The Jazz Singer* and *The Cantor"s Son* had both been radical tradition-challengers, the sons of the postwar period are much more likely to be willing to follow their father's path or nearly invisible as a character. In *Marjorie Morningstar*, which was the first contemporary film to incorporate these new archetypal characters, the son character nearly disappears, only appearing for his Bar Mitzvah. It is the suitor Noel who is rejecting his father's profession and works as a writer rather than a judge. In the later *Goodbye Columbus*, the son Ron is complacent, giving up his dream of being a counter-cultural PE teacher to join the family business with his father. In contrast, it is the potential son-in-law Neil that acts as more of a rebelling agent of change, with a non-upwardly mobile job and a lack of aspirations. But because his parents are silent and living in Arizona, we don't know how they experience his semi-rebellion. In both films the biological son is complacent or irrelevant but the suitor is rebelling, though we don't know his family's reaction. This is a large departure from the previous era but weakened by the presence of the rebelling suitor. Both films do not offer absolutes, but rather offer variations on characters, adding a realistic complexity to the family dynamics.

Another shift is with the potential son-in-law's Jewish identity. Both Noel and Neil don't seem to be committed Jews in terms of religious practice. Non-Jewishly-named yet Jewish Noel Airman seems not clearly grounded in terms of his career and in

terms of his identity – he floats around. Clearly, Wouk disapproves of Noel's separation from his Jewish identity, as he doesn't allow his character to achieve the success that he aspires to. Instead he presents Noel ridiculing the Passover seder at Marjorie's home. Roth is less ridiculing of Neil, but similar to Noel, Neil is not religiously observant. Though the skeptical Neil has had little contact with his local synagogue outside of his Bar Mitzvah, he seems more connected to his roots that the materialistic Patimkin women. Jewish identity at this time was undergoing a substantial transformation for many Jews in America at this time.

Jewish identity continued shifting in the postwar era, a time marked by a decline in anti-Semitism and significantly the inclusion of Judaism among "big three" religions in America. The 1955 book on American identity by Will Herberg's *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* promoted Jews to insider status and as a part of the triple melting pot in which Protestants, Catholics and Jews each had equally valid expressions of "the American Way of Life".[114] For those who had previously felt that Jews were "cultural interlopers, as clever guests of uncertain constancy"[115] suddenly they found themselves feeling more authentically American and more accepted by Americans. One of major historical events heralding this insider status was Bess Myerson's 1945 win as the first (and only) Jewish Miss America which stood in stark contrast to an earlier generation of Jews who often had to change their names and disguise their Judaism in order to achieve mainstream success. But in this postwar time period, where films like *Gentleman's Agreement* and

[114] Herberg, Will. *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: an essay in American Religious Sociology*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983), 84.
[115] Zipperstein, Steven J. "Commentary" and American Jewish Culture in the 1940s and 1950s." *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Winter, 1997), 19.

Crossfire condemned anti-Semitism, Jews were able to rise to new positions of leadership and power. Post-war, ―Jews refused to accept anything less than full participation on their own terms in American life".[116]

One of the big changes in the family structure in the postwar era was the shift in the relationship between sons and their mothers. In contrast to the protecting and nurturing image of the Jewish mother shown in the interwar year films, in the 1950s and 1960s, Jewish mothers became the ‗first victims' of Jewish sons who sought to free themselves from Jewishness ‗in order to possess the fruits of the mainstream.' Jewish women became the ‗lightening rod for the electricity of Jewish men's ambivalence."[117] The books and films of this time period written by Jewish sons show caricatures and disparaging stereotypes of mothers. What is significant to note is that ―the literary and dramatic representations of Jewish sons about their mothers often differed from the postwar accounts of scholars, professionals, and activists."[118] For example, Sociologists Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum write favorably about the role of the Jewish mother in the suburbs but the two books that were the basis for the films studied for this research show much more caricatured images of the Jewish mother, reflecting the perceived relationship between son and mother.

Fathers-Sons

[116] Shapiro, *Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II*, 86.
[117] Brodkin, Karen. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*. (Rutgers University Press. 2002), 161-162.
[118] Antler, Joyce. *You Never Call! You Never Write!: A History of the Jewish Mother*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 103.

While the relationship between fathers and sons was the focus on the case study films in the interwar period, in the post war period, that relation is less on a focus of the selected films. The stories don't focus on the sons. For example, in *Marjorie Morningstar* we don't really hear from Marjorie's brother after his bar mitzvah as he is off at camp and Noel is totally disconnected from his father. All we really know about Noel is that the attractive man never succeeds and can't live up to his father who is an important judge. In *Goodbye, Columbus* we never see Neil interacting with his father who has moved to Arizona, part of The Sunbelt, though there is a sense of condemnation of the choices he made in his life. The relationship between Mr. Patimkin and his son Ron is pretty flat and unemotional, though Mr. Patimkin does take Ron into the family business, a shift from the previous generation's (at least temporary) rejection of the father's occupation. Mr. Patimkin is concerned with his son's happiness, something that the fathers from the earlier era were less concerned about. However, Mr. Patimkin is so concerned about his family's happiness that he has lost his own happiness in order to create a safe and happy place for his family. The film's questions this success on the back of the suffering father. When Neil visits Mr. Patimkin at his plumbing business, Patimkin presents a side of the Generation Gap not usually acknowledged: "You kids look at us as if we were a bunch of freaks and you were something special. You know something? At your age I felt exactly the same way. Surprise you?" In this way, Neil is reminded that the previous generation underwent many of the same struggles, though this acknowledgement may have pushed Neil further from making the older generation's choices since he was so turned-off by the Patimkin lifestyle. Ultimately, as Riv-Ellen Prell argues, "Both Neil and Noel calculated love in terms of a consistent set of

dimensions- lose/win, victory/defeat, resist/seduce- because their passions were inseparable from their fates. Which American dream would they pursue- to supersede their fathers' economic successes or remain free pursue adventure and art?"[119] The films show son characters that reject and son characters that accept their father's way of life. These films present a conflicting view of which is the right choice. The viewer is left to decide: should the son sell out and become a part of the machine towards the American dream of suburbia or should he embrace art and give up a focus on material wealth? How does this impact his ability to "get the girl"? The films suggest that ultimately the father must lose in order for the son to win and yet, the sons are too blind to see this self-sacrifice.

Mothers: Self-sacrificing and Meddling

Jewish women in *Marjorie Morningstar* and *Goodbye, Columbus* became the embodiment of American Jewish life in postwar New York and the suburbs of the Northeast. They personified the success and excess in the world, which the writers linked to Jews' upward mobility, their changing relationship to work and pleasure, the suburban Jewish family and the synagogue".[120] The images of women in these films were not universally positive and reflected deep problems that the male writers had with the women in their lives. For example, a persistent feature of popular culture at the time and in both films is the emerging image of the Jewish American Princess (JAP) who is spoiled and entitled. Both Marjorie in *Marjorie Morningstar* and Brenda in *Goodbye,*

[119] Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender and the Anxiety of Assimilation*, 127.
[120] Ibd., 123.

Columbus can be considered proto-JAPs, a character trait which will be further explored in the daughter section. In the two films, we discover that a Manipulating Mother raises a Jewish Princess daughter[121] and sets her up to believe ~~t~~hat she is precious, the thing that the man has to earn and deserve."[122] The negative characteristics of the daughter are presented as the fault of the over-concerned mother. This overprotectiveness may stem from the ghetto experience of the immigrant mother who tried to protect her children from poverty and anti-Semitism. The Jewish mother's experience encapsulated the changing lifestyle of the Jewish American woman.

> ~~M~~anifest in both Marjorie Morgenstern Schwartz and her mother, Rose, the Jewish mother type had moved beyond her association with the tensions of the first state of Jewish immigrant acculturation. Now she would stand in not only for Jews' conflict over the values of materialism versus Old World piety, but for a newer version of their ambivalence about joining the American middle-class- reflected in ongoing debates about suburbanization, the conflicting demands of leisure and work, and changing child-rearing styles." [123]

The experience of ~~b~~becoming American" seems to happen on the back of mothers. This can be seen as a function of the internalization of the cult of domesticity.

And by the 1950s this self-sacrificing character trait backfired. While the mother was expected to give up her goals and desires to become a family-focused housewife and mother, then the same women were accused of being too child-focused and intrusive. This can be seen in the films, where the mother characters are criticized for being too-

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[121] Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, 205-206.
[122] Waxman, Barbara Frey, ~~J~~Jewish American Princesses, Their Mothers, and Feminist Psychology: A Rereading of Roth's "Goodbye, Columbus", *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, ser.2:7:1 (1988: Spring), 91-92.
[123] Antler, *You Never Call! You Never Write!: A History of the Jewish Mother*, 102.

child-concerned, as portrayed by their meddling into their children's lives. There was a combination of positive and negative factors affecting the role the mother took: "parental love, generosity, and affirmation mingled with criticism, resentment, and pressure to achieve in order to gratify parental pride as well as with longer maternal bonding and an overprotection that encourages childish dependency."[124] These different factors left the mother pulled in a number of directions, taking on a number of different family roles.

