Mishpacha in the American Diaspora: An Exploratory Study of Highly-Involved Jewish Families

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MISHPACHA IN THE AMERICAN DIASPORA: 
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF HIGHLY-INVOLVED JEWISH FAMILIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
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in

The School of Social Work

by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...........................................................................................................ii

ABSTRACT ..............................................................................................................................vi

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................1
  The Schismatic Jewish Community .....................................................................................2
  The Love / Hate Jewish Paradox .........................................................................................5
  American Jewry and the Jewish Family ............................................................................14

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ..................................................................................18
  Cultural / Religious Community and the Family ..............................................................19
  Cultural / Religious Beliefs and the Family .....................................................................22
  Cultural / Religious Practices and the Family .................................................................25
  The Contemporary American Jewish Family ....................................................................29
    Jewish community and the family ...............................................................................29
    Jewish beliefs / practices and the family .....................................................................33
  The Future of Research on Contemporary Jewry ..........................................................39
  Summary of Literature Review ......................................................................................42

CHAPTER 3. METHOD ...........................................................................................................45
  Sample ..................................................................................................................................45
  Design and Procedures .....................................................................................................47
  Data Collection ................................................................................................................49
  Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................49
  Qualitative Validity ...........................................................................................................50
    Credibility .......................................................................................................................51
    Transferability ................................................................................................................51
    Dependability ................................................................................................................52
    Confirmability ................................................................................................................52
    Reflexivity .......................................................................................................................52

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS .........................................................................................................54
  Theme 1. Family Influences Jewish Community Involvement ........................................55
  Theme 2. Community Involvement Influences Family Life ..............................................58
  Theme 3. Jewish Religious Beliefs and the Family ............................................................65
  Theme 4. Family Influences on Jewish Observance in the Home ....................................75
    Subtheme 1. “They teach us:” How children influence parents .....................................76
    Subtheme 2. “Respect this tradition:” How parents influence children .........................81
  Theme 5. Sabbath Observance in the Home ....................................................................87
    Subtheme 1. Sabbath traditions help form and maintain strong Jewish identity ..........88
    Subtheme 2. Sabbath facilitates peace and relaxation ....................................................91
    Subtheme 3. Sabbath traditions unify the family ............................................................93
ABSTRACT

Both family and religion are important to a large majority of the population in the United States. In the last few decades, research on religious families has significantly increased. Empirical research on Jewish families, however, is scant. The purpose of this study is to explore contemporary American Jewish family life in relation to Judaism, both cultural and religious. Specifically, the two primary objectives of this study are 1) to examine how Jewish culture and religion may influence and shape Jewish family life; and 2) to examine how family relationships may influence observance of Jewish cultural or religious traditions. This reciprocal dynamic between family and Jewish culture and religion was examined by focusing on involvement in the Jewish community, the espousal of particular Jewish beliefs, and participation in certain Jewish practices, all in relation to the family. Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with thirty highly involved Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and secular Jewish families from seven states. Grounded theory methods were employed to analyze the data. Five major themes that emerged from the data were presented: 1) Family Influences Jewish Community Involvement; 2) Community Involvement Influences Family Life, 3) Jewish Religious Beliefs and the Family, 4) Family Influences on Jewish Observance in the Home, and 5) Sabbath Observance in the Home. Implications for theory, research, and practice relating to both Jewish families and non-Jewish families in the United States are also discussed.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Several studies (Lichter, Batson, & Brown, 2004; Mauldon, London, Fein, Patterson, & Bliss, 2002) have found that a majority of people in every demographic in the U.S. expect to marry. Marriage and family is very important to 80% of Americans. In addition, the majority believe that married individuals are happier and report higher levels of life satisfaction than single adults (Axinn & Thornton, 2000). Expectations to marry are usually met. Goldstein and Kennedy (2001) estimated that 90% of women born in the early 1960s have married. Among welfare recipients, 70% report that they expect to marry, according to Mauldon et al. (2002). In their book, Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage, Edin and Kefalas (2005) reported that a majority of the 162 poor single mothers that they interviewed expected that they would eventually marry their baby’s father. They also reported that “new mothers almost universally believe that a child is better off with both a mother and a father” (p. 61), which was also reflected among their sample.

Religion and spirituality also tend to be salient for many Americans. Ninety-two percent of Americans claim a belief in God (Gallup, 2011) and 95% of married couples affiliate with a religion (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). Nearly 90% of Americans reported that religion is fairly important or very important to them (Mahoney, 2000) and a “substantial minority” of Americans claimed that religion is “the single most important influence in [life]” (Miller & Thoresen, 2003, p. 25). In the Jewish community, two-thirds of American Jews who identified themselves as Jews by religion (as opposed to Jews by ethnicity or birth heritage) reported that religion is somewhat or very important in their lives, and 75% of married Jews who have a Jewish spouse reported that religion is somewhat or very important to them (Pew, 2013). Based on these findings concerning the salience of family and religion for many Americans, including Jews, it is surprising that very little research has been conducted on
American Jewish families. The purpose of this study is to explore contemporary American Jewish family life in relation to Judaism, both cultural and religious. Specifically, the two primary objectives of this study are 1) to examine how Jewish culture and religion may influence and shape Jewish family life; and 2) to examine how family relationships may influence observance of Jewish cultural or religious traditions. This reciprocal dynamic between family and Jewish culture and religion will be examined by focusing on involvement in the Jewish community, the espousal of particular Jewish beliefs, and participation in certain Jewish practices, all in relation to the family. In short, the goal is to investigate this understudied demographic, American Jewish families, by exploring various underlying processes and by “mining the meanings” (Marks & Dollahite, 2011) of Jewish involvement and tradition and family life. The fields of both Family Studies and Jewish Studies may benefit from this exploration. Findings in this study regarding a highly visible minority group in the U.S. may highlight trends or contribute to a model that family scholars and family counselors may utilize while working with this, or other demographics. Before proceeding to the overview of relevant literature for this study, some historical and sociological background information pertaining to American Jewry, including their minority status and family life, is presented.

The Schismatic Jewish Community

In the decades following their expulsion from Spain in 1492 when Jews were required to either convert to Christianity or leave Spain (Lindemann & Levy, 2010), Jews entertained the question about how they could survive, both religiously and temporally, as a minority culture and religion, and how they should interact with the dominant culture to ensure their survival. The two positions that dominated the discussion were accommodationism and particularism.
Particularists maintained that Jews must only be guided by a Jewish way of thinking, and that Jews must reject all other ways of thinking that are either inimical or superfluous to Jewish religion and Jewish culture (Sherwin, 2003). Non-Jewish ways of thinking, they argued, lead to mass assimilation. In contrast, accommodationists argued that the two primary sources of truth—(1) the Greek philosophical tradition adopted by the dominant culture, and (2) Jewish thought—are really one source of truth expressed in two different ways. Jews, therefore, must accept truth wherever it exists, including from the dominant culture. These two positions clashed for the next several centuries, and by the mid-nineteenth century, three major Jewish movements had developed and have been perpetuated to the present: Conservative Judaism, Orthodox Judaism, and Reform Judaism.

As a result of the struggle to redefine Judaism, particularly in Germany, the Reform movement was founded. Some Jewish leaders and thinkers attempted to modernize Judaism in order to fight against assimilation and retain those who considered converting to Christianity. The accommodationist approach of these German reformers spurred changes that included a greater leniency to ritual observance, the use of the local vernacular in the prayer book and sermons instead of Hebrew, and the inclusion of music in the worship services. This new reformed Judaism of the early nineteenth century spread to other Western European countries, and by the 1824, a reform society had been established in Charleston, South Carolina (Kaplan, 2003). Reform Judaism has continued to spread throughout the United States. As of 2013, according to Pew (2013), Reform Jews comprise roughly 35% of the American Jewish population, making it the largest Jewish group in the United States. One of the most contested and debated issues today between the three largest Jewish groups deals with the family, and
whether or not a particular individual is Jewish. As an illustration, a major Reform website provides the following statement:

According to halachah (traditional Jewish law), Jewish status is determined on the basis of matrilineality; that is, the child of a Jewish mother is a Jew, even when the child’s father is a gentile. The offspring of a gentile mother is a gentile, even if the father is a Jew. Prior to the Rabbinic period (70 - 500 CE), we find little trace of the principal of matrilineal descent. The Bible in fact seems to recognize a purely patrilineal descent, regardless of the identity of the mother.

In 1983 the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted the Resolution on Patrilineal Descent. According to this resolution, a child of one Jewish parent, who is raised exclusively as a Jew and whose Jewish status is “established through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people” is Jewish. These acts include entry into the covenant, acquisition of a Hebrew name, Torah study, bar/bat mitzvah and confirmation. (Washofsky, n.d.)

The term orthodoxy comes from the Greek orthódoxos, which means belief or opinion and has subsequently developed in modern languages to denote what is commonplace and traditional. Orthodox Judaism as a systematic movement originated in the nineteenth century in Western Europe, as some particularist Jews pushed back against attempts at reforming Judaism. Opponents of these more traditional Jews began calling them “orthodox.” This term was later adopted by those who now are considered Orthodox Jews. Orthodox Jewish synagogues and governing bodies today reject Reform Judaism’s position on who is considered Jewish.

According to all Orthodox Jewish groups, an individual is Jewish whose mother is Jewish (regardless of the father’s status) or who has converted to Judaism by proper authority and appropriate procedures (Brown, 2004). Roughly 10% of American Jews identify with Orthodox Judaism, making it the smallest of the three primary Jewish branches in the United States (Pew, 2013).

Conservative Judaism developed from the intellectual thought of Zacharias Frankel in the mid-1800s in Western Europe, and was a reaction to Reform Judaism. Solomon Schechter of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America is recognized as the father of the movement in
America, as he helped establish the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism in 1913. The Conservative movement grew rapidly throughout the twentieth century and was the largest branch of Judaism in the United States until the turn of the twenty-first century. Conservative Judaism flourished because it offered a moderate alternative to Orthodox Judaism that some maintained was too antiquated and unrealistic, and to Reform Judaism that some deemed as too liberal and non-observant. Conservative Judaism sought to conserve traditional Jewish practices and Jewish thought, like Orthodox Jews, while adapting to the ever-changing environment around them, like Reform Jews. Approximately 18% of American Jews are associated with the Conservative movement (Pew, 2013). Conservative Judaism tends to be more traditional on the question of who is a Jew—accepting matrilineal decent, although intra-group debates are not uncommon in the Conservative Jewish community (Gordis, 2004).

The intense debates between the three major branches of Judaism heavily influence family life decisions. One’s connection to the Jewish community and affiliation with a preferred Jewish group may affect one’s choices relating to dating and marriage, child bearing, location of residence, employment, and various other aspects of family life.

**The Love / Hate Jewish Paradox**

In addition to Jewish intergroup dynamics and relations, Jews’ interactions with the general population and their status as a minority group also heavily influence family life. Throughout recorded history Jews have experienced a tremendous amount of persecution from the dominant culture. Jews were persecuted and scattered by the Romans, slaughtered by Christians during the Crusades, expelled from multiple Christian countries in Europe, and faced extinction by Hitler’s Nazi regime (Lindemann & Levy, 2010). Jews have also experienced anti-Semitism in the United States. The anti-Semitic publications of Henry Ford, the beloved
American icon, spanned an entire decade starting in the 1920s (Blakeslee, 2000). His newspaper, *Dearborn Independent*, contained articles about Jews and their alleged involvement in corrupting the financial system. A series of articles were compiled into an anti-Semitic booklet entitled, *The International Jew*, which accused Jews of conspiring to take over the world (Rubinstein, 2010). By 1940, Henry Ford had claimed that Jews lead the Bolshevik Revolution (Rubinstein, 2010), blamed the Jews for corrupting the American financial system, and accused Jews of starting WWII (Blakeslee, 2000). Ford was eventually awarded a medal from Adolf Hitler (Blakeslee, 2000) and was praised in *Mein Kampf* (Rubinstein, 2010).

In the late 1930s, public polling revealed that anti-Semitism was as at its highest point in American history. *Fortune* magazine, for example, found that 50% of the respondents to their survey agreed that Nazi policies toward Jews were helping Germany’s economy (Hertzberg, 1990). Another poll in 1938 reported that 77% of respondents when asked, “Should we allow a larger number of Jewish exiles to come to the United States to live?” answered “no” (Dinnerstein, 1994, p. 127).

Today, as many Jews are only one generation removed from the Holocaust, the Jewish community remains skeptical that persecution against them is no longer a problem. As of 1998, a large majority of Jews believed that anti-Semitism was a moderate to serious problem, or potential problem in the near future in the United States (American Jewish Community, 1998; Rabb, 1995; Tobin & Sassler, 1988). According to a survey of Cohen and Eisen (2000), nearly 50% of Jews interviewed agreed with the statement, “Because I’m Jewish, I identify with the powerless, the vulnerable, and the underdog” (p. 127). The attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, seemed to have produced a hyper-sensitivity in the U.S., especially toward Muslims. However, although the War on Terror has highlighted the Muslim community and the
religion of Islam, the American Jewish community has experienced a much higher volume of hate crimes than the American Muslim community. From 1996 to 2008, the mean number of anti-Jewish hate crimes per year was 1,075—a figure that increased by roughly 10% in the years following the September 11 attacks. In 2004, for example, anti-Jewish hate crimes accounted for approximately 12% of the total number of recorded bias-motivated incidents (Cheng, Ickes, & Kenworthy, 2013). In contrast, anti-Islamic hate crimes from 1996 to 2000 averaged less than 1% of the total number of bias-motivated incidents.

In the immediate aftermath of the World Trade Center attack, anti-Islamic hate crimes jumped 1,650% from the year before; however, even with that increase, anti-Jewish hate crimes were still more than double that of anti-Islamic hate crimes in the United States. Two years later in 2003, anti-Jewish hate crimes were significantly higher than anti-Islamic hate crimes at six to one, and by 2008 the ratio had jumped to nine to one (Cheng, Ickes, & Kenworthy, 2013). In 2009, the statistics were roughly the same. Nearly 20% of the total number of hate crimes in the U.S. was perpetrated by individuals with some anti-religious bias. Of those, 72% were against Jews while 8.5% were against Muslims (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2009). One year after the 9/11 attacks, a national survey revealed that only 47% of respondents ($N = 1,013$) disagreed with the statement that “Jews killed Christ” and over a quarter (26%) of respondents agreed with the statement: “Because Jews think they are the chosen people, they care only about themselves” (Tobin & Groeneman, 2003, p. 15-16).

The Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011 again raised concerns over anti-Semitism. CBS New York (Aiello, 2011) interviewed several protestors who said, or heard others make statements like: “Jews control Wall Street” and “There is a conspiracy in this country in which Jews control the media [and] finances.” One protestor allegedly held a sign that read, “Hitler’s
Bankers” and another protestor stated on a widely-circulated video: “The fingerprints belong to the Jewish bankers who control Wall Street…. They are one percent who control America. President Obama is a Jewish puppet. The entire economy is Jewish. Every federal judge [on] the East Coast is Jewish” (Neumann, 2012). Another Occupy Wall Street protestor in Chicago told ABC Chicago: “I think the Zionist Jews who are running these big banks and our Federal Reserve, that is not run by the federal government, they need to be run out of this country” (Goudie, 2011). Occupy protestors, waving a large Palestinian flag, reportedly lined up outside the home of Mayor Rahm Emmanuel, Chicago’s first Jewish mayor (Goudie, 2011). An Occupy protestor in Los Angeles held a sign with a detailed message stating that the Illuminati, a satanic cult, “represents Masonic and Jewish bankers who finagled a monopoly over government credit….Thus the people who control our purse strings are conspiring against us” (Neumann, 2012). The Occupy Wall Street Facebook page reportedly contained images of Henry Ford’s title page of the International Jew and also a picture of the phrase, Arbeit Macht Frei (“We don’t work for bad money”), which hung over the entrance gate at Auschwitz concentration camp (Neumann, 2012). Apparently these kinds of vitriolic statements and actions were numerous enough to raise concern of two Jewish organizations: the Anti-Defamation League (Anti-Defamation League, 2011) and the Emergency Committee for Israel (Aiello, 2011).

In the summer of 2014, when the world focused on the Israel-Gaza Conflict, the Jewish community in the United States and abroad experienced several hate-crime incidents. The following are just a few examples: a North Miami Beach synagogue was vandalized with spray-painted swastikas (JTA, 2014); an apartment building in Crown Heights was vandalized with the phrase “Murder the Jew tenant” (Rizvi, 2014); a group of men flying Palestinian flags on their vehicles assaulted a Jewish couple on the Upper East Side when they hit the woman with a water
bottle and punched the man in the head (Feis, 2014); a kosher meat shop in Northeast Philadelphia was spray painted with swastikas (Henry, 2014); in addition to Nazi symbols, chalk-inscriptions at a New York City playground read “Kill Jews” (Rajamani, 2014); flyers were slipped underneath the door of a Jewish-owned store near UCLA campus that contained swastikas and the word “Warning” (CBS Los Angeles, 2014); a rabbi was murdered in Miami on the Jewish Sabbath while walking to the synagogue in broad daylight (Fleischman, 2014).

These types of events around the world and in the United States have contributed to agitation and nervousness among the Jewish population in several U.S. communities, according to the reports mentioned just above. Periodic events, either in the U.S. or overseas, seem to stir up anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish sentiment. Perhaps this explains why a large majority of Jews agreed that anti-Semitism may be a moderate to serious problem in the future, even in the United States (American Jewish Community, 1998; Rabb, 1995; Tobin & Sassler, 1988) and why many Jews agree that, as quoted above, “Because I’m Jewish, I identify with the powerless, the vulnerable, and the underdog” (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 127).

Perceived persecution and trauma tends to influence group and individual identity, both for good and bad (Haddad, 2004; Volkan 2001, 2013; Wohl & Van Bravel, 2011). A certain level of victimization and persecution may galvanize a community or a family, the way it seemed to do among Americans after the attack on the World Trade Center (Li & Brewer, 2004). Volkan (2001, 2013), who has studied numerous ethnic and religious groups around the world, referred to remembered persecution among large groups as “chosen trauma.” Chosen traumas, as opposed to chosen glories, are salient for group identity because they are “shared representation[s] of event[s] in a large group’s history in which the group suffered catastrophic loss, humiliation, and helplessness at the hands of an enemy” (2013, p. 231). Chosen traumas are
often used to strengthen groups and are easily perpetuated, as they tend to be transgenerationally transmitted, especially among family members (Volkan 2001, 2013; Wohl & Van Bravel, 2011).

Over the last few decades, Jews have used one of their *chosen traumas*, the Holocaust, as a means to strengthen their community, as evidenced by the building of numerous Holocaust monuments and museums around the world, by producing hundreds of films about the Holocaust, and by introducing more Holocaust studies courses on college campuses (Haynes, 1998; Libowitz, 1990; Rapaport, 1997, 2005). Recently, 73% of American Jews identified, “remembering the Holocaust,” as an essential part of being Jewish (Pew, 2013), the highest percentage of any other option for that question. *Chosen trauma* seems to have an especially salient influence on Jews (Stein, 2014).

The picture presented above of seemingly rampant oppression, disadvantage, anti-Semitism, and anti-Judaism is, however, incomplete and one-sided. Jews also experience a high level of achievement (Lynn & Kanazawal, 2008) and are generally respected by the U.S. population. In a 2014 national survey (*N* = 3,217) conducted by the Pew Research Center (2014), Jews scored the highest on a feeling thermometer among the general population of the major world religions. In a recent field experiment, Wallace, Bradley, and Hyde (2014) found that fictitious employment applicants who expressed a religious identity on their resumes were 26% less likely to receive a callback from employers. Jewish applicants, on the other hand, did not experience discrimination and even received preferential treatment in employer responses.

In addition to their overall popularity, Jews have reached high levels of success in the United States and around the world. Their influence seems to be incommensurate to the size of their worldwide population. In the mid-1990s, 76% of America’s 200 most influential intellectuals had at least one Jewish parent, and half were full Jews (Dershowitz, 1997). When
*Vanity Fair* released their list of the one hundred most powerful people in the world in 2007, 51 were Jews (Linde, 2010). In Forbes’ 2010 annual billionaires list of 50 people, 20% were Jews (Linde, 2010). Further, despite the estimated Jewish population of 0.2 percent of the world’s population (Pew, 2012b), 22% of the Nobel Prize winners to date have been Jewish (Schuster, 2013).

Jews have also been credited with “inventing Hollywood” (Gabler, 1989). Marcus Loew founded MGM when three other motion picture companies merged, all of which were founded by Jews (Gabler, 1989). MGM later merged with 20th Century Fox, also founded by Jews (Gabler, 1989). In addition, Columbia Pictures, DreamWorks, Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, and Warner Brothers Entertainment, were all founded or cofounded by Jews (Gabler, 1989; Goldberg, 1997). Although Walt Disney Company was not founded by a Jew, the last two CEOs, Michael Eisner and Robert Iger (current president and CEO), are Jews (Goldberg, 1997; Stein, 2008).

Jews were, and are, also heavily influential in the television, newspaper, magazine, internet, publishing, and financial industries. Jews founded, or acted as CEO or president in, or both, the following major companies that dominate their respective industries: ABC, CBS, ESPN, HBO, NBC, Major League Baseball (MLB), NFL Network, National Basketball Association (NBA), Viacom (including BET and MTV), eBay, Dell, Google, Microsoft, PayPal, Yahoo, *The New York Times*, Washington Post Company (including *The Washington Post* and *Newsweek*), *U.S. News and World Report*, Dow Jones & Company (including *The Wall Street Journal*), Simon & Schuster, Random House, Goldman Sacs, and H&R Block (Berkman, 2010; Birmingham, 1996; Bloch, 2010; Burrell, 2010; Clurman, 1993; Goldberg, 1997; Grover &

Jews were also influential in the founding and development of the three major social scientific disciplines: anthropology, psychology, and sociology. According to Moore (1997), two of the four individuals credited for founding modern anthropology were Jews, Emile Durkheim and Franz Boas, and nine of the 25 theorists (36%) highlighted by Moore were Jews. Of the seven sub-disciplines of psychology, according to Schultz and Schultz (2011)—structuralism, functionalism, behaviorism, Gestalt psychology, psychoanalysis, humanistic psychology, and cognitive psychology—Jews were major figures in the development of four. Goodwin (2008) highlighted four individuals who were instrumental in the founding and development of Gestalt psychology and three were Jews, including Max Wertheimer who is regarded as its primary founder—the other two were Kurt Koffka and Kurt Lewin. Sigmund Freud is considered to be the founder of psychoanalysis (Goodwin, 2008) and many of its early proponents were also Jews including Erik Erikson. Abraham Maslow, the son of Jewish Russian immigrants to the U.S., is known for developing the school of humanistic psychology (Rich, 2008). Several Jews were instrumental in the development of cognitive psychology, the most notable of whom were Noam Chomsky (Rich, 2008) and “pioneer” of cognitive psychology, Ulric Neisser (Cutting, 2012; Parvin, 2012). In 2002, Haggbloom et al. published a list and ranking of the ninety nine most eminent psychologists of the twentieth century, based on several variables—nearly 40% were Jewish.

According to Kim (2012) the three principal figures in the development of modern sociology were Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. Fernandez (2003) added a fourth
individual, Georg Simmel, to this elite list. Dukheim, Marx, and Simmel were all Jewish (Fernandez, 2003).

In terms of western religious influence, Jews produced arguably the number one printed book of all time, the Bible, which has been translated into 349 languages, as estimated by Guinness World Records (n.d.). Jews preserved the Hebrew Bible from their Hebrew and Israelite ancestors, and most of the New Testament is attributed to first-century Jewish writers (Carson & Moo, 2009). Christianity, the religious philosophy of over 2 billion people worldwide (Pew, 2011b) was largely founded by Jews, regardless of whether the credit is given to Jesus of Nazareth, Paul of Tarsus, or Jesus’ closest followers who headed the Jerusalem Church (Tabor, 2012; Wright, 1997). Islam, the religious philosophy of 1.6 billion people (Pew, 2013), was also heavily influenced by Hebrew thought. Islam’s founder, Muhammad, claimed that his revelations were congruous with the teachings of the Hebrew prophets, who the Quran invites all believers to honor (Quran 2:135-136; 3:84; 4:163; see also Tottoli, 2009). In short, 50% or more of the world’s population identifies with religions that have Hebraic/Judaic foundations.

Researchers have attributed Jewish achievement to IQ scores that are higher than the national averages. Various studies have shown that American and British Jews have an average IQ of roughly 10 points higher than the general population (Lynn & Kanazawal, 2008; Lynn & Longley, 2006; Lynn & Vanhanen, 2006).

Achievement and perceived successes—“chosen glories” according to Volkan (2001; 2013)—among a group of people may also strengthen community or family identity. This is evidenced, for example, in the African American community during Black History Month. Although the struggles in African American history are recounted and highlighted, so too are times of triumph and accomplishment, especially of public figures like Oprah Winfrey, Jackie
Robinson, Colin Powell, and others. Similarly, many Jews celebrate the achievements of members of their own community.

Whether they are loved or hated by the rest of the world, perhaps because of their achievement and influence on the world stage and in major corporations, Jews are continually being reminded of who they are. They see fellow Jews in the media and on the big screen, they are frequently queried by their Christian neighbors about their faith and heritage, and they are often pulled into discussions and debates about foreign policy issues relating to Israel and the Middle East. Their identity and their connection to the Tribe are often in the forefront of their minds (Pew, 2013).

