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**THE ADULT CHILDREN OF INTERMARRIAGE:
MEMORY, IDENTITY, NARRATIVE AND PERFORMANCE**

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Adult Children of Inter-marriage: Memory, Identity, Narrative and Performance

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While current studies show interest in adult children of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, the bulk of this research does not fully elaborate on dual cultural-religious identity, the complexities arising from competing definitions of Jewishness, and how those complexities impact hybrid identity formation among the offspring of intermarriage. The analyses within this thesis are based on a collection of in-depth personal narrative interviews in which informants responded to questions, told stories of their life events, and discussed their identities. As extreme examples of cultural-religious hybridity, the project explores how adult children of intermarriage draw on the past to construct identities and narratives. The study contributes to broader understandings of hybrid identity and the relationships between memory, identity, narrative, and performance.

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Introduction

Human beings are unique conversational creatures who have developed complex languages to store memories and create identities. Self conceptualization does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it is an ongoing social process. Individuals participate in this process through learning the discourses, expectations and suppositions of societies, through interaction in various social circles, making decisions on what they associate with or distance themselves from. Identity formation happens in verbal interactions and conversational storytelling is an important venue for constructing and performing identities. It is this interest in human conversation and identity creation that led me to this project that explores the formation of self through memory and narrative. In an effort to better understand a group of people whose identities reflect a distinct set of social processes, I set out to explore how some individuals see themselves today in the context of their remembered experiences. Therefore, this is a human interest project as much as it is an intellectual endeavor.

This project focuses on adult children of intermarriage, by which I refer to children of a union between two people from differing cultural-religious and/or ethnic backgrounds. "Intermarriage" is the most academic of these terms, acting as a sociological umbrella for other characterizations; including "dual heritage," which is becoming more popular; "Interfaith" refers specifically to unions comprising mates of differing religions; and "mixed marriage" is a more general term most often referring to unions of different racial identities. Each of these terms connotes duality and hybridity,

suggesting that two or more aspects of identity are experienced simultaneously or that an amalgam of identity exists. The project specifically deals with the children of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, with primary interest in their concerns about Jewishness. As McCarthy notes, “Jewish-Christian pairings are by far the most common interfaith combination in the United States today,”¹ and the majority of the informants in this study are products of Jewish-Christian unions.

I chose this subject population for reasons both academic and personal. To my knowledge, this group has so far not been the subject of a personal narrative analysis. Adult children of intermarriage are studied vigorously by many Jewish scholars, writers, and religious leaders, with interest increasing since the 1970s and 1980s when intermarriage rates began to grow in America along with a rise in both American multiculturalism and the feminist movement. This may be accounted for in the plethora of books published since that time; most notably Egon Mayer’s pioneering academic work, Love and Tradition.² Yet most efforts to understand intermarriage offspring are demographic and are often propelled by ideological agendas. In fact, this group is often symbolically made to represent a statistical expression of a likely future for the Jewish people within the American Jewish community where concern about the phenomenon of intermarriage is paramount. This approach stems from the possibility of adult children’s cultural-religious identity decisions: they are endowed with the potential for continuity or abandonment of Jewish life – increasing or decreasing the Jewish population – and they pose an uncertainty for a people who are concerned about survival, especially after the Holocaust. American Christian institutional attitudes are

more accepting of intermarriage, given that the religious majority in the United States is Christian: “Intermarriage might be seen [by Christians] as a risk to personal, individual faith, but it hardly represents a threat to the survival of the religion.”³

This anxiety is apparent in the most recent demographic study of the American Jewish population, The 2013 Pew Research Study. In its opening chapter it reports:

*Jews who have non-Jewish spouses are much less likely than those married to fellow Jews to be raising children as Jewish by religion and much more likely to be raising children as partially Jewish, Jewish but not by religion, or not Jewish at all. Furthermore, Jews who are the offspring of intermarriages appear, themselves, to be more likely to intermarry than Jews with two Jewish parents.*⁴

Pew Research also reported that 58% of their Jewish respondents (NET total of 3,475 interviews with Jews, as opposed to 1,190 conducted with “Non-Jewish people of Jewish background”⁵) had intermarried from 2005 to 2013.⁶ An overwhelming 73% of Pew respondents suggested that being Jewish means “remembering the Holocaust,” which may be related to American Jewish preoccupations with the threat of survival.⁷ The Pew categories do not take into account individual decisions that adult children of intermarriage make in terms of hybrid identity. It focuses, rather, on estimating who will or will not identify as Jewish in the future.

In contrast, my study researches the identity construction of individuals as presented in their own words, exploring a range of personal views and decisions that adult children of intermarriage make for themselves. This approach will contribute to awareness and understanding of the kinds of identity negotiations and constructions adults of dual heritage express and how they address others’ expectations and

definitions of their hybrid identities. It will also enhance our understanding of other dualities born from differing parental identities more broadly. As diverse cases of hybrid identity, the study of intermarriage offspring dramatizes issues that other people may face.

The analysis within this project focuses on Jewishness with attention to the particular concerns Jews have about identity as compared to others' conceptions, making an interesting case study for examining ethnic and cultural-religious hybridity more broadly. Many of the informants expressed familiarity with and confronted a traditional religious definition of "halakhic" Jewish identity – derived from the Hebrew term *halakha*, or the body of religious law as defined by Orthodoxy and some Conservative groups – even if they were not exposed to a traditional community. According to halakha, Jewish identity is matrilineal, meaning that it passes down from mother to child. It also means that a person is not considered halakhically Jewish if their mother was not born a Jew (i.e. her mother was not a Jew) or if she converted to Judaism after said person's birth. This principle is called "matrilineal descent," and its definition has inspired competing definitions of Jewishness as it persists into modern times. Orthodox and Conservative Jewish communities define Jewishness matrilineally; however, there are differing contemporary Jewish attitudes that contest the matrilineal definition in order to include those who may only have Jewish fathers. Reform and Reconstructionist Jewish movements, along with other smaller movements such as Jewish Humanism, assert the importance of patrilineal Jewish heritage as an identity marker for inclusion. The Reform movement officially considers children who only have

one Jewish parent as unquestionably Jewish, no matter which parent is Jewish. As a result, the Reform community was the first to welcome intermarried families. Orthodox and Conservative movements, however, do not accept children born only to Jewish fathers as full-fledged Jews. If such a child wishes to fully participate, they must formally convert to Judaism in the manner prescribed by Orthodox and Conservative Jewish law (observance and learning requirements are considerably different for each movement), no matter if the child was raised as a Jew or not. Due to the differing requirements of these movements, most conversions are not accepted among every sect of Judaism, unless the conversion happens to be Orthodox. Orthodox rabbinical authorities require the strictest level of learning and practice in order to convert, and therefore they usually do not accept Conservative or Reform conversions. Conservative communities accept Orthodox converts, as do Reform communities, yet they not accept Reform converts. Inevitably, the Reform movement accepts all conversions while creating their own avenue for conversion.

Both matrilineal and patrilineal concepts invoke the ethnic dimension of Jewish identity. Unlike Christianity, which usually requires baptism in order to be considered Christian, Jewishness is acquired by birth. Ethnic concepts of Jewishness differ from mainstream definitions of religious identity because they define “Jewish” not only as belief, but also as a national ethnic group connected by peoplehood and bloodline. Popular conceptions of identity that suggest “you are what you believe,” or those that debate the national, religious, and ethnic considerations of Jewish identity, conflict with traditional “official” views of what constitutes Jewish belonging. Jennifer Thompson

describes these traditional views as “ethnic familialism,” a kinship conception of Jewishness that “intertwines race, mythic shared ancestry, and shared religious and cultural practices and beliefs.”⁸ She understands popular conceptions as stemming from “universalist individualism,” which is centered more on individual choice, commitment, belief, and self-fulfillment.⁹ The informants in this study were familiar with matrilineal descent, even though most were not exposed to traditional religious environments. Matrilineal descent was, for some, an authoritative concept presented in their narratives. They referenced different sources for what or who they perceived as authoritative in defining Jewishness, but the most common reference was a peer group they encountered in an educational environment. Competing definitions and the tension between popular and official conceptions have created a complexity in the meaning of Jewish identity in the American present for those who are products of intermarriage.

The idea to study adult children of intermarriage also grows out of my own personal experience as a product of intermarriage. My research and writing is certainly influenced by my upbringing in a home where I was given both Jewish and Italian Catholic identity options and where I experienced the conflicts and resolutions of my dual identity. It is even possible this study itself is an act of my personal identity construction in the hopes of better understanding the phenomenon of hybrid identity construction as part of a larger group of people. Yet, the interviewees represent a much wider range of diverse experiences that include cases different from my own, and I made a conscious effort to look at each interview with a fresh perspective and empathy

towards each individual's situation and views. Since I conducted the interviews myself and related to the informants in a personal way, I was able to ask questions articulating a deep sense of interest in the process of addressing dual cultural heritage as well as individual choice. At the same time, I was also aware of the need to formulate open questions to avoid presuppositions, to allow informants the space to speak openly. Over the course of this discussion, I attempt to provide personal narrative analysis of these interviews through which I hope to contribute to our understanding of how individuals raised in intermarried families construct and perform their cultural-religious identities, and the ways in which they draw from the past to do so. I also aim to explore the meaning of being "Jewish" for the informants by looking at the ways they understand their own identities in relationship to Judaism, taking into account their narratives of identity, upbringing, and agency.

In the context of this research, identity can be understood as one's subjectivity, which is constructed through socialization within a range of communal groups, such as the family, a religious or political community, a region, or a nation. Rejecting previous conceptions of identity as essential and fixed, new scholarship suggests that identity is shaped in a continual process. "[W]e should think, instead, of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation."¹⁰ Within a family, individuals ignore, interact with, or assume certain aspects of their parental identities in relation to themselves. Though family is a community that often mediates between individual and society, these processes extend to communal groups beyond the family. While an individual constructs identity based on

personal choice, they are also a product of their connection to collective environments, the duties and norms within them, and their “symbiotic relationships with others.”¹¹ As members of multiple communities, individuals learn what is worth remembering and identifying with based on what their communities deem valuable. “[T]here are clearly demonstrable long-term structures to what societies remember or commemorate that are stubbornly impervious to the efforts of individuals to escape them.”¹² Thus, personal identity is created in light of collective identity. Considering this, the union of two or more cultural-religious collective identities may further complicate the processes of transmission, catalyzing expressions of hybridity. People with hybrid identities are often pitted in contrast to each of their constituent components, causing them to seek reconciliation when their identities seem problematic or even incompatible.

As a theoretical term, “hybridity” gained academic momentum in post-colonial discourse on cultural mixing and globalization.¹³ For the purposes of this discussion, hybridity refers to a combination of identity elements in which two or more identities interact and influence each other, ranging from mixed cultural and ethnic identities to a junction of religious and ideological beliefs. Such hybridity “signifies the encounter, conflict, and/or blending of two ethnic or cultural categories which, while by no means pure and distinct in nature, tend to be understood and experienced as meaningful identity labels by members of these categories.”¹⁴ While “hybridity” suggests a blending of identities, “duality” seems to suggest that two things are happening at once. Duality may be considered a kind of hybridity; and for the purpose of this project, hybrid identity is understood as a range of “double consciousness,” as was coined by W.E.B.

Dubois. "Double consciousness is distinct because it explicitly embodies multiple identities instead of crossing identity group boundaries. Groups or individuals that occupy this space experience a kind of 'two-ness,' as two identities trying to exist in one person."¹⁵ Jessica expressed this by coining herself as "Jewminican," combining her Jewish and Dominican identities. Hybridity is not limited to duality, as some people have access to more than two cultural spheres. Jake's mother and grandmother were born in British Giana, a fact he used to explain why his family was disconnected from the Chinese American community. When individuals in this study related to themselves as feeling part of "both and neither" of their cultural spheres, when they identified with an in-between space, or when they blended identities by making distinctions between religion and culture, they were expressing their hybridity. Others expressed hybridity by consciously articulating one identity more than another, such as those who converted to Judaism.

Memory is at the root of identity as a source of knowledge about the self and as an imaginative tool for constructing that knowledge. "Memory is knowledge with an identity index, it is knowledge about oneself, that is, one's own diachronic identity, be it as an individual or as a member of a family, a generation, a community, a nation, or a cultural and religious tradition."¹⁶ People make use of a series of remembrances, both personal and collective, to conceptualize a sense of self over time, selectively arranging memories to support possible perspectives on their experiences. "Collective memories originate from shared communications about the meaning of the past that are anchored in the life-worlds of individuals who partake in the communal life of the respective

collective.”¹⁷ A person’s collective memories are, therefore, interwoven with their personal ones, as they engage with their mnemonic communities.¹⁸ For example, several informants understood themselves in terms of memories constituting their families’ identities and origins, or in terms of their perceived national or religious histories. Thus, the relationship between collective memories and personal or autobiographical memories is one which is interwoven. Each feed into each other, yet they are not subsumed into one another.

Developing self-knowledge through memory over the course of their lives, people create subsequent trajectories of identity. “Across time we change, and since memory provides a complex set of links back into the past, much of our analytical focus is initially on how, in our particular life-trajectories, there are certain constituent features that define us in recollection even as we change, and help us relate our successive selves to each other in terms of who we were, are and might become.”¹⁹ Retrospectively, people often construct coherent autobiographical narratives, assembled with corresponding memories that are produced in an “experiential process” of remembering.²⁰ They frame their memories according to correspondence and coherence: “Correspondence describes the need for memories to accurately represent what happened. Coherence, on the other hand, refers to the drive to organize experiences along a stable conception of what the self is and how it interacts with the world.”²¹ The past is thus fundamental for constructing a sense of self over time, and personal narrative becomes the vehicle for communicating it to oneself as well as to others.

Personal narrative is an essential human practice. The first cited use of the word, *narratif*, dates back to the 15th century, pertaining to anything “that narrates or recounts, that tells a story.”²² Later, “narrative” develops into a literary genre to convey a text representing a sequence of events, including the use of dialogue and description.²³ Structuralist and post-structuralist theorists have since elaborated this definition as “a representation of a history, biography, process, etc., in which a sequence of events has been constructed into a story in accordance with a particular ideology.”²⁴ Recognizing this definitional progression can expand our current understanding of how and why people talk about themselves in conversation – or in interviews, for that matter. Personal narrative practice being one of the first acquired structures of discourse, children learn to tell stories of who they are.²⁵ In studying conversations between children and parents, Robyn Fivush found that by the time small children start using language, “they are already participating in sharing stories of the past with their parents, listening, confirming, adding bits and pieces of information, and by the end of the preschool years, children are actively engaged in telling and sharing the stories of their lives.”²⁶ This socialization process of answering questions about what has happened teaches children to reflect on and develop identities, for themselves and for others. It is also perpetuated by educational institutions and media. For example, in the United States, language arts curriculums prepare students to write personal narrative essays, and college applications require them. Reading trends indicate a growing market for autobiography and memoir genres. Personal narrative is placed at very high value in Western culture, perhaps due to a modern emphasis on individualism,

but this penchant is arguably due to narration as a function of human nature. Narrating the stories of one's self is a process of performance, whereby individuals assert and define their differences and commonalities when interacting with other people. It is a dialogical performance, taking in information gained from conversations held outside of the self and also reinterpreting that information in conversations within the self.²⁷

My Study

Over the course of two months, I collected the seventeen narrative interviews that became the focus of this research, including eight male and nine female participants that fit the qualifications I set forth: "adults, ages 20 to 30, who grew up in households with one Jewish parent and one parent of another cultural-religious, ethnic heritage." I placed ads on graduate list-serves and on departmental bulletins, and most people responded via email. I offered no incentives other than a cup of tea and some cookies. About half of the participants were Rutgers graduate students and the other half consisted of one Rutgers graduate, three undergraduates and five people who were unaffiliated with Rutgers yet heard about my study by word of mouth. It was not possible to interview every willing individual due to travel distances and time constraints, and I did not interview those who lacked any of the specific selection criteria. Each informant was presented with a common set of questions requiring them to discuss their past and their identity over time. While these questions prompted them to discuss certain topics, they were open-ended and allowed respondents to answer in

any way they preferred (including the option to skip any questions they felt uncomfortable answering). The interviews were conducted one-on-one in a small, quiet office in the Jewish Studies Department. The average length of an interview was about an hour, though some lasted much longer depending on the personality and conversation style of the participant. I video-recorded each interview and took only brief notes during conversations so as not to distract the interviewees and to maintain eye contact. Later, I transcribed the interviews, while paying close attention to the informants' body language as well.

The Jewish-centered nature of this project must also be addressed in light of how the informants became aware of the study and how they perceived my identity. A sizeable number of interviews may have been concerned with Jewishness due to the fact that the advertisement used to publicize my study linked me directly to the Rutgers Jewish Studies Department (see Appendix B). Furthermore, many informants were aware of my identifiable Jewish last name, Bernstein, via my contact information, even though they were not given details about the study. The project's interest in intermarriage and dual-exposure, which were presented within questions, may have also inspired informants' attention towards Jewishness. Since the interviews were conducted in the Jewish Studies Department, this condition may have potentially influenced some of the participants' preconceptions. All of these factors may account for the self-selection among those who volunteered. To better understand the participants' backgrounds and gain a sense of their interviews, a brief cameo of each person is provided in Appendix A, with assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

These individuals represent a range of dual cultural-religious identities, exhibiting how they understand themselves by understanding the past. Their interviews revealed different choices, from the decisions they made in constructing their narratives to the everyday decisions they spoke of within those narratives. Adult children of intermarriage are valuable subjects for personal narrative analysis and the study of memory and identity for many reasons, but they are especially intriguing since they often draw on more than one set of cultural views and experiences. Their potential for hybridity lends itself to the analysis of unique perspectives, remembrances, and identity negotiations. Therefore, this project aims to provide analysis showing how adult children of intermarriage create identities on their own terms, utilizing their pasts in narrative constructions. Personal narrative analysis will, thus, further both our understanding of how hybridity influences identity construction and what the role of memory is within that process.

Chapter 1: Interview and the Performance of Identity

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live." – Joan Didion

The Interview Dynamic: Roleplaying

The questioning and answering dynamic of the interviews established a form of dialogue between me and the informants. As the interviewer I became the conversational co-pilot, asking respondents to share, directing them to think about the past, their dual cultural-religious exposure, and their identities. In turn, they developed responses, revealing memories, interpretations, doubts, and questions. At times they resorted to song, reminiscence, or humor as part of remembrance, either to illustrate their points or perhaps to capture my attention as their only audience. Informants engaged me as a listener and a witness, gripping my imagination in a process of bonding and testimony. Many of them shared complex emotional experiences. Similar to a psychoanalytic encounter, the telling of certain memories served to reconstruct and externalize interviewees' experiences in a process of transmitting their personal histories.²⁸ I remained mostly silent during the interviews to maintain my role. This silence helped reduce the risk that respondents would overtly craft their answers to please me or say what they thought I was interested in hearing. "[T]he listeners to whom we tell our stories should be considered important players because their responses can lead us to bury, revise, or solidify our stories."²⁹ Thus, my goal was to maintain a quiet yet attentive presence, taking notes only when necessary in order to maintain eye contact and perceived interest so that informants would feel respected

and heard. The interview was designed to give each respondent the opportunity to reflect on their lives, defining themselves. I was only inviting them to think about issues they might not think about in such detail on a regular basis.

