UNDERSTANDING THE PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF JEWS IN

TEXAS


by

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## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my grandparents, Abraham and Sarah Atzmon, who taught me the value of education, the meaning of persistence, and to push my own limitations.

## ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

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# ABSTRACT

Despite recent research indicating that the American Jewish population is growing in the Southern United States (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014), there remains a dearth of information regarding the perceptions and experiences of Jews living in the state of Texas. This study employed the use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews with sixteen participants who identified as Jews and lived in the Central Texas area. Results describe how Jews process and negotiate their identity in social situations in their everyday lives. The findings show that living in Texas does impact the meaning making and formation of Jewish identity in nuanced ways. Furthermore, this study describes how Jews navigate ethnic and racial stigma and discrimination in social contexts, which in turn affects their perceptions of themselves. The results of this exploratory study contribute to an understanding of what it means to be Jewish in Texas, the meaning of Jewish identity, and how Jewish identity is a social and culturally constructed process.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Jews have been instrumental in the history of Texas for hundreds of years and are known to have fought with General Sam Houston at San Jacinto and died at the battle of the Alamo (Rochlin and Rochlin 1984:13; Weiner 1997:294). Although Jews continue to have a meaningful impact on the state of Texas, there are few academic studies that explore how Jews in Texas perceive and experience daily life. This study is an exploratory examination of the experiences and perceptions that Jews who live in Central Texas have.

The experiences of contemporary Jews in Texas are of interest for several reasons. Recent demographic research found that the Jewish population in living in the South is steadily increasing (Rebhun and Goldstien 2006:9; Dashefsky and Seshkin 2014). Texas is among the largest states in the South in terms of population and area. Dashefsky and Seshkin (2014:211) found that the Jewish population of Texas has more than doubled since the 1970's. There are 138,705 Jews living in Texas, whom account for .05 percent of the state's population (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014:208). These factors, coupled with the knowledge that the proportion of the Jewish American population in the South is growing (Dashefski and Sheskin 2014), makes Texas an interesting cite for the study of Jews.

Herbert Gans (1956) found that 2nd generation American Jews have adopted a *symbolic ethnicity.* "Symbolic ethnicity proposes that ethnicity can survive without significant social or cultural participation" and hypothesizes a passive ethnicity (Gans 2009:123). A passive ethnicity refers to one that is temporarily or periodically expressed (Gans 2009:123). On the other hand, an active ethnicity refers to active "participation in

ethnic groups and in ethnic culture" (Gans 2009:123).. Therefore, my research questions are: What does it mean to be Jewish in Texas?

Historically, as an ethno racial group, Jews have experienced anti-Semitism that still persists in Texas today. For example, Jews in Texas have reported higher incidents of hate crimes than other religious groups over the past decade (Texas Department of Public Safety 2013). Texas represents an interesting sociopotical context for the study of Jews as an ethno racial group because it is a place where Jews report experiencing more hate crimes than other religious groups report in this geographic space. In this study I view Jews as an ethno racial group in the sense that they are an ethnic group and, as a religious and cultural group, have been *racialized* (Omi and Winant 1994), or racially categorized, as subordinate.

On the other hand, Karen Brodkin (1998) found that Jews have crossed the racial divide and benefit from white privilege. However, Brodkin (1998) also noted that being racialized as white, yet distinct from other whites, may still persist for Jews. This study explored how Jews perceive themselves as an ethno racial group within the context of living in Texas (Du Bois 2005:17; Gallagher 2003; Zinn 2003), how this group perceived their ethno racial identity, and it aimed to identify the social and cultural situations that shape the formation of Jewish ethnic identity.
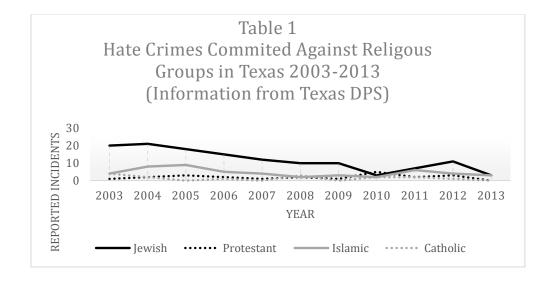
## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

*Texas: A Unique Place*

A discussion of the demographic characteristics of Jews in Texas is necessary to frame my study. According to Dashefsky and Sheskin (2014), the state of Texas holds the 10th largest population of Jews in America. Yet, Jews in this geographic space have received little scholarly attention. This study focused on everyday life experiences, the perceptions Jews have, and the ways these individuals navigate various social situations. The Jewish population in the South has doubled since 1971 and Jews living in the South now account for 21.6% of the Jewish American population (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014:212). This is a sharp increase from the 11.5% of the Jewish population living in the South in 1971 (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014:212). Given these reports, studies that explore the nuances of Jewish life in a southern context will become more pertinent. I focus on the state of Texas, which boasts one of the largest Jewish populations in this region, accounting for 2.2 percent of the Jewish American population (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014:208). Although 2.2 percent does not seem large, Texas is the state with the 10th largest Jewish population among the fifty United States. In addition, Texas ranks second (behind Florida) among southern states with the highest percentage of the total Jewish population

The Jewish population of Texas is a minority in a majority Christian space (Cultler 2006). According to the Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project (2008), eighty one percent of Texans identify as Protestant or Catholic while only seventy five percent of all Americans identify with these religious categories. It appears that Jews in Texas find themselves in a place where there are fewer Jews than the national average

and more Christians than the national average, potentially heightening their experiences of feeling like outsiders.

Texas' Department of Public Safety Hate Crime Reports from 2003 – 2013 (see graph 1 below) show that, over the past decade, there are more hate crimes committed against Jewish individuals than any other religious group. The need to manage Jewish identity could be particularly important to this group because they are a small portion of the population and experience the most religious based hate crimes. In addition, these statistics indicate that Jewish individuals are consistently the group that reports the 4th highest number of hate crimes in Texas on an annual basis behind African Americans, Latinos, and homosexual men. When looking at these graphs it's also important to consider the size of the Texas Jewish population within the Texas population. While Protestants and Catholics account for approximately eighty percent of the population combined, they report experiencing far fewer hate crimes than Jews and Muslims who each account for approximately .05 percent of the population of Texas (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014; Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project 2008).



Table 1
Hate Crimes Commited Against Religous
Groups in Texas 2003-2013
(Information from Texas DPS)

Researchers have suggested that geographic space shapes identity formation, particularly among Jews. Cutler (2006) found that "the experience of Jews in the suburban and rural South differs from those of Jews living in areas with denser populations of Jews" (698). This echoes the sentiments of Kaye-Krantowitz (1996:141), who asserted that Christianity is a normative category in US culture much the same way heterosexual and white are. She noted that Christianity is assumed by those who are Christian, normative, and has the power to structure the lives of those who are not Christian (Kaye-Krantowitz 1996:141). This was consistent with the findings of Cutler (2006) who noted, in a study of a Jewish youth group in the South, that the group's awareness of their normative Christian environment played a role in shaping identity. Cohen and Bar-Shalom (2006) found that Jewish youth in Texas navigate through a largely Christian society by compromising, but they are able to live in relative comfort. The implication of these studies is that the demographic makeup of a location is a meaningful factor in the formulation of Jewish identity and everyday experiences for Jews. By conducting this study, I aimed to contribute to a more informed understanding of the perceptions and experiences of Jews in the sociopolitical context of Texas and how Jews navigate this unique space.

Kadushin and Tighe (2006) and MacDonald-Dennis (2006) found that Jews on college campuses face challenges related to their ethnic identity. Kadushin and Tighe (2006) also found that the relative number of Jewish students in the larger campus population and the level of engagement Jewish students have toward their religious life were factors that affect Jewish students "sense of ease" (Kadushin and Tighe 2006:1) on

campus. However, there remains a dearth of information regarding the experiences of Jewish college students on campus, particularly in the South.

*What does it mean to be Jewish?*

Gans (1956) explored Jewishness in the contemporary United States. He found that many Jewish Americans had adopted a form of, what he called, *symbolic Judaism*. By symbolic Judaism, Gans refers to a Jewishness that "functions as one element among many making up the middle class way of life of the second-generation Jew. It comes to the fore especially on holidays, at family gatherings, and on other special occasions" (Gans 1956:427). To counter this notion, Gans (1956) discussed the concept of *traditional Judaism*, a Jewishness that is primarily based in everyday Jewish practices. In the case of traditional Judaism, material symbols are considered secondary or nonexistent aspect of Jewishness. According to Gans, symbolic Judaism "appears as a combination of barely related themes" (Gans 1956:427) that he describes in terms of three separate cultures for the sake of clarity. These themes include "objects culture", "Jewish popular culture", and "problems culture".

Objects culture consists of collecting and displaying Jewish symbols and objects that are adjusted to fit American tastes. According to Gans (1956), this "objects culture" developed from second generation Jews who turned away from traditional forms of Judaism that require Jewishness to be an overriding factor in the everyday life experience. Because Jewish life no longer required daily participation, Jewish culture ceased to be a living culture for many Jewish individuals. Rather than an unconscious and thematic everyday life experience, Jewishness became confined to an existence within "customs" and "ceremonies" that Jews observe on a self-conscious level in order

to "feel Jewish".  Gans (1956) continued by noting that traditional Jews had no need to decorate their homes with Jewish symbols such as the Star of David in order to feel connected to their Jewishness.  Physical objects that represent Judaism were used only by traditional Jews because they were prescribed by religious law or tradition (e.g. mezuzah) (Gans 1956:248).

Jewish popular culture "adds Jewish flavor to popular American fare" (Gans 1956:428).  It allows for Jewish individuals to blend Jewishness into secular aspects of American culture.  Popular aspects of American culture are "Judaized", or given a Jewish twist, making these things Jewish in nature (Gans 1956:429).  For example, candy makers will make candy in the form of matzoh, unleavened bread traditionally eaten by Jews during Passover, thus creating "Jewish candy" (Gans 1956:129). While traditional forms of Judaism were restrictive and required sacrifice, symbolic Judaism is open and permissive.  Like American leisure culture, symbolic Judaism is permissive "providing stimulation, enjoyment, and emotional satisfaction without threat of sanction" (Gans 1956:429).  Gans continued to develop these concepts by looking at ways other third generation white immigrant groups employ their ethnic identity in the United States. This expanded the concept of *symbolic Judaism* to the concept of *symbolic ethnicity* (Gans 1979).   The concept of *symbolic ethnicity* refers to an ethnicity that is passive and involves the "temporary and periodic expression of feelings about or toward an ethnic group or culture through material or non-material symbols" (Gans 2009:123).

*Stigma and Identity Management*

Goffman (1959) asserted that individuals manage their identity differently based on social setting.  He used the metaphor of individuals as actors and the people they

interact with as the audience.  The actor's performance is described in terms of the visible and readable signs that are presented to the audience in a given social context known as the stage.

Goffman defined stigma as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" (1963: Preface).  He noted that individuals who do not, or can not, conform to the societal ideal are stigmatized through social interactions (Goffman 1963).  Stigma can emanate from a variety of domains including physical and mental disability, nationality, race, and/or religious affiliation. These stigmatized individuals must routinely negotiate their individual self in light of the social self that others reflect back at them in a negative light.  Goffman's concepts in stigma are concerned with "mixed contacts" (Goffman 1963:12), or social situations where stigmatized individuals interact with "normal" people.  For this reason I will be examining social situations where Jewish individuals interact with Christians in Texas.

Kenji Yoshino (2006) discussed the concept of passing and covering up in contemporary America.  He noted that, for some minority groups, the ability to pass (Goffman 1963; Yoshino 2006), or disguise a minority status, can help with stigma management.  Yoshino discussed passing in terms of mutable and immutable traits. Mutable traits are those that can be canceled or muted.  For example, the wearing of a Yamaka, a religious garment worn on the heads if many Jews to signify respect for God, is a mutable trait.  Immutable traits are traits that cannot be covered up or disguised such an individual's skin color.  This idea is central to my thesis because this study aims to understand how Jews in Texas may manage mutable traits in a primarily Christian palce. In addition, I explore the notion that my Jewish respondents may not feel anti-Semitism

directly but may or may not still act in a ways that are consistent with coerced conformity emanating from social situations.

Yoshino (2006) also discussed the discriminatory treatment of individuals who refuse to cover or mute the significance of their stigmatized status during social interactions. The author argued that the issue of coerced conformity limits the identity expression of many Americans and should be addressed as a modern civil rights issues. As it stands, individuals who refuse to cover and downplay their differences are routinely denied equal treatment in the United States.

Yoshino and Smith (2013) found that there are four primary axes along which individuals cover. These include affiliation, appearance, advocacy, and association (Yoshino and Smith 2013:4). Appearance based covering is the altering of self-presentation for the purpose of fitting in. Affiliation based covering is concerned with "how individuals avoid behaviors widely associated with their identity, often to negate stereotypes" (Yoshino and Smith 2013:4). Advocacy based covering is concerned with the level to which stigmatized individuals stick up for their group and advocate for their ideas. Often, people can be viewed in a negative light for doing so. Finally, association based covering refers to avoiding contact with members of a group in order to not be seen as excessively involved in the group. This project explores the ways Jews in Texas navigate social situations where anti-Semitism and/or stigma are present. I view Jewish individuals as actors who portray their Jewish identity on various stages to audiences that convey various forms of feedback. In particular I explore if Jewish individuals experience anti-Semitism and if these individuals act in ways that are consistent with coerced conformity.

*How Prejudice, Discrimination, and Stereotypes Relate to Anti-Semitism and the Stigmatization of Jews*

Some common ways that marginalized groups experience stigma in their daily lives include stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Dovidio et. al. 2010). These ideas serve to distinguish the accepted from the unaccepted or those without stigma from the stigmatized.

Dovidio et al. define a stereotype as "a set of qualities perceived to reflect the essence of a group" (2010:11). Often times, these sets of qualities serve to differentiate the "other," whether true or not. When individuals become aware of the stereotypes people hold about them, they then perceive the threat of being judged in terms of these stereotypes (Steele, 1997). In addition, the relative number of group members in a given situation can affect the development of stereotypes (Kanter 1977).

*Social bias* refers to partiality or negativity toward a group. This social phenomenon is often expressed though prejudice and stereotyping and is an intra-psychic phenomena that is conveyed explicitly or implicitly (Dovidio 2010:13). Bias occurs within individuals and can vary in terms of transparency and the awareness of individuals who harbor such ideas. Bias is also expressed subtly (covertly) and blatantly (overtly) (Dovidio 2010). This differs from discrimination, which is defined as an outward act toward an individual or group, therefor making the concept non intra-psychic (Dovidio 2010:13).

The consequences of social bias can be devastating, as noted by Allport (1954) and Steele (1997). The effects of repeatedly being told you are lazy and have inferior blood can create a negative self-image and destroy the ego of an individual (Allport

1954). In addition the perception of stereotype threat can have a negative impact on the academic performance of members of racial minority groups (Steele 1997).

