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The Gender and Sexuality of Jewish Women

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Liberal Studies

By

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May, 2020

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Hamilton Holt School

Master of Liberal Studies Program

Winter Park, FL

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The Gender and Sexuality of Jewish Women

Practices and Experiences of Traditional Judaism

Personal Experience of Being A Non-Religious Jewish Female in the United States

This paper explores the intersection of traditional, Orthodox Judaism and modern lives of Jewish women. Drawing from the author's personal experiences and research on Judaism and modernity, our thesis is that all Jewish women are affected by both world views in ways that are complex and multifaceted.

Growing up in a household, with a mother who identified herself as a Jewish woman and a father who converted to Judaism prior to marrying my mother, created much confusion, throughout the years, about my religious identity. My mother, her sister and maternal grandparents often stated that according to Judaism, if my biological mother was Jewish, her children were recognized in the religion as being of Jewish descent. Fueling my confusion was that my father's side of the family was Irish Catholic. My paternal grandfather died before I was born but I still have vivid memories of my paternal grandmother with her red hair and bright green outfits. My father's mother was Irish, celebrated Catholic holidays and had lots of pictures on the walls in her home of Jesus Christ. My father also had a tattoo on his arm that depicted Jesus Christ with tears on his arms. Although half of my biological family was Irish Catholic, my Jewish upbringing instilled a sense of belonging to the Jewish culture. Familial roots of being raised by a Jewish mother, shaped my emergence as a woman, even though my family didn't follow a strict observance of the Jewish religion. In my middle age years, I realized that while I

am not a religious woman, a cultural identification of being Jewish, resonated within my sense of self. Acquired knowledge developed through the study of the history of religious practices of women in Judaism has led me to the belief that tracings of Judaic thoughts and practices have influenced my sense of femininity through a cultural connectedness. This paper explores how chromosomal biology, socialization, religious influence and cultural changes have shaped the gender and sexuality of Judaic women in modernity, from varying levels of religiosity, in Western civilization.

The mere suggestion that I was expected to embrace Judaism due to my being born from a woman who identified herself as being Jewish always seemed questionable to me because my immediate family wasn't very religious. It was my maternal grandparents who followed religious rituals and often invited my immediate family members to their home on Jewish holidays. My grandmother was a wonderful cook and prepared lavish meals symbolic with religious significance during Passover and Yom Kippur. However, the extent of my mother's religious observance of traditions and customs didn't extend far beyond our immediate family's presence at the annual Passover seders held in her parent's house. My brother and I were gifted with Hanukkah presents annually, and this represented the extent of our immediate household's level of religious observance. Our family was not religious, so I often wondered if God existed, and if so, would God truly recognize our family as being part of the Jewish faith. Many families in our hometown of Briarwood, Queens, New York resembled ours in that their religious identities were Jewish, but they were also not strict followers of the Law and the Prophets. While my family's level of observance was confusing to me, at times, there were other Jewish families in

our neighborhood with lenient, observant levels of Judaism just like ours, which was representative of a modern practice of the religion.

Since my years as a young adult, I've learned that there are varying levels of observance within the Jewish population in the United States. To date, as per an article published in 2020 called, "The Jewish Denominations", My Jewish learning states that the three major Jewish movements are Reform Judaism, Orthodox Judaism (Modern Orthodox, Ultra Orthodox, Hasidic, Yeshivish, Open Orthodox) and Conservative Judaism, and states the smaller denominations are Reconstructionist Judaism, Jewish Renewal and Humanistic Judaism (MyJewishLearning). Each religious sect varies in its interpretations and adherence to religious laws.

In the United States, there is a large population of Orthodox Jews. An article entitled, "A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews A Further Analysis of the 2013 Survey of U.S. Jews" published by *Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life*, stated the research was based on questions given to followers of Judaism that self-reported their level of observance within Judaism. According to the Pew Survey,

Seven-in-ten adults who currently identify as Orthodox Jews (70%) were raised as Orthodox. Upwards of one-in-ten Orthodox Jews (12%) say they were brought up in the Conservative movement and 5% were raised as Reform Jews. An additional 8% say they were raised in the Jewish faith but in some other stream of American Judaism (such as Reconstructionist) or gave other answers, such as saying they were raised in a Sephardic Jewish tradition (Pew, 2013).

This survey offered a small snapshot of the varying sects of followers within American Judaism. It was looking at people who self-identified as Orthodox Jews but not all of them were raised within the Orthodox sect of the religion. This was interesting to note because the Orthodox following of the religion has very strict guidelines to follow yet the people surveyed chose to switch from liberal sects of Judaism that had more lenient observance levels, to the strict Orthodox following of Judaism.

In the Orthodox sect of the religion there are people that identify as the Haredi, or Ultra-Orthodox who follow the very strict laws of Judaism. And, there are the Modern-Orthodox who follow the strict guidelines of Judaism but try to incorporate modernism into their following of the religion. More often, stories are heard about Jewish people that chose to switch from Orthodoxy in the western world because the strict following of the laws in Orthodoxy conflicted with their lives in some fashion. Strict adherence to Jewish Orthodoxy is very difficult for some Jewish, American people to follow. For example, the five-day work week in the United States poses a challenge for Orthodox Jewish Americans because the fifth day of the week is a Friday, and the Jewish Sabbath begins on Friday evenings at sundown. It has been a challenge for many American Orthodox Jews to earn a living in the United States and keep up with the laws of the Sabbath within Judaism. As part of the Sabbath observance, Jews are forbidden to drive or spend money and are required to begin the Sabbath at sundown on Friday evening until Saturday at sundown. They are also required to go to temple during this time and participate in ceremonial dinners at home with the family. This tradition may interfere with the Orthodox Jew's ability to work a full day on Fridays. Additionally, the kosher diet guidelines also pose additional

challenges for Orthodox followers in the United States that try to integrate their lifestyles with the American way of life centered around activities during the day and coordinate the need to eat out somewhere that follows kosher food guidelines.

The results of this survey suggest a high number of people choose to convert to Orthodoxy from lenient observance levels of the religion and this prediction is incredibly interesting. The Pew Survey additionally noted, “By comparison, the other major streams or denominations of American Judaism have smaller shares of adults who were raised in these movements: 57% of adults who identify as Conservative Jews say they were raised in the Conservative movement, and 55% of Jews who identify as Reform were raised in the Reform movement” (Pew, 2013). These numbers also suggest that a little less than half of Conservative or Reform followers may identify themselves as Orthodox although the study did not confirm or deny that. This study also did not identify the genders of the participants and it would have been interesting to note the male to female ratio of participants involved in the study.

Personal Introduction to Women Within Modern, Orthodox Judaism

It was in Kew Garden Hills, Queens, back in the late 1960's and still in present time that the very religious, Orthodox Jewish families reside. The contrast of the very religious Orthodox Jewish community to the area I was raised has always left an impression upon me. My old neighborhood had a multicultural hybrid of religions amongst its people. The Jewish members of the community only comprised a very small mix of people within the neighborhood. While there is a Briarwood, Jewish temple in my old area, the temple congregants are Conservative Jews and not Ultra-Orthodox like in the neighboring community. The Briarwood temple typically hosts

events that the entire neighborhood is invited to participate in and the congregants of this little, Conservative Jewish temple in Briarwood are much more inclusive of the community than the neighborhood in Kew Gardens that has a large population of Orthodox Jews. The Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Kew Garden Hills is a very tight knit community that is less welcoming to outsiders.

The differences between the Orthodox Jews as compared to the Conservative and Reform Jews captured my attention. On Sundays, when I walked from Briarwood, Queens toward Flushing, Queens to visit my grandparents, my path of walking to my grandparents' home was toward Kew Garden Hills where the Orthodox Jewish families resided. They live within walking distance to kosher markets and the Jewish temple in their neighborhood. They can often be spotted walking together, to and from temple during Sabbath, from sundown on Friday evenings to sundown on Saturday evenings.

On Main Street, which was the main road that linked Briarwood to Kew Garden Hills, there was a Kosher pizzeria, kosher meat markets and a kosher bagel store. As a treat, I often stopped into the Kosher pizza place to have a slice of pizza and a soda on my walk to visit my grandparents. Not only did I enjoy the unique taste of kosher pizza but I welcomed the opportunity to observe Orthodox, Jewish families at a close distance while I savored my ethnic food.

It was fascinating to note that the Orthodox women wore very little make-up, if any. They also wore wigs on their heads and stockings with dressy shoes. Their dresses covered most of their arms and legs. The young girls also wore modest dresses and dressy shoes like the older

women. The women had lots of children with them that appeared to be in their immediate families and very few men were in the room. The men who were present sat off to the side, at their own tables. This might have been because the husbands and fathers were probably at the local temple studying and memorizing the Torah laws. Everyone always seemed very happy and content any time I stopped into the pizzeria.

I observed the women and young girls and wondered if the rumors imprinted in my childhood impression about their religious practices were true. My aunt and grandmother joked that Orthodox Jewish women were required to sleep with a sheet that separated them from their husbands. This was a myth but I have since learned my aunt and grandmother were likely referencing the Jewish mikvah laws pertaining to a Jewish woman's menstrual period, but at the time my aunt and grandmother did not elaborate on what they meant other than to mention that the Orthodox husband and wife typically slept with sheets between them. It was apparent to me, however, that the Orthodox, Jewish way of life differed immensely from the mainstream of society.

In my neighborhood, the Conservative and Reform Jewish women dressed like everybody else in the mainstream of society, and we rarely went to temple unless there was a bar mitzvah/bat mitzvah, wedding or funeral. We celebrated Passover and Hanukkah but that was the extent of the Jewish holidays that most of the Jews in our immediate social circle celebrated. I recall wondering how it was that despite our differences, and a commonality of Jewish identity, that the Orthodox Jews honored religious beliefs of Judaism with such a high level of rigidity, but my family and friends did not. The Orthodox women were exposed to beliefs and practices,

handed down from generations of Orthodox women. The religious rituals and honored traditions of Orthodox Jewish women have been ingrained into the female psyches of these women, and for most of them from very young ages.

Orthodox Jews believe that following the strict guidelines set forth within the written laws of the Torah adhere to a more ethical standard of living that was intended for the Jews to follow. It is believed by the Orthodox that the following of these rules will bring order, ethics and enhancement to their social and spiritual lives. The Orthodox following of Judaism requires a very strict adherence to laws outlined within the religious scrolls. Changing cultural trends within modern, Western civilization continue to challenge the strict guidelines of Orthodox Judaism and adaptations to the religion in varying sects of observance have begun to form.

Jewish Women Share A Common History of Judaism in Varying Levels of Observance

While Orthodox Jews follow Judaism with a strict level of observance, the varying levels of practice within Judaism share a common history of Jewish descent. Throughout history, the Jewish people have faced ethnocentric persecution for their religious beliefs, and historical accounts point to the opposition forcefully beginning in the society of the ancient Romans. As Maggie Anton notes,

We start in 66 CE, when Jewish people in Judea (a province in the south of Israel) revolted against their Roman overlords. Other countries lost to Rome with minor consequences, but the Judean War ended in an unimagined disaster for the Jewish people—the Second Temple’s destruction in 70 CE. If this weren’t bad enough, the remaining

Jews in Judea revolted again in 132 CE, resulting in a crushing defeat in which Jerusalem was razed and much of the population, particularly the priests, were killed or taken as slaves to Rome (Anton, 3).

The perseverance and will for survival in the ancient Jews was demonstrative of the primary reason the Jewish religion is still practiced in modern times. The Jewish people are extremely proud of the survival of their ancestors. Much of the practice of Judaism is representative of celebrations of the survival of the Jews throughout history. Jews are very proud of their abilities, throughout history, to overcome the enormous challenges they faced, in the hands of religious wars and pertinacious attempts of their opposers, to gain power and control of ancient civilizations. The ancient Jews collaborated with one another and intellectualized ways for the practice and beliefs of the Jewish religion to continue and prosper, based on what they believed to be divine will and the original laws of Moses and the Pentateuch.