The interview format was question and answer, but as the interviews proceeded and our rapport grew more comfortable, they took on a conversational style while continuing to address a trajectory of questions. Some questions addressed issues the informants already thought about while others inspired new thoughts. The ways in which subjects communicated cued me about how to proceed as a response. Informants' answers often assumed conventional models and devices of storytelling, such as providing background settings, foregrounding descriptions, and elements of foreshadowing. Many informants also repeated dialogical encounters and created story "build up," followed by dramatic climax and sometimes forms of resolution.³⁰ Melissa told a vibrant story about an incident at a Baptist church that her family briefly attended in which the pastor appeared to signal his wife to speak in tongues. Her story followed a sequence, and it added meaning to her negative experience of Christianity and her parents' choice not to return to a particular church:

[The] church was situated like a circle and it was like a dome – acoustics were best standing in the back against the wall... In the dome-like church, everyone sits in the exact same spots every time. One day the pastor's wife was sitting in the back area with good acoustics. The pastor was giving a sermon, starts to fiddle with his pen, which he had never done [said with emphasis]. Why would you have a pen? You're giving a sermon! And right when he starts fiddling with the pen, his wife starts speaking in tongues. [appears shocked, puts hand to forehead] It was – you could tell it wasn't real [smiling]. And my family didn't believe in that kind of stuff to begin with... we never came back.

Melissa's story began with a description of the setting that added weight to her depiction of the wife's cue to speak. She created a build-up and story climax, concluding with her family's resolution to leave the church due to what they perceived as falsehood. She moved between the past and present tenses and directed the narrative to the characters in the story using "you" and "you're." These verbal transitions indicate her active involvement in the enactment of the story, either for the purpose of engaging the interviewer's attention or perhaps even facilitating her reliving of the moment in the experience of telling. Melissa was not alone in performing storytelling techniques. Switching between tenses in this manner was common among most informants. Some informants' articulated a perceived idea of storyline (i.e. beginning, middle, and end) in their comments on "jumping too far ahead." For example, when I asked if they participated in any religiously affiliated youth groups while growing up, Evan responded with, "I eventually did, but I guess, I don't know if that's jumping ahead a bit." Daniel made a similar comment while discussing memories that shape him, apologetically justifying his transition to his thoughts on dating and marriage by saying, "I jump ahead a lot in my mind."

Often, the informants returned to memories they had already related, discussing the relevance of those moments as they continued in storytelling, which suggested connectedness between events over time. Jessica and Sam referred back to their traumatic experiences to define their present identities, such as the times when Jessica was forced to participate in Catholic-Dominican activities or Sam's reflections on his grandfather's death. Other times, individuals were prompted by formal questions

leading them to look back and think about the implications of the past. In his response to a question about “key moments” in his life and their relation to his present identity, Adam referred to memories which suggested the “holes” he perceived in the logic of religion. Connecting an experience in Hebrew school with a present day experience of learning with an Orthodox group, Adam mirrored both experiences as moments when religion could not answer his questions as effectively as science could. Throughout their interviews, Informants connected memories, constructing narratives with sequences of life events in the process of answering questions. This constructive tendency lent itself to elements of performance: because telling is performing, and performance is a means of actualizing and reshaping identity in words and gestures. It is important to remember that these performances were related to the social context in which they were performed, producing narratives particular to the circumstances in which they were told. Holstein and Gubrium have pointed out that “personal stories are not completely formed before they are told to others, and that personal stories are molded in the action and interaction of speaking them aloud to a vivid audience.”³¹ The following section elaborates on this context.

Telling as Constructive Performance

The informants’ responses also revealed processes of reflection and interpretation. Such responses were triggered by specific questions that could inspire particular frames of reference or plot structures. When asked to speak about their

origins, families, upbringings and memories, their narrative responses served as acts of self-presentation,³² both for themselves and for an interviewer. Brubaker and Cooper note that, “Identity is both a category of practice and a category of analysis.”³³ As practice, it is a performance of everyday social experience employed by individuals “to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others.”³⁴ Informants’ narrative performances, therefore, enable them to structure and understand their identities, presenting themselves through immediate narratives and within expressions of everyday practice, such as dress, professional and academic endeavors, music preferences, and even foods symbolic of their cultural identities. Performances involve telling stories of events that happened, often followed by interpretations of those events that led to a relative point. As storytellers, the informants establish narrative timelines of those life events, which were situated in “unique moments in a unique past-time world.”³⁵

Within the broader dialogue of each interview, informants’ storytelling became public and private “reifications” of self – verbal performances allowing them to reflect on and communicate identity outwardly and as self-revelation from what Stuart Hall calls “positions of *enunciation*” originating from “a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific.”³⁶ While individuals can speak from the place of “I,” reifying the self on a personal level, they also have cultural or communal identities. Such identities are made “visible and intelligible to others through cultural signs, symbols and practices,”³⁷ most commonly conveyed through language. Given that cultural identity encompasses not only similarities with those sharing collective

histories, but also as “critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute ‘what we really are,’” the process of narrative involves acknowledging both continuous experience and fragmentation or “rupture.”³⁸ In this sense, identity can be considered as a process of “becoming” and “being”³⁹ – a continual course subject to reflexive change and negotiation. Through the act of narration, language is able to harness this process, conceptualizing and communicating identity at a particular moment in time, organizing the teller’s understanding of their self in the presence of another. Therefore, the act of narrating one’s experiences is an act of enunciating one’s identity, performing and actualizing both experienced cultural similarities and positions of difference.

Their narratives constituted “speech acts,” as respondents used specific language and tonal delivery. Jerome Bruner coined these elements as “signs of the subjectivity of selfhood... rang[ing] from posture and pace to highly stylized verbal expressions, intentional or otherwise.”⁴⁰ The performative aspects of informants’ self-presentations are not limited to the stories themselves. They include body language, such as the use of hands, facial expressions and posture to indicate the emotionality of the stories they were attempting to deliver and engage with. When Jessica and Melissa conveyed shocking experiences, their facial expressions became disturbed. This kind of animation was especially important to Daniel’s interview, in which he made interesting “eye contact” with the camera and enthusiastically shook his head in “yes” and “no” motions when conveying moral approval or disappointment within his stories. Most respondents used their hands when speaking. A prime example was Sarah’s tendency to tap one shoulder to represent her Jewish side and the other to represent her Christian

background. Posture was important to Dana's interview, especially when her shoulders began to curve and slouch as she discussed her feelings about being excluded from Jewish social-ethnic circles. She would also sometimes stare out into the distance as if looking at the event she was describing, a tendency that Adam also exhibited.

Performances also varied from tonal changes, like Jessica's tendency to lower her tone when she was discussing serious moments, to alterations in pronunciation, such as when Rebecca's manner of speaking occasionally transitioned from Standard English pronunciation to one inflected with a Brooklyn accent – similar to Hasidic Jews originating from that enclave. Benjamin even resorted to singing part of a hymn to communicate the cultural knowledge of his Methodist roots. These responses enhance the understanding of performance in personal narrative as “folklore-as-a-way-of-speaking,” otherwise known as “verbal art.”⁴¹ Almost artistically, respondents offered remembrances that were characterized by “individually shaped, innovative performance directly connected to people in social contexts,” primarily in relation to the interviewer and the context of the discussion.⁴² Every interview was a creative process wherein each person utilized the physical tools of storytelling in order to substantiate themselves.

Folklorists, such as Dell Hymes and Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, have studied the nuances of communicative performance through storytelling, and their theoretical analysis lends insight to the study of personal narrative.⁴³ While performance in the context of this research does not necessarily suggest conscious effort on the part of the informants to “craft” their stories, they do engage in culturally specific ways of

communicating life events. Performance, in this locale, is the “culturally intelligible”⁴⁴ representation of self within a social interaction. Emergent performances of cultural knowledge were observed in varying degrees, and certain interviews yielded strong examples. Such performances often employed displays of Jewish knowledge.

Daniel’s attention to Jewish history, Hebrew, and the Bible within his narrative emphasized his immersion in Jewish collective memory and his ability to provide an authentic or authoritative performance of communal identity.⁴⁵ Daniel remembered receiving a “C” in his fourth grade Prayer class at his Jewish day school: “And he wrote, ‘Daniel daydreams too much during prayers.’...” Daniel then offered traditional knowledge, stating, “Since then, I’ve come to terms with that, daydreaming at synagogue, because *l’hitpalel* (Hebrew, “to pray”) comes from, like, a reflexive *binyan* (Hebrew, grammatical case), so a better term would be ‘meditation’ than ‘prayer.’ Um, but he [the teacher] can live in his own la-la land.” Daniel’s use of Hebrew, the authoritative religious Jewish language, demonstrates his authority and competency in Jewish knowledge for his listener. Interestingly, these statements followed a comment stating that, “the kids who went to the Orthodox synagogue, the majority of them... had superiority complexes. A couple of times they told me I wasn’t really Jewish [pause] because of my heritage.” Therefore, Daniel’s use of Hebrew appears as a strategy to compensate for doubts regarding his identity instilled by others and assert his authentic Jewish identity through a display of traditional knowledge. In this performance he also emphasized his anxieties about preserving Jewishness for his future offspring. Expanding on the Hebrew phrase *l’dor v’dor*, meaning “from generation to generation,” he

launched a discussion about how learning an anthropological approach to the Bible both shattered and strengthened aspects of his Jewish identity, weakening his faith but strengthening his appreciation. The example he gave concerned the covenant with Abraham:

[T]he Brit Milah [Hebrew, "circumcision"]... the connection I make is, okay, so, God's talking to Abraham saying, "Be fruitful and multiply." [remarks on the health benefits of circumcision and that ancient people perhaps understood those benefits] So, there's a part of me that's really scared about [pause] okay, am I going to have kids? And what does that mean in terms of my Judaism? Because this is like one of our identifying rituals, the Brit Milah, and also it's like our patriarch, Abraham.

While his conversation was somewhat frenetic, Daniel's use of the covenant and the commandment of circumcision simultaneously added authority to his voice as a communal participant in Jewish culture and expressed anxiety over his performance of that identity.

Eric also used biblical narratives to display an authoritative cultural voice, most visibly in clarifying his theological position as what he referred to as a Jewish Christian. When asked to elaborate on this position, he responded with a series of questions testing my religious knowledge, followed a description of biblical events that added to his authority:

Do you have any understanding of the Christian religion? [Yes] Do you know what happened when Christ died on the cross? [Yes] What happened in the Temple? Do you know what happened in the Temple? [No] The Temple veil split from the top down. That has been recorded in both religions, but it's not highly spoken about or written about in the Jewish religion. Um, in our history, um, and what that means is that there is no intermediary. People have the ability to go directly to God to plead their case. Blood sacrifice is done. It's not necessary anymore [pause] and [clears throat] that's the theological explanation.

Eric's dialogue may be considered a "breakthrough into performance," a concept developed by Dell Hymes which relates to the use of traditional "stylized content and conduct" emerging from contemporary social interactions as "creative, realized, achieved, even transcendent of ordinary course of events."⁴⁶ Hymes expanded on concepts of conversational behavior as "interpretable" (cultural) and "reportable" (doable) by adding the third dimension of "repeatable" (doable, yet not interpretable).⁴⁷ Both Daniel's and Eric's narration displays all three characteristics: they are culturally intelligible to their interviewer and they are repeatedly conveyed communal knowledge signifying authenticity and authority. They also arise out of specific instances where their references will be understood as meaningful.

Breaking into performance of song and parable, also folkloric genres, occurred as well. In his narrative, Benjamin sang a hymn he remembered from his experiences at his mother's family's church. He also employed an illustrative parable to explain his complex relationship with Judaism. Singing the hymn emphasized familiarity with his mother's community and asserted authentic association with that part of his identity, while his use of a parable functioned as "a traditional technique for coping with problematic social situations."⁴⁸ During a discussion of the complications involved in his Jewish identity, Benjamin explained:

Did you ever hear the story of the basketball player with one arm? There was a high school basketball player who was being considered for some big college draft stuff, and... He was born without one arm... And because he doesn't have an arm, and because that's been a defining part of his athletic life, um, he busts his ass and he's really good at the technical aspects of the game. And he's now a very skilled player, and... he has a style and a technique that is unique because he only has one arm... And sometimes I feel like that for me, that even though having a mother who wasn't Jewish made my Jewish

journey more difficult, it also forced me to think really hard about what it means to separate yourself from other people, about this Jewish cultural and religious insistence on separation. And [pauses, closes his eyes] that's been the most defining part of my Jewish identity.

Narrations such as these are highly performative acts of storytelling, and they aren't entirely premeditated. They often happen "spontaneously or even unexpectedly in the course of conversation,"⁴⁹ using communal wisdoms to convey meanings within specific personal experiences. Adam's reference in Hebrew to *Kohelet* ("Ecclesiastes") is a simple example. Discussing his search for more adequate answers to life's questions, Adam said, "I eventually came across Ecclesiastes, Koheles [in Ashkenazic pronunciation], which seemed, I don't know... That's the best [religious] answer I've found so far. It's like... the mind of God is unknowable, um, but try to enjoy your time on earth while you have it." Adam's reference was proverbial, displaying cultural wisdom and familiarity. Like Adam, Benjamin borrowed from a cultural source of knowledge, but this is not to say that it was rehearsed. His response was candid and the parable became useful to him in the context of our specific conversation.

Personal narrative performance is linked to, yet distinct from, unconscious repetition. Judith Butler developed the concept of "performativity," by which she relates to a social process of repetition that individuals absorb in constructing identities of similarity and difference.

As individuals inserted within specific discourses, we repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity and identity until these are experienced as if they were second nature. Where they are successfully internalized, they become part of lived subjectivity. Where this does not occur, they may become the basis for dis-identification or counter-identifications which involve a rejection of hegemonic identity norms.⁵⁰

Performativity is most often applied in discussions of gender codes, but it can also pertain to religious discourses. Rebecca, a Hasidic Orthodox Jewish convert, followed a dress code that emphasized the primacy of modest behavior as provided by her community. This included covering her hair with a wig to signify that she was married and dressing in skirts and long-sleeved shirts. These physical performances are indicative of her identity as repetitive acts of identity affirmation. Rebecca follows an appropriate form of Jewish feminine behavior according to the discourse of religious identity that she has embraced and adopted as a “second nature” over time. Benjamin presents an example of an individual who does not meet the requirements of religious discourse and subsequently rejects its identity norms. Despite his rejection from Orthodox circles, he chooses to practice religion while refusing to convert. This refusal is his departure from hegemonic norms, as Butler suggests. He aligned himself with a counter-identification, declaring himself a “post-denominational” Jew, which refers to “committed Jews” (meaning, committed to Jewish practice) who withdraw from conventional denominational Jewish labels, opting for “ideological and stylistic differences.”⁵¹ Given these examples, it is important to notice the difference between performativity and performance acts: performances, including speech acts, are symbolic assertions of the individual’s identification process, but their performativity originates in codes of behavior that are beyond the individual in larger groups or societies.

Informants' Preconceptions

The informants made implicit and explicit assumptions about the purpose of the study, my identity, and their own performances. They came to their interviews with ideas about why they were being sought out, and they gauged probabilities about their listener, which in turn influenced how they decided to convey information. As a genre, the interview is a contextually informed dialogue in which the narrator responds to “a specific stimulus,” aiming their narrative towards someone they do not know personally.⁵² This is what made each interview an emergent narrative performance dependent on the dynamic interaction within the event of telling.⁵³ Many respondents recognized my Jewish last name and my connection to the Rutgers Jewish Studies Department via my contact information. While some directly asked about my identity or the purpose of my research, I maintained a position of silence so as not to influence how they might alter their assumptions or their narratives. After the interviews concluded, I addressed any inquiries about my identity by stating that I was also a child of intermarriage, neither confirming nor denying a definite affiliation. I did not reveal specific points of analysis. However, the nature of interview is that it is conducted for a purpose. Informants knew they were contributing to a study on the offspring of intermarriage. They came to their interviews with responses that reflected preconceived ideas about the study and my identity as a Jewish studies graduate student, monitoring their own presence in the process of answering.

Daniel's narrative was concerned with Jewish continuity. He assumed my study was going to gauge whether or not children of intermarriage grow up and remain Jews, which is a common American Jewish approach to the study of intermarriage. The most poignant assumptions he brought forth arose from his last response. In telling his opinion of intermarriage, Daniel shared a narrative about the uniqueness of Judaism and the phenomenon of others wanting to "squash the Jewish population," which he clarified as extermination (alluding to the Holocaust), boycotting Israel, and other forms of anti-Zionism or anti-Semitism. According to him, anti-Semitism should propel Jews to give their children strong Jewish identities and stick together, elaborating on his own strong Jewish identity and the positive, possibly even triumphant, aspects of being Jewish. In Daniel's opinion, intermarriage plays a large role in assimilation. While he asserted that Jewish institutions need to do more to include non-Jewish spouses so as to keep the Jewish population "intact," he also described a threat on the other hand of this inclusion: "If we keep doing that, but we're not asking these non-Jewish parents to commit, what does that do to the children? And, like, will they grow up feeling Jewish or will they feel like they have an easy out? And I guess that's what your research is going to cover." With that very telling statement, Daniel ended his narrative. The opinions fueling his assumption were based on survivalist Jewish narratives of anti-assimilation, and his response reflects the possible coloring of his answer based on the Jewish context of the project.

Jessica also made a revealing statement about the purpose of the research.

Sharing her feelings of difference, she stated, "I definitely felt different. And this is why I

was so interested in your interview, because it is about identity and it is so hard to place my identity.” Unlike Daniel, Jessica defined the purpose of the research as an open question. Her interview focused mainly on her ethnic hybridity, devoting more attention to her background of “racial-mixing.” Indeed she assumed correctly, which may have contributed to her telling narrative regarding identity construction.