This paradox of the postwar mother is present in both films. For example, the mother who was raised in the midst of the Great Depression where food resources were scarce often viewed food as love and lavished her family with huge meals. In *Goodbye, Columbus* the Patimkin family is fed large meals and a whole refrigerator is filled with fresh fruit. Even when domestic help aids her role as nurturer and culinary provider, she is still the master of her domestic domain. Expected to take care of the home, the children, the synagogue, etc, the wife/mother in both *Goodbye, Columbus* and *Marjorie Morningstar* is not shown having any personal interests. In an emerging caricature of the Jewish mother in *Marjorie Morningstar*, Noel Airman speaks out against these women. "Oh God, Marjorie! The dullness of the mothers! Smug self-righteousness mixed with climbing eagerness, and a district attorney's inquisitive suspicion." In this outburst, Airman devalues the role of the mother and yet speaks of her importance in the life of the family.

The time the Jewish mother spends on screen in both films is filled with doting over her children or meddling in their lives, but not in any other area of self-interest.

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[124] Waxman, "Jewish American Princesses, Their Mothers, and Feminist Psychology: A Rereading of Roth's _Goodbye, Columbus,'" 92.

However this selfless character trait backfires as the wife/mother is often viewed negatively as someone who is too involved, too powerful, too child-focused and too busy spending the money husband makes. The mother is seen as a social climber, often using her children to help her climb the social ladder. She is not presented as having many redeemable traits and her husband often must rein her back in, lest she meddle too much in the life of her children. It is her role in the family that leads each of the other family members to take on their character roles. The impact of the Jewish mother on the family is profound, yet she is often the source of ridicule by her family. While twenty years earlier Jewish mothers were idealized due to their strength and dedication to their family, by the postwar era this turned in misogynistic images of smothering and emasculating mothers.[125] We see this in the negative portrayal of Mrs. Patimkin and Mrs. Morgenstern and in Brenda and Marjorie's subtle concern about becoming their mothers. The daughters in the films have become the opposite of their mothers.

Daughters: Materialistic Princesses

In these two films we see three daughter characters that each embody some of the stereotypes of Jewish daughters of the time period. In the postwar era, as previously noted, there was a huge growth of the Jewish American Princess stereotype. Many scholars have written on this topic. Whether she is enhancing her wardrobe, ensnaring a spouse, decorating her home, planning a bar mitzvah, or ascending the ladder of a corporate law firm, she is identifiable by her daunting self-confidence- even hubris- her

[125] Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*, 161.

glamorous appearance, her drive to win, and the arrogant conviction of the perfectionist that nothing but the best will do, both in her own performance and in what is due to her. The Jewish American Princess glitters when she walks."[126] The development of the JAP character marks a stark contrast with previous images and societal expectations of daughters in Jewish tradition. The interwar period films did not showcase daughters. Historically, girls were raised to be drudges, trained to manage the work of the household and keep the laws of *kashruth*, and their status as property was reflected in the dowry by which they enticed prospective husbands.[127] How did the change from the dutiful daughter to the demanding daughter take place? It took a generation of adored, hardworking firstborn American sons to acquire the middle-class upwardly mobile status necessary to elevate the Jewish daughter to this new American aristocracy of achievement, taste, intelligence and conspicuous consumption."[128] It could be argued that the concept of the Jewish American Princess came into existence when Jewish expectation first met the American Dream."[129] The combined factors affecting the Jewish family in America in the postwar era led to the development of the JAP characteristics and the JAP stereotype.

Our three JAP daughter characters are Marjorie in *Marjorie Morningstar* and Brenda and Julie in *Goodbye, Columbus.* Marjorie is the daughter of Eastern European

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[126] Waxman, "Jewish American Princesses, Their Mothers, and Feminist Psychology: A Rereading of Roth's 'Goodbye, Columbus,'" 90.
[127] Tonner, Leslie. *Nothing But the Best: The Luck of the Jewish Princess*. (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1975), 17
[128] Sequoia, Anna. *The Official J.A.P. Handbook*. (New York: NAL 1982), 8 in Waxman, "Jewish American Princesses, Their Mothers, and Feminist Psychology: A Rereading of Roth's 'Goodbye, Columbus,'" 90-91.
[129] Tonner, Leslie. *Nothing But the Best: The Luck of the Jewish Princess*, 19.

immigrants who move from the Bronx to Central Park West in Manhattan, in part to help Marjorie find a better potential mate. She is the first Morgenstern to go to college and aspires to move beyond the bourgeois trappings of her upwardly mobile Jewish family. Because Marjorie is the first JAP image, she is more of a neutral figure. In contrast, Brenda Patimkin, is demonized as the ~~–ur~~-JAP, a Jewish-American Princess, the archetype for Jewish Bitch Goddesses to follow."[130] Each of the portraits of a JAP in these films shows the shifting role of Jewish American Princesses in film. There isn't just one image of the JAP. Brenda's younger sister Julie could be read as a JAP in training, expecting to always get her way and beginning to fight with her mother much in the way that Brenda does. While Marjorie is the cautious but kind Nice Jewish Girl, a bit of a prude but ultimately with good values, Brenda is unashamedly sexually active, at least until her parents find out, is a princess who sweats while competitively playing tennis and is manipulative in her relationships. While Marjorie functions like a perfect film character, Brenda is more real; having sex because she enjoys it, sweating while playing a sport she enjoys (and likes winning) and controlling her family members and romantic interests. While the JAP was a persistent feature of popular culture, it is significant to note that in both *Marjorie Morningstar* and *Goodbye, Columbus*: the women are the focus of the texts but the novels are really about the relationship between Jewish men of different generations with the women- daughters of fathers and wives-to-be are conduits through which the males transacted their intergenerational relationship.

[130] Pinsker 266

In the films, women can be seen as prizes from older generation to younger generation.[131] This makes the father character important in these movies.

By the postwar era, many Jewish American families had attained enough financial stability to allow for the emergence of a leisure culture. While Jewish women often tended to continue their focus on the domestic domain and the Jewish philanthropic domain, Jewish men increasingly became interested in secular leisure activities, particularly as societal boundaries dissolved. This dichotomy is less present in these films, though we do see Mrs. Patimkin concerned with philanthropy and her domestic duties of overseeing the hired help. Through this emerging leisure culture Jewish families had the opportunity to socialize with other Jews, even as they moved from their ethnic neighborhoods to the suburbs and Sunbelt. Two key summer locations symbolize this leisure culture, the summer camp and the summer colony. Additionally recreational sports also came to symbolize an embrace of mainstream American leisure culture at this time. Leisure culture allowed Jewish families to feel more authentically American, even as much of their leisure time was still spent primarily among Jews.

In *Marjorie Morningstar*, the independence-minded Marjorie gets a summer job at a girls‘ sleep away camp. At Camp Tamarack we see young girls who are campers who can be seen as Jewish to viewers, even though no Jewish content at camp is presented, similar to their families‘ socializing where they are surrounded by other Jews but not embarking on specifically Jewish activities. Jewish families embraced the camping movement for their children, believing that it helped create independence and

[131] Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender and the Anxiety of Assimilation*, 125.

develop leadership skills. While the first known Jewish camp was founded by the Jewish Working Girls' Vacation Society in 1893, the first generation of Jewish educational camps emerged in the 1920s and 1930s. While many camps struggled for staff during World War II, these camps saw a huge resurgence postwar, when Jewish educational camps entered a second generation.[132] Camping played a historically significant role in the lives of many Jewish families living in America at this time as part of the growing interest in leisure culture.

Another area of leisure culture that Jewish families in the postwar era supported was the resorts of the Catskill Mountains in Upstate New York. For many Jewish families the Catskills, an entertainment and lodging area, were near enough to the greater New York City area, particularly as families began to own personal cars, but far enough away to offer a safe and fun escape from the stresses of life at home. In *Marjorie Morningstar*, with the help of Noel Airman, the charming summer theater director, Marjorie joins the staff at the resort. The resort, South Wind, is coded as a Jewish resort based on the characters presented, the situations that emerge and even the working-class Jews who were on staff. Wouk sets his love story in the summer colony where hundreds of other couples met in the postwar era. Jews ~~c~~reated in the Catskills a cultural location that symbolized their transformation into Americans."[133] For many people, the Catskills were a place where ~~J~~ewish could became Americanized while preserving their

[132] Sarna, Jonathan D. "The Crucial Decade in Jewish Camping." *A Place of Our Own: The Rise of Reform Jewish Camping (Judaic Studies Series)*. (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama, 2006), 29.
[133] Brown, Phil, ed. *In the Catskills: A Century of Jewish Experience in „The Mountains."* (New York : Columbia University Press 2002), 13.