It is within this paradoxical context that Jewish families live and perpetuate their traditions. The many factors presented above may effect, among other things, how closely Jews associate with the Jewish community, how they portray themselves in public, whether or not they marry a Jew, where they live, how many children they have, and where they send their children to school.

American Jewry and the Jewish Family

Jews in the United States are as diverse as the general population. Jewish contemporary life is complex, and this complexity is rooted in three thousand years of history and tradition, as well as a highly developed and refined legal and ethical system. “Jew” refers to both ethnicity and religion. The Jewish community includes both a highly secular and highly religious segment. Jews are considered to be both privileged and marginalized. Two well-known Jewish dictums demonstrate the complexities inherent among the Jewish people: “Where there are two Jews, there are three opinions;” “On what can two Jews agree? The only thing two Jews can agree on is how much a third Jew should give to charity” (Schlossberger & Hecker, 1998, p. 130).
The worldwide Jewish population as of 2010 was estimated by Pew (2012) to be 13.85 million, 0.2% of the world’s population. Pew researchers also estimated that the United States contained the largest population of Jews in the world at 5.69 million (41.1%), followed by Israel at 5.61 million (40.5%). Based on the most recent survey by Pew (2013), a large majority of Jews, even secular Jews, are proud to be Jewish and are Jewishly involved by, for example, attending local Jewish events, enrolling their kids in Hebrew school or Jewish day school, sending their kids to Jewish summer camps, participating in Jewish holiday activities and traditions, donating money to Israel or other Jewish causes, or completing adult education courses in Hebrew or Judaic studies (Pew, 2013). However, although the American Jewish community seems to be strong and vibrant, some Jewish leaders and social scientists are less optimistic about the future of American Jewry (Dershowitz, 1997). Research has shown that the American Jewish community is facing difficult challenges including low marriage rates, high intermarriage rates, low birthrates, and low fertility rates.

The percentage of Jews who are married has dropped from 60% in 2000 to 51% in 2013 (Pew, 2013), a percentage that mirrors the general U.S. population. Survey research reveals that the age at first marriage for Jews is higher than the national average, which is 28 for men and 26 for women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Further, the percentage of unmarried Jews at age 35, 52% of men and 36% of women, is also higher than the U.S. population, which is 41% and 30%, respectively (Ukeles, Miller, & Beck, 2006).

The most difficult challenge in the American Jewish community of the last several decades, particularly relating to the family, is arguably intermarriage. Of those Jews who married before 1970, only 17% married a non-Jew. The percentage of those who marry a non-Jew has more than quadrupled (58%) among those who were married between 2000 and 2013 (Pew,
2013). Even Jews by religion (as opposed to secular Jews) who married since 2005 experience a nearly 50% intermarriage rate (Pew, 2013). In contrast to other religious minorities in the U.S., 87% of Mormons (Pew, 2012a) and 84% of Muslims (Pew, 2011a) are married to a person of the same religion. Moreover, it has been estimated that roughly 50% of Jewish young adults were born into an intermarried household (Ukeles, Miller, & Beck, 2006). Research has shown that roughly 75% of Jews raised in an intermarried household marry non-Jews, compared to 28% who were raised in households with two Jewish parents (Fishman, 2004). Further, Phillips (1997) estimated that 98% of children with two Jewish parents are raised Jewish, while only 39% of children in intermarried households are raised Jewish.

In addition to the low marriage rate and high intermarriage rate, the Jewish population in the U.S. experiences a net loss every decade. Jewish adults age 40-59 report an average of 1.9 children (Pew, 2013). This number would probably be as low as 1.6 children per Jewish female adult without the Orthodox Jewish community who report an average of 4.1 children per female adult. In comparison, the general U.S. population of adults ages 40-59 average 2.2 children per adult. Moreover, Jewish adults who are married to a Jew report an average of 2.8 children, compared to 1.8 children for intermarried Jewish adults (Pew, 2013).

Two remaining factors that heavily influence family life, education and socioeconomic status, are worth briefly mentioning here. On average, Jews are far more educated than the general U.S. population. Nearly 60% of Jewish adults are college graduates and 28% have a graduate degree, nearly double and triple the national averages, respectively (Pew, 2013). As an aside, the percentage of students who are Jews at Ivy League institutions is roughly ten times higher than Jewish representation in the general population (Cantor, 1994). The percentages are similar regarding socioeconomic status. Over 40% of Jewish households earn more than
$100,000 per year. Twenty-five percent of Jewish households earn over $150,000 per year compared with 8% of the U.S. general population (Pew, 2013).

Jews are a highly-influential cultural and religious minority that experience many complexities and paradoxes that impact individuals and families. Their high levels of achievement and history of oppression, and their difficult challenges of low marriage rates, high intermarriage rates, low birthrates, and low fertility rates make them an ideal population to explore (Hatch & Marks, 2014). Moreover, numerous cultural and religious traditions are performed either with the family or in the home (Kaufman, 1996). In other words, “Judaism ‘happens’ at home” (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 8).
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the past thirty years, and especially since September 11, 2001, religion has become an increasingly popular topic in the social sciences. Researchers largely ignored religion vis-à-vis the family in the early decades of the twentieth century. In the 1980s, religion received more attention among family researchers; however, the “interface” between family and religion was typically conceptualized and examined distally (Mahoney et al., 1999, p. 322). Mahoney and colleagues (1999) petitioned scholars to shift to proximal concepts and measures when studying religious families. This call for specificity was warranted, as religiosity was too often measured by a single item—usually religious attendance or self-rated religiosity. In addition to this suggestion by Mahoney et al. (1999), Marks and Dollahite, (Marks, 2004; Marks & Dollahite, 2011) have also recommended that researchers examine the processes and meanings—the whys and hows—of the religion-family interface. In this spirit, Dollahite and Marks (2005, 2009) developed a framework for studying family life in a religious context that is based on three key conceptualizations of religion: religious community, religious beliefs, and religious practices. Religious community refers to the support and relationships rooted in one’s faith-based community. Religious belief includes any belief or perspective that is faith-based. A religious practice is an outward expression of a fundamental belief—for example, prayer or scripture study—or any other act, observance, or abstinence that is influenced by religious belief or culture. Other examples may include attending educational courses relevant to one’s tradition or serving in the community.

The conceptual framework of religion consisting of community, beliefs, and practices by Dollahite and Marks (2005, 2009) may also be applied to various ethnic groups and non-
religious groups, in this case, secular Jews, who may be involved in the Jewish community and may observe certain Jewish traditions even though they do not identify as “religious.”

In the subsequent sections, general empirical literature on community, beliefs, and practices vis-à-vis the family, followed by research focusing specifically on the American Jewish family, is presented.

**Cultural / Religious Community and the Family**

Numerous studies in the last thirty-five years have examined the relationship between religious community involvement and married couple outcomes. A meta-analysis (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001) of more than a dozen studies published in the 1980s and 1990s revealed that higher frequency of religious service attendance is associated with a lower divorce rate. Mahoney et al. (2001) reported that according to Rosenthal’s fail-safe index (Rosenthal, 1979), over 2,600 “contrary effects would be needed to nullify this finding” (p. 566). That religious community involvement is a significant predictor of divorce, particularly among denominationally homogamous couples, is supported by more recent studies, including three longitudinal examinations (Brown, Orbuch, & Bauermeister, 2008; Vaaler, Ellison, & Powers, 2009; Woods & Emery, 2002).

In addition to research on religious community involvement and divorce, multiple studies have found a significant positive relationship between religious community involvement and marital satisfaction (Call & Heaton, 1997; Glenn, 1982; Myers, 2006), marital adjustment (Schramm, Marshall, Harris, & Lee, 2012), and marital commitment (Olson, Goddard, & Marshall, 2013). One study, however, that moved beyond the superficial variable of frequency of religious attendance (Olson, Goddard, & Marshall, 2013), using a random sample of 1,204 young married participants, revealed that worship service attendance was not positively associated with
marital commitment. Rather, perceived support from the community, as well as the specific beliefs associated with the community, are positively related to marital commitment, suggesting that community support may be a better predictor of marital outcomes than simply attending religious services.

Surveys show that religious couples are not only more likely to have a child than non-religious couples, but they also have more children on average than non-religious couples (Abma & Martinez, 2006; Mosher, Williams, & Johnson, 1992; Pearce, 2002). A large study of over 4,000 middle-aged women (Abma & Martinez, 2006) concluded that those who were voluntarily childless were less religious and significantly less likely to attend a religious service than those who chose to have children, a trend that has remained true since its earliest examination in 1982 (Mosher & Bachrach, 1982).

Numerous studies from 1980 to the present have examined the influences of religion on parenting styles and parent-child relationships. Most of these studies included religious community involvement as an independent or predictor variable. Key findings from the 1980s and 1990s relevant to this study include the following: 1) more community involvement of parents was related to stronger emphasis on child obedience, as well as child autonomy (Alwin, 1986); 2) mothers who regularly attended religious services, tested at multiple points across the life course of their children, reported significantly higher relationship quality with their children than those mothers who rarely attended religious services (Pearce & Axinn, 1998); 3) social support from a religious community, for 200 participants in 20 U.S. religions, was a stronger predictor of family relationship satisfaction than a belief in divine intervention (Abbott, Berry, & Meredith, 1990).
Since the 1990s, several studies have supported and expanded the aforementioned findings. Regarding parental involvement, multiple examinations have found that regular religious community involvement of the parents was positively associated with time investment with children (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000; Dumas & Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006; King, 2003; Petts, 2007; Wilcox, 2002). An analysis of longitudinal data from a national survey (Wilcox, 2002) revealed that fathers who were involved in their religious community were more likely to engage in one-on-one activities with their children and participate in family meals. In a large study of over 3,100 fathers, Petts (2007) found that first-time fathers who frequently attended religious community events reported more engagement with their young children. Research by Smith (2003a; 2003b) also found that parents who frequently attended religious community events reported more supervision, including regarding social networks, of their adolescent offspring.

The research presented above primarily deals with parental outcomes (e.g., parenting attitudes, parenting styles, and involvement with children); however, an abundance of research has investigated the wellbeing of children from religiously involved families. One intriguing qualitative study (Ecklund & Lee, 2011) highlighted the salience of involvement in a religious community for child wellbeing. In this study, the researchers interviewed 166 atheist and agnostic scientists at elite U.S. universities. The objective of the study was to identify reasons why non-religious parents, particularly those who have no strong belief in a deity, chose to immerse their children in a religiously-based community. Two of the major themes include: 1) parents desired that their children benefit from resources that religious communities are capable of providing: larger social network, social development, and social support; and 2) parents desired that their children be part of a moral community.
A rigorous regression analysis of nationally representative data of more than 15,000 young children (Bartkowski, Xu, & Levin, 2008) revealed that frequent attendance at religious community events of parents significantly predicted higher self-control (ratings from parents and teachers), higher social interaction (ratings from parents and teachers), higher interpersonal skills (teacher’s ratings), lower internalizing behavior problems (teacher’s ratings), lower impulsiveness (parent’s ratings), lower externalizing problem behaviors (teacher’s ratings), and higher learning skills (ratings from parent and teachers). A majority of these measures were significant at the .01 or .001 level, while numerous factors for which were controlled (e.g., race, gender, family structure, family size, household income, parent’s education).

Another longitudinal study of over 600 African American adolescents (Landor, Simons, Simons, Brody, & Gibbons, 2011) reported that parental involvement in the religious community was inversely related to adolescent risky sexual behavior (viz., early sexual debut, multiple sex partners, and unprotected sex), results that are congruous with two recent studies by Laird and colleagues (Laird, Marks, & Marrero, 2011; Laird, Marrero, & Marks, 2010). The Landor et al. (2011) study also found a positive correlation between parental religious attendance and authoritative parenting (see also Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999; Hardy, White, Zhang, & Ruchty, 2011; Wilcox, 1998).

**Cultural / Religious Beliefs and the Family**

A large body of research in the past two decades has shown a strong association between the belief that marriage is a sacred union endorsed by God and higher marital satisfaction (Lichter & Carmalt, 2009; Mahoney et al., 1999; Stafford, David, & McPherson, 2014). More specifically, this belief is associated with less inequity in the marriage, more gratitude to deity, greater peace, and positive spiritual coping (DeMaris, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2010; Mahoney,
Pargament, & DeMaris, 2009). Qualitative studies have supported many of these findings. For example, a study of twenty-four Latter-day Saint couples (Goodman, Dollahite, & Marks, 2012) reported that not only did they believe that their marriage was sanctioned by God, but that God assists them in staying committed to each other and resolving conflicts. Couples mentioned that based on these beliefs, they were happier, experienced less conflict, and had a clear understanding of the purpose of marriage. Another qualitative study on a minority population (Lu, Marks, & Baumgartner, 2011) reported that a belief in God was salient for their marriage. These twenty Chinese Christian immigrant families, many of whom transitioned from Atheism to theism, stated that a belief in God provided for them a deeper sense of meaning in their lives and marriages. Many reported that even during times of stress, they generally felt joyful and peaceful.

A third qualitative study on a minority population (Marks, Tanner, Nesteruk, Chaney, & Baumgartner, 2012), in this case, African American couples (N = 30) throughout nine states, reported that spiritual beliefs was a salient part of their lives. Multiple themes in the data highlighted the following: 1) God is a loving being who rewards those who reciprocate that love; 2) God is a source of strength during hard times; 3) marriage and family is ordained of God. These beliefs, as discussed in other studies, were linked with greater couple and family functioning. Additional recent qualitative studies of large samples of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim couples reached similar conclusions (Burr, Marks, & Day, 2012; Dollahite, Hawkins, & Parr, 2012; Goodman & Dollahite, 2006; Goodman, Dollahite, Marks, & Layton, 2013).

Research on the links between spiritual beliefs and family life has focused on parenting styles, parent-child relationships, and religious intergenerational transmission. One regression analysis (Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999) of 486 middle-class, mostly Caucasian families
concluded that religiosity—measured here with 11 items primarily about salience of religion and religious beliefs—was associated positively with authoritative parenting for both mothers and fathers. Religiosity was associated negatively with authoritarian parenting for mothers, but unrelated to paternal authoritarian parenting. Two smaller community sample studies (Murray-Swank, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2006; Volling, Mahoney, & Rauer, 2009) reported that higher sanctification of parenting was associated with more frequent praising children and less spanking.

In addition to parenting styles, religion may also influence the quality of parent-child relationships. Brelsford (2013) found in an analysis of 155 parent-child dyads that emerging adults who perceived their relationship with their parents as sacred, or having sacred qualities, reported greater relationship quality. A few studies from the late 1990s found that homogamy of spiritual beliefs of mothers and children (Miller, Warner, Wickramaratne, & Weissman, 1997) and positive mother-child relationships (Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Conger, 1999) were associated with less depression and greater intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs.

The latter outcome, transmission of religious beliefs, has also received attention in the last five years. A study of 486 mostly Caucasian emerging adults (Power & McKinney, 2013) concluded that perceptions of high parental religiosity—defined by religious salience, beliefs about the nature of God, and beliefs about God’s role in their lives—of emerging adult offspring related to higher levels of emerging adult religiosity and psychological adjustment. In addition, perceived positive parenting practices among emerging adults were related to both emerging adult religiosity and psychological adjustment. Finally, emerging adult religiosity was associated with higher levels of psychological adjustment. These findings were supported by prior research.
Another study (Desrosiers, Kelley, & Miller, 2011) of 615 youth and emerging adults from multiple ethnic and religious backgrounds also found that mothers are highly influential in the process of adolescent relational spirituality development. *Relational spirituality* was defined as the belief that one has a personal relationship with God who protects and rewards. Specifically, mother-child dialogue and openness about spiritual questions related positively to adolescent spiritual development independent of the level of warmth in the mother-child relationship. In contrast, warmth and affection from fathers seem to be more influential than dialogue and religious conversation in the development of relational spirituality. These findings suggest that parental relationships and support do play a significant active role in adolescent spirituality, as well as religious identity formation and transmission of religion. In light of these several studies, consider the conclusion of Horwath, Lees, and Sidebotham (2012) that perceived religious views of grandparents and parents seemed to have greater influence on teenagers' attitudes about life and religion, than the views of faith leaders. This finding highlights the salient influence of parental and familial religious beliefs on religious identity and spiritual development of their offspring.

**Cultural / Religious Practices and the Family**

Social science research on religion and family life has identified positive correlations between participating in religious rituals and marital quality, especially when those practices are shared among family members (Lu, Marks, & Apavaloiae, 2012). Shared religious practice appears to help couples prevent and resolve marital conflict (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006). Fiese and Tomcho (2001) found that higher marital satisfaction was related to participation in religious
holiday rituals. They reported that husbands’ satisfaction was more closely associated with the meanings behind the rituals, while wives’ satisfaction was associated more with the routine practices and traditions. Research by Rossano (2012) revealed that family routines and rituals not only bind family members to each other emotionally, but that they are the primary mechanisms for transmitting social norms from parents to offspring. The same holds true for the transmission of cultural or religious values and traditions.

A regression analysis of 2,400 adults, with an oversampling of African Americans and Latinos (Ellison, Burdette, & Wilcox, 2010) found that couples who frequently engaged in religious activities in the home reported greater relationship satisfaction. This same study found that religious homogamy is a weaker predictor of relationship quality than shared religious activities. Moreover, younger couples seem to be less affected by religious affiliation than are older couples. This revelation is consistent with other studies showing that religious service attendance is a weak predictor of relationship satisfaction among emerging adults (Myers, 2006). This is not surprising, since an increasing number of emerging adults have an unfavorable view of organized religion and identify themselves as being spiritual but not religious (Myers 2006; Smith, 2009).

A small body of literature has examined the links between participation in family religious activities and family outcomes. While a few studies of this nature appeared in the 1980s, most of them seem to have been published in more recent years. According to Spagnola and Fiese (2007), meaningful family rituals, not necessarily religious, are associated with higher relationship satisfaction and strong family identity. This same study also identified several child outcomes including, better mental health, higher academic performance, and positive social skill development. A qualitative study of 224 individuals (Loser, Hill, Klein, & Dollahite, 2009) from
67 religious families found that regular engagement in family religious rituals—in addition to increasing family unity and improving relationships—fostered greater spiritual growth, refined the focus and perspective on life’s meaning, and improved personal behavior among all family members. A larger qualitative study (Marks, Dollahite, & Barker, 2012) of 445 individuals in 184 Christian, Jewish, Latter-day Saint, and Muslim families reported the following benefits of frequent participation in family religious activities: 1) facilitation of relaxation; 2) added structure to family life; 3) improved health benefits (both physical and mental); 3) improved parent-child communication (both direct and indirect); 4) improved quality of marriage relationships; 5) more clarity on life’s meaning; and 6) stronger relationship with deity.

Research has also indicated that shared religious rituals may be detrimental under certain circumstances to both parent-child relationships and the spiritual progression children and adolescents. An examination of 7,658 youth (Lee, Rice, & Gillespie, 1997) found that even though youth who regularly participated with family in religious activities had a more active belief in God and lower drug use, those whose parents required the participation of every family member in every phase of the worship activity every day experienced more materialism and more drug use. This finding, as the authors noted, may suggest a pattern of compulsive behavior. These researchers also found that if adolescents perceive the family worship experience to be compulsory or boring, they may come to resent the parents, the rituals themselves, and the religious doctrines and institution associated with those practices (Strahan, 1994).

Literature on home-centric faith activities has also focused on religious transmission from parents to offspring. Similar to the findings presented above in Horwath, Lees, and Sidebotham (2012), Dollahite and Marks (2005) found through qualitative inquiry that parents are highly influential in transmitting traditions, in this case religious traditions, to their offspring, both by
explicitly and implicitly conveying beliefs and practices to their children in the home. According to a one-year longitudinal study on emerging adults \( (N = 551) \), McNamara, Prenoveau, and Diehl (2013) reported that children who regularly participated in family religious activities were more likely to engage in frequent religious practices and maintain religious beliefs as emerging adults. Another study (Hardy, White, Zhang, & Ruchty, 2011) on emerging adults \( (N = 122) \) suggested that religious beliefs and practices may best be transmitted to the next generation via the family. Specifically, Hardy et al. (2011) concluded that the level of past religiousness—defined as the frequency of participation in family religious activities while in high school—corresponded strongly to current individual religiousness and spirituality; however, this was only the case among authoritative parenting families (see also Landor et al., 2011). A third, recently published study of 322 adolescents (Kim-Spoon, Longo, & McCullough, 2012) similarly found that parents’ religiousness (both organizational and personal) had significant positive associations with adolescent religiousness for both boys and girls. Results were even more significant for adolescents who reported higher parent-offspring attachment.

Research has shown that family conflict is heightened when offspring stray from their parents’ religion (Bromley, 1988; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2001, 2004; Sands & Roer-Strier, 2004; Stokes & Regnerus, 2009). Identity formation is a salient aspect of emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1959; Schwartz, 2001), and when offspring diverge from their parents’ faith practices and traditions, at least two phenomena may be implied: 1) emerging adults are in a state of identity crisis, which may have been caused by earlier familial or religious dysfunction; and 2) families may experience more conflict when offspring embrace a different religion, or abandon religion altogether. A study of Stokes and Regnerus (2009) is worth noting here. Their analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health revealed that parent-child
relationship quality decreases when parents value their religion more than their adolescent offspring value the religion, when parents and offspring differ on religious community involvement, or when parents and children embrace different religions. Surprising, however, is the finding that differing levels of community involvement, and even differing religious affiliation, is not associated with low parent-child relationship satisfaction as much as difference in the importance of religion. We turn now to social science research on American Jewish family life.

The Contemporary American Jewish Family

The field of Jewish Studies vis-à-vis the family as the unit of analysis is nascent and nebulous. Empirical research on highly involved Jewish families in the United States is especially scant, with a majority of studies focusing on individual outcomes and broad demographic issues related to intermarriage and assimilation. Below, empirical research on American Jewish families is presented.

Jewish community and the family. The few empirical studies in recent decades on the Jewish community vis-à-vis the family have focused on Orthodox Jews, and particularly on the role of embracing a new religious community. Most of these studies, however, primarily examined individuals and their decisions to become more observant (Danzger 1989; Davidman, 1991; Glanz and Harrison 1978). Jews who become Orthodox are referred to in Hebrew as Baalei Teshuvah (literally, “masters of return” or “masters of repentance”). Research has suggested that Baalei Teshuvah families tend to experience more stressors than do lifelong Orthodox families.

Sands (2009), upon conducting interviews ($N = 48$) and focus groups, discussed the realities facing Baalei Teshuvah families. Participants, while expressing a deep connection and
love to Judaism and the Jewish people, reported that they do not strongly identify with lifelong Orthodox Jews (non-returnees). They embraced an Orthodox Jewish community, for example, with a non-Orthodox upbringing and secular degrees. At times they felt inadequate when associating with lifelong Orthodox Jews because they are comparatively inferior in their cultural and linguistic knowledge. A few participants described lifelong Orthodox Jews as “uninspired” and “uninteresting” (p. 98). Participants also mentioned that not only do they feel uncomfortable in association with non-returnees, they also feel marginalized. Many Baalei Teshuvah, therefore, associate with, and even exclusively date (and marry), other Baalei Teshuvah. In addition to dealing with feelings of inferiority and marginalization, several participants admitted that some Baalei Teshuvah hide their status because they are embarrassed by the rigid, and at times extreme lifestyles that other Baalei Teshuvah adopt after becoming Orthodox. Participants described these kinds of Baalei Teshuvah as, “overboard,” “reactionary,” “too fervent,” “gung ho,” “intense,” and those who have become “black and white in their thinking” (p. 94). Interviewees also lamented that not only do they feel uncomfortable in association with lifelong Orthodox Jews, they no longer identify with the more secular community from whence they came. They are, as Tallen (2002) described, living in a borderland. Many Baalei Teshuvah are Orthodox Jews who feel like outsiders in their new community.

The information presented in Sands (2009) suggests that ideology and religious beliefs are not a major concern Baalei Teshuvah regarding their familial functionality; rather, the concern seems to center on identity and poor community integration. This is congruous with the literature on community integration that indicates that families who have high community integration experience, for instance, increased marital satisfaction (Booth, Edwards, & Johnson, 1991) and decreased child maltreatment (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1992).
That *Baalei Teshuvah* families have an increased risk of dysfunction is expected, given the information presented in Sands (2009). Subsequent studies have shown that Jewish families who become Orthodox may experience more familial dysfunction than do life-long Orthodox Jewish families. Schnall, Pelcovitz, and Fox (2013) found that *Baalei Teshuvah* reported that stressors—including financial problems, lack of communication, sexual incompatibility, lack of quality time together, religious differences, and child-rearing burdens—were significantly higher than among non-returnee couples. A few other studies, a large quantitative analysis of 1,632 Jewish parents (Kor, Mikulincer, & Pirutinsky, 2012) and a smaller quantitative analysis of 226 parents (Cahn, 2012), reported similar results.