An assumption Rebecca made fairly apparent was linked strongly to her performance. Her recognition of my Jewish name and affiliation with Jewish Studies contributed to her effort to bond with me as a fellow group-member. Her interview took place shortly before the Jewish holiday of Passover, when observant Jews go to great lengths to clean their homes and remove any traces of leavened bread, forbidden during the holiday. Since her infant daughter accompanied her to the interview, she brought cereal for the toddler to eat. The baby spilled the leavened bread product onto the floor, and Rebecca reacted to the spill by apologizing to me in light of Passover’s approach. “Sorry! *Pesach* [Hebrew, “Passover”]! I’m sorry [laughs].” This moment was well into the interview, in which Rebecca had already referenced many Hebrew words with Ashkenazic pronunciation, such as “Tznius” (a concept of modesty) or “Yomim Tovim” (referring to holy days), without explaining their meaning. This revealed her assumptions about my knowledge base as a Jewish Studies student while engaging in a speech performance furthering her Orthodox Jewish identity.

Informants’ mindfulness of the impressions they were giving was influenced by the recorded aspect of their narrative and my identity as listener. At the very end of her

interview, Anna was concerned about making sure that she provided a neutral characterization of her experience as a product of intermarriage. “I guess I just want to make sure that I didn’t come across as, like, having a positive or negative experience – as having a negative view or, like, negative experience, exclusively negative experience. I think there [have] been challenges, but I feel warmth and affection towards everyone in my family.” Sam verbalized a similar awareness regarding whether or not his interview was valuable to me. He asked me if his interview was “fruitful,” and later he apologized for giving me what he considered a terrible interview. Implying that he had only been rambling he stated, “I feel like I am a babbling idiot at this point,” even though I had reassured him more than once that his interview was enlightening. Eric was sensitive to my thoughts toward him as well, especially when discussing theology. Throughout his narrative, he would pause to provide a disclaimer that he did not want to offend anyone with what he was about to relate. For instance, before telling me that some of his fellow church congregants considered his family to be “completed Jews” since they accepted Jesus as their messiah, Eric apologetically interrupted himself to say, “Forgive me, I don’t want to be disrespectful of your beliefs either...” Eric was not privy to my beliefs, but it seems he assumed that mine were different from his own.

Assumptions and meta-narrative comments reveal that informants treated the occasion of being interviewed as something more than the research: beyond offering basic information, it was an act of identity work, furthering individuals’ goals of selfhood. For example, Rebecca’s assumptions about my identity, her use of Hebrew terms, and even her pronunciations suggested not only that she wished to bond but also

that she was using the our dialogue to work on and strengthen her Jewish identity.

Daniel revealed that he consulted his brother prior to the interview and asked him for his opinions as to what to say. Not only does this mean that Daniel came to the interview with prepared narratives, but it also adds weight to his manner of treating the interview as a recorded testimony of his family's Jewishness. When asked to characterize his exposure to both Jewish and Pennsylvania Dutch heritages, Daniel answered in terms of his and his brother's Jewish identity:

Um [pause, puts hands together] really positive [pause] um, in terms of my relation to [pause] the rest of the world outside of Judaism. So this is where I talked to my brother today, and he wanted me to make the point that [pause, clears throat] we didn't take our Judaism for granted, and I think that had to do with how certain kids treated us at the Jewish day school.

He also used this opportunity to express resentment towards his classmates' Jewish superiority, yet he used a story in which he hurt his own mother's feelings by perpetuating that superiority. Daniel remembered refusing to do a chore by saying to his mother, "Why should I listen to you? You're a Christian." Reflecting on the reason for this incident he said, "I don't know where that came from. Maybe, at the time, like, I was being taught some kind of Jewish superiority complex at the Jewish day school."

Revealing his shame, Daniel added further meaning to the event by declaring that moment as a turning point:

[T]hings really changed after that. I became very proud of, like, who I was. [...] But my brother wanted me to express that we definitely grew up and became much more active in the Jewish community and much bigger Zionists than our Jewish peers[...] And the kids who had two Jewish-born parents [...] we felt, "okay, somebody actually had to work for this, for us to be considered Jewish, and we're proud of being Jewish."

Abruptly moving from self retrospect to his brother's comments, Daniel emphasized the continuity of their Jewishness in a redemptive way. He stressed that he and his brother have stronger Jewish identities than their peers who do not have to question their Jewish identities against the matrilineal definition of Jewish identity, due to their mother's efforts to provide identity resolution for them as a convert. His statements suggest an attempt at compensating for his own memory of having taken Jewish identity for granted, using the interview to testify. Informants such as Andrew, Rebecca, and Dana expressed the issue of Jewish continuity as well, speaking to the complexity of defining Jewish identity and the importance of the issue for their individual "projects of selfhood." Their narratives will be revisited in Chapter Four.

Discussing his identity today, Benjamin used his response as an opportunity to unload his anger towards institutional Judaism and American Jewish organizations. He referenced the Pew Research Study to support his argument for a more pluralistic and meaningful Judaism:

I'm just so fed up with the sort of [Jewish] Federation style 'how do we get young people to be more Jewish' kinds of stuff. The right question to ask is 'How do we make Judaism meaningful to people?'...Questions I don't want to ask are 'Are you Jewish? Matrilineally Jewish?'[...] This Pew Research Study that's coming out – I'm like, 'Thank God. Thank God Jews have stopped going to shul (Yiddish, "school" or "synagogue") because they feel obligated to do it. Maybe now we'll actually get some creative activity going [laughs] you know we'll actually get things that people want to do and don't feel like they have to do.

Benjamin's comments illuminate his dissatisfaction with the status quo, imparting his own ideas about the kind of Judaism he wants to see in the future based on his rejection of matrilineality.

Paying close attention to these assumptions and concerns about self-portrayal, and earlier analyses of the performance dynamics of informants' interviews, allows for better understandings of cultural-social behavior and of personal narratives in context. Interviewing may impose a dialogical format, but individual responses express complexities and nuances aside from purely reporting relevant information. In the process of performing their pasts, including their subsequent interpretations and reflections, informants engaged in understanding themselves. The examples presented throughout this text show how relaying experience is an experience in itself, one which contributes to informants' coherence of their identities and is informed by how they wish their identities to be understood by others.

Chapter 2: Narrative, Memory, and Meaning

“Stories live to be told to others.” – D.P. McAdams

Memory and Autobiographical Narrative

Narrative is a tool for constructing identity through performance, yet it is also a construction in itself. Individuals create narratives that suit their present needs in expressing selfhood, which means they can change not only over time but also from one social interaction to another. People draw from the past to construct these narratives, connecting remembered events based on relevance and chronology to conceptualize experience. In order to understand how they construct narrative, it is important to first understand the dynamics of remembering.

Memory is not purely the human faculty to retrieve information from the past. Remembering is a process that utilizes experience and creativity to derive knowledge and meaning. Memory is central to “experience as lived and interpreted,” as remembering subjects “negotiate processes of change and patterns of continuity.”⁵⁴ Through recollection, people continually shape their experiences using imagination to connect memories over time according to their interpreted meaning. This process of paradigmatically connecting remembrances over the course of a life story is known as emplotment, or “stringing past events” to form plot structures.⁵⁵ Remembering also involves forgetting: “[M]ore broadly over the course of a life being lived the past is subject to a continual interchange of remembering and forgetting, with what seemed vivid at one time slowly fading and falling away, and at another time what has been

obscured coming to attain a newfound importance...”⁵⁶ Essentially, how individuals remember and value particular memories and arrange them is dependent on how they are changing as people over time.⁵⁷ Within autobiographical memory, changes in identity can occur because forgetting allows people to relinquish “what lies outside of the horizon of the relevant.”⁵⁸ The relevance a person places on one memory versus another is influenced by what is considered both personally and culturally valuable. “Far from being a strictly spontaneous act, remembering is also governed by unmistakably social *norms of remembrance* that tell us what we should remember and what we should essentially forget.”⁵⁹ Thus, remembering is a selective,⁶⁰ dialectical process. Individuals select memories they consider as “self-defining” or culturally relevant in order to adapt them to certain personal goals and plot structures, such as thematic progression or redemption. Highlighting certain memories over others silences certain experiences from personal narrative, deeming them less valuable. Memories may also be regarded as more or less valuable depending on the kind of relationship a remembering subject has with their listener.⁶¹ The dynamic of remembering is, therefore, not simply retrieval, but also varied based on social influence – both in terms of who is listening and how the remembering subject learned to conceptualize their memories. Individuals learn how to perceive the past through “mnemonic socialization,”⁶² a term coined by Eviatar Zerubavel, by which he refers to how the social process of memory transmission teaches remembering subjects what is worth remembering and how they should remember it, through the use of ceremonies, institutions, stories and behaviors. In this socialization, personal memory is shaped by

individuals' social interactions, autobiographical memory informing itself with collective memory (and vice versa). However, this does not mean that an individual cannot choose the memories they identify with, which is apparent in informants discussions of family memories and key moments.

Self-understanding emerges from the relationship between experience and meaning, as it actualizes in narrative. Autobiographical narratives are constructed through a social process in which remembering subjects communicate selfhood to others by connecting various mini-stories together.⁶³ They recall these stories repetitively and in multiple contexts, therefore strengthening their sense of connectedness over time. According to recent scholarship on social interaction theory, people learn to do this as young children as they are taught to remember and tell life stories in repetitive question-answer conversations with adults, thereby acquiring concepts of autobiography cognitively and culturally.⁶⁴ This socialization continues and develops well into adolescence and young adulthood, allowing for memories to be constantly reconstructed in their relation to one's present and future.⁶⁵ Reconstruction permits remembering subjects to derive meaning from past events and for that meaning to change over time. Marco Gemignani coined this constructive process as "memory-ing."⁶⁶ Through memory-ing, individuals draw from the past to create thematic narratives based on their present desires for meaning.

"A person's knowledge of self derives from episodes, and only later does the person organize them into what becomes the autobiographical knowledge base and

conceptual self. However, once in existence, the layers of organization can alter a person's perception of the original episodes."⁶⁷ In other words, individuals simultaneously draw from and creatively position autobiographical memories in relation to the present, stabilizing identity and re-organizing how they understand themselves as well as how they wish other people to understand them.⁶⁸ This organization of memory illustrates emplotment. According to McAdam's life story model, young adults "begin to reconstruct the personal past, perceive the present, and anticipate the future in terms of an internalized and evolving self-story, an integrative narrative of self."⁶⁹ Therefore, much like performance, autobiographical narrative is continually constructed. The creative positioning of autobiographical memory develops in social contexts as "communicative memory," which Jan Assmann introduced as a form of collective memory rooted in every day communication.⁷⁰ In ordinary verbal exchanges, people compose socially mediated memories relating to their groups: "Every individual memory constitutes itself in communication with others."⁷¹ Autobiographical memory is shared through narrative. Utilizing and positioning autobiographical memories in the contexts of groups and discourses, such narratives serve the function of publicly "defining self, defining relationships with others, and regulating emotional experiences through drawing moral and life lessons."⁷² By assigning meaning to experiences, autobiographical narratives articulate and reshape memories in the process of their telling.

In the project, interview conversations were situated in a particular context and the informants' autobiographical narratives presented according to what they decided

was meaningful. In research, the interviewer is an active part of the informant's process of recollection, not purely an observer collecting data,⁷³ and therefore becomes a part of the context of meaningful narrative construction. As speech acts, all narratives are interpretive, yet the extent to which it is explicit varies from one person to another. In the interviews, informants offered "meta-stories," making interpretations of life events as they went along with their narrations. These stories indicated the level of individuals' awareness of how they were constructing their stories. Elizabeth described her family's religious participation with a meta-characterization:

Most of my experience was just my mom and I going to church... We didn't pray before meals. And, um [pause] when we got the whole family together, we would – usually for large occasions – we would pray before meals, but there wasn't any sort of, like, participating in church activities as a family or... I think this is very stereotypical of sort of Irish Catholic American. Your faith is in your household and it's private.

Elizabeth positioned, or emplotted, her memory within a larger narrative of Irish Catholic American communal experience, which she perceived as different from the cultural experience of other American Christians. She also presented a narrative of rejecting religion during adolescence only to encounter a meaningful return to her beliefs. Elizabeth interpreted this return as the result of the "turbulence and independence of college," which she felt had caused her to "find comfort in the familiarity and repetition and security of Catholicism." Other informants provided similar characterizations using autobiographical accounts, ones which furthered the plot structures and narrative themes they favored in understanding their experiences and themselves. Yet, they did so in varying degrees of explicitness. The following section is

devoted to the moments that informants brought forth as particularly significant to who they are.

Key Moments

Part of the process of finding out how informants utilized the past was to inspire them to think about the past. Each one was asked if they had any first memories of engaging with either or both of their cultural-religious and ethnic communities. In a separate question, they were also directed to think back to holidays and memories of cultural-religious events. Informants remembered events mostly took place during family gatherings in the home rather than in places of worship. Many respondents answered in a fashion that reflected their hybrid identities, providing first memories of one cultural religious group, usually the one they most identified with, and then for another. A poignant example surfaced in Jake's narrative, as he created a dichotomy of memories based on his familial cultures. He answered most questions both in terms of a perspective from his "Jewish side," and then concluded with a perspective from his "Chinese side," suggesting his experience of duality through emplotment. Preceding first memory discussions, interviews included a brief conversation about the levels of family participation in either cultural-religious communities. Sarah's conversation about her mother's interest in going to Shabbat services easily flowed into an active remembering of the Shabbats she experienced as a child prior to her mother's decision to formally convert to Judaism. It seemed as though her mother's conversion took precedence in

her first memories. For example, she recalled the very last Christmas they celebrated together as a family in the home.

I remember the last Christmas. I was upset we were doing Christmas because, whenever the last Christmas was – either First or Second Grade – like, my mother had already, you know, decided conversion. She was telling us “We’re going to be a Jewish family now” and that we wouldn’t do Christmas anymore, but they wanted to do one last one.

Sarah humorously characterized her own response to her family’s decision for one last Christmas by stating, “Why don’t we just [pause] not do this one? Why are we doing it?” She tried to remember other first memories, but she returned to the last Christmas, inadvertently marking it as a key moment. “I was definitely mad about us having Christmas because I, like, was embracing, like, the whole Jewish identity. I was kind of [pause] I think I kind of always saw myself as Jewish. Yeah...” Sarah’s remembrance of one of her first moments of engaging with her duality draws attention to how memory is important to the narrative assertion of identity. At that point, I had not yet asked any questions directly relating to her identification, yet her recollection of that particular event became a recapturing of the emotion and a retrospective evaluation of why she remembered feeling angry. Sarah postulated that her anger grew out of her desire to fully embrace their shift as a family towards sole Jewish identity. Celebrating Christmas undermined this shift. Her assertion that she always identified as Jewish may act as a corrective statement serving either to justify her anger, expressing her sense of difference from non-Jewish identity, or to use her anger as a proof from the vantage point of the present about her earlier identification. This possibility is strengthened by her reiteration:

We started going to the preschool... [she pauses and interrupts herself] And yeah, to go back to the identity thing, yeah I definitely did identify as Jewish always. I remember we did used to do Christmas and we used to go to the mall Santa. And I remember one time, like, I wanted to bring in my mall Santa for show and tell at school and my mom was like, "Well, most Jewish kids don't do this." It wasn't presented to me that I had a Jewish identity and a Christian identity, but that I had a Jewish identity, but I do these things.

Her conversation about first memories became circular, returning to the point of stressing a certainty about her Jewishness, though this reiteration moved Sarah forward in her construction of an identity that was "always" unified as Jewish despite her non-Jewish experiences. "Stories are constructed to make sense of experiences that disrupt individuals' assumptions about their place in the world and their relations with others."⁷⁴ Sarah's story may be an attempt to construct continuity of Jewish identity in the story of her life, even during times in which her family was not solely focused on Jewish cultural practices. Later, she supported this suggestion by stating that her "Jewish identity feels continuous."

Informants who spoke of meaningful "key moments" usually shared memories revolving around life-cycle events, comings of age, traumatic experience and the death of loved ones, with high mnemonic density⁷⁵ taking place during informants' late adolescence into their early college years. Such vivid moments are often considered "self-defining memories" when informants use them repetitively, linking them to other memories in trajectories or themes.⁷⁶ Sometimes, informants shared key memories as turning points. A key moment is a memory of an event singled out by an individual as centrally important to their life story, yet it is not always considered a turning point. Turning points mark specific moments of transitions that signal major shifts in narrative emplotment. Thus, turning point memories are "paradigmatic self-related memories"

that contribute to a coherent narrative of change.⁷⁷ Those who constructed turning point narratives designated certain events as marking watershed moments in their personal understanding of selfhood. Often, key moments constituted traumatic and emotional memories communicating some kind of fracture for the narrator. While several informants were able to quickly recall and single out central moments in their lives, about half of the subject pool did not deliberately define memories singularly or specifically as “key.” However, all but a few of the respondents who could not consciously single out key moments ended up realizing that they had experienced key events without explicitly acknowledging them as such. This may indicate that some narratives are more situationally emergent than others: while some individuals were able to easily and deliberately contextualize their life with relevant memories, those who did not label events as “key” may not have reflected on their lives and did not have established narratives in the same way. Perhaps this may also indicate varying degrees of past, present, and future-oriented-ness among respondents. Furthermore, these differing ways of expressing key events could illuminate differences in the socialization of life storytelling. However, even informants who defined singular moments as “key” began to attribute similar importance to other memories without defining them as such – further proof of narrative as an emergent process, and that remembering subjects privilege certain memories over others within certain contexts.

The death of a loved one can be a very powerful emotional experience that leaves its mark on identity, both at the communal and individual levels. Sam cited the death of his grandfather as a key memory, making direct links between his grandfather’s

death and his identity throughout our discussion. He recalled that his grandparents, both deceased, were Orthodox and he discussed the Jewish traditions he learned from them. “[...] that’s a very vivid part of my life that I can remember [pause] clearly,” he said. He started to become emotional, so I asked if anything in particular stood out for him: “I’ll talk about – my grandfather had passed away when I was in [pauses, looking up] I want to say, like, sixth grade... My grandpa, he was like my hero in life... And, uh, that was just like a really difficult time for me.” Sam remembered the funeral, commenting on the stark difference between the “glitz and glamour” of Catholic funerals versus his grandfather’s Jewish funeral: “You go out the way you came in.” He told me it was a closed casket ceremony, yet his great aunt wanted to see her brother’s face. Sam described the difficult experience of seeing his grandfather’s lifeless body:

[T]hey were going to open the casket, so I thought, you know, they were going to open the casket and he was going to look exactly like he did when he was alive. And you know, of course, he didn’t and he was just like, you know, no makeup or anything like that. It was just him, lifeless in like a shroud, and it was just, like, a very difficult thing for me to comprehend at that point in my life. And still to this day, actually.