With the strong-willed determination to carry on the religious theology of Judaism, the ancient Rabbis quickly realized that despite having their temples of worship destroyed and ruined, the essence of the religiosity, spirituality and practice of the Jewish religion needed not to be buried in the ruins of the worship temples. Jewish Rabbis rallied the strength and determination of the Jewish people to disallow opposing societal forces that interfered with the Jewish peoples' covenants with God. Jewish followers united in spirit and practice, and they followed interpretations of religious laws of Judaism set forth by the Law, the Prophets, and the Rabbis, as they were believed to have been dictated by Moses. These laws and rituals have become ingrained into the practices of Judaism. When speaking about Judaism the term midrash

is sometimes used and refers to the biblical interpretations of the Talmud. The holidays in Judaism are celebrated with the body and the mind and within the Talmud are interpretations on the expected roles of women during holidays and religious rituals. As per Judith Plaskow noted,

Midrash can instruct, amuse, edify, but the cycles of the week and year have been most potent reminders of central Jewish experience and values. The weekly renewal of creation with the inauguration of the Sabbath, the entry of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, the Exodus of Israel from Egypt every Passover--- these are remembered not just verbally but through the body and thus doubly imprinted on Jewish consciousness (Plaskow 57).

Within the law handed down from God to Moses was an outline for the behavioral roles and rituals for the Jewish people. Jewish laws and rituals were established by the Divine and the implementation of these laws has served the Jewish people with the basis for their religious beliefs and practices, as well as a remembrance of their shared history. Over centuries, the rabbinical traditions, as set down in the Talmud and commentaries, has elaborated every detail of these original laws. A central feature in these transcribed laws was the rabbinic interpretation of the expected behavior of Jewish women.

Main Enduring Beliefs about Women in Judaism

Jewish Lineage

In Judaism, the offspring born to a Jewish mother have lineage to the Jewish religion and are recognized as Jewish because of the mother's Jewish blood line. Even if the child's father is

Jewish, the child is still considered not Jewish according to Jewish law. However, in traditional Judaism, if a child is born from a mother who is not Jewish but from a Jewish father, the child is typically not recognized as being part of the Jewish religion. In modern times, however, Jewish Reform movements have worked toward the recognition of the child born from a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother as Jewish, if the child is being raised Jewish and participates in religious acts such as Jewish milestones and ceremonies.

However, to say that a child can only be identified Jewish if the child is born to a Jewish mother represents patriarchal control of a woman's body. Does the woman need to follow every law written in the Torah regarding the laws of Judaism to be labeled Jewish? If the woman steers away from any of the laws that are written in the Torah does that mean that she will not be acknowledged within Judaism as having Jewish matrilineal lineage when giving birth to her children? The Torah controls every aspect of a woman's body and her sexuality such as the laws of the menstrual mikvah, to the modest requirements for a Jewish woman to dress, to the foods she is allowed to nourish her body with, to the laws pertaining to sexual activity within a marriage, and the list continues on.

To state, as part of religious law within Judaism, that a child born to a Jewish woman will be recognized as a Jewish child, is a patriarchal movement toward grasping ownership of the woman's uterus, and telling the uterus that if it doesn't follow every strict guideline set forth within Judaism, then the woman will not be deemed to be part of Judaism and neither will her child. This puts a lot of pressure on women, and families who place value on having their children fully accepted into the cultural and religious traditions of Judaism. Many women, for

example, that have married men that are Jewish but were not born into Judaism themselves, feel societal pressures of the Jewish community to convert their own religious beliefs and practices to Judaism as converts, so their children born from a Jewish father will be fully accepted in the Jewish religion. Matrilineal lineage is very much a part of Jewish thought and practice yet it is an example of a patriarchal constraint placed upon women and their bodies, set forth within ancient laws of the Jewish religion.

Keeper of Kashrut

In traditional Jewish families, women typically maintain the domestic household. Jewish women prepare meals for their husbands and children. In households that follow religious, dietary guidelines, an understanding of the laws pertaining to the upkeep of a kosher home is required and in Jewish households, the responsibility of implementing *kashrut* falls upon the woman of the household. Keeping a kosher home requires a lot of work and the eating regimen makes it difficult to eat out in restaurants other than ones that follow the laws of kosher style eating. If a family decides to follow the dietary rules of eating kosher they are doing so for the benefit of a heightened religious and spiritual existence. As per a study by Min-Min Tan, Carina K.Y. Chan, and Daniel D. Reidpath entitled, “Religiosity and Spirituality and the Intake of Fruit, Vegetable, and Fat: A Systematic Review” that examined fat intake as compared to fruit and vegetable intake among religious groups, the authors stated,

There are six categories: institutional (social and behavior aspects of religion and spirituality, e.g., attendance and social support), ideological (religious and spiritual beliefs, e.g. importance of religion), personal devotion (personal and internalized

devotion, e.g. private prayer), existential (measures that are spiritual but not religious, e.g. spiritual wellbeing), multidimensional (examined more than one category of religion and spirituality), and generic (e.g., one-item measure that asks about how religious are the respondents). The relationships positive and negative, mixed or none between religious and spirituality measures and fruit, vegetable, and fat intake were identified (Tan, Chan & Reidpath).

This study examined the religious dietary practices of several religious groups such as Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jews to measure the correlation between religious dietary practices and physical and emotional well-being. In the results for the Jewish dietary practices it was found that Jews consume a higher amount of animal fat. However, this can be problematic because it can cause heart problems, high cholesterol and diabetes. It was also determined that the Lubavitcher Hassidim consumed high amounts of cooked fruits which is deemed a healthy food choice. Women in observant and non-observant Jewish families take on the role of trying to find combinations of food for the family to consume that are healthy and follow dietary laws outlined within Judaism. Orthodox women follow the dietary laws with a strict observance but many modern non-religious Jewish women also try to find healthy and nourishing combinations to feed their families as well.

There are several ways in which food represents symbolism with religious and spiritual meaning within families. Religious beliefs and spiritual practices of wellbeing encompass the repetition of cultural traditions and customs of religion that involve food consumption.

The preparation of food and the ascertained knowledge and following of Judaic, religious laws are imperative within the gathering of family members around the dining table. When a Jewish family maintains a kosher lifestyle, Jewish women, as the domestic keepers of the household, need to be familiarized with kosher dietary laws and must possess knowledge regarding foods that are considered fit for the family's kosher consumption. In Judaism, the body is viewed as a sacred creation of God, and the religion has set forth rules for Jewish people to honor and follow regarding food consumption for the healthy maintenance of the human body. In Tan, Chan and Reidpath's study the researchers stated,

Two of the denominational studies examined Jews. One compared the Jews with the general population in Italy and found that there was no difference in fat intake between the two groups. However, Jews consumed more animal fat than the general population. Another study compared two Jewish Hassidic sects and found that Lubavitcher Hassidim consumed more cooked fruit (Tan, Chan & Reidpath).

There is a link to mental health well-being and a following of ritualistic food consumption. When families participate in religious rituals and aim to eat healthy combinations of foods as part of religious practice, a high feeling of internalized self-satisfaction is achieved by the followers of religious dietary guidelines.

In Jewish families, the women's inherent job, as a wife and mother, is to nurture her family with healthy combinations of foods. Jewish women, observant of *kashrut* strongly believe that the Torah outlines guidelines for healthy food consumption set forth by the commandments of God, so that Jewish people will be set apart and recognized by God, for their strict following

of dietary guidelines. Religious, Jewish women work diligently to create healthy and lavish kosher meals for their families. In my family, any time it was Passover my grandmother prepared lavish meals that were symbolic for the holiday feast and the meal was the central part of the holiday observance. The family gathered around the large dinner table set with the fancy dishes and my grandfather sat the head of the table and recited words in Yiddish. My mom and dad and aunt and uncles would laugh as my grandfather said his prayers because nobody understood his spoken words. My grandmother was an excellent cook and she always set aside a plate for me that was stuffed with her home-made matzo balls because she knew I loved them. My grandmother loved to cook and feed her family during the holidays. Despite my modern Jewish nonobservant family's inability to understand the Yiddish words spoken in prayer by my grandfather, the family gathering around the dining table was looked forward to and became ritualistic.

Faith leader in family

During Shabbat, the head woman of the household ritualistically lights the candles as a mitzvot and recites the prayers for the family. The woman's role of candle lighting is symbolic in representation. The significance of the lighting of the Shabbat candle by the woman is interpreted in two ways. A positive representation suggests the lighting exemplifies the shining or beginning of God's light as a woman's physical body gives life when she gives birth. The lighting of the candle by Jewish woman, in the second interpretation allegorically portrays God's creation of the first light. The woman's role in lighting the holiday candles, in both interpretations depicts the onset of a sacred holiday, hosted by the woman in her domain.

Additionally, on the final day of Sabbath, the woman of the home recites prayers prior to the final meal of the weekly Sabbath. In traditional, Judaism, a woman's place is deemed to be in the home. The act of lighting the Shabbat candles, by the Jewish woman, is representative of the harmonious balance between life on earth, with the responsibilities bestowed upon the Jewish people in daily life, and the heavenly pleasures of Shabbat. The less positive interpretation of the significance of women lighting Shabbat candles points back to biblical times when Eve sinned in the garden with Adam and the act of lighting the candle by the woman is a way to enter out from the darkness of the sin and into a new light of existence. However, these interpretations of the significance of the candle lighting by the woman in Sabbath acknowledge that the woman's existence is in the home and little interaction, if any, is mentioned of the Jewish woman's activities in the external world.

Another mitzvot commandment in the Torah directed to women in Judaism is the act of separating a piece of dough before baking it. This is typically done by women in Israel but American, Jewish families are reminded that a piece of dough from the matzah has been separated for them, by Israeli Jewish women, when their box of matzahs, typically consumed by Jewish families at Passover, is marked with an identification that its challah has been taken.

Finally, the last of the three mitzvot commandments outline in the Torah for women is the *niddah*, which is the commandment for a woman to separate her menstruating body from her husband during the time of her menstruation. At the end of her menstruation she is instructed to immerse her body in a ritual mikvah bath, and once she has ceased bleeding and soaked in the mikvah she can resume sexual relations with her husband. The following of the laws of the

Mikvah are not as heavily followed in modern Judaism as in generations past. The reasons for this are because the routine of the mikvah bath have become less and less important for the busy American non-observant Jewish women. The following of Jewish mikvah rituals steered more toward the preparation of family meals around holidays and going to temple. While some modern women have moved away from the mikvah ritual there have been some that have gone back to the tradition as a sacred choice.

The Jewish woman, as a leader in faith for the Jewish family, is expected to adhere to the mitzvot commandments directed for her to follow in the Jewish Torah. In modern Judaism observant Jewish woman still bear the responsibility of the spiritual health of their families and some nonobservant Jewish women do too.

The Silencing of Women in Judaism Women Silenced In Judaism

Women have historically been excluded from the compilation of ancient, Judaic laws. Women were a part of the community in ancient, Judaism but they were not active members of the external world. Men were the dominant figures within the world of ancient Judaism. While Jewish women were vital to the ancient, Jewish community in their roles as wives and mothers, their presence in the ancient world was silenced. Religious rules pertaining to the Jewish religion were transcribed and interpreted by male rabbis. Women and children were considered the property of husbands and fathers in ancient times. The societal culture within ancient Jewish civilization did not recognize the social importance of women outside of the domestic sphere. In fact, men attempted to control the disorganization and “evil” they perceived in the world by segregating women from the men in places of worship. The ancient Rabbis believed that the

women caused sexual distraction to the men by their presence and this sexual tension that arose in the temple was categorized by the men as being an “evil” force. In response to the sexual urges of the men brought on by the presence of the women, the men set forth religious laws that segregated the women from prayer and silenced them. As per Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito note,

As gender separation became increasingly enforced in Talmudic times, women’s voices were dimmed, as they were relegated to more and more remote areas of the synagogue, distant from the center of religious activity. It became increasingly easy for the male shapers of Jewish liturgy to disregard women’s voices altogether (Haddad & Esposito 36-37).