Anti-Semitism is defined as "stereotyping or prejudice toward, or discrimination against, the Jews" (Feagin and Feagin 2008:115). Studies of European anti-Semitism have found that Jewish individuals are often constructed as "evil and racially impure" (Jacobs 2002:22) or a biologically inferior race (Feagin and Feagin 2008:114). The origins of anti-Semitism are attributed to medieval teachings suggesting that the crucifixion of Christ was plotted by Jews (Jacobs 2002:22). Anti-Semitism can have a great effect on the way in that Jewish individuals construct their ethnic identity (Brodkin 1998:104). For these reasons, I ask questions that will allow me to understand whether and how respondents experience anti-Semitism and/or stigma. I then delve into probe questions relating to the nuanced ways Jewish Texans navigate social situations where anti-Semitism and/or stigma are present.

*Jews and Race: A Brief History*

The reasons for incorporating the racial identity of Jews in Texas into this project are twofold. First, the history of the racialization of Jewish individuals is one that is complex in nature. It highlights the social construction of race and its importance to time and place. Second, Texas provides a unique sociopolitical context for these questions. Although Jewish Texans do not experience institutionalized forms of discrimination in contemporary Texas, I seek to understand how they are racialized in a place where rates of religious based hate crimes against Jews (anti-Semitism) are consistently higher than other religious groups.

The history of how Jewish individuals have been racialized highlights the social construction of race and its dependence on sociopolitical context. Jews have been considered both white and non- white based on historical time period and geographic location. Thomas (2010) noted that the theory of racial formation applies to the Jewish experience in Medieval Christian dominated Europe. In the following paragraphs I discuss the ways Jewish individuals have been racially categorized during various historical periods.

Fourteenth century Spain marked a difficult period for Sephardic Jews during the Spanish Inquisition. Sephardic Jews refer to Spanish Jews with a distinct Jewish culture that arose within Muslim and Christian Spain (Jacobs 2002:155). During the Inquisition Jewish blood was constructed as impure while Christian ancestry was constructed as "pure blood" (Jacobs 2002:128). Those with Jewish blood were seen as heretics and a threat to the established order of the Church. Therefore, Jews were forced to convert to Christianity or face grave consequences, including being burned at the stake (Jacobs 2002:5). Overall, we see that this period of anti-Semitic policies take root in the racialization of Jews as impure through their blood; a biological construction that served to mark Jews as subordinate to dominant Christians.

The Holocaust marks another time during European history in which Jews were racialized as "others" through the concept of Jewish blood. In Germany at this time German, or Aryan, blood was considered to be pure while 'Jewish blood "was constructed as impure. Once again we see socially constructed biological difference marking dominant and subordinate racial categories. In this particular time and place the

process of racialization served to construct Germans as racially superior to Jews, despite the fact that both groups are phenotypically white (Feagin and Cobas 2013:16).

The racialization of Jews as "other" allowed for anti-Semitic sentiments to become part of the everyday lives of Germans.  This was evident in the song "Horst Wessel Lied" that stated, "…When Jewish blood spurts from the knife, then everything will be fine!..."(Meltzer 1976:34).  Courses in "racial science" and "racial culture" were also taught in German schools during this time period. These courses promoted the racialization of Jews as "half castes" and subordinate to the Aryan race (Meltzer 1976:36) as well as stereotypes about Jewish deceit and greed.  On September 15, 1939 Hitler made anti-Semitism part of the German legal code with the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws.  These laws were designed to deny Jews of their political and civil rights under the guise of protecting "German blood and honor" (Meltzer 1976:36).  The treatment of German Jews under the Nuremburg Laws bears a striking resemblance to the treatment of African American individuals in the United States' Jim Crow era (Meltzer 1976:37).  At this period in history Jews were banned from German schools, public places, and public transportation.

Pogroms, or officially sanctioned attacks against Jews, in Russia mark another episode where Jewish individuals have been racialized as "others".  After the rise of the Bolsheviks in Russia, a time of relative acceptance for Jewish individuals met its end (Orleck 1997).  Although the new communist party publicly opposed ideologies linked to nationalism and racism, the continued to adopt the anti-Semitic rhetoric common in Eastern Europe at the time, leading to a hostile environment for Russian Jews. One example of this are the officially sanctioned, and often government sponsored, attacks

against Jews known as pogroms. During this time many Russian Jews feared for the safety and lives, leading to large migrations of Russian Jews to the United States (Orleck 1997).

The use of anti-Semitism and the racialization of Jews were also prominent features of the pre-World War II era in the United States (Schafer 2006:116). After a large influx of Jewish immigrants to the United States in the 1920's, the concept of "the Jewish problem" became common rhetoric in American society (Steinberg 2001:223). During this time period, new anti-Semitic rhetoric began to form centered on the idea that Jews were a distinct race and involved in a plot to dominate the world. These ideas were laid out in a forged document titled *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Shaffer 2006:365). In this fake document, Jews around the world are called to take over all governments in order to bring a rise to communism. Through communism, the new Jewish world order would arise. Although the text has long been discredited as a forgery, it continues to surface in the mass media in places such as Egypt and France as recently as 2002 (Schafer 2006:365). Once again we see elements of the "devious Jew" stereotype surface in an attempt to racialize Jewish individuals as non- white.

Higher Education is also a place where Jewish individuals in the early 20th century experienced anti-Semitism and discrimination (Steinberg 1974; 2001). Both Harvard and Yale banned Jews from their honor societies in 1913 (Steinberg 2001:223). Abbott Lowell, who served as President of Harvard from 1906 to 1933, helped instill anti-Semitic practices at Harvard that included the implementation of religious quotas. Abbott felt that the implementation of the quotas was necessary to maintain the "traditional character of the college" (Steinberg 2001:223). Although other Universities,

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including New York University and Columbia, used discrete methods of limiting Jews, Harvard became the first University to implement and defend a quota system (Steinberg 2001:223).

The late 1920's and 1930's also saw the rise of anti-Semitism in the Midwest and Farm Belt regions of the United States (Hertzberg 1997:239). The economic downturn the nation was experiencing at the time was easily attributed to Jews through historical stereotypes of Jewish greed. One of the most prominent promoters of anti-Semitic rhetoric of the time was Charles Coughlin, a Catholic Priest who spoke to an audience of primarily industrial workers through a national radio show (Hertzberg 1997:239). Some of the factors allowing for the spread of anti-Semitism across the country at the time include large portions of German Americans in the Midwest who sought to sympathize with the actions of their homeland as well as the predisposition of African American and white individuals from the south to think in terms of racial categories (Hertzberg 1997:240).

*Racialization of Jews*

*Racial formation* refers to "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi and Winant 1994:55). This macro level social process organizes the way society is structured and ruled (Omi and Winant 1994:56) and effects the everyday experiences of those it categorizes (Omi and Winant 1994:59). This concept is particularly interesting when considering the history of Jews. Depending on time and place, Jews have been racialized as either white or non-white, highlighting the social construction of racial categories.

To say that race is a social construction is to suggest that there are insignificant biological differences between races (Anderson 2013). This approach "questions the naturalness of the social order and looks for the underlying social motivations and mechanisms that shape human social relations and societies" (Nagel 2003:5). This concept can often be difficult for individuals to grasp because they see phenotypic, or skin tone, differences among members of different racial categories. However, social constructionists note that the meaning ascribed to these phenotypic differences are defined by the social context; making these categories a product of social phenomenon (Omi and Winant 1994:55).

*Racialization* refers to "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (Omi and Winant 2013: 21). The process of racialization allows dominant groups to oppress subordinate groups by constructing them as biologically, culturally, and physically inferior (Feagin and Cobas 2013:16). Typically, this process manifests itself in one of two ways. Groups who are positioned to gain from the racialization process benefit from privilege while those who are marginalized through this process are victims of discrimination. This concept is particularly interesting when considering the way Jewish individuals have been racialized as both white and non- white during their history (Brodkin 1998). This process becomes even more complex when looking at the work of Sherri Cavan (2013) that was published in a special issue of Symbolic Interaction highlighting the life of Erving Goffman. Cavan (2013) quotes an interview with Eli Bay (2009) that discusses how in 1920's Canada the terms "white Jews" and "Black Jews" were used to distinguish between those Jews who were deemed acceptable and unacceptable by society. The prevalence of anti-Semitism

and the racialization of Jews in 1920's Canada was influential on the theoretical work of a young Jewish Canadian, and future sociologist, named Erving Goffman (Cavan 2013).

Anti-Semitism has been at the heart of much of the rhetoric that seeks to label Jews as a distinct race. By *race*, I refer to the differentiation of human bodies for the purpose of signifying and symbolizing social conflicts and interests (Omi and Winant 1994:55). In conducting this study, I aimed to contribute to an informed understanding of how Jewish individuals in Texas racially identify and how they construct their racial identity.

As previously mentioned, Jews have been racialized as both white and non-white depending on the historical and sociopolitical context within which they find themselves. In the following paragraphs I discuss "Yiddishkiet", ("the culture of Jewish immigrants" (Brodkin 1998:183)) and its relationship to whiteness in addition to the transition from the construction of the Jewish non-Jewish binary to the black white binary in the Jewish community (Brodkin 1998). As we will see, ideas about race have shaped, and continue to shape, the way Jews are perceived in the contemporary United States.

In the process of constructing non-white as subordinate, Whites are able to construct whiteness as dominant, allowing those marked as White to benefit from the associated privilege (Anderson 2003:26; Bonilla Silva 2014; Makalani 2003; Cornell and Hartman 2007:26). This allows whiteness to become situated as a category that constructs difference from "others" (Anderson 2003). The concept of white privilege can be difficult for many white individuals who cite historical ethnic prejudice toward their ethnic group (Gallagher 2003). However, the adoption of this view is to suggest that the experiences of white immigrants is the same as those of racial and ethnic immigrants who

were not white.  Upon further investigation it is clear that white ethnic groups, although

discriminated against during points of American history, have historically had access to

economic, social, and political opportunities that other racial and ethnic minorities were

denied (Steinberg 2001).

At different points in Jewish American history, Jewish individual have been

racialized as both non- white and white (Brodkin 1998; Cornell and Hartman 2007:26).

However, Karen Brodkin (1998) noted that in the post World War II era of relative

Jewish tolerance, Jewish individuals were largely able to position themselves as white.

This is evident in a story Karen Brodkin shares in her book, *How Jews Became White*

*Folks*, about her grandmother's use of the term "shwartze," a racist, Yiddish, term used to

refer to African American individuals.

> Grandma's racism made us uncomfortable because she entered a terrain
> that we wished to avoid. How was she as a Jewish woman to position
> herself in it? Her world was no longer one of Jews and non-Jews.  Now
> she had to deal with whether as an "old fashioned" Jew, in contrast to her
> modern daughter and grandchildren, she was on the white or black side of
> the American racial divide (Brodkin, 1998:18).

This is an example of how "difference" is constructed whereby African Americans are

labeled as "others" by using the term "shwartze".   This allows the grandmother to

associate herself with the white side of the black- white binary.  If Brodkin's

grandmother did not identify with the white side of the back white binary, there would be

no need for terms that serve to mark African Americans as others. In addition, if her

world was this one constructed in terms of Jews and non-Jews a terms like "goyim"

would be more suitable to mark the "other".  Instead, she uses the term "shwartz".  My

study seeks to understand if Jewish individuals in the state of Texas see themselves as

white, or if they believe they have been racialized as non- white.  I will also explore why

these individuals see themselves as white or why they do not.  This will allow me to gain

a better understanding of how these respondents construct their racial identity.

"Yiddishkiet", or the Yiddish term for "the culture of Jewish immigrants"

(Brodkin 1998:183), is a thought-provoking topic when discussing the racial formation of

Jewish individuals.  This culture has been historically constructed in opposition to

whiteness yet Jews have been able to be adopted into the white category.  How could this

be possible?  The adaptation of Jewish individuals into the white side of the Black- white

binary came at the price of losing much of the identity, culture, and authenticity of early

Jewish American immigrants (Brodkin 1998). "For Jews, the fruits of success seemed to

come at the cost of a meaningful Jewish community, cultural identity, and the loss of an

authentic Jewish soul" (Brodkin 1998:182).

However, Brodkin noted that even when positioned on the white side on the

black- white binary, being Jewish is still at odds with whiteness.  She qualified this

conflict as being white, but not like the "blond people" (Brodkin 1998).  Here we see that

although many Jewish Americans are phenotypically white, their Jewish identity sets

them apart from, and conflicts with, whiteness; even in a time and place where Jews have

been racialized as white (Brodkin, 1998).   This also reveals that the Jewish experience is

that of white acceptance but still at odds, to a degree, with whiteness (Brodkin 1998).

My thesis project seeks to explore if Texas Jews experience this dilemma, or whether

they view their racial identity differently due to the geographic location, culture,

experiences during social interactions, etc.

The Pew Research Religious and Public Life Project (2013) found that ninety-five

percent of contemporary Jewish Americans identify with the white racial category.

However, as we have seen, Jews have been racialized differently in different

sociopolitical contexts throughout history.  Historically, Jews have been racialized as

"others" in sociopolitical contexts where they have experienced institutionalized

discrimination.  Texas provides another interesting setting for the study of Jewish

experiences.  Although there are not institutionalized forms of anti-Semitism, rates of

anti-Semitism experienced by Jews are higher than other groups (Texas Department of

Public Safety 2002-2013).  However, Jews account for only half of one percent of the

overall Texas population (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014).  For these reasons, I explore the

racial identity of Jews in Texas as well in terms of how these individuals construct their

racial identity.  In doing so, I will contribute to the discussions regarding the social

construction of race and its application to Jews- both historically and in the contemporary

United States.

# III. METHODOLOGY

I employed a qualitative methodology in order to explore the perceptions and experiences of Jews in Texas. Qualitative methodology lends itself to the study life-worlds and allows researchers focus on naturally emerging languages and the meanings individuals assign to experiences (Berg and Lune 2012:15). In order to understand the perceptions and experiences of Jews living in Central Texas I was required to consider the individual's own perceptions and meanings. "Life-worlds include emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy, and other subjective aspects associated with naturally evolving lives of individuals and their groups" (Berg and Lune 2012:15). This approach required the use of qualitative data because perceptions and experiences are not directly observable nor objectively measured (Berg and Lune 2012:15) in a valid sense. In addition, this methodology is useful for studying self-identities, which can often be difficult to categorize and study with numerical data. Therefore, I explore the daily lives of Jews in Texas through qualification rather than quantification.

This project is a case study. Case studies allow researchers to study sociobiographies, which can uncover the nature of social roles (Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg 1991:5). This is done by constructing (partial or whole) life histories of role occupants (Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg 1991:5). In doing so the researcher is able to capture the richness associated with occupying a particular role (Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg 1991:5). This study examines the role of being Jewish in Texas through the sociobiographies of respondents who self-identify as Jews and have lived in Texas for at least one year.

In conducting this study, I employed a retroductive analysis of the data (Ayim 1974; Blaikie 2004).  Retroduction entails the concept of going back from, below, or behind observed patterns or uniformities to discover how they are produced (Blaikie 2004:972).  Specifically, this study is governed by the simultaneous and reflexive use of the literature and my prior, member's understanding of the Jewish community in Texas along with the actual discovery of Jewish experiences among respondents.  In doing so, I discovered themes and typologies that emerged from the data that shed light on the perceptions and experiences of Jewish individuals in Texas.