Jewishness."[134] For the American-born children, "the Old Country" wasn't Eastern Europe or the Lower East Side, but rather the resorts of the Catskills.

For the Patimkin family living in the suburbs, the embrace of leisure culture included playing a variety of sports. They are members of a club which includes a swimming pool, have a basketball hoop near their house and their daughter Brenda plays tennis. Son Ron was a big athlete in college and remembers that time by listening the record "Goodbye, Columbus" about the big Ohio State football game. Ron as a jock is sort of the non-Jewish stereotype but leads to the question for the parents: how far assimilated can a family become before they lose their identity? For the Patimkin family, leisure culture may bring them close to losing elements of the Jewish identity, while their lifecycle rituals, like Ron and Harriet's wedding, may bring them closer to their ethnic identity.

For daughters like Brenda and Marjorie, leisure culture allowed them to access the American dream and reflected their family's new affluence. Their relationships with their mothers reflected the complexity of their families and their struggles with the Jewish family in America becoming American.

Mothers-daughters:

The relationship between mothers-daughters is a big issue in both films. In *Marjorie Morningstar* we see three main family characters, Rose Morgenstern, the mother, Marjorie Morgenstern, the daughter and Arnold Morgenstern, the father. The

[134] Brown, *In the Catskills: A Century of Jewish Experience in „The Mountains."* 12.

film viewer is presented with an image of the pragmatic contemporary mother.[135] The cautious but kind Nice Jewish Girl, Marjorie, is trying to break free of her meddling mother (similar to earlier films in which sons take a job and leave the family) and therefore Marjorie goes to Camp Tamarack to get away. However it is while she is away, outside of the watchful eye of her mother that she meets her romantic interest who will forever impact her life.

In *Goodbye, Columbus* there are three women in the Patimkin family: the mother (Mrs. Patimkin), the elder daughter (Brenda) and younger daughter (Julie). The women are constantly presented as at war with each other and the JAP image as spoiled and controlling is present in each female family member. Julie is bratty and allowed to get whatever she wants. Mrs. Patimkin is, similar to Rose Morgenstern, a meddling mother, going so far as to go through her daughter‘s drawers when she isn‘t home. While Mrs. Patimkin acts like she had the best interest of her daughter in mind when she tries to suggest who she dates or questions Neil‘s family background, ultimately it comes across as malicious and negative to the film viewers.

The complex relationship between mothers and daughters in the two films mirror the challenges of becoming Jewish American families in the postwar era. While in the previous generation fathers and sons were in conflict over different values and views of assimilation, in this generation it was the mothers and daughters who experienced conflict. And yet, in both films we see that the mother continues to play a significant role in their daughters‘ life. While the daughter struggles with her mother, she still wants her acceptance and love.

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[135] Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema*, 205.

Spouses: Pulled in Different Directions

In the films of the post-war period, there is a stark divide between the spheres of influence and focus of the spouses. The husband is focused on the financial sphere, producing income and providing for this family. The wife is solely in the domestic sphere, caring for her children and her home. Even when financial success allow for domestic workers, the wife is still the queen of her castle.

In the films *Goodbye, Columbus* and *Marjorie Morningstar* the husbands are often presented as business-focused and absent but well-intentioned. They are trying to pay for the suburban lifestyle for their wife and kids by working all the time back in the cities. Their absence leaves a void for the wife to fill. The powerful, meddling, domineering, emasculating, and child-focused wife fills the void left by her absent husband. Because the time period is viewed as being very child-focused, the relationship between husband and wife is less significant in the films, though the budding relationships between the young lovers in the films also speak volumes about the expectations between husbands and wives in the time period.

The marriages and relationships between courting couples in *Goodbye, Columbus* reflect the worst of the nature of people and their relationships. The couples fight, both the married couples such as Neil‘s aunt and uncle and Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin, as well as the young lovers Brenda and Neil. The newly-weds Harriet and Ron are more amenable but also flat characters with Harriet represented as a prude. Neil‘s absent parents only seem to have in common the mutual health ill of asthma. The relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin is not one of love or devotion, but rather constant bickering. Children

act as a source of tension for Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin, as Mrs. Patimkin claims that Mr. Patimkin always sides with his daughter, rather than with her. In this way Roth is critiquing the bourgeois family, wealthier than ever but falling apart at the seams. Even tangential characters speak against the institution of marriage. A man at the wedding explains that he was married at 35 and he doesn't know what kind of hurry he was in, implying that marriage isn't all that it claims to be. There are tensions in the film between romantic love and the relationship between married people. Neil is infatuated with Brenda and yet is so worried about being stuck with Brenda due to an unplanned pregnancy, that he pushes her to acquire a diaphragm. There is a sense that while some relationships might have once been loving, marriage erodes that relationship, leaving people, especially men, shadows of themselves. With relationships like these between spouses, the image of marriage in *Goodbye, Columbus* is universally negative. While statistics of the period show most adults of marriageable age as married, it is unclear how happy these marriages were. The discontent of married people began to be a more recognized phenomenon through the publication of books such as The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan. Though the public image of marriage during the postwar period was largely positive, changes in marriage patterns would forever change the image of the Jewish family in upcoming decades.

Our introduction to a married couple in *Marjorie Morningstar* is through hearing the couple arguing. It is our first introduction to the family unit. We hear the voice of the wife worried about being late to temple as she nags about spending money. While the film does present the couple as primarily content, there is an element of dissatisfaction which trickles down to their child. When in the film Marjorie is delaying marriage, to

could be thought that she is also delaying giving up her own hopes and desires in order to devote herself to her family, a role she saw her mother take. It is clear to her that she cannot be an actress and be a committed wife. Marjorie is faced with the dilemma of whether or not to sleep with a man she loves but who refused to be tied up in the bonds of matrimony. Marjorie knows that her relationship with Noel is only temporary and will not result in fulfillment of her idealized social role of wife and mother. This leads Marjorie to doubt her relationship. Still, the pull of romantic love leaves her devoted to Noel, even to the point of chasing him around Europe. But whereas Roth would later fully critique marriage, Wouk is more supportive of the institution of marriage, ending his book with Marjorie happily married in the suburbs. In an interesting departure from the novel, the film ends significantly earlier, with Marjorie single and without Noel. The film doesn't allow Marjorie to become the dull "Shirley" that Noel prophesizes she will become. It allows the audience to imagine the future they want for her. In this way, Wouk is more conservative than Roth; Wouk's characters are taken to less of an extreme than Roth's Brenda, Julie and Mrs. Patimkin.

Both films focus on passionate love affairs between young lovers, but only present spouse relationships that are fraught with conflict. This deep divide between the non-committed young relationships and the committed loveless or less loving marriages suggests that the authors each had their own social commentaries on marriage. Roth is more extreme than Wouk in questioning the institution of marriage as well as the roles within it. He is also more critical of women through his writing of his complex and difficult female characters. Wouk's Marjorie is more loveable and relatable, even as she is complex. For both authors who wrote books that were made into films, the

relationship between spouses was complex in the 1950's and 1960's, complicated by a number of historical phenomena that were affecting the family.

The postwar era was also marked by a number of major demographic changes for the Jewish population in America. Beyond the geographic changes noted elsewhere, the Baby Boom rapidly expanded families and increased family-size which had contracted during the lean years of the Depression and the war. The result was a Jewish community that was very child-focused. Often synagogues and JCCs were founded in order to provide Jewish education to the children rather than for the spiritual or religious needs of their parents. The postwar films begin to reflect this growing family size as the Patimkin family in *Goodbye Columbus* has three children, in contrast to the earlier generations' one child like in *The Cantor"s Son*and *The Jazz Singer*.

Another significant shift in the demographics of the US Jewish population was that by the 1950s most Jews in America were native-born and part of the so-called Second Generation (even if technically many were the third generation of their family to live in America) and viewed America as _home'.[136] While in the films of the interwar years the characters were from the –Old Country," in the postwar period, even the characters representing tradition, such as Uncle Samson in *Marjorie Morningstar*, were thoroughly American, speaking English without an accent and wearing American clothes. In *Goodbye Columbus* there are similarly no major ethnic characters in the immediate family, though the final wedding scene showcases some more ethnic characters as caricatures.

[136] Heilman, Samuel C. *Portrait of American Jews : The Last Half of the Twentieth Century*. (New York: University of Washington Press, 1995), 18, 20.