The ancient Rabbis interpreted the Torah as stating that men and women should be kept apart from one another to prevent any future ruins of the temple due to evil forces that the presence of women might bring to the temple. There is a Biblical story of a woman in ancient times named Hannah. She lived in ancient Judaism around 1000 B.C.E. Hannah was a motherless woman who desperately wanted to have a child. One day she bowed down in a temple and prayed to God silently, but her lips were moving. She prayed silently to God to let her have a child. There was a Priest present named Eli that witnessed Hannah’s silent prayer. This is the first account written in the Hebrew Bible that references silent prayer. Eli was dumbfounded by two things. First, a woman of all beings was praying in the first temple of worship. Second, she was praying with the movement of her lips but words weren’t coming out of them. His immediate reaction to this occurrence was that she must have had something wrong with her. He thought perhaps she had

some evil kind of source that bestowed itself upon her or maybe she was inebriated. The idea that a woman was seen in a public sphere, praying with an internal voice was unfathomable to Eli. Ancient, Jewish men typically prayed with words spoken aloud and ritualistically moved their bodies in prayer. This marked a difference in the way genders emotionally respond and react to challenging, emotional situations in their lives. Women tend to be more introspective in the face of a challenge than men, while men use physical rituals to gain control over troubling scenarios. As per Haddad and Esposito, the authors note the Biblical incident with Hannah as they commented,

She prays in an unstructured way, sharing her emotional state of mind with God. Eli reacts as a man who naturally gravitates toward structure, that is, toward the ritual “rules” with which he is familiar and comfortable. This moment of conflict between Eli, a representative of the cultic “tradition,” and Hannah with her own idiosyncratic spiritual style, reflects a centuries-old reality: men and women experience and communicate with Divine in very different ways (Haddad & Esposito 38).

Part of the reason Eli misunderstood Hannah’s act of prayer to God as a state of drunkenness was likely due to the social construct of women during those times. Women were typically silenced during the act of prayer. The possibility that Hannah might have been praying to God never entered Eli’s thought process. Additionally, the preconceived opinions of women during those times is evident in Eli’s reaction to Hannah. Rather than considering that Hannah was in the temple in silent prayer, Eli assumed that she was infected with an evil source of drunkenness. The importance of Hannah’s prayer was irrelevant to Eli. This imagery is representative of the

unimportance that ancient Jewish civilization placed upon women in society and the lack of power believed to exist in their prayers.

The physical separation of men and women in the Jewish temple of worship has trickled down into modernity in the Orthodox, Jewish observance and practice of Judaism. In Jewish, Orthodox temples men and women customarily sit apart from one another in the Jewish temple during religious ceremonies just as they did in ancient, Judaism. In Modern and Ultra-Orthodoxy, the men believe that a woman's presence in the temple of worship will cause the men to become sexually distracted from prayer and the distraction will cause some state of chaos during the time of prayer. To keep order from distractions in the temple, the Orthodox men and women ritually sit apart from one another, on different sides of the temple. The men typically conduct the prayer rituals and services while the women remain seated on the opposite side of the room and observe.

Sexuality of Jewish Women

While Jewish women of ancient times were silenced by men in the public sphere their sexual expertise was relied upon by men, in the bedroom. In the Jewish religion it is believed that God commanded the Jewish people to have lots of sexual relations within the marital relationship so they could have an abundance of children and so the Jewish religion would prosper. As per Judith Plaskow,

Archeologist Carol Meyers, for instance, has begun to reconstruct the roles of women in early Israel through a combination of Biblical and archeological evidence. Although the details of her model are speculative, she asks important new questions about the changing roles of women in Biblical society, questions that point to the social construction of gender in Biblical culture. She points out the skeletal remains from the period of early Israelite settlement reflect the presence of both endemic disease and periodic plague. This suggests, she argues, that the ancient Israelites would have desperately needed large families to offset the effects of a high death rate, particularly since they were also trying to cultivate newly acquired territory and subdue part of the population. In this precarious situation, women's biological contribution would have been very important and highly valued, as would have been their contribution to agricultural production (Plaskow 41).

The survival of the Jewish population during health pandemics in ancient, Jewish society might have been dependent on the need for the Jewish people to reproduce for the longevity of the ancient world's Jewish population. This would offer an explanation as to why the Torah commanded a husband and wife to have an abundance of sexual activity. The husband is commanded in the Talmud to have satisfying, sexual relations with his wife and the husband is expected to sexually satisfy his wife, daily. As per author Maggie Anton,

Based on the verse from the Genesis (Torah's first chapter) where God blesses Adam and Eve and tells them, 'Be fruitful and multiply', the Talmudic rabbis (aka the Rabbis, the Sages) concluded that procreation was the first mitzvah, the first positive commandment. Unlike today with all our varied medical interventions, procreation in Talmudic times

meant having marital relations. Which means that (ta-da) a Jewish man was obligated to make love to his wife—doing what the Sages euphemistically called the *mitzvah act* (Anton 10).

Sexual activity, during ancient times, between a Jewish husband and his wife, was highlighted in the Talmud as a good deed and the sexual pleasure of a married couple for the purpose of procreation was highly encouraged. In ancient Judaism, the society valued the birth of young males as they were believed to be the valued gender for the sustainment and prosperity of society. The Talmud even instructed married couples on how to have a male child instead of a female child. As per author Maggie Anton,

First the Rabbis informed us that a child's gender was determined at conception- If the man emits seed first, the child will be a girl; if the woman emits seed first, the child will be a boy. Commentaries made it clear the *emits seed* is synonymous with orgasm for women as well as for men (Anton 35).

In Judaism, men are commanded in the Talmud to sexually satisfy their wives first, before the men have a seminal ejaculation. In Judaism, it is part of the husband's contract with Judaic religiosity that he will agree to sexually satisfy his wife before he experiences his own sexual gratification. This agreement may be indicative that ancient society valued the reproduction of male children over female children.

In the practice of traditional Judaism, married couples are encouraged to pleasure each other sexually and have lots of children. Very religious, Orthodox Jews and Hassidic Jews often

have large numbers of children because they strictly follow the laws written in the Talmud that command them to have lots of sexual activity and to procreate. Not only is it commanded in the written texts for husbands and wives to have lots of sex but it is considered a mandatory duty for the husband to give his wife multiple orgasms on a regular basis. It is the religious duty of a married Jewish couple to sexually satisfy one another and to reproduce children out of that Godly pleasure. As per author Danya Ruttenberg,

The Traditional Jewish approach to heterosexuality encourages giving and receiving sexual pleasure, but only with certain boundaries. Once one complies with these restrictions, sex is not only allowed but is a *mitzvah*, a Divine commandment. For instance, sex between certain partners such as sister and brother, father and daughter, or a man and woman not married to each other is forbidden. Once a heterosexual couple is married, however, sex is obligatory. Nevertheless, even within the marital relationship, sex is not permitted all of the time (Ruttenberg 116).

The Torah also teaches couples about tradition and practice of proper timing for sexual relations. The Torah encourages couples to engage in sex as often as possible for the purpose of procreation but there are times when it states that couples should steer away from lovemaking. As per Ruttenberg, “The Talmud also teaches that a couple should not have sex when angry or drunk, or, when one partner is thinking of someone else or has already mentally checked out of the relationship. Our being fully present with one another is a primary Jewish value—one often missing from the contemporary conversation about sex”(Ruttenberg 2). The Torah directs couples to focus on a present state of emotional connection, free from external distractions so

that while engaging in sexual activity with one another they are expressing the propensity of the love they have for one another. The Torah examined religious and spiritual thought in all venues of life but much attention was placed by the Jewish sages on the topic of Jewish sexuality.

Ruttenberg additionally commented,

In Judaism, every aspect of human life is a holy piece of Torah, worthy of thought, study and consideration—and sex is certainly no exception. The Talmud compares the penis sizes of its most venerated Sages and discusses in euphemistic, but excruciating, detail the positions in which a married couple is permitted to make love. Jewish law devotes pages and pages to the prohibition against sex with a menstruant, down to instructions on how to comport oneself if, mid-coitus, it appears that the female partner has just gotten her period (Ruttenberg 1).

The interesting question to ponder here is whether ancient, Jewish society was comprised of a bunch of men and women alike that were mesmerized with the simplicities of human sexuality or were they advanced in knowledge with expertise on the sexual pleasures of the mind and body, or both? The Talmud is very descriptive and definitive in its conversations pertaining to sexual activity.

While married couples are encouraged in the Talmud to engage in lots of sex, they are required to have sex that is considered holy in its practice according to Jewish laws. Strict

observance of Judaism disallows husbands and wives to show any affection toward each other in public places. Restrictions have been placed upon married couples in the Talmud laws regarding the times of the month that couples are permitted to have sexual relations.

In non-observant Jewish marriages the laws pertaining to a woman's menstrual period or the display of public affection is not typically practiced in the relationship as it is in the observant Jewish relationships. However, modern Jewish men typically do try to please their wives sexually and publicly display the utmost of respect to their wives.

Clean and Unclean Sexuality

When a woman begins her monthly menstrual period she is considered by the Torah, to be unclean and is forbidden to engage in sexual activity with her husband according to Jewish laws. In Hebrew the term *niddah* refers to the Jewish laws pertaining to a woman's menstrual period. The word refers to the Jewish law that requires women to separate their bodies from their husbands and to refrain from sexual engagement. Author Ruttenberg commented about Jewish women and menstruation when she stated,

When a woman contracts *tumah* because of a uterine flow of blood, whether her regular menstruation or some other irregular bleeding, sex with her and by her is forbidden. The first place this issue arises in Leviticus 15:19-33, appears in the context of a discussion of ritual impurity contracted from both male and female bodily emissions. One of the emissions that cause ritual impurity, or *tumah* is menstrual blood. A woman who has contracted ritual impurity from a flow of menstrual blood is called a *niddah*. *Tumat*

niddah, the tumach of a *niddah*, can be transferred further through contact between the *niddah* and other people, utensils, clothing, and food; contact with objects the woman sits or lies upon; and by the act of sexual intercourse (Ruttenberg 116).

The act of engaging in sexual activity with a menstruating female, or a female that has not been cleansed with a *mikvah* bath once her bleeding has ceased for seven days, is viewed as an exhibition of religious impurity that is punishable by God.

A *mikvah* bath is a spiritual cleanse that the woman soaks her body in for a minute or two, to cleanse the body off from the time of menstruation. *Mikvah* are private sections of buildings, set up in some locations like lavish spas, that have a bath and dressing room, fully equipped with soaps, brushes, washcloths and towels. The women initially undress themselves in the bathroom, stripping their bodies of any jewelry or make-up they might have been wearing. Then, the woman and the *mikvah* attendant go into the other room that has the body of water referred to as the *mikvah*, which is a body of water that must be mixed with some other type of natural spring of water. The attendant of the *mikvah* will say a prayer for the woman and her body is dunked in the water for a very brief one or two minutes.

The woman values this time as a spiritual time of being one with God. After the ritual cleanse, she is free to get re-dressed and continue on with her daily routines of activity, until the next time she is in need of a cleansing from having another menstrual period. In the stricter sects of Judaism, such as the Orthodox and Hasidic Jews, for approximately two weeks out of every month, the husband and wife need to be physically separated from each one another because the woman is considered to be a *niddah* during the time of her menstruation and seven days

following her period until she immerses her body in a spiritual mikvah bath. In the very strict Jewish homes, husbands and wives sleep in separate beds for the two weeks of the month that involve the woman's menstrual cycle. Physical touching does not occur during this time between the married couple at all. This time of physical separation for the man and wife is considered a time for spiritual renewal between the couple. When the physicality of the relationship is removed from the relationship between the husband and wife, it is believed that the bond of friendship between them is strengthened, and the emotional and intellectual connection is most appreciated.

The strengthening of the friendship between the husband and wife is especially valued in the Orthodox and Hassidic sects of the religion because when they first meet and date they are not looking to fall in love with their potential partners. In fact, many times if asked, they will say that they were not married because they fell in love. Being in love with each other was not a requirement for them at all. When the very religious couples first meet, it is usually because a friend in common arranged for them to meet because they thought they would make a great match, or because a match maker in the community, arranged for them to meet. When the couple first meets for the purpose of finding a mate for marriage, they are not interested in finding love, but a partner with whom they have shared values.

It is the belief of the couple that a life in marriage together, with shared values of raising a large family, will bring the love to the relationship they have with each other in time. The most valued attribute of the marital bond is the shared values the husband and wife build their family upon. In the religious sects of Judaism that are more liberal in following, the priorities in finding

a marital partner are different from the Orthodox and Hasidic and typically follow a more culturally familiar ideology of couples looking for a love connection in a potential marital partner.