It became apparent that the traumatic realization of his grandfather’s passing created a lasting impact on Sam’s life narrative. His favorite holiday memory took place at his grandparents’ Chanukkah party, and he attributed this to the fact that “they’re no longer with us.” While Sam spoke of both grandparents, he focused more on how his grandfather connected to the most significant memories he has, especially his identification with Judaism. It appears from Sam’s narrative that the loss of his hero compels him to establish continuity of his grandfather’s existence through his own thoughts and actions.

[...] When my grandpa passed away, a lot of the traditions that I just spoke of so fondly kind of stopped, because, uh, he was the patriarch of the family. You know, the guy that carried the, you know [pauses] the kind of guy that had a presence, you know what I mean. Where, like, uh, no one goes and says it out loud but, like, if you walk into a room, you could tell that he's like [pause] the most highly respected person in the room [...] he was a big part of my life, so I think that when he passed, it bummed out everybody. A lot of the tradition that we had – people didn't want to do it anymore just because it kind of reminded them of him. You know, instead of being a happy event, it became a sad, nostalgic event.

Sam saw his grandfather's death as the cause for his family's abandonment of certain traditional Jewish identity practices. Later, he mentioned that his Jewish heritage was important to him not in a religious way, but more in the sense that he wanted to "make the people that shaped me that are no longer with us, or I want to make them proud of who I am and what I accomplished... they deserve for me to do good in this world – make them proud." Sam communicated that his identity involves memorializing his loved ones: by behaving in ways that his deceased relatives would appreciate (by being a good person) he creates continuity of values, honoring those who shaped him by sustaining their moral legacy in the way he lives his life.

The death of her Jewish grandfather was very important to Jessica's understanding of her identity. She recalled a traumatic memory of being forced to go to a Catholic mass instead of being allowed to go to a synagogue to mourn his death in a Jewish way.

[M]y Jewish grandfather [looks down] passed away [pauses, becomes emotional, fans her face] And this is, like, years ago, um, I was with my mom [pauses] and my cousin was having a [Catholic] confirmation... I got the call that my grandfather had passed, and I was like... "I need to go to the synagogue right now. I need to go to a synagogue." And my mom's, "Well, we have to go to this confirmation. It's all the same God anyway and we have to go to this confirmation." I said, "No, you don't understand [she begins to cry]. I have to hear Kaddish, I have to do this. That's where I feel comfortable and that's

where I want to go.” And my mother made me go to church... I just lost it. I went outside. I wouldn’t be in the church.

Jessica’s memory of being denied access to a Jewish practice at an emotionally upsetting time exacerbated a tension between her and her Christian mother, which was already palpable. She attributed this tension to the lack of acceptance she experienced from her mother’s Dominican culture of her queer identity, which is not socially acceptable in their circles. “Queer” is an overarching term that includes various degrees of gender identity and sexual orientation which are not considered heteronormative. Jessica vaguely identified herself throughout her narrative as queer, articulating her identity as a masculine female. She depicted her identity as marginalized in Dominican culture, emphasizing her discomfort not only when Dominican relatives tried to impose a normative gender identity onto her, but also when she was forced to participate in Dominican Catholicism, which she felt unaccepted by. “I never went to church with my mother. That would have made me extremely uncomfortable. [Motions hand in a cutting swipe, adding finality].” Contradicting herself, Jessica followed this statement by saying:

And the few times I did go to church with my mother, I was very uncomfortable. I’m, I was, I’m queer and my mom’s brand of Christianity that she follows and one of the reasons I identified so strongly with Jewish for a long time is because all my dad’s Jewish friends and the Jewish community I was a member of were okay with gay people. A lot of the Dominican community, the Catholic community or Evangelical community [her mother became evangelical later in life] is not okay with gay people.

In light of these comments, the memory of not being able to express grief Jewishly over her grandfather’s passing became part of a broader narrative of identity difference from Dominican cultural values. Jessica added to this narrative by citing a moment in which

she felt disapproved of in her Dominican Catholic sphere. She thought that the priest at her grandmother's funeral mass was looking at her disparagingly as he talked about Satan because of her masculine appearance. She furthered her differentiation theme by stating, "So, moments like that [pointing] – I was so not this – that made me feel what I was. I'm definitely not Catholic or any of these things... When it was time for me to mourn, I needed the Jewish stuff." She rounded out this theme by concluding that some of the most striking moments in her life were those moments when she was forced to do things that she was uncomfortable with, and that doing these things helped her to realize who she was by recognizing what she was not.

Andrew also singled out a traumatic event as "key," one which he linked to a broader narrative theme. While studying in Germany, he recalled walking far from his apartment to attend *Shabbat* (Hebrew, "Sabbath") services one Saturday afternoon. Instead of returning home after the concluding evening service, he decided to go to a café to watch the Eurovision song contest. Andrew, however, was traditionally observing the Sabbath, which meant that he did not carry his wallet and cellphone during that time, an element very important to his story.

...the Eurovision song contest's final round was going to be debuted and I remember seeing on the screen – keep in mind there are lots of students very loud [shaking his hands chaotically] – a train in Connecticut had exploded. It wasn't just any train; it was the metro-north train that my parents used to take back and forth from New York quite often. Because I couldn't hear anything over the noise and I recalled something vaguely about my parents having to travel to New York for the weekend, I went completely pale, I ran all the way home... And I called my parents on Shabbat [a prohibited act], making sure that they were okay. Just in case you know about this, my parents do not keep Shabbat as a result and now I think that I'm a bit similar on their level of observance.

Andrew told a full story depicting a beginning, middle, and end that underscores the trauma of believing his parents might have died in the train explosion. The trauma was compounded with his religious observance preventing him from communicating with them— an observance he has since abandoned. In line with his broader plotline of transition from Orthodox Judaism to a less observant form of Jewish identity, Andrew's key moment constitutes the turning point marking his shift to an identity loosely characterized as "culturally Jewish." Important to note is that his narrative employed performative strategies, such as using phrases like "keep in mind" to establish the setting and "just in case you know" to personally address his interlocutor.

The informants also related key moments that positively shaped their identities. For example, Sophia recalled the instant she realized she wanted to become a bat mitzvah (Hebrew, "daughter of the covenant"). She was at a bat mitzvah ceremony when she decided that it was something she wanted to pursue as well. "It was about taking on the responsibility and proving to everyone that I could do it." Evan described the summer he went to religious Christian camp as his key moment. He marked that trip as the beginning of his spiritual "journey," one which involved shifting towards Christian fundamentalism and eventually falling away from religion altogether. Sarah's key moment was undoubtedly her mother's Jewish conversion, which signaled the start of her Jewish family experience. Since she and her siblings were born before her mother's conversion, Sarah and her sisters were also converted as very young children, making her mother's conversion a collective turning point memory.

Rebecca's key moments formed a spiritual awakening story presenting major turning points. This narrative was mnemonically dense during young adulthood, a time in which she felt the most confusion and discovered resolution. While discussing her exposure to Christianity and Judaism, she set up her identity shift by stating that as a child she felt lucky to have both heritages and sets of holidays, followed by confusion about her beliefs as she grew older. Her parents' divorce also lingered in the background of this narrative, a phenomenon which also presented in Jessica's and Dana's narratives. Rebecca marked her shift with a period of religious discovery. While soul searching at the end of college, her best friend encouraged her to visit Chabad, a religious organization created by the Lubavitch Hasidic movement of ultra-Orthodox Jews. Their "houses" function as Jewish community centers aimed at encouraging secular Jews to practice traditional Judaism. At the time she began attending Chabad, she was living with her Jewish father, a living situation that began shortly after her parents' divorce when she was not getting along with her mother. Her initial exposure to Lubavitch Hasidic Judaism was followed by a fateful trip to South America after graduation.

I remember after college I took some time and went to South America, and I was, like, on this big spiritual trip. Like, "I need to figure out my spirituality, because, like, I've been raised this, I've been raised that. There's all these conflicting ideas," and like [pauses] I felt very conflicted and, like, not very settled with I myself [pauses] was or believed in.

She elaborated that during this spiritual retreat she concretized her spiritual beliefs. "I came up with my definition of what I thought God was. And my definition of God was, like, the energy of the universe. And I remember feeling recharged, 'cause I was like, 'Okay, I know what I believe in and I know what I think God is,' and I felt much more settled about it." Rebecca then connected this spiritual trip to another one that

happened years later when she traveled to Israel on Birthright (a program that subsidizes trips to Israel for international Jewish youth), creating a plotline that served to “string” both events together and yield meaning for her decision to convert to Judaism.⁷⁸ Rebecca described the Birthright Shabbat dinner at which she met an Orthodox rabbi who explained to her the Jewish definition of God.

I remember I was sitting at the table and I asked him what his definition of God was. And it was [speaking with emphasis] exactly the same as the definition I came up with myself... when I was sitting on the beach [in Ecuador]. And so, I remember thinking then, like, “Oh my gosh! I really think I’m Jewish! Like, I think I need to convert... that was, like, the turning point: I remember that rabbi saying his definition of what God is and that it, like, matched so closely with what I thought God was. I really felt the pull and I was like, “I really feel like I need to convert and that I’m really Jewish.”

Eventually, Rebecca did convert to Hasidic Judaism, and this narrative presents how she came to that decision. Her story resembles the structure of an awakening, following the narrative formula of discovering the truth about the definition of God.⁷⁹ Prior to this epiphany, Rebecca lacked a stable worldview, but after connecting both of these experiences she was able to substitute her confusion with a set of beliefs and establish a religious paradigmatic shift from a secular thought-community to a religious one.⁸⁰ According to DeGloma’s theory of awakenings, her use of two events that occurred years apart to construct her realization of “truth” expresses a “cultural and epistemic dispute between different communities within an autobiographical field.”⁸¹ Rebecca underscored the contrast between her present lifestyle as a modest Hasidic woman to that of her previous identity as an aimless and unsettled college graduate that partied and drank too much. Depicting her past as depraved of meaning reflects a formula aligning her with her new religious community, one which embodied her discovery of

meaningful personal truth.⁸² Her depiction somewhat resembles a “myth of origins,” as she articulated a new beginning and emphasized discontinuity with her past.⁸³ She supplied the narrative resolution of her plot by sharing that within the span less than two years after her conversion, she built a new life, one which practically excluded her Christian mother and included her Jewish father. She married a man who became Lubavitch as a *Baal Teshuva* (Hebrew, meaning a formerly secular Jewish person who “returned” to the religion), established an Orthodox Jewish home structured on ritual performance, and had her first child. Interestingly, Rebecca did not see her child living a life that resembled her own upbringing. She suggested that her daughter probably would not attend college, because it was not a modest environment for women, which directly contrasted Rebecca’s own life as a graduate student. Perhaps her daughter symbolically represented the narrative redemption of her awakening.

A contrasting phenomenon that emerged from the interviews was the tendency of individuals to express “memory fusion,” when remembered events blended together forming vague or blurry conceptualizations of the past: such as characterizing every Christmas celebration as looking the same or expressing the inability to remember anything specific outside of a general formula of elements constituting “Christmas” experience. Participants also related fusion by depicting Christmas and Chanukah as basically the same event, their celebrations being indistinguishable from each other. Elizabeth stated that most of her early memories consist of her and her mother being together in church. Since she was raised Catholic, she supposed that this was the reason that her Jewish memories “tend to blur together.” Both Elizabeth and Dana could not

single out even one moment from their celebrations of Christmas, yet they were able to vividly remember Jewish holidays because they were “different.” Evan even used the term “fused” to describe the quality of his memories of attending various kinds of churches in his youth. His experience is similar to Melissa’s family’s experimentation with churches, yet she was able to single out vivid memories of their trial-run attendances. The blending of memories is an interesting phenomenon because it may speak to issues of forgetting, or the privileging of some memories over others due to affinities in identification.

Interpreting Life Narratives

Life narratives are always interpretive because they are retrospective. Retrospection is a process of understanding development and change over the course of one’s life, and the narration of hindsight often articulates realizations or judgments – essentially, more explicit forms of interpretation about the past. Interpretations came to light within the interviews as a result of each informant looking at the past with an implied knowledge or wisdom arising from their vantage point in the present.

Benjamin’s recounting of his early Jewish and Christian experiences led him to a retrospection of the gendered associations he made with both religions. Introducing his narrative as a “funny anecdote,” he reflected on the cultural-religious engagement in his home, explaining and emplotting the idea that for a period of time he considered Christianity to be something feminine and Judaism to be something masculine.

[...] because I had these experiences, these early experiences, and because I sort of knew that my mother was [pause] Christian and my dad was Jewish, um, from an early age, like at that time my mother hadn't converted, um, my associations with Christianity are still very feminine and my associations with Judaism are still masculine. Is that true? No, that kind of died out in high school.

This narrative is especially interesting because Benjamin changed his viewpoint during narration. Questioning the logic of his earlier view, he made the evaluation that he no longer has gendered associations of the religions. He clarified by saying that up to the age of six or seven his gendered associations revolved around the parenthood identities he made of each religion. "I was under the impression that Jesus was the woman and Jesus was a woman's name, Christianity was motherly, Judaism was fatherly." As a result, Benjamin explained that as a child he thought that his friends' Christian activities were somewhat "girly." Looking back at his gendered conceptions, Benjamin offered further explanation:

I can only assume it was because the most womanly influence in my life was my mother and this was the only discernable identity that she had that was different from my father, right. I knew she was a woman. I knew she was Christian. And I knew my father was a man. And I knew my father was Jewish. And other than that, those were like the massive categorical differences of identity that I was aware of at the age of five, six, seven.

It is uncertain as to whether or not Benjamin continued to have these associations. Interestingly, his narrative changed from extending these gendered conceptions to the present to limiting them twice – once to adolescence and again to mid-childhood. Explaining and interpreting his changes in perception may serve to contextualize changes in his identity then and now as an adult making his own decisions about religion based on reason.

While recounting the event of his bar mitzvah, Andrew emphasized his difference from most of the congregants at the Orthodox synagogue he grew up attending. He stated that at thirteen he was able to chant the entire Torah and Haftarah portions (respectively, the Hebrew Bible and excerpts from the Book of Prophets) for the prayer service that day. He credited this experience as influential:

It effectively set me up for a lifetime of singing after that point. And to that I am grateful that I was at a very small congregation. It was Orthodox, and as a result – because I was surrounded by some people who never really wanted to take action with the services or anything – if they didn't have a very good singing voice, then I was the one to take the initiative.

Yet, after this exchange marking a positive difference from his community, one which endowed him with more respect and responsibility, Andrew made an interpretation which led to revealing social insecurity: “In retrospect, I think you make me realize that now I think it would have been a ‘come-up-ins’ for me, like, socially. Uh, socially inhibited [pauses, looks away].” Andrew changed course slightly by stating that he recently joined a choir, was praised very highly for his singing capability, and he even turned down offers for synagogue cantorial positions. Changing the subject away from his feelings of social inhibition in the manner that he did may suggest that Andrew was censoring his narrative. At first, he suggested that his talent would have been an opportunity to be more social, but the narrative indicates that he may regret missing that opportunity. Later, Andrew went into more detail about his social inhibition and solitary experience in Jewish circles, which added meaning to his interpretation here.

Sam made a poignant interpretation that began with expressing his dissatisfaction with religion. When asked if he experienced any shifts in identity, he

responded with his disapproval of the connection between religion and the fear of dying.

One of the things that irritates me about religion in general is that, like, I think that a lot of – and this could be a naïve thought, but it does go through my mind – is that, like, the connection between a religious belief and the fear of dying... I don't think that you should practice a religion just because of a safety net that you want to give yourself because you have a fear of dying... I won't do that... that is what kind of turned me off from pursuing a religion, per say.

Not only do these statements reflect Sam's own identity work within the context of the interview, but he enhances his statements by explaining how he came to this moral decision. In this explanation, he creates a narrative of having escaped death numerous times:

I was in a car accident where I totaled my car, and I never really thought about death until that point. And then, like, certain instances happened in my life where, like, I almost died a couple times, and it's, like, I guess that's when it happened [meaning, when he decided religion and death shouldn't connect]. I almost died in like a scuba diving accident. And then the car crash I had, obviously. And, you know, until you have a moment or an experience like that, you kind of think, "This is going to last forever," until you have that reality.

Sam's narrative is redemptive. He connects his memories of brushing with death to interpret what made him come to his spiritual moral decision. Sam credits those experiences as endowing him with a certain level of moral wisdom and life knowledge. It is noteworthy that he began this meta-narrative with a disclaimer that his thinking might be "naïve," yet he offered a point of view that reflected first-hand knowledge.

As this chapter has explored, narrative, memory and meaning are strongly linked to one another in the process of conceptualizing the self. In order to construct identity, individuals must construct narratives using the resources of the past, their goals and

motivations, and the language and discourses culturally available to them. Narratives reside in social interactions, which mean they are subject to alteration based on changes in the remembering subject and who is listening. The informants in this study constructed narratives based on memories of cultural-religious experience due to the context of the interview, yet they also brought forth broader self-concepts. They connected memories to communicate various themes and plot structures as well as hybridity. As the next chapter illustrates, much of what the informants related was rooted in their memories of family.

Chapter 3: Origins and Family Memory

“I don’t think I belong to either category. I feel like I belong to my family.” – Melissa

Ancestry: Family Narrative and Family Memory

Self-defining memories can include events that one did not experience firsthand or those one was too young to remember, since they are often related and repeated through a process of family story-telling or reminiscing. This is because individuals make memories in relation to groups. Halbwachs asserted that “The idea we most easily picture to ourself, no matter how personal and specific its elements, is the idea others have of us. The events of our life most immediate to ourself are also engraved in the memory of those groups closest to us.”⁸⁴ Therefore, most of what individuals remember expands “beyond their autobiographical memory” and relies on inter-generational transmission.⁸⁵ According to Assmann, family memories are communicative, originating from social time for the construction of social selves.⁸⁶ Unlike “cultural memory,” which relates to historical time and cultural identity, communicative memory is embodied, direct transmission that can therefore only persist within the span of about three communicating generations – the recent past.⁸⁷ “Like the present, the past is also part of a social reality that, while far from being absolutely objective, nonetheless transcends our subjectivity and is commonly shared by others as well.”⁸⁸ A family-centered line of questioning took into account that the family, as the first mnemonic community a human being encounters, influences how individual members remember the past. As a member of a family, the practices of communicative memory within that family create a

sense of belonging. “[T]he family plays a critical role in our *mnemonic socialization*. In fact, all subsequent interpretations of our early ‘recollections’ are only interpretations of the way they were originally experienced and remembered within the context of our family.”⁸⁹ Conventionally, family is understood as what connects a person to a larger collective, whether that is an ethnic group, a religion, or a nationality. The adult children of intermarriage are often situated in and between remembrance communities representing multiple cultural-religious groups, endowing them with the potential for hybrid identity. In this sense, informants’ articulations of rootedness can appear bifurcated – their lineage allows them to draw from more than one common collective. Each interview subject in this study was asked to recall where they and their parents come from and what their parents’ cultural-religious and/or ethnic backgrounds are. They were then asked to look back on different family-based experiences. Informants often responded to questions regarding their inherited collectives by emphasizing commonality or harmony, even if they expressed identification with one over another.