Research also reveals that Jews who become Orthodox experience increased strain with their family of origin, especially parents, which only increases the burden already placed upon them by poor community integration. *Baalei Teshuvah*, for example, may be reluctant to attend events at their parents’ home on holidays and Shabbat out of concern for the violation of kosher (dietary) and Shabbat laws (Danzger, 1989; Kaufman, 1991). Consequently, parents, who do not share the same level of appreciation and understanding of Jewish law as their child, may experience feelings of rejection (Danzger, 1989; Davidman, 1991). It must be noted, however, that qualitative data of Roer-Strier and Sands (2004), found that, although relationship strain between *Baalei Teshuvah* \( n = 35 \) and their parents \( n = 29 \) is inevitable, parents became more understanding and supportive of their child (daughters in these studies) and that relationship strain seems to diminish over time.

In addition to reporting that dysfunction occurs within the family after becoming Orthodox, studies also reported that emotional and social dysfunction occurred before becoming Orthodox, and that certain stressors may even lead to, or precipitate the process of seeking out a
new faith community. For example, Kaufman (1991) reported that before they became Orthodox, all 150 women she interviewed had become concerned for the “loss of boundaries” in family and sexual relationships in society (p. 8). Most participants commented on their poor heterosexual relationships, and a large majority (71%) identified with the drug and sex culture of the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to these generally dysfunctional lifestyles, abrupt changes in life—a loss of a family member to death or a ruptured romantic relationship, for example—often fostered a need to seek out a new religious-based community and ideology (Danzger 1989; Kaufman, 1991). Research conducted by Pirutinsky (2009) seems to be consistent with previous studies showing that dysfunction may precipitate the process of becoming more observant and embracing a new Jewish community. Individuals who joined or left an Orthodox group reported significantly higher levels of attachment insecurity than those who did not. Although consisting of a small, convenient sample ($N = 153$) these results are consistent with research produced by attachment and religion theorists (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004, 2008).

Researchers, in addition to examining familial outcomes in relation to community integration, have investigated individual and familial outcomes in relation to Jewish education. Although some scholars have argued that Jewish education correlates to Jewish identity in youth (Aron, Zeldin, & Lee, 2005), other studies have found that participation in Jewish day schools either: 1) does not significantly strengthen or impact Jewish identity in youth (Dashefsky & Lebson, 2002), or 2) is not the most important factor in the process of forming identity (Bock, 1977). Dashefsky and Lebson (2002), after analyzing numerous studies on Jewish education spanning a quarter of a century, concluded that no firm evidence exists of a causal relationship between participation in formal Jewish schooling and various measures of Jewish identity. A more recent multivariate examination (Hartman & Sheskin, 2012) of data from twenty-two
Jewish communities with a combined sample size of 19,800 Jewish households, found that various community characteristics have little relationship to Jewish identity.

Qualitative research suggests, however, that involvement in Jewish community educational activities, including Jewish day schools, Jewish education classes, and bar/bat mitzvah training curricula may heavily impact Jewish identity for all members of the family if all members participate together (Pomson & Schnoor, 2008; Shevitz & Koren, 2004). In an ethnographic study of multiple Jewish day schools, Pomson and Schnoor (2008) found that children’s schools may play an important role in identity of the parents, not just the children. Parents not only become frequently involved with their children’s Jewish education by helping them with homework or other school related projects, but they also concern themselves with the efficiency of the school and become more involved with the local Jewish community by interacting with teachers, administrators, and other parents. Jewish day schools, for many parents, have supplanted the synagogue as their primary point of engagement with the Jewish community (Pomson & Schnoor, 2008).

**Jewish beliefs / practices and the family.** Unlike Protestant Christianity that seems to be more theologically centered with emphasis placed more on beliefs and creeds than on observances, Judaism tends to be more legalistically centered and the focus appears to be placed on observing laws espoused in the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud. It is no surprise, then, that few empirical studies have examined the impact of specific Jewish beliefs on family relationships, or the role that family plays in perpetuating certain Jewish beliefs. A few such studies will be mentioned in this section, but most of them are relevant to Jewish practices.

Research has revealed that strong Jewish identity is inextricably connected to meaningful family-centered religious practice. Cohen and Eisen (2000), for example, stressed that ritual
behaviors were more meaningful for Jews in a conventional family context. Participants ($N = “almost” 50) rarely mentioned friends or extended family when asked about their Jewish involvement; they almost always mentioned close family members. In addition, religious observance seems to increase dramatically when children enter the home, and especially when they reach elementary-school age. Less-observant, single participants stated overwhelmingly that they will become more religiously observant once they are married and have children. That religious observance is an important part of family life in Judaism, even in the minds of less observant single adults, suggests the need for further investigation into the influence of Jewish practices on family relationships, as well as the role of family on the transmission of Jewish practices.

Two qualitative studies of 48 families (Davey, Fish, & Robila, 2001; Semans & Fish, 2000) researched the role of Jewish identity on family life. Both studies concluded that Judaism informs thought and action on a daily basis for families who identify strongly with Judaism. Parents stressed that Judaism provides their family with an ethical guideline and helps them transmit ethical and moral teachings to their children. One specific practice mentioned in both studies was that of negotiation and respectful debate between parents and teenagers. Families who strongly identify with Judaism were able to limit parent-child contention through a conscious practice of respectful negotiation. Judaism, as recognized by many of the participants, encourages debate, as the sacred texts are replete with scholars debating legal and religious issues. Parents seemed to welcome this practice in the home and commented that this style of communication helps the family decide which Jewish practices to observe and which practices to ignore. Another qualitative study (Ringel, 2007) on a smaller scale ($N = 13$) focused on Orthodox women. Every interviewee identified herself first in relation to her family (this
tendency included a medical doctor and a program director with a PhD). Participants considered the acts of bearing children, performing duties as a mother, and performing acts as a wife (including sexual activity), as spiritual practices. Participants also viewed the role as mothers and wives as a means toward self-actualization. One mother recognized the importance of a women-centered home when she stated that “because of us, our families run, we are called the mainstay of the Jewish home…without us they would fall apart” (p. 31). To further illustrate the importance and sensitivity of bearing children among observant Jewish women, consider that Ringel (2007) judged that the interviewees demonstrated the most emotion, defiance, and protectiveness when discussing the subject of children and appropriate family sizes, an issue they perceived as being negative to outsiders. As a prime example of the display of defensiveness, one mother related a story that the rabbi circulated throughout the entire Jewish community about the importance of having children without being ashamed:

An orthodox woman was walking in the supermarket with a cart full of food, diapers, etc. Another woman stopped her and said, “You have so much stuff, how many children do you have?” The Orthodox woman told her, “I have six children.” The other woman looked at her incredulously: “You have six children? How many more do you think you will have before it is all over with?” The Orthodox woman answered: “If I could, if it was possible, I would have not six, but six million children to replace all the Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust.” (p. 37)

Notice that this mother, when asked a question about her several children during the interview, chose to invoke a widespread story that references the Holocaust. The emotion behind these interviews reveals frustration that many Jewish mothers feel about outside perceptions of Orthodox Jewish fertility rates, which are relatively high compared to most other demographics in the U.S. (Anson & Meir, 2007; Tighe, Saxe, & Kadushin, 2011).

Several studies have analyzed the relationship between family size and psychological functioning of parents. The findings, however, are mixed. For example, large families compared
displayed higher levels of depression due to stress (Brown & Harris, 1978), higher blood pressure among mothers (Brisson et al., 1999), increased physical and/or psychological burden (Loewenthal et al., 1997), an increased risk of child abuse (Whipple, 2006), and higher levels of child misconduct (Bassarath, 2001). In contrast, other studies revealed no link between family size and parental depression (Calzeroni, Conte, Terzi, & Vita, 1989; Caserta, Lund, & Gray, 1987; Weissman et al., 1984), and one study (Calzeroni et al., 1989) even reported lower maternal suicide rates among large families. A few studies dealing with Jewish women either found no link between family size and parental depression (Loewenthal et al., 1995), or that women with large families had lower levels of depression compared to women with small families (Loewenthal & Goldblatt, 1993). These findings may suggest that, among religious Jewish women, having larger families might actually relate to higher levels of life satisfaction and stronger identity as a Jewish mother.

A few studies relevant to motherhood and Jewish beliefs are worth noting here. Interviews with Orthodox Jewish women who had recently given birth ($N = 30$) found that many of these Jewish mothers believe that children are a trust from God, and that parenthood is a sacred responsibility (Callister, Semenic, & Foster, 1999; see also Charnes & Moore, 1992; Semenic, Callister, & Feldman, 2004). This belief extends from the spiritual experience of giving birth, which fulfills Jewish law. Women in these studies reportedly feel empowered because they believed that God created women for the purpose of creating life. This sacred religious practice is a salient part of being a woman. The sanctification of parent-child relationships, as mentioned previously, is associated with more frequent praising of children and less spanking (Murray-Swank et al., 2006; Volling et al., 2009).
In another study on parenthood, Bjork and Lazar (2011) hypothesized that strong social support, maternal motivations shaped by faith, and religio-cultural norms of having large families contribute to positive functioning among religious Jewish women. Their examination of data gathered from Jewish women with six or more children (N = 79) revealed that those who reported faith-focused motivation for having large families had higher levels of psychological functioning, life satisfaction, and perceived health than women who reported self-focused motivation for having large families. As the researchers mention, these findings are not surprising given that research seems to show that those who practice religion for ideological reasons and who are intrinsically motivated by faith, generally experience higher levels of functioning and report a greater sense of meaning in life than people who are extrinsically motivated to practice religion (Koenig 1995; Maltby & Day 2000; Park, Murgatroyd, Raynock, & Spillet, 1998). Thus, is it anticipated that Jewish women with several children who reported intrinsic motivation in practicing religion will generally have higher levels of psychological functioning.

Although larger family sizes may relate to positive outcomes for observant and faith-focused Jewish parents, some research studies suggest that large Jewish families are at risk for high levels of stress due to increased financial burden. Schnall, Pelcovitz, and Fox (2013) showed that Orthodox Jewish couples, overall, report that financial issues are atop the list of major stressors. Although financial problems are also a major issue for the general population, it may be the case that a highly religious and traditional Jewish lifestyle may contribute to the financial burden. Many Orthodox Jews, for example, place their children in private Jewish schools that have high tuition costs (Snyder, 2011). In addition to home-related expenses, including the elevated prices of kosher food, Orthodox Jews—who refrain from driving a car on
Shabbat—pay relatively high real estate costs in order to live within walking distance of an Orthodox synagogue (Loewenthal & Rogers, 2004; Schnall, Pelcovitz, & Fox, 2013; see also Marks, Dollahite, & Baumgartner, 2010; Marks, Dollahite, & Dew, 2009).

A growing body of research has investigated various types of domestic abuse and how Jewish beliefs or practices may either escalate abuse and conflict, or act as a moderator for abuse and conflict. Many of these studies, however, are non-empirical and simply offer suggestions on why domestic abuse seems to exist at higher rates in the Orthodox Jewish community and how Jewish leaders and clinicians can help families reduce or avoid domestic abuse (Cwik, 1995; Graetz, 2005; Grodner & Sweifach, 2004; Lebovics, 1998). One empirical examination (Cares & Cusick, 2012) of a non-representative sample of 76 Jewish women—88% experiencing multiple forms of abuse—reported that 70% stated that abuse from their partner was linked with Jewish factors. A close inspection of this study, however, reveals that while conflicts may arise among couples concerning aspects of their Jewish lives, little evidence suggest in this study that particular Jewish beliefs or practices inherently foster spousal abuse. The more probable causes of abuse seem to be a lack of cultural and religious homogamy in the couple’s relationship. For example, differing views on kosher observance, Jewish day school, Jewish legal injunctions regarding sexuality (niddah), or Jewish affiliation preferences seemed to heighten stress and lead to conflict. Another small (N = 19) qualitative study (Ringel & Bina, 2007) identified possible catalysts of abuse and tension that may be unique to the Jewish community. Only one suggestion from participants seems to fit the criterion of a Jewish belief or practice: gender separation starting at an early age, which may result in limited experience with members of the opposite sex. This practice, however, is only relevant to Orthodox Jewish communities. The study by Cares and Cusick (2012) also found that Jewish community resources seem to help in significant
ways to avoid conflict, reduce conflict, or assist women who have previously been abused by
their partners.

**The Future of Research on Contemporary Jewry**

Based on trends in the last several decades of high intermarriage rates, low birth rates,
and assimilation in the Jewish community, many prognosticators have warned that American
Jewry is on the verge of extinction (Dershowitz, 1997). One Jewish scholar, for instance, wrote:

> Saving an unforeseen reversal of current trends, it appears from present perspective that
> the history of the Jews as we have known it…is probably approaching the end…. Distinctive Jewish identity is running out as the largest, most affluent and vibrant Jewish community in the United States is demographically disappearing…. What the Holocaust began physically will in the twenty-first century be accomplished culturally” (Cantor, 1994, p. 425, 434, 437).

Jewish commentators, leaders, and scholars have been concerned with the survival of the
Jewish people, and perhaps thousands of articles, blogs, and books have been written discussing
this theme (Goldscheider, 2004). In order for the Jewish community to properly address the
serious problem of the survival of American Jewry, and how the Jewish community might
combat cultural extinction, they must rely on more research than demographic trends on
assimilation and intermarriage (Goldscheider, 2002, 2004). As noted above, much of the
empirical research on contemporary American Jewry focuses on assimilation and intermarriage.
Few studies have explored the family in depth. Prominent scholars have recognized this glaring
gap in the research and have petitioned other social scientists to begin studying the family

Cohen and Eisen (2000) suggested that younger generations of Jews seem to be honoring
their heritage and observing their religion in the home, with family. Jewish young adults, similar
to young adults in general (Smith, 2009), appear to be moving away from the “organizations,
institutions, and causes that used to anchor identity and shape behavior” for previous generations.
(Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 2). Goldscheider (2004) similarly acknowledged that Jews have become “less attached to religious activities and institutions” (p. 100). The family seems to be filling the vacuum. He argued that Judaism is not in decline like many have suggested, but that Judaism is in transition, or transformation. This transformation has consisted of a movement away from communal institutions to the family, although in conjunction with communal institutions, and that the family has become “a central feature of Jewish continuity” (p. 127). Cohen (1999) also argued that Jewish identity has undertaken salient transformations. He explained how Jewish cultural identities have transitioned through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from collective-based identity to individual-based identity (Cohen 1999; Cohen & Eisen, 2000; see also Horowitz 1998). Jews in North America, he argued, now feel free to appropriate and incorporate into their individual lives only those aspects of Jewish culture and religion that are personally meaningful, which tend to be more relevant to the family and the home (Cohen & Eisen, 2000).

Some researchers, as mentioned above, have found that the Jewish community, including Jewish day school participation, has only a weak relationship to Jewish identity (Bock, 1977; Dashefsky & Lebson, 2002; Hartman & Sheskin, 2012; Rosenman, 1984). Over thirty years ago, Rosenman (1984), after discussing the bleak reality that Jewish education has contributed very little in forming identity and transmitting Jewishness to young Jews stated at the Annual Meeting of the Conference of Jewish Communal Service: “We should be telling parents that maintaining and transmitting Jewishness is largely a family responsibility” (p. 192). In the closing pages of his book, *Studying the Jewish Future*, one of the most notable sociologists of world Jewry (Cohen, 2012), Calvin Goldscheider (2004), wrote the following:

> While family values and cohesion are central to the understanding of contemporary Jewish communities, few sociological studies have had a family focus…. When we focus
on family, we tend to measure only group processes of fertility and family structure, yet we have argued theoretically for the power of networks as a basis for continuity among ethnic populations. We need to refocus on the future of family networks.…

How do we conceptualize the Jewish family? Too often we start (and end) with indicators of family deterioration. We need to study how Jewish families strengthen their communities… Family patterns in turn need to be related to institutional structures, synagogues, and Jewish organizations and to be linked to what is happening in Jewish homes.

The key and most powerful finding of sociologists’ research is the importance of examining the quality of Jewish life… We should be focusing on community. We should be focusing on families. Why are we diverting our energies from these grand questions about Judaism and the Jewishness to obsess about biology [i.e., the common question in the Jewish community of “who is a Jew?”]. (p. 134-137, emphasis added)

In addition to arguing that the future of social science research on the Jewish community must concern the family, notable scholars have also opined on preferred methods for executing this research. Brodbar-Nemzer wrote in 1988 that the field of contemporary Jewish studies has been waiting for an “in-depth qualitative observational study of the American Jewish family” (p. 68). He also commented that the few studies that have been conducted on the American Jewish family have lacked theoretical or conceptual foundations. Much of the research on Jewish families relies on large Jewish population surveys or census data. Understanding Jewish family processes, argued Brodbar-Nemzer (1988), “requires in-depth, largely qualitative approaches” (p. 72). Over 25 years later, we are still waiting for an in-depth, qualitative examination on the American Jewish family.

Goldscheider (2002, 2004) also observed that research on contemporary Jewry must not only concern the family, but must be executed with more rigorous methods and with more depth. Social scientists have paid lip service to the importance of studying families, but fail to do so. They often examine superficial factors of the family, or examine individual outcomes and then claim that they have studied families. Goldscheider has acknowledged that a serious focus on Jewish families “has been conspicuously absent from our research agenda” (2002, p. 207). “The
top item on our research agenda for the next decade,” he continued, “should be the systematic study of family relationships” (2002, p. 208). That much of the quantitative studies on the Jewish population are deeply flawed, according to Goldscheider (2004), is also problematic. Like Brodbar-Nemzer (1988), Goldscheider (2002, 2004) petitioned researchers to employ qualitative methods to examine the processes, meanings, and roles of Jewish families. This new research focus must include, not just cultural variables, but also variables of religion including “values,” “activities,” “institutions,” “organizations,” and “ideologies” (Goldscheider, 2002, p. 210)—precisely the conceptual framework (viz., community, beliefs, and practices) that Dollahite and Marks (2005, 2009) proposed for studying religious families in general.

Steven Cohen, another leading sociologist of American Jewry, argued that new research questions and methods are required for studying the Jewish population. He suggested that this new approach must involve individuals and families using qualitative methods: “Quantitative methods alone cannot grasp the ways in which contemporary American Jews follow and depart from the attitudes, behaviors, and conflicts that they witnessed as children” (Cohen & Eisen, 2000, p. 3). Cohen and Eisen (2000) subsequently stressed the importance of studying contemporary American religion, and especially contemporary American Jewry, using “first-person narration” (p. 3; see also Mahoney, 2010).

Summary of Literature Review

Religion in relation to individual and familial well-being has received a significant amount of attention in the past twenty years, and especially since September 11, 2001. Mahoney and colleagues (1999; Mahoney, 2010) have petitioned scholars to shift from “distal” to “proximal” concepts and measures when studying religious families. It is not enough to continue examining superficial variables, like frequency of religious attendance. Several researchers,
including Marks and Dollahite, (Marks, 2004; Marks & Dollahite, 2011) have attempted to respond to these petitions, and have themselves challenged researchers to examine the processes and meanings of the religion-family interface. Dollahite and Marks (2005, 2009) have also proposed, and implemented in their research, a conceptual framework for studying religious families that involves examining specific community variables, beliefs, and practices relevant to religious families.

Research on Jewish families is especially scant. Many of the studies presented previously in this chapter on Jewish families examined individual outcomes because very few studies have been conducted that examine relational outcomes. Perhaps most academic publications on Jewish families focus on broad demographic trends relating to intermarriage or assimilation, or are non-empirical pieces intended to help clinicians understand Jewish culture (Dorff, 2005; Meyerstein, 2004; Mindel, Farber, & Lazerwitz, 2012; Rockman, 1994; Schlossberger & Hecker, 1998; Wieselberg, 1992). Many of these types of publications have stereotyped Jewish families and have contributed little to empirical knowledge of family relationships (Brodbar-Nemzer, 1988; Goldscheider, 2002), the influence of Jewish practice and beliefs on the family, or the role of family on Jewish involvement and perpetuation of Jewish traditions. Several empirical studies have focused, for example, solely on Orthodox Jewish women (Danzger, 1989; Davidman, 1991; Friedfertig & Schapiro, 1981; Kaufman, 1991) or Jewish Israeli families (Feldman, Masalha, & Nadam, 2001; Lazar & Bjorck, 2008; Shoham, 2014), but few have examined American Jewish families. Research on Jewish Israeli families may help inform examinations of American Jewish families; however, the implications of these findings may be limited because the two communities are quite different. American Jews are a small minority in a large country that generally accepts them, whereas Israeli Jews are a large majority in a small country in a region of
few allies. The cultural and religious foundations of these two communities may be similar in some aspects, but the dynamics of daily life and primary concerns of these two communities may be quite different and, therefore, must be researched independently of one another.

In this study, I attempt to fill the repeatedly identified gap in the research and to answer the petitions of the three notable Jewish scholars mentioned previously by examining the American Jewish family; by investigating the meanings and processes of family relationships and the role of the family in Jewish observance; by utilizing the conceptual framework of Dollahite and Marks (2005, 2009) that considers community factors, beliefs, and practices; and finally, by employing in-depth, qualitative methods. A discussion regarding this last point is the topic of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3. METHOD

As previously discussed, research on Jewish families, as well as on families of most other religious traditions, has been mostly demographic and quantitative. Qualitative research in the last fifteen years or so has increased, but largely due to two scholars, Dollahite and Marks, the directors of the American Families of Faith project, which has yielded about fifty such studies.\(^1\)

Regarding the Jewish community, no in-depth qualitative study appears to have specifically examined the meanings and processes of highly involved Jewish families in relation to their unique beliefs and practices. This study employs qualitative methods in an attempt to examine, in a Jewish context, “the processes by which families create, sustain, and discuss their own family realities” (Daly, 1992, p. 4).

Sample

The goal of qualitative research is to examine basic, often global, properties of understudied or “poorly understood” phenomena, usually through deep, rich descriptions (Anastas, 1999, p. 25). Qualitative researchers typically do not seek for generalizability, but rather to use a “strategy whose goal is utility rather than certainty” (Pieper, 1989, p. 11). Qualitative sampling methods are often different from quantitative sampling methods. A quantitative researcher usually seeks to identify trends, and to generalize for statistical representativeness through findings from the sample to the population. Therefore, the sample, ideally, consists of a representative, or generalizable group and the primary concern rests with central tendencies in the data (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). In contrast, the qualitative researcher usually seeks to

\(^1\) See, for example, Alghafli, Hatch, & Marks, 2014; Batson & Marks, 2008; Burr et al., 2012; Chaney, Marks, Sasser, & Hopkins, 2010; Dollahite & Marks, 2005, 2009; Goodman, Dollahite, & Marks, in press; Goodman, Dollahite, Marks, & Layton, 2013; Laird, Marks, & Marrero, 2011; Lu, Marks, & Apavaloiae, 2012; Lu, Marks, & Baumgartner, 2011; Marks, 2004, 2005; Marks & Chaney, 2007; Marks & Dollahite, 2007, 2011, forthcoming; Marks, Dollahite, & Barker, 2012; Marks, Dollahite, & Baumgartner, 2010; Marks, Dollahite, & Dew, 2009; Marks & Palkovitz, 2007; Marks, Swanson, Nesteruk, & Hopkins-Williams, 2005; Nesteruk & Marks, 2011.
generalize for social representativeness (Daly, 2007). The qualitative researcher, ideally, mines the field and carefully selects participants to interview or observe. Subsequently, the researcher drills down deep to gather thick and rich narrative data to help examine and explain the nature, the meanings, and the processes of a particular phenomenon. Qualitative samples, therefore, tend to be purposive and often consist of participants who are prototypical (Boss, 1980), most effective (LeComte & Preissle, 1993), or negative, meaning that they tend not to fit typical concepts or theoretical ideas (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Relating to this concept, well-known American psychologist, William James (1902), suggested that in order to learn the most about a particular thing, “we must view it under a microscope, as it were, or in its most exaggerated form.” This is especially true of “religious phenomena” (p. 39).

For this study, the most effective participants are likely those who are highly involved Jewish families. In referring to “highly involved Jewish families,” the concern was not with interviewing and analyzing data from participants of a specific branch of Judaism (e.g., Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform), as much as it was with interviewing couples and families who strongly identify with Judaism and the Jewish people, and who are active participants in their form of Judaism. The prototypical and purposive sample for this study is described next.

Nearly one-thousand pages of narrative data was collected from thirty Jewish families (N=76 individuals—including husbands, wives, and offspring). The sample includes families residing in five regions (seven states): New England (MA); Mid-Atlantic (DE & NJ); Pacific (CA); Intermountain West (UT); and Gulf Coast (FL & LA). Families in the sample identified as Orthodox (9), Conservative (5), Reform (14), and unspecified but non-Orthodox (2). The majority of both husbands and wives held graduate degrees. Husbands’ ages ranged from 32 to 58 (mean age = 48), wives’ ages ranged from 35 to 59 (mean age = 46), and ages of offspring
who participated in the interviews ranged from 10 to 20 (mean age = 16). The wide age range of the participants allows for examination of multiple Jewish factors at various stages of life (Elder, 1998; Hareven, 1996). In addition, the sample allows for examination of both marital and parent-child relationships.

Ideal participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) the husband and wife self-identified as Jewish and they had offspring and 2) either the rabbi of the family’s congregation identified them as a “highly involved” family, or the couple identified themselves as being “highly involved” in the Jewish community (Marks, 2004). This involvement did not necessarily refer to frequency of synagogue attendance, but may have also referred to, for example, frequency of observing Jewish rituals in the home, attendance at Jewish education classes, participation of children in Jewish day school or Jewish summer camp, or involvement in the board of directors at the local synagogue or Jewish Community Center.