The Texas State University Institutional Review Board approved this study on February 4, 2014.  I conducted interviews over a twelve month period with individuals who self-identified as Jews and who had lived in Texas for at least one year.  In order to conduct my research, I recruited sixteen respondents by posting information about this study in public places and using snowball sampling techniques to grow my sample. Snowball sampling refers to asking previously located members of the target population to provide contact information for other members of the target population (Singleton and Straits 2010:178).  Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) found that snowball sampling is particularly applicable to research that examines "moral, legal, or social sensitivities surrounding the behavior in question" (144).  I placed announcements about this study on message boards (both physical and online) that were open to public access including Facebook group message boards, coffee houses near synagogues and Jewish community centers, and craigslist ads.   Individuals who wished to participate in the study then used provided contact information to become involved in the study.  After each interview, respondents were asked if they might know anyone who was interested in participating in

the study.  In order to qualify for this study, individuals had to identify as Jewish and

must have lived in the state of Texas for at least one year. Using these recruiting methods

to gather my sample, I found 16 respondents who fit my criteria.  Their demographic

characteristics are listed below along with their assigned pseudonyms.  Pseudonyms were

assigned in order to protect the confidentiality of respondents.

| Table 2<br>Sample Demographics | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mean Age | 42.75<br>(20-65) | |
| Mean Number of<br>Years Lived in Texas | 28.25<br>(4-65) | |
| | | |
| **Sex** | **N** | **%** |
| Male | 7 | 43.75 |
| Female | 9 | 56.25 |
| | | |
| **Education** | **N** | **%** |
| 8th Grade or Less | - | - |
| Some High School | - | - |
| High School Graduate | - | - |
| Some College | 3 | 18.75 |
| Graduated College | - | - |
| Post College Study | 13 | 81.25 |
| | | |
| **Denomination** | **N** | **%** |
| Reform | 2 | 12.5 |
| Conservative | 5 | 31.25 |
| Orthodox | 2 | 12.5 |
| Mix of All | 3 | 18.75 |
| Conservadox | 2 | 12.5 |
| Conservative/Reform | 1 | 6.25 |
| Orthodox philosophy<br>(not practices) | 1 | 6.25 |

As seen in the table, there were seven male and nine female respondents in this study. They also represented a variety of ages, Jewish denominational backgrounds, and amount of time spent in Texas. This sample was also nicely balanced in terms of sex, representing seven males and nine females. In addition, they represented various occupational backgrounds including teachers, lawyers, accountants, clergy, unemployed students, professionals working for Jewish organizations, bus drivers, and store managers. This sample was also comprised of respondents who are highly educated. Thirteen of the sixteen respondents reported having a graduate degree while the other three were currently enrolled as undergraduate students at a university.

I conducted all interviews using a digital audio recorder. They were then transcribed by GMR Transcriptions Service using word processing software. All identifying information was excluded from transcriptions and all names were replaced with pseudonyms in order to maintain the confidentiality of respondents. I then coded the interviews to reflect major themes that were discussed by respondents during the course of the interview. These themes related to my four major points of inquiry. All data gathered from this study was kept on a jump drive that was placed under lock and key for the duration of the project.

*Semi Structured Interviews as a Research Tool*

In order to conduct this research, I used semi-structured, face-to-face, interviews. When appropriate, I used probing questions, or questions that seek more detailed information to understand relevant social phenomenon. Therefore, the interviews were directed, but at the same time, open to conversation. By asking these questions I sought to understand the meaning of Jewish identity to Jewish Texans, when Jewish identity is

relevant for Jews in Texas, how these individuals identify racially, and the nuanced ways that Jews navigate social situations where they perceive and/or experience anti-Semitism and/or stigma.  I selected these questions for their openness, allowing respondents to freely discuss the perceptions and experiences they have had as Jews living in Central Texas.

*Limitations of the Study*

In conducting this study, I intended to provide a nuanced, rather than a generalizable, understanding of the everyday lives of Jewish individuals in the state of Texas.  Therefore, the study is a platform on which I begin to understand the perceptions and experiences of Jews in Texas.  This study was conducted using a small sample that was taken out of convenience and does not represent the larger Jewish population of Texas or the United States.  Therefore, it cannot be broadly generalized.

## IV. JEWS IN TEXAS

"No Ahuva, I really have no idea who,
When the rodeo announcer gave the invocation
Allowing as how it was such a good thing that
In America we can all pray together in Jesus' name,
Yelled, 'Baruch Hashem!' *as loud as they could.

I mean, there's Jews at the rodeo?
Who nu?**

(Winegarten 2014:39)

\*      Baruch Hashem means praise G-d in Hebrew.

\*\*      Nu is a term used regularly by Jews and is meant to replace knew to give a Jewish feel to the poem.

The history of Jews in Texas is as old as the state itself. In the year 1844 the first Jewish cemetery was consecrated in Houston. By the year 1859 the first synagogue in Texas was established in Houston under the congregation name Beth Israel (Weiner 1997:295). The pattern of establishing Jewish cemeteries followed by synagogues that had previously taken place in Europe also took place in Galveston, San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas in the late 1800's (Wiener 1997:290). Over the next century and a half, Jewish individuals would prove to be vital to the growth of Texas as a state.

Today, Jews in Texas account for half of one percent of the Texas population and number 138,705 (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2013:211). This is an increase of one hundred and five percent when compared to the Jewish population in Texas in 1971 (67,505) (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014:211). Given the increase of Jews in this area, high rates of anti-Semitism when compared to other religious groups (Texas Department of Public Safety 2013), the large Christian population in Texas (Pew Research Religion and Public

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Life Project 2008), and the historical difficulties in the South regarding racial and ethnic tolerance, I explore the experiences of Jews in Texas.

In my interviews with Jewish Texans one common theme that emerged from the data was that being Jewish in Texas was a very different experience than being Jewish in places where the Jewish population was much larger. Several of my respondents report feeling more comfortable with their Jewish identity and feeling a sense of ease in their everyday life experiences when they are in places with large Jewish populations. For example, Israel, Miami, New York, New Jersey, Los Angeles, and college campuses with large Jewish populations were described by respondents as hubs of Jewish life, where Jews felt comfortable being Jewish in their everyday life. This pattern of respondents who reported place as a meaningful aspect of their daily lives was consistent within this sample. For example, some respondents indicated that they would feel more comfortable being Jewish in an urban area in Texas but not in a rural town. Metropolitan areas with fairly large Jewish populations, such as Houston, Dallas, and Austin, were brought up in interviews as places within Texas that Jews have more positive experiences when compared to rural towns. In addition, many respondents noted that they experienced interactions with Christians in Texas where their Jewish identity would come up. In these conversations, respondents described Christianity in Texas as a meaningful aspect of the given sociopolitical context.

*Small Proportions: Jews in Texas*

A small number of Jews within the larger group context was a theme that was found consistently among respondents when describing their experiences as a Jewish individual in Texas. Although Jews are a minority group in all states (The two highest

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concentrations of Jews in the US are New York with 9% and New Jersey with 5.7%

Jews), Jewish Texans represent only half of one percent of the larger population

(Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014:207-211). Due to these facts, Jews in Texas find

themselves in a place where they may be more likely to encounter social situations with

few Jews, where they are the only Jew, and where they are the first Jew another person

has met.

The experience of being the first Jew that another person has met was common

among respondents. This was evident in my interview with Miriam. Miriam was fifty

six years old and had lived in Texas for forty nine years at the time. She also teaches in

the Central Texas area. During our interview, Miriam, age 56, recalled, "If I'm not at the

Synagogue, I'm around non-Jews. At work, there are Jews in [my department], when I

teach I'm usually the only Jew and often I'm the first Jew people have ever met." When

asked what that experience is like, Miriam continues, "Well, part of it sucks because then

you're oh yeah, it's the token Jew, just like being the token black. Anything I say – and

then of course, they think you're the expert. I'm like no, I have no idea what the answer is

to that question". When asked if there are certain subjects she is expected to be an

expert in, Miriam added,

> Anything to have anything to do with Judaism. It's like well what do Jews
> think about hell? I'm like oh, well we don't believe in it. … It's a
> responsibility and if I'm the only Jew a person has – if I'm the first Jew a
> person has met or knows that they've met, I'm like okay – it's a
> responsibility.

Miriam's quotes reveal a great deal about daily life for Jewish individuals in the state of

Texas. First she noted that outside of a uniquely Jewish environment (e.g., Synagogues)

Jews are regularly around non-Jews. She then noted that at work, there are a few Jews in

her office, but that when she teaches students, she is often the first Jew they have

encountered.  This is a social situation that Jews in Texas are more likely to experience given the small number of Jews in the larger social context.  She then noted that expectations emerge from these situations where she is expected to have an expertise in Jewish subjects. This is similar to the work of Kanter (1977) who noted that the attributes of tokens are often distorted by members of the dominate group in order to fit preexisting ideas about the minority group.  However, these Jews are not tokens..  They are simply a minority group whose ratio in the overall population is minute.  In this case, the expectation is linked to all Jews being experts in all things Jewish.  When thinking about this rationally, it reveals a misguided expectation.  The degree to which Jews take an interest in and develop and expertise in Judaism varies the same way interest in religious and ethnic practices vary for all other groups.  A similar experience was noted by Avi, a 29 year old native Texan who grew up in a small town and converted to Judaism in his 20's.  During the interview, Avi recalled an incident at work with other accountants by stating,

> when we're doing our international tax returns, there are some – I don't
> know if it's tax code law or some law that if a country has some kind of –
> if they're banning stuff from Israel or something like that, then we have to
> report it on our tax returns somehow if we're doing business with the
> country that's boycotting Israel.  People are like, why are you doing that?
> What's up with that?  I'm- just because I'm Jewish, doesn't mean I wrote
> this law.  I don't know the history behind this.  I think they think that every
> Jew knows.

Earlier in the interview Avi also noted that, as far as he is aware, he is the only Jewish individual in his office. The above quote reveals that, at work, Avi experiences similar pressure from non-Jewish individuals to have an expertise in all things related to Jews that Miriam described earlier.  Avi's response is indicative of a perception that, at least some, non-Jews as believing that Jews are experts in all Jewish matters, including Israeli

foreign policy and it's applications to international tax accounting. These quotes reveal that Avi and Miriam experience distortions of their difference in the work environment. Due to the fact that Jews are such a small percentage of the overall Texas population (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014), they may be more likely to experience social situations where there are few other Jews, or to be the first Jew that a person has ever met.

One way skewed ratios presented themselves as a challenge was through the inevitability of having a small dating pool for those who would like to date other Jews. This was noted by two respondents and came up during my interview with Ilana, who stated "He's probably the only one who's about my age for about seven years. It was him and like one or two other people. It's (dating) very hard in my group. Then within my group, there's only a few of us that are single. So the group is even smaller." Here we see how, within a small ethnic community in a larger group context, the challenge of finding a person who shares that ethnic background, age, common interests, etc. can make finding a partner more difficult for those who desire these qualities in a partner.

Another interesting aspect of having a small Jewish community relative to the larger population, was that close social ties may develop. This was noted by one respondent, Avi, who was raised in small town Texas. He stated, "The Jewish population (in San Antonio, Texas) is … maybe as big as the population of [a small Texas town] and that – they're nosy and stuff like that and it can be bad, but then again, you know everybody so that makes the community maybe a little bit stronger than if you lived in New York." Here we see that Avi equates his experience in a relatively small Jewish community to positive and negative aspects of his experience. Another important factor

to note is that Avi grew up in a small Texas town and therefore, may feel more at home in such a setting that Jews who grew up in suburban areas.

*Being Jewish in Christian Texas*

Respondent's reports of experiences with Christians in Texas were quite nuanced. However, all respondents reported having interactions with non-Jews where their Jewish identity was relevant to the social interaction. For some individuals, interactions with Christians were positive and often centered on a common ideological values regarding the state of Israel, Judeo-Christian values, or anti-Islamic sentiments. This was evident in an interview with Isaac where he stated "And then if anything, I would say the blend of Christianity that I find in Texas, I think is even more – has even more of a positive association [with Judaism] than maybe other southern states do". When continuing with the interview, Isaac noted that a positive association between Jews and Christians is centered on common interests in the nation of Israel. "But here (Texas), I think there's a slightly stronger identity with Israel among the larger [population] – you know, if you took a poll, I think there'd be support for Israel, and it's kind of – it's a litmus test". In my interview with Meirav, she noted that an ideological alignment of Judeo-Christian values along with anti-Arab sentiments becomes a topic of discussion during social interactions with Christians in Texas.

> "There are two people, just recently, that have said to me and I think it's because of what's going on in Israel right now, they're in more fundamental churches. Both these women have said individually, not together, but individually that the Jews are a chosen people and the Arabs are going to find that if they go against the Jews, they'll be punished. God's promised that to them".

Mierav's experience is an example of the mixed experiences Jews reported when interacting with Christians in Texas. Here we see how interactions with Christians can

take the tone of "us" (Jews and Christians) and "them" (Islam), as noted in them final

statement of the quote.  On the other hand, Jewish Christian interactions can be rather

negative toward Jews. Mierav also noted,

> "[My husband] and I went – [my husband] is Baptist – he went to [*a Baptist Church*] for a while.  One of my friends said Jews come to the Sunday School sometimes and just listen to the teacher that we had.  He's really interesting and he's talking about the Old Testament. So I went and for about two or three sessions, it was fine.  Then he made a comment that caused me never to go back and I was so resentful.  He said that anyone that didn't accept Christ was a heathen.  That was it for me.  That's all I needed to hear".

My interview with Meirav illustrates how her contact with Christians can take a myriad

of directions- from acceptance to stigmatization.  Meirav clearly understands that the

label of heathen is one that serves to distinguish Jews (and all others who do not believe

in Jesus) as morally inferior to Christians.

Another interesting experience regarding social interactions with devout

Christians was mentioned during my interview with Rachel, who currently lives in San

Antonio but has also lived in Houston and Austin.  During our interview she recalled an

experience where she was invited to a prominent evangelical Church, along with several

other fellow Jews, during a night that honors the nation of Israel.  At this gathering, the

Jews were all gathered together in one small area of the Church while the congregation of

thousands sang songs to honor the Jewish individuals present.  Rachel recalled feeling

very uncomfortable during this time and noted a feeling of "difference" in this social

context.  When continuing our conversation, she also added that the social context of the

situation influenced her behavior.  She noted that individuals at this Church donate

millions of dollars to Israel and that she was willing to endure an awkward moment for

the long term positive outcome, continued support for Israel by Christians.

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The way Jewish individuals perceive the intentions of Christians can also be important to social interactions, and to the experience of the interactions, between the two. This was evident in two interviews with Chaim and Zahava. Chaim stated, "There was an ex-neighbor – we have a very tight little community – was convinced we're all going to hell because we were Jewish but he was very friendly about it". Here we see that Chaim perceived interactions with his Christian neighbor, in which he is marked morally inferior, as "very friendly". This sentiment was echoed by Zahava, who also has a neighbor that is outwardly concerned for her soul in the afterlife due to Zahava's Jewish identity. However, Zahava noted that she finds these interactions to be friendly and is called "sister in Christ" during these interactions. The latter statement being indicative of a Judeo-Christian bond yet the context of the conversation is based on Christian moral superiority- leaving a confounding and complex social interaction.