A final demographic shift in the Jewish population in America was class-based. Most Jewish immigrants to the US during the Era of Immigration had been working-class. However, postwar, ~~J~~Jews moved en masse into the middle-class, and the Jewish working class virtually disappeared. Second and third generations were not attracted to the small businesses established by the immigrant generation and instead sought employment in government, the professions, academia, and big business."[137] These changes in the make-up of the American Jewish community are reflected in the films of the period, which focus on American-born families which are child-centered and upwardly-mobile. The Morgenstern family moves to Central Park West, a prestigious address in New York City in *Marjorie Morningstar*, in order to socialize with a more desirable group of people. Their family is able to afford college for their daughter, which had been unaffordable for the parents. Clearly not every family or every family member was experiencing the same upward mobility, in the Morgenstern family, Uncle Samson needs to wear donated suits and eat the handouts provided by his more wealthy relatives and works a manual labor job at the Catskills resort that other Jewish families frequent for leisure culture. Similarly in *Goodbye Columbus*, the Patimkin family has achieved fantastic wealth, as reflected in their large and fancy house, their ability to pay for college for two children and their lavish lifestyle including gifts and the gluttonous consumption of food. In contrast Neil remains working class or blue collar which some people he encounters frown on. The class-divide between Brenda and Neil is a point of conflict between Brenda's family and Neil, as one family has experienced upward mobility while

[137] Shapiro, *Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II*, 98.

the other family hasn't. These demographic changes were transforming the Jewish family in America in the postwar period, but not without growing-pains along the way.

Conclusion:

Films of the postwar period provide contemporary viewers with insights into the historical phenomena affecting Jewish families in America in the 1950s and early 1960s. In the postwar period there was a significant geographical shift in US Jewish population characterized by dispersal, privatization, individual choice and growing diversification. Several major phenomena including suburbanization, Jewish demographic changes and questions of Jewish identity inform our understanding of the cultural milieu which the Jewish family films are situated. Even though this generation of authors wrote reflecting similar concerns to the previous generation, such as the struggle to integrate into the American mainstream, they also expressed a new dissatisfaction with the life of the Jewish American family. They questioned what had happened to the Jewish family in America with new affluence and the new reality of life outside the ethnic ghetto. An important feature that connects these films to the interwar ones is the focus on Americanization, assimilation, success.

The films focus on the triptych of Jewish life at the time: hard work, personified by the father-producer; the creation of family, personified by the beautiful, sexual daughter; and the maintenance of Judaism, personified by the mother.[138] The son characters are significantly less significant, but some still rebel, this time against the

[138] Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender and the Anxiety of Assimilation*, 127.

mother, while others –sell out" with the father. The generational conflict between parents and children present in the earlier era continues to manifest itself but in a more nuanced way, as new material wealth acts as a wedge between the hardworking parents and the entitled children. Spouses, separated by work/home divide, struggled to maintain the passion they had as young lovers. The reality of life for the Jewish family in America had shifted from the immigration experience. Jewish families in the postwar era overcame obstacles in order to thrive. As the postwar generation experienced financial success and life in suburbia, new challenges would emerge for the next generation. In the coming chapter, in the modern period, many of the issues and struggles present in the postwar period evolved to create new challenges for the modern generation. Films such as *Keeping Up With the Steins* and *Kissing Jessica Stein* showcase these new obstacles.

Chapter 4: The Shifting Image of the Contemporary Jewish Family in America (Late 1990's-2010)

Introduction:

By the beginning of the 21st century, Jews in America had reached the highest levels of government, business and entertainment as exemplified by the nomination of the first Jewish Vice-presidential nominee, Joseph Lieberman in 2004. For many, it seemed that the barriers limiting the previous generations had disappeared. And at the same time, new challenges and realities had emerged. Many of these issues play out on the family, shifting what the family itself looks like for the Jewish community in America. In light of the changing family make-up, the socio-cultural phenomena affecting the family will be explored by expanding the definition of family, acknowledging the presence of same-sex partners and the role of friends as "like family." The changing American Jewish family is particularly powerful when viewed through the case study film texts which offer new understandings of "Jewish family," while offering a subtle message about the ideal Jewish family in the contemporary period.

Family Relationships in Film: Jewish Family in America: Shifting, Changing, Unfolding:

For Jewish families living in America at the beginning of the 21st century, the new era reflected the unique historical and social position of Jews. As the Jewish community found itself more included in and accepted by American society, their family patterns began to more mirror that of gentile American society. Mainstream American society continued to experience shifts in the make-up of a family such as divorce, parenthood

outside of wedlock, the increased visibility of LGBTQ people and the significant presence of empty-nesters. For Jewish families, the basic assumed structures of family presented in the idyllic Talmudic text, a born-Jewish husband married to his born-Jewish wife[139] with at least 2 biologically born-Jewish children, a son and a daughter, has continued to evolve and change. Around them, within secular society, the definition of family was changing, and Jewish families in the 21st century reflected those shifting societal norms. The shifting face of the Jewish family in America is mirrored in the films of the time period. The picture of –Jewish family" expanded to include families with three generations living in a house, a group of unmarried adult friends including two non-Jews, and a Jewish woman dating a non-Jewish woman. The films upon which this research focuses demonstrate both the continued importance of family for 21st century Jewish families in America and the ways in the family has continued to shift and change. Family remains an important and stabilizing force for Jews, even as the make-up of the family has shifted. Jewish families in the films of the contemporary period reflect the increased family diversity in the larger Jewish world, while still offering subtle messages about normative family verses alternative or alternate family.

The major phenomena affecting the family get to the core of the relationships between family members and to the position of Jews in America. For example, what does it mean to be spouses with someone who is of the same sex as you? What does it mean to parent a child who is choosing a romantic relationship with someone who is not Jewish? Though its make-up has changed, in part because of widespread

[139] Heterosexuality, a term unknown to the rabbis, is implied based on the structure of heterosexual marriage that the rabbis create.

Americanization, the Jewish family is still distinctive. By the late 20th century, American identity is taken for granted by many Jews. The issue of Jewish distinctiveness comes across in the films, where the shifts surrounding Americanization are more pronounced. The three films selected to reflect this time period, *Keeping the Faith, Keeping Up with the Steins* and *Kissing Jessica Stein*, offer insight into the power of socio-cultural phenomena on the Jewish family. These films are the result, in many ways, of the evolution of the Jewish family in America. The Jewish family at this time is welcomed into the very fabric of mainstream society, it mirrors other American families, yet is often still deeply Jewish. Perhaps significantly more so than in the previous time periods, these films offer the unapologetic message: you can be Jewish AND American.

Film Overview:

Jewish families play prominently in many films of the 1990‘s and early 2000‘s, both in contemporary films depicting the current reality and nostalgia films, reflecting an idealized understanding of historical periods. The three Jewish family films explored in this chapter each focus on emerging historical phenomena of the contemporary period, set as contemporary films, and each offers a unique twist on several key overlapping themes and topics.

Keeping Up with the Steins, made in 2003, tells the story of an affluent Los Angeles Jewish family, the Fiedlers, and the Bar Mitzvah of their sole son. The film explores the relationship between three generations, the estranged hippie grandfather, Irwin, the money and power-focused movie agent father, Adam, and the awkward, struggling prepubescent son, Benjamin. The film‘s climax is the Bar Mitzvah day itself

and the focus of the film as a whole is on the tensions within this distinctly Jewish family going through a uniquely Jewish life cycle event.

The romantic comedy *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001) offers a contemporary portrayal of Jews in America, but offers a twist on the classic single girl in the city looking for a mate story; the film's female main character dates a non-Jewish woman. The film is set in a very culturally Jewish New York City and features characters that are obviously Jewish; they have Jewish last names such as Stein and Meyers, take part in Jewish activities like attending Yom Kippur services, a Jewish wedding and a Shabbat dinner and even have stereotypical Jewish neuroses like being sexually frigid. But these Jewish characters are also taking part in and totally accepted by secular society. For the characters, there doesn't seem to be a question of dueling religious/cultural identities.

The third film, the 2000 movie *Keeping the Faith*, also takes place in New York City. This romantic comedy tells the story of a single young rabbi who is looking for a mate and falls in love with his non-Jewish childhood friend, who is also being pursued by their mutual childhood friend, a Catholic Priest. The dating and mating patterns of young people and intermarriage are important themes in this movie.

Each film offers the viewer a message about the new realities of life for Jewish families in America in the early 2000s. The films both reflect the film maker's agenda and reflect the realities of life at the time. By acting as a microscope on current realities, these films are able to reflect the changing face of the Jewish family in America.