Participants were located by convenience sampling techniques, either through clergy referrals, or through acquaintances of the researcher. Participants were subsequently contacted by phone or email and invited to participate. This sample is not generalizable, but the findings may provide some useful insights, not only for some types of Jewish families, but also for families of other ethnic and religious backgrounds.

**Design and Procedures**

This study is conducted on the foundation of grounded theory. The atheoretical approach to data analysis, consistent with the grounded theory method, allows for identification of core themes and concepts that are used for the building of conceptual models and theories—especially micro-theory or mid-level theory—as opposed to the testing of theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
Interviews were conducted after obtaining from each participant: 1) the Informed Consent (Appendix A) and 2) the Demographic Summary (Appendix B). Interview questions were also sent to the participants before the interview date. Data collection was based on semi-structured, open-ended interview questions (Appendix C). The questions were relevant to the family in relation to Judaism. More specifically, questions were formulated to gather data on factors relating to the Jewish community, Jewish beliefs, and Jewish practices that may influence family life.

Interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes and they varied in length between one to four hours. Husbands and wives were interviewed at the same time; however, husbands and wives each provided answers to every question, alternating the first response. Marks et al. (2008) suggested that interviewing husbands and wives jointly “provide[s] a rich context for learning about marriage, marital interaction, and marital processes” and also provides the researcher “with a front row seat as couples co-created meaning through narratives” (p. 175). Lambert and Dollahite (2006) articulated that joint interviews provide rich narratives and also create an atmosphere where couples may correct each other. Since many people tend to exaggerate and inflate their lived experience in relation to religion (Hadaway, Marler, & Chaves, 1993; Marks, Dollahite, & Freeman, 2011), the technique of interviewing family members together may ensure more accurate and reliable data regarding the processes and meanings of religious and cultural experience in the home. Many interviews also included offspring, which was not a mandatory criterion, but rather an invitation if desired by the family.

The narrative approach to interviewing allows for the interviewer to encourage participants, through follow-up questions, to provide more detailed information regarding the meanings and processes of particular beliefs and practices (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993). If, for
example, the interviewer perceives that the participants are providing superficial answers, and essentially offering only platitudes and talking-points, then the interviewer may utilize follow-up questions such as: “why was that experience meaningful to you,” or “what specifically do those observances provide for your family?” Assisting the participants in providing richer narratives through follow-up questions, without fishing for answers, is an ideal way of “giving the researcher a more fluid motion picture of meaning-making as opposed to a snapshot of meaning as a ‘product’” (Marks, 2002, p. 33).

**Data Collection**

The data for this study was collected under the auspices of the American Families of Faith Project (AFFP), directed by Dr. David Dollahite and Dr. Loren Marks. The AFFP was supported and funded by Brigham Young University and Louisiana State University. The AFFP is a national research endeavor designed to gather in-depth data, through extended interviews, from hundreds of families of numerous religions across the United States. The interviews of Jewish families were conducted from 2001 to 2014, mostly by David Dollahite and Loren Marks. I conducted and transcribed two of the interviews.

Each interview was recorded digitally and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Multiple text copies of the interviews were saved for coding at a later date. The process of transcribing is valuable because it allows the interviewer to hear the information a second time. Listening to the interview a second time in order to generate a typed verbatim copy facilitates greater familiarity with the data.

**Data Analysis**

Daly (2007) posited that qualitative data analysis begins to occur during the interview itself as the participants answer questions and the interviewer processes information internally or
in a notebook. During the transcription process, the transcriber makes decisions about what to include in the text copy of the interview. For example, the transcriber may decide to highlight when a participant sighs, utters a word with emphasis, or displays emotion (e.g., crying or laughing).

Following the transcription of the interviews, I analyzed the data from a combined perspective of analytic induction and grounded theory. Recognizing that I was not approaching the data *tabula rasa*, I coded the interviews, consistent with analytic induction, while keeping in mind the three key conceptualizations of religion (viz., *community*, *beliefs*, and *practices*) proposed by Dollahite and Marks (2005, 2009). The first analytic step of data coding is the procedure of open coding—or line-by-line coding—which is consistent with grounded theory research (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Emergent and salient concepts and categories are identified based on words and phrases in the interviews. To ensure that concepts and categories are common across interviews, and to avoid *cherry-picking* concepts based on my biases, I produced a Numeric Content Analysis (NCA) for each interview (Marks et al., 2008) that provides a specific, verifiable data audit trail (Patton, 2002) or “data accounting sheet” (Miles & Hubermann, 1994, p. 80). The NCA provides information on which terms and phrases appear in each interview and how often they appear.

**Qualitative Validity**

The validity and rigor of qualitative research has been called into question by many quantitative researchers (Postman, 1984); therefore, a brief discussion on the validity of qualitative research is warranted. Validity is defined as: “The best available approximation of the truth of a given proposition, inference, or conclusion” (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008, p. 14). Four criteria for evaluating the validity of qualitative research have been proposed (Trochim &
Donnelly, 2008); these are, *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability*. Each of these criteria are briefly discussed below, followed by an explanation of the role of *reflexivity* in qualitative research.

**Credibility.** *Credibility* refers to the congruency between the participant’s intended meaning and the researcher’s presentation of the participant’s statements. In other words, are the researcher’s interpretations faithful to what the participant was trying to convey (Gilgun, 2005)? A few strategies may be employed to improve credibility. One is *persistent observation* (Dienhart, 1998), which refers to the researcher’s first-hand involvement throughout the interview process. Another strategy is *peer debriefing* (Schwandt, 2001), meaning that the researcher’s colleagues review the presentation of data in order to identify excessive biases. A third strategy is *member checking* (Schwandt, 2001), which refers to the process by which participants check the researcher’s presentation of their statements for accuracy. For this study, the *peer debriefing* strategy was employed.

**Transferability.** *Transferability* is a qualitative parallel to generalizability in quantitative research. It is the degree to which qualitative findings can be generalized, or *transferred*, to other contexts or settings (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The researcher may enhance a study’s transferability by thoroughly describing the context and assumptions central to the study. Whether or not the results of a qualitative study may be transferred, however, depends not on the researcher, but on the person who wishes to transfer the results to a different context or setting. Myerhoff’s, *Number Our Days* (1978), is a prime example. Her published piece on elderly Jews in a 1970s retirement community in Venice, California, so thoroughly describes the context of the study, and presents many nuances of her participants’ problems related to poverty, poor health, and other daily challenges, that readers may easily place themselves in that particular
setting and also transfer what is presented to other places and times relevant to their own lived experience.

**Dependability.** Dependability in qualitative research is comparable to reliability. It is the extent to which the instrument is consistent and accurate over time (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). For this study, the same instrument—the interview questions and interview structure (Appendix C)—was used across interviews. Follow-up questions and verbal detours do not decrease the study’s dependability if they fit into the general interview structure that serves as a guide to gather information on the meanings and processes of community, beliefs, and practices in a Jewish family context.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the degree to which others can confirm the results of a particular study (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). To enhance confirmability the researcher may: 1) identify counter examples that contradict prior observations, 2) conduct a data audit, and 3) report and attend to reflexivity as a researcher (Daly, 2007; Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). These three strategies are utilized in this study to highlight potential biases or distortions of the researcher.

**Reflexivity.** Qualitative and quantitative research differs in the degree to which each claims objectivity or subjectivity. According to Slife and Williams (1995), both research approaches contain elements of objectivity and subjectivity. The ideal is that both quantitative and qualitative research is primarily objective with some subjectivity; however, qualitative researchers are more likely to be constructivists, recognizing the subjectivity in their research and maintaining that reality is unknowable, while quantitative scholars tend to be logical positivists, assuming that reality is knowable (Anastas, 1999). Qualitative researchers tend to favor reflexivity and acknowledge their own involvement in the research (Anastas, 1999).
Reflexiveness refers to self-observation and skepticism in the process and results of the research (Anastas, 1999). In other words, it is “practicing bias regulation through bias recognition, rather than through the denial of bias” (Pieper, 1989, p. 18).

In the spirit of acknowledging my own potential for bias in relation to this study, it may be important for the reader to understand the following: 1) while I am not Jewish, I have an intellectual connection to Judaism and the Jewish people, as I have studied at two universities in Israel and have completed a master’s degree in Jewish Studies at a Jewish institution in the United States; 2) I am “highly involved” in both the cultural and religious aspects of my own faith community; and 3) I am a married father of three young children and have daily experiences with my family that are religiously or culturally based. To counter and balance my potential biases in interpreting and reporting results, I include interview questions regarding the crises, challenges, and dangers that families experience due to religious practices and beliefs.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Research on minority families has dramatically increased over the last few decades. Similarly, research on religion vis-à-vis the family as also increased since the 1990s, and especially since September 11, 2001. Despite the significant rise in the volume of empirical investigations on the interface of religion and family life, a dearth of research on proximal concepts and on specific processes and meanings of family life remains. Mahoney (2010) highlighted this fact in her decade review of religion-family research (1999-2009) and urged scholars to conduct more in-depth studies, including employing qualitative methods.

As shown previously in Chapter 2, the lack of research on American Jewish families is even more conspicuous than research on American religious families in general. In this chapter, I examine how family life may influence Jewish involvement, and also how Jewish cultural and religious traditions may influence family life. The primary goal is to present the participants’ voices through their first-hand reflections with minimal commentary.

Open coding of the narrative interviews yielded nearly twenty emergent or salient themes. Five themes are presented here relating to the three dimensions of religion: community, beliefs, and practices. The first two themes are related to community involvement. Theme 1 examines the family’s role in increasing involvement in the Jewish community. Theme 2 investigates the reverse: how community involvement may influence family life. Theme 3 presents rare empirical insight into specific religious or mystical beliefs that many Jewish families espouse regarding marriage and family. In similar fashion to Theme 1, Theme 4 examines the role of family in the observance of Jewish practices and traditions in the home. Theme 5 investigates a specific religious practice, the observance of Sabbath traditions, and
what they may provide for Jewish families. Illustrative and representative comments and reflections from primary data will be presented under each theme.

Theme 1. Family Influences Jewish Community Involvement

Participant comments in this theme were provided primarily in response to the question, *Do either of you influence the other in terms of living a Jewish life or being involved in the Jewish community?* One of the themes that emerged from the interviews was that women seem to be highly influential in increasing community involvement for the entire family. This finding, however, is not surprising. According to the Baylor Surveys of Religion (Stark, 2008), higher percentages of female respondents attended weekly services (41% to 31%), prayed at least once a day (57% to 40%), read the Bible weekly (32% to 24%), and considered herself very/somewhat religious (78% to 69%). As an illustration, one Orthodox couple of two adult offspring explained that the wife is the motivator for family involvement in the Jewish community:

*Jacob:* You know, we are still struggling and I think it’s great that sometimes Mara sort of drags me along kicking and screaming…toward more ritual, more consciously, deliberate religious consciousness [and] religious participation.  
*Mara:* Observance is a problem in this family, as Jacob hinted at, that I drag people kicking and screaming. And so I’m not at ease. I am not at ease being the leader. It’s not a role I take in life, but evidently it is. And I don’t like it. I don’t recognize that in myself. I also get a great deal of resistance.

While Mara was not comfortable acting as the leader in the home, and even resented her role in being the motivating force for Jewish involvement, most other couples who discussed this topic seemed to accept their roles as either leader or follower regarding increased community involvement. A Conservative couple provided the following comments:

*Daniel:* Oh yeah. Let’s just say that I have not influenced her.  
*Wendy:* I carry the religion in the family.  
*Daniel:* She has influenced me.  
*Wendy:* And he gladly…  
*Daniel:* Gladly.
Wendy: You know what? I’m not going to say I carry the religion in the family, [but] I force him to Sunday. I get him up, I get him dressed for Sunday school.
Daniel: No, force is a good. It’s a good…
Wendy: Synagogue on Saturdays, Shabbat wouldn’t be done if left to him.
Daniel: Like the family would collapse.
Wendy: But however, he doesn’t fight it.
Daniel: Why would I fight it?
Wendy: He doesn’t fight it.
Daniel: You know I like it deep down and it’s kind of very comforting. You know it’s a rock. It’s definitely a pillar in the house.

Another couple (Reform) provided a similar account in greater detail:

Linda: Saul and I came from different faiths, actually, because I grew up in a Christian orientation, and Saul grew up being Jewish. My family was very actively involved in their religious practices, but as I went through graduate school, I probably changed a lot in my opinions and my beliefs and my values. So, even though Saul and I came from almost diametrically opposed orientations as young people, by the time we met, we had very similar faiths and belief systems. Saul wasn’t really a practicing Jew, very much, when we met. I actually am probably the one who…got him going more, and I’m the one who said, “We need to go more often. We ought to be involved in this, if we’re going to do it.” And so we had similar perspectives and probably, and I’m speaking for him, because of some negative experiences he had when he was young, involved with Judaism, he was less actively involved than he would have been, and I kind of got him off his butt. Okay, your turn.
Saul: Okay, first of all, in terms of the overall orientation that we both had, that was really key. Our beliefs were really similar in a lot of ways. As Linda said, despite the fact that we had come at it from very different directions, I felt Jewish, but I was what you would call a “High Holy Day Jew.” I went on Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur, always. I did that, but that’s it. And I did get to the point where I literally only went twice a year. I only went to the evening services and Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I was a very secularized Jew. I mean, I felt very Jewish, but I felt it much more from a cultural stand point than from a religious stand point. I had a lot of agnostic beliefs. So I was Jewish, but I was Jewish in only a specific sense. What really made us both get going, finally, is Linda was pregnant with our first child. And we wanted to raise our children in a religious tradition. And Linda had not been practicing a religion for some years, and I’d been practicing Judaism only, again, in the sense of going a couple of times a year. And she said, “Well, you know, I think we really ought to join a synagogue.” So that really got us going. Once we joined, she actually was the one who said, “Well, you know, we should go a little more often.” And then, a little more often still, and before we knew it, we were going every week.

In addition to women being a motivating force for increased community involvement, the introduction of children into the family also seems to increase involvement (see Theme 4), as
discussed by Saul and Linda. Notice, however, that it was Linda who first suggested that they become more involved, and Linda also pushed her husband gradually, over a period of time, until he was attending “every week.”

The following Reform couple also joined a synagogue at the behest of the wife, but this account also provides information on what motivated her to begin nudging the family toward greater involvement:

Richard: I think Gale’s influence was that I would not be a member of the [synagogue] if it wasn’t for her… Having been brought up a little more religious, not much, but a little bit more, [if not for] the children and Gale, I probably wouldn’t [be a member]. So, in that sense, the answer to that question is that she has been a huge influence…
Gale: I feel an obligation. My family are holocaust survivors, and those are some of the complicated reasons why I didn’t have a religious training, and so I just feel it’s a moral responsibility to make sure that my children did have that training. And that’s what is motivating me.
Richard: And she’s the one motivating me.

The next three reflections also illustrate that women were the motivating forces for increased community involvement; however, they also highlight that the husbands were striving to contribute more to the Jewish involvement of the family, both culturally and religiously:

Marc (Conservative): A hundred percent, a hundred percent. It’s all her. [Without her] I’d be going to synagogue with my parents on the High Holidays, that’s it. But I like the fact that we have the Sabbath every Friday night. I think that’s cool. We say prayers before dinner every night and that was actually a decision we made when my grandfather died. One of the memories I had of him was that he wouldn’t sit down to a meal without saying a blessing, “Thanks for this bread.” When he died we decided, “Let’s do that before each meal, that way we’ll remember him for eternity. And it really stuck. We started doing it right away and we have been doing it every day since his passing. It’s all her, it really is. I’ve gotten involved and pushed some things along but she says, “There’s a service tonight, do you want to go?” “Okay” or I’ll say no sometimes but she goes with or without me. She doesn’t hold it against me one iota if I don’t go but if I do go, it’s great… I am going to take steps for her in that direction. If it’s important to her, then automatically, it should be important to me. I want to meet her half way on some of this stuff but she is the motivator. She really is.
The second quote was provided by a non-Orthodox (unspecified branch of Judaism) father:

*Joseph:* I sort of come and go with activities at the synagogue. Diane’s been constant, and I am not as people oriented as she is. She likes being with the people. I like being with the traditions. And I’m not as interested in the people that we have, always, which is my own limitation, I guess. She reinforces in me the need for involvement, and *I think I can bring background information to her that she might not have,* as she prepares a lesson, or studies a Hebrew word, or something. I think I have a little better knowledge than she does, *so I try to give some of that.*

Like Joseph, a Reform mother of two shared her thoughts about her and her husband’s influence on each other’s Jewish involvement:

*Kristen:* The other thing about how we’ve influenced each other is that I think in the early part of our relationship it was much more me influencing Harris to be more religious… Now it’s more Harris I think, because he’s on the Board of our [synagogue] so he goes to services. Sometimes I do the flea trot along with him—and he goes to this Torah study thing, so I go with him. So I think now, *not that the tables have turned, but it’s sort of symbiotic* in a way.

This theme has demonstrated that women seem to be the motivating forces for their families’ increased, or maintained, Jewish community involvement, a finding also reported in Ringel (2007). In that study, one mother recognized the importance of a woman-centered home when she stated: “Because of us, our families run, we are called the mainstay of the Jewish home…without us they would fall apart” (p. 31). That statement sums up Theme 1.

**Theme 2. Community Involvement Influences Family Life**

As discussed in Chapter 2, frequent involvement in a religious community may significantly impact, not just individuals, but also family relationships in various ways. Even some atheist and agnostic parents, including Christine, a Reform Jewish mother, have acknowledged the practical benefits of community involvement. “*My participation in the synagogue,*” she explained, “*is based on a belief that is more about cultural and social practice—that organized religious faith is very good for some people and…for families.*” As an agnostic
Jew, Christine’s motivation for involving herself in the local Jewish community may be similar to the 166 atheists who chose to immerse their children in a religious community, as presented by Ecklund and Lee (2011). Two of the benefits highlighted by those in Ecklund and Lee’s sample include: 1) religious communities are capable of providing a social network, social development, and social support, and 2) religious communities provide a moral foundation for children and for families.

According to the Baylor Surveys of Religion (Stark, 2008), only 13% of American Jews attend synagogue services weekly. Not every family in the present sample would be included in that 13%; however, all families in this sample are highly involved in the Jewish community, and many of them do attend weekly synagogue services. The present study sought to explore how involvement in the Jewish community influences these highly-involved Jewish families.

In response to questions about the benefits and importance of involvement in the Jewish community, several participants identified more opportunities for quantity and quality time with family, as well as common interests and shared experiences. For instance, Lisa, a Reform mother commented, “We’ve actually spent more time together since we’ve gotten more involved…. The kids get excited about coming to [synagogue].” Another Reform participant provided a specific example of how attending community events together has benefited her relationship with her husband:

Laura: From our perspective there have been some things that we have done, I mean we opted together to take some Jewish courses over a period of a year and then have continued some education about Judaism. That was actually great from the perspective of, well, we have been married over fifteen years and it was good to be able to do something together that was learning that was not related to work, which we share, directly to parenting, which we share, and to step outside the day to day and learn and talk about things above the usual functioning. So I think that has mattered.
Laura and her husband, both of whom are family physicians, found that attending community educational classes concerning Judaism created a common interest that was not related to the more mundane, day-to-day aspects of life, like work or parenting duties.

Another Reform mother articulated a similar benefit of attending educational classes as a family:

*Kristen:* It’s given Harris and me something more to talk about and…another connection. I’m thinking specifically that Harris started going to this Torah study thing on Sunday mornings and I’ve started going with him and that’s a very interesting and intellectual kind of class but it’s given us a common interest, which is nice for us because what he does for a living and what I do for a living is really, really different. I don’t know what he’s talking about a lot and he may not know what I’m talking about a lot, but [Torah study] is kind of a nice common interest for us.

Later in the interview, Kristen discussed this same theme in relation to her children:

When our kids started going to Sunday school, we started going to the family education programs because we felt like it should be a whole family education rather than the kids go to Sunday school and the parents go out to breakfast, which may have been what we preferred to do originally, but we started going to the classes and then I started teaching. So I ended up teaching Sunday school for about six or seven years during the whole time that our kids were going. Trying to teach them that being part of a religious community and part of a synagogue was something for the whole family, not just something that the kids do until they reach bar mitzvah age and then it’s over.

Shared religious experiences are not only beneficial because they create common interests for a couple or family, but also because cultural or religious experiences may be enhanced when shared with close family members, as opposed to experiencing it individually, a theme that also merged in a recent study of Muslim couples (Alghafli, Hatch, & Marks, 2014).

Consider the following reflection from a Reform father:

*Saul:* As a couple…it’s really a matter of sharing the traditions and practices in general. For example, the High Holy Days, I already liked to go to the High Holy Days services, but when you go to High Holy Day services as a married person with your spouse it is a very different experience than doing it as an individual. Basically, being in a shared religious practice is a huge advantage. I think it makes it all much more meaningful. In general, almost all the practices that I would like anyway, you know, going to synagogue on Friday night for Shabbat, going to the High Holy Days services, even going to
someone’s funeral, a Jewish funeral, there’s just shared meaning. The shared meaning makes it much more significant. And the two interact very much like that…. Your familial position enhances the religious experience, and the religious experience enhances your familial experience. They are mutually reinforcing.

Perhaps the best illustration of shared cultural and religious experience for the family in a Jewish context is the tradition of bar/bat mitzvah. According to the latest Pew (2013) research on American Jews, nearly 60% of religiously involved Jews and nearly 30% of secular Jews had a bar/bat mitzvah ceremony. This rite of passage is a special event for the entire family and the local Jewish community (Hatch & Marks, 2014a). The term bar/bar mitzvah means “son/daughter of the commandment” and refers to a series of Jewish rituals performed by adolescent males and females age 13 and 12, respectively. The millennia old tradition of becoming bar/bat mitzvah consists of leading part of the worship service at the synagogue and reading the sacred texts in Hebrew in front of the assembly. These rituals signify that the adolescent is hereafter recognized as an adult by the rest of the community. Although technically the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony is an achievement of the individual, the entire family is often involved in the preparation of the event, as well as in the ceremony itself. Family members often help the adolescent practice the readings in the months and weeks leading to the event, they may help prepare food for a post-ceremony luncheon, they may participate in sending out invitations, and they are often times invited to also read portions of the sacred texts during the ceremony.

Many of the participants mentioned bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah throughout the interviews and in response to a variety of questions. These comments and reflections provide insight as to why and how the family may benefit from this type of family and community event. The quotes below explain more broadly how community events, like bar mitzvah, seem to influence the entire family due to the “shared vision” involved:
Interviewer: Does religion help you to be on the same page and kind of be looking in the same direction, have a kind of a shared vision for what your family life ought to be about? Or is it not really a big part of it?

Wendy (Conservative mother of three): I would say so long as the kids are around, definitely, because there are milestones in the kids’ lives that are religious-based. You know birth, a bris, a bar mitzvah, going to Israel, Hebrew school, confirmation, and so the shared vision channeled or pioneered by the kids definitely keep us on the same page. I don’t know that when the kids are gone…

Daniel (Wendy’s husband): I think the strongest bind is sort of this shared vision in the children. But in terms of our own individual practices, you know I would say that with the kids out of the house, I wouldn’t be surprised if Wendy continues to be observant and goes to [synagogue] on Shabbat and maybe even continues to teach in Sunday school and you know I’ve never had a strong feeling of being observant—although, I don’t have an objection. It’s just that it’s not been important in that regard. I think I carry the legacy of my own upbringing in that context.

Daniel and Wendy attributed their community involvement to the children and the events that come along during childhood, like bar mitzvah. Daniel also commented that when the children are grown and have launched, his observance may decrease; however, he “wouldn’t be surprised if Wendy continues to be observant” (see Theme 1). It seems that milestones such as bar/bat mitzvah may create a shared vision for the family that keeps everyone involved together, at least while the children remain. More specifically, the following Reform family highlighted one important aspect of the bar/bat mitzvah ceremony: it not only involved the entire immediate family, but also brought together the extended family:

Interviewer: Which religious practices that you guys have done either recently or earlier in your life were meaningful to you?

Ryan (age 17, one of three offspring): Well I guess definitely my bar mitzvah and like my sister’s bat mitzvah and my brother’s bar mitzvah. I mean it brought our whole family together.

Justin (age 19, one of three offspring): Our entire family from the East Coast flew over. It was a big deal. And everyone’s involved, our parents did chants from the Torah too at our bar mitzvah. And there’s little parts where…the entire family’s involved at the service.

Another Reform couple of two offspring shared a similar experience:

Gale: Well, the bar mitzvahs were great because [they] brought everyone together and it was really an exciting time, and it was one of those happy moments [for us] as parents, that we were really looking forward to, it was really fun.
Richard: It was very memorable, both of them, one in Tennessee and one here.
Gale: The son you met had his bar mitzvah here, and that was great, and the family came in for that.
Richard: That’s probably the last time the older generation was together. Now they are too ill to travel.