Here we see the complex nature of how Jewish respondents in this study report experiencing social interactions with, at least some, Christians in Texas. On one hand, respondents report experiences that are seen as positive that tend to revolve around common Judeo-Christian ideologies. On the other hand, respondents report experiences where Jews are clearly a minority group within a Christian context, making them "others". In this context, Christianity is normative and can have a great effect on the everyday lives of the Jewish individuals it surrounds. Therefore, the Jewish experience in the predominantly Christian context of Texas is quite varied – ranging from positive, too mundane, to negative depending on the experience. This is because Jews sit at a unique point in their relationship to the dominate Christian group – creating a complex social situation. On one hand they share ideological similarities with many Christians

regarding Israel and Judeo Christian values. On the other hand, clear distinctions

regarding moral superiority, as seen in the quotes with Meirav, Chaim, and Rachel can

lead to social situations where respondents experienced stigmatization.

*Being Jewish in Texas vs. Major Jewish Centers*

During my interviews with Jews in Texas, it became quite clear that being Jewish

in Texas was a different experience than being Jewish in major Jewish centers around the

United States and Israel. In fact my interviews uncover several nuanced ways that place

affects the everyday lives of Jews in Texas- including holiday observance, experiences at

work, and social interactions.

Chaim described his experience being Jewish in Los Angeles by stating, "You

could taste when it was Jewish high holidays, when it was Hanukah, Passover, because

things in L.A. kind of resembled it.  You couldn't go anywhere without bumping into

fellow Jews."  These experiences are in sharp contrast to his experiences in San Antonio,

as seen in the following quote. "When we came here you wouldn't know if it was Rosh

Hashanah.  Surely by the numbers game it was a big deal difference.  We had 13, 400

people every week at worship (in Los Angeles).  Here they don't even have that on the

high holidays.  So, I mean, because it's a smaller Jewish community, everything is de

minimis observance."  Chaim's experiences with Jewish holidays are quite different in

Los Angeles and San Antonio and centered on the concept of skewed ratios within a

group context. Chaim highlights the experience of being Jewish during Hanukkah in L.A.

with the statement "you couldn't go anywhere without bumping into fellow Jews".  In

addition, he noted that the number of Jews who attend services in San Antonio during the

high holidays (a time when many Jews, observant or not, attend synagogue) are fewer

than the number of Jews in synagogue during a typical weekly service. In addition, he noted that during Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, there is no Jewish feel to the atmosphere as described in L.A. Finally, he noted that the screwed ratio of Jews within the larger group context does not allow for Chaim to "feel" Jewishness in his everyday life the way he describes his experience during Hanukkah in L.A.

Avi said he felt the small number of Jews in the larger group context was linked to his experiences with stigma at work. Specifically, Avi noted that the small number of Jews working at his office in San Antonio is likely linked to this experience with stigma during Christmas parties.

> I just don't think that there's enough of us in the workforce – at least here in San Antonio. We have an office in New York and I'm sure there's a lot more I would think since the demographics – there's a lot more Jewish people in New York than San Antonio, that there'd be more working at the New York office than here. There might be more in the forefront of the manager's minds where here it's like oh, since we've opened, we've had two giant Christmas trees in the lobby and decorations all over the place, but I don't think that they're trying to be exclusive, I just think that they haven't been informed that other people might not go along with that.

Here we see Avi's experience of being a Jewish individual in a workplace that is predominantly Christian. Avi noted that relative numbers, or the small number of Jews in San Antonio, likely has an impact on his experiences. Furthermore, he indicated that if he worked for the same company's New York office, there likely would be more Jews in the area, and he expects that there would be more understanding of, and acceptance for, his Jewish identity and the practices associated with it.

New York was regularly mentioned by Jews in Texas as a place where Jews are comfortable with their Jewish lives. Once again we see the theme that place (New York

City) can help facilitate a sense of ease for some Jewish individuals that is linked to the number of Jews in the given social context. Devorah describes how,

> I was in New York and … it was really cool because there were so many girls that are, you know, also observant [Jews]. … And there's actually a really cool temple when I went there. There were so many girls that I could hang out with and talk to whenever I wanted. We would go, we would go out to drink or dance at a country club or just sleepovers or whatever. It was really amazing, I was just – I was in heaven the whole time because I had friends like that.

This is because only a small percentage of the Texas Jews identify as Orthodox and Devorah noted in our interview that I was unlikely to meet many people like her because of her age, location, and orthodox lifestyle. Devorah's quotes clearly indicate how daily aspects of social life can be affected by place and the relative number of Jews in the given social context.

These themes were also highlighted by Ester, who noted that place is meaningful in her daily life experiences as a Jewish individual. However, Devorah refers to the contrast of Jewish life in South Florida and Texas. She stated,

> In Miami they are everywhere. **[Inaudible]**, young Israel; five of them in a ten mile block, like it's not uncommon and you've got 500,000 Jewish people living in the tri county area in South Florida to the 10,000 Jews that are in San Antonio. There are 10,000 Jews in my parents' neighborhood to the 1,000 Jewish students in all of San Antonio. You have more than 1,000 Jewish students in some of the high schools. It's just a different experience being there than it is being here.

Although a myriad of places with large Jewish communities were discussed (ie. Los Angeles, South Florida, and New York), the theme of vastly different daily life experiences related to the number of Jews in the given social context was consistent. Although this is a relatively simple idea, it highlights the need for studies that understand the experiences of Jews outside of areas with large Jewish populations from outside the historical and autobiographical lenses. In addition, as Jewish Americans make a

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demographic push toward the South (Rebhun and Goldstein 2006), an understanding of the nuances of Southern Jewish daily life will become ever more pertinent.

*Sense of ease*

Another comparison that came up regularly was the experience of being Jewish in Israel vs. Texas. This is highlighted in an interview with Miriam, who stated,

> "Oh to be around people that speak your language – it's the same thing
> like the first time I went to Israel, I was 12 or 13. We were driving
> through Tel Aviv. It's in Hanukkah and every – it was at night and every
> window had a Menorah in it. When ET says home, I was oh, I'm home. I
> don't experience that here, not that I don't feel it – because Texas is my
> home. I cross the Texas border and I'm like I'm home. But not Jewish
> home."

This distinction drawn between the *Jewish home* and the *home* is indicative of the influence of place on the daily lives of Jewish individuals. Miriam's Jewish home is Israel, a place where being Jewish is the norm- as noted in her comment about all windows having menorahs during Hanukah. It is this experience that Miriam sees as valuable to her and unavailable to her in her other home, Texas. Zahava also noted, "my soul is in Israel and I try to go back as often as I can." Here we see a theme that emerged with regard to major Jewish centers surfacing once again. Israel, however, stood out somewhat in the sense that it is a Jewish nation and was seen as "home" or where the "soul" resides by some respondents.

Another interesting theme that emerged during data collection was the experiences of Jews in Texas vs. large Jewish centers when interacting with non-Jews. This was evident when speaking with Daniel and Ester. It became clear during conversations that non-Jews who live in major metropolitan centers of Jewish life were socialized to be more aware of Jewish life, making daily life for Jews in these places more accommodating (aka sense of ease, or home). On the other hand, non-Jews in

Texas are less aware of Jewish culture- creating a less accepting atmosphere for Jews.

This theme came up during an interview with Daniel, who stated:

> "… I can tell that when I'm talking to the non-Jews in the Northeast, I
> don't have to explain what a Bar Mitzvah is or I throw out a Yiddish term
> here and there, they know what it means. They use it also whereas here
> (Texas) if I say, use some Yiddish term, people say what is that, what does
> that mean or I didn't know that was a Yiddish word or they don't even
> know what Yiddish is and the difference between Yiddish and Hebrew."

These sentiments were also echoed in by Ester, a Jewish mother who has experienced
Jewish life in a variety of places. She stated,

> "It doesn't matter where they're from, what language they speak; if they
> go to a public school in Miami they know what a Bar Mitzvah is, they
> know what confirmation is, they know what Hebrew is, they know the
> basics of the Jewish holidays because there are so many Jewish kids in
> each of these schools that just like everybody is talking about basketball
> practice, the kids are talking about we're in Bar Mitzvah class together
> and it's Joey's Bar Mitzvah this weekend and that one's that weekend
> and everyone from the class is invited so the parents then know. Everybody
> knows what Judaism is. …. So the exposure to is much different."

Ester and Daniel both bring up interesting features of Jewish life as related to the larger

group context.  In social situations where Jews are more prevalent, their experiences

suggest that the dominant group becomes more familiar with Jewish life in social context

where they are more visible.  As noted by Ester, the amount of exposure non-Jews have

to Jewish culture can vastly impact the everyday lives of Jews, allowing them to feel

more comfortable within the larger group context.

*Metropolitan Texas vs. Small Town Texas*

Another theme that emerged from the data was the difference in the experiences

of Jewish individuals depending on geographic location within Texas.  This was often

discussed in terms of small towns vs. large metropolitan areas.  In these cases, Jews noted

that in small towns in Texas Jews are likely to be an extremely small portion of the local

population and face greater amounts of anti-Semitism in these places.  These concepts are

illustrated in quotes from Zahava, a 54 year old Jewish woman who has lived in Texas

for sixteen years.

Zahava:              I live in Austin, I don't live in Waco where they
                     discriminate against people.

Interviewer:         Tell me a little bit about the Austin Jewish community.  You
                     mentioned that you live in Austin and that has something to do with
                     your experience.

Zahava:              If I was in Midland, I don't know if I would want to be Jewish there.
                     I don't know if I'd want to be in a small town in Texas.

Interviewer:         Have you ever been to small town Texas or anything like that?
                     Spent maybe a weekend or something like that in a small town?

Zahava               I've been in Valmarie and I've been in Marfa.  I think I would be
                     considered an oddity or a curiosity or someone would try to
                     convert me.  In general, Jews are more liberal and small towns
                     would be more right wing.  Although, good Christians are
                     supportive of Israel monetarily and whatever.  I just don't think I'd
                     want to be in a small town."

Although it is not clear on what basis Zahava made these claims about Midland (a rather

distinct town from Marfa culturally and geographically), it revealed her perception that

small towns are less accommodating toward her Jewish identity.  In the final quote,

Zahava discussed the reasons that she feels her Jewish identity would be a stigmatized

status in small town Texas.  She noted differences in political attitudes and that she would

be "considered an oddity or curiosity".  It's clear from these quotes that Zahava felt that

in small town Texas, she may be subjected to a stigmatized experience that she would not

be in Austin, Texas.  In addition, at the end of the final quote, Zahava indicates mixed

experiences with Christians.  This is consistent with the themes discussed earlier in this

chapter.  On the one hand, she is concerned that she may be an "oddity", "curiosity" or

could be a target for people who want to convert Jews. On the other hand, she also noted

that "good Christians" take a supportive stance regarding the state of Israel- creating a somewhat double edged sword to Christian interactions.

The difference between being Jewish in large metropolitan areas with Jewish communities and rural areas was also brought up in an interview with Leah, a thirty three year old woman who has lived in Texas for fifteen years. She stated, "In Austin and the surrounding area, it's a little more accepting of everybody.  If I was in Odessa, Midland, Abilene, or some of the southern towns in Texas, I probably wouldn't disclose it (Jewish identity) at all for a while".  This quote clearly highlights the importance of place for Jewish individuals within Texas.  In this quote, the Austin area is described as a more accepting place for Jews than smaller Texas towns.  Furthermore, Leah noted that she would not disclose her Jewish identity in these particular geographic places, causing her to manage her Jewish identity (Goffman 1963).

*Overall Experience in Texas*

When asked about their overall experiences in Texas, respondents had resoundingly positive things to say.  In general, Jews in Texas feel free to practice their Judaism and site the lack of institutional discrimination in Texas as a sign of a pro Jewish sociopolitical context.  In addition, most respondents described incidents of anti-Semitism as rare, occasional, or infrequent.  However, all respondents reported that they have experienced forms of anti-Semitism (as defined by Feagan and Feagan) during their time in Texas.  In an interview with Isaac, he stated: " I think Texas is unique [and] has some of a southern state feel, but it's distinct from the others.  It's just [that] in general, everyone is free to live their lives.  People kind of respect each other's space … I think".  Here we see that Isaac's experiences within Texas are those of general acceptance.  He

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feels that the larger Texas community is fairly respectful of his personal space and Jewish identity as a whole.

However, another respondent noted that, although his experience being Jewish in Texas was positive, it may have been linked to experiences outside of Texas that help individuals understand who they are. Daniel, who is fifty two and has lived in Texas for forty years, brought up this idea during an interview through the following comments. "I've had a great life as a Jew iFn a Texas, it might be misleading because it's not, I think, really because of Texas". Daniel also noted, "It's because I've been lucky enough to have the experiences everywhere else such that when I'm here (Texas) and I get that out-of-place feeling, I draw on those other experiences to help me feel – I always know who I am despite Texas". In this interview, Daniel also indicated that he feels he can be who he wants to in Texas and that he has never felt threatened. These sentiments are very similar to what Isaac describes in the quotes above. However, Daniel noted that the ability to cope with the "out of place feeling" he experiences as a Jew in Texas is linked to his experiences outside of Texas. This helps solidify his identity as a Jewish individual "despite Texas".

Ester, who has only lived in Texas for seven years, noted that to be Jewish in Texas, "… you have to work at it". "I would say you have to work at it. If you don't work at it you can take it for granted. I will say that I've met very knowledgeable teachers here in San Antonio and in Texas but there's a small, strong, committed core group and then everyone else just is basically how I would sum it up in Texas". This quote reveals that, from Ester's perspective, being Jewish in Texas is something that must be accomplished on a daily basis. Here we see that one respondent noted a need to work

at creating a Jewish life around them, as opposed to larger metropolitan areas where the foundation for Jewish life is provided by the number of Jews in the geographic area. Although all respondents reported being happy in Texas, these three quotes reveal the subtle differences within these experiences. Some Jews in Texas feel very at home, some are comfortable despite occasional out of place feelings, and others are comfortable despite having to "work at" being Jewish on a daily basis.

# V. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE JEWISH IN TEXAS?

What does being Jewish mean to you?  This was the question I posed to Jews living in Central Texas that sparks the discussion for the first half of this chapter.  When I asked this question, I received a myriad of interesting responses that indicated subtle differences in the way respondents answer this question. In the second half of this chapter, another main theme that emerged involves how the respondents in this sample identify racially and how these individuals construct their racial identity.

In this section, I follow this work of Gans (1956) who noted that, by in large, Jewish Americans have adopted a symbolic form of Judaism.  *Symbolic Judaism* refers to a form of Judaism where Judaism is one element of the many making up second generation Jewish American life (Gans 1956:427).

When conducting interviews with Jews in Texas, I found a great deal of nuance, or subtle differences, in the meaning of being Jewish to respondents.  While some individuals have highly traditional or symbolic meanings associated with being Jewish, many individuals described being Jewish as a central aspect of their daily lives despite not strictly adhering to traditional elements of Judaism.  These interviews suggest that, rather than a dualism between traditional and symbolic forms of Judaism, respondents fall on a continuum of symbolic to traditional in the way they construct their meaning of Judaism.  In addition, responses from some respondents suggest that the degree to which individuals adopt symbolic or traditional forms of Judaism can ebb and flow based on the larger life circumstances that they find themselves in.