Bringing this conversation back to sexual engagement with a *niddah*, sexual activity with a menstruating female in observant Judaism, is thought to bring either a religious disassociation with the parties or an early death to the parties that choose to dishonor the *niddah* laws of the Torah. Interestingly, it is not deemed impure to accidentally contract *tumah* but it is prohibited to knowingly sleep or have sexual relations with a woman during the time she is shedding her uterine blood. If a person becomes *tumah*, which means that they have accidentally been exposed to uterine blood, they are instructed to cleanse their unclean bodies in a *mikvah*, which is blessed water, combined with a natural body of water that cleanses the body to help it to regain its purity.

Additionally, it is important to note that the ancient Talmudic instructions written in Jewish law about *niddah* and pertaining to the commandment for a husband and wife to refrain from sexual activity, during the time of the wife's menstrual period and for seven days after that, is only directed to heterosexual, married couples. This *niddah* law does not mention how it is directed to homosexual women and their same sex partners. In the Torah, there are no specific guidelines for homosexual women to follow regarding sexual activity along with the issue of their menstruating bodies. Anything pertaining to *niddah* with lesbian women is not mentioned in the Torah and is left for interpretation by the more lenient Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist Rabbis and followers of the more liberal sects of Judaism.

The time spent apart between the husband and wife during the time of a woman's menstrual period and during the seven days post bleeding have been re-invented by Jewish men and women as being a time of spiritual renewal that strengthens the love and sexual desires within the relationship due to the temporary time of sexual abstinence. The time spent apart from each other sexually is believed to increase the sexual desires of the husband and the wife. When the woman and man reunite sexually, the lustful desires are believed to be intense due to the physical separation. The sexual acts are considered most satisfying at this time of reunion and the time apart is referenced as being a helpful tool in strengthening their sexual bond. As per Ruttenberg,

An approach to sexuality within marriage that limits permissible sex to only certain times during the month can be a positive or negative influence not only on the couple's sex life but on their relationship in general, depending on the couple's spiritual and emotional attitude toward this sexual regimen. For instance, if they see their time apart as an opportunity to give each other individual space within the marriage, or as a time when they can strengthen their nonsexual connection, this regimen can be a healthy and beneficial one. If, however, they view their time apart as a curse or a challenge that they cannot possibly meet, then they set themselves up for failure and for a sexual relationship wrought with tension and guilt (Ruttenberg 118).

Despite claims, from some couples, that the times of separation during the wife's menstrual period is beneficial to the relationship, there may be some women that experience emotional issues with their bodies at the time of their menstruation and if they struggle with the monthly

change in their bodies and feel ashamed or uncomfortable by it then those feelings of discomfort will have a negative impact on their emotional well-being and has the potentiality to adversely affect their daily life. Additionally, if a woman's husband has an issue with his wife's menstruating body and is disgusted by it, or disrespects her in any way because her body is menstruating, then this will also cause emotional dissonance within the marital relationship and effect the couple's sexual relations with one another.

The *mikvah* bath is used by women of all ages for reasons aside from menstruation. For example, young, virgin women who are about to get married and have sexual relations with their new husbands may feel the religious need to visit a mikvah right before she engages in sexual relations with her new husband. *Mikvah* baths are generally housed in conspicuous buildings or private sections of Jewish temples.

Adaptations To The Practice of Ancient Judaism In Modern Times

When Jewish scholars of Judaism came to the realization that there were many ways for the religion to carry on to subsequent generations, they must have realized that people within each culture will inevitably change over time. Despite not having a physical temple building to practice the religion, they were able to transcribe the laws and covenants made with God on to a traveling scroll that was representative of the Judaic religious beliefs the Jewish people were accustomed to honoring. The Talmud and the Torah are representative of the religious scrolls that Jewish people worship and follow. The historical beauty that lies within these religious scrolls is that religious laws have been followed, practiced and revised throughout time, by Rabbis and their followers in generations that followed. With each new generation that follows,

comes the changing society and contextual views of the laws within the religious scrolls. As society began to change, there were additions to the Talmudic writings and interpretations for each new generation. In each new generation, views about women's roles in society began to take little strides toward reform. Author Maggie Anton additionally commented,

Today's Talmud is even longer because later editors added commentaries, most prominently those by medieval scholar Rashi and his disciples. Jews still study Torah, of course, but for over fifteen hundred years the go-to source of Jewish Law and tradition has been the Talmud. For we are all Rabbinic Jews now—Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, secular, what-have-you. Even those Jews who don't do Judaism, it's Rabbinic Judaism they don't do (Anton 5).

The Jewish Torah represents the law of God as it was dictated to Moses in the first five books of Hebrew scriptures which are referred to as the Pentateuch. The later revised Talmud, which represents Jewish civil and ceremonial law in the Mishnah and the Gemara, comprises the intellectual works of scholarly, Jewish men that posed questions about life within the lifetime spans of hundreds of years, representative of each new generation. Rashi was a Jewish scholar that lived in the eleventh century. Rashi's commentary pertaining to the Talmud are well respected to this day. As the years progressed, cultures within each emerging civilization evolved, and Jewish scholarly men, also referred to as Rabbis, made addendums to the Talmud scrolls that addressed the societal changes of culture and religious practices of Judaism.

Exclusion of Jewish Women

Despite the movement toward women's rights in modern times, Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women are often excluded from the act of learning the Hebrew texts. In the Orthodox community, a woman's role is to carry out her womanly duties in support of her husband and children, if any, as her husband becomes a scholarly expert in the laws of Judaism. As per an article written by D. Butler entitled, "Spirituality, textual study and gender at nishmat: A spirited chavrata", Butler commented,

There is a long-standing debate in the Orthodox community that questions whether it is advisable or even permissible to educate Jewish women in Torah and Talmud study. The implications of this question are far reaching. Since the tenth century, Jewish men have studied Torah and Talmud together in the Yeshiva. The Yeshiva is not only a key institution for training men in proper Jewish observance it also socializes Jewish men, and through the skills and expertise gained there, confers spiritual, cultural, and social authority and status. Most importantly, halakhic expertise gained through the study of Torah and Talmud is the only entrée into the continuing formation of the halakha. In the Ultra-Orthodox or Haredi world, the Yeshiva is still the normative path for male education. For the Orthodox world in general it is still the framework of halakhic discourse. Women's historical exclusion from Torah and Talmud study has necessarily kept women in the margins of this center of Jewish life and has made it virtually impossible to participate in the halakhic process (Butler).

As seen in modern communities of Jewish Orthodoxy and Hasidism, in ancient Jewish societies, women were thought to not be intelligent enough to learn the ancient scrolls of the Jewish religion. It was also believed that women would take the learning of the religious scrolls less seriously than men would.

Women's roles in ancient Judaism pertained to support of men in their learning of the Talmud scrolls, child rearing and the maintenance of the domestic home. Women's intelligence outside of the domestic sphere was questioned in ancient, Jewish societies and a woman's worth was most valued within the confines of the domestic sphere. This patriarchal mentality has been passed down to future generations and is most evident in modern, Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities. In her article, Butler additionally commented about ancient Jewish scholars when she stated that the early sages known as Rabbi Eliezer and Maimonides were skeptical of teaching women the Torah out of fear that teaching women Torah would cause harm to the religion. The concern was the belief that their lack of intellectual ability would cause them to misinterpret the works and cause harm to the religion. Maimonides stated that if the women studied written works and were taught well by their fathers then it would be okay for them to learn the written Torah only.

The cultural norm in ancient Jewish civilizations was for the Jewish people, both men and women, to respectfully honor the religious scrolls and teachings. In modern, Ultra-Orthodox and Hasidic communities, the rigidity and strict adherence of religious laws from past generations along with its patriarchalism, has persevered and still exists in very religious, Jewish communities to this day.

In modern-Jewish communities, young boys and girls are educated together, in both public and private schools. However, the ritual of the Bar/Bat mitzvah continues to involve separate education. There are many ways children reach the milestone of a Bar or Bat mitzvah. The boy or girl who is approaching thirteen years of age can work with a tutor that is knowledgeable of the Torah to help them identify passages to recite at the time of the celebration.

Movement Toward Change From Clothing Constraints For Jewish Women in Modernity

Orthodox and Hasidic, Jewish women portray modest guidelines of dress in the style of clothing that they wear. For example, Orthodox and Hasidic Jewish communities throughout New York City have very religious Jewish neighborhoods with men and women that follow the strict dress codes outlined within the Jewish laws. The modest dress code for the very religious Jewish women involves wearing clothing that covers the collarbone, elbows and knees and married women typically cover their natural hair on their heads with a wig or scarf or both to signal to the other men in the world that they are not single, but married. The women wear the wigs when they are outside of the home, in the external world, and in front of children, because they only show their natural hair to their husbands, demonstrative of control and personal power in the sacredness of their spiritual connections to God and their God given sexuality that they only share with their husbands, in the privacy of their homes. Orthodox and Hasidic women wear different types of wigs that vary in price, from a modest expense to very expensive which often reveals the financial status of the married couple.

While Orthodox and Hasidic women are very modest in their style of dress, a more modern Chabad hipster type of fashion for women has emerged. Modern fashions for religious women are appearing across the United States, in areas that are heavily populated with religious Jewish, Muslim and Christian women, where modest attire for these women will be most appealing. For example, there are two Hasidic, Jewish women, clothing designers, that paired together to modernize the style of dress for Orthodox and Hasidic Jewish women in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York. The friends are Hasidic women married to Rabbis. They developed a clothing line for observant, Jewish women that is showcased in a boutique owned by the women in Brooklyn, New York. Their line of fashion clothing exhibits dresses that are colorful and free flowing expression of femininity within the confines of observance of Judaism's laws pertaining to modest dress for women. The creation of modern, fashion clothing designs for religious Jewish women is exemplary of a successful movement for women, toward a modernized mode of dress, among Judaism's strictest of followers in the modern world.

While modernity has re-shaped many traditions for women, the traditions are instilled from the core beliefs and practices of the Jewish religion. For example, the traditional, modest standard of dress for women in Orthodox Judaism will always serve as the comparative model for what is considered acceptable in the attire for women in traditional Judaism.

Comparatively, traditional interpretations of laws set forth in Judaism will always hold the standard for example of conformed models of interpretation within the religion. In an article entitled, "Accommodation and Resistance to Modernity: A Comparison of Two Orthodox Groups" author Lynn Davidman commented,

Many contemporary students of religion take a middle-ground position between these two extremes. In challenging a strict interpretation of the secular thesis, these scholars assert that although modernity does have a transformative impact on religion, religious traditions nevertheless respond to its pressures and continue to exist, reform, and even thrive in modern societies (Davidman 4).

The Chabad hipster exists! Women fashion designers were successful in modernizing the style of dress for the Ultra-Orthodox women and have been successful enough to showcase their work in a boutique, and run a thriving business but, the women sought the approval for the start of the business from the men in their community first.

Without the approval of their husbands, who are rabbis, and their extended community, the idea of amending the dress attire for religious women would likely have been rejected by the religious community. The need for the women to gain the approval of rabbis, their husbands and the extended community for the alteration of the modest, clothing style of Orthodox women is representative of the patriarchal tracings of the religion in its modern form of Orthodoxy, and poses a modern challenge to the strict tradition of women's style of dress within the religion.

Orthodox and Changing Gender Roles

Ancient civilizations within Judaism outlined traditional gender roles of men and women through religious laws, for centuries, however modernity, in revised practices of Judaism, has reshaped the mysteries of gender roles and differences with a completely new lens. Therefore, it is important to define the meaning of gender as it pertains to this discussion. Bennett deMarrais and

LeCompte (1999) noted that Sex and gender are different terms; Sex is physical and biological, while gender includes learned behavior and understandings (Bennett deMarrais and LeCompte 289).

Sex refers to the sexual organs a person is born with. Comparatively, gender refers to the internal, sense of belonging to a gender, and the behavior accompanied to that inherent, sense of belonging.

In the practice of traditional Judaism, female behavior is interpreted by the proposed expectations of the female gender as outlined in Judaic, religious laws and from sociological norms of the immediate cultural environment. Young, Jewish females learn how to behave from the examples provided to them by their parents and neighboring communities. This is accompanied by influential factors existential within their immediate surroundings. Bennet deMarrais and LeCompte additionally commented, “Children learn what it means to belong to any society through a socialization process which begins in infancy. Interacting verbally and nonverbally with family members and other caregivers, they learn behavior appropriate to the cultural norms”(Bennett deMarrais and Lecompte 292). Children are taught assumed differences, in gender roles, early on in life, through their play time experiences and observations of parents, family members and other adults within their immediate, social circles. Authors Bennet deMarrais and LeCompte additionally noted,

In a summary of research on sex role differences, Lee and Gropper (1974) report that males and females are socialized to different lifestyles through child rearing practices which entail differential expectations. Despite learning a common language, they differ in

their verbal and nonverbal expressions. They are socialized to belong to sex-segregated social groups, wear gender-appropriate clothing, prefer activities and toys associated with one sex or another, and develop different competencies based on those activities (Bennet deMarrais and LeCompte 292).