Key Phenomena Affecting the Family in the 21st century:

The films from this time period serve as case studies for viewers to understand the socio-cultural phenomena affecting the family. The first area of focus, exploring the impact of affluence on the Jewish family, reflects the opportunities that America has afforded many Jewish families. This plays-out in the relationship between parents and children. The second area of focus, exploring Family-Model Diversity, looks at how phenomena such as intermarriage, late marriage, and the increased visibility of LGBT people are changing what the family itself looks like. These issues especially affect the relationship between spouses, though they also have an impact on relationships between parents and children. The final area of study, a brief look at Jewish identity in the 21st century, highlights how the family itself has changed and how the individuals within the family have evolved. These transformations within the family are both the result of the impact of the previous eras' phenomena and the collective experience of the Jewish family in America over the course of 350 years. Within each of these categories, the films offer subtle messages both supporting Jewish distinctiveness and celebrating the opportunities that America has afforded Jewish families.

Affluence and Inclusion in American society:

At the beginning of the 21st century, many Jews living in the United States had achieved tremendous financial successes. Many family narratives include a rags-to-riches story in which the immigrant generation's hard work and frugalness had led to a native-born son's educational opportunities and success in business. In contrast to the interwar period in which many families struggled with poverty, or the postwar period,

when many Jews moved into the middle-class but lived socially marginalized lives, for Jewish families in the contemporary period, the combined impact of wealth and opportunities mark a significant change. Postwar films critiqued the class shift that occurred as many Jewish families moved to the suburbs. In contrast, these three contemporary films are unapologetic when discussing the new affluence and societal inclusion of Jews and Jewish families. What makes the contemporary period unique, in terms of wealth, is that younger Jews are the inheritors of their parents' financial success and that some Jews are experiencing extreme wealth.

The location of the films is telling about the state of the Jewish family in America at the turn of the 21st century. The setting of both *Kissing Jessica Stein* and *Keeping the Faith* is New York City. It is significant to note that nearly every film in this research focused on Jewish families living in or near New York City, despite the reality of the geographic mobility of Jews in America, particularly in the 21st century. These films were selected in order to showcase the prevalent image of the "New York Jew" in film, even as the Jewish community of New York City experiences its own demographic shifts. A 2003 New York Times article highlighted the falling Jewish population in New York City, which had reached below one million people for the first time in a century, reflecting both Jewish migration out of the city and falling birthrates.[140] While in 1957, one in four New Yorkers was Jewish, in the early 21st century, the number is closer to one in eight. Still, the greater New York City-area has a significant Jewish population,

[140] Berger, Joseph. "City Milestone: Number of Jews Is Below Million." *New York Times* 16 June 2003, New York ed., sec. B: 1. *New York Times*. Web. 7 Jan. 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/16/nyregion/city-milestone-number-of-jews-is-below-million.html?pagewanted=1>.

with 1.4 million Jews. Perhaps, in terms of setting these films reflect the imagined Jewish experience, rather than the reality of the American experience, in which many Jews live outside of the urban centers of the East and West Coasts. At the same time, the films reflect the unique integration the contemporary Jews have within the fabric of life in New York City. Films set in New York City often convey a deep love for the setting through the constant images of the city. Both films include scenes of classic New York locations such as Central Park, Zabars and the Cloisters. In this way, even the non-Jewish settings become Jewish settings through association with Jewish characters. The harmonious coexistence between Jews and non-Jews in *Keeping the Faith* comes across both in the way they build the Senior Center together and the potential for creation of interfaith families. In New York City, it has been said, even the non-Jews are Jewish.[141]

In contrast, *Keeping Up with the Steins* focuses on Jewish life in Los Angeles, another significant site of Jewish life in America. This reflects both the historical reality of the post-war move west but also the success that these West Coast Jewish families have attained. The Jews of L.A. have built their palaces, both their homes and their synagogues. These displays of opulence reflect the monetary success of many of the Jews of this community. While the LA Jewish community is quite multi-ethnic, with a large Persian-Jewish community as well as a significant Israeli population, the film focuses on a family of Ashkenazi ancestry.

The financial success of many Jewish families in America is showcased in these films, each in a slightly different way. The affluence of the adult children is shown in relation to their wealthy parents, with the exception of the grandfather in *Keeping Up*

[141] This is a phrase the author had heard many times in conversation.

with the Steins who has renounced wealth in order to follow his heart. And yet, *Keeping Up with the Steins* is the most money-focused film of the three, showcasing how the affluent father tries to care for his son by planning an over-the-top Bar Mitzvah for him. Meanwhile, the relative wealth of Jessica Stein in *Kissing Jessica Stein* and Rabbi Jake in *Keeping the Faith* is subtle. Jessica lives in a fabulous duplex apartment in Manhattan, travels by taxi cab rather than subway and is able to quit her job in order to paint without much concern about finances. Her parents live in the affluent New York suburb of Westchester County. They were able to send her and her brother to an excellent and expensive college, Brown University. While Jessica‘s parents may be more financial well-off than she is, she is nevertheless displaying signs of her own financial stability. In *Keeping the Faith*, Rabbi Jake is the Assistant Rabbi at a large urban synagogue. He may not be as wealthy as his congregants, such as the women he dates, he is able to go out to fancy restaurants and wear nice clothes. He is presented as a good fundraiser and has convinced his board to fund an interfaith Senior Center. In contrast, his Irish Catholic Priest friend has taken a vow of poverty and lives in the rectory at the church. Jake‘s family owns their own business and his mother lives in a spacious Manhattan apartment even after her husband has passed away. For both Jake and Jessica‘s families, the wealth of the parents has allowed the children to follow their dreams and to continue to pursue what they enjoy. Both the parents and adult children have access to money and what money will allow them to acquire such as an education. What is unique here is that there is no sense of struggle, unlike previous eras where the parents struggled to provide for their kids or were still struggling to meet their children‘s needs.

While *Kissing* and *Faith* show generally well-off young Jews, it is the film *Keeping Up with the Stein* that really focuses on the impact of fantastic wealth on the Jewish family. In *Keeping Up With the Steins*, father character Adam Fiedler, is a competitive talent agent who is very concerned with creating an over-the-top Bar Mitzvah to top that of his business rival's son. In the opening Bar Mitzvah sequence of Zachary Stein's half-million-dollar "Titanic"-themed bash given by Adam's former business partner and archrival, Arnie Stein, and his new wife, the non-Jewish or convert Raylene, viewers see conspicuous consumption. The initial Bar Mitzvah scenes serves as a social commentary, much like the wedding scene in *Goodbye, Columbus*. The Steins are trying too hard, perhaps because of Raylene's dubious position in the Jewish community, or perhaps they are using this lifecycle ritual to assert their arrival into the Upper Class. The Bar Mitzvah party, honoring the passage into manhood of 13-year-old Zachary, involves a miniature Titanic plastered with a sign stating "Mazel Tov, Zachary!" which carries the young boy making a grand entrance. In a play on the movie line "I'm the King of the world" from the film *Titanic*, Zachary proclaims, "I'm King of the Torah" and kisses the hired Kate Winset look-alike. In another ironic twist, the African-American DJ and MC breaks into a thumping rap version of the celebratory song "Hava Nagila," changing the lyrics to "Hava nagila, beer and tequila." Later, in a scene similar to the gorging wedding scene in *Goodbye Columbus*, the camera lingers on the tables of piggy children stuffing ice cream into their mouths from a giant ice cream-filled boat. This comparison could be seen as a continuation of the critique of consumption presented in *Goodbye Columbus*. It also could be setting up the Fiedler family to have their later revelation that the Bar Mitzvah is not about showcasing wealth, but really about family. However, initially this Bar

Mitzvah experience leads the Fiedlers to decide to hold their own over-the-top party for son Benjamin, using his coming of age to showcase their wealth and how they have arrived in society. The appearance of long-absent hippy grandfather in his beat-up RV which is parked in front of the younger Fiedler‘s McMansion offers conflicting images of financial success. Grandfather Irwin abandoned the pursuit of wealth to follow his heart, but also abandoned his family. While in the interwar period films sons left their families in order pursue wealth, viewers are left to interpret the retelling of Irwin‘s abandonment of his family. Irwin‘s absence has led his son Adam to become a money-focused person. Adam has focused all of his energy and effort on achieving wealth to care for his family, including his mother who lives with them. But it is ultimately his son Benjamin who reveals the true meaning of the Bar Mitzvah, not to use their wealth to top what another family has done, but to focus on family and tradition. In what could be seen as an anti-assimilation, pro-identity message, this family learns that while wealth is important, nothing is more important than family. This film message is similar to the true meaning of Christmas films, in which someone with the wrong priorities learns the truth of the holiday, but with a Jewish twist. In this case, in contrast to earlier Jewish films in which the universal is stressed, in this film, the particular of the Jewish experience is elevated.