This ancient rite of passage not only benefits the individual who becomes bar or bat mitzvah, but it also tends to enhance the religious and educational experience of the parents and family, including strengthening Jewish identity. A Conservative mother of two briefly explained how she personally benefited from her daughter’s bat mitzvah preparation:

Karen: I’m sort of learning it, trying to learn it along with her and I go to all of her bat mitzvah tutoring sessions, so that’s something we’re also all going to have in common at some point, if I can get it down. It’s very difficult.

Like Karen, many other mothers participated with their children in the bar/bat mitzvah preparation sessions. The following Reform family explained that the son’s bar mitzvah was a family event that influenced the mother’s decision to convert to Judaism:

Sam (father): It [observance] became more central as the kids came along and got older and [began] going to religious school and training and preparing for Bar Mitzvah. So, as they got older it became more central, and then it became even more central as we took some classes. Laura went through the conversion process and we became more involved in the synagogue. I would say it’s become more important.
Denim (14-year-old offspring): In terms of family involvement there are different levels. So when I was younger our parents would just pick us up and take us, but they didn’t know as many people as they do now so there wasn’t as much talking after [the services]. And then as we got older, when it came closer to my Bar Mitzvah, you [speaking to his mother] started to think, “Maybe I should convert.” I think that’s when it became something for our whole family because now when we go there it’s something that we can all engage in and it never felt that way when we were younger…. [Bar mitzvah is] basically the climax of Jewish involvement of the family… One of the big things is, I mean most people don’t drop out of religious school before their bar mitzvah, but after the bar mitzvah [is] a huge deciding point for everyone if you’re going to keep with Judaism or drop it. I said the “climax” of Jewish involvement for the family, but I think it can [either] be the peak, or the very beginning. That choice is very big.

At another point in the interview, the mother explained that she had been participating in Jewish community events with her Jewish husband and two kids for over a decade before converting. It
was not until the oldest child started taking classes to prepare for his bar mitzvah that Laura considered converting to Judaism. She also took classes and helped her son prepare for the ceremony.

Another Reform family reported a similar experience that resulted in the conversion of the mother:

Matthew (husband): When we were first married, there was some effort on Susannah’s part to participate in the Catholic Church… [But] in the Jewish synagogue, they were all the people I had known, since the Jewish community is small. They are people I’ve grown up with, knew, and was comfortable with. When Susannah went to the synagogue they made her comfortable… And it became more important to us when the children were born, because we had decided it was very important to us to raise the children in a religion. And we talked about this before we were married, and decided we were going to raise the children Jewish.

Susannah (wife): The only thing Matthew has ever asked of me was that his children be raised Jewish. I had no problem with it. Because the priest that married us, his words still ring in my mind, he said, “Our history is the [Jews’] history. We all started together.” And so, I had no problem. So, when the children arrived, I said, “Okay, got to start,” you know? And so, yeah, I did begin getting involved.

Later in the interview, the same couple added:

Susannah: When my daughter had her bat mitzvah three years ago, this was something she wanted to do. So, when it came time for my son, I said, “You know, this is strictly your decision. You’re doing the work. You’ve got to want to do this.” And he said, “Yes, my religion is important to me.” So, he did it. That’s one thing I think we’ve given our children is a strong Jewish belief and they feel a part of the congregation.

Matthew: The services, the bar and bat mitzvahs, those take a long commitment, a couple of years of study, weekly classes, things like that. And it brought our children together, my daughter having done it before, helped my son learn the Hebrew, and things like that… Those events and the stuff associated with them…also brought [other family members] into town, which is not something that happens. Our families don’t get together that much.

Susannah: And my son’s bar mitzvah was the turning point for me converting too, because I’d been thinking about it for a long time, and matter of fact, the day after his bar mitzvah, I went up to Rabbi, and I said, “I’m ready.” It was like this was the time.

Matthew: It’s kind of funny, they [the kids] more teach us than we teach them. We have an extremely active religious school, and they learn a number of things, and through the bar and bat mitzvah process, they’ve taught us.
The data presented in this theme provide some explanations as to why shared community experiences may benefit the family. They tend to generate a common interest among family members, as well as provide more opportunities for families to spend quantity and quality time together.

The bar/bat mitzvah rite of passage is a prime example of a Jewish community event that is salient for many families. Not only does the son or daughter who is becoming bar/bat mitzvah benefit from knowledge gained during the preparation courses, but parents are also benefited as they become engaged and learn (or relearn) along with their children. Moreover, the local Jewish community rallies around the family during this time by offering financial gifts, verbal encouragement, and service to help prepare and organize for the event. Perhaps these are some of the reasons why, as stated by the 14-year-old Denim, the bar/bat mitzvah is “the climax of Jewish involvement of the family.”

**Theme 3. Jewish Religious Beliefs and the Family**

The previous two themes concern the Jewish community and how the family may influence community involvement, as well as how the family is influenced by community involvement. This next theme shifts the focus to cognitive influences on the family. As presented in Chapter 2, the sanctification of marriage and family, or the belief that marriage and family is ordained by deity and is reserved for special purposes tends to correlate with higher levels of marriage and life satisfaction.

The interviews included two main questions about beliefs: 1) *what are God’s purposes for marriage and families* and 2) *what are some of your deepest religious beliefs relating to marriage.* A typical response was short or tangential, and no concept or belief emerged from the data as a common theme across interviews. The absence or de-emphasis on Jewish religious
beliefs in the interviews compared with other religions in the AFF project may reflect Judaism’s broader phenomenon of a de-emphasis of Jewish theology. Despite the liturgy being replete with references to God, angels, reward and punishment, the meaning of human existence, and the afterlife, many contemporary Jews tend to focus on history and tradition, not theology (Sherwin, 2013). According to a series of three surveys from 2005 to 2007 by the Baylor Surveys of Religion, only 3% of American Jews agreed that Hell “absolutely or probably exists,” and less than a third (27%) responded that Heaven “absolutely exists” (Stark, 2008). In comparison, 66% of Liberal Protestants, 92% of Conservative Protestants, 69% of Roman Catholics, and 98% of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) responded that Heaven absolutely exists. The most recent Pew survey (2013) on American Jews similarly found that 34% of all American Jews are absolutely certain that God or universal spirit exists, while an additional 38% tend to believe but are less certain. The percentage of “Jews by religion” who believe that God absolutely exists is also relatively low at 39%. This section, therefore, focuses not on a common or recurring theme, but presents data on both sides of one salient issue: the role of God in marriage formation and family life in general. Of the 30 families interviewed, 17 (56%) mentioned God. Of these, about half espoused the belief that God is highly involved in human affairs and especially in marriage formation, and about half emphasized that God does not predestine certain outcomes and rarely intervenes in the decision-making process. The former position is presented first.

The belief that “everything happens for a reason” was mentioned by some participants, as illustrated by an Orthodox male, one of three offspring, who participated in the interview with his parents:

*Zvi (age 20):* I think I find much more useful and powerful…a belief, which is very much Hasidic [Ultra-Orthodox], the idea that nothing at all is accidental—that every movement of every electron is very much intentional and with a purpose.
An Orthodox mother and two of her three children also commented on God’s direct influence in human affairs; however, their comments were addressed more specifically in relation to marriage and family:

*Janice* (mother): Hashem\(^2\) is directly intervening all the time, sometimes we’re conscious of it, sometimes we’re not. I mean that’s true of just life in general. And the Jewish term for that is *Hesgah ha prentice*, meaning, “heavenly intervention.” The more tuned in you are, the more you see that happen. Sometimes you’ll see something that appeared [to] be a coincidence back when, but now you realize that’s no coincidence. The fact that we [husband and wife] were brought together at all, the fact that we were both Jewish so that when we became more religious, we were pulled together instead of apart…. If God had not arranged it that way, things could have turned out very horribly. So I call that intervention.

*Nate* (20-year-old offspring): After all, there is an old Jewish saying that God created the world in 6 days [but] what has he been doing since that time? *He’s been making matches*, because it’s so difficult that God has to spend all His time doing it. So I think that is basically what I’ve decided to do is leave it up to God, if He’s spending so much time on it, let Him take care of it. It’s actually not something I worry about that much.

*Marissa* (17-year-old offspring): Yeah, make Him worry about it. We’re just here. They’ll come to us, right?

Janice and Nate stressed that God influences every action, to the point that God spends “all His time” in the role of *matchmaker*. For Nate, he does not intend to be proactive in finding a spouse because God will find a spouse for him. Notice, however, that his sister Marissa sarcastically challenged his comment as an overstatement.

The belief in fatalism, or that a spouse is not chosen by the individual but assigned by God, is known among some segments of the Jewish community as *beshert*, a Yiddish word meaning, “destiny” or “preordained.” The following Conservative couple explained their belief in *beshert* as follows:

*Leah*: There is a Hebrew word, *beshert*. I don’t know if you have encountered it with any of your other couples, but it connotes people who God intended to be together. I believe that Aaron is my *Beshert*, and that I am his *Besherta*, the feminine. And we are just so

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\(^2\) Traditional Jews tend not to write, or utter aloud, a few select names of God. Some even write, as presented in a few quotes in the present work, “G-d” out of respect. God is holy and to profane God’s name by writing it on paper or uttering it aloud is discouraged. Instead, many Jews use “Hashem” as a substitute title for God meaning, “The Name.”
well matched. I just think it was just meant to be…. As I said before, I think that God meant for us to be together. That would be the most central element. God created us to be Jewish, which led to us meeting each other. God watches over us. I believe that, not that God influences every moment and every action, but I believe that things happen for a reason.

Aaron: Without a doubt…. When you have somebody that is your soul mate, there is the satisfaction, the fulfillment.

Another Orthodox father of three also commented on the doctrine of beshert:

Seth: A lot of people look upon things as…destined to happen. They say things are “beshert,” it’s supposed to happen that way… We met in a synagogue our first day, the evening of Rosh Hashanah. And friends introduced us and it was instantaneous. But then you have to look at something, how did we get there? You know, it was destined that we were to get together… But believing that G-d has a purpose for things helps [you] get through a lot of the good times and the bad times. And knowing that even though there may be some problems occurring, there’s a purpose for everything and it will work out… You know, she was my Besherta. That’s how, it was supposed to be.

Another Orthodox couple with three offspring similarly explained their understanding of beshert:

Ellen: Bershert. It’s pre-destined. It’s fate in the sense that supposedly Hashem gets the two souls, or one soul that’s separated [in two] and before you’re born, He already knows who is for whom. You see, and then it’s just a matter of finding each other, which sometimes I think He’s got a big sense of humor, you know like, “hey, let’s put this one in Singapore and let’s put this one in London and see if they find each other.”

Moshe: And he really works it out so that they do, often. Sometimes the other problem people have is that sometimes they find the person and they don’t recognize it. He puts them together, he puts them in front of each other and they blow it… which is unfortunate. But by and large, well, someone that we know told us that our souls have been together for thousands of years…. but we’ve been together a long time and it feels like that. It really does.

The next quote was provided by an Orthodox couple of four children, who offered more details regarding beshert:

Melissa: Well, there’s a Jewish belief that 40 days before you’re conceived, your beshert, your other half, the person you’re supposed to marry, is declared or chosen.
Adam: And is shown to you too.
Melissa: Right.
Adam: Actually it’s just shown to the man, it’s not shown to the woman.
Melissa: Oh, that’s why you were more interested in me than I was in you.
Adam: I’m telling you.
Interviewer: So 40 days before you’re conceived it’s shown to you.
Adam: She’s shown to me.
Interviewer: And what state are you in 40 days before you’re conceived? Is it in a spiritual form or?
Adam: I don’t know where I am. Wherever you are, before you’re conceived, you know, you’re with Hashem and your soul is up there waiting to get called. They call your number; you’re asking for your number to be called, you know, “Coach, put me in.”
Interviewer: How do you spell beshert?
Melissa: “B-E-R-S-H-E-R-T”
Interviewer: Beshert.
Adam: Beshert.
Interviewer: And that means soul mate?
Adam: Yeah, your soul mate.
Melissa: And it’s also a concept in Judaism that your beshert is, is like your other half, that together you create a kind of wholeness, kind of completeness. When two flames that join are greater than the sum of, is greater than the [sum of the parts]… And when you know you’re married to your G-d given beshert, it changes everything. When you don’t ever have to question, is this the person that I’m supposed to marry… It’s very nice to know, that we’re married to the person that we’re supposed to be married to. It’s everything G-d intended it to be.
Interviewer: Adam any additional thoughts on what are some of your deepest spiritual beliefs pertaining to marriage?
Adam: [Marriage] is the completion of the soul . . . The same way G-d has two aspects, a person has two aspects. And when you as male aspect find your female aspect and are bound up with that female aspect, you feel like your soul is completed. You know, now you have a complete soul and you can think about bringing other souls into the world.

The belief in beshert is one way that couples sanctify their marriage. It is a step beyond just claiming that God approves of their union. This idea of soulmates and, as Adam and Melissa articulated above, the notion that one’s soul is not complete until it reunites with its other half—in other words, each soul in a pre-earth life has a male and female aspect that is reunited during a moral lifetime (Givens, 2012)—may be salient for a couple’s relationship. That marriage relationships transcend profane time and space, and was created by God long before mortal life—“souls have been together for thousands of years,” according to Moshe, quoted previously—may be a powerful influence on how couples interact with one another.

One detail worth highlighting here is that all of the participants quoted thus far in this theme, save one whose Jewish affiliation is Conservative, are Orthodox Jews. This is not
surprising given that 89% of Orthodox Jews are absolutely certain that God exists (Pew, 2013), compared to 41% of Conservative Jews and 29% of Reform Jews. Perhaps several factors are responsible for Orthodox Jews being more likely to believe that God is directly involved in human affairs; however, the primary reason may be that they tend to study and perpetuate symbolic and cosmological teachings developed and promoted by medieval and early modern mystic sages. This esoteric and mystical school of thought, called Kabbalah, is studied as much, or more, than earlier authoritative texts (e.g., Hebrew Bible) in many Orthodox Jewish communities. In contrast, progressive Jews, like Reform, may be less likely to seriously consider Jewish mysticism in their personal or communal faith curricula.

As presented below, and by way of contrast, many participants highlighted the belief in personal responsibility and free will over beshert theology. Before presenting those comments, however, consider one final quote from a Reform couple as an illustration of how the topic of beshert is fluid and conflicting in the Jewish community and even within families:

Harris: I have a deep belief about marriage that I don’t think I got from my religiosity anywhere along the line, but that you choose the person you marry and you make it work. It’s [both] wonderful and bad sometimes and you just hang in there and you stick with it and you work [at] it and you treasure it and you honor it and you don’t walk away.

Kristen: I probably have more beliefs about marriage that come from my religion than Harris because I was brought up in this religion…. There’s a concept in Judaism called beshert. And that’s definitely what I feel with Harris. He is my person and I knew that the minute I saw him, the minute I met him, not that I was thinking about getting married because I was 17. Marriage wasn’t on my mind, but I feel like he is the person that I was meant for… My soul mate… I definitely feel like somehow it was pre-ordained in the heavens that we would meet and be together.

Harris and Kristen both felt strongly about their marriage and about each other, which was conveyed throughout the interview. Their underlying religious beliefs about marriage, however, differed from one another. Harris opined that marriage is a union of choice rather than a union that was “pre-ordained in the heavens,” as his wife Kristen expressed.
The Jewish community, as presented in Chapter 1, experiences many paradoxes. The emphasis on God and the fundamentally different approach to marriage and life choices is another paradox among Jews. The following three comments illustrate a different approach to God from most of those previously quoted. The first comment was provided by a Reform mother of two:

_Gale_: I think that God as an entity is not something that I commune with [on a daily basis]. So for me, our religion is more a set of traditions and laws about how you behave and how you interact and how you keep community and how you keep family. The God part is probably incidental… My grandmother just died two weeks ago. We had a funeral, and it was appropriate, then I would pray and think about God, but it’s more in crisis situations. God is not an entity that is shaping the decisions, it’s more the laws.

A Conservative couple of three provided the second quote:

_Wendy_: We don’t chat about God.
_Daniel_: We don’t talk about God together.
_Interviewer_: And you’ve been married how long?
_Daniel_ and _Wendy_: 14 years.
_Interviewer_: See that’s just amazing to me. But you talk about your religion a lot. You talk about Judaism.
_Wendy_: We talk about our Judaism.
_Interviewer_: Talk about observances.
_Wendy_: Yeah but you know what, Judaism also teaches the relationship you have with God is between you and God. It’s a private thing. It’s not open.
_Daniel_: I don’t have to share…
_Wendy_: We’re not open.
_Daniel_: Which is one reason why Jews are not about proselytizing.
_Wendy_: My best friends, I have no idea, except for my girlfriend, I know she doesn’t believe in God. I have no idea [about] my other girlfriends. I don’t even know if my parents believe in God… I was in the synagogue the other day and I was listening to the rabbi and I remember saying to my girlfriend, “Do you think he believes in God?” My rabbi!

The third quote comes from Kristen, the Reform mother quoted previously who disagrees with her husband on _beshert_:

_Interviewer_: I find it very interesting that I’ve interviewed many Jewish folks that are highly observant—Kosher kitchen, Shabbat observed 100%... I mean really, really observant. And when I ask the question, “How does your relationship with God influence your relationship with each other?” they say, “What does God have to do with
it? I don’t believe in God.” I had one couple, highly observant couple, the guy said to me, “We’ve been married 27 years and we’ve never had a conversation about God.” And his wife said, “Yes we did. There was that time in Ohio that we talked about God. Remember that time?” “That’s right. Okay so we’ve been married 27 years and we’ve talked about God once.”

*Kristen:* That doesn’t surprise me at all… I specifically remember a rabbi talking to us before Harris converted and saying, “It doesn’t matter whether you believe in God. That’s not part of the conversion process.” And I knew very little about religion at that point but I remember being kind of bowled over about that. “Oh, so you don’t have to believe in God, even to convert to this religion?”

Several participants in this sample did not believe in God, were agnostic, or rarely talked about God. Recall that this is a “highly involved” sample. Many of those who did believe opined that God does not micromanage human affairs—that all individuals are expected to make their own decisions. Consider, for example, the comments of a Reform couple:

*John:* We’ve had some difficulties with our son…about 3 years ago. Other people might have said, based on their faith, “Well, it is God’s will, and that’s it.” Whereas with us, we’re like, “Okay, well, we make our own way in this world, and it’s up to us to get him through,” and we tore apart everything we could, and figured out what we were going to do, and we did it, and he’s thriving. So, I can’t imagine, and we see other people who just shrug and move on, and that’s just not our way. I think that unless the two of us were in sync on things like that, there would be no way for us to really be happy, I don’t think.

*Dina:* I think we see God as not so much as a figure that has overall influence on our lives, as much as a force that allows us to function, that is an overseeing force. And so, I would say, absolutely, God and spirituality, and family, very much has helped us over the last few years. On the other hand, it has been very much in our hands to make the difference.

John and Dina acknowledged that God is an influential force in general, but that God ultimately gives them responsibility to “make [their] own way in this world.” A Conservative mother articulated a similar view as follows:

*Debbie:* I don’t think about beliefs as much as I do about traditions and [rituals]. I think that one thing that is very important to us is a belief in a God that is Omnipresent, who is all knowing, all powerful, everywhere and in everything… I believe that although there is a God who is all powerful, people are given complete free will and that people have complete choice in the world and so that is why there is evil in the world, because people CHOOSE to do bad things.
The final two comments specifically challenge the notion that God predetermines every action and outcome, including marriage unions. The first quote was provided by a Reform couple:

_Saul_: I don’t view God in such a way that God’s up there making decisions all the time and saying, “Your life is going to be thus.” That’s really not my view of God.

_Linda_: One real big principle of Judaism is that God gives us choice, full choice in our lives, and that we make these choices. I see God as being less interacting directly in the lives as indirectly through the principles of Torah, and through… the Ten Commandments and through all the other Mitzvoth [lit. “commandment”] about how you are supposed to live your lives. That’s the way God influences our lives, not directly by saying, “Okay, this child is going to be born to you and he’s going to be autistic, and this is what you’re going to do…” I don’t see that as much as the undercurrent of the teachings that we’re given… Somebody in our group said, “You know, God is going to affect the decision as to who is president. And all we’ve got to do is to pray to God, and whoever God wants to be president is going to be president.” I don’t believe that.

The second quote was also provided by a Reform participant, who similarly emphasized free will in relation to choosing a spouse:

_Rebecca (mother)_: I don’t believe there is one person on earth for everybody. I don’t believe that God put me on this earth, and put him on this earth, for us to find each other. I believe that God creates in all of us the potential to love someone enough to spend your life with that person, and to make a life together, and that while this may not have been the only person on earth I could have married, it’s the one [that] I’m glad I did… I think when you recognize that people, we’re all created in God’s image, and you think, really, about what that means, it certainly causes you to see the best in everybody, especially your spouse, when that is sometimes difficult.

Saul and Linda’s comments are in direct contradiction to those who believe that everything that happens in life does so out of God’s design per His grand purposes. Moreover, Rebecca’s belief that every individual is completely free to choose their spouse contradicts the doctrine of _beshert_. Notice also that Rebecca appreciates her husband because she chose to marry him and because he is created in God’s image. Thus, for Jews like Rebecca, the belief in complete free will does not necessarily diminish the importance of marriage for them compared
to couples who believe that their marriage was made in heaven by God. Participants who espoused either belief seemed to reverence and respect their marriage and their spouse.

A conspicuous phenomenon in Judaism, or among the Jewish community, is the variety of religious beliefs, even on major issues like the nature and influence of God. This phenomenon, however, also exists in every major religion. It is worth noting that participants on both sides of this issue stated in the interviews that “Judaism teaches…,” or “a principle in Judaism is that…” Linda, for example, commented that “one real big principle of Judaism is that God gives us choice, full choice in our lives;” however, the proponents of beshert theology may not agree. It seems that to each individual Judaism does teach X or Y, but that may not be the reality.

Judaism, like any major and ancient religion, contains a variety of positions, some of which are fundamentally opposed to others. Religious people tend to take what they need from their religion, and discard (or ignore) those aspects that are useless to them. They take the wheat and discard the chaff. Consider the comment of one Orthodox, atheist father of two, who articulated the importance for his family of adapting Judaism to their own preference:

Yigal: There are so many reasons why we love our [family traditions]. Number one, we love it because we made it up and we both feel that Judaism…well, we don’t believe that there was a tradition that was handed down in this kind of linear ironclad way and that if you are part of the tradition you do what you are told and do exactly the things that the generation before you did. No! We believe that Judaism is a very fluid and dynamic thing that is constantly changing and has changed with different pressure throughout history and that we have the power today to do with it as we will. Obviously it’s based on certain principles and inspirations that we didn’t just make up ourselves, but still we take it in directions that decide to take it. But I also think [about] what are the beautiful characteristics of Judaism, and what are the things that I would want to have in my Judaism? Much more than a rigid observance of practices or doctrines, but there would be a sense of love in the family—that the parents love and respect each other and that parents love and respect the children and the children love the parents and that their Judaism is an expression of that. Sometimes you have parents that say, “This is what Judaism means, [so] you must do X.” Even if the kids hate it, “To Hell with you, you must do it” and that is the kind of Judaism that I grew up with. I disagree with the kind of Judaism where I just had to do certain things even if it made me miserable, you know—that we needed to do it because that is what you are supposed to do. And that kind of
slavish obedience to tradition is anathema to me. I loathe it! So because of that, the things that I loathe I do the opposite. The things that are beautiful that the children and parents love and that we enjoy, we do it even if we aren’t commanded to do, or even if we are commanded to do it. It injects our Judaism and our family with a sense of joy with the traditions, rather than the sense of obligation to follow traditions.

Yigal’s comment is primarily about practices and traditions—the topic of the next two themes. His approach, however, is also applicable to beliefs. Earlier in the interview, Yigal commented that he and his wife disagreed with a passage in the liturgy and so they decided to not say it during the synagogue services. They essentially omitted it from their form of Judaism. Like Yigal’s family, most religious people take what they need (or want), socially and psychologically, based on their life’s experiences, and they discard what they do not find as helpful. Notice that Yigal referred to his religion as “my Judaism” and “our Judaism.” For his family, Judaism is special because it can be adapted. Indeed, “Judaism” presupposes change, adaptation, and even contradiction. This phenomenon is precisely what emerged in the interviews regarding the theological beliefs about God’s nature and God’s influence in family life presented in this section. With Yigal’s comment in mind, we now shift to observance of Jewish practices and traditions in the home.

Theme 4. Family Influences on Jewish Observance in the Home

In their thirty-five year, longitudinal study on transmission of religion across generations, Bengston, Putney, and Harris (2013) found that parents tend to influence religious observance of their children more than any other factor. Although many believe that religion has been in decline for several decades, and that offspring are rebelling against their parents’ religion at a rapid rate, the study of Bengston et al. (2013) revealed that offspring are just as likely today to affiliate with their parents’ religion as they were in 1970. They also found that warm (authoritative) parents were most successful in transmitting their religious beliefs and practices to
their offspring. Parental attributes of consistent role modeling and unconditional support not only resulted in higher rates of religious transmission, but also resulted in higher return rates of prodigals, which is consistent with other studies (Davey, Fish, Askew, & Robila, 2003; Gunnoe et al., 1999; Landor et al., 2011; Murray-Swank, et al., 2006; Volling et al., 2009). It seems that high parental religious piety and “teaching by example” is not as influential in transmitting religion as is warm parenting. Moreover, Bengston et al. (2013) found that non-transmission, even more so than cold (authoritarian) parenting, most likely led to offspring rebelling against their parents’ religion or becoming a religious “none,” meaning no religious affiliation in adulthood.