*Symbolic Judaism*

Of the sixteen respondents, three were coded as having highly symbolic meanings associated with their Jewish identity. These respondents were Rachel, Daniel, and Sarah.

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These respondents tended to discuss the meaning of being Jewish in terms of pass time activities, social events, choices, and in ways did not infringe on daily life. In an interview with Sarah, she noted "Basically it (being Jewish) means that I believe in Jewish theology and follow some Jewish traditions. I'm a reformed Jewish person so I don't necessarily adhere to the strict orthodox or Shabbat-like thinking. I don't keep kosher." Sarah reported the meaning associated with her Jewish identity being tied to "some" traditions. She also noted that she does not adhere to "strict orthodox" traditions that would likely infringe upon an Americanized daily lifestyle, including keeping kosher and keeping Shabbat.

> In an interview with Rachel, a fifty seven year old life long Texan, she stated,

> Well, I obviously love the traditions of being Jewish but I can't say that
> I'm actually very observant and that's when you know, you think religion
> is following rules and being observant. So there's a lot of other aspects of
> any Jewish [person]. There's cultural, enjoying the whole cultural aspects
> whether it's food and humor, Jewish humor and Jewish language, Yiddish
> and there's so many cultural identifications and so in that regard, that's a
> high level of my Jewish identification.

Once again we see aspects of traditional Judaism entering the quote but they are largely based on convenience for the respondent. In addition, Rachel described the cultural aspects of her Jewish identity as enjoyable free time activities. This was also evident in Daniel's interview. He noted,

> Well, I would say it's a décor of who I am, is a part of my identity. I don't
> think of myself as like religious. I still participate in the traditional
> religious holidays. I know when the holidays are. I know what the
> holidays mean. I passed on the tradition to my kids. But for me, it's
> mostly; the identity part is mostly about like the *Seinfeld* episode where
> it's about the jokes, probably for the jokes.
> It's more about the jokes, the humor, the music, the commonality I guess
> that the commonality is you can meet a Jewish person from France or
> from Israel or from Australia and you have something in common.

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Daniels comments also show a symbolic meaning associated with his Jewish identity. Daniel is aware of, and participates in, major Jewish holidays. However he noted that Judaism, from his perspective, is primarily based on free time activities such as socializing with Jews from around the world, jokes, humor, and music. Individually and combined, these quotes are indicative of what Gans discussed as symbolic forms of Judaism. It enters the forefront only on occasion, is associated with free time activities, and is not a burden in the daily lives of those who identify with it.

*Traditional*

When looking at respondents whose meanings associated with being Jewish were more based on a traditional form of Judaism, I found Devorah, Chaim, Ester, and Adam. However I also found several respondents whose responses were largely based in traditional forms of Judaism but more nuanced than suggested by Gans (1956). For example, Avi, Saul, Isaac, David and Meirav noted that traditional Jewish values guide their daily decisions despite the fact that they do not adhere strictly to traditional Jewish ceremonial and daily living practices. These individuals reported to associate themselves with a meaning of Judaism that is based on the traditional codes of Judaism but not (or only to a degree) the traditional practices. They base their daily life decisions on traditional Jewish codes but not the ceremonial practices discussed by Gans (1956:425). When asked "What does being Jewish mean to you?", Devorah noted. "So that means that if the mother is Jewish, according to Halacha then. Or conversion". This is a highly traditional answer to this question and is based in Jewish teachings regarding laws and practices called Halacha. Devorah noted that to "be Jewish" a person must be born to a Jewish mother or formally convert. Ester stated, "It is … my value of belief system.

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How I operate my day-to-day life. It's my dietary needs. It's my dress code. It's what my child ingests. It's what my child is exposed to; so I guess it shapes my parenting. The traditions of it shape my family". Ester noted a myriad of daily life routines that revolve around her Jewish identity including her value system, diet, dress code, parenting, and family life. She also noted that the meaning of Jewish identity for her is based in traditional codes and ceremonial practices.

My interview with Saul revealed some nuance in the meaning of Jewish identity that is not explored by Gans (1956) with regard to traditional forms of Judaism. Saul stated, "Every part of my identity is tied up with being a Jew. Meaning, how I view myself in society, how I view my relationships with others, my personal values, how I raise my children, and how I conduct my business". When asked what some of these values are, he noted "Honesty, integrity, doing the right thing, having the core values about how you treat other people, how you expect to be treated – all based on how I was raised as an Orthodox Jew". Here we see that, from Saul's perception, the meaning of being Jewish is largely tied to traditional Jewish codes and values that guide the way Jews socially interact in daily life. Saul later added, "I don't keep kosher. I don't observe the Sabbath. It's (the meaning of being Jewish) a cultural identification, where people identify themselves as Jewish and attend synagogue, engage in all of the Jewish rituals that they can comfortably…". These later quotes reveal that Saul is not tied to traditional Jewish rituals and dietary customs. Yet, he does feel that Jewish codes and values are guiding factors in his daily life and that being Jewish has a meaningful impact on his daily life.

This theme was also found in interviews with Avi and David.  Avi stated, "I think it's how I live my life so that mainly I treat people how I want to be treated, considerate and try to repair the world while I'm here, try to do as much good as I can, nobody's perfect".  David echoes a similar sentiment in his interview by stating,

> Being Jewish, to me, means doing Mitzvots, it's *tikkun olam,* repairing the world, and just recognizing those who aren't Jewish as people, not as people who don't belong on this world.  They are people.  Being Jewish also means, to me, frequently attending *shul*, having a close relationship with your rabbi, being able to be part of community and speak to people that are in your community.

These quotes reveal a meaning of Judaism that is largely based on codes that guide social interactions rather than ceremonial traditions. This suggests more nuance than the duality of traditional and symbolic discussed by Gans (1956).   In addition it reveals that the sample used for this study is made of Jewish Texans who have a myriad of meanings associated with being Jewish.

*Jews in Texas and Race*

Today the Jewish experience in America is largely that of white acceptance (Brodkin 1998).  As noted by Brodkin (1998), Jews have positioned themselves on the white side of the black white binary in the United States.  However, whiteness was achieved at the expense of the Yiddiskiet culture.  In order to become white, many American Jews left behind aspects of eastern European Jewish culture that served to mark them as unique (e.g. Observing the Sabbath, clothing and grooming standards consistent with orthodox European Jewish practices, praying three times a day, and keeping kosher).  The theme of racially identifying as white was consistent in this sample.  In fact, all sixteen respondents reported that they racially identity as "white", "Anglo", or "Caucasian" when asked how they do so on official forms such as the

census. Brodkin (1999), also points out that, despite the adoption of Jews into the white racial category in the U.S., Jews have (or have had in the past) a feeling of being "white, but not like the blond people". These sentiments were expressed in interviews with Miriam, Ilana, Isaac, David, Saul, and Rachel.

"How do you know that you are white"? This was one of the questions that I posed to Jewish respondents, all of whom stated that they identified with the white racial category. This question sparked a great deal of thought in respondents and, presumably, was the first time many respondents had considered this question. Three themes emerge with regard to these responses – phenotypes, ancestry, and social construction. Phenotypic claims to whiteness centered on the concept that these individuals had a pigmentation to their skin that marked them as "white" (See literature review for comments on social construction of race and its relationship to phenotypes). Ancestral claims to whiteness were based on the idea that previous generations were white, therefore they must be. As noted by Zahava," my parents are and their parents are".

During the interviews some respondents gave answers that hinted at the socially constructed nature of racial identity. For example, Daniel stated ""Because I'm white. Well, because I'm not any of the other – because I don't see myself as any of the others, although I do struggle with what the definition of Hispanic is". Here we see how whiteness is a category that is constructed in opposition to "other". In addition, Daniel noted that this identity is based on his own perception of what white is. This also highlights the significance of the social construction of race because the perceived meaning of race is subject to change across time and place. Avi noted that he knows he is white "Because that's what I've been told". Here we see that Avi's concept of

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whiteness emanates from social interactions with others where he is "told" he is white.

The same theme was found in an interview with David who stated, "That's what my birth

certificate says".

Issues with whiteness were evident in several interviews. During Saul's

interview, he noted that he views whiteness in terms of "dominant Protestant Anglo"

culture, that is in stark contrast to Jewishness. This was also evident in my interview

with David. "I like to say that I'm not white and I'm Jewish a lot, but there is no option

for Jew as racial background on an application". When asked to clarify David continued,

> I don't know why I'm white, but I know why I'm Jewish. I can express my
> Judaism to people, but I can't express my – as the term says on the
> application as white – whiteness to people. But I can express my Judaism
> to people. It's weird to say. Many people I meet say, "Well, Christianity
> is my religion and my racial profile is white, black, or Hispanic." I just
> tell them that I feel like I'm Jewish. I'm not white. I'm sure a lot of Jews
> feel the same way. I feel uncomfortable saying I'm white or marking that
> check on a box. It's weird to say.

When probed if he feels whiteness and Jewishness are at odds, he added

> Oh, definitely. Being white is what I feel like is a very Americanized
> term. Your last name has to be Smith or something … and you're living in
> a house and your parents are happily married. I feel like it's a fictional
> term. I don't really like it. But being Jewish – a Jewish person will live
> their life however they want to live it. There are several differences I can
> think of right now. For Judaism, there are a lot of traditions. I don't really
> know very many traditions with the term white...

Rachel also shared similar sentiments about the nature of whiteness and Judaism being at

odds in her interview. When probed about these issues she stated " I think we're (Jews) a

minority and we're really more with minorities, at least I do than the typical white bread

type of personality in America. Ironically they're becoming the minority, slowly but

surely, you know". Here we see that Rachel saw her Jewish identity as being more

closely aligned with a minority group experience rather than the dominate white

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experience. This quote is also interesting because it highlights the importance of the

black white binary (discussed as white bread types and minorities in the quote), but

places Jewish individuals on the minority or black side of the binary. It also reveals the

ability of, at least some, Jews to navigate the color line in various ways. When asked how

she identifies on the census, Rachel noted that she identifies as white. Here we see how

some Jewish individuals identify with but are at times at odds with their perceived white

racial identity.

Some respondents saw white as a category with little or no meaning and therefore

saw themselves as having a primarily Jewish identity. Isaac stated in his interview "I

could identify as ethnically white, I guess we're talking about. But I put an asterisk on it

and would somehow like to – Judaism – even though it's a religion, it's kind of a little

inextricable, I think". Isaac later added, "Caucasian [or] white really doesn't have any

meaning for me". Ilana noted, "I always look to find Jewish, but that's not an option on

there. I usually just put white. There's not really any other option for me because I'm not

Middle Eastern". Ilana latter added, "I don't feel like a Caucasian, I feel like a Jewish

American".

These quotes reveal a great deal of nuance in the way Jewish individuals construct

their racial identity. As reviewed earlier in the chapter, Jewish individuals have been

considered white and nonwhite based on sociopolitical context (CITE). This study

reveals that some Jewish individuals may have a more complex relationship with

whiteness. Although it is the racial category the respondents report to most closely

identify with, at least some Jews in this study report to have a perception that whiteness is

at odds with Jewishness. This leaves some Jews in a unique situations. They choose a

racial identity that they are at odds with in some fashion, leaving a duality in the racial

identity of those respondents.  On one hand they see themselves as part of the white

category, yet they simultaneously understand that they are somewhat different and do not

completely fit this mold.   This finding is similar to themes discussed in the literature

review section.  The work of Karen Brodkin (1998) noted that Jews largely have been

adopted into the white side of the black white binary but are not like other whites.

## VI. PERCEIVING AND NAVIGATING STIGMA, ANTI-SEMITISM AND DISCRIMINATION

"Being eight years old means walking
Alone to the Skillern's Drug Store
At the Park Forest Shopping Center
With my weekly allowance quarter
Searing a hole in my already-sweaty pockets

I know what I'll buy-
The latest Superman or Batman comic book
Whichever one came in that week
And doesn't already live in the pile on my nightstand at home.

With my new Superman comic slipped in the sleek paper bag
Top carefully folded so my sweaty hands don't ruin my treasure,
A grown man stops me on the sidewalk,
Eyeing my Star of David necklace and asking me if I am Jewish.

When I nod yes, (I'm not supposed to talk to strangers),
He tells me that's really too bad for me,
Because didn't I know that Jews burn in Hell when they die?

Tears falling so hard I could barely see,
I dropped my weekly treasure and went home
To Mom so fast I thought
I might keel over before I got to her
And be snatched right down to Hell.

When I told mom what happened,
She put both hands on my shoulders,
Knelt to my height where she could look square in my eyes,
And in that Dallas drawl of hers, said,
'That's okay, honey, don't worry.
We're Jewish.
We don't believe in hell".

(Weingarten 2011:2-3)

The ability to navigate daily social interactions has been a matter of survival for

Jews in the past.  This is evident in the story of Egon Bittner (Cicourel 2013).  While in a

concentration camp during World War II, Egon was able to survive by interacting with

SS Officers who noticed his intelligence and practical skills (Cicourel 2013:33).  After

the war, Egon moved to the United States, where he received his Ph.D. in sociology and taught at many prominent universities.  This chapter examines the various ways Jews in Texas navigate social situations where stigma and/or anti-Semitism associated with their Jewish identity is perceived or experienced.  Although Jews in Texas do not experience institutional forms of oppression, as Egon did in Nazi Germany, they report experiencing more hate crimes than other religious groups in Texas (Texas Department of Public Safety 2013), making the study of anti-Semitism in Texas a point of interest .

The work of Goffman, (1959) noted three key elements to understanding how people present themselves in daily life.  These elements include actor, stage, and audience.  The actor enacts their identity within a given social setting called the stage.  The audience then interprets these actions and relay feedback to the actor regarding their performance.  Goffman (1963) further discussed how individuals manage social situations where they are stigmatized.  One way they manage is by passing (Goffman 1963) as a member of the dominate group.  Another is by covering, or not being overt about, a stigma (Goffman 1963).  This frame is also useful for understanding social interactions where stigma and/or anti-Semitism are perceived and/or experienced by Jewish individuals. As noted in the literature review, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination and forms of anti-Semitism (Feagin and Feagin 2008) that serve to stigmatize Jews.  However, stigma, or the condition of not being fully socially accepted (Goffman 1963: Preface) can be perceived or experienced in other ways (e.g, feeling excluded in a church group.  This is not directly anti-Semitic, but Jews could find it difficult to fit in due to a lack of socialization)

Respondents in this study report various experiences with anti-Semitism inside and outside of Texas.  Some have faced discriminatory actions, such as swastikas painted in public places, while others have experienced the results of social bias through differential treatment. In this section I discuss the meaning of anti-Semitism, circumstances under which Jews in Texas encounter Anti-Semitism in daily life (including work, school, family interactions, interactions with acquaintances, and encounters with strangers).  I then discuss the various ways Jews in Texas navigate social situations where they perceive and/or experience anti-Semitism.