Informants employed plotlines in telling stories of past events belonging to a repertoire of family memory.⁹⁰ The participants were grounded in historical narratives of their families’ pasts, and they used family memories to position themselves in both their collective and individual narratives. Family memory is similar to Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, in the sense that it is embodied; yet, it is still a separate concept. “Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and

behaviors among which they grew up.”⁹¹ According to this concept, second generation descendants of Holocaust survivors adopt their parents’ traumatic memories as their own. Descendants of a particular family or lineage can also adopt the “memories” and narratives of the generations preceding them as part of their own frame of autobiographical memory⁹² through a process of inter-generational transmission or “mnemonic transitivity.”⁹³ For example, individuals can “remember” events they experienced in early childhood through the lens of their parents, grandparents, and older siblings’ narrations of what happened. While this process may not replace memories of one generation with those of the generation prior, as is possible in postmemory, a repertoire of family memory can facilitate the filling of memory gaps that cannot be accessed alone, allowing for the absorption of others’ recollections into one’s own store of self-knowledge. Family memory, therefore, can be considered a subcategory of communicative memory. Informants articulated this phenomenon when they referenced particular memories with disclaimers like “I was too young to know what was going on” (Melissa) and “I don’t actually remember this, but she’s told me this” (Monica).

Lineage and genealogical origins emerged as crucial aspects of the personal narratives. While some respondents offered short answers to questions about their parents’ cultural-religious backgrounds, others responded with extensive information about their grandparents, great-grandparents and other relatives reaching far back into their ancestral histories. Ancestries are structures that individuals use to gain and socially express access to what they perceive as the inherited past, facilitating plotlines

of continuity and connecting them with other common descendants who share ties to the same past. “[Our] ancestral background affects not only how others see us but even how we experience ourselves... knowing who our ancestors were is fundamental to our sense of who we are.”⁹⁴ Narrating their family histories and the connections they felt towards their ancestors – some of whom they had never met – indicated the informants’ aims to position themselves within their origins, and that they understood themselves to be a part of a larger trajectory of personal history.

Depictions of ancestry, genealogical ties, and even the chronicling of events in their immediate families presented in the form of family narratives, stories that are repeated and remembered by more than one family member. Such stories can be incorporated into a repertoire of family identity or knowledge, demonstrating the role of collective memory for individuals in relation to a past that they did not physically witness. “[S]ince the invention of language, our genealogical memory need no longer be confined to, and can therefore transcend, our personal, firsthand experience of ancestors.”⁹⁵ Repeating these memories and preserving known ancestral origins through speech helps to create a continual and unified sense of family identity and a sense of self. Deriving selfhood from the collective of one’s lineage often inspires individuals to preserve and continue memories of ancestors through reproducing stories and more descendants.⁹⁶ These two levels of continuity differ in that memories are continually shaped as they are shared and are dependent on the act of repetition. Continuity through reproduction is a physical chain of preservation which is often symbolic. Individuals rely on stories to perform their connections to certain ancestors, ensuring

continuity of the collective past. Some informants indicated a performance of ancestral continuity by explaining their attempts to learn languages that were linked to their genealogical identities. Andrew qualified his decision to learn Swedish because his maternal grandparents' families came from Sweden. Sarah's pursuit of learning Yiddish and Jessica's and Anna's attempts to speak better Spanish are also illustrative examples.

Informants' attention to lineage speaks to the power of mnemonic socialization and to the importance of having a collective social legacy. However, these collective memories are remembered by individuals in varying degrees of intensity.⁹⁷ "I've actually done quite of genealogy, so you can cut me off if I get too far into it." Benjamin answered my question about his parents' cultural-religious backgrounds by providing me with an extensive look at their family histories. He went into detail to depict his father's grandparents who came from Eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and were raised as very observant Jews. They represented his father's beginnings in Benjamin's narrative, in contrast to his father's eventual upbringing as a Conservative Jew who gave up religious practice during high school. The narrative he constructed for his mother's family origins was even more extensive. "Her mother is full-Swedish and her grandparents, I think her grandparents – my, what would it be, my great-grandparents – were born overseas by my mother's mother's family. And then my mother's father's family were sort of Norwegian, German ancestry, but with one line of the family that goes back to the Mayflower." He explained that there are several towns in New England that bare his family names due to their status as pilgrims. It is possible that this theme was Benjamin's way of establishing American rootedness.

Andrew launched a detailed genealogical description of his family's European and early American ancestral ties. He began with his father's Ashkenazi Jewish heritage as a third generation American, and followed by telling about his mother's Swedish and Hungarian ethnic heritage. Noting his grandfather's second generation status and his grandmother's longstanding English and German American "roots," he paid homage to Abraham Lincoln and Harriet Beecher Stowe as his ancestors. Andrew emphasized his family surnames and their possible European origins on the one hand, and on the other he indicated the early American rootedness of his mother's family by referring to generational labels. Sarah also pointed towards her American ancestry, establishing her mother's status as a Daughter of the American Revolution and expressing how she felt as if she was throwing out half of her heritage by choosing only to explore the Jewish side of her identity. These statements communicated a sense of loss in that she could not seem to express both identities simultaneously. Sarah referred to her Jewish half as her "useable history," but she considered that perhaps later in life she would re-invent herself as a Daughter of the American Revolution and "do waspy things." She said this humorously, yet her statements imply the possibility that she has an either-or perception of her identity, indicating a need or pressure to make a conscious choice. Her plotline, therefore, follows a structure that separates both heritages and affords her the option of sequential moves, echoing her earlier comments about really being Jewish, yet outwardly participating in some Christian activities.

Elizabeth's interview was intriguing in terms of family narrative, referencing it often as one of her favorite pursuits to know family genealogy and the personal

histories of her predecessors. This included the stories of her most recent ancestors, and her overall narrative paid more genealogical attention to her Jewish family history. Through these stories, she revealed that her cultural associations revolved more around her Jewish side, stating that she connects to it by sharing and acquiring her father's family memories, including family stories of immigration during World War II and more recent recollections of events that happened before she was born. For instance, Elizabeth related a narrative of family reactions to her parents' intermarriage. She explained that her father grew up in Brooklyn and did not marry until he was 38. The last point was put into the context that his brother never married, justifying her grandparents' pleasure that her father was getting married at all and was going to provide future grandchildren. Her description of her father's family's reaction contrasted that of her mother's Catholic family, who "didn't care one way or another" about the religious identity of her mother's chosen mate. Background information like this is most certainly gleaned from family storytelling, but Elizabeth mentioned later that she felt drawn to her father's heritage because it was "different," a sentiment echoed Dana and Sophia. Elizabeth's interest in her father's history became a genealogical inspiration to do independent research to trace it back, leading her to read about New York Jewish and Irish immigrant narratives. She used the memory of her families' immigrant experiences to shape her own identity, stating that learning about those hardships became a driving force for her to improve herself. According to Elizabeth, the immigrant mentalities of her parents' families revolved around a message of doing better than the last generation in order to provide more for the next one. Her

genealogical pursuits and the use of family memory suggest that she feels part of a larger continuum of family identity. The way she integrated her dual family heritage into her narrative illustrates that she looked to the past of both peoples to construct continuity in a way that honors both: Irish-Catholic heritage characterized her faith while Jewish heritage characterized her cultural pursuit. One of the most telling comments Elizabeth made in support of this integration of narratives was that learning about both Jewish and Irish historical family narratives was her way of promoting and preserving both identities for herself and for future generations, calling it a form of “family perseverance.” She described this concept as something uniquely Jewish, as “perseverance through tradition and history,” emphasizing that it was her choice to adopt and pass down memories of both families. This integration also implies an effort at harmonizing the two as an expression of commonality in her hybridity, thus creating separate but equally important identities.

Elizabeth’s narrative also provided a strong example of how memory is passed down through various means. When asked if she had any religious ceremonies growing up, she answered that she had completed a number of Catholic ceremonies, including baptism, reconciliation, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. She began to recall the family narrative of her baptism – a Catholic experience that usually takes place during infancy and cannot possibly be remembered independently:

I don't remember the younger ones [ceremonies]...looking back I've seen pictures. So, I think a relevant story is that my Dad's parents knew that I was being raised Catholic, but I'm not sure[...] what sort of approval there was of that, and there was sort of this understanding that had I been a boy my father would have raised me Jewish. I don't know why...when I was baptized my mom, out of respect, wanted to keep it sort of hush-

hush and didn't invite my dad's parents. And they saw pictures of it when they came over the house the next time, and they were so upset that they had been excluded from something important in my life. They didn't care that it was not their religion.

Elizabeth mentioned looking at photographs as a mnemonic practice orienting herself in a past event of her early life. The story that followed her statement suggested that her Jewish grandparents also saw the photographs as proof of the event they were not able to witness. As Hirsch states in her study of family photo albums, "Photographs mediate familial memory."⁹⁸ It seems that these photographs functioned as a sight of embodied family memory, filling out memory gaps for both Elizabeth and her grandparents, most likely based on her parents' and grandparents' repetition of the story. Elizabeth immediately uses it to explain a memory she actually was old enough to remember. At her First Holy Communion, there weren't enough seats for her parents and both sets of grandparents to sit. "My mom's parents gave up their seats for my dad's parents because it was, like, so important for them to be part of this experience. So, I remember that." It is not a coincidence that Elizabeth recalls both stories, one after the other. The previous recollection enhances the second, adding meaning to her Catholic grandparents' choice to give up their seats: it acts as a strategy of integration infusing what may seem outwardly as a split in cultural-religious identity with a sense of common ground and equality of importance.

As Elizabeth's narrative illustrates, family memory was important to informants' narrative constructions in ways less genealogical. Melissa used her father's memories of growing up as a means to enhance the meaning of her own experience. She stated that religion was an experience she only had at school. Her parents were not interested in

religion, yet they decided to send their children to a Born Again Christian school because they felt it would provide a better education in comparison to the local public school. The most religious family observance she referenced was that they sometimes said grace before dinner. Reflecting on the fact that Judaism remained a mystery to her through much of her childhood and adolescence, Melissa commented that she thought this was because her father “didn’t enjoy being Jewish” and therefore did not want her or her brother to be Jewish. At this point, Melissa told a family narrative of her father’s Jewish upbringing to explain her less dominant Jewish identity:

My dad got his Bar Mitzvah...I believe my aunt got her Bat Mitzvah...they used to get just dropped off at synagogue...they used to have to do all that stuff [in Hebrew school] and his parents never went with. They would just drop him off. So, like, for him I guess it was similar to how I felt about the Christian school: it was just something you had to do, it wasn't a family thing. After his Bar Mitzvah, he didn't go back. He said, "I really hate going here."

Two aspects of this narrative are interesting. First, she compared her father’s memory of dissatisfaction to her own narrative of disinterest in Christianity. Like her father, religious identity was also something relegated to an education outside of the home without family participation. Second, she used dialogue as a storytelling device to end the story, quoting what her father said to his parents as a thirteen-year-old boy in the present tense. This dialogical ending added emphasis to the narrative, perhaps echoing how she first heard her father’s remembrance. Melissa’s portrayal of her dislike of religious education as a likeness reflected through her father’s experience may also be a strategy of integration communicating commonality, despite the fact that her religious education was Christian and her father’s was Jewish. Her plot structure, therefore, can

be characterized as connecting stories as interweaving experiences between her father and herself.

Jessica referenced family memory as she explained how she had to “make [her] own space to be Dominican.” Identifying herself as a masculine female, she described her Dominican sphere as a group in which she could not fit the standard for femininity. She discussed how she lacked sufficient role models in her Dominican world because of this, thus attempting to create her own. “I didn’t have a role model of a strong, masculine female to identify with, so I looked for strong males instead.” The people she admired the most were her Dominican grandparents, especially her grandfather, because they were social activists and she was passionate about social justice and civil rights. Her narrative constructed similarities in moral values between herself and her ancestors, functioning to connect her to a heritage she felt distanced from. This created a harmonizing effect for her identity. Interestingly, Jessica used another family memory to echo her identification with social justice – a value she characterized as very Jewish. She remembered a story her father told her after the death of her Jewish grandmother, describing his mother’s reaction when he first called her to say he was in love with Jessica’s mother:

She’s amazing! She’s Dominican,” and the first thing my grandmother said is “Is she a shvartze [Yiddish for black person]?” My father hung up on my grandmother with a “Yes!” [she acts out the phone clicking]. My mom is not black, but he was so [made final slicing motion with her hand] upset that that was her first thing that my grandmother asked. He let her sweat it until she met my mom.

After sharing this memory, Jessica interpreted her grandmother’s response as the fear of dark skin, and she made the assertion that “no group is monolithic,” including Jewish

people. She also suggested that attitudes such as her grandmother's may be why she "clings to the Reform end of the spectrum," portraying Reform Judaism as more accepting of diversity. This part of her narrative was interesting because Jessica told the story of her grandmother's reaction as if she was there, though she had not been born yet. This further supports family memory as collective communicative memory. Using this story furthered Jessica's narrative goal in communicating her rejection of moral injustice, a value she identified with as liberally Jewish.

Daniel's preoccupation with family history focused on preservation in a way that connected his essential familial ties to the experiences of his own time. The narrative of his responsibility to preserve familial memory is quite revealing, and like Elizabeth he paid homage to a Jewish idea of perseverance through history:

I am looked upon by both sides of the family as the person who has to keep the heritages intact. What that means is the family histories. So, I'm now in possession of the family trees on both sides and large books of information. This one book came from Germany, um, with the Pennsylvania Dutch heritage stuff... it's a huge thing to carry on my shoulders and I think about it, like, "Why don't some of my grandmother's other children carry this because it's more the Christian side of our family." And, um, they don't have any interest in that whatsoever. And what I think it is, it's because of my Jewish heritage that I care about the past and transmission of ideals from one generation to the next is always a huge tenet of our culture... "L'dor v'dor" [Hebrew], "generation to generation."

Daniel's conscious attention to Pennsylvania Dutch heritage surfaced repeatedly. In the middle of a story relating his feelings of difference during an uncomfortable incident in Hebrew school where his Christian-background was targeted, he interrupted to tell stories about his strong connection to Germanic heritage, legitimizing his taking offense to the comments made and expressing his duality. In one story, Daniel said that while in Israel he made a German friend whom he eventually visited in Germany, where they

went hiking together in the Bavarian Alps. “I don’t know if it was the landscape, the serenity of it that really spoke to me, but I did have this sense of like, ‘Okay, these are my other people [pauses] this is the other side of me... I’m pretty sure the Pennsylvania Dutch came from West Bavaria.” These statements connected Daniel into a larger continuum of family identity, similar to Elizabeth’s narrative.

Daniel then asked to “fast-forward to last year,” offering a meta-comment that connected his strong identification in Germany to another story that blended both of his family narratives. While participating in a cultural festival, a German professor who happened to teach Pennsylvania Dutch language stopped at his table. He explained how this man revealed to him that through genetic testing he found out that even though he was Pennsylvania Dutch on both sides, he tested positive for a Jewish gene. “[H]e had to get [the test] twice because the first time he didn’t believe it – he’s of the *Kohanim* [Hebrew, “priestly”] group in Judaism!” Daniel then suggested a theory, gleaned from his conversation with the professor, that it might be possible that all Pennsylvania Dutch are Jewish as well. He supported his theory with a series of rhetorical questions intimating that the group possibly left Germany for “other reasons,” implying Jewish religious freedom due to persecution. The appeal of the idea that the Pennsylvania Dutch are actually Jewish also communicated an integrative strategy offering a common ground for his heritage identities. Daniel’s crediting his Jewish identity for making him a person concerned about the preservation and transmission of his non-Jewish past, extending the Hebrew term “*l’dor va’dor*” to his Christian background, also employed this strategy. He finally returned to the outcome of the Hebrew school story, his

circuitous narrative serving the purpose to construct balance. His foregrounding stories were legitimizing his responsibility as carrier of familial history and justifying his strong connection to an identity that differentiated him from his peers. Keeping in mind his comments about Jewish heritage causing his reverence for family history, Daniel interjected these stories into a narrative of difference to claim ownership of his non-Jewish history and to add meaning to his infuriated response to the offense in his childhood. Legitimizing his deep connection to Christian Pennsylvania Dutch heritage allowed him to be angry, even though the stories he related to support his response happened long after the incident affected him. Though Jewish identity “overrides” his Christian cultural identity, Daniel can still claim ownership to his genealogical past by employing a plot structure blending his roots. It also bolsters his sense of responsibility to feel connected to that past alongside his dominant connection to Judaism. To borrow Sarah’s terminology, Pennsylvania Dutch family history is just as “useable” as his Jewish heritage.

These examples illustrate the dynamic of remembering for the purposes of constructing narrative to fit certain goals or motivations. The plotlines that were used by informants who placed importance on lineage and family narratives were dominantly framed in a spirit of commonality in spite of difference – either emphasized as equal expression of identities or depicting them as having equal importance in their lives. For informants who felt the need to emphasize one identity over another, such as Sarah’s emphasis on Jewishness and the loss of her non-Jewish identity or Jake’s overriding Jewish identity and his latent connection to Chinese heritage through memories of his

grandfather, they cited family history and family narrative to communicate authentic connections to less dominant identities.

Chapter 4: Otherness: Constructing Identity and Confronting Definitions

“The only person who can define me is me.” – Eric

Belonging and Difference

Within a family, a group of blood relatives, individuals biologically connected by genetics, but they may not always be connected ideologically. Many interview subjects identified with their families, expressing varied levels of belonging; however, their conversations often led to sharing experiences of sameness and difference in various mnemonic groups. While people belong to multiple collectives, ranging from the family, a religion, a nation and beyond, they experience sameness and acceptance in varying degrees. Often, the communities they see themselves identifying with do not entirely accept them as persons fitting the criteria for membership, excluding them in order to maintain a perceived “authenticity.” Alternatively, individuals may cluster based on their rejection of perceived characteristics of other groups.