Through film, viewers learn that many Jewish families still live in the Jewish centers of New York City and Los Angeles and have achieved financial success. While not reflective of every Jewish family, and perhaps a bit reliant on prominent Jewish stereotypes, of wealthy New York Jews, these film images do reflect a dominant Jewish experience. Through the hard work of previous generations, including those portrayed in the earlier film periods, many Jewish families have achieved their own version of the

American dream. The films simultaneously celebrate this wealth and offer subtle criticism. The portrayal of money-focused women who date Jake in *Keeping the Faith* and the opulence of the Bar Mitzvah culture in *Keeping Up with the Steins* reveal a layer of disapproval on the part of the film makers. And yet, the films also celebrate how far American Jews have come, that they can afford to chose a low-key at home Bar Mitzvah rather than being forced into that situation by a lack of options. The ability to choose is a sign of that success.

Family-Model Diversity in the 21st Century:

In the 21st century, the Jewish family itself is being transformed. Through several key phenomena, the make-up of the Jewish family is being shifted. While influenced by the burden of history, including Talmudic texts, these families are finding their place within the Jewish community. This shift is significantly felt between spouses as the very assumptions that had been made in previous periods were questioned. No longer could the Jewish identity or the gender of a spouse be assumed. And at the same time these shifts affect relationships between parents and children as parents struggle with the choices their children make in terms of romantic partners and children resist their parents‘ expectations and work to find a balance with their own desires. These films in this period reflect how the Jewish family is itself changing, but still remaining both Jewish and a family.

Late Marriage, Singles and Dating/Mating:

With the Jewish population declining, dating and mating became significant issues for many 21st century Jews in America. Like other Americans with similar socio-economic profiles, many members of the Jewish community began marrying later, leaving them with a greater number of years between ending childhood and potentially marrying and having children. As a result of demographic concerns, many younger Jews feel a sense of pressure from members of the older generation to find a life-mate and to reproduce.

Reflecting these social trends, intimate relationships are an important focus of each film. Both *Kissing Jessica Stein* and *Keeping the Faith* each include montages of terrible first dates. For Jessica, the terrible dates include a man who mispronounces words and calls himself a ―self-defecating guy," a man who responds to Jessica's lateness with a sexually suggestive ―you're right on time," an accountant who is such a cheap date that he divides the bill based on how much each ate of a shared dish, and a flamboyant man whose heterosexuality is doubtable. For Jake, the terrible dates include a woman who could be considered to fit the ―JAP" stereotype; she sees exercise as a religion, has a great apartment ―thanks [to] daddy," and lacks empathy as she beats a panhandling homeless man. Even his date with the beautiful, smart and well-spoken news reporter Rachel goes nowhere because the two lack chemistry. Though these women are deemed socially acceptable by the members of his congregation, it is the non-Jewish Anna who attracts Jake's attention. She is beautiful, independent, business-minded, appropriately sexy, and she isn't pressuring regarding marriage. While a congregation is not pressuring Jessica regarding her relationship partner, she does have the pressure from her family and friends, especially from her mother, to find a nice Jewish man. The woman she ends up

with, the gentile Helen is a sexually adventurous woman who after engaging three men in sexual relationships at the same time decides to date women because it ―is the one thing I haven‘t experienced.” Later in the film, when family members meet Helen, they acknowledge their support for the couple based on the assumption that they would have children, thereby continuing the Jewish people.

Even barely 13-year-old Benjamin in *Keeping Up with the Steins*, called Benji by his mom, doesn‘t escape pressure to couple. Benji is very interested in a young woman, Ashley, from Hebrew school who sings her Haftarah portion with a beautiful and alluring voice. Benji lusts after Ashley throughout the film, though ultimately Ashley is revealed to be vapid and not worth adolescent Benji‘s time. But Benji also attracts the attention of another student in his class, a self-professed ―late bloomer.” These semi-romances of the early-adolescent Benji reflects the larger pressure within the Jewish community to couple, even if this subplot is not the main focus of the film. Given the pressure to couple reflected in these films, some might see that interfaith marriage as a possible outgrowth.

Interfaith Marriage

Scholar Sylvia Barack Fishman asserts that other than intermarriage, ―no social phenomenon expresses the extraordinary new status of American Jews more than their attractiveness as romantic and marital partners for mainstream Christian Americans. The permeable boundaries that allow Americans to enjoy manifestations of each other‘s

ethnic heritage have increased rates of marriage across ethnic and religious lines."[142] While in the decades immediately following World War II most American Jews did not see intermarriage as an acceptable option, by the 1970s and 1980s increasing numbers of young Jews intermarried, regardless of the opinion of their parents or the larger Jewish community. While intermarriage had always existed in the American Jewish community and is even explored in earlier historical periods in film, such as Jack Robin's girlfriend in *The Jazz Singer*, it did not become a statistically significant phenomenon until the 1970s, reaching tremendous proportions by the 1990s. A few key studies and papers changed the way that American Jews saw the issue of intermarriage including the 1964 paper by Marshall Sklare "Intermarriage and the Jewish Future" and Elihu Bergman's 1977 "The American Jewish Population Erosion." But it was the 1990 Jewish Population Survey which purported that 52% of Jews were intermarried that marked a watershed moment.

For much of Jewish history, the intermarrying Jew was seen as a traitor to his or her faith and was rejected by friends and family and effectively excommunicated. Early in the history of Jews in America, some Jews used their intermarriage as a way of escaping their Jewish identity. For example, in the interwar period film *The Jazz Singer*, the romantic interest of Jack was a non-Jewish woman named Mary who was also involved in the non-Jewish entertainment business. This reflected his own ambivalence regarding his Jewish identity. Even the post-war period, some Jews chose non-Jewish spouses as a way of distancing themselves for their Jewish families of origin.

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[142] Fishman, Sylvia Barack. *Double or Nothing Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage (Brandeis in American Jewish History, Culture and Life & Brandeis on Jewish Women)*. (New York: Brandeis UP, 2004), 5.

But while intermarriage today remains a complex issue for the organized Jewish community, it is a social reality, rather than a marginal issue and many intermarried people still want to maintain ties to the Jewish community. As intermarriage increased, ~~r~~esistance to it weakened. The basic reason for this was simple - the children are going to do what they want; if parents refuse to accept their choices, it will damage and perhaps even destroy the parent-child relationship. It was a sea of change in just one generation."[143] While postwar intermarriage was a social taboo, by the end of the 20th century, it was a reality no one could deny. Still, it had major implications for each family member in a family where intermarriage was a possibility.

In the films *Keeping the Faith* and *Kissing Jessica Stein,* both Jake and Jessica end up in secret relationships based on, in part, their own shame from dating a non-Jew. In Jake's life, his brother's marriage to a non-Jew has set a precedent, suggesting that his mother will not support his interfaith relationship. Of course his congregants wouldn't support such a choice of partner either. Jessica doesn't face the same anti-intermarriage sentiments from her family or friends, though all of her previous matches are with seemingly Jewish men. She also expects her friends and family to react poorly to her dating a woman. However, when they finally discover her relationship with Helen, the response is supportive, including inviting Helen to the wedding of Jessica's brother. Though some of the comments and questions may be in poor taste (such as discussing who might carry the child they might have), Helen has an important position as a member of the family at this important Jewish lifecycle event. In both films, perhaps it is the

[143] Kaplan, Dana Evan. *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal*. (New York: Columbia UP, 2009), 169.

main characters' neurosis that is more of the problem than their community's response. Is this the contemporary American Jewish community? Maybe yes. The Jewish community wants their rabbi to be a role model and live the Jewish life that they can't maintain. In Jake's Kol Nidre sermon he rejects this notion, saying "No rabbi can save anyone. He can only act as a guide." Perhaps Jake is uncomfortable with the sense he is getting that he must live the Jewish life that his congregants are too lazy to live.[144]

While in-marriage is presented as the ideal in contemporary Jewish publications, within many Jewish communities and indeed within traditional texts, perhaps the last scene in *Keeping the Faith* is more telling of the reality of life in America. The moments of the film take place at the opening of the karaoke bar/interfaith senior center and intermarriage is presented as a reality for the contemporary Jewish community. Jewish news reporter Rachel Rose introduces her black boyfriend to her shocked mother. In a twist that is indicative of movies, but also perhaps of life, it is revealed that gentile Anna had been taking "classes" with the senior rabbi (which could be perceived as conversion classes and or simply as more "enrichment" classes). The film ends with the implication that maybe Rabbi Jake will end up with the nice (soon to be)-Jewish girl. This may be considered an implicit message from the filmmaker that the resolution of the film is not that intermarriage is really ok, but that conversionary marriage is a better alternative.[145] While interfaith relationships are acknowledged and accepted within the films of the period, the relationships still cause challenges for the characters, reflecting the continued

[144] The notion that congregants want their rabbis to be the kind of Jewish they are too lazy to be is spoken about by clergy and seminary students.

[145] Conversionary marriage is that when the previously non-Jewish spouse converts in order to marry their Jewish spouse. This was also a choice chosen by people involved in interfaith relationships in order to avoid intermarriage.

difficulty the organized Jewish community has with interfaith marriage. The understated message about conversionary marriage as preferred over intermarriage reflects that inner conflict. Other non-traditional Jewish family models also cause challenges for the organized Jewish community.