In the vein of Theme 1, this theme explores the perpetuation of religious practices in the home and the role of the family on in-home Jewish observance. This theme is divided into two subthemes: 1) how children influence Jewish observance of their parents and 2) how parents influence Jewish observance of their children.

**Subtheme 1. “They teach us:” How children influence parents.** One major theme that emerged in the data, and in response to various questions, was the influence of children on increased observance in the home. As previously presented, children seemed to influence their parents’ observance in the home and community through bar/bat mitzvah preparation. Daniel’s and Wendy’s comments in Theme 2 indicate that their children are what keep them involved. Daniel specifically stated that after the children leave home, he will not be surprised if his observance decreases while Wendy’s observance remains constant. The bar/bat mitzvah section of Theme 2 revealed that not all children were the active agents in driving this change, but that their activities seemed to naturally raise parents’ interest as the kids became involved and
brought home their activities and newly-acquired knowledge. The title of this subtheme, “They teach us,” came from Matthew, a Reform father who stated:

It’s kind of funny, they more teach us than we teach them. We have an extremely active religious school, and they learn a number of things, and through the bar and bat mitzvah process, they’ve taught us.

Younger offspring, including infants, also seemed to effect change in parents’ level of observance. When childless couples transition to parenthood, they seem to become more aware of what their Jewishness means to them and what they must start doing as Jews in order to benefit the children. Many parents perceive religious involvement as beneficial for their children; yet, they themselves often lose interest in their religion during emerging and early adulthood and cease participating in community-based religion, home-based religion, or both. A non-Orthodox (but unspecified) couple of two offspring practiced their religion, similar to Daniel and Wendy, primarily because of their kids:

Joseph: If we didn’t have kids, we wouldn’t prioritize some of the things we do as much like Friday night services, Shabbat dinners, which we always make it a point to have. We sing certain songs with the kids. I say the Shema with the kids every night. I wouldn’t do that if I didn’t have kids. And a lot of it is with music. We sing a lot of Jewish songs with them. I don’t know what we would do if we didn’t have kids. I think it would be more of a synagogue-based probably rather than home-based [approach].
Diane: Yeah. Tons of stuff we do around the home. Prayers. We say prayers before we eat and Judaism also has a prayer you say after the meal. A grace after meals that we do. Much of the observance that we do is really geared around kids in a lot of ways. I mean not that we wouldn’t be somewhat religious, but I think we’re more so because of the kids.

An increase in religious observance seems to start when children are preschool age and younger, as illustrated by the comments from an Orthodox couple of two adult offspring:

Jacob: [At] first we did major holidays. I think we did a Seder, we did not keep kosher at all in our home. And that’s how it was for maybe the first 10 years of our marriage, until maybe our first child…. I didn’t know what that meant to raise him Jewish. I thought it was just something that happened by default in some way. That is not the case, but I was a lot younger then. I think the first serious encounter that we had as a couple over this issue was [when] Mara, who spotted this [said], “What are we going to do about our
children and Judaism? Because if we do nothing, then that’s what they’re going to have, is nothing.

Mara: Especially in the community in which we’re living.

Jacob: Right, and so we needed to define for ourselves how we were going to become… We needed to define for ourselves what real Judaism we would have in our family so that there would be a structure for our children, for our [first] child at [the] time. And that’s really when this process began, so he’s now 22 [years old].

As the children get older, the discussion between parents continues about how Judaism should be observed in the home. The more involved in Judaism the children become, the more observant the entire family seems to become. One Conservative couple, for example, noticed that their observance increased at home after they enrolled their children in Hebrew preschool, as explained in their comments:

Marc: The [children] were a major influence. We elected to send our kids to a Hebrew preschool and she started learning about the holidays and the Sabbath and I guess we just had to make a decision that if we’re going to do that, we’ve got to have it at home. Being kosher, we thought that would simplify our lives and the lives of the kids, I guess they’re the reason we’re both involved, they’d really have to be. We never did much before them. I think we both agree that it’s good for them. Debbie and I have very similar values. Nothing bad can really come of it, only good. There’s other good role models around there. Other kids, I want them hanging around their own kind. I want them in an environment where being Jewish is normal. I want them to have that feeling. The more we get involved with Judaism and the more we get involved with people who are Jewish, we have moved into a development where there are more Jews, in a community where there are more Jews… This house itself is partially a driving factor of our Judaism. We lived in a spectacular farm community in the middle of nowhere, beautiful house with spectacular property that made me feel spiritual, I mean I loved walking outside and not seeing anything [but nature]. I mean, that was God right there. But the kids’ involvement in the synagogue and the school was what drove the move… Debbie loved the house and the property but we were not in or near a Jewish community… The kids have been a huge influence on our Judaism, a HUGE influence.

Debbie: Yeah, I think that’s the reason we became more involved, really, the kids. That’s DEFINITELY where it stemmed from because we belonged to a synagogue and we were not involved until my oldest daughter was around two and I needed to find another daycare situation for her…and I kind of instinctively looked to the Jewish community center. I don’t think I went to any other child care centers in the area. I just knew that I wanted them. I knew I could trust them up there… We liked the idea. We thought it would be nice for her to get some exposure to Judaism. So we started sending her there two mornings a week. So she started learning the holidays and coming home with songs and the blessings and they’d celebrate the Sabbath at lunchtime on Friday so then she wanted me to do things at home…and I’m like, “Wow! Well, I guess we can find the candle
“sticks” and we’re pulling things out, remembering…and that’s kind of how it started. When she was three and a half and I was having my second child, I came to a point where I wanted to get more involved for them… I started bringing [the kids] to a Sunday School kind of thing and got to know people there and it all just built because of the kids. So I was there almost every day and people got to know me and asked me if I could be on a committee and so most of the involvement started because of the kids and went on from there.

Marc and Debbie became more involved in the Jewish community and increased their observance at home after their children started Hebrew preschool. Debbie recalled that her children wanted to celebrate holidays and observe traditions at home, about which they learned at school. Marc also explained that they felt the kids needed “to have it at home” to compliment what they were learning at Hebrew preschool. Notice also that Debbie mentioned that the kids’ desire to practice Judaism at home forced her and Marc to “remember” how these practices must be observed. The following three quotes also illustrate how many parents relearned (or learned for the first time) along with their kids on how to do Judaism. The first comes from the interview of a Reform father:

Steve: [Rebecca] has wanted to do more of the traditions, the religious traditions, and some observances with the kids that we didn’t do in our childhoods, so we had to learn how to do them, and the same sort of thing for different holidays. We’ve learned how to try to influence each other, to make it a more special time for our children, so that they would enjoy it, and learn from it.

The second was provided by another Reform couple:

Eric: We’re getting more involved in the [synagogue] because our kids are here now. And it’s kind of… I wouldn’t say it’s a rebirth in a religion, but I think it reiterates maybe the importance behind it, that if we’re going to teach our kids the understanding—what the religion is—we’ve got to walk the walk as well. It kind of makes it more important to us as well as it is for the kids. Lisa: And the difference is that my son, who is 4, is now at the age where he’s asking questions, and telling us what he’s learned at his school about the holiday, so when he asks the question, I want to make sure…
Eric: He teaches us.
Lisa: I want to make sure that I know the answers, or that I’m going to find the answers, and I’m amazed at… I knew it at one time, but I forgot it. And I’m learning it again, through him, because he’s so excited about it.
The third couple explained how they “re-learned” many of the traditions when they were raising children:

Rachel (Non-Orthodox, but unspecified otherwise): I think everything that we do as a couple has to do with the kids. Like taking them to the Friday night service, and we light the candles on Friday night, and the kids know how to say the prayer over the candles, and the prayer over the wine, and the prayer over the bread.

David: Yeah, and early on, it became important when we both became, when she converted, and I re-converted, and we really got into Judaism, and then we kind of got away from it, and now that we have another family, because the kids have only been with us for 2 years.

Rachel: You know they are his grandkids?

David: They had no structure whatsoever. So, now we are starting back with the traditions, and the Hebrew, and I’m even re-learning. I used to be able to read Hebrew, and now I can’t. I’m re-learning with the kids. The traditions, it gives them something to do, and it gives them an identity, more so than us.

The final illustration for this subtheme is unique because it demonstrates that offspring can influence their parents, not just when they are young kids and adolescents, but even after they become adults. Janice’s grandfather abandoned Judaism due to the pogroms in Russia, so her father was raised without Judaism after immigrating to the United States. As she grew and started having children her father became more interested in Judaism as he watched his daughter raise her children. Janice, an Orthodox mother of three, provided the following reflection:

Janice: Well, I wanted to tell you about my father, who grew up in a home hostile to religion. His own father had been in a pogrom in Russia and had been maimed as a child. He wanted nothing to do with being Jewish. When he came here, he did his best to try to pass as a non-Jew. My father, therefore, and my mother… didn’t know much about Judaism. They had nothing to transmit. They didn’t want to go and learn themselves so they could transmit it. They wanted to put it all aside and become good, assimilated Americans. And they did a very good job of that. It wasn’t wise from the point of view of raising healthy children. But they did the best they could under the circumstances. My father though, as he’s gotten older . . . He has four children, [but] only one, that’s myself, is observant or is religious in any way. He has shown remarkable signs of appreciation of the kind of home we’re building here. He actually has surprised me by taking on certain observances. He’ll make the Kiddush [a blessing and meal that inaugurates the Sabbath day] on Friday night. He and his wife, not my mother, do not observe anything on the rest of the Sabbath day, but they have made that advance. And I never would have thought that my father would have done any such thing. That was not in his nature at all. But what really surprised me is his constant expressions of
appreciation and support for what we do here. He has told me again and again that he sees the good it does. He sees how good it is for my children. He regrets not having known more about it, so that in some way he could have done it himself. That is a real tribute coming from somebody who was raised with hostility towards religion. He sees now what’s in it. I think that’s rather beautiful and has helped my father and myself become closer.

Janice mentioned several things that were presented in the comments of other participants previously. First, her father observed her religious efforts and began to appreciate the foundation that she had built in her home for her children. He saw value of it because of what it provided for his daughter and his grandchildren. Second, his observance began to increase, at least with a few Jewish traditions that he found personally meaningful. Third, their relationship improved as they shared these experiences. The other aspect of Janice’s quote is her role, not as offspring, but as the parent and transmitter of Jewish religion and tradition, the topic of the next subtheme.

**Subtheme 2. “Respect this tradition:” How parents influence children.** Much of the information in this section about parental influence on children’s Jewish observance was provided in response to a question about the most important thing that they as Jewish parents can do. Several participants commented that the most important thing they can do, aside from teaching their kids to be ethical human beings, was to help their kids become good Jews and to transmit the religion. It is worth noting here that at least three participants from different households, when asked a different question, *what is the purpose of families*, responded that families exist to perpetuate Judaism:

*Seth (Orthodox father of three)*: Join two people together and then help promulgate [the] faith, have children and bring them up according to these practices and the beliefs and traditions.

*Tobi (17-year-old female Orthodox offspring)*: I think that the purpose of families is a sort of support system in that, through which you pass on the ways to serve God, or the ways of your tradition… I think that families kind of like created a way to pass on knowledge.
Zvi (20-year-old male Orthodox offspring): Knowing that his whole Judaism exists basically in an attempt to make sure that I pass it on to my children.

The participants in this sample not only stated that building a Jewish home is important, but also provided information concerning how parents attempt to accomplish this. What did parents emphasize to their children to instill in them a strong Jewish identity and to encourage observance of Jewish traditions and practices? In answer to the interview question, what do you feel is the most important thing you can do as a Jewish parent, one Orthodox couple provided the following comment:

Jacob: To give them a sense that this is a tradition that is worth preserving. That, to show them by example and by instruction that this is a tradition that commands respect, that deserves to be perpetuated, and that they have a responsibility to perpetuate it. But not out of a sense of some kind of obligation, but that this is worth doing. That it’ll be a positive influence in their lives. This is part of the self-definition that we embarked on 22 years ago. We set something in front of them that they would want to take to be a part of themselves. I think it is of paramount importance that this tradition continue, and it can only continue by positive example. So the children have to see something there that’s worth doing.

Mara: I tried very hard not to put anything in front of them that was not very moving and useful, and beautiful. And I think all along it’s been important for me to make sure that it’s not a dead religion in our home, that it’s not something we do because it’s been done before; but rather I sought to make ways to make it really be alive and useful.

Note the language used by Jacob to emphasize his faith and role as a father. He impresses on his offspring that Judaism “commands respect,” that it “deserves to be perpetuated,” and that Jews have a “responsibility to perpetuate it.” He teaches his children that this is of “paramount importance.” Jacob and Mara transmit Judaism to their children, not by establishing that certain rituals and practices are obligatory because of a divine decree, but by showing their children how Judaism is “worthwhile,” “useful,” and “beautiful.” The two following quotes also illustrate how Jewish parents made Judaism “useful” to their children. The first quote is from a teenage female who commented the following in anticipation of raising her future children:
Tobi (17-year-old Orthodox female offspring): I think what would probably be most important to me is that they know more about Judaism than just Hanukkah and the High Holidays… There's a not-so-nice term known as “three-day-a-year Jews.” It’s people that have…no connection to it, but they come to both days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and never do anything else. And I think that whatever you do is fine and that's your connection, but I would like my kids to understand why they're going.

The second quote was provided by a Conservative mother of two:

Melanie: [I] try to pass on the traditions that are special and that are important—you know, how to make meals for the holidays and go to [synagogue]. My focus is what happens at home. I mean we go to [synagogue] as a family… But in the house what I teach them is: This is how you set a Shabbat table, and these are the foods that you prepare for a traditional Sabbath meal. These are the foods that you prepare for a traditional Rosh Hashanah, which is the Jewish New Year. You know, you have apples and honey, and why do you have honey? I mean this is already ingrained in them since they went to preschool, so they know. So I think teaching them how to make a Jewish home, so that when they have a Jewish home [they don’t] have to look in a book.

Another parent explained that part of teaching kids the hows and whys of having a Jewish home was to emphasize more of what Jews do, instead of what Jews don’t do. It is especially important for cultural and religious minorities to define themselves by their own heritage, instead of defining themselves in relation to others, especially the dominant group:

Rebecca (Reform): “I want a Christmas tree.” It’s a book about snow, it wasn’t even about Christmas. “Why don’t we have a Christmas tree?” “Why don’t we celebrate Christmas?” I said, “We don’t celebrate Christmas because we are Jewish.” “Well, I don’t want to be Jewish anymore.” And here we had just come back from this wonderfully enriching Jewish experience. “Son, if we aren’t Jewish anymore, we wouldn’t have Shabbat, and we wouldn’t have Hanukah, and we wouldn’t have Passover, and we wouldn’t have Sukkoth, and he said, “I want to build the Sukkah.” And Mark and I looked at each other. We’d never built a Sukkah in our home. We looked at each other and said, “Yessirie, we will build a Sukkah this year.” And for the first couple of years, we laughed that it was our Christmas tree. And that is where so many Jewish parents miss the boat. And especially where, and I don’t mean that to sound judgmental, but it is such a missed opportunity because living where we live, it is so easy for Judaism to be about what we don’t do. “We don’t do that because we are Jewish. We don’t celebrate Easter. We don’t celebrate Christmas. We don’t go to church on Sunday. We don’t… We don’t do all these things.” And it takes a certain amount of work to find all those rich things that we do, and to make the effort to do them. Because you don’t just

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3 A sukkah is a makeshift hut in which many Jews dwell for several days during the festival of Sukkoth. This holiday commemorates the forty years when the Israelites wandered in the wilderness and slept in tents after the Exodus from Egypt.
pick it up at Target, you have to make it. You don’t just go buy, there’s not a Sukkah stand on every corner. And it is such a rich opportunity to do those things with your family, and to learn how to do those things with your kids.

An important aspect of religious transmission, as presented in the previous quote, is for parents to instill in their children a sense of pride about being Jewish. For example, Sheri, an Orthodox mother, explained that being observant is a “gift” that she is giving her children. This gift is a “strong foundation” that will help her children “be proud of who they are.” To strengthen pride and Jewish identity in their children, many parents taught them about Jewish history and their Jewish ancestors, as illustrated by the following comment:

*Interviewer:* What do you consider to be the most important thing for you to do as a Jewish mother?
*Janice (Orthodox mother):* To connect my children with Jewish history [and] make them understand their part of it. And to live actively as a Jew the best that I can.

A Reform father of two children similarly commented:

*Matthew:* We teach them heritage… I think you will find that the children believe it strongly [as] a part of their heritage.

A Reform mother from a different family highlighted the respect they have for their Jewish heritage:

*Dina:* I think that such a huge part of Judaism is about family. Most of our holidays are centered around family celebrations, and food, and it’s like food is such an important part of Judaism. That sitting around the table, and enjoying a meal, and enjoying each other, and I would say that that respect for family, and respect for parents, and *respect for heritage plays a tremendous part in who we are*, and how we raise our children, and how we counsel them to respect their elders, including their grandparents and their great grandparents.

Another parent emphasized the responsibility that she feels to her ancestors that she tries to instill in her children:

*Debbi (Conservative mother):* In terms of why I have chosen Judaism as opposed to other possible religions or faiths, part of it is that I don’t see it as an option and I don’t think I could with any degree of sincerity. Part of it is a responsibility. I don’t mean a burden of responsibility, but kind of a privilege of responsibility. *I am responsible to my ancestors,*
I am responsible to those who died for this [faith], I live it as fully as I can and teach my children and do what I can to live up to certain values of the faith.

An Orthodox father of two also stressed the importance of teaching his children about family history:

Yigal: I feel that it’s very important to try to make our children aware what our own family history is, not just that my family is Lubavitch, which is part of the story, but going back. My great grandmother and great aunt were Yiddish socialists and that is a point of pride and I think that is something that I want them to understand, even though today there are very few Jewish socialists. Also, in terms of the Holocaust, I think it is important that my children know that my grandparents got out before the war, but their aunts and uncles were all killed in the Holocaust. I want them to know about those things, and at the same time to know that there is not one answer to the Holocaust.

The following two parents from different families felt that forming a strong identity in their children requires an extensive knowledge about Jewish scripture and Jewish rituals:

Micah (Orthodox father of seven): For me the most important thing I would like to give my kids is the desire only to grow in their Jewish identity, the desire that they should grow in deeper interest in knowing the scripture of Torah and learning it, the desire to pursue it. That’s what I want most for them. I view that quality is the most important quality.

Susan (Reform mother): I want them to have that background and to know about that kind of life and ritual… I want them to know about everything behind it. When they grow up they’ll have to decide on their own but they’ll have had everything that we’ve provided in their upbringing and they’ll need to choose. If I don’t provide it, then they won’t have known and won’t be able to choose. It’s my role to have it be part of their lives.

The quotes from these seven parents, affiliated with all three major branches of Judaism, stressed that they want their children to have knowledge of, and respect for, their Jewish heritage. Notice that many of these parents said that knowledge of Jewish history and their Jewish ancestors is the most important thing they can give to their children. Janice felt strongly about “connecting her children with Jewish history” and helping them “understand their part in it.” Debbie wanted her children to feel a “responsibility” to their ancestors and to those “who died for this faith.” Micah said that the most important thing was for his children to have a strong
Jewish identity and to know the Torah. Dina, like Jacob (quoted previously), taught her children that their heritage must be “respected.” Susan wanted her children to “know about everything behind” the rituals they perform.

To influence their children’s future and to strengthen their children’s Jewish pride, these parents taught them the Jewish past, an important point emphasized by Goldscheider (2004). As Yigal expressed at the end of the previous theme, and as illustrated throughout this theme, being Jewish must include more than observing Jewish practices and traditions out of a “slavish obedience to tradition.” Being a proud Jew requires knowledge of the Jewish past and respect for those who came before them and who died for Judaism.

One final series of comments from an Orthodox family emphasizes many aspects of parenting that were highlighted in this subtheme, particularly the responsibility that these parents felt to transmit their religion to their children and how they attempted to accomplish this task:

Janice (mother): God has handed us enormous responsibilities, yeah? To raise the next generation of Jews. To make sure they have a Jewish consciousness, that they feel close to Hashem, that they know where to turn in times of trouble, and that they know what it means to live as a Jew.

Michael (father): To be Jewish myself, authentically and so therefore to provide an example—an authentic, non-conflictive, or at least minimally-conflicted example—of faith and behavior. And also to transmit the tradition in as far as I understand it.

Marissa (17-year-old daughter): Well, they’re excellent examples. They do exactly as they tell us to do... They’re always there giving a good example. I don’t know what else to say, you’re just there… So I would say the actual practice and really intentional practice of Halakhah [Jewish Law] is what was necessary to transmit a sense of Jewish identity to me, otherwise I probably wouldn’t have had much of one.

Janice: But we also [spent] many hours studying, or teaching and studying together. Many hours spent on Hebrew. Many hours spent on preparation for your bar mitzvah was a big…

Nate (20-year-old son): Exactly, I mean, my mother, actually for a while was kind of dragging me along. I may not really have at the time... understood any of what I was learning. You know, she insisted that I study Hebrew. She insisted that I study for my bar mitzvah quite early, actually. And that had a big effect too.

Janice: Also because we studied together.

Nate: Persistence. Yes. And that actually was, that was very important.

Janice: [We] really established that we’re all in this together, that this is the family
commitment we’re doing.

_Nate_: Yeah, parents teaching children is something that doesn’t happen enough.

_Janice_: That’s the way it’s supposed to be.

_Nate_: Yes, actually teach your children as their teachers as opposed to giving them to someone else to do it by proxy.

_Janice_: Yeah.

_Marissa_: I also have a great respect for my parents because I can’t imagine how tough it’s got to be to not only raise your children Jewishly, but become Jewish as you’re doing it. And how, you know, I’m guessing, quite a few times, they probably thought to themselves, “Why do we bother?” you know, and think, “Oh it’s so tough.” But then realize it’s for a very, very important reason.

This theme has illustrated that children seem to increase observance in the home in certain ways. When parents, who were raised Jewish, transition to parenthood they tend to increase their in-home Jewish observance for the kids’ benefit. In addition, children bring home what they learn in school or at other Jewish community events. Parents then add to the experience by doing it with them and teaching them the meaning behind the traditions. The data presented in this theme also highlights that many parents feel a deep responsibility to transmit their culture and religion to their children and to help them establish a strong Jewish identity and an appreciation for their Jewish heritage.

**Theme 5. Sabbath Observance in the Home**

In this theme I narrow the focus to a specific, widespread Jewish practice: Sabbath observance. According to a recent Pew survey (2013), nearly half of Jews (45%) who have a Jewish spouse reported that they _always or usually_ light Sabbath candles; however, that percentage would be higher if the survey included additional Sabbath traditions in the home, such as special family meals. Participants in the present study mentioned practices associated with the Sabbath more than any other cultural or religious practice. Of the thirty families in this sample, twenty eight (93%) discussed the Sabbath during the interview and most mentioned it multiple times. When asked, _what practices or observances hold special meaning for you as a_
couple or family, nineteen families (63%) mentioned the Sabbath. As Wendy, a Conservative woman stated, many Jews who do not believe in God observe Shabbat: “I have a lot of [Jewish] friends who don’t believe in God who celebrate Shabbat every Friday.” The comment from the following interview further illustrates the importance of this tradition:

Abraham (Orthodox father): The one that comes to mind right at the beginning is Shabbat...because you’re building all week to it. Everything in the household, everything in Judaism revolves around Shabbat. And I really do think that by and large Shabbat is the most important one.

Like Abraham, a Reform family emphasized the importance of Sabbath:

Christine (wife): We’ll start with the Sabbath. I mentioned that we don’t go to synagogue every Friday night, but we do have a dinner at home. We do light candles. We do say prayers. It’s very important for the kids, and for us.

Jerry (husband): I think that the Sabbath is a very important part of our experience and there was a time when I could take off early on Fridays and go home and actually make a challah. I haven’t been able to do that lately, but that, making sure that we do some recognition of the Sabbath, each Sabbath, is really important

Christine: I’m right now a little conflicted about the fact that we don’t go to Friday night services... Because I’m hearing from the Rabbi that he really wants us to come more, and coming from a Catholic background, where you always went to church on Sunday, I mean that was not an optional thing. But in the Jewish community, the at-home participation in the Sabbath is equivalent to, not the same as going to synagogue, but [it] is the more important thing. If you had to only do one, you should light candles and say prayers at home.

The significance of the Sabbath for many Jews is already well-known. This theme explores why Sabbath home traditions are salient for many Jewish families and how they may strengthen family relationships and lead to other positive outcomes. This section is divided into three subthemes: 1) Sabbath traditions help form and maintain strong Jewish identity, 2) Sabbath facilitates peace and relaxation, and 3) Sabbath traditions unify the family.

Subtheme 1. Sabbath traditions help form and maintain strong Jewish identity.

Several participants discussed the importance of the Sabbath in the context of tradition, identity, and self-definition. One example was provided by a Conservative father of two:
Joshua: Judaism is a...dialectical religion. There’s always a tension between the holy and the every day. And there’s the tension between the two which gives it its own complexity... I mean having Shabbat, that distinction is what gives meaning to life. Otherwise you work all the time and it would be intolerable. But when one sets time aside, it becomes very critical in defining self as well.