*The Meaning of Anti-Semitism*

As noted in the previous chapter, most respondents reported being comfortable being Jewish in Texas and they have not experienced that anti-Semitism with much frequency.  However, all respondents reported experiencing social situations where anti-Semitism (as defined by Feagin and Feagin) and/or stigma were present. As noted in the literature review, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination are forms of anti-Semitism that serve to stigmatize Jews (Feagin and Feagin 2008:115).  The term anti-Semitism is difficult to define and can take on various meanings.  Therefore, during interviews I asked respondents what the term anti-Semitism meant to them.

The interviews revealed a great deal of variation in the way respondents constructed the meaning of anti-Semitism. Several respondents noted that elements of the Feagin and Feagin definition were relevant to their perceptions of anti-Semitism.  For example, David stated, "It means picking on someone for being Jewish". "Picking on someone" is an action and would therefore be classified under the discrimination section of the Feagin and Feagin definition.   Devorah echoes a similar perception in her

interview by saying "People who are prejudiced against Jews".  In addition Chaim sees

anti-Semitism as "having a negative perception of somebody just because they're

Jewish".  These quotes hinted at the importance of intra-psychic phenomena in the

construction of the meaning of anti-Semitism for some respondents.

Other respondents saw anti-Semitism as a lack of knowledge regarding Jewish

life.  For example, when asked what anti-Semitism means to her Miriam stated, "It just

means people are ignorant, they've got sold a bill of goods about who Jews are, and they

don't really know who we are".  Israel was another theme that was brought up by

respondents in regard to anti-Semitism. Rachel noted that she sees anti-Semitism as,

"Someone who is against the livelihood of a Jew, the Jewish people and the state of

Israel". From this point of view anti-Semitism is not limited to ignorance but rather is

seen as those who are "against" Jews and the state of Israel.  Similar sentiments regarding

the meaning of anti-Semitism were expressed by David who noted,

> It means picking on someone for being Jewish – not necessarily speaking
> about Nazism or Hitler, just picking on someone for being Jewish.  For
> example, throwing a penny or making Holocaust jokes – all of these things
> correlate to the Holocaust, but still.  I think Israeli apartheid is a form of
> anti-Semitism.  A lot of people refer to it as anti-Zionism and it may be
> because you're speaking about Israel, but you're also affecting the Jewish
> people who made Israel into the place it is today.  So a number of things,
> but mostly Holocaust jokes and throwing a penny on the ground is anti-
> Semitism to me.

Here we see a similar construction of the meaning of anti-Semitism to that previously

mentioned by Rachel.  It recognizes the importance of prejudice and stereotypes as

central to anti-Semitism but also noted that he views critiques of Israeli policy with

Palestinians in the West Bank to be anti-Semitic.  These views on Israel are rather

confounding because, presumably, some Jews may critique Israeli policies out of a

genuine love for the state of Israel or a desire to change policy for the better.  Although

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this is not a focus of this study, a deeper understanding of the way Jews may or may not perceive critiques of Israel and possible links to anti-Semitism from their perspectives would be of interest.

One respondent, Isaac, saw anti-Semitism as strictly an institutional phenomenon and did not see micro aggressions as meaningful forms of anti-Semitism. He stated,

> I don't attach that term to individual actions, to an epithet or to even a Swastika painted on a synagogue. I think there's a real distinction to be made between individual actions and societal, organizational, institutional pressures. I think there's a lot less anti-Semitism – well, it's twofold. I guess there's different aspects, but many times what is essentially just individual action or – I guess just that – individual action, is really not what I would raise to the level of anti-Semitism.

Here we see that Isaac perceived anti-Semitism as something that emanates from social institutions in "its meaningful sense". During Leah's interview, a similar theme emerged. According to Leah, anti-Semitism was something that was intended to be hurtful to the Jewish individuals. From this point of view, ignorance would not be construed as anti-Semitic. As noted earlier, this is in direct contradiction to the way Miriam perceived anti-Semitism. From Miriam's point of view anti-Semitism is largely based in the ignorance of non-Jews who speak to Jews. This begins to reveal the complexity of the meaning of the term anti-Semitism, even among members of the Jewish community. However, for the terms of this project I defined anti-Semitism as "stereotyping or prejudice toward, or discrimination against, the Jews" (Feagin and Feagin 2008:115).

When I analyzed reports of anti-Semitism that did occur, I found two specific places where Jews in Texas reported experiences with anti-Semitism – work and school. I also found themes related to the social context in which anti-Semitism occurs- interactions with friends, family, and strangers.   Furthermore, the normativity of Christianity is a common theme that was present in social situations where stigma and/or

anti-Semitism were perceived and/or experienced.  This suggests that place is an important factor regarding the experience of anti-Semitism.  After discussing these ideas, I move onto themes found in the data that shed light on the various ways Jews in Texas navigate social situations where anti-Semitism are perceived or experienced.  Themes of management and engagement emerge at this point that differ from classic Goffmanian concepts centered on identity management.   I find that individuals do not simply handle all social situations regarding anti-Semitism the same way.  Several respondents stated they were more likely to disclose their Jewish identity during an anti-Semitic incident based on their comfort level, the acceptance level they perceive from the audience, and the threat level within the given social context. Choice in promoting or managing Jewish identity is often based on the social context and provides unique tools to Jews in social situations where anti-Semitism is present. However, it should be noted that this sample did not include any Orthodox Jewish men.  *Passing* (Goffman 1963) may be a more complex situation to these individuals because they are required by religious law to have traditional beards, wear pais (long sideburns traditionally worn by orthodox Jewish men), and a yamaka (head covering traditionally worn by observant Jewish men to signify respect for God) in all social situations. These are symbols of Jewish life and practice that make it difficult for them to *pass* (Goffman 1963).

*School and Work*

Work was a common place where respondents reported experiencing anti-Semitism and/or stigma. Of the sixteen respondents, three were currently full time students and not working and five worked in a workplace with a large proportion of Jews (ex. Jewish community centers, university campus, synagogues).  This left eight respondents who worked in primarily non Jewish environments.  Of these eight

respondents five reported encounters in the workplace with anti-Semitism or stigma associated with being Jewish.

Some of these social interactions were based on the use of stereotypes related to Jewish greed. For example, both Rachel and Saul report that during interactions with business associates they were told "don't Jew me down". This same term was mentioned by Daniel when describing an interaction with a coworker.

> I do remember one situation at work where I had an office mate who I think she might have known I was Jewish but didn't remember that I was and there was some situation where I think I owed her like .55 cents or something from a soda machine or vice versa, and I don't remember exactly how the conversation went, but she said something like I wasn't trying to Jew you down.

This is an example of the stereotype of the greedy Jew being expressed in the workplace. As noted in the literature review, these stereotypes are forms of anti-Semitism that serve to distinguish Jews as 'others', creating stigma. Although most respondents report that these situations do not occur frequently, they are situations that do arrive.

Christmas in the workplace was another theme that was regularly brought up by Jews as a way they felt stigma related to their Jewish identity. Rather than having holiday or winter themed parties that are inclusive of all individuals, many Jews who worked outside of a Jewish workplace reported feeling uncomfortable with Christmas in the public workplace. Avi noted feeling a sense of not being included in Holiday Christmas parties.

> They still had a Christmas party and so I didn't RSVP to attend and several people stopped by and asked why I wasn't going. I said well because you're having specifically a Christmas party and not a holiday party or winter holiday or whatever kind of party that would be more inclusive in my opinion to me and other people who may not – who may be atheist or some other religion in the workplace. That was brought up and discussions made and it was like well, even though I can go, I can't

eat a lot of the food and participate in other ways, have gift exchanges and
stuff like that that I didn't feel like participating in.

The issue of Christmas themed parties in the work place was also discussed by Saul. In

his interview, Saul recalled an incident where he felt pressured to contribute to an Office

Christmas tree fund. "I was in the [office] and [a coworker] said that everyone's going to

donate $5.00 for a Christmas tree and everything. And we had another Jewish [individual

in the room]. It was interesting. He said, "Is that okay with you, [Saul]?" I said to him,

"No, I'm never going to give you any money. Ever. Never. In fact, you'll have to beat it

out of me." Here we Saul's reaction to being singled out about his Jewish identity in a

work situation that construct Christianity as normative. He is strongly committed to his

Jewish identity, engages the situation, and does not participate in these Christian

normative events despite the pressure he feels from coworkers.

Interviews with Saul and Rachel also revealed a great deal of differential

treatment in the work place. Saul stated, "I worked for a lawyer by the name of [*****]

in Houston – who is still alive – who was the biggest anti-Semite I've ever experienced.

He used to call me the Irishman, which was code for calling me a Jew boy". When

probed further, Saul added,

> Yeah, he would call me the Irishman. "I want to talk to the Irishman."
> When I was a [****] in Houston, a lot of it. I heard a lot of it. People
> would curse me out. That's how they would say it. They wouldn't call me
> just an asshole – Jew boy, motherfucker, die kind of shit. So I got a lot of
> that.

Saul also recalled an experience with coworkers earlier while living in Austin,

Texas and working as a bus driver. "They were rednecks and were from all parts of

Texas. They had never really met Jews before. They had a lot of things to say about

something they didn't know very much about. So that was an issue." When probed

about statements made Saul added, "Oh, you know, "Where's your horns? Jew me

down." Those kinds of things." These quotes highlight the importance of token Jews and solo status by noting that Saul was the first Jew these individuals had met. During her interview, Rachel stated, "so I deal with a lot of middle-aged men who are Texans in banks and I'll tell you, they remind me I'm Jewish." She added, "All the time – little jokes, you know, the don't Jew me down business…" Rachel later shares, "so my secretary once said to me, she's a secretary of 10 years, you Jews are so rich, you all know how to make money. I was like god, you've worked here for 10 years you know, that's kind of scary that you – but I didn't say anything to her." These interviews reveal a great deal about the experiences of Jewish Texans in the workplace. As we have seen, a myriad of experiences related to anti-Semitism and/or stigma are encountered in this place that is an inherent part of everyday life for these individuals. These Jewish individuals reported encounters with stereotypes, coded language, bias, and several other forms of anti-Semitism and/or stigma at work.

The topic of Israel was one that came up during interviews with Jewish respondents, particularly those conducted during the summer of 2014. During this time tensions between the Israeli government and Palestinian groups in the West Bank were escalating to the point of military action. Several respondents report feeling uncomfortable discussing Israel during this time and note a lack of historical understanding and Jewish stereotypes linked to these conversations. Because arguments made to the former point are outside of the scope of this project, I focus on the latter assertions regarding Jewish stereotypes related to Israel. "…just because I'm Jewish, doesn't mean I wrote this law. I don't know the history behind this. I think they think that every Jew knows". This quote by Avi is an illustration of the daily life situations

where Jews encounter stereotypes in the workplace.  From Avi's perspective, his coworkers believe that "every Jew knows" or is complacent in the activities of the Israeli government.

School was another place that respondents report encountering anti-Semitism and stigma related to their Jewish identity.  As noted by Zahava, "When I was in college, someone called me a kike."  Adam recalled his experience being Jewish on a college campus of predominantly Christians and having three Christian roommates by stating,

> When I got to college, in the Bible Belt, I was roommates with three pretty devout Christians, one Baptist, and two from the Church of Christ.  In one case, I was the only – I was the first Jew that they had ever met.  Most of my freshman year was spent trying to defend my belief system to them because they were trying to convert me in order to save my soul from going to hell.  It was extremely disturbing to me and upsetting because I was just as good a person as they were, but they had been taught that the only path to Heaven was through Jesus.  There were only seven Jews in the entire college, a population of 1,200.

Adam later added "The experience in college made me question myself and my upbringing a little bit".  Adam also noted that the proportion of Jews at the college he attended was relevant to his experience, further suggesting that location within Texas and the proportion of Jews in the given social context can be instrumental in shaping the experiences of Jews in Texas.   Here we see how experiences with anti-Semitism that are linked to location and skewed ratios, can have an effect on the identity of Jewish individuals.  To further add to the complexity of Jewish Christian relations in Texas, Adam noted that after several years of interacting with these Christian roommates, they have become more accepting of his Jewish identity.  In fact, he still keeps close ties with these roommates and they now attend Jewish functions celebrated by Adam's family. This theme is similar to the ideas brought up in the previous chapter which note that Jewish Christians can have complex social interactions based on Jews' social position.

Jews are similar to, yet slightly different than, the dominate culture- Christianity. Another interesting theme that emerged from the datum was that University settings with larger Jewish populations were tied to better experiences for Jews in college. For example, Jewish respondents who attended Brandeis University and the University of Texas at Austin reported positive experiences being Jewish on campus.

Sarah grew up as a member of the only Jewish family in her small town. She recalled an incident where anti-Semitism was prevalent while attending an interfaith Sunday School course at a church in her home town.

> I went to enough religious school; I know the answer to these questions. I paid attention to the teacher and when the teacher said who is the lord and savior, I said it's Jesus Christ because I was trained that that's the answer that they want, not because that's what I believed. Then when we got together for the church portion, she basically claimed that she had saved my soul because I knew that answer.

Sarah added, "I remember being very conflicted with that and feeling like well, I didn't say he was my lord and savior". Sarah noted that, as one of the few Jews in town she regularly found herself immersed in Christian centric environments because this was the established norm in the area. Therefore, for Sarah, this experience of stigma associated with her Jewish identity while at Church was rather commonplace. Sarah's comments are interesting for several reasons. She noted that she has been socialized, through her Christian environment, to answer questions "properly" despite her lack of belief in such answers. This quote illustrates the concepts discussed in the literature review, which suggests Christianity is a normative category that has the power to structure the lives of those it categorizes (Kaye-Krantowitz 1996:141). My study suggests that this phenomenon may also be linked to the relative number of non-Christians in the given social context.

Devorah recalled, "… in middle school somebody drew a swastika on my locker". This represents an act of discrimination. However, only three of the sixteen respondents report experiencing acts of discrimination related to their Jewish identity during their time in Texas. Adam reported another incident involving swastikas in public places. During my interview, he recalled,

> When I was in high school, the cemetery was desecrated by Swastikas on many of the graves. The gang -- it was an initiation to spray swastikas my grandfather's tombstone and many of my other relatives. It was my first potent experience with anti-Semitism...

Although this particular incident took place in a Jewish cemetery, and not school or work, it shows how Jewish individuals encounter anti-Semitism in a myriad of daily life circumstances.

Being the mother of Jewish children at public schools in Texas can be a challenge. This point was brought up by Zahava, a Jewish mother whose children attend public schools in Texas, during our interview. She recalled that the school scheduled a lock in for Yom Kippur and she "… was very angry about that and also they had people handing out New Testaments on the school property. I had to go in and talk to the principal about that. I'm always the one that's having to bring up these things. I'm sure I walk in the door and they go ugh, she's walking in the door again". Here we see how Zahava perceives that her interactions with individuals at the school are unwelcome. The need to discuss school holidays and their overlap with school activities is no necessary for the dominate Christian group, yet is part of everyday life for Jewish Texans (and likely many other minority groups). On top of this, Zahava is met by, what is perceived to be, an unwelcoming environment.