Additionally, in the Jewish religion, Rabbinic interpretations of Jewish laws and customs, exemplify the rituals and behaviors that are expected from women of all ages within the Jewish faith.

Religious laws and the interpretation and incorporation of these laws into a Jewish way of life shapes the lens for a Jewish woman's sense of female gender and role of femininity within Judaism. In addition to sociological and religious explanations for the behavioral examples of gender, scientific research examines inherent, biological factors that may facilitate behaviors associated with the categorization of gender; being either male or female. While research has yet to determine conclusive results on the biological causes for behaviors contributed to being sex and gender related, research has taken strides to identify chromosomal markers. As per *Time Magazine, The Science of Gender, Differences, Similarities and How We Live, Beyond He or She, Biology and the Brain, Matters of Sex*, published in February 2020,

From the time the human species emerged, it was clear to us that we were binary beings, designed in two varieties, male and female (within Western industrial society, --that is hundreds of cultures throughout time have recognized more than two genders). The more we learned about biology, the more we thought we understood that there were two basic drivers of the gender divide: our genome---especially the X and Y chromosomes that

determine a male and the two X's that determine a female—and our hormones, the fuel for the genetic engine. These hormones, which are with us for life, operate most dramatically at two developmental moments: in the womb and, later, during puberty, when they trigger explosive physical and emotional changes, turning the child into a sexually mature adult (*Time Magazine*).

Hormones and their interaction with genes create a genetic make-up that is a probable, influential determinant for a person's internal sense of gender. *Time* stated,

Hormones don't operate independently. Much of what they do happens in collaboration with genes. In the womb, the sex determining region Y (SRY) gene and the hormone dihydrotestosterone (DHT) are the joint spark plugs that get sexual differentiation going. With high levels of DHT and the SRY gene on the Y chromosome, the journey toward being male begins. Lower DHT and no SRY gene leads to a female (*Time Magazine*).

In addition to the research on the effect chromosomal levels have on the formation of gender, researchers are looking into the effects of brain development in the womb and its contributing factors to whether a person identifies as male or female. As per *Time*,

Sanbonmatsu is now exploring another part of the gender puzzle: brain structure. She and Rupert Lanzenberger, an associate professor in the department of psychiatry and psychotherapy at the Medical University of Vienna, are conducting neuro-imaging to look for any telltale anatomy that acts as a marker of gender identity (*Time Magazine*).

Brain imaging research is still very preliminary and research on sex-related behaviors has not been conclusive.

Biological and environmental stimuli appear to be at play in shaping a person's gender identity. As per *Time*, "Even if Sanbonmatsu and Lanzenberger do find something in the architecture of the brain, it still won't fully explain the ineffable nature of gender identity—the deep sense of simply knowing who we are, whether our anatomy agrees with that or not"(*Time Magazine*).

This research strongly points to the correlative link between biological factors and socialization, in the formation of a person's sense of gender. Additionally, socialization found within the beliefs and practices of religion may also influence behaviors associated with a person's sense of gender.

While modern scientific research has tapped into the biological differences in female brains and male brains, the research has yet to specifically identify the biological markers in the brain that would explain the differences in the ways that each sex acts. This suggests that differences in behavior of the sexes are also due to the socialization of the individuals. As per *TIME*, "While science must recognize sex-based brain differences, experts say culture and gender categorization will always have to be a coequal object of the research"(*Time Magazine*). This would also support the notion that female gender roles exemplified within the practice of Judaism are not only biologically inherited, but learned behaviors adopted from the beliefs, practice and cultural traditions of the Jewish religion. A Jewish woman's sense of femininity is

cultivated from inherent, genetic markers culminated with environmental influences of religious beliefs and practices within the family unit and community.

Gender Role Affiliation Within Judaism Learned From Observation and Environment

In traditional Judaism, children are taught gender roles, early in life through storytelling, and observations of the traditions and customs of the religion. It is from these experiences that their minds are imprinted with the association of being either male or female within Judaism. Children are impressionable and imitate role playing within school and play settings. In traditional Judaism, children note that a mother's role is to stay at home and care for the children and family while the father typically goes out to work and earns money for the family.

However, in modern times this cultural trend has rapidly changed its course. Mothers and fathers interchange roles within the family unit in modernity. A father may decide to stay at home with the children while the mother goes out to work and earns money. Children observe the roles that their parents take on in the family unit and their observations mold their intuitive sense of themselves as masculine or feminine.

The role of a Jewish woman is not learned only from her familial unit, but from the impressions made upon her in the larger community. Observations on the assumed roles of women in the domestic sphere and in the external world influence the perception of a Jewish woman's role in society. In religious, Jewish families, information regarding the external pop-cultural world is sheltered from the minds of young children. Instead, the children play with each other, often raised in large families of 8 to ten children, so the siblings have each other to

socialize and imitate roles with. As per *PEW*, “They are especially likely to have large families: Among those who have had children, nearly half (48%) of Orthodox Jews have four or more offspring, while just 9% of other Jewish parents have families of that size (*PEW*).

The Jewish faith relies heavily upon the history of the religion and its past. Most holiday celebrations and traditions represent a story celebrating the past. The depiction of Jewish women in these historical Biblical stories is impressionable to later generations and responsible for the social constructs of the female gender. Additionally, a patriarchal social order within ancient societies was existential in ancient Jewish society. Men dictated the laws that shaped social expectations on how a Jewish woman should look and act. In most of these Biblical stories we often only hear from the male’s point of view which is suggestive that the women’s presence was silenced because it was deemed less important than the male’s presence within society.

In a book entitled, *Standing Again At Sinai: Judaism From A Feminist Perspective*, Plaskow noted, “Thus Torah—“Jewish” sources, “Jewish” teaching—puts itself forward as *Jewish* teaching but speaks in the voice of only half the Jewish people”(Plaskow 5). The Torah represents religious scrolls the Jewish religion is centered around. The Torah has religious laws that were influenced by the cultural expectations of the societal times in which they were transcribed. The Torah is referenced as God’s word that was handed down to Moses and is referred to within The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. In these writings, are laws that infer to how women should act, and cites rituals that women should perform.

These laws, supposedly stated from God, were re-interpreted by Moses, and then interpreted again by subsequent rabbis, and dissected, analyzed, re-written and re-conformed for centuries. Each new generation and the cultural imprints on the minds of its people and religious leaders has a small influence in the interpretation of religious teachings and laws. With each new generation, comes new interpretations of Jewish law that have shaped the sense of gender and femininity of Jewish women. Cultural changes and societal constructs posit challenges to ancient, Jewish laws. Handed down, throughout centuries, has been an evolution of responses to the religious questions and concerns of Jewish women in modernity. These issues continue to be addressed and are imminent in the newer branches of thought from traditional Judaism.

Women's roles within Judaism, except for the strictest of following as seen in Jewish Orthodoxy and Hasidism, have evolved throughout the centuries, and newer models of Judaic thought, referred to as the Conservative and Reform platforms of the Jewish religion address women's concerns and issues in Judaism. Plaskow noted,

For feminists, insistence on the communal character of human selfhood is articulated over against the individualism of the dominant strand in Western culture, and represents the intersection of a number of streams of experience and analysis. The consciousness-raising groups of the 1960's that marked the beginning of the second wave of feminism provided important evidence of the communal nature of human life. Examining our experience in the conscious-raising context, women were able to piece together the process of socialization and learning that shape the female role. We were able to see that our self-understandings, our life choices, our expectations of ourselves as women were

not the product simply of our own growth and development but of powerful social forces that had molded us from birth. Moreover, at the same time we came to see the communal origins of the constraints of our lives, we also experienced community as the source of our liberation. Coming to a clear understanding of gender as socially constructed, we experienced a new opening of self, a sense of freedom to be and become our own persons rather than to live out the prescriptive social roles (Plaskow 77).

The roles assumed by the female gender within Jewish families of past and present has been the repetitive pattern of ancient traditions and rituals representative of the social constructs formulated and interpreted from the readings of Ancient Hebrew texts.

Within each new interpretation and reading have been alterations to the previous social constructs, and changes have been made by these interpretations of each new generation, throughout history. Plaskow additionally commented, “If women’s experience is distinct from men’s---and I believe it is---the reasons are primarily historical and social. The different socialization of men and women, present in different ways in every culture, nurtures divergent capacities and divergent experiences of the world” (Plaskow 11). The Jewish way of life honors and celebrates the writings found within the Torah, and the Torah has been instrumental in the social construct of the female gender exemplary within interpretations of ancient and modern, Judaism, but modernity has reframed those constructs, in our culturally familiar ideals of feminism, and even in the Orthodox community,

Mental Adaptations of Female Gender Roles Within Modern Orthodoxy

In Orthodox Jewish families, men are expected to learn the laws of the Torah while the women care for the home. Davidman's study showed the recruiting style differences in the Orthodox and Hassidic sects. In the Orthodox recruit the Rabbi appealed to the women's sense of obliged sense of passage to convert to Orthodoxy while the Hassidic Rabbi packaged the choice on Hasidic conversion as more of a personal choice. In Davidman's study of Orthodox, Jewish women recruits as compared to the Lubavitch Hasidic women recruits, Davidman referenced the different perspectives of the recruiting rabbis in each temple as she commented,

Rabbi Levine is well aware that in becoming Orthodox, the women are in fact choosing to live very differently from the way they were brought up. Yet even while knowing that these women have left non-traditional, un-Orthodox homes to become observant Jews, the rabbi *overlooks* this act of choice on the part of the women. Instead, he emphasizes how similar the women are to their mothers, in role if not in ritual behavior. This idealization of their resemblance to their mothers has the consequence of reinforcing traditional roles for women with true fulfilment coming in the Orthodox mode. It also highlights the theme of continuity, in the context of a world view that stresses obedience to the tradition and its past (Davidman 13).

This study exemplified the potentiality that Orthodox Judaism has on the influence of impressionable psyches belonging to both men and women. Rather than presenting the choice on the part of the women to convert from a non-religious following, to an Orthodox following of the religion, as a move of religious and social empowerment on the part of the women, the Rabbi in

the study reframed the women's decisions as the expected transitional paths expected of them in Judaism and coerced them into believing this move was most optimal. The rabbi's effort in recruiting these women into his congregation was representative of the patriarchal treatment of women evident in tracings of traditional Judaism. If the women decided to choose a more Hasidic lifestyle then that choice should be viewed with the positivity of the decision and examine the beneficial effect it would have on the woman's life and there are several.

A strict following of Judaism as seen in Orthodox Judaism and the Hasidic sects, offers a ritualistic way of approaching life. The following of religious rituals, customs and traditions is spiritually grounding. Offspring born to the mother of a very religious Jewish woman will be fully accepted into the Jewish community. It gives the strict followers of Judaism a sense of connectedness to God and a tool guide to a sensuality within a marriage. Orthodoxy helps people to feel that their lives have some type of order. They feel a sense of God's presence in their lives and this is what they find most comforting. When re-framing the rabbi's view that this path of Orthodoxy was expected of them to this choice will empower their lives the religious decision to make the change is viewed with encouragement and respect for the woman. The choice to switch religious practice from non-religious to a more religious following of Judaism has many advantages along with disadvantages but the personal benefits for a woman and her future family and should be fairly viewed and her freedom of choice treated with the utmost of respect.

Modern Jewish Re-Framed Thought on Menstruation

The strict adherence to the laws of purity are typically seen in Jewish families that are Orthodox or Hassidic but there are many young, Jewish women, observant and non-observant

Jews that are re-writing the traditional, Jewish attitudes toward menstruation. Historically, in ancient Judaism and in modern households, the act of a woman's menstrual period is often treated as if it is unclean and is held as a secret occurrence.