Notice that, for Joshua, one of the outcomes of taking time away from the profane (“every day”) and focusing on the “holy,” in this case the Sabbath, is not just to relax or to get in touch with one’s spirituality, but to define the self. One of the major reasons why he takes time away from the world is because he is Jewish and is observing the Sabbath; this tradition helps him remember his Jewishness. Joshua’s wife also discussed the Sabbath in the context of tradition and the connection they feel to their ancestors and to other Jews:

Melanie: [We light candles] because it’s what [my] mother does and [my] grandmothers do. It is because all Jewish women that light candles on Friday night are saying blessings at the same time... It’s very special. You know, the house is always bright and filled with life. The house is just clean. We just came back from our summer home in Nova Scotia, and it’s really cool to have our Shabbat there because it’s in a village of 40 houses and we’re the only Jews there and at night the house is lit up and the candles are on the table... So there it’s really cool because you know that everybody else is doing it in other parts of the world, but we’re the only ones in this village, and it’s very special.

Melanie strongly emphasized the connection they feel to the global Jewish community during Sabbath, particularly when lighting the candles. The following comment from a Reform mother further illustrates the salience of Sabbath and lighting candles for strengthening identity and increasing appreciation for ancestors and the tradition:

Kristen: What [lighting candles] meant to me was tradition because I have the candlesticks that my grandmother used. I still have them and that’s why I wanted to light candles because this is what my grandma did and this is what I’m going to do and I’m going to pass those candlesticks down to my daughter. Whether she uses them to light Shabbat candles or not, I don’t know but that’s really, really important to me.

A Conservative couple with two children also commented on lighting comments with more detail:
Marc: I’m really affixed by the links we have with our early ancestors in Judaism. The religious aspects of Judaism don’t turn me on nearly as much as the cultural aspects. When we celebrate the Shabbat on Friday night, we are doing the same thing my relatives did thousands of years ago, that intrigues me. We light candles at my Mom’s house that our family has been lighting for two hundred years, that’s amazing…. Even when I worked unbelievably crazy hours and at crazy times in life, we always have Friday nights together… I don’t know that the Sabbath meal is a religious experience for most people but for me, it’s the heart of religion.

Debbie: We light candles every Friday night to welcome the Sabbath and I use two sets of candlesticks. One was given to us for our wedding and the other was my grandmother’s that she used for I don’t know how long. And then my husband’s parents use a set of candlesticks that has been in my father-in-law’s family for maybe two hundred years or so. And they’ve been passed down and polished, and my mother-in-law was saying that when they’re gone the candlesticks will be passed down to us. The important thing is that in each generation, they are always passed down to the child who lights the candles every Friday night. Something like that, I think, is just incredible…the connection you feel with your family, with your people, and your history…

Another couple also discussed the importance of the Sabbath for their family and how it makes the kids feel special. This family, whose Jewish affiliation is non-Orthodox but unspecified otherwise, explained how the kids were not Jewish, as they were adopted; however, they started learning about Judaism from their new parents, and their Jewish identity was greatly enhanced by their participation in Sabbath activities in the home:

Rachel: Well, the kids had never done Passover, and all that kind of stuff. But Friday nights are big nights for us. The first year, we took them to services every Friday night. We haven’t really gone for the last year, but every Friday night, we get out the Sabbath candles, and I lights the candles, and say the prayer in Hebrew, and I’ve got wine glasses, so we do grape juice in the wine glasses for the kids, and the boys know the prayer over the wine, and then they all do the prayer over the bread. Usually we have pizza on Friday night. But that’s their favorite thing to eat and they know that Friday night is the Sabbath, and so that’s our big deal… The kids love that. They love lighting the candles, and saying the prayers. They like drinking out of wine glasses. They think that’s a big deal.

David: And that’s a big deal for them, and that ties in with the religion. And they like being Jewish. See, they were nothing before. They had no religious training at all. So, the fact that we’re Jewish, and they come into the family, and it’s, “Oh, we’re Jewish? Wow!” It’s like, they’re really not, but they are now.

Rachel: They were in foster care for almost 4 years before we got them.

David: They think that’s a big deal. They like being Jewish. And they’re unique. They’re the only Jews around.

Rachel: Our Friday night service, our Friday night thing… It is just that the kids like to do it. It just makes them feel special.
The previous comments illustrate how salient rituals and traditions can be for both adults and children. For these Jewish families, lighting candles is a ritual that, while simple, tends to strengthen identity because: 1) it is a frequently practiced, unique, and symbolic ritual that institutes the beginning of a holy day; and 2) it is a ritual that some families have been performing for generations that include passing down antique candle holders from mother to daughter. In her comment, Kristen explained that she loves lighting candles on the Sabbath because her grandmother used those same candle holders, and Kristen was looking forward to giving them to her daughter.

**Subtheme 2. Sabbath facilitates peace and relaxation.** This next subtheme deals less with the identity-related benefits of observing the Sabbath, and more with the practical benefits, including peace and relaxation. The following participant described the Sabbath as an “island” that separates observers from the chaotic world:

*Janice (Orthodox mother): Just being at home with God… You feel it when Shabbat is over, and it’s back to all the troubles of the world. And you turn on the news, and there have been more troubles. And it’s such an island of peacefulness.*

An Orthodox parent from another interview also used the word “island” to describe the Sabbath.

*Moshe: It’s an island in time. It is completely removed from the rest of the world and the rest of your existence. It’s a timeout and there’s nothing to think about except for God and Shabbat and each other, and everything else is gone put aside.*

Janice commented that Sabbath to her means “being at home with God.” Moshe also mentioned family and God in relation to the Sabbath, specifically that observing the Sabbath requires one to reserve thoughts for God and family and that “everything else” must be set aside. Another Orthodox parent discussed how the Sabbath is not just about doing or performing rituals, like lighting candles or saying blessings, but also avoiding stressful thoughts:
Melissa: It’s funny, there’s all this stressful air before Shabbat, getting ready and all this, and then you light the candles. Everything does change. And you know the laws about Shabbat, you’re not even supposed to be thinking anything stressful, let alone talking about anything stressful. It’s like you leave all the stresses of the rest of the week behind… And the kids are always very excited about it. They know that no one’s going anywhere, no one’s answering the phone, no one’s driving anywhere, that we’re just going to be here as a family.

The following comment also illustrates the high emphasis that some families place on separating themselves from the stressful activities of the week to rest and regroup:

Michael (Orthodox father): Well, certainly the observances that you do on the day, although all of those are important, it’s what you don’t do and what you are released from [doing] that is also very important. That is the day that is set outside of time… because every other day is stressful—[you’re] striving of the job, you’re striving to teach, you’re striving to keep the home clean, you’re striving to deal with all the challenges that life gives you. And sometimes they’re really hard to put aside, but that is what you are commanded to do. And, personally it took me a long time to recognize the value of it. But I do. You are to set aside all the other aspects of your life.

The next two quotes are similar to Michael’s comment. The first was provided by a Conservative father:

Joshua: So we’ve seen plenty of examples of this where people run everywhere and Shabbat is just one more day to run everywhere, and you know what? Your life is stolen from you. So by having Shabbat, we reclaim our lives, even if for a day, it’s enough to get our bearings back and that is enough to sustain you throughout the week, it does linger that way. It works.

This next quote was provided by an Orthodox mother:

Simcha: It just makes us stop and rest. Normally during the week [we’re] running around, whether it’s work or errands or shopping… This quiets us down. This gives us a rest. I mean we can’t do anything. You can’t go anywhere. I can’t talk on the phone, it’s not ringing. The TV is not on. It just, you know, you rest. You take naps, I go to classes. We just, we see friends, we talk. You know, we play, as a family we play games. Things like that.

Finally, the last two quotes from participants of two different families also explain how Sabbath facilitates relaxation:

Marissa (17-year-old Orthodox daughter): Okay, it means that I don’t have to worry about the usual things. The rest of the week. Totally different time. We have Shabbat,
and that’s different. We don’t have to worry about the rest of the world. The rest of the world goes on. But we’re here with our family and our religion. That’s just, you know, it’s our time.

Debbie (Conservative mother): [Sabbath gives us] a chance to breathe, to relax. We’ve had a busy week and here’s our time to be together and we always take a deep breath before we do this and let all the thoughts, craziness and worries, and everything slip away... I think that when we take the time out, when we light the candles Friday night, that’s a time that I feel really close to them... When we sit across the table from each other, my husband and I, and the candles are lit, and you see the kids, there is something you get from that that is SO DEEP. It’s just a feeling that all is right in the world...it doesn't matter what else is going on. Right in that circle...it’s awe-inspiring. That’s what it means to me.

Notice that these last two participants, an unrelated daughter and mother, both discussed their family in relation to their relaxation time. Debbie specifically linked the “timeout” aspect of Sabbath to her relationship with her family and that taking time away from the “craziness” to observe Sabbath provides moments for her to “feel really close” to her children. For Debbie, the simple practice of lighting candles and sitting with her family is “awe-inspiring” and helps her feel that “all is right in the world.” Such simple rituals, if practiced routinely, have been linked with these types of outcomes, including positive thoughts and greater family unity (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Loser et al., 2009; Marks et al., 2012; Rossano, 2012; Spagnola & Fiese, 2007). The latter outcome of family unity is the topic of the next subtheme.

**Subtheme 3. Sabbath traditions unify the family.** The most common concepts from the data regarding the Sabbath were family time and family unity, as illustrated by the following three comments, all from different families:

*Josiah (19-year-old Orthodox son):* For me Shabbat is the pinnacle of everything… We all spend time together. We have three meals together. We play [games].

*Nate (20-year-old Orthodox son):* Well, Shabbat has the traditional role of being sort of that time when families are generally together… And I don’t know if there’s any particular practice, that I can think of, that’s particularly more meaningful than [Sabbath] to me personally.
Zvi (20-year-old Orthodox son): At times in my life where I have not particularly been interested in aspects of Judaism for their own sake, Shabbat has always been the thing that I keep doing for the family’s sake because whether or not I care about it for religious purposes, it’s such a big deal on a family level that that’s not something you can cut out.

An Orthodox mother unrelated to the three males just quoted also highlighted family togetherness in relation to the Sabbath:

Mara: I like family togetherness. And I think that one of the only ways to achieve that, given the lifestyle of most Americans is if one can focus on a particular time, a particular holiday, and use those as a vehicle, to explore the holiday, to explore the tradition, and to explore each other and to be with each other. So I value buying into Shabbat and the holidays as a way to bring us closer together.

Notice that three of the four quotes about the importance of family time on the Sabbath were provided by offspring. These individuals were not young children who were attached to their parents; they were emerging adults who emphasized that they value the Sabbath a great deal because it provides opportunities for them to spend time with their families. A few additional comments also explain why offspring, including younger children, find value in observing Sabbath with their family. The first was provided by an Orthodox female offspring:

Tobi (17-year-old): I think [Shabbat] is really nice because it’s consistent. You know, it’s like not changing at all…and I kind of like that, even though we’re not a particularly observant family, that it’s not difficult for me, or weird for me to tell my friends [that] I’m eating at home tonight for a couple of hours. And I really like that consistency, that we all sit at the table together and say the prayers.

The next quote was provided by a Reform couple:

Susan: We do the same rituals for our holidays and all our Sabbath activities and you know, a lot of times we have to nag them and pull them into things. But if we DON’T do something or if something is missed or if we say, “We are not going to do Shabbat.” They say, “What do you mean we’re not doing it!?” They’ll get mad that we don’t do it. They’re upset because it’s not the way it usually is. They get upset if we don’t hallow [the Sabbath]. It’s very interesting. Sometimes they act like we are annoying them by dragging them through the ritual but if we don’t have it there for them they get upset by it.

Alan: They like the routine. They complain about it, but they like it.
The next quote also discusses the importance of family time; however, this participant explained that her family consciously increased their observance because they valued quality family time:

*Karen (Conservative mother):* We’re trying…to do more around Shabbat observance. And the ultra-Orthodox do nothing between sundown on Friday and sundown on Saturday but study and be together and be with the family. They don’t drive, they don’t buy, they don’t use money, they don’t use the phone, they don’t use electricity. We’re not like that. We’re not there yet and I don’t know if we’ll ever get there. But we are trying to be more observant of Shabbat by spending time together as a family and I think that’s strengthening for a couple to sort of put everything else aside for an entire day, which is hard and spend that time together.

Another Conservative couple offered a similar comment:

*Joshua:* Early on when the kids were very young, we had a big crisis that we had to confront, and that was whether or not we would let the kids play soccer on Shabbat. *Melanie:* On Saturday morning. *Joshua:* Yeah, because all of our [daughter’s] friends were playing soccer, so we let her do it for a few weekends, and we hated it because it stole the family away from us. And in the end we decided: no, we weren’t going to do it ever again. And we’ve really held to that, not just with the children, but with ourselves as well. With very few exceptions, very rare exceptions, it’s the one time we’re all together.

The previous comments in this subtheme illustrate that the Sabbath is important for family togetherness. The following comments provide details on the kinds of traditions and rituals that families engage in that elevate the significance of the Sabbath for many Jews regarding family relationships. In other words, what is it about the Sabbath and Sabbath traditions that help unify the family? A Reform couple, for example, explained that the Sabbath is accompanied by a special feeling because the family experiences the Sabbath together:

*Linda:* [Shabbat] brings you to the closeness of the marriage and the family, things like…lighting Shabbat candles, or being together during Shabbat; during Shabbat you kind of get that special feeling like a lot of Christians do, that kind of closeness, that sense of unity. *Saul:* There’s a special meaning to Sabbath traditions when you’re doing it [as] a family.
The following four comments from mothers provide more concrete examples of what makes the Sabbath special:

Wendy (Conservative): The kids know Friday night is Shabbat. They don’t make plans. They know it’s Shabbat. I’ll pick them up from school [and] they’ll be like “Tonight’s Shabbat. Who’s coming?” They’re always asking. The older one said to me the other night, “I love Shabbat”… Everybody’s together and we’ll set the table and it’s a nicer dinner… We’ll set the table, the kids, depending on who’s coming, we’ll put on nicer clothes, but we do the lights and the cooking.

Kristen (Reform): When our kids were younger we did Shabbat dinners every Friday night and it was really fun for all of us I think. My daughter would run upstairs and put on her special Shabbat clothes and she and I would make challah [traditional Sabbath bread] together.

Melanie (Conservative): It’s fun. We always change our clothes and put on nice clothes… It’s our moment. It’s our evening and time to kind of…become a unit once again. We’ve all scattered and gone our separate ways during the week.

Esther (Orthodox): The special thing about Shabbat [is that] we always eat supper together, so at our house it’s not so unique that we’re all around the table. But I try to make special things for Shabbat that I know that the kids really like and they’re looking forward to it.

These parents highlighted family meals that help make Sabbath a special experience. The first three participants also mentioned that they wear nice clothes for the family dinner. More specifically, Kristen established a tradition of making challah with her daughter, and Esther saved the best, or “special,” recipes for Shabbat meals. Other participants in this sample discussed studying sacred texts as a family during Sabbath meals or singing together on the Sabbath, as illustrated by the following comment:

Elizabeth (Orthodox mother): So Fridays I would come home, I would work, and he would get Shabbat dinner ready. We’ve had Shabbat dinner since [before] we were Orthodox… Shabbat usually involved turning on…CDs or tapes of Jewish music, singing with the kids while we got ready for Shabbat, lighting the candles, having dinner…and then when we were done with dinner and dessert, we watched a movie. So it was kind of family time together.
Another Orthodox couple explained their adapted tradition of singing with their kids on the Sabbath:

*Alissa*: So for sure Shabbat observance and we light Shabbat candles and we are not on the computer and we don’t drive anywhere. [We] don’t talk on the phone or go shopping or do weekly things and that is very important personally and as a couple. So that going to synagogue together and now that our older daughter is bigger we incorporated singing together on Shabbat, either on Friday or Saturday afternoon while it’s still Sabbath. Singing Shabbat songs together in the house is something that I think, we had tested that out when we were dating. While we were staying at his family’s house while dating we went on a walk and we started singing together. So I checked that off as something that we can do together, especially on Shabbat. And we do that now and recently we had friends over and we all started singing together, and they said “We don't sing well.” But all of us are tone deaf, but that wasn’t the issue. It was more of the energy. Singing religious songs is really significant to me.

*Yigal*: Definitely singing together is important… Also another thing is kind of minor, but is really beautiful, is that on Friday night right after we light candles, we create a little dance with our kids and us. We dance for a minute or two while singing Shabbat songs. They love to do it and it’s such a good thing. There are so many reasons why we love. Number one, we love it because we made it up…So that is why I love the dancing because it’s something that we love doing and our children love doing. It injects our Judaism and our family with a sense of joy with the traditions.

In addition to the food, nice clothes, games, dancing, and singing, the following quotes discuss another practice mentioned by several participants: family blessings. Several parents established traditions in their homes of blessing their children on the Sabbath, as illustrated by the comment from the following Reform couple:

*Steve*: At night time we say a prayer before going to bed, with each of the kids, and we have them bless whoever they’d like to bless, and we bless whoever we’d like to bless, and that’s a special thing that we do. And we also bless the kids, usually on Friday nights.

*Rebecca*: The blessings that we do on Friday night…I never even knew existed as a child; it is a special time when the parents bless the children. It is a beautifully wonderful and tender moment that we have really come to do and our children have come to expect. [It’s] not just that we put our hands on their heads and bless them, but we also, each of us, says something to each child about something that we’re proud of that they’ve done this week. It’s just a wonderful thing.
Another Reform couple discussed Sabbath blessings in greater detail:

*Scott:* Most Friday nights we do a blessing with the kids, and bless them, and whisper what they did good for the week in their ear, and they look forward to that.

*Julie:* In the Bible and the Torah, there’s a blessing where Jacob blesses Joseph’s two sons, right before he dies. He’s an elderly man, and he blesses Ephraim and Manasseh, who are Joseph’s two sons. It’s a blessing in Hebrew, but it’s, “May God bless you and keep you. May his light shine upon you and be gracious unto you,” and it’s the priestly benediction, so we say that blessing, and then we do whisper something in each of their ears.

*Scott:* Now they look forward to it. I think if it was just a blessing, they wouldn’t care.

*Julie:* So the thing that we whisper in their ear is not like, you know, “Oh, I’m so glad you made an A on the spelling test,” it’s some kindness that you did. It’s to make, hopefully, they’ll always remember that the things that we told them that we were proud of them for were things that were acts that God would be proud of you—how you acted to somebody else, kindness, honesty, you know, things like that. So, you don’t have to be a great athlete or a great student, it’s just being a good person…. It’s funny, because [one of our sons] is really serious about what we whisper in his ear, and if you whisper something vague, in general, like “I’m really proud of how you were nice to your brother this week,” then he’ll say, “Like when?” And it is just so funny, because you can’t get away with, like, if you didn’t pay attention that week to something. It really takes a lot of work to have something [to say]. So what it also does is make you catch them being really good. It makes you notice them being good. And Scott is funny, he’s like, “Can you think of something? I need to tell (son’s name) something.” Because, you know, I’m with them more… It keeps you on your toes.

Although most of the participants discussed positive aspects of the Sabbath, a few commented on the negative aspects. These negative aspects were discussed in response to a different question: *what are the challenges of being a religious minority?* Several participants explained the challenges of observing Sabbath due to concerts, sporting events, or other activities on Friday nights or Saturday mornings. This theme is not discussed in this study; however, it may be important to consider at least one quote as a counter example. The following quote illustrated, not so much the external influences that may discourage Sabbath observance at home, but the internal struggle. Kristen, a Reform mother of two, explained that observing Sabbath at home is hard because it requires a lot of energy, and also because the kids do not want to join them:
With us and our kids, we’re hardly in the same room together ever. We don’t have dinner together every night and it would be nice if we were having Friday night dinners together still. I think part of it is with my son going to a Jewish high school now, he kind of feels like he has enough of that… And he probably does not want to eat dinner with us on Friday nights, but I still think we can do it and it’s kind of in my head that we should be trying to do it again. We could always have dinner together and then they could go out with their friends after. And if they want to have their friends here, that’s fine. I’m totally fine with having other people here… [Another] thing that kept us from having Shabbat dinner is thinking that it’s got to be a big deal and I don’t have time to set the table. Because we used to do this thing, white table cloth and special clothes. I mean, I just don’t have the energy for it.

Some of the factors contributing to the “special” nature and atmosphere of the Sabbath, mentioned by several participants, were the very factors that discouraged Kristen’s family from observing the Sabbath. For example, her kids seemed overwhelmed with Jewish related practices from school and did not want to spend Friday night at home doing more prayers and observances. They wanted to be with friends. Moreover, the special dinners and nice clothes mentioned by other participants required too much time and energy for Kristen.

This theme has provided details about why and how the Sabbath may be salient for families. Several participants mentioned their identity in relation to the Sabbath and how lighting candles, a centuries-old tradition, connects them to their ancestors. The Sabbath is also a day that is reserved for relaxing and peaceful family activities that seems to help reinvigorate the mind and body before the start of another hectic week. Finally, several participants seem to look forward to frequent participation in Sabbath rituals and traditions like family meals, playing games, singing, and blessing the children, all of which are special moments for the family that seem to improve relationships and unify the family.

These findings are supported by other studies, as presented in Chapter 2, that show that meaningful family rituals are associated with many positive outcomes, including higher relationship satisfaction and strong family identity (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Loser et al.,
2009; Marks et al., 2012; Spagnola & Fiese, 2007), high academic performance and positive social skill development in children (Spagnola & Fiese, 2007), facilitation of relaxation and added structure to the family life (Marks et al., 2012), and higher transmission of social and religious norms (Rossano, 2012). Also note the study by Fiese and Tomcho (2001) in relation to the findings in this theme. They found that husbands’ satisfaction was more closely associated with the meanings behind the rituals, while wives’ satisfaction was associated more with the routine practices and traditions.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Nearly ninety years ago, Sigmund Freud referred to religion as an “intoxicant,” a “poison,” and a “childishness to be overcome” (Freud, 1927, p. 88). At a science conference in 1999, Nobel Prize (physics) winner, Steven Weinberg, said: “Religion is an insult to human dignity. With or without it you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion” (Freedom From Religion Foundation, 1999). More recently, the outspoken HBO comedian and social commentator, Bill Maher, opined that all religions are “stupid and dangerous” (Chumley, 2015). Regardless of whether “religion” really is poisonous, insulting to human dignity, stupid, or dangerous, the first four chapters of the present study have shown that various aspects of religion, in this case Judaism, may be salient for many individuals and families and provide several benefits. It is not the purpose of the present study to defend religion, or more specifically Judaism; the purpose is, however, to explore how Judaism may influence family life and how family relationships may impact Jewish observance.

As presented in Chapter 1, religion is fairly important or very important to nearly ninety percent of the population in the U.S. (Mahoney, 2000). Similarly, a large majority of Jews by religion (66%) and Jews who have a Jewish spouse (75%) reported that religion is important to them (Pew, 2013). A case for exploring Jewish families was also propounded in Chapter 1. This highly-influential cultural and religious minority experience many complexities and paradoxes that impact individuals and families. Historically, Jews have experienced a high level of both achievement and oppression. Many Jews currently living are only one generation removed from the Holocaust. Specifically regarding the family, the American Jewish community is facing difficult challenges including low marriage rates, high intermarriage rates, low birthrates, and
low fertility rates. Moreover, many of the Jewish cultural and religious traditions are performed in the home with the family (Kaufman, 1996). For these reasons, among others, Jewish families are an ideal demographic to examine.

Religion-family literature was reviewed in Chapter 2 that highlighted numerous positive familial outcomes associated with religious involvement. However, over three-fourths of the quantitative studies from 1999 to 2010, used only one or two items to measure religious variables (Mahoney, 2010)—frequency of church attendance to measure “religiosity” being perhaps the most common. A few prominent religion-family researchers have urged scholars to move beyond examining superficial variables and producing simple regression models of non-representative samples, and to employ more rigorous methods (e.g., longitudinal) in the their studies, as well as to conduct more in-depth qualitative studies (Mahoney 1999, 2010; Marks, 2004; Marks & Dollahite, 2011).

Empirical literature on Jewish families was also reviewed in Chapter 2, which reveals that research that investigates relational outcomes is scant. A large body of empirical and theoretical literature on American Jewry examines broad demographic trends relating to intermarriage and assimilation. Much of the “family” research on the Jewish community examines individual outcomes, such as self-actualization of mothers, identity formation of youth who attend Jewish day school, or the treatment of women in general. Prominent sociologists of American Jewry (Brodbar-Nemzer, 1988; Cohen & Eisen, 2000; Goldscheider, 2002, 2004) have urged researchers to make the study of families “the top item on our research agenda for the next decade” (Goldscheider, 2002, p. 2008), and to concentrate efforts to conduct in-depth, qualitative studies. The present study seeks to answer the petitions of these sociologists and family scholars cited the previous two paragraphs.
Following an explanation of the sample and method in Chapter 3, novel findings were presented from the narrative data on five themes in Chapter 4. The aim of Chapter 4 was not to steal the microphone from the participants and perform as a *diva soloist*, but to act as a *choir director* who “blends and harmonizes” voices from the presented data (Marks, under review). In other words, participants’ voices were presented without providing extensive author-driven commentary in order to convey their reflections and comments with as much fidelity as possible (Marks, Cherry, Hatch, & Lu, in press). Since the findings are presented in Chapter 4, it is not ideal to repeat them again here (Goldberg and Allen, 2015). For a snapshot of the findings, see Appendix D.