Remembered experience directly influences sense of belonging, which in turn affects identity. “Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core of your individuality. But it is also about your relationships, your complex involvement with others...”⁹⁹ The similarities people share in one group are often “similar differences” from other groups. This may or may not be consequential of exclusion from those groups. “Sameness and difference are marked both symbolically through representational systems and socially through inclusion or

exclusion of certain groups of people.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, identity is actually fashioned according to difference – by what it is not – through a process of socialization.¹⁰¹ In social interactions, people make self-evaluative decisions about whom and what they identify with. As Evan intuited, “It’s kind of just something that occurs naturally, I think... you’re aware of others... you’re kind of, I guess, measuring yourself up against other people.” In middle school, Monica said that members of her peer group identified as being *Other*. “The town I grew up in was overwhelmingly Italian Catholic [...] There weren’t many Jewish kids in school, but I was friends with a lot of them and most of them were also half Jewish and something else – and not particularly religious. [They] kind of had similar upbringings to me.” In high school, she continued to seek friends that differed from the majority. “I had a pretty diverse group of friends. It was kind of funny because, like, we didn’t go to a diverse school, but we were like all of ‘the Others,’ you know?” Jessica also described her multicultural group of friends as “Others.” Elizabeth identified her peer group growing up as “halvsies” (half Christian and half Jewish), and Dana echoed this saying that most of her childhood friends were “half Jews.” It seems that these informants clustered socially based on experiences of “otherness.” Monica mentioned that, unlike most classmates, she did not have a First Holy Communion ceremony, remembering one student could not comprehend why. Both she and Sam remarked that other children discussed catechism (Catholic Sunday schooling), which they knew nothing about. Sophia distinctly remembered Hebrew school being a part of other people’s experiences and not her own, as did Dana. Their lack of access to certain

cultural knowledge circles enhanced their sense of difference, understanding their identities through that difference.

The very nature of intermarriage lends itself to hybrid identity formation. When asked to look back and consider if there were any moments where they felt difference or experienced shifts in identity, informants often addressed their hybridity. Late adolescence and early adulthood were particularly dense times mnemonically for most informants. Elizabeth recalled a time when her dual identity was challenged by a fellow student: "I remember once in middle school someone asking me what my religion was and I said, 'I'm half Catholic, half Jewish,' and then another boy pointed out, 'Well, you can't be half Catholic, half Jewish.' And that's something I've thought a lot about as an adult." This memory supported a larger theme, which was learning that her dual-heritage experience wasn't necessarily "normal" compared to other people she knew growing up. Similarly, when Dana left Long Island to attend college in a small New England town, the Jewish community she encountered did not accept her as "half-Jewish," challenging her to question and reinterpret her identity as such.

Benjamin experienced a shift during high school where, instead of recalling difference as involuntary, he described it as a conscious effort to distinguish himself. "At that time, it was an identity question. Like, some of my friends started dressing up like Goths, punk jackets or whatever with studs... And I started asserting a Jewish identity among my friends... it was a work in progress, because I didn't actually have much

Jewish education.” He began listing kinds of religious Jewish observance that he took on during that time, ending with retrospection:

I think socially it was a mixed bag, because, you know, it was a way of asserting my identity, but it's also a way of kind of making a line between me and other people, right? Like, if you're dressing up like a punk, it means that you're saying, "I don't share some sort of value system with you," ... You're sort of making a statement, or at least this is my case, you're making a statement that you believe in something different than other people.

Benjamin drew attention to symbolic representations of difference. Symbolic identity markers usually involve visual material items, such as clothing, jewelry and other physical products. These symbols can indicate a person's social associations. Rebecca was immediately recognizable as a religious Jewish woman due to her style of dress and her use of a wig to cover her hair in modesty like many other Orthodox Jewish women. Her clothing marked her as different and communicated a set of values she shares in common with a specific group. Jessica drew attention to her symbolic differences according to her narrative of female masculinity, remarking on her short hair, tattoos and piercings as physical signs of her non-normative gender identity. Her narrative revealed gender hybridity, which is considered “a broad set of acts, behaviors, and attitudes that do not conform to the socio-culturally constructed meaning assigned to each gender in a particular society or culture at a particular point in time.”¹⁰²

Interestingly, she was drawn to Judaism as an adolescent because her Jewish circle accepted her masculine identity. This contrasted her Dominican circle, which she described as “gender police” who tried to make her wear dresses and participate in “feminine conversation.” It seems, therefore, that Jessica prioritizes gender identity over her ethnic or religious ones.

Symbolic identity markers are not always the outcome of a conscious process. Group members make assumptions about individuals based on their physical attributes. Jake commented on his “ethnic ambiguity” among members of his Jewish social sphere. “So for me and my sister, we’re kind of, like, ethnically ambiguous in terms of how we look. So, people can tell that we’re, like, not just purely Caucasian, but they can’t quite place [us]... for me, it’s kind of like, alright, I look Chinese, but I also could be just sort of, like, [pause] you know, Sephardic or something [laughs]. So, I think I stick out less.” He expanded on these comments, reflecting on the dynamics of his hybrid identity: “I kind of always identified as Jewish first. And then Chinese heritage tended to come up more when I was within the Jewish community... my Judaism set me apart [...] from the general population, but then within the Jewish community, it’s kind of like my Chinese heritage set me apart within that community.” He ended his response by sharing that his identities influenced each other in his “self-deprecating comments about being a Chinese Jew,” drawing attention to his short height. Combining both identities with humor, or suggesting that others may assume he is a Sephardic Jew, is appealing because it may function to minimize his difference in Jewish circles. Later, Jake told a “funny story” in which his imminent mother-in-law introduced him to a Jewish friend by stating that he looked Chinese, but he was really Jewish. This memory speaks to his own awareness of physical difference and also to others’ notions about his Jewish identity.

Anna’s remarks on “phenotypical difference” also communicated ethnic ambiguity:

I recognize also that there's, you know, phenotypically things that... like if I were African American and I looked more – like I didn't look more one way or the other, or like had a phenotype that didn't present like one way or the other, then that would be an additional challenge... sort of this ascribed identity that [pause] takes place. But I think that I get a lot of like, 'Oh, really? Oh, you are Puerto Rican? Oh, like, I can see it.' [...] It's an individuating process.

Anna's ambiguity seemed to make her question how much she qualified as one identity or the other, especially when declaring her ethnicity on paperwork. She discussed evaluating her authenticity, stating "I feel uncomfortable. It feels like this – are people thinking that I'm just, like, putting this mask on just to, like, get some, like, economic benefit? Which is not it... I've always been thinking about this, and like, you know, my research looks at this, bi-racial identity and how people do this." Following these comments, she expressed hopes that she would be able to provide her children with enough exposure so that they too would have an "authentic connection" to both of their heritages. Authenticity is important to discussions of ethnicity. Werner Sollors has argued that ethnicity is an invention wherein groups create "essential continuums" of characteristics that are used to measure and ensure "authenticity and cultural heritage within the individual, somewhat idealized group."¹⁰³ Anna's narrative reflects the "imposed modern sense of belonging"¹⁰⁴ that is created by being placed in situations where one needs to publicly evaluate their ethnic options.

Social and symbolic differences were integral to informants' narrative assertions of belonging and identity. This was particularly evident in recollections of negative experience.

One of my aunts is more religious than , like, most of the rest of the family, and one of her daughters – it was on a holiday, I think it was Christmas – like, basically said to me,

like [in a whisper] 'I know you're Jewish. My mom didn't want me to – like, grandma told me but my mom's not supposed to know, but I know that you don't believe in God.' [...] My grandma secretly told my eight year old cousin that I was Jewish, and for some reason her mother, who is my aunt, didn't want her children to know that their cousins were a different religion than them. Looking back, that's not right.

This memory facilitated Monica's broader narrative of difference from her Catholic relatives. She paired this memory with another, describing a baptism ceremony where the priest implied that non-Catholics were going to Hell and a relative did not object. She was too young to remember this event. Her mother filled the memory gap by telling her the story. Both of these memories added to a theme of not having "good experiences of churches," that further emphasized her Jewish belonging. Recalling Jessica's negative experiences in the Catholic Church, her narrative also emphasized Jewish belonging through difference from her Catholic family. Melissa similarly associated negativity and strangeness with her church experiences, constructing a narrative marking not only her difference from religion, but also her family's collective difference from the Born-Again Christian school community. This enhanced the belonging she felt within her family: "[Religion] wasn't a familial identity." She reinforced this with a school memory:

I remember there was a presentation. They talked about, like, Jews are going to Hell, Hindus are going to Hell, Catholics are going to Hell. And, um, that was the year that we left. I was too young to know what was really going on. My brother was in Fifth grade and he was really mad about it, and he told my mom – he said, "I'm not going back there. We're done doing this." And that's when we left.

Like Monica, Melissa cited a memory she could not remember on her own. Her older brother filled the gap for her, and she used it as a defining story: the conflict was the bigoted presentation, the climax was her brother's adamant refusal, and the resolution was leaving the Christian school. Monica, Jessica, and Melissa each expressed their

identities in relation to what they were not. Jessica insightfully described that very process: “Sometimes identity isn’t necessarily what you see yourself as. Sometimes it’s what you don’t.”

While studying Jewish religion in Israel for a summer, Eric was offered a placement to study at his *yeshiva* (a school for studying sacred Jewish texts) for the following year. The rabbis knew that his parents had intermarried and that he was raised primarily Christian. Offering the placement, they voiced their concerns about his identity.

I was asked a question, and the question was would they be finding me on Sunday sneaking off going to church. And I just kind of laughed at it. First off, I was insulted [...] I was insulted by the lack of respect for that question, because I had never shown anything else but devotion to what I was doing at that time [...] Secondly, I was disheartened. Um, it made me feel like I wasn't, uh, [pause] like I wasn't enough.

This experience left Eric disheartened. Unlike many of the other young men in his class who were raised solely as Jews, had bar mitzvahs and years of Jewish education, Eric knew he was different. The rabbis’ reminder of his difference constituted a level of exclusion. Following this response, Eric declared his identity as “a Jewish Christian,” emphasizing the belonging he felt in his Baptist family. “Actually, the only Jews that I know are Christians are me, my mom, and my sister [...] I know there are a lot more out there.” Fusing his identities, he explained his hybridity by stating that he is a Christian by faith and a Jew by ethnicity – not a Messianic Jew, since he does not practice Christianity with Jewish ritual. Eric’s description of himself as a Jewish Christian created a dichotomy between religion and culture.

Separating religion and culture was common among more than half of the informants, who used the dichotomy to express hybridity. Sam chose to identify “with” Judaism culturally, though he identified “as” an agnostic spiritually. Elizabeth stated that she “always felt the cultural side of things” when it came to Jewish identity, though she maintained a strong Catholic faith. Jake made a parallel statement with regard to feeling culturally Chinese in some respects, while feeling more spiritually inclined towards Judaism. Andrew marked his shift away from religious Jewish identity towards being culturally Jewish. Distancing or falling away from religion, which was articulated by a quarter of the informants, may also be linked to a separation of culture and religion. Cultural identity is often linked to a dominant religion, and when a person identifies with one and not the other, a dichotomy allows for hybrid expressions instead of sacrificing any aspect of selfhood. The division of culture and religion is also what allows for a range of faith-based and cultural definitions of Jewishness. For example, the Pew Research Study organized its Jewish respondents as “Jews of religion” and “Jews of no religion,” noting that the number of Jews who identify culturally instead of religiously is increasing.¹⁰⁵

One more major dichotomy was expressed by half of the informants: sentiments of simultaneous belonging and exclusion, most often described as being “both and neither.” Often, informants insisted that this quality allowed them to empathize with different kinds of people. They credited their hybridity as enabling them to find common ground, making them more open-minded and self-aware. Jessica said, “I think it was a really good and enriching experience. A part of it is lonely because you never really feel

like one, but it gives you this empathy because you're not fully enclosed in a group. You're always kind of standing on the outside, you feel more able to relate to different kinds of people." Dana expressed similar sentiments, adding that her exposure made her more "self-reflective." Evan also emphasized openness, stating that from his position, "you kind of understand where different people are coming from a little bit more... [It's] nice to be able to kind of interface with different cultures." Melissa elaborated that being a child of intermarriage prevented other cultures from bothering her, as opposed to people who do not have a cultural understanding outside of their own. Melissa echoed Evan's characterization of himself as an "interloper," yet he implied that this state of in-between-ness detracted from his authenticity: "[Y]ou're kind of playing the game a little bit, but you're not really an honest part of either side." Anna's sentiments aligned with both Jessica and Evan, stating that she "sort of" felt like she belonged in both spheres, but "not really in either of them," the reason being that she perceived the Puerto Rican community as less exclusive than the Jewish community. Anna felt tense and awkward when disclosing her Puerto Rican identity to Jews: "I'm afraid that they're going to catch me for not being a real group member." Anna and Evan's descriptions come from different angles but they both evoke questions of authentic or truthful belonging.

Informants' narratives of hybridity and complicated feelings of being "both and neither" support the theory of double consciousness: "The individual occupying a hybrid space navigates between two cultural groups and occupies space within both cultural groups."¹⁰⁶ Their articulations of experiencing their cultural groups from within and

without also support Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "the third space" or "the in-between position... that arises as cultural boundaries meet and blur."¹⁰⁷ These informants enunciated their identities as hybrid within the third space because, as Bhabha states, it "intervenes" to break down representations of cultural knowledge as "an integrated, open, expanding code."¹⁰⁸ This means that it blurs conceptions of authentic cultural historical cohesiveness and cultural "purity," allowing for individuals to exist in multiple spheres and construct diverse conceptions of identity.¹⁰⁹ Diversity discourse scholar Golnaz Golnaraghi aptly described this in terms of her own hybrid identity: "I found my voice in what I call the space and the hyphen... this is the in-between space where differences can be entertained and can be assumed... identity is not fixed. Identity is very complex. And in this space, identity may shift, change, and mutate over time. For me in this space, it is about having the power to choose."¹¹⁰ The fluidity of the in-between or "third space" allows for identity choices: while some informants chose one identity over another, others decided not to choose between them at all. The agency provided by this fluidity presented in their narratives as both positive additions to their identity and as a sense of lack, which is keenly illustrated in Benjamin's parable about the basketball player with one arm. Indeed, informants exerted their "power to choose" as they constructed narratives of difference and confronted others' definitions of their identities.

Contesting Definitions: Coping with Ambiguity

Eric's blended conception of Jewish-Christian identity arose from his particular upbringing. His mother converted to Christianity as a teenager, yet she maintained certain Jewish observances while raising him as a Christian. His maternal grandmother also instilled in him "a strong Jewish identity." While discussing his exposure to both religious heritages, Eric asserted how hard it was for others to accept his hybridity:

It's very easy for me. It's hard for everyone else. Everyone else has these expectations of what I should or shouldn't be. Um, and I've become very aware of that. Um, some are very dogmatic. Some are very, um, very abrasive. Some are, um, blasé faire [indifferent], um, some are accepting. Some think it's very interesting. Um [he pauses]...for me it's been easy.

Although Eric claimed ownership of his hybridity despite others' expectations, he revealed that he usually avoids questions about his identity because he fears disappointing people. He asserted comfort in his decision not to favor one identity over the other. "[...] It's more with people just trying to define who I am and there's no need for that. The only person that can define me is me." Elizabeth's blended identity claimed Jewish and Irish ethnicities and a Catholic faith. She too confronted opposition about her hybridity: "I've found even from my lifelong or long term Jewish friends resentment that I could possibly identify as Jewish." Elizabeth's half-sister converted to Orthodox Judaism and therefore held a *bris* (a circumcision ceremony) for her son. When relating the event to a Jewish peer, she reported the young woman's response as, "'Yeah, see, that's why you're not Jewish.' And I was like [wincing], 'That's weird.'" Elizabeth explained that her friend knew she was "grounded in her Irish-Catholic faith," proposing that maybe this awareness made her view her claim to Jewish culture as

“unfair,” meaning that she felt Elizabeth couldn’t “have both” or “straddle the line.”

Elizabeth is aware that some Jews do not think she can claim both ethnicities: “I have learned about the ethnic side of being Jewish, um, but also that I am not religiously Jewish because my dad is Jewish and not my mom. And that the religion passes through the mom.”

A number of informants considered popular and official conceptions of identity in their discussions, commenting on the influence of differing attitudes towards Jewishness in their processes identity construction. They were not informed about matrilineal descent during their interviews, which made it even more interesting that they were so aware of it. It became apparent that some informants understood matrilineal descent as less of a religious construct and more of a cultural one.

Dana understood why she wasn’t considered halakhically Jewish, despite the fact that her father was born a Jew, because of what she described as “the dying state” of the Jewish people. She elaborated the concept of a decreasing Jewish population by indirectly addressing the Holocaust and remarking on her racial identity as outside of the Jewish population. She even went as far as to say that her existence somehow taints the Jewish population in light of her half-Jewish status. Dana’s portrayal of the Jewish people and her relation to them are informed by an American Jewish context of looking at intermarriage as an assimilative threat to continuity and group boundaries. Jennifer Thompson explains:

Attributing assimilative desires and habits to intermarried couples, rather than recognizing the ways in which all Jews are affected by questions about assimilation and

*the meaning of Jewishness, renders unnerving questions about the future of Jewish existence in the United States less threatening. It also perpetuates a sense that monolithic constructions of Jewish community, Jewish continuity, the Jewish people, and Jewish tradition reflect shared meanings among most or all Jews.*¹¹¹

Thus, Dana's understanding of Jews as a dying people comes from an American Jewish anxiety about Jewish survival in the face of modernity, which has been displaced onto intermarriage and its offspring.¹¹² "The dying state" is a longstanding perception that she absorbed, one which Simon Rawidowicz characterized as "a double process of ever-dying and ever-living: as much as Israel was the 'ever-dying people,' its dread of death ensured its vitality."¹¹³

Dana grew up in an environment that accepted her as "half-Jewish," yet her new Jewish friends in college rejected her identification. In turn, she began to question her hybridity against the matrilineal definition embraced by her peers. "There's no half-Jew, there's no such thing. And your mother's not Jewish, so you're just not Jewish.' And so there was the start of my [pauses, flattens her lips and looks away] questioning that part of my identity, I guess, and how I can communicate it and how I should live it and what I should do with it." Other informants with non-Jewish mothers or mothers who converted to Judaism described similar rejections from Jewish social spheres upon entering college. Many students were unwelcoming towards Jessica at her campus Hillel organization: "I feel like they were not so welcoming to me because, you know, I don't have a Jewish mother..." Her response to this rejection did not convey the internal struggle that Dana eventually experienced. I asked Dana what she thought of the idea that she cannot be Jewish according to that view, and she did not agree with it. Yet, her narrative seemed to suggest that she accepted the validity of matrilineal descent to

some extent. "It's difficult for me to say, I mean [sighs]. I don't agree with it, but also if that's very much how the religion is, then that's how the religion is and there's nothing I can do." While questioning her identity against matrilineality, Dana mentioned that she was dating a Jewish man, expressing both joy and hesitation in this fact. Her hesitation derived from the idea that Jewishness is matrilineal: "...me not being really Jewish... I don't want to taint the gene pool, so to speak." She clarified that she would taint the gene pool by having children who would not be considered Jews because she is not a Jew according to Jewish law.