LGBT Jews in Jewish Families:

The start of the modern Gay Rights movement in America is linked to the 1969 Stonewall Riot, in which the New York City police raided a Greenwich Village gay bar called The Stonewall, which later became a symbol of a new era of gay politics and gay liberation, a new form of collective resistance. Gay Jews organized gay synagogues[146] including Beth Chaim Chadashim (BCC) in Los Angeles in 1972 and Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in New York City in 1974 to provide a Jewish religious experience in a safe space where they could integrate both of their identities, Jewish and Gay. BCC member Robin Berkovitz reflected that at the time of the congregation's founding, gay people "had to choose between identifying exclusively as Jews - and concealing our sexual orientation - or identifying only as gay or lesbian and not finding a place to nurture our Jewish selves."[147] Many of the members faced obstacles from the outside world. As member Harriet Perl explained, "at the time BCC started, if you were gay, it was the thing you kept secret, because coming out of the closet typically meant the loss of family, community and employment."[148] Gay synagogues provided a safe space and even a

[146] I refer to synagogues founded to serve the gay and lesbian population as "gay synagogues" for brevity's sake, though most congregations now consider themselves for "gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender Jews and their allies."
[147] "About BCC - Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Synagogue." *Beth Chayim Chadashim | Los Angeles*. Web. 27 Jan. 2010. <http://www.bcc-la.org/About.html>.
[148] Ibd.

surrogate family to those who had faced rejection elsewhere. At the dawn of the 21st century, many LGBT Jews find themselves in an era of increased tolerance, with the ordination of LGBT rabbis by the Reconstructionist, Reform and Conservative movements,[149] and the officiation of clergy at same-sex weddings. Some would argue that gay synagogues may not need to exist,[150] however, the gay synagogues have continued to evolve and find new niches. Today, CBST represents ~~–s~~ingles and couples of every sexual orientation and gender identity, young and old, with and without children, from all walks of life, from every variety of Judaism—Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Orthodox—and from the most secular to the most observant."[151] Some heterosexuals have even joined historically gay synagogues because they see them as beacons of tolerance for all different types of Jewish families (interfaith, Jew-by-choice, etc). At the dawn of the 21st century, LGBT Jews experience wide-spread inclusion in many parts of the Jewish community and within many Jewish families.

Of the three films, one, *Kissing Jessica Stein* was selected in part because it focuses on the diverse family model of LGBT Jews. There are a number of Jewish LGBT images in film at the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, including the movies *Torah Song Trilogy, When Do We Eat?*, and the documentary *Trembling Before G-D,* in addition to *Kissing Jessica Stein*. In *Kissing* the twist on ~~–s~~ex and the single girl" is that this single girl ends up dating a nice gentile girl

[149] The Reconstructionist movement began ordaining openly gay rabbis in the mid-1980's and the Reform movement in the early 1990s. The Conservative movement first admitted gay and lesbian rabbinical and cantorial students in 2007.
[150] Weiss, Anthony. "As Acceptance Grows, Gay Synagogues Torn Between the Straight and Narrow." *The Forward* 20 Mar. 2008. Web. 27 Jan. 2010. <http://www.forward.com/articles/12994/>.
[151] *The LGBT Synagogue - CBST*. Web. 27 Jan. 2010. <http://www.cbst.org>.

(at least for a while). But unlike other Jewish or coming out films, she faces relatively *little* rejection or social alienation for dating a woman and a non-Jew. This reflects the modern progressive American Jewish community, one that is comfortable with both homosexuality and intermarriage. The film does presents the normative Jewish in-marriage relationship with Jessica's brother Danny marrying the Jewishly-named Rachel and having a Jewish wedding complete with the breaking of the glass. Ironically it is Jessica herself, the one who is in the lesbian relationship, who is most uncomfortable with her non-male non-Jewish significant other. Ultimately in *Kissing Jessica Stein*, Helen and Jessica suffer from "lesbian bed death," end up breaking up and ultimately end up with people more suited for them. Helen dates a woman and Jessica flirts with Meyers (now called by his first name, the more intimate sounding Josh). The message is that perhaps the single Jewish girl will end up with the nice Jewish boy. Again this subtle message suggests an ideal, in this case, heterosexuality. While this conclusion was considered controversial by some, who hoped that Jessica could find happiness in the arms of a woman, rather than, predictably, in the arms of a man, for others it marked a significant step in LGBT visibility. The visibility of a non-straight Jew being welcomed by her Jewish family offers a larger positive message about the inclusion of LGBT people. But for many Jewish families, the inclusion of a LGBT child and the development of a family of their own, is more of a non-issue than ever before in Jewish history.

Evolving Jewish identity for Members of the Jewish Family:

By the beginning of the 21st century, the majority of Jewish Americans no longer saw themselves as an immigrant community and most American Jews were not even the children of immigrants. While earlier generations had expressed ties to their birthplaces in Eastern Europe or to the homeland of Israel, viewing themselves as perpetually in Diaspora, many Jewish Americans at the dawn of the 21st century no longer see themselves as away from home. Rather, argue scholars Caryn Aviv and David Shneer in New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora, Jews in the contemporary era experience multiple homelands or even the end of Diaspora.[152] For the characters in the three films at the focus of this research section, there is no question as to loyalties. They are genuinely at home in America. Yes, there is the lingering pull of tradition. They sometimes find themselves different than their non-Jewish American peers, but they are still fully a part of the culture where they live and do not seem to experience or express dissonant messages about where they belong. This lessens the generational conflict between parents and children. Old ethnic patterns no longer divide society. Living in the large Jewish communities of Los Angeles or New York City, the film characters experience a secular life that is influenced by their Judaism and have both Jewish and non-Jewish friends who are accepting of and often interested in their faith. Both cities offer multiple and multi-ethnic Jewish communities from around the world, though the films present mostly monolithic Jewish images, in which the film's main character's Judaism is The Way to be Jewish.

[152] Aviv, Caryn, and David Shneer. *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*. (New York: NYU, 2005), xv, xvi and 3,

Keeping the Faith focuses on the one character that each of the previous films has avoided including: a rabbi. In contrast to the Cantor‘s sons of *The Jazz Singer* and *The Cantor"s Son*, this rabbi, played by Ben Stiller, is young, hip and unabashedly Jewish. Rabbi Jake‘s mother is proud of her son and happy with his career choice, enthusiastically joining-in with synagogue services. Her issue is with her intermarried elder son which whom she no longer speaks. The key twist in this film is the love triangle between the rabbi, his best friend the Roman Catholic priest and their gentile childhood friend who has reemerged on the scene. While classic religion is demonstrated through the leadership of the older clergy members, the younger clergy members are seen as shaking things up and presenting the religion of the future. The scenes of synagogue include a gospel choir revolutionizing *Ein Keloheinu*, a personal confessional Yom Kippur sermon and a young boy butchering *Parsha B'reishit*. Outside of the service is a meat market for the single young rabbi with the ladies of the congregation trying to set Jake up with their daughters. In *Keeping the Faith*, Shabbat is an important opportunity for Rabbi Jake to reconnect with his mother and to share his tradition with his friends. While Judaism is work for Jake, he still connects with it on a personal level.

It is clear to film viewers from the start of *Kissing Jessica Stein* that the title character is Jewish as the movie opens with Yom Kippur services and the confession of sins. However, Jessica‘s mother and grandmother are discussing handsome men in the congregation, so much so that Jessica gets fed up and yells –mom! Will you shut up, I‘m atoning.” This opening scene informs us significantly of Jessica‘s character; she is Jewish, single, and feeling the pressure to marry from family. This contrasts with Jessica‘s real sanctuary, her apartment, where she worships G-D through painting and

eating mainstays of a single woman (wine, ice cream, Chinese food). Jessica seems to enjoy the solitude of wonderful apartment full of books. Most of the rest of Jessica's Judaism is expressed through a home-based Judaism at her parent's house where Shabbos dinner is both an opportunity to attempt matchmaking and reconnect with adult children.

The friends of the characters are interesting for comparison. The important figures in Jessica's life include her newly pregnant best friend (who also we can assume to be Jewish from her daughter's name Hannah Claire Levine), her co-worker Meyers (again a Jew) and her very Jewish family. Jake's best friend is a Roman Catholic priest and his friend and later girlfriend is also a Christian (though perhaps looking towards conversion at the end of the movie). He is social with other Rabbinical students (he says that he has to stop playing basketball with the guys from JTS) and is also friendly with local basketball players. But Jake doesn't really seem to have close Jewish friends, which is particularly interesting given his career path. Adam has Jewish and non-Jewish friends and lusts after a young Jewish woman in his Hebrew school class. His father's quasi-friend and former business associate is also Jewish and his son Zachary's Bar Mitzvah is the benchmark by which his own family's Bar Mitzvah is held up against.