In modern Jewish society the laws regarding *niddah* are often not observed. Author Blu Greenberg commented,

Relatively few Jews observe the laws of *niddah* today, not the great mass of assimilated Jews who ignore mitzvot in general, nor Reform Jews who view *niddah* as a relic of rabbinic Judaism, nor Conservative Jews who default by silence, nor, for that matter, many Jews who consider themselves Orthodox. And yet, the laws of *niddah* and *mikveh* are considered *gufei ha-torah*, the essential laws of the Torah (117).

Many modern Jewish females feel that the *niddah* laws are unnecessary because they can clean themselves at home and may feel uncomfortable with the fuss of cleansing themselves publicly around their time of menstruation. On the other hand *mikvehs* have around for about two hundred years and the modern Jewish woman that do use them view the experience as spiritually renewing.

Young, Jewish females may often be raised to believe that menstruation is not something to talk about in front of the males in the household. While I was not raised in an Ultra-Orthodox household, this mentality of not discussing the occurrence of my menstrual period in the home around my brother or father was the manner in which my non-religious, Jewish mother taught me to handle menstruation every month. I felt so ashamed that I was a menstruating female that for

the longest time I couldn't even say the word "period" if it referenced menstruation. In retrospect, I realize now that this must have been a mind-set that my mother unknowingly and inadvertently handed down from religious beliefs pertaining to menstruation in Judaism. I was never taught to go to a *mikvah* when my menstrual bleeding ceased but I was taught how important it was for a female to bathe her body in a tub bath following the time of a menstrual period. It is only after learning about the Jewish laws of the *mikvah* and menstruation that I have recently linked the Judaic customs and beliefs on menstruation to how my Jewish mother treated it in our household along with the learned regimen of bathing in the aftermath of ceased menstrual periods. Additionally, once married I never felt ashamed about my menstrual period and my husband never let it deter him either. He unknowingly listened to the commandment that he was required to satisfy his wife and neither he nor I ever seemed to care what day of the month that entailed.

Judaic Femininity Can Be Re-Shaped Through Modern Storytelling

Stories of ancient Judaic women serve as role models for generations of women that follow. As per Lynn Gottlieb, author of a book entitled, *She Who Dwells Within, A Feminist Vision of a Renewed Judaism*, Gottlieb noted,

One of the greatest challenges for Jewish women is the broadening of religious meaning around the telling of the stories of our first "Tribal mothers," Sarah, Hagar, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. These women (with the exception of Hagar, who is honored by women in Muslim traditions) have served as spiritual role models for generations of Jewish women. On Friday evening girls are told, "May you be like Sarah and Rebecca, Rachel

and Leah,” after their mothers light the candles. Yet the lives of these women are told only in relationship to husbands and sons. We do not hear about their birth, even in legend, nor about their lives once their sons become men (Gottlieb 8).

Gottlieb represents the re-telling of traditional stories found within the bible that give the silent women mentioned in the stories a voice from within. Gottlieb further commented,

“The Freedom Generation” retells the stories of the midwives, Search Bat Asher, Shifra, Yocheved and Miriam. These women appear in the Bible and Jewish legend as heroines in the drama of the Israelite exodus from the slavery of Egypt. Although their stories are fuller than those of most women of the Bible, they still have not found their way into the liturgy of Passover. I would like to retell the stories of these women so they become a standard feature of Judaism’s most celebrated holy day. As we struggle to liberate from our tradition from the bonds of sexism, may these women’s stories help us to envision our freedom (Gottlieb 8).

The reframing of these Bible stories will help to re-shape the imaging of Judaic women within Judaism and serve as a model for the changing cultural climate of the modern world, where the role of women in society is recognized and honored. Gottlieb additionally commented,

A feminist approach to Torah begins with the question, how might women have told their stories if they were central, rather than peripheral characters in the Bible? What happens when we let Dinah speak in first person about her rape? When Miriam becomes the prophet who leads us through the parting seas? When we transform Rachel and Leah’s

stories into a tale about two loving sisters instead of jealous rivals? When we allow Biblical women a story beyond their roles as mother? Stories are the medium through which women learn about each other and widen the circle of shared experience. Through story-telling we add to the wisdom contained in the traditional sources and help one another envision a future in which men and women have equal opportunities to tell stories in public (Gottlieb 60).

While the re-framing of Biblical stories in modern times, has the potentiality to influence the minds of young women, some women are more inclined to follow the laws of Judaism that are outlined in the Orthodox way of life. They may be born into families that follow the Ultra-Orthodoxy with strict laws of Judaism but these women may find the Orthodox lifestyle satisfying with its order and tradition of customs.

In Ultra-Orthodox Jewish homes, young women are typically not educated on Jewish laws because it is believed that their role in life is to maintain domestic homes, raise children and support their husbands as they become scholarly experts on the religion. Orthodox Jewish thoughts and practices exemplify the strict adherence to Jewish laws and are demonstrative, to the young children of the religion, of the ways a Jewish man and a Jewish woman should act in accordance to Jewish laws within society.

Ethnicity Shaping a Woman's Connection To Judaism and Adherence To Religious Laws

There is a common thread of ethnicity that many people within the varying sects of Judaism feel toward the religion. As per Bennet de Marrais and LeCompte (1999), the authors

state that ethnic identity refers to self-identifying with a particular ethnic group and acknowledging the group as an ethnic heritage (Bennett de Marrais and LeCompte 261).

While there are many levels of observance in Judaism, there is a commonality of history and culture within the religion, as Jewish people often share an approach to life that is inherent in the ways they process information and conduct themselves.

Interpretations of Scriptures Outline Behaviors Expected of Modern, Jewish Women

Through a strict observance of the religious scriptures, a Jewish woman's sense of femininity or gender has been shaped, according to religious, Judaic rules contextual to the societies they were living within. Author Lynn Davidman commented,

The changes in women's roles in the past two decades likewise are viewed as undermining religious world views. Orthodox Judaism, for example, denies women access to full participation in public ritual life and defines their roles exclusively in conventional terms, emphasizing their duties as wives and mothers in nuclear families.

Presently, however, many women are choosing alternative roles as central components of their self-identity (Davidman 6).

Females in Orthodox Judaism are expected to act in accordance to what is written in the Talmudic religious scripts. Following these strict religious laws is believed to sustain society as God envisioned it to be. Religious rules serve as an outline for how people are supposed to act. However, in modern society women are taking on roles outside of the domestic home. They are educating themselves and working professional jobs outside of their responsibilities as wives and

mothers. This poses a challenge to the modern, Jewish families that traditionally outlined the role of women as the center for the family unit. Now, in modern times, mothers are taking on jobs and children are being sent to day care or the care of the children is assumed by the fathers. This branching away from the traditional gender roles is what many Conservative and Reform, Jewish American families are adopting as a lifestyle. Women want to work outside of the home and in many families the additional money a woman can earn outside of the home has become a necessity for financial survival.

The more traditional sects of Judaism and its followers feel that adopting an Orthodox way of life is most rewarding. As per author Lynn Davidman,

Unlike the Lubavitch, who shore up their religious teachings by asserting that the newcomers really do have a choice about taking on this way of life, the rabbis at the Metropolitan Synagogue promote ritual observance by enumerating its benefits.

Newcomers are told to become Orthodox because they will personally gain from it: it is the healthiest, most ethical, and most satisfying way to live (Davidman 9).

For survival, in ancient civilizations, men were notably tough, strong and the hunters of food for that sustained the survival of the family unit, while women's, stereotypical characteristics were marked with sensitivity and nurturing. In most civilizations, men have been socially conditioned to act tough while women have been taught to be the nurturers. Comparative to ancient societies, in modern times, a heightened societal awareness has come to the forefront of that gender roles encompass more fluidity than generations of the past have given credit to. However, gender related behavior appears to have a scientific, biological explanation that can be attributed to

female behavior. Additionally, gender related behavior has developed as a social construct that was in response to the influences of gender in religious rules and socialization. The Jewish scriptures, if closely followed, have the potentiality to shape a woman's sense of femininity but in the modern, Western world, as women adapt to the cultural context of the changing world, philosophies of the strict observance of Judaism have become questioned and altered with adaptable approaches to the following of Judaism.

Feminism Influences Women Within Judaism

In modernity, women of all faiths have stepped outside of the domestic sphere, along with their husbands or partners, to further educate themselves, take on professional jobs and raise children either alone or dualistically with their domestic partners. Societal norms outlined for women, of all faiths have moved further away from the patriarchal mindsets that existed in ancient civilizations. Many Jewish women have reframed religious constraints historically set upon them and they practice the religion, with a newly found sense of empowerment, within the context of the changing society. Gottlieb noted,

Since the advent of the twentieth century, Jewish women have been steadily moving from silence and submission toward women's liberation. We are breaking down the barriers that restricted our lives and are empowering ourselves to refashion a tradition based on the assumption of our equality. Not as separate but equal, but as fully able and equal. Feminism, the movement for women's rights, has confirmed our recent perceptions that Jewish women have, indeed, been an oppressed class within our culture. We have been

denied the material, legal, and spiritual privileges granted to the group of people we have been required to serve, that is, men (Gottlieb 5).

In moving forward from the patriarchal mind-set against women within historical societies it is important to understand the context of patriarchal history those constraints were built upon. As Plaskow commented, “The project of creating a Jewish Feminist theology begins with memory, for Jewish existence is rooted in Jewish memory. Both the patriarchal character of Judaism and resources for transforming the tradition are grounded in the Jewish past” (Plaskow 75). In understanding the historical context of the theological rules and laws that were placed upon women in ancient civilizations, new perspectives on a woman’s place in the religion can be analyzed and molded to better fit into the lives and attitudes of Judaic women in the modern world.

A philosophical adaptation or feminist perspective to the historical treatment of women in past Jewish civilizations would be to acknowledge the past for its patriarchy, while reimagining the status and portrayal of Judaic women in modern times. Plaskow further noted,

The consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s that marked the beginning of the second wave of feminism provided important evidence of the communal nature of human life. Examining our experience in the consciousness-raising context, women were able to piece together the processes of socialization and learning that shape the female role. We were able to see that our self-understandings, our life choices, our expectations of ourselves as women were not the product simply of our own growth and development but of powerful social forces that had molded us from birth. Moreover, at the same time we

came to see the communal origins of the constraints on our lives, we also experienced community as the source of our liberation. Coming to a clear understanding of gender as socially constructed, we experienced a new opening of self, a sense of freedom to be and become our own persons rather than to live out prescriptive social roles” (Plaskow 77).

In the modern world, many women aim to rise above the prior constraints of societal and religious patriarchy. Blu Greenberg noted,

The charge that Jewish feminists are mixing religion with sexual politics must be examined, not denied. Those who say it is unthinkable, unwise, unholy, or untraditional to speak of Halakkah and political pressure in the same breath are simply hiding historical facts. Politics and pressure ---the substance as well as the art---certainly have affected halakhic decisions throughout our history. How could leaders know the needs of individuals and special interest groups if not through politics, pressure, power plays, protest, and pleading. These actions enabled those with knowledge and authority to bring a different subjectivity to their task of interpreting the law (Greenberg 50).

With the exception of the very Orthodox and Hassidic Jewish sects, who adhere to the very traditional followings of the female gender roles, Jewish women from transitioning levels of Judaic observance, such as Reform and Conservative Judaism, are stepping outside of the domestic sphere and taking more active roles in society.

The Emergence of Reform and Conservative Feminism Within Judaism

Reform and Conservative Jewish women feel that they can no longer be silenced to the degree they historically once were in their adherence to the religious laws of Judaism. To function within the mainstream of society, and have their presence heard, alterations to the previous constraints made upon women in the traditional laws of Judaism must come into focus. As per Greenberg,

The issue of *tzniut* has often been invoked in discussions of such matters. (*Tzniut* is the concept that embraces privacy, modesty, decency, and chasteness.) Is there a loss of this virtue as women take on public and private roles previously assigned only to men? Yes, if we define *tzniut* to mean women as “inside” persons with no public presence in ritual or liturgy and subject to circumscribed actions and areas of control; breaking all these taboos, in this view, constitutes a flagrant violation of the norms of *tzniut*. But it is necessary to define *tzniut* of women more broadly, that is, in terms of its characteristics, not its role limits. *Tzniut* is both absolute and relative; absolute in modes of behavior, dress, speech, and relative in all those things as well. In certain communities at certain times, a woman did not initiate actions, speak until spoken to, or venture forth into public places (a man’s domain); she did not uncover her ankles, elbows, neck, eyes. What is today perfectly acceptable behavior in the modern Orthodox community in speech, thought, dress, and action was unheard of a generation ago. Furthermore, what is permissible in one community is not permitted in another (Greenberg 51).