Dana thus revealed her sense of being "impure," a loaded racial term. Her body language communicated heaviness as she began to slouch and touch her face, and her tonal changes indicated sadness. "Me as a person, I don't care. I've dealt with it fine in my life. But it goes back to the idea of like... my father already tainted the gene pool by having me." This racial conception of Jewishness is intriguing and disturbing at the same time, and it became even more so once Dana finished elaborating how her existence complicates the existence of the Jewish people. "I appreciate my upbringing, but I also realized the difficulties, and not necessarily for me personally, but... for Judaism as a population as a whole." With an invisible pie chart, she stated that she enjoys having Judaism as a part of her, "but I realize that by having it I'm almost cutting out a piece of the whole." Although Dana is able to claim and connect to cultural Jewishness, she does not allow herself to claim religious and racial Jewish identity. Combining "dwindling numbers" and the "horrific things" that happened to cause them with comments on the effects of intermarriage, Dana alluded to the Holocaust and repeated a conventional

trope about why intermarriage hurts the Jewish population: some Jews who adhere to matrilineal descent equate intermarriage to the damages of the Holocaust since it diminishes an “authentic” Jewish population – another disturbing, racialized concept.

Lastly, Dana drew attention to her physical appearance in light of matrilineal descent: “...it’s still something I struggle with because, I mean, [moves hand across her face] I have the features of someone who’s Jewish and I get mistaken for being fully Jewish all the time.” She gave examples of others’ awareness of her Jewish physique, even a very recent interaction with a colleague who crudely rejected her assertion of half-Jewish identity: “So I told him I was half-Jewish, and again, ‘Well, there’s no such thing.’ And he was like, ‘Is your mother’s vagina Jewish?’ And I was like, ‘No,’ and he’s like, ‘Then you’re not Jewish.’ And he’s not Jewish.” Dana told the story in a jovial way, smiling at the inappropriate nature of the interaction, but she soon became solemn as she reflected on the incident. “But at the same time, um, I look the part [again, waves hand across her face]. And also, compared to most people, [I] grew up with the cultural influences.” She reiterated this later, implying that because she had Jewish cultural knowledge and a Jewish appearance, she could indeed “act the part” and “pass” as a Jew when she wanted to. Despite the complexities and complications involved in her confrontations with the matrilineal definition of Jewishness, Dana insisted, “It’s how you identify yourself that really matters,” maintaining a conflicted half-Jewish identity.

Dana may have been more explicit, but she was not alone in articulating her anxieties. Andrew’s recollection of his bar mitzvah articulated the difference he

embodied by having a mother who converted to Orthodox Judaism. Although Andrew is halakhically Jewish because his mother converted prior to his birth, he impressed that he always felt different. He stated that people saw him as a “full-fledged member of the community” after his bar mitzvah, yet he contradicted himself, saying, “I always had this lingering suspicion that I was some sort of mudblood, as it were. That is, um, that some people – somehow I wasn’t, I wasn’t exactly real. I wasn’t exactly as real as everybody else.” The term “mudblood,” borrowing from J.K Rowling’s Harry Potter series, describes a person whose parental heritage includes non-wizards or regular people. It is a racial trope, invoking ideas about purity of bloodline and lineage – a direct structure monitoring group authenticity. Prior to mentioning his “mudblood” status, Andrew shared the discomfort he felt about the possibility that his non-Jewish relatives felt uneasy at the bar mitzvah. Yet, it may be possible that his discomfort related more to the fact that he had non-Jewish relatives in attendance on that particular day marking his authenticity as a “full-fledged” Jew. Andrew elaborated on the idea that he was not as “real” as other congregants, sharing a flashback from Jewish day-school: “...actually, one teacher went so far as to say that a person who was fathered or mothered from such a marriage [meaning, intermarriage] would develop ‘problems.’ Although, I, you know, what’s interesting – for most of my teenage life I worried I that somehow that I was genetically cursed, because of that.” Andrew spelled out the meaning of “genetically cursed,” explaining that “because, you know, I wasn’t born to two Jewish parents, from birth, that somehow I wouldn’t ever be seen as very real. Or, you know, no matter how much I do, I’ll never be seen as genuine enough as everybody else.”

Combined with his earlier comments on feeling socially outside of his Jewish peer group, the idea that he was permanently cursed made a profound statement about his identity. Andrew noted that his feelings of being cursed had “dissipated” within the past few years of his graduate education abroad due to his “integration” into various European communities “where partial Jewish ancestry has been the norm.” Yet, he anxiously contemplated what things would be like when he returned to the U.S., alluding to the Jewish social circles that initially caused his anxieties.

Daniel’s mother also converted to Judaism prior to his birth. In fact, she converted twice: once as Conservative and again as Orthodox. “[...] To make sure that the Orthodox couldn’t question my Jewish validity, or their potential children’s validity, my parents decided for her to have a conversion supervised by an Orthodox rabbi, um, so that there’d be no question of our Jewish heritage.” It is significant that he chose his mother’s conversion as the first topic of discussion. A great deal of Daniel’s foregrounding family narrative revolved around his mother’s decision to convert, possibly because it marked the beginning of his family’s collective identification story (similar to Sarah’s narrative). Despite his extensive Jewish education and upbringing, Daniel pointed out his struggle with matrilineal descent, drawing attention to his physique. “I guess what I still struggle with is [pauses] Okay, if Judaism is blood related and it’s matrilineal [pause] then I – I still don’t feel, like, Jewish all the time. Like, in Israel they’ll see the non-Jewish side of me, like, instantly [snaps his fingers].” Daniel shared that this last element was advantageous, allowing him to travel through restricted Palestinian territories and Jordan because of his ethnic ambiguity. He

pretended to be a Canadian Christian during one of these trips, stating that he was able to “pass” due to his non-Jewish physical features. This, however, was also confusing for him: “So, racially, what am I? Judaism identifies – some Jewish people identify as Jewish being a race, and you can blur the lines between race, religion, ethnicity, culture, um, as much as you want. Um (pauses, shakes head as if to say “no”) So, I – sometimes I’m confused about, like, what I am.” While he expressed confusion about his racial Jewish identity, Daniel also emphasized comfort in his hybridity, which made him appear less conflicted. He asserted pride in being part of a Jewish way of thinking and feeling culturally connected to the Jewish people by blood, evoking a sense of biological familial ties to them. Yet, this comfort and pride is not quite simple given his previous statements. He did return to the insecurity of his physique, remembering that as a child he wanted a more Jewish nose so badly that he would press his nose down until he fell asleep at night.

Sarah’s mother was also a convert, yet in her early childhood she and her siblings converted together with their mother. “I remember when my mother was converting, we were also converted because there was like – we weren’t born of a Jewish mother. So, she had hers... then we were all in the *mikvah* [a ritual bath] together.” Since their conversions were Conservative, Sarah said that in recent years she notices their contested legitimacy.

I’ve sort of become more and more aware of the fact that like, you know, because it was a Conservative conversion, it’s not legitimate in Orthodox eyes... I don’t know, that’s [pauses for some time, I ask: Does that bother you?]. You know, it used to not at all, um, but it’s kind of – I used to joke about it, actually [laughs]. I mean, I still joke about it, I

guess, but I used to think it was really funny and then, like [she pauses, her face begins to change]

Sarah may have glossed over the rejection humorously, but her body language and tone revealed a deeper emotional reaction. She used the story of a recent experience at her boyfriend's family Christmas celebration to indirectly explain why it wasn't actually funny.

This last Christmas, um, I actually hadn't even started explaining how I would officially be considered – just that my mother was a convert, and like my boyfriend's sister's boyfriend (a non-Jew) was like [assuming a deep, masculine voice] "Ha-ha, you're not a real Jew, then!" And [in a shocked tone] I got really upset! I was so surprised at how upset I was [laughing, begins to bite her lip].

After this incident, Sarah confided that she felt strange and worried about returning to future Christmas dinners. She attempted to "laugh it off," but then she began to cry, looking down and grasping the back of her neck. Trying to remain composed, Sarah expressed surprise in her emotionality. "I'm getting more emotional than I thought I would," she said, wiping her tears. Her mother's conversion used to make her feel more Jewish than most people, identifying with her passionate decision to be a "Jew by choice." "[...] It used to make me mad, but I thought it was funny [becoming emotional again] that, like, my mom wouldn't be considered Jewish." What used to make her angry on behalf of her mother now worries her about her own identity. "And I didn't think about the fact that that also meant I'm not Jewish, by some standards. Um, and I've started thinking about that more." Later, she mentioned that she almost considered converting again, but instead she chose to speak openly about her identity as "the daughter of a convert," taking pride in her mother's legacy instead of compensating for it.

Rebecca's awareness of matrilineality was the key turning point in her narrative, in which she converted to Hasidic Judaism. She claimed that she wasn't sure when she found out about the matrilineality of traditional Jewish identity, but as a girl she felt content to consider herself "half and half." Given her narrative earlier in Chapter Two, it is significant that it seamlessly glosses over any discussion over the matrilineal definition of her Jewish identity. She constructed a story that suppressed when she learned she was not considered a legitimate Jew, highlighting instead that she found truth in the most "authentic" definition of Jewish identity, one that provided her with order, boundaries, and spirituality.

In contrast to Rebecca's accommodation and acceptance of the matrilineal definition, Benjamin defies this traditional view. When asked how he would characterize his dual cultural-religious exposure, he demonstrated awareness of matrilineality by stating, "It's been a massive part of my Jewish identity. I haven't converted, even though I run in Orthodox circles, where people care about that sort of thing. Um, and I believe that that's, in a large part, because I identify strongly also with my mother's background." Looking back on his childhood, Benjamin revealed entertaining the idea that he might not be considered Jewish. Like Rebecca, he referenced a turning point in this process:

There was never any doubt about my Jewish identity, until I was 16, and understood that the majority of the Jewish community didn't think I was Jewish... because my mother wasn't Jewish when I was born [...] And at that time, you know, this was in high school. I was really – I was getting really into the Jewish thing and that was pretty traumatizing, in a way. It was like a real, like, shock development in that building of my Jewish identity.

In characterizing his Jewish identity, he included experiences of exclusion, such as “having experiences in Israel when I wasn’t able to participate in a Jewish ritual because my mother wasn’t Jewish when I was born – I wasn’t matrilineal descent...” I invited Benjamin to talk more about that experience, and he explained that prior to going to Israel, he had never been exposed to Orthodox Jews during his Reform upbringing. When he did come in contact with them, he asked them many questions and gravitated towards them. During a time when he was staying in Tzfat, a city in northern Israel known as the epicenter of Jewish mysticism, he met an Orthodox man who told him he would have to convert to participate in Judaism. “That was his belief. In order to be Jewish, I would need to convert. In his world, right, there was no Jewish identity that didn’t include: your mother was Jewish when you were born or you have converted.” After this experience, Benjamin remembered feeling frustrated and “sick of Judaism entirely,” indicating feelings of rejection.

Benjamin compared this incident to another that occurred while he was in college. He became good friends with his Bobover Hasidic neighbor who gave him access to his particular Orthodox community. “And the whole experience was nuts! And I never really told them that my mother wasn’t Jewish.” He remarked that he was careful not to ever be the tenth person in the *minyan* (a traditional Jewish requirement that ten Jewish men be present in order to commence with certain rituals and prayers).

Because that was my nightmare, right? That I would be the tenth person in this minyan... Because then, would I tell other people in this – would I blow it? Would I blow my cover? Of being the “ger” [Hebrew, “convert”], of not being the “ger,” being the “goy” [Yiddish, “non-Jew”] in the room, right?... And it never happened... I’ve wondered if I need to make some sort of reparation, because at one point my friend asked me my

mother's family name... And my mother's maiden name is [x], and how am I going to tell him that my mother's name is [x] and not, like, blow it, right? So I told him my mother's maiden name was [inserted Jewish-sounding last name], which was my grandmother's maiden name. And it killed me.

Ending this response, Benjamin rationalized that he had not gone to his friend to “correct the impression” because he does not feel “settled enough” in his reason for not converting. He qualified his reason with the proverbial story discussed in Chapter One about the basketball player born with only one arm. He became very upset during this portion of the interview, and though he tried, Benjamin could not hide his anger over experiences of Jewish “particularism” and his insecurity:

And I am so comfortable with that, it scares me, because that's such a radical departure from the Jewish tradition that I wonder if I'm doing something wrong. I wonder if this is an unwise position that I've taken and a line in the sand... I'm not converting. I don't want to convert. I like being an inter—a child of intermarriage. I'm not ashamed of it and I'm fed up with people who are obsessed by the question.

His statements not only expressed palpable anxiety over exposing his difference, but they also may reflect a strategy of coping through self-denial. By refusing to convert, he maintains personal authenticity.

As informants had to confront others' expectations and definitions of their identities, they coped with these issues internally in light of these points of difference. The social processes of recognizing and creating difference allowed them to construct belonging and conceptualize their identities, which they conveyed through remembrance in their narratives of hybridity. The significance of matrilineal Jewish descent is strikingly present in a number of interviews, which sheds light on the complexities children of intermarriage face in determining what it means to be Jewish. Their self-surveillance and attention towards matrilineality also illuminates the tension between their personal

conceptions of identity versus the concepts they understood as official or authoritative.

Rather than simply monitoring themselves, they approached their levels of Jewish identity with vigilance based on others' judgements.

Conclusion

This research has attempted to explore how self-concept and identity form within the social processes of conversational storytelling, remembering, and performative acts, all within the context of personal narrative interview. Furthermore, the project endeavors to understand these processes specifically in light of hybrid identity, focusing on individuals who have both Jewish and other cultural-religious backgrounds. In everyday social interaction, individuals draw from personal and collective memories to construct narratives of coherent selfhood, enacting their “authorial selves.”¹¹⁴ As they position their identities through narrative, they simultaneously create and draw from their autobiographical knowledge base. Placing themselves along a continuum of experience, employing plotlines and conventional storytelling devices, people use the past to piece together trajectories that facilitate their present desires for meaning. Stringing together and interpreting these autobiographical memories – including familial memory and other collective memories they absorb – shapes the meaning of their narrative responses in terms of the identities they wish to convey. By sharing their narratives of experience with others, individuals define their differences, construct identity, and understand themselves in relation to specific mnemonic communities. Performing their identities through such communicative speech acts, participants in this study illuminate the emergent, creative dynamic of self-construction in a specific context of place, time, and witnessing. They also illustrate the force of memory, as they favor certain memories and let others fall away from relevance, choosing what they perceive is valuable about the past to

conceptualize identity in conversation. Each dialogue is informed not only by a series of questions, but also by participants' assumptions and goals, which were communicated as nuances in their narratives.

The adult children of intermarriage provide an interesting subject population for analyses due to their mnemonic socialization within multiple cultural-religious groups. Studying their memory use from both collective and autobiographical viewpoints is essential for understanding the social aspect of remembrance and how it influences their narratives. This provides a stronger foundation for studying informants' expressions of hybridity, as they draw from multiple sources of memory based in differing cultural spheres. Their potential for hybridity reveals a heightened awareness of issues in identity. Through personal narrative analysis, I was able to look more closely at the way they navigate, conceptualize, and redefine duality, paying attention to: the particular memories they shared and in what order, how informants connected memories across time to convey narrative themes or plots, how they positioned themselves in those narratives to communicate identity, and the relevance of Jewishness in their constructions. Informants' discussions of Jewishness shed light on the complexities they face in determining what "Jewish" means for their identities, as they draw from experiences in which they confronted competing definitions. Analyzing their narratives in terms of memory, identity, and performance served my research by allowing me to separate the layers of each dialogue, closely examine informants' motivations, and deconstruct their articulations of hybridity. The memories each respondent shared represent their experience, and the act of telling them constitutes

another level of experience. Telling became a performance that strengthened their bond with the interviewer-witness and helped them conceptualize themselves in story format for their own benefit. Examining their verbal and non-verbal performances reveals what information and goals they understand as culturally valuable, and what information they want witnesses to value.

This research also contributes to the scholarship of memory, identity, and narrative by exploring the relationship between them through the lens of hybrid identity. The patterns that emerged from the interviews suggest that hybrid individuals utilize memories from unique spaces in-between remembrance communities (i.e. their families, friendship circles, and religious groups) drawing from multiple sets of experiences to communicate and navigate plurality. All people are, essentially, the products of more than one mnemonic group, since two parental or familial identities combine to create each of them. Therefore, individuals can experience group-specific processes of mnemonic socialization; learning different sets of values based on what each collective privileges as worth remembering and identifying with. However, looking at acute examples of hybridity magnified the process of “memory-ing,” providing a closer look at what others may experience. Examining how informants thought about themselves in relation to Jewishness further contributes to new perspectives on identity construction due to the complexity of defining Jewish identity in the face of contesting religious and cultural definitions.

It is important to recognize that the informants are products of a particular historical and geographical environment. Prior to the 1990s, American attitudes towards intermarriage commonly viewed the phenomenon as a way of “marrying out” of one’s cultural religious group – as exogamy. Conventional Jewish attitudes understood intermarriage as the abandonment of Jewish life. Generally speaking, interfaith and mixed racial marriage was judged critically as less acceptable in American society. As these perspectives began to shift at large, some Jewish scholars and social activists publicly asserted that many intermarried Jews still identified as Jewish and raised Jewish children. Egon Mayer noted that forty-three percent of his demographics reflected “integrationist marriages,” where neither spouse abandoned their respective religion and each maintained connections to their cultural tradition, sometimes even blending their traditions.¹¹⁵ Mayer and other writers furthered shifting considerations that intermarriage was not the end of Jewish survival, emphasizing instead “the tenacity of Jewishness.”¹¹⁶ Now that mixed marriage is more acceptable in American society, Jewish attitudes reflect that change as well. While traditional perspectives continue to exist, an overwhelming number of Jewish communities recognize that intermarriage does not equate with exogamy, which has in turn fostered more acceptance and has changed the conversation about the children of intermarriage. The participants in this study were all born during a major increase in intermarriage that occurred during the 1980s and early 90s, in the wake of this change. They are also geographically positioned in New Jersey, not far from New York City, and due to the high rate of intermarriage between Jews and other cultural-religious groups in this particular region, the issue of matrilineality arising

from intermarriage becomes more important as cultural groups strive to maintain boundaries amidst blending. Furthermore, the informants are positioned in young adulthood, as undergraduate and graduate students, as well as young professionals. They are people who are working to figure out who they are as adults. All of these facts support that the cohort involved in this study share characteristics based on their cultural, historical, and geographical specificity – elements which inform their participation, their narratives, and their motives in identity construction.