Social scientists have found that many American Jews see themselves in a fundamentally different way than they did just a generation ago.[153] In the postwar 1950s, many American Jews saw themselves as American and Jewish, but saw clear divisions between those two identities. Today, Jews in America no longer see their Jewish selves as separate from their American selves. In the films we see the Jewish characters

[153] Kaplan, Dana Evan. *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal*, xvi.

integrated into mainstream society, not left to choose between their Jewish or American identities. They are able to have multiple identities, such as Jessica in *Kissing* who may have identified as a lesbian-Jewish-American (or a bisexual-Jewish-American). Jews in the films and in larger society are able to live full lives without feeling pulled in one direction or another. For Jews living in America, their Judaism is an integral part of the American religious landscape, albeit with unique characteristics.[154]

Conclusion:

The Jewish family in America at the start of the 21st century achieved new heights, faced new challenges, and continued to transform. The Jewish families presented in the contemporary films reflect both the historical phenomena and the contemporary socio-cultural phenomena. Jews in the 21st century have symbolic ethnicity; they are able to express their ethnic alliances in an unself-conscious and public way.[155] They feel totally accepted into society and do not see barriers to achieving the American dream. Many Jews in America, according to social scientists Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen, feel a sense of "historical familism." There are two key elements of this family experience of Judaism in which Jews born into and remain a part of this Jewish family and that as part of this extended family Jews feel a sense of mutual responsibility.[156] The Jewish family in America may look different, but ultimately, many Jews feel a part not just of their own Jewish family, no matter the make-up, but also the larger American Jewish family. These films offer an affirmation of difference and the right to be different without sacrificing one's Americanness, similar to *My Big Fat Greek*

[154] Ibd., 5.
[155] Ibd., xi.
[156] Ibd., 65.

Wedding. Even with explicitly Jewish characters, with Jewish names and professions, these Jewish families are still able to be unapologetically American.

Conclusion

Jewish families in America, the inheritors of significant Jewish texts such as the Talmud, have been impacted by a series of historical phenomena. This research has offered insight into the experience of Jewish families in America through using the study of popular film. These film ~~"t~~exts" served as critiques or statements about the American Jewish experience. These films are texts that give us insight into how American Jews understood their individual and collective identities as Jews and as Americans.

This project explored several essential questions: How has the Jewish family been viewed and represented at three different points in American Jewish history? Are the representations of the Jewish family realistic, idealistic, nostalgic or a little of each? Through the analysis contained in this thesis, readers have been provided with a range of perspectives regarding the ebb and flow as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by the Jewish family.

In the initial chapter, key Talmudic passages related to the family and the relationships between its various members were explored in depth. As noted, the description of the family and its central role in Jewish life provided in the Talmud has been used an analytic device to help us understand the multiple dimensions of the evolution of Jewish families in American life. More specifically, the descriptions in the Talmud were used as a literary text to inform our understanding of the family. The first chapter laid out the rules governing family relationships. The Talmud outlines the configuration of the family in terms of several key figures, each of whom has responsibilities to and derives benefits from the other family members. In reality, the

Talmud remained an influential Jewish text that shaped the evolution of modern American Jewish history. Because of its sustained central place in Jewish life in America, this thesis has highlighted its utility as a valuable tool for studying and understanding the Jewish family of the interwar years, postwar period and contemporary era in America was studied. In the introductory chapter, we see how the rabbis constructed the family concept in late antiquity through classical Talmudic texts, marking a significant moment in Jewish history. In this regard, the analysis shows how and why these classical Jewish texts, despite the fact that they provide an idealized representation of the family, continue to resonate on some level for Jews for centuries to come. Moreover, it also becomes clear that the themes and depictions presented in the films discussed within the thesis also are consistent with the representations offered in the Talmud.

After deploying the perspectives about family contained in the Talmud in the initial chapter, the three subsequent chapters utilized popular film as a way to gain insight into the experience of the family during three time periods. Similar to Talmud‘s view of the family and inter-family relations, many of the films of the time provided idealized and even simplistic characterizations. While some films reflected the dominant norms of their times, others sought to shape perceptions and address bias. Nonetheless, in both cases, they are a useful vehicle for understanding the Jewish family in their time period. Each of the films analyzed was selected to reflect dominant phenomena during the time period in which it was set. Each film offers a subtle agenda which, when carefully dissected, enhances our appreciation of the dynamics of the experience of the Jewish family in America.

Taken together, the three main chapters provide an examination of the changing face of the Jewish family in America through an analysis of the key phenomena affecting them during different points in American Jewish history: the immigrant experience and the impact of the Americanization project during the Interwar years; suburbanization and embourgeoisement in the postwar era; and the unprecedented Jewish inclusion in American society that helped restructure the prevailing definitions and configurations of the Jewish family in the contemporary era. The films are used as helpful instruments to address critical questions about the makeup of the family and its orientation as well as the obligations of the respective members.

From the analysis provided in this thesis, we learn that in each specific historic time period, the Jewish family was faced with new challenges and opportunities. We also learn about the different ways the family as a unit responded during the different time period in question. In the interwar period, the impact of immigration and acculturation struggles were keenly felt by members of the family which, in turn, affected how they related to their fellow family members. Following World War II, many Jewish families found themselves in the suburbs, benefiting from new wealth that frequently also led to greater materialism. Over the past decade, Jewish families have shifted not only their location but also in their makeup, including an expansion in the numbers of interfaith and LGBTQ families. Each of the historical developments that affected the character of the Jewish family had both immediate and long lasting impacts. What affected a Jewish man as a child shaped what type of father he would become. A Jewish family that had a rags-to-riches story would view money in a way that reflected their earlier poverty. The changing milieu shaped the experiences of the Jewish family and influenced its evolution.

Despite all the challenges to the integrity of the family, especially in terms of the ideal images presented in the Talmud, the family has endured as a central part of Jewish life in America and elsewhere.

An important feature that connects the films studied for each of the three periods discussed of American Jewish history was their ongoing focus on Americanization, assimilation, and success—economic, social, and cultural. In each time period, the key characters presented in the respective films struggled to balance their desires around these three areas with their roles and responsibilities in the family. While they were bound by certain familial expectations as introduced and defined in the Talmud, they also each had their own hopes and goals. In each unique setting, as noted, the specific historical phenomena of the time period shaped the family. Interwar period films like *The Jazz Singer* and *The Cantor"s Son* provide evidence of the generational shift between native born or assimilationist children and traditionalist parents. Postwar movies such as *Marjorie Morningstar* and *Goodbye, Columbus* focus on the opportunities that America's economic advance provided to American Jews, but also highlight some of the new challenges that these opportunities brought into family life. In contemporary films like *Keeping the Faith, Keeping Up with the Steins*, and *Kissing Jessica Stein*, the Jewish family itself experiences changes as it responds to increased societal inclusion and wealth.

Why is this study important in the context of understanding the modern Jewish experience? Throughout their history in the modern world and the various episodes of turbulence and trauma in the lives of Jews across the world, one of the sources of greatest resilience has been the family—which has served as the bedrock of Jewish life in good

times and bad. This resilience seems to derive from the fact that the family has served as a resource in emotional and social as well as economic terms. Even more important, however, the family has served as the foundation for the preservation and sustenance of Jewish values and beliefs. While the strength of one's local community has always remained important, the reality is that the family has served as a focal point and has provided the necessary "glue" to sustain Jewish life in times of dramatic change. Whether it is religious ideas in the pure sense or the Jewish culture in the broad sense, the family has been a magnet that has been able to evolve, adapt and change as conditions made necessary.

The question that remains today is whether the family can continue to play this same role as the Jews become further assimilated, as intermarriage expands, and as other challenges emerge through processes such as globalization, etc. As the Jewish community strives to maintain some degree of consensus about what it means to be a Jew in the 21st century, one of the key determinants in shaping the answer to that question will be the role of the Jewish family. Can the family remain central to Jewish life? And, if the family recedes into the background, will that prove to be the Achilles heel for contemporary Judaism? How does the family stay relevant, especially in terms of the primary concepts articulated in the Talmud and other core Jewish texts. By providing some insights into the past challenges and how they were handled, this thesis hopefully has helped us better understand the central role played by the family. Still, we may now be entering an era that is even more challenging, more vexing, and more uncertain than ever before. Is there something to replace the role of the family such as a new role for the synagogue or can the concept of family still evolve further to meet the new pressing

needs for Jews to have a substantial center of gravity in their lives. Or perhaps, the answer to this question is to be found in both community and family; how these two important components of Jewish life evolve together in the future as well as their degree of integration and level of interaction may indeed become the imperative for the survival and enhancement of the Jewish people in the decades ahead.

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