In Judaism, the story telling of the history when re-told if encompassing the victory and strength of women will reframe the importance of a woman's places in society as they live their lives in modernity. Yvonee Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, authors of a book entitled *Daughters of Abraham, Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* commented,

It is within this context that the first work written by an Orthodox Jewish feminist, Blu Greenberg, was published, some nine years after the birth of Ezrat Nashim. Greenberg's book (1981), *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition*, was "a sensitive attempt to reconcile the claims of feminists with complete observance of Jewish law." Greenberg was to maintain halakha as the guiding structure of Jewish life, but to find ways within it to ameliorate women's status and expand their participation in Jewish institutional, ritual, and cultural life. Most of Greenberg's efforts still fell into the category of the "equal access agenda," and her work contributed little to a search for new or different structures for Jewish communal life (Haddad & Esposito 41).

It is through the development of new ritualistic ceremonies that women's religious beliefs, traditions and customs of Judaism, can immerse the important occurrences of women's lives into the religious theology of Judaism. Gottlieb further commented that many women don't view being in a married relationship with children as their end term goal and aim to find other meaningful roles in their lives (Gottlieb 36).

It is from the changing social constructs of a woman's role in modern society, a reframing of religious thought had developed in traditional Judaism. Haddad and Esposito further commented,

During these “equal access, civil rights” years, much was accomplished: rabbinic ordination for Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Jewish women, reconsideration and reinterpretation of many specific halakhot (Jewish statutes) to improve and enhance women’s place within the tradition, introduction of feminist concerns into university Jewish studies curricula and much more (Haddad & Esposito 41).

In a changing society that attempts to move away from the idea that women belong in the domestic sphere, resistance has often been met with the ideology that if a woman assumed roles outside of the home, then the children and family unit will suffer and society at large will incur a loss of quality of life. Greenberg acknowledged this when she stated,

There is, in addition, the fear that there will be a blurring of the sex roles as a woman increasingly does a “man’s thing.” This again is based on the premise that authority, leadership, initiative, and matters of the spirit (prayer) and the mind (study) are exclusive male prerogatives (Greenberg 52).

When members of society, both male and female, accept that modernity has placed value of the roles of women within the frameworks of society, then sociological changes of the roles of women within Judaism will be implemented. For this to occur, a re-shaping of theological attitudes set forth within the early scriptures of the religion need to take place. Greenberg additionally noted,

To be sure, Judaism places very heavy emphasis on separation. We are always separating things into categories, spaces, time slots, and so forth: Sabbath from weekday, milk from meat, wool from linen, leaven from unleavened, and yes, men from women. In doing so, the uniqueness of each thing or each being is enhanced; a sense of holiness is miraculously established through the commandments of setting apart (Greenberg 52).

The lives of men and women in current modernity have exemplified that it is possible for both sexes to interchange traditional gender roles. Men are often the caregivers of young children while the mothers go out to work a professional job that financially supports the household. Women don't lose their sense of femininity by taking on corporate roles. They can still stay home and enjoy intimate, sexual relationships with their husbands or partners. As Greenberg additionally commented,

One cannot deny that Judaism has succeeded in generating a healthy sense of sexual identity, and we must be on guard to preserve this. But it cannot be done in ways which keep women suppressed, nor by means of which women are perceived as less holy or more limited. Moreover, the specific repair that Jewish women are suggesting need not—indeed, will not—break up healthy categories of male and female. How do we know this? From what we see all around us. We once had imagined that women as executives and priests and men as househusbands and kindergarten teachers inevitably would become either masculinized, feminized, or neutered in the process. Not so. Nor have women rabbis become sirens or man-like. Somehow, there must be other, perhaps finer, ways to

keep human sexuality intact than the broad, sweeping functions we have inherited (Greenberg 52).

While some Judaic women remain strong in their Orthodox Judaic beliefs, others have adapted to the changing attitudes of a woman's role within modern society. These modern, Jewish women have affiliated their religious beliefs and practices from a more traditional, Orthodox following of Judaism to a reframed theology of beliefs and practices as seen in the emergence of Reform and Conservative Judaism. As Greenberg additionally stated,

Some confront these challenges by saying that nothing can be changed. This is certainly not true of Halakkah, which is a living system, an ongoing process. There have been stringent and lenient trends in Jewish law in every generation. By combining common sense and a sensitivity to contemporary needs with a desire to remain faithful to the Torah, rabbis in every generation succeeded in preserving a love for the tradition and a sense of its continuity (Greenberg 68).

As men and women within Judaism, evolve within each new generation, the social constructs of each new society challenge the traditional laws of the religion as they pertain to gender and gender roles within Judaism.

Challenging Traditional Norms and Social Constructs Toward Change Within Judaism

A study using open-ended survey data in 2015 that involved Jewish, female participants who challenged the traditional norm of men wearing a *kippah* by choosing to wear a *kippah* in their practice of the religion, revealed a gender challenge to the traditional practices of the

religion. As Darwin noted,

Role modeling can directly inform children's internalized scripts about how to "do gender," "do religion," or in this particular case, "do gendered Judaism." To change the traditional script, this woman---and others like her---felt obligated to visibly deviate from it. It is clear that these women are not just wearing the *kippah* in order to make Judaism more inclusive of future women. Such women hold themselves more accountable to this egalitarian shift---and to other Jewish women---than they do to the patriarchal Jewish tradition (Darwin 11).

Many women in the study reported that they made the wearing of the *kippah* feel more feminized in practice because they chose to wear beaded *kippahs* or matched them with feminine accessories and clothing. Darwin additionally commented,

To encourage more women to wear the *kippah*---and thereby challenge the narrative that "*kippot* are only for men"--- such role models strategically emphasize their femininity. These feminizing tactics allow women to internally reconcile their religious and gendered scripts, enabling them to do Judaism differently without redoing their gender (Darwin 12).

This study revealed several responses to women wearing *kippah*. Women enjoyed leveling the field of what they perceived as a patriarchal practice. By wearing this *kippah* on their heads like men traditionally do, the women feel they are practicing the religion in a way that empowers

them to do so as women. Orthodox Jews have been appalled by the practice though. As per Darwin, “As one female rabbi recounts, ““ In public places where I am a rabbi, members of the ultra-Orthodox community have told me to take off my *kippah*—in the mall once and in a shopping center parking lot once””(Darwin 15). Female empowerment within the past few decades has greatly influenced the dominant roles within society that women have begun to fulfill.

As women of varying levels of observance within Judaism become more fluent on the ancient laws of the religion they implement adaptations to the outdated laws that are more suitable to life in the modern, Western civilization, yet still compatible to the practice of Judaism. Greenberg astutely acknowledged,

The unequal status of women in the religious courts needs halakhic reinterpretation and repair. There must be a flowering of women’s prayer and an encouragement of leadership roles for women in liturgy. And, most important—the means whereby all of these will be wrought—Jewish women must begin to acquire an intensive Jewish education right up through the level of high-quality rabbinic schools, preferably non-sex differentiated, so that each will hear the interpretation of the law in the presence of the “other,” so that they simultaneously grow in understanding of the tradition (Greenberg 69).

Women and men in Judaism, in all levels of observance, have made enormous strides toward the changes of older precepts within the religion. Even the strict, Orthodox Jewish women have altered some of the rules of dress, for example, from older laws.

Orthodox and Hasidic Women Require Altered Interpretations in the Modern World

Orthodox Jewish women rely upon and honor religious laws interpreted by local Rabbis and from the informed, religious beliefs of their fathers or husbands. The Orthodox Jewish community is very tight knitted and controlling of the viewing of outside information received internally from the mainstream of society. Authors Tkatch, Hudson and Albrecht published a study entitled, “Barriers to Cancer Screening among Orthodox Jewish Women.” Flyers were sent out to recruit participants in focus groups and 10 of the 53 women that responded were cancer survivors. In the article the authors noted,

Among Orthodox Jews, Judaism is more than a religion; it is a way of life. The high religiosity and strict interpretations of the Torah lead to a very insular and self-contained community. Modesty (in dress and speech), the great importance placed on marriageability and family, adherence to the Sabbath and holidays, and dietary restrictions are Torah commandments that are high priorities among Orthodox Jews. Exposure to secular media is limited and discouraged. Alternatively, Orthodox Jewish media have strict standards on what is considered appropriate for disseminating to the general Orthodox community (Tkatch, Hudson and Albrecht).

Male rabbis, fathers and husbands of Jewish Orthodox women still have tremendous control on the information that the women in their lives receive from the external, modern world. Authors Tkatch, Hudson and Albrecht additionally commented that the views of the Orthodox women were not meant to deny the women access to health care because the laws they follow were written during a time when such care and screening was not available. The study revealed that a

more updated approach to the health care for Jewish women was needed along with a better understanding of their religious modesty issues. In modern times, new rules must be created to deal with the new realities of Jewish life.

In addition to the Orthodox Jewish women feeling burdened with the demands and responsibilities of caring for large families, information on cancer health screening is often not discussed and isn't made available to them by Rabbis, fathers and husbands. A belief held by the women is often accompanied with the unavailability of cancer testing. The women tend to feel that if a cancer is detected and brought to the forefront of their lives, that God would then not perform a miracle to heal them, so they would prefer to not know if they have cancer so God would perform a miracle healing for them. The study led by the authors revealed a few barriers that Orthodox, Jewish women face in the challenge to receive health screenings and in their day to day lives.

Information pertaining to the external world is controlled in the lives of Jewish Orthodox women by Rabbis, fathers and husbands and is often not forwarded to the women. Additionally, the women feel over-burdened with the responsibilities affiliated with caring for large families and preparing for lavish holiday meals and settings throughout the month. Orthodox women are taught to be very modest about their bodies so there is consequently not much discussion on what is considered abnormal about their bodies which additionally hinders an awareness of problems and issues. Finally, Orthodox, Jewish women often feel that God will perform a healing miracle for them if health problems are not brought to the forefront.

When Orthodox, Jewish women step outside of the confines of the neighborhoods they reside within they are met with social and religious challenges. The world outside of their small communities doesn't always have an intimate understanding of their religious customs. Very Orthodox women feel very proud and modest about their bodies.

Orthodox, Jewish women are raised with the religious belief that their sacred bodies should be guarded from the external world. As Caryn Scheinberg Andrews notes in "Defining and Exploring Modesty in Jewish American Women," in the United States, there are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform/Reconstructionist groups which could be viewed on a continuum for strictest observance of the Torah Laws. The Orthodox are the strictest (Andrews, 4). Andrews explored the varying levels of modesty exhibited within the varying sects of women within Judaism. Andrews acknowledged that the guidelines the Orthodox Haredi women follow, require a strict adherence to Jewish law. As per Andrews, "Tznuut includes not only dress, but also prohibitions against being touched by the opposite gender unless married, restrictions about dancing with those of the opposite gender (even if married) in public" (Andrews 5). Andrews' report involved a case study of modesty seen within the varying religious practices of Jewish women. Orthodox women within Judaism are raised as young woman to believe that their bodies are sacred.

Andrews found that modesty was an issue that should be addressed with all women in health care but with more sensitivity and a developed understanding of the religious beliefs and customs of women. She referenced the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish women as being highly modest and shy with their bodies in the realm of receiving health care treatment. As Andrews noted,

With highly religious Orthodox Jewish women, their belief that modesty is the essence of who they are could be supported by the health care provider. When private issues are discussed, the door to the room should only be closed if the patient agrees, asking the individual if she would like another person present, and recognizing signs of discomfort when talking about sensitive subjects. Moreover, modesty is not just about covering up or wearing specific clothing, the health care provider could make the patient more comfortable by only uncovering what is necessary (Andrews 16).

When Ultra-Orthodox religious women step outside of their communities they are forced to intermingle with beliefs and practices that often differ from the ones they are most accustomed to. Health care professionals and society at large would be most effective in treating these women if their responses are empathic and slightly informed of their customs and beliefs.

Comparatively, the women need to understand that modern practitioners attempt to deliver the utmost of care to their patients and are required to follow ethical standards of health care. For the efficacy of care, a collaborative effort should be formed between the health care workers and the religious community. Modern rabbis must find culturally appropriate solutions so that Jewish women have full access to physical and mental healthcare solutions that do not violate the Talmud-only social customs derived from traditions of another time.