Intermarriage is by nature a catalyst of hybridity, and the informants expressed this hybridity in ways that were not limited purely to their narratives. It is interesting to note that some informants' professional endeavors reflected aspects of their identities, such as Jake who combined his love of nature with his Jewish identity, studying landscape design and environmental outdoor Jewish education in the hopes of someday "connecting the Jewish community to... experiences in the natural world." Other informants' articulated professional goals that more poignantly engaged with their experience of hybridity, such as Anna and Elizabeth. Anna, a PhD student in social psychology, studies bi-racial identity and how people make identity decisions. When discussing her future and her children, Anna added, "My research looks at bi-racial identity and how people ... [make decisions about declaring identity]... I research how diversity is perceived in groups... it's going to shape a lot of things. Um [pause] in that sense, I hope my children have a sense of both of their identities... and that they feel an authentic connection to both." Elizabeth commented on the fact that she was raised with two of the Abrahamic faiths and that her experience in college involved trying to

understand the third one, Islam. She stated, “Most of my academic work and my actual work since college has been working on inter-religious understanding.” While she insisted that she wasn’t sure that her pursuits came from her inter-religious experience growing up, she did suggest, “It is arguable that it came from this inherent understanding and peace that I was raised in, and it’s a lack of understanding from the rest of the world that can’t also see it that way.” Elizabeth graduated with a degree in International Relations, spent a year in Malaysia studying inter-ethnic conflict, and she began pursuing a Master’s degree to focus on “ethnic and religious tension.” It was intriguing to observe possible connections between these informants’ hybrid experiences and what they desired to achieve in their professional lives, a correlation that is worth exploring in the future. Their professional experiences may provide such informants with a vocabulary, or certain ways of thinking about and articulating issues of memory and hybrid identity with particular models of telling.

A number of informants expressed hybridity in ways that appeared seamless, while others articulated less integrated understandings of their duality. Those who identified with one cultural-religious group more so than another tended to emphasize that they still felt an authentic connection to their “other half.” For example, Andrew, Daniel, and Jake primarily identified as Jewish yet they consciously brought forth ways they connected to their other heritages. Others who developed well-integrated narratives of their heritages’ appeared to compensate less for any tension in their hybridity, such as Eric, Melissa, and Elizabeth. Several respondents even created their own categories in this process of integration, such as when Elizabeth stated that her

childhood friends included several children of intermarriage, calling their group the “Halvsies.” Other informants, such as Jessica, Monica, and Dana made similar categorizing statements as well. Many informants depicted their identity formation as a life-long process, such as Evan, Anna, and Melissa who thought of themselves as the sum totals of all their experiences. Their narratives reflected an ordered nature. Yet, other informants articulated irresolution and identity conflict as they moved towards the present. While their hybridity allowed them to make identity choices, some experienced this hybrid state as a lack.

Rebecca’s and Dana’s narratives pointed toward ruptures in their “half and half” self-concepts as they grew older. While Rebecca found resolution later in conversion, Dana described her current existence as problematic. She allowed herself to connect to her Jewish heritage, yet she was insecure in claiming Jewish identity biologically due to her encounters with matrilineal descent. Dana cited memories of contestation with peers who argued that she could not be a Jew, asserting alongside the complication of physically being able to “pass” as Jewish. Benjamin too conveyed his identity as problematized and insecure while refusing to convert, as it was a “departure” from the authority of the Orthodox practices he was drawn to. It “killed him” to lie to his Hasidic friend, implying that he was *really* Jewish – a complicated and painful feeling, considering his fear of rejection. The most poignant example emerged from Jessica’s portrayal of irresolution, stating that as child she “just wanted to be a Jewish kid,” a sentiment influenced by the primacy of her gender identity and the acceptance of which she found in her Jewish sphere. Yet, after she learned about the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict and her political ties shifted away from Israel, she began looking towards her Dominican identity as she felt distanced from the Jewish people. Jessica described her shift in the motion of a pendulum, “swaying back and forth” between the two identities at different times. She even predicted that she might sway back towards Jewishness if she found a Jewish community aligned with her beliefs. This pendulum concept added balance to her irresolution. These informants brought to light the tension between the ordered nature of narrative and the fraying of identity discourse as it moved towards the present. They also revealed the powerful conflict between individual conceptions of identity versus official conceptions stemming from sources they saw as authoritative or authentic.

Authenticity, cultural fluency and “passing” were important topics brought forth by most informants who did not have Jewish mothers. Their responses reveal what they invest in and assume about “authenticity,” including what sources they understand to be authoritative in determining authentic identity. Dana, Daniel, and Andrew, assumed a biological or genetic understanding of what was authentically Jewish. Their assumptions suggest that they invest in the authority of traditional cultural sources, ones which they encountered in social interactions with peers and their communities, even though they may not personally identify with those sources. Questioning their own authenticity against traditional concepts also questions more liberal positions on Jewish identity that do not base themselves on bloodline. These informants and others shared a variety of anxieties regarding authenticity, and the ability to “pass” in cultural spheres. While some considered themselves authentic yet different from authoritative

boundaries, such as Eric and Benjamin, others, like Rebecca and Daniel, turned to the confidence of more stringent observance to relieve anxieties over lacking authenticity. These anxieties are not limited to Jewish identity. Jessica and Anna both expressed concern about being able to authentically connect to and perform their Latino identities. Issues of physical appearance, cultural knowledge and language emerged as important factors in making sure individuals could “pass” as one kind of group member or another. This was especially important to Jessica’s assertion of Jewishness and her ability to read Hebrew unlike the rest of her family, and it was highly central to Dana’s narrative about being able to “play the part” of a Jewish person, despite her conflicted sense that she wasn’t really Jewish.

Competing definitions of Jewish identity magnified informants’ expressions of hybridity. A preponderance of interviews was concerned with Jewishness due to the context of the research, but also due to their familiarity matrilineal Jewishness. Those whose mothers were not Jewish or had converted to Judaism often communicated insecurities or confusion about their Jewishness. This population constituted two thirds of the respondents in the study. Yet, if this proportion had reflected informants with Jewish mothers instead of Jewish fathers, matrilineality may not have been as much of an issue affecting informants’ identity construction. Underneath their confusion lies the issue of a racial understanding of Jewish identity versus a religious identity. Sociologist Lynn Davidman has suggested that this racialization of Jewishness is an American cultural phenomenon, and that the religious origins of matrilineal descent are less important to this process.¹¹⁷ However, the insecurities brought forth by informants in

this study suggest otherwise. For some, being born Jewish was an enviable authenticity. Andrew's anxiety over being a "mudblood" and Dana's conception of herself as "tainting the gene pool" are evidence of this, especially considering that Andrew's mother had an Orthodox conversion and he was born halakhically Jewish. Even Daniel, who is also considered halakhically Jewish from birth, expressed insecurity. Sarah highlighted this tension most, her anxieties stemming from the fact that by Orthodox standards, she might not be Jewish since her mother's conversion was Conservative. My research emphasizes that religious matrilineality has become a cultural force in racializing Jewishness.

Some of these informants compensated for their insecurities by becoming more religious, such as Rebecca and Andrew, though Andrew eventually opted out of a religiously oriented Jewish identity once he moved to an environment where intermarriage was the norm. Daniel's demonstrated compensation for an underlying insecurity about his status as a product of intermarriage and the threat intermarriage presumably poses for Jewish survival, as he incorporated a wealth of Jewish traditional knowledge into his responses and focused much of his discussion on having Jewish children. This furthered his emphasis on Jewish continuity, which he assumed was the primary concern of my study. The fact that so many informants were aware of others judging them on their Jewish authenticity is interesting in itself, some of them voicing this awareness through monitoring their Jewishness, revealing a dialectical process of understanding and judging internal and external definitions. I understand this as "self-surveillance," since their responses reflected an attentiveness to oversee their identities

as befitting or in relation to external judgements, and I understand it as evidence that matrilineal descent is something deeper than religion and tradition. Informants articulated their Jewish insecurities in terms of biological identity when discussing matrilineality, including those who are considered Jews by the strictest standards. Informants' fears of not truly belonging, not being "real," "honest," or authentic are, according to narrative analysis, rooted in an insular cultural position on Jewish identity that is sensitive to any threats to survival. This position prevails socially even among some non-traditional and secular Jews –further evidence of the complexity which faces adult children of intermarriage in America today.

Perhaps this population has a greater consciousness when it comes to understanding their hybrid identities in terms of what is considered authoritative and authentic, because intermarriage is problematized in a broad way. This is especially true when considering the racialization of Jewish identity, which conceptualizes Jewishness not as what one believes, but rather as an embodied characteristic. This concept emerges poignantly in Benjamin's parable of the basketball player with one arm, using a metaphor of physical disability to understand his Jewish identity issues. Adult children of intermarriage have a set of challenges that other people do not, due to the variable of their Jewish parentage. Therefore, they may engage in an ongoing process of continually determining their identities against competing definitions. Some desire to "unproblematize" their identities in this process, or normalize themselves, such efforts becoming apparent through their performances. Conversion is a potent example presenting in Rebecca's narrative when she describes feeling unsettled until her

conversion to Hasidic Jewish life. Sarah normalizes herself by declaring pride in her identity as the daughter of a convert, a “Jew by choice,” in spite of any doubts resulting from her consideration of Orthodox judgements. One of the most prevalent ways that informants normalized themselves was through making a dichotomy between culture and religion, allowing themselves to belong in multiple categories and express multiple hybridities.

If there is any mark I hope my project will leave, it would be an approach towards adult children of Inter-marriage as legitimate identity-makers on their own terms. As a product of intermarriage myself, I am aware of the impact of my own background on the lens of this research, especially since I have a Jewish father and eventually sought out the path of Jewish conversion. I personally resonated with many of the informants’ life experiences and was able to look at their interviews with an informed perspective. However, I put my experiences aside to whole-heartedly experience their narratives as individuals and avoid bias. It was an enlightening experience, both in terms of my academic work and my personal growth. I hope that my efforts will inspire those who read to look at these individuals as people who create non-marginal identities within the margins of two different cultural-religious spheres. Also, I hope that the information shared in this work will sow more seeds of compassion towards children of intermarriage, rather than rejection. Identification is, after all, a result of certain exclusions. Dana and Benjamin’s narratives, for example, shared painful experiences of rejection from certain Jewish groups, causing each to struggle with and

evaluate the Jewishness of their identities, weighing their authenticity against the judgement of others.

While my project did not directly concern itself with the validity of matrilineal descent for determining Jewish identity or the survival of the Jewish people, I emphasize with this research that more attention must be paid to how the promulgation of matrilineal boundaries affects real people – people who may not be considered halakhically Jewish, yet they may struggle to claim a Jewish identity in the face of contesting definitions. Such individuals are entitled to choose and construct identity options in their own right, despite the tensions between differing conceptions of identity and the sources that claim authority in defining ethnic boundaries.

Matrilineality must be understood as a cultural construct in light of its religious position, and I hope that my research demonstrates further that the challenges adult children of intermarriage face in terms of Jewishness – whether they identify religiously or culturally with Jewish heritage – should be critically examined through the lens of social science, by exploring cultural and ethnic influences on collective memory and history.

Notes

- ¹ Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 128.
- ² See: Egon Mayer, *Love and Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians* (New York: Plenum Press, 1985).
- ³ McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America*, 130.
- ⁴ *A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews*, (Oct. 1, 2013), PDF download from <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>, p. 9.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ⁸ Jennifer A. Thompson, *Jewish on Their Own Terms* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 81.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.
- ¹⁰ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222.
- ¹¹ James E. Coté and Charles G. Levine, *Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture: A Social Psychological Synthesis* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 2002), 163.
- ¹² Jeffrey Olick, From "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures" in *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 227.
- ¹³ Chris Weedon, *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging*, (New York: Open University Press, 2004), 165.
- ¹⁴ Keri E. Iyall Smith, "Hybrid Identities: Theoretical Examinations" in *Hybrid Identities: Theoretical and Empirical Examinations*, eds. Keri E. Iyall Smith and Patricia Leavy, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 3. (Refers to Ming-cheng Lo).
- ¹⁵ Iyall Smith, *Hybrid Identities*, 7.
- ¹⁶ Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory" in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, (Germany: DeGruyter, 2010), 114.
- ¹⁷ Wulf Kansteiner, From "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies" in *The Collective Memory Reader*, 302.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 8.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ²¹ Azriel Grysman and Judith A. Hudson, "The self in autobiographical memory: Effects of self-salience on narrative content and structure," *Memory* 19, no. 5 (2011): 502.
- ²² Oxford English Dictionary Online: See <http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/125147?rskey=JwxFJo&result=2#eid>
- ²³ *Ibid.*, See <http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/125146>
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
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Appendix A

[Informant Descriptions]

- ❖ **Adam:** (26) Adam was born to a Catholic father and a Jewish mother. He was raised Jewish with exposure to Catholic holidays. He is a recent newlywed whose spouse has introduced him to Orthodox Judaism, and his narrative addresses a range of comfort in and dissatisfaction with religion's ability to explain existence over the course of his own life.
- ❖ **Andrew:** (25) Andrew's father is Jewish and his mother was raised Episcopalian, though she converted to Judaism prior to his birth. Andrew was raised Orthodox, though he expressed a current distance from that identity despite his strong cultural Jewish affiliation. As a graduate student conducting research in Europe, Andrew's narrative emphasized levels of difference between himself and both his Jewish-American and European socio-cultural spheres.
- ❖ **Anna:** (32) Anna was raised primarily Jewish by a Jewish father and a Puerto Rican mother who converted to Judaism prior to her birth. Her narrative focuses on the identity decisions she and her family made, especially with regard to difference, and on the cultural aspects she wants to provide for her young children. She emphasized the continual and fluid process of constructing her cultural identity.
- ❖ **Benjamin:** (26) Born to a Jewish father and a Methodist mother who converted to Judaism after his birth, Benjamin strongly identified as Jewish in his interview. His narrative reflected a palpable sense of self and an awareness of difference. Benjamin's discussion was marked especially by his retrospections and his reactions to matrilineal Jewish identification boundaries.
- ❖ **Dana:** (26) Dana was born to a Jewish father and a Presbyterian mother. She was not raised religiously and she identified herself as an atheist. However, Dana's interview was marked by her cultural knowledge. Her narrative expresses her feelings of difference and her awareness of outside identity definitions and their implications.
- ❖ **Daniel:** (30) Daniel was the most verbal interviewee, who provided extensive knowledge and awareness of his identity and his genealogical past. His father was raised Jewish and his mother grew up within the Pennsylvania Dutch community, though she later

converted twice to Judaism – first to Conservative Judaism and then second to Orthodoxy – prior to Daniel’s birth. His narrative emphasized continuity, performance, and the authenticity of his Jewish and Pennsylvania Dutch identities.

- ❖ **Elizabeth:** (25) Born to a Jewish father and an Irish-Catholic mother, Elizabeth was raised religiously as a Catholic and continues to identify this way. Her interview placed a high emphasis on family narrative and genealogical history, including her connection to both sets of Jewish and Irish immigrant narratives in constructing her own identity.
- ❖ **Eric:** (28) Born to a Lutheran father and a Jewish mother who converted to Christianity in her adolescence, Eric’s interview was marked by interesting expressions of ethnic and ideological hybridity. He identified himself ethnically as a Jew, though a Christian by faith. Eric’s narrative highlighted the choices he has made throughout his journey.
- ❖ **Evan:** (27) Evan was born to a Jewish father of Russian and Polish descent and a Catholic mother of Polish and Lithuanian descent. His narrative emphasized cultural rather than religious identification, expressing distance from a formerly dominant Christian identity, which he had cultivated during adolescence. His interview was marked by his thoughts on cultural performance.
- ❖ **Jake:** (30) Jake was raised Jewish by a Jewish-born father and a Chinese-American mother who converted to Conservative Judaism after he was born. Jake’s narrative asserted that he also chose Jewish identity for himself, having also undergone a Jewish conversion. His interview sheds light on aspects of physical difference and belonging, along with views on his hybridity.
- ❖ **Jessica:** (28) Jessica’s narrative was characterized by expressions of hybridity. She was born to a Jewish father and a Catholic Dominican mother who converted to Judaism. She identified primarily as a Jew during her upbringing, but she expressed movement between both identities as she grows older.
- ❖ **Monica:** (21) Monica’s father is Irish-Catholic and her mother is Jewish. As a child, she was exposed to both cultures, though she was mostly introduced to Jewish religion. Her interview was marked by her use of the memory of family events to express differences in values, while also characterizing her cultural hybridity.
- ❖ **Melissa:** (19) Melissa is the youngest interviewee. She was born to a Jewish father and to a Polish-Catholic mother. She was raised primarily Catholic and attended born-again

Christian schooling, though she has since abandoned her belief in a Catholic representation of God. Her narrative was characterized by an emphasis on cultural exploration rather than a fixed religious belief.

- ❖ **Rebecca:** (29) Rebecca's father is Jewish and her mother was raised catholic and later converted to Episcopalian Christianity. Her narrative is marked by specific turning points which led her to convert to ultra-Orthodox Judaism after a lifetime of being raised as both. Rebecca's interview primarily addresses her spiritual awakening, her self-immersion into a specific cultural-religious group, and her performance of those values.
- ❖ **Sam:** (30) Born to a Polish-Catholic father and a Jewish mother of Sephardic descent, Sam grew up with exposure to both cultures and religions and was allowed the opportunity to choose which he identified as. In his narrative, Sam marked the difference between his "identification with" Judaism versus his "identification as" an agnostic.
- ❖ **Sarah:** (21) Sarah's father is Jewish, while her mother was raised Protestant and later converted to Judaism when Sarah and her siblings were very young. She recalled in her narrative how they converted together. Sarah's interview devotes much attention to her mother's conversionary status and the legitimacy of her own Jewish identity.
- ❖ **Sophia:** (27) Sophia, a native of Brooklyn, was born to an Italian-Catholic father and a Jewish mother who raised her primarily Jewish with some Italian-Catholic traditions. Her narrative emphasized her choice of a dominant Jewish identification, a sense of pride in her Italian heritage, and a distancing from the Catholicism she experienced in private schooling.

Appendix B**[Research Advertisement]****Seeking Interview Participants: Adult Children
of Intermarriage**

Rutgers graduate student seeks participants for research interviews. The study requires adults, ages 20 to 30, who grew up in households with one Jewish parent and one parent of another cultural-religious, ethnic heritage. Individual interviews will consist of open ended questions and will last around one hour to one hour and a half. Participants' identities will remain *confidential*.

Please participate in a study that will enhance our understanding of the life experiences of those who have grown up in intermarried families. Share your life story, and make a difference!

To participate, and for more information, please contact:

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