**Implications**

What are some of the implications of these findings, and how might this study be useful to researchers and counselors? This section addresses these questions and discusses the implications of the present study for theory, research, and practice. I will also highlight how this study may benefit the fields of Family Studies, Psychology, and Social Work.

**Theory implications.** Much of the religion-family research seems to lack a theoretical or conceptual foundation. Further, qualitative research seeks to develop and inform theory, and is not necessarily expected to be grounded in theory, as discussed in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, many theories may be considered and utilized when studying American Jewish families. First, the present study was conducted on the foundation of the conceptual framework proposed by Dollahite and Marks (2005, 2009), who suggested that examining religious families with more depth can be done by investigating specific factors concerning *religious community*, *religious beliefs*, and *religious practices*, or more specifically, *how* and *why* these factors influence families.
A major theory worth considering when studying Jewish families is identity theory. Jewish thinker Erik Erikson wrote extensively on this theme. While Erikson was influenced by the Freudian, psychoanalytic tradition that focuses on five psychosexual stages of development, he diverged from Freud, his Jewish predecessor, by positing eight stages of psychosocial development from birth to death (Miller, 1999). For Erikson, the quest for identity is most crucial for improved life satisfaction and overall individual functioning. The process of identifying oneself—ultimately answering the question, “who am I?”—is present and ongoing in each stage of life, but is most salient in the adolescent stage (Erikson, 1959; Schwartz, 2001). The concept of identity not only constitutes one’s beliefs, but also one’s actions; therefore, researchers have deemed fruitful the study of identity in relation to religion (Capps 1997, 2008; Erikson, 1981; Hakola, 2009). As an illustration of the salience of religious identity formation for many people, sociologist Christian Smith (2009), in a major study on the religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults, quoted a woman named Amanda, who observed that the biggest challenge facing emerging adults is “deciding who we are, the growing up process of separating from our parents and deciding for ourselves what we want to be and do” (p. 26).

Identity formation includes the process and maintenance of a sense of belonging to a group with a common interest. This sense of belonging usually dictates what one believes and what one does or practices because of their connection to a particular group (Phinney, 1990). Consider the definition of ethnic identity by Bernal, Knight, Garza, Ocampo, and Cota (1990): “personal ownership of ethnic group membership, and its correlated knowledge, understanding, behaviors, and feelings that are direct implications of that membership” (p. 4).

Jews are an ideal demographic to consider when researching issues pertaining to identity. “Jew” refers to both birth heritage and religion; therefore, scholars have used identity theory to
study the Jewish population (Altman, Inman, Fine, Ritter, & Howard, 2010; Boyarin & Boyarin, 1993; Lightstone & Bird, 1995), and Jewish families in particular (Davey, Fish, & Robila, 2001). As presented in Chapter 4, various Jewish beliefs and practices may impact family life and family relationships. These beliefs and practices are espoused and observed because of Judaism. It is the connection to Judaism and to the Jewish community that primarily dictate what many individuals and families believe and do.

Another theoretical framework relevant for studying religious families is sacred theory (Burr et al., 2012), which is concerned with how the sacred aspects of the human experience may help and harm families. Sacred theory is grounded on four propositions. The first proposition suggests that sacred aspects (e.g., ideals and beliefs that are based on religion) of the human experience give individuals a “unique, unusually powerful, and salient influence.” The second proposition expands the first, suggesting that sacred aspects of the human experience give families a unique, unusually powerful, and salient influence. The third proposition suggests that sacred aspects of the human experience may help or harm families based on what they do as a result of these sacred aspects. The developers of this theory also posited that it is not “the mere presence of religion in general or global religiosity” that necessarily makes the difference in families, but it is what families actually do as a result of religious ideals and beliefs. The fourth proposition states that the “more behavior is consistent with a cluster of widely shared goals in families the more it tends to be helpful, and the more it is inconsistent with these goals the more it tends to be harmful” (Burr et al., 2012, pp. 14-18).

Although Jews tend not to use terms like “sacred,” “spiritual,” or “faith,” as multiple participants in the present study explained during their interviews, many Jewish families do
implement practices and behaviors that are based on religious traditions that are relevant to the framework of sacred theory.

**Research implications.** “Religion” has been labeled by some, including David B. Larson as recently as 1995, as a dangerous “anti-tenure” topic (Marks, 2005). This may still be the sentiment in the academy, as one recent meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) illustrated. During Jonathan Haidt’s (2011) address to the SPSP audience of more than 1,000 people, only three hands went up when he asked all political conservatives to identify themselves. Another study (Inbar & Lammers, 2012) of SPSP members found that the percentage of fiscal or social conservatives among this group is higher (6%) than demonstrated during Haidt’s 2011 address. However, the fact that only three individuals allegedly raised their hands suggests that conservatives may be more likely to hide their views out of fear of discrimination from their colleagues. Inbar and Lammers (2012) found that the academy tends to be a hostile climate for scholars who are perceived as being conservative. Their surveys revealed that liberal respondents were more likely to discriminate against conservatives. Specifically, one in four admitted that they would discriminate in reviewing conservatives’ grant applications, and more than one in three would discriminate against them when reviewing employment applications. This trend may be similar in other human science fields including Family Science and Social Work. While these studies do not reflect the topic of religion specifically, it may be the case that scholars who study religion, especially from a salutogenic approach (i.e., strengths based), will be perceived as being conservative.

Despite these trends in discrimination and partisanship in the academy, the topic of religion must not be ignored in the fields of Psychology, Family Studies, and Social Work. The present study, and dozens more cited in Chapters 1 and 2, illustrate that religion is salient for a
majority of families in the United States and that many religious-based factors are associated
with, or even lead to, positive outcomes. More specifically, the present study extends the
knowledge base by examining how Jewish culture and religion may influence and shape Jewish
family life, and also how family relationships may influence the observance of Jewish cultural or
religious traditions. Moreover, this study is one of the only qualitative examinations of
contemporary Jewish families that seeks to not only identify specific practices and beliefs that
influence Jewish families, but also how these practices and beliefs impact Jewish families.

Significantly more research is needed, however, to understand more fully the meanings
and processes of family life in an American Jewish context. Future research must examine in
more depth how Jewish families perpetuate Jewish beliefs and practices and how parents
influence the Jewish identity of their children, and vice versa. In addition, future research must
strive to identify specific Jewish traditions that impact family relationships. The present study
narrowed the focus on one specific practice, Sabbath observance (Theme 5), but several more
practices must be examined.

Perhaps one effective way of exploring Jewish families is to analyze the different
branches of Judaism independently. For instance, this study may be replicated with a purposive
sample composed exclusively of Orthodox Jews or Reform Jews. After these groups are
examined independently, researchers may attempt to conduct comparative studies. As
highlighted briefly in Theme 3, differences in Jewish beliefs regarding the nature of divinity, as
well as divinity’s role in marriage formation, emerged between Orthodox and Reform Jewish
families. Many more studies are required to understand these Jewish intergroup differences.

The salutogenic approach of the present study does not imply that all cultural and
religious aspects of Judaism and Jewish tradition benefit families. This study examines how and
why various Jewish traditions benefit families; however, future research with a pathogenic, or deficit perspective, is also warranted. Such research must explore whether, and if so how, various aspects of Jewish community, beliefs, and practices harm families by leading to stress, fatigue, boredom, intimate partner violence, depression, or decreased relationship satisfaction. Some of these outcomes have already been examined; however, more focus is needed on relational outcomes, not just individual outcomes.

Many of the interview questions employed in the present study may have been formulated with the presuppositions that religion benefits families; therefore, the answers would obviously highlight positive outcomes. In addition, religious people tend not to emphasize the negative aspects of their religion and their answers are likely to contain hyperbole in favor of their religion (Hadaway et al., 1993; Marks et al., 2011). One question in this study did encourage counter examples by asking, *Do you feel that there are any religious beliefs or practices that if misunderstood or misapplied can be harmful to family relationships?* This question is unlikely to generate substantive answers with this particular sample of “highly-involved” Jewish families. By definition these families value Jewish tradition, or they at least participate for social reasons and are benefited by the support structure of their local Jewish community. In response to this question, several participants discussed broadly the separation of genders in Orthodox synagogues or the stereotypical patriarchal structure of some traditional Jewish groups. Very little substance was provided to this question and no clear themes emerged in the data. Only a few participants identified negative aspects of their Jewish experience, which must be explored further in future studies with a different purposive sample. For instance, one counter example presented at the end of Theme 5, revealed that, for this family, Sabbath
observance faded because Kristen, the mother, lacked the energy required to observe it, and the children also pushed back because they wanted to spend Friday nights with friends.

A few other participants, when asked the question, *what affect, if any, does Judaism have on avoiding or reducing marital conflict*, responded that Judaism has actually been the “cause of conflict” in many instances, as in the case of Sam and Laura (Reform). Another couple, Yigal and Alissa (Orthodox), provided a similar response to this question:

*Yigal*: Funny you should ask because the first big fight that we had as a couple was over Judaism.

*Alissa*: Yes!

*Yigal*: Specifically over the role of rituals, [and] the meaning of rituals, in our Jewish life.

They also mentioned at another point in the interview that they frequently debate and argue (not necessarily contentiously) about God; moreover, they discuss with each other their annoyances about their local Jewish congregation. Negative outcomes, like those that briefly surfaced in the interviews, deserve more attention in future studies if we are to understand more fully how Judaism impacts family life.

Finally, future research must use findings of the present study, as well as of other relevant studies on Jewish families, as a point of comparison for various cultural or religious minority groups. Brodbar-Nemzer (1988) articulated that studying American Jewish families is “important because it may have some unique attributes or emphases which provide a ‘laboratory’ for the development” of broader research on families and family theory (p. 78). The greater number of special-interest, cultural, and religious groups that are explored, the more developed the relevant theories will be. Exploring various types of families in a comparative mode may highlight potential benefits, as well as unfavorable trends applicable to all types of families. Moreover, cross-cultural research on minority families may result in more effective interventions for “at-risk” or dysfunctional families.
**Practice implications.** Clinicians and researchers have recognized in recent years that issues pertaining to religion and spirituality are relevant for counselors and social workers who assist couples and families, as most clinicians are almost certain to encounter religious or spiritual clients (Hook, Worthington, Davis, & Atkins, 2013; Roberts-Lewis, 2011; Sharde’, Pavkov, Hecker, & Killmer, 2012; Tangenberg, 2005). Some helping professions like Social Work seemed to have embraced the inclusion of religion and spirituality in education and practice since the 1980s and 1990s, partly as a result of the emergence of postmodern and constructivist approaches to practice (Tangenberg, 2005).

The concern, however, is that most clinicians lack capabilities to address religion in ways that would benefit their clients. For instance, more than 75% of marriage and family therapists (MFTs) and a significant majority of clinical psychologists have received no training related to religion and spirituality (Carlson, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Killmer, 2002; Wendell, 2003). A more recent survey of members of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapists (Rosmarin, Green, Pirutinsky, & McKay, 2013) found that more than one in three reported discomfort in addressing religious or spiritual issues with clients, and 71% reported little or no clinical training dealing with religion. Moreover, Slife and Whoolery (2006) argued that attempts at integrating psychology and religion are problematic because the fundamental and philosophical assumptions behind Psychology’s ideas are biased against many religious people. By continuing to adopt these assumptions, classical behaviorists “run the risk of being fundamentally prejudiced against theists;” this is “not only unethical by psychology’s standards but also potentially misleading” (p. 228). Despite some efforts to include religion in clinical education and practice, some have continued to discourage the inclusion of religion (see, for example, Clark, 1994).
Policy makers and clinicians must be aware of the benefits and pitfalls of certain religious beliefs and practices to families in order to better assist their clients. *Cultural competence* does not mean that an aspect of life as salient as religion to a significant majority of the population must be ignored in favor of every other minority and special-interest demographic. *Cultural competence*, as defined by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), is “the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services” (NASW, 2001, p. 12). Moreover, social workers “should have a knowledge base of their clients’ cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients’ cultures” (NASW, 2001, p. 13). Other associations of helping professions (e.g., Psychology and Nursing) have crafted similar definitions of *cultural competence*. Further, the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) specifically mentions *religion* under the diversity section 3.1 (CSWE, 2008). Thus, clinicians who have received training and who are equipped, for example, to work with LGBT individuals, undocumented immigrants, Hispanics, African-Americans, sexually-active youth, oldest-old adults, adolescent single mothers, abused women, and drug addicts, cannot be applauded as being *culturally competent* if they are uncomfortable, uninformed, and otherwise ill-equipped to address religion, a topic that is important to over 75% of the population (Gallup, 2011; Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney et al., 2001).

Religion, particularly the religious community, may be especially important among religious minorities, like Jews and Muslims, who may lean on their religious faith and religious community for support more than White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASP), for example, who have multiple support structures available to them. Further, Jews, Muslims, and other religious
minorities may be hesitant to trust outsider professional counselors (Wieselberg, 1992), and are, therefore, left to receive counsel from their local religious leaders. Clinicians must be aware, not only of the empirical literature on religion and family, but also of the broader issues and trends of the major world religions, and must obtain additional knowledge of the religions that are more prevalent in their region. Further, they must engaged in outreach to local religious leaders and demonstrate to them that they can help their vulnerable congregants.

This acquired knowledge will not go to waste. Clinicians may use what they learn from empirical literature, as well as from local religious educational classes or online podcasts to develop interventions that will benefit their various types of clients. For instance, Theme 5 of this study demonstrated why Sabbath observance is salient for many Jewish families. Based on this information, clinicians may recommend to their Jewish clients that they implement some of these practices in order to strengthen family relationships or to simply facilitate relaxation and rejuvenation. Further, clinicians may transfer and adapt aspects of these Jewish Sabbath-inspired practices to non-Jewish families. They may urge them to reserve one day a week solely for family time when they can have nice dinners, dress in nice clothes, light candles, sing, dance, study their sacred texts, or discuss topics with their children relevant to their cultural or religious traditions that will help strengthen their ethnic or religious identity. The more knowledge obtained about specific cultural or religious practices of various groups, the better prepared clinicians and therapists will be to effect positive change in the lives’ of their clients.

Limitations

A few limitations of this study have already been highlighted in the previous sections of this chapter. Specifically, this study focused on only one set of beliefs as well as on only two practices (viz., bar/bat mitzvah and Sabbath observance). Several more beliefs and practices,
however, must be examined. In order to more fully understand the various beliefs and the meanings and processes of the various practices, this study could have focused on each branch of Judaism independently, which would have required a larger sample size for each of the major branches of Judaism. Future research must consider this approach.

This study could have also asked a few more specific follow-up questions during the interviews in order to obtain the necessary data concerning these beliefs and practices. However, without the present study, this limitation may not have been as apparent.

Another limitation of the present study, as previously mentioned, may be that negative outcomes were not highlighted or expounded upon. A greater focus on those outcomes may extend the knowledge base and lead to more effective interventions for families. Future researchers, in order to gather appropriate pathogenic (i.e., deficit perspective) data, may consider gathering a purposive sample of individuals and families who perhaps changed their religious affiliation, or whose rabbi identified them as uninvolved or uninterested in being actively involved in Judaism.

Regarding the sample and interviews, this study included offspring in some, but not all of the interviews. I could have either omitted comments or included comments from offspring in all interviews. Moreover, I could have interviewed couples both separately and together in order to satisfy both approaches, each of which is arguably superior to the other. Future research may benefit from doing all of the above: interviewing couples together and separately, as well as interviewing offspring both together with parents and separate from parents.

In addition, most of the interviews were conducted by males. Including female interviewers in all or half of the interviews may reduce potential effects of the researcher’s gender.
Despite these, and other potential limitations, I am confident that the interview structure, sample, design, and overall methodological approach have resulted in a significant contribution to knowledge on the subject, as well as a clear path moving forward to 1) extend research on Jewish families and 2) to transfer knowledge about this religious minority to other ethnic and religious minority families in the United States.

**Conclusion**

From the outset of this study, I sought to explore the meanings and processes of Jewish family life—more specifically, how and why Jewish traditions (cultural and religious) and Jewish family dynamics may influence each other. I sought to approach this exploration through the concepts of community, beliefs, and practices. What I found to be fascinating, however, was that the findings did not necessarily improve our *understanding* of these meanings and processes as much as they did reveal just how much we do not know, and how much more research must be done to increase our understanding of not just Jewish families in the United States, but also other cultural and religious minorities.

These complexities and paradoxes must not be feared. Scholars, by nature, may tend to overly simplify explanations of human behavior, as we are accustomed to do so through our study and development of theory, and due to our apparent obsession with identifying causal relationships. For the Jewish community and Jewish families, however, simplicity is not an option. Life is complicated and religion is complicated. As researchers move forward in examining Jewish family life, as well as families of other cultural and religious backgrounds, let us consider one final comment from Jonathan Boyarin (2013):

In some areas of science, the so called “principle of parsimony” dictates that the simplest answer to a problem is the one to be preferred. But that principle doesn’t apply to all objects of inquiry… When it comes to a matter as emotionally, politically, and historically charged as the Jewish family, we shouldn’t be looking for simple stories.
Instead, we should be working simultaneously to complicate and enrich our own notions and to share them with one another… Let’s do what we can so that there will be a future in which we—Jews, sorts of Jews, and others who may happen to care about Jews—can look back in fascinated wonder on this moment in the career of that thing we persist in calling “the Jewish family.” (p. 162)
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A. STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

Purpose of the Research

I am being asked to participate in a study that examines families and religion. My participation in the study will take 60-90 minutes. I understand that the interviewer will audio record my interview and that she or he will later analyze the interview data.

Rights of Participation

Everything I provide the researcher with will remain anonymous and confidential. If any information from my interview is used in any form, this information will not be accompanied by my name or any other identifying information. I have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) I am uncomfortable answering or request that the tape recorder be turned off for certain responses. I also may end my interview at any time by telling the researcher that I do not want to participate any longer.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks for participating in this study. However, this research will help family scholars and professionals better understand the relationships between families, stress, coping, and religion.

Contacts

I have had time to address any questions or concerns I have with the researcher. If have additional of future questions or concerns, I may contact Dr. Loren Marks at lorenm@lsu.edu or (225) 578-0433.

Participation Assurance

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary.

Consent Signatures

__________________________________  __________________  
Signature                          Date

__________________________________  __________________  
Signature                          Date

Please sign and date above if you agree to participate in the study.
APPENDIX B. DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY FORM

Name:__________________________________________________________

Age:______  Circle One:  Male    Female

Faith Affiliation:____________________________________________________________________

Number and Gender of Children (i.e., 1 girl, 2 boys):____________________________

Child(ren’s) Age(s):_______________________________________________________________

Educational Level (High School, College, etc.):_____________________________________

1) If you feel comfortable responding, approximately what percentage of your income do you spend or donate in direct and indirect ways that involve your faith community?

2) Approximately how many hours a week do you spend in faith-related activities?(including worship services, faith-related meetings, prayer and meditation, scripture study, family worship, youth or children’s organizations, service to other congregational members, etc.)
APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Overarching / Broad Questions
1. How central is your religion to your marriage, and what role does God play in your marriage?

2. Most couples have some conflict, what affect, if any, does Judaism have on avoiding or reducing marital conflict?

3. Do you feel that there are any religious beliefs or practices that if misunderstood or misapplied can be harmful to family relationships?

4. What are the greatest challenges of being an ethnic and religious minority in the surrounding culture?

Jewish Beliefs
5. What are God’s purposes for marriage and families?

6. What are some of your deepest religious beliefs relating to marriage?

Jewish-Related Practices
7. Do either of you influence the other in terms of living a Jewish life or being involved Jewishly?

8. What practices or observances hold special meaning for you as a couple?

9. How important is it to you that your children follow in your faith, follow in your footsteps?

Jewish Community
10. How important is your local Jewish community to you as a family or a couple?

Parenting
11. What do you feel is the most important thing you can do as a Jewish parent?

Miscellaneous
12. Are there any other links between your religion and your family life that you’d like to talk about?
APPENDIX D. TABLE OF FINDINGS

Theme 1. Family Influences Jewish Community Involvement

Interview questions:
- “Do either of you influence the other in terms of living a Jewish life or being involved in the Jewish community?”

Findings:
- Women seem to be the motivating force for increasing, and maintaining, community involvement for the entire family
- Most female participants seemed to accept this role; however, some resented it

Theme 2. Community Involvement Influences Family Life

Interview questions:
- Various questions, but especially, “How important is your local Jewish community to you as a family or a couple?”

Findings:
- Community involvement provides more opportunities for quantity and quality time with family
- Common interests and shared experiences
- Bar/bat mitzvah is a prime example of a milestone that involves the entire family and brings the community together in support of the family

Theme 3. Jewish Religious Beliefs and the Family

Interview questions:
- “What are God’s purposes for marriage and families?”
- “What are some of your deepest religious beliefs relating to marriage?”

Findings:
- 56% of families mentioned God
- About half (primarily Orthodox): God is highly involved in directly influencing human affairs (e.g., beshert as soul mate)
- About half (primarily Reform): God does not predestine most outcomes and rarely intervenes in the decision-making process

Theme 4. Family Influences on Jewish Observance in the Home

Subtheme 1. “They teach us:” How children influence parents

Interview questions:
- None particular

Findings:
- The introduction of children into the home seem to increase observance
- Home observance increases as children start Jewish day school or Synagogue classes and bring their knowledge home
- Parents were forced to relearn (or learn) along with the kids how to do Judaism

Subtheme 2. “Respect this tradition:” How parents influence children

Interview questions:
- “What do you feel is the most important thing you can do as a Jewish parent?”

Findings:
Parents overwhelmingly remarked that they want their children, not only to feel a responsibility to perpetuate Judaism, but to respect it and to understand it (i.e., Jewish history and the meaning behind the traditions)

**Theme 5. Sabbath Observance in the Home**

**Subtheme 1. Sabbath traditions help form and maintain strong Jewish identity**

*Interview questions:*
- “What practices or observances hold special meaning for you as a couple or family?”

*Findings:*
- Sabbath is a time for self-definition
- Sabbath rituals and adapted family traditions, like lighting candles, link families to their ancestors

**Subtheme 2. Sabbath facilitates peace and relaxation**

*Interview questions:*
- “What observances hold special meaning for you as a couple or family?”

*Findings:*
- Sabbath is an island of peace that separates families from the chaos of the world
- Sabbath is a time to avoid even thinking about stressful things of life

**Subtheme 3. Sabbath traditions unify the family**

*Interview questions:*
- “What observances hold special meaning for you as a couple or family?”

*Findings:*
- Sabbath is special and meaningful *because* of family time
- Certain practices enhance the Sabbath for families: candles, family meals (w/ special dishes), dressing in nice clothes, singing and dancing, playing games, and blessing the children
APPENDIX E. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

IRB #: 2768        LSU Proposal #: 18446        Revised: 03/24/2004

LSU INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) for 578-8692 FAX 6792
HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT PROTECTION Office:203 B-1 David Boyd Hall

APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION FROM INSTITUTIONAL OVERSIGHT

Unless they are qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from
Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/projects using living humans
as subjects, or samples or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or
without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form
helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

Instructions: Complete this form.
Exemption Applicant: If it appears that your study qualifies
for exemption send:

(A) Two copies of this completed form,
(B) a brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects
and to explain your responses to Parts A & B),
(C) copies of all instruments to be used. If this proposal is part of a
grant proposal include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment
material.
(D) the consent form that you will use in the study

to: ONE screening committee member (listed at the end of this form) in the
most closely related department/discipline or to IRB office.

If exemption seems likely, submit it. If not, submit regular IRB
application. Help is available from Dr. Robert Mathews, 578-8692,
irb@lsu.edu or any screening committee member.

Principal Investigator Lorent Marks Student? Y N
Ph: 8-2405 E-mail lornm@lsu.edu Dept/Unit HUEC (Ecoc Div)

If Student, name supervising professor Ph:
Mailing Address
Project Title Faith and Families

Agency expected to fund project Grants will be submitted to PRISEF, NSF, CR, and Louisiana Institute
Subject pool (e.g. Psychology Students) Religious Two-Parent Families
Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the
mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with
incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project
scope or design is later changed I will resubmit for review. I will obtain
written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU
institutions in which the study is conducted.

PI Signature D. Marks Date 10/13/04 (no per signatures)

Screening Committee Action: Exempted V Not Exempted Category/Paragraph

Reviewer Matthews Signature D. Marks Date 9/6/05
VITA

Trevan Hatch is a PhD candidate in the School of Social Work. He specializes in Jewish and Muslim families. In addition to his doctoral training at LSU, Trevan earned a bachelor’s degree in history at Brigham Young University and a master’s degree in Jewish Studies at Baltimore Hebrew University / Towson University. He has also taken several graduate courses in Jewish Studies at the Spertus Institute of Jewish Learning and Leadership in Chicago, and in Israel: Hebrew University of Jerusalem and University of the Holy Land.