When discussing if there were any social situations where his Jewish identity made the social situation awkward, David recalled "First encounters and first meet-ups – maybe study sessions in my study group – I'll get together with them and they'll say, "Well, [David], how about you tell us a little bit more about your Judaism?" "I know it's awkward when they bring it up while we're not even speaking about that specific topic. I know when they bring it up, that specific person most likely has an issue with the way a Jewish person lives". Here we see that even during seemingly mundane social interactions on campus, such as a study session, the need to negotiate stigma and potential anti-Semitism associated with Jewish identity can arise.

*Social interactions*

Social interactions with friends, family, and other acquaintances was another theme that emerged regarding ways Jews in Texas report experiencing Anti-Semitism. For example, Meirav noted an experience with anti-Semitism after breaking up with a boy in high school. "When I was in high school, I was at a party and I had broken up with a boy that I was dating. He had a little bit too much to drink and was angry about that. He called me – I wasn't there, but he referred to me as a kike." Here we see the use of derogatory terminology that serves to distinguish Jews as "others". Further contributing to the sad nature of this finding is the fact that anti-Semitism in emanating from sources close to these individuals. When recalling an interaction with friends in his youth, Adam stated,

> I also had friends who would make comments in high school, stereotypical comments about Jewish people being stingy, think they were funny. They were comments that I didn't fully understand at the time and as I went and talked to my parents about them, it became clear that those were lessons that my friends were learning from their parents.

Adam, later continues by adding,

> My closest friends never made any comments. They were people that
> were in our groups, so to speak, who I was not as close with – one
> recollection I have is of one kid. We were all going out to lunch one time.
> He thought he was being funny. He took a quarter out of his pocket, threw
> it on the ground, and said go get it, [Adam]. Like the Jew is going to pick
> up any spare change that they find. Because no one else would pick up a
> quarter that they found.

Adam's experience is indicative of the way stereotypes are employed by anti-Semites to create stigma surrounding Jewish identity. Although Adam is able to choose the friends he keeps, friends of friends can be bring about complex social interactions related to Jewish identity. Here we see how anti-Semitism, while not an experience that Jews are subjected to on a daily basis, is potentially looming in social situations over which the person may have little control.

Another example is evident in an interview with Chaim, who stated, "There was an ex-neighbor – we have a very tight little community – [he] was convinced we're all going to hell because we were Jewish". A similar story was told by Zahava who regularly speaks to her Catholic neighbor who suggest that the acceptance of Jesus into her heart will be the link to the salvation she needs. Zahava also shared experiences where she regularly discusses these concepts with an acquaintance who noted that she is concerned for her soul in the afterlife but considers Zahava, "Her sister in Christ". From the point of view of Zahava and Chaim, these comments are made out of genuine curiosity about Jews and tend to not offend them. However, following the work of Barbra Trepagnier (2006), I argue that the divide between the dominate group and "others" can be perpetuated by those with "good" or "curious" intentions. These well-meaning, or curious, Christians, may not (or may) intend to be anti-Semitic. Regardless, the construction of their arguments serves to distinguish Christianity as a dominant and superior practice while claiming Jews are morally inferior ("going to hell"). This

research finds that anti-Semitic incidents, emanating from individuals close to Jews in their everyday lives, is a theme found in interviews with several respondents.

*Reactions to Anti-Semitism and stigma*

This study finds three themes regarding the ways Jews in Texas navigate social situations where anti-Semitism is perceived or experienced. This first is in classic Goffman fashion where Jewish actors feel compelled to manage their Jewish identity for a non-Jewish audience. In this perspective the onus is placed on the actor to conform to the needs of the audience. This was seen in my interview with Avi who noted that he removes his kippah when he walks into work. I also find that Jews in Texas promote their Jewish identity during social interactions where anti-Semitism and/or stigma are perceived and/or experienced. In these situations, Jewish actors place the onus on the audience to understand their performance as a Jewish actor. This is evident in my interview with David who notes that he feels compled to teach people about Jewish life because they lack a true understanding of what that entails. For example, these Jews tend to feel a need to educate individuals who use anti-Semitic terminology. Finally, many Jews choose to rationalize the social situation in their head. This is an intra-psychic phenomenon where Jewish actors decide that the audience is incapable or unwilling to understand their performance and that the opinions of the audience are therefore unimportant. Jews tend to move between these two ways of negotiating social situations based on the social context they find themselves in.

When interviewing respondents, it became clear that the situational context under which Jews experience anti-Semitism is a key element to understanding how these situations are navigated. Depending on the respondent, several would negotiate these situations differently based on the given location, threat level, comfort level with the

person, and whether they perceived the audience to be antagonistic or curious toward

their Jewish identity.  Many respondents report that within certain social contexts they

will not reveal their Jewish identity.  Most consistent among these themes was the threat

of physical harm.  In this situational context many respondents note that they would not

disclose their Jewish identity.

*Managing Jewish Identity*

As noted by Goffman (1963), individuals who experience stigma related to their

identity often manage social situations.  This is done by passing as a member of the

dominate group or by covering this stigmatized identity (Goffman 1963). Covering refers

to social situations where individuals are not overt about their stigmatized identities.  For

example, Jewish individuals may choose to cover their Jewishness by removing a

Yamaka (Jewish head covering worn to signify respect for God) in a given social context.

Some respondents report using this techniques to negotiate situations where anti-

Semitism was perceived or experienced.

During Leah's interview, she noted that her ability to pass as Christian was

relevant to her everyday life experiences growing up in Oklahoma.

> I think just having grown up in Oklahoma versus being on the East Coast,
> I was a little bit more careful about who I'm talking to and try to get a feel
> for who they are first before disclosing that (Jewish identity).  I think
> every Jew has this concern that if somebody were to find out that they
> were Jewish, there might be some anger or some reaction that wouldn't be
> favorable.

Leah's quote reveals a great deal about negotiating anti-Semitism in the South.  To begin,

she noted the importance of place in negotiating social situations where anti-Semitism

was perceived by drawing the differentiation between the east coast and Oklahoma.  She

then noted that she prefers to interact with people before revealing her Jewish identity.

The fact that she must disclose her Jewish identity is evidence that she passes as a non-Jew in her daily life. However, Leah saw her Jewish identity as a central part of her life and noted "Being Jewish has basically shaped my entire identity and my life choices". This puts Leah in a difficult social context- Jewish identity is important to her, yet she cannot openly discuss it due to potential encounters with anti-Semitism or stigma that are connected to geographic location. Although Leah's experience was in Oklahoma, this state has an even smaller portion of Jews when compared to the overall population (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2014).

When looking at the ways Jewish individuals cover, interviews with Ester and Avi are of particular interest. Ester stated,

> But at the same time I don't necessarily wear my Jewish star as proudly as I should in some of the areas. Like I'd rather just cover it up or put it inside of my shirt or something if I'm wearing it than have some of the issues that could potentially arise in some of these neighborhoods. Like when I'm in neighborhoods that I know I'm going to be going to like the little Czech town or the little German town.

Here we see Ester's perception that it is in her best interest to cover symbols of her Jewish identity when in small, historically German, towns in Texas. Once again we see links between place and how Jews negotiate stigma associated with a Jewish identity. In this case the need to cover is associated with small, historically Czech and German, Texas towns. This theme of identity management in small towns was evident in my interview with Meirav who noted, "If I was in Odessa, Midland, Abilene, or some of the southern towns in Texas, I probably wouldn't disclose it (Jewish identity) at all for a while". Here we see that Meirav would choose to pass as a member of the dominant group in certain sociopolitical contexts. Similar links to specific places were found in Avi's statements. During our interview, Avi noted, "I don't wear the kippah in the office.

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… I think it might create a situation. … I don't want people making a big deal out of it.  I don't want to draw attention to myself as being, I guess, different in the work place… and I take it off as soon as I get into the building and put it on when I walk out".  This quote ties together several aspects of my thesis study.  To begin, we see the importance of place.  The office is a place where Avi experiences stigma associated with his Jewish identity, causing him to cover his identity on a daily basis when he enters work.  This highlights the situational context of the negotiation of Jewish identity.  When asked if he would like to wear his kippah at work, Avi stated that he would but does not.  This finding echoes the work of Yoshino (2006), who finds that coerced conformity, or the need to cover racial and ethnic identities, is a challenge to the civil rights of Americans.  Here we see how Avi would like to be overtly ethnic in his workplace, yet he is faced with a workplace where he feels coerced to conform on a daily basis.

*Engagement*

Another form of negotiating social situations where anti-Semitism was perceived or experienced was the concept of promoting Jewish identity through engagement.  In these situations, that are typically associated with times Jews feel comfortable and safe in the given social context, Jews will promote their Jewish identity to audience members who give them negative feedback regarding their Jewish identity.  Some of the ways respondents report doing this is through education and humor.   As noted previously the decision regarding weather to promote or manage Jewish identity is largely contingent upon the social context, or stage.

One way engagement occurs in social situations where anti-Semitism is perceived and/or experienced is through education.  This was evident in an interview with David who stated, "I have bouts with anti-Semitism, but I have been able to teach those anti-

Semitic people that Judaism is not a bad religion. I educate them, because without me educating them they would never learn the true [concept] of what a Jewish person feels Judaism is." Here we see that David sees the actions of the anti-Semitic audience as the product of a lack of education regarding his performance as a Jewish individual. Therefore, he feels that he must engage these individuals in order to make them more aware of what Judaism truly is. However, later in the interview, David noted,

> But especially in El Paso, people have really paid attention to my Judaism and their whole idea that all Jews are rich and all Jews can do this and that that non-Jews can't do. So inviting non-Jews to my house has made things very awkward because of the details they've paid attention to and look at the most. I really wish they didn't do that. Now, in situations with friends, I've made my house off limits because of the number of things they do pay attention to.

*The Importance of Context*

My interview with Saul provides interesting insight into the importance of situational context for navigating Jewish identity. Saul described himself as extremely connected to his Jewish identity and noted that it influences his life meaningfully. Saul identifies as an Orthodox Jew. He even stated that he "sometimes thinks in Hebrew" and that Jewish values guide his ethics and all aspects of decision-making. He is also shared that he is very open about his Jewish identity in the vast majority of social situations and noted that he is not concerned with the way audiences interpret his performance as a Jewish actor. However, Saul noted that there are situational contexts where he would hide his Jewish identity.

> The only time I would be hesitant to do it (disclose Jewish identity) is if I'm in an unsafe situation. Safety is an issue. You can't be an idiot. If there are people with hoods on and automatic weapons, maybe you don't bring that (Jewish identity) up. But other than that, I couldn't give a fuck. If you don't like me, fine.

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Saul later added, "It's a safety thing. You are who you need to be to keep from getting hurt. But other than that – I know all of these priests. They know I'm Jewish. I tell them right away". Here we see Saul is typically very forward and open about his Jewish identity, even in social situations where he interacts with priests. Yet, he noted that safety is key to the decision to be passive or active about his Jewish identity, highlighting the importance of situational context.

The perception that stigma could emanate from social situations with non-Jews also effects the way Jews navigate social situations with non-Jewish individuals. This came up in the interview with Devorah,, who is an Orthodox Jewish woman. Part of orthodox Jewish practice consists of wearing clothing that is conservative in nature. During our discussion, Devroah recalled

> I'll wear a skirt that goes down to the knees and a long-sleeved shirt to the elbow in the summer. And people – I remember going to a party and people, and some people were just like, "Did you just get out of work?" Or, "You look so professional. … I just say no. … I mean, I'll talk about it (Orthodox Jewish identity) with Jews, but non-Jews, it's just, it's just I don't know. I feel like if I start talking about it, then they'll think I'm a freak.

Here we see that Devorah chooses to pass as a normative in a social situation where her dress (an aspect of her Jewish identity) is relevant to the social situation. In fact, she goes on to note that when she is around other Jews she promotes her Jewish identity. However, because she perceives that she may be stigmatized ("they will think I'm a freak") in social situations with non-Jews, she manages these social situations through the use of information control (Goffman 1963). This is indicated by her "no" response, that does not reveal the true reason for her dress - it is linked to her beliefs as an orthodox Jew. In addition, Devorah refers to Jewishness as "it", suggesting that the term "Jewish"

has stigma associated with it.  This was also found in the interview with Leah, who stated,

> I think just having grown up in Oklahoma versus being on the East Coast, I was a little bit more careful about who I'm talking to and try to get a feel for who they are first before disclosing that (Jewish identity).  I think every Jew has this concern that if somebody were to find out that they were Jewish, there might be some anger or some reaction that wouldn't be favorable.

Leah's quotes reveal the importance of geographic context in navigating Jewish identity. She then highlighted the importance of place in the navigation of her Jewish identity by discussing the juxtaposition between Oklahoma and the east coast.  In addition, she noted the importance of how she feels the audience is reacting to her statements.  This indicates that she is more open about her Jewish identity in social contexts where individuals are more accepting of her differences.   Finally, she noted that this is something she feels is common among Jewish individuals and not an individual experience.

In my interview with Isaac, he also discussed how the degree to which he is he is open about his Jewish identity is based on the social context.  "I kind of base the degree of detail [to which I disclose my Jewishness] on my understanding of the other person's capacity to kind of comprehend, or the degree to which their varying judgments are going to the scope of the conversation".  Isaac promotes his Jewish identity in a social context where he feels the audience can understands and is not judgmental of his performance Within these quotes by Jewish Texans, the perceived need to navigate Jewish identity based on the greater social context is apparent.

## VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

When beginning this study, I aimed to explore how living in Texas impacts the perceptions and experiences of Jewish individuals, what being Jewish means to Jews in Texas, and how Jews in Texas navigate social situations where anti-Semitism and stigma are perceived or experienced.

Place was found to be meaningful in the daily life experiences of Jewish individuals. Specifically, the proportion of Jews to non-Jews in Texas was influential in a myriad of daily life experiences for Texas Jews. All study respondents noted an awareness of the skewed ratios that exist regarding Jews and the larger Texas population. This manifests itself in various ways in the lives of Jews, from dating to everyday social interactions with non-Jews. In addition, my respondents report experiences that suggest they are similar to, yet sometimes considered quite different than, the dominant Christian group. This findings are similar to the work of Cohen and Bar Shalom (2006), who found that Jews in Texas negotiate and compromise their Jewish identity to live relatively comfortably in the predominantly Christian society. However, this study explores the various experiences and perceptions that Jews in this sociopolitical context have, adding to the literature.

In addition, I found evidence that two respondents felt that, despite being labeled as "others" by Christians, the intent of these conversations was positive. In these social interactions respondents were told that they were going to hell because they were Jewish, yet perceived the intentions of the person who made the remark to be good. I argue a similar point to Trepagneir (2006), who noted that well intentioned white people perpetuate the racial divide. I argue that well intentioned Christians can perpetuate a

religious divide between the dominate Christian group and "others".  The concept that Jews (or any other group) are going to hell is based on the notion that they are morally inferior to Christians.  Regardless of the intention of the individual who states these ideas, it serves the same purpose- the perpetuation of difference between Jews and Christians.  Ultimately, more research will need to be done in order to understand if this phenomenon takes place on a larger scale during Judeo-Christian interactions.

The importance of place was evident in the everyday lives of Jews interviewed in this study.  This suggests a need for further exploration of the various ways location effects the everyday lives of Jewish Americans.  As the proportion of the Jewish American population in the South rises, the need to understand the perceptions and experiences of Jews in this sociopolitical context will become ever more important.   In particular, an understanding of the experiences of Jews in rural and metropolitan areas of the South and how they form and navigate their ethno racial identities would serve to clarify differences among rural and metropolitan experience.  In addition, the way Jews in the South interact with various Christian denominations would be of interest.  This study simply looks at Jewish Christian interactions.  However, an exploration into Jewish interactions with various Christian groups (Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witness, Evangelicals, Baptists, etc.) would provide a more nuanced understanding of Judeo-Christian relations in the South.

The second chapter of this study explored what being Jewish meant to respondents and how they perceive their racial identities.  Respondents described a meaning of being Jewish that had more subtle variation than the duality of symbolic and traditional Judaism described by Gans (1956).  For example, I find evidence of a

continuum that respondents fall upon with regard to the meaning associated with their

Jewish identity that stretches from symbolic to traditional. I found that many respondents

reported observing codes associated with traditional Judaism in their daily lives but did

not engage in the ceremonial daily practices associated with being Jewish. In addition, I

find that respondents moved along this continuum at different stages in life. This

suggests that age may be a mediating factor in the way Jews perceive the meaning of

being Jewish. For example, some people reported becoming less traditional as they grew

older, others reported becoming more traditional as they aged. This suggests that the

degree to which some Jewish individuals engage in symbolic or traditional elements of

Jewish life may be part of an existential, or life course (Kotarba 2013), process. Further

research regarding the life course of Jewish individuals from an existential perspective

may shed more light on this concept.

The latter half of the second chapter centered on the racial identity of Jews in

Texas. As noted in this chapter, my respondents all reported to identify as white when

asked to on official forms such as the census bureau. However, some respondents note a

sense of Jewishness being at odds with whiteness. Respondents were also asked, "How

do you know you are white"? This revealed three themes in terms of racial identity

construction for Jewish individuals. These themes were related to ancestral heritage,

phenotypic skin color, and the social construction of race. These findings suggests that

the racial identity of Jews may change when asked to categorically identify their race, as

opposed to situations where they are asked to qualify their racial identity. This is similar

to the work of Karen Brodkin (1999), who found that Jewish individuals have crossed the

racial divide in the United States, yet still experience difference from the "blond people".

The third chapter of this study discusses the various ways Jews in Texas navigate social situations where anti-Semitism and/or stigma are perceived to be present or directly experienced. I began with a discussion which noted that Jews in Texas do not report experiencing a great deal of anti-Semitism in their daily lives. However, upon further investigation, the meaning of the term anti-Semitism varies greatly among respondents. For these reasons, I rely on the definition of anti-Semitism provided by Feagin and Feagin,(2008) "stereotyping or prejudice toward, or discrimination against, the Jews" (115). However, the need for future studies which better understanding the meaning of anti-Semitism from a Jewish perspective would help inform this line of research. In addition, I found one confounding report regarding the perception of anti-Semitism as being related to all critiques of Israel. Future research would be well served to better understand if there are perceived links between critiques of the Israeli government and anti-Semitism among the Jewish American population.

I also found that all respondents reported experiencing anti-Semitism (under Feagin and Feagin's definition) at some point. Work and school were found to be specific places that Jewish individuals in Texas navigated their Jewish identity in light of overt anti-Semitism and *micro aggressions* (Sue et. al. 2007). Micro aggressions refer to brief exchanges (verbal, non-verbal, and visual) that are often automatic or unconscious, which serve to denigrate a marginalized (often racial) group (Sue et. al. 2007:273).

In addition, the proportion of Jews in the school or work place was a mediating factor in the experiences of Jews in these places. Those who attended universities with larger Jewish populations and those who worked in places with more Jews reported less anti-Semitism at work and at school. As noted in chapter three, this may not simply be

because Jews do not spout anti-Semitic comments toward other Jews. Rather, when there are more Jews in the given social setting, those who are non-Jewish become more aware of Jewish life, potentially lessening the view of Jews as "others. These findings highlight the need for more research in higher education that examines the disturbing trends of discrimination and anti-Semitism on college campuses. In addition, it highlights a need for an understanding of the experiences Jews have in the workplace. Researchers who look into this this phenomenon would be well served to differentiate between environments that have large numbers of Jews and those which have few in the given context. In addition, further research looking into the importance of context in navigating Jewish identity would serve to further the academic discussion on anti-Semitism, its effects on Jews.

When conducting this study, I found two ways respondents navigated social interactions where anti-Semitism and/or stigma were perceived and/or experienced-management and engagement. Ultimately, I found that respondents did not solely choose to promote or manage their Jewish identity in all social contexts. Respondents tended to navigate the situation differently based on the social context. This adds to the body of literature on anti-Semitism by noting the importance of the social context for navigating social situations where anti-Semitism is perceived and/or experienced. In addition, I found three mediating factors that were linked to the way Jews navigated these social situations-age, time spent in Texas, and Jewish education. Older respondents tended to report that they were more likely to manage their Jewish identity when they were younger and became more comfortable promoting their Jewish identity when they were older. This also appears to be linked to more education regarding, and awareness of, Jewish

identity. For example, Adam noted in his interview that he became more comfortable with being Jewish and expressing his Jewish identity as he became more knowledgeable on the subject though out his life. I found that three respondents reported that they were more likely to manage their Jewish identity when they were younger. With age, they reported becoming more comfortable with, and educated about, Judaism. From their perspectives this helped them promote their Jewish identity later in life. This also suggests the need for future research that examines Jewish life as an existential, or life course (Kotarba 2013) process. In addition I noticed that respondents who reported attending Jewish day schools, summer camps, and actives reported to promote their Jewish identity more often.

This study expands on the work of Dashefsky and Sheskin (2014) who showed that the Jewish population of Texas is rather minute when compared to the larger Texas population. I found that several factors related to geographic space nuance, or subtly change, the daily lives of Jews in Texas. These findings echo those of Cohen and Bar Shalom (2006) who noted that Jews compromise to live in relative ease in the largely Christian environment of Texas. The vast majority of respondents reported to enjoy their lives in Texas. However, this study explores the sociobiographies (Feagin, Orum, Sjoberg 1991) of Jews in Texas in order to examine their social lives. In conducting this project, I add an in depth look into some of the various ways Jews compromise to live at ease in this sociopolitical context.

I also expand on Gans' work (1956) by noting the continuum of meaning associated with being Jewish. In particular, findings related to the way Jews in Texas adhere to traditional codes but not practices described by Gans (1956). This suggests

more complexity than the previously noted, symbolic and traditional forms of Judaism. In addition, this study reveals that this the meaning associated with Jewishness is not stagnant, rather it is subject to change throughout the life course.

This work also expands the literature on Jews and their relationship to the white racial category.  As noted by Goldstein (2006) "whites had a particularly difficult time seeing Jews as part of a unified, homogenous white population, but also because whiteness sat uneasily with many central aspects of Jewish identity" (1).   Six respondents in this study shed light on the later concept through their interviews.  They saw whiteness as being at odds with aspects of their Jewish identity.  This study takes this historical account and discusses whiteness in terms of contemporary American Jews living in Central Texas.  As we see, Jews have a complex relationship to whiteness that is linked to history and the racialization process.

Although this research is focused on Jews in Texas, it is intended to add to the literature on racial and ethnic relations in the United States.  As noted in the work of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014:130), one line of rhetoric used to justify racist attitudes is "If Jews, Italians, and Irish have made it, how come Blacks have not?".  This line of thinking equates the experiences of all immigrant groups and overlooks the voluntary nature of immigration for European immigrants while most early African American immigrants to the United States were forced to emigrate as slaves.  The everyday life experiences of members of minority groups are there for disproportionately affected by the historical circumstances groups entered the United States under (Bonilla-Silva 2014:131; Steinberg 2001) and barriers to racial equality that persist today (Alexander 2012; Anderson 2012; Bonilla Silva 2014; Feagin and Cobas 2014).

My study finds that several Jewish individuals involved in the study navigated social situations where anti-Semitism and/or stigma were perceived and/or experienced based on the situational context. Because being Jewish is a mutable trait for these respondents, they are able to choose what situations to promote and manage their Jewish identity. This allowed these individuals to navigate these social situations in unique ways that are not available to members of many racial and ethnic minority groups. Most individuals cannot shed their race because it is not a mutable trait (Yoshino 2007). Because Jews are able to pass (Goffman 1959) as white actors in these social situations, they are able to choose when to confront oppression and when to manage it through identity management. This sheds light on the logical inconsistency of the rhetoric of contemporary racists (Bonilla Silva 2014:130). The quality of being Jewish, Italian, or Irish is more easily muted than phenotypes on a person's skin.

However, the need to manage identity is a double edged sword for my respondents. Managing Jewish identity in social situations is evidence that these individuals are coerced to conform. Therefore, I echo the sentiments of Kenji Yoshino (2007) who noted that coerced conformity is a challenge to the civil rights of many contemporary Americans, including Jews. These individuals experience coercion to conform in work and school situations. In being coerced to do so, the ability to express a Jewish identity is challenged though social interactions. At the same time, the ability to manage situations where they encounter stigma or anti-Semitism allows them a choice in how they handle the situation.

Although this project is exploratory in nature, it has many applications for the Texas Jewish community. Specifically, it highlights the need for Texas universities and

workspaces in Texas to create an atmosphere that is understanding of Jews.  Ultimately, advocating for these pro Jewish atmospheres will need to come from Jewish voices and through a great deal of education and social interaction.  It also highlights the importance and need for Jewish education which encourages the promotion of Jewish identity when faced with anti-Semitism.  In order to promote a strong Jewish identity among Jews in the South, the need to teach Jews how to promote their Jewish identity in circumstances where they are oppressed is paramount.  Through direct confrontation, Jews can be agents of change and may potentially change the attitudes of anti-Semites.

## APPENDIX SECTION

### APPENDIX A

1. Date of Birth:

2. Sex: Male/Female

3. Highest Level of Education Completed: Did not graduate high school, High school,

some college, college graduate, graduate degree

4. How long have you lived in Texas?

5. Can you give me a brief history of where you have lived in Texas?

6. Do you identify as Jewish? Yes/No

> If so…
>
> What does being Jewish mean to you?
>
> Where did you develop that idea? What was that process like?
>
>> With which denomination do you identify? Orthodox, Conservative,
>>
>> Reform, Other, NA
>>
>>> What does _____ mean to you?
>
> Do you identify as Ashkenazi or Sephardic?
>
>> What does that mean to you?
>>
>> Do you identify with the ethnic heritage of any of the countries of origin
>>
>> you mentioned?
>
> Do you speak Hebrew? Yes/No

7. In what social situations is being Jewish relevant to your social interactions?

(Examples?)

> What do you do in these situations?

Why do you choose to handle these situations in this manner?

8. Do you discuss the fact that you are Jewish with others?

How do you go about these conversations?

How do these experiences play out?

9. In everyday life situations…

Do you discuss Jewish affiliations you might have?

Do you ever find yourself avoiding behaviors associated with Jewish identity?

10. Are there social situations where you would expect to be treated better because you are Jewish?

What do you do in these situations?

Why do you choose to handle these situations in this manner?

11. Are there social situations where you would expect to be treated worse because you are Jewish?

How do you handle these situations?

Why do you choose to handle these situations in this manner?

12. What does the term anti-Semitism mean to you?

13. How do you racially identity?

How do you know that you are ____?

14. Overall, how would you describe your experience as a Jew living in Texas?

APPENDIX B

January 2014

Title of the Study: **Understanding Perceptions and Experiences of Jewish Texans**

My name is Thaddeus Atzmon and I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at Texas State University. As part of the completion of my Master's thesis I am conducting a research project on Jewish identity management among Jewish individuals who have lived in Texas for at least one year. Specifically, the study seeks to gain a nuanced understanding of how, when, and why Jewish individuals in Texas manage their Jewish identity. I can be contacted at 512-573-5239 or ta1145@txstate.edu if you have any additional questions regarding the study.

The research will entail an in person interview that will last approximately an hour and a half. During the interview I will ask you questions about your perceptions and experiences as a Jewish individual living in Texas. It should also be noted that during the course of the interview you will be asked to recall times where you were possibly made to feel uncomfortable about being Jewish. This data, and all other data, will only be reported as group level data, meaning individuals responses will not be singled out. Additionally, this may provide benefits to research participants including the ability to discuss complex issues in an open minded and judgment free setting; potentially providing some catharsis.

With your consent, the entire interview will be recorded digitally. If at any time you do not want to be recorded you can turn off the recorder. The study is completely confidential and your name will not appear anywhere in this study. All the information gathered will be held in strict confidentiality and only I and my thesis chair will have

access to data. All data will be held under lock and key in a storage cabinet in office number 429 of the Undergraduate Academic Center at Texas State University (601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666) and will be discarded once any possible publications have been made. Should any information derived from this study be published, a pseudonym will be given in order to protect confidentiality. You are not obliged to answer any questions you do not want to answer and you may conclude the interview at any time. Before deciding to participate in the study, feel free to ask me any questions you may have.

This project [2014V3791] was approved by the Texas State IRB on February 4, 2014. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, Dr. Jon Lasser (512-245-3413 -lasser@txstate.edu) and to Becky Northcutt, Director, Research Integrity & Compliance (512-245-2314 -bnorthcut@txstate.edu)

Additionally, if you have any questions or problems in connection with this study, please feel free to contact me at 512-573-5239 ta1145@txstate.edu , or you can contact Dr. Gloria Martinez-Ramos, my committee chair, at 512-245-2470 gm21@txstate.edu .

Thank you,

Thaddeus Atzmon, Master's Graduate Candidate

Department of Sociology, Texas State University

## RESPONDENTS

| Pseudonym | Sex | Denomination | Racial Identity | Highest Level of Education | Age At Time of Interview | Years Lived in Texas |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adam | M | Conservative | Caucasian | Graduate Degree | 37 | 34.5 |
| Avi | M | Conservadox | Caucasion | Graduate Degree | 29 | 29 |
| Chaim | M | Conservative | Caucasion | Graduate Degree | 59 | 14.5 |
| Daniel | M | In flux- Conservative and Reform | Caucasion | Graduate Degree | 52 | 40 |
| David | M | In Flux | White | Some college | 20 | 20 |
| Devorah | F | Orthodox | White | Some college | 23 | 23 |
| Ester | F | Conservadox (Blend of conservative and orthodox) | Caucasion | Graduate Degree | 36 | 7 |
| Isaac | M | Orthodox philosophy (not practices) | White | Graduate Degree | 34 | 15 |
| Ilana | F | Conservative | White | Graduate Degree | 35 | 4 |
| Leah | F | Mix - Grew up Conservative | White | Graduate Degree | 33 | 15 |
| Merav | F | Reform | Anglo | Graduate Degree | 65 | 65 |
| Miriam | F | Conservative | White | Graduate Degree | 56 | 49 |
| Rachel | F | All of them | Caucasion | Graduate Degree | 57 | 57 |
| Sarah | F | Reform | White | Some college | 34 | 33 |
| Saul | M | Orthodox | Caucasion | Graduate Degree | 60 | 30 |
| Zahava | F | Conservative (attends all) | White | Graduate Degree | 54 | 16 |
| MEAN | - | - | - | - | 42.75 | 28.25 |

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