Reform and Conservative Judaism Emerge as a Response to Modernity

Changes in women's roles in society, from ancient Jewish civilizations to modern, traditional, Judaism, has inspired the birth of newly formed temples of Judaic thought referenced

as Reform and Conservative Judaism. The original interpretations of Rabbinic laws were made within the context of the societies of that time period. Experiences and perspectives of people changed over time and with that change has been the need to alter interpretations of religious Jewish laws. New Judaic sects have emerged in response to the cultural changes that have taken place in society throughout decades, and because women in Judaism throughout time, raised their voices to inspire change for women in the practices of the religion and further influenced the gender and sexuality of Jewish women in modern, Western civilization.

Summary and Conclusion

Our thesis has been that all Jewish women are affected by both world views in ways that are complex and multifaceted. In this review, we have discussed and concluded that Jewish women have adapted to modernity on many levels.

As members of Jewish society evolve within cultural traditions within a society, the need for revisions to prior rabbinic interpretations of Jewish commandments made to the Jewish people, arises. Through the course of history, the roles of women in Jewish society has changed and with the exception of the very Orthodox and Hasidim sect, the Jewish interpretations of Judaism have been altered as seen in Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist practices of the religion.

While my family is not religious by any means, I have a clearer understanding of the Jewish history that offers an explanation as to why we are not religious and how the ancient traditions have nevertheless influenced my modern life. Jewish women in my family in modern,

western civilization feel a cultural connection to Judaism and follow some of the traditional holiday celebrations, like Passover and Hanukah. We may not be in the habit of visiting a mikveh bath, nor do I wear wigs or modest clothing but the women in my family line are Jewish women representative of religious adaptations made throughout Jewish history in the roles of women in modern, Conservative Judaism.

Jewish ethnicity is a sense of cultural identity, a feeling of belonging to a culture and a group. Judaism is an ethnicity as well as a religion. In Judaism there are many people who identify as being Jewish but who do not necessarily follow the strict guidelines of the laws of the Torah. This is seen in my immediate family members. My grandmother when she was alive, aunt and mother have verbalized a strong sense of connectedness to the Jewish heritage and culture through the years and while there are some Jewish holidays and religious rituals they practice they are not following these practices as a strict following of the religion but rather because the following of these traditions and customs feels festive to them and provides them with a feeling that this is what they are supposed to do as Jewish women.

I have a childhood friend whom I have known since I was eleven years old. She was raised Jewish in my neighborhood of Briarwood, Queens but her family, like mine, was not religious. She lost her mother to a long cancer battle a few years before I met her. She has an older sister and brother who moved out of the apartment she lived in with her father. They already married and started families of their own. My friend was the youngest of the siblings yet her father left her to fend for herself on most days because he went to work to earn money for the family. She and I became close friends and spent much time together. She eventually met a

wonderful guy who was not Jewish. He was twenty years older than her but they fell in love, married and had two beautiful boys.

My friend was never religious when she was younger but once she had children, she and her husband decided to join the Orthodox sect of the Jewish religion. She encountered many problems with this decision. The main problem was that her husband was Catholic and the Orthodox Jews in their neighborhood temple in Fairfield, Connecticut would not accept their family into the congregation because her husband did not have a Jewish blood line.

Despite being rejected from the congregation, she and her husband continued to learn about Judaism and together began to strictly follow the laws of Judaism as a new way of life. I asked her once why she felt inclined to strictly follow the Jewish laws and she said that it made her feel closer to God and to her mother but most importantly it provided her with a list of ways to be a Jewish woman. What I have not understood in all this time is something that I learned while researching and writing this paper. My friend has been carrying out the rituals of visiting a mikvah, wearing wigs, dressing modestly and keeping a kosher home because she feels that the following of these religious acts will help her to define her role as a Jewish woman. She is acting in this way because she truly believes it is expected of her, even in the modern world. She is carrying out religious rituals that have been handed down for centuries that depict how a Jewish woman is expected to act as a follower of Judaism. Judith Butler is a modern philosopher who examined the concept of gender related behavior and has written much on the topic. In Dino

Felluga's examination of Butler's writings on gender related behavior discussions, Felluga commented,

Such feminists accepted the fact that certain anatomical differences do exist between men and women but they pointed out how most of the conventions that determine the behaviors of men and women are, in fact, social gender constructions that have little or nothing to do with our corporeal sexes. According to traditional feminists, sex is a biological category; gender is a historical category. Butler questions that distinction by arguing that our "gender acts" affect us in such material, corporeal ways that our perception of corporeal sexual differences are affected by social conventions (Felluga).

Butler is stating that performative gender identity is the result of performative actions that are repeated over time. Judaic laws written in the Torah require religious women to follow strict rituals in the name of Judaic observance. Gender is a regulating ideal. It can also be argued that the performance of the ritualistic acts, in the name of the following of Judaism, aims to construct the heterosexual nature of Jewish women coercively from the lens of ancient Jewish civilization that was filled with patriarchal views of its time.

What my friend has yet to realize is that there are new ways in modern civilization to re-frame and re-model the image of a Jewish woman's role in modern society. There are newly formed beliefs socially constructing the expectations of Jewish women that incorporate ideologies and concepts of modern society. There is a modernistic approach to Judaism that is feministic and empowering to Jewish women that reframes patriarchal rituals placed upon women from within ancient interpretations of the religion. For example, if a woman chooses to

engage in a mikvah bath around her time of menstruation it is deemed as a retreat and spiritual renewal experience and not a demand placed upon her because her body is considered unclean. My friend can choose to honor and take care of her body in a way that better matches her core identity.

Yentl's Revenge, edited by Danya Ruttenberg, is a collection of modern Jewish women's feminist perspectives of Judaism. Jewish women in modern society have reframed their sense of belonging to the Jewish heritage and culture in ways that exclude the need to keep a kosher home or visit a mikvah with regularity. In Ruttenberg's book, Belzer commented,

Embracing my Jewish feminist Valley Girl identity has allowed me to honor all sides of myself. As a Valley Girl, I had paid meticulous attention to altering my appearance. When I became feminist, I decided to learn to love and honor my body, rather than investing all of my energy in trying to improve it. Instead, I set out to change the world. My Valley Girl identity enables me to feel entitled to complain, while my feminist identity compels me to acknowledge the class and race-based privilege behind the entitlement. As a Jewish feminist, I acknowledge the importance of community and the significance of history while working to critique and correct the myopic attitudes that pervade American culture (Ruttenberg 187).

Modern Jewish women have recognized their value in society and have embraced their abilities to be active members of the Jewish community. Rather than being spectators on the sidelines to the rituals, women actively join in the religious practices of modern Judaism.

When I was a young girl my family struggled with finances. Money was allocated to the essential needs of our family. However, when it was time to make the decision for my brother and I to receive a higher education my mother found monetary resources to support my brother's schooling endeavors -- but not mine. He went to Law school and became a lawyer, and I was encouraged to marry as quickly as possible so that I could find husband to start a family with and who would support me financially. Ignorant to the ramifications of this suggestion, I followed the advice of my family members and married a man that my grandmother and mother advised I could learn to love through time. I had a child from that union of marriage but the relationship did not prosper. My ex-husband and I had a tumultuous relationship until we finally divorced after seven years of marriage.

As a single mother, I chose to stay at home and raise my son because it didn't make sense to pay a stranger to care for him. This decision resulted in putting my educational and professional endeavors on hold. It is only as of recent years in my fifty-five years of life, now that my son is grown, that I have returned to school and am earning a Master's degree. I realize now that the advice given to me by my family members to not pursue a college education in my youth had coercive tracings of patriarchal thought found within traditional Judaism and I regret being influenced in that way. Jewish women now have the freedom to act out their lives separate from the coercive patriarchal influences I experienced as a young woman.

Future research on the gender and sexuality of Jewish women should include an opportunity to speak with women who identify themselves as followers of Judaism in varying levels of observance to explore their experiences of being Jewish women in modern American

society. It would be interesting to learn if modern Jewish women visit mikvah baths with regularity, and if they do, how they view their experiences. Additionally, I would like to learn if modern Jewish women follow the *niddah* laws around their times of menstruation and how that works for them. Appendix A contains a survey/interview format which may be used to collect data on these questions. Once I have compiled the survey results I would perform a qualitative analysis of the interviews to organize results and identify areas that are of further interest to explore. Additionally, it would be interesting to visit Jewish temples in varying levels of observance to observe how congregants interact with each other in a temple of worship.

My religious communications with God are introspective and reflective of Hannah's private prayers with God, back in ancient Judaism. While I have never bathed in a mikvah, as a woman who identifies a Conservative Jew, with a hybrid of spiritual beliefs, representative of a feministic re-telling of traditional Judaism, I would have to say that a culmination of religious and spiritual tracings of traditional Judaism have shaped my sense of womanhood and sexuality. While my father was Catholic he converted to Judaism when he married my Jewish mother. Under matrilineage law I am considered a Jew, and the cultural influences from the bloodline of my mother's Jewish heritage have much to do with the woman I am today.

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Appendix A: Gender & Sexuality of Jewish Women Question Pool

The purpose of this survey is to gather information from women of varying levels of Judaic religiosity who live in modern, Western civilization to understand how modernity has affected belief and practice of Judaism for women.

Women and Judaism in the Modern World – Question Pool

DEMOGRAPHICS

Can you please tell me a little about yourself?

The following questions will help to gather demographic information about you.

- 1) What is your religion?
- 2) Can you please state your age?
- 3) What gender do you identify with?
- 4) What is your highest level of education?
- 5) What is your occupation?
- 6) What city and town do you live in?
- 7) What is your marital status?
- 8) If married, how many children do you have?
- 9) If married, how many years have you been married?

- 10) Do you currently live in a neighborhood that is within walking distance to a Jewish synagogue?
- 11) Do you have Jewish neighbors?
- 12) Do you have many Jewish friends? Where do they live?

FAMILY FACTORS

Can you please tell me about your family of origin?

- 13) What state and town were you raised in?
- 14) How many siblings do you have?
- 15) Are you close with your siblings and their families?
- 16) Do your siblings and their families live within close proximity to you?

RELIGIOSITY

What was the level of religiosity in your household when you were growing up?

- 17) Did you attend a public school or a private school?
- 18) Did you receive religious education?

How observant was your family?

- 19) Did your family live within walking distance to a temple?
- 20) Did your family attend religious services with regularity?
- 21) Were both of your parents of Jewish descent?
- 22) Did you have other Jewish friends?

- 23) Did your family follow a strict observance of the Jewish religion?
- 24) Were you expected to dress a certain way?
- 25) Was your clothing personally made for you or did you buy it in a store?
- 26) Were you required to attend any religious services?
- 27) Did your family celebrate Jewish holidays? What holiday traditions do you remember?
- 28) Were you taught how to cook as a young woman?
- 29) Were you required to follow a kosher diet? If so, were you taught how to keep a kosher house? What does that entail, if so?
- 30) Were you allowed to have male friends at a young age?
- 31) Were you allowed to date as a teenager?

LEVEL OF OBSERVANCE

I would like to ask what you feel your current level of religious observance is. How observant is your immediate family?

- 32) Do you currently follow the strict guidelines of Jewish law? In what ways?
- 33) Do you follow a dress code?
- 34) Do you keep a Kosher home?
- 35) How do you feel about people that don't follow strict guidelines of Jewish law?
- 36) Please describe your relationship with God.
- 37) How do you and your family follow the strict religious laws?

FAMILY STATUS

- 38) Do you feel you have certain duties to your partner/husband? What are they?
- 39) Were you set up with your partner/husband by a friend of the family or match maker?
- 40) What do you feel your obligations to your partner/husband are?
- 41) Do you follow the laws of the mikvah around your time of menstruation?
- 42) If so, how does this observance affect your relationship with your significant other?
- 43) If so, do you feel these laws enhance your relationship in any way?
- 44) Do you have children? How many? How many are female?
- 45) How important is it to you that your children marry Jewish people?

REARING DAUGHTERS

The following questions are intended for women that have a daughter or are preparing to have a daughter. Do you have a daughter or plan to have a daughter?

- 46) What will you teach your daughter about being Jewish?

- 47) If you had a choice of religion for your daughter would you choose for her to be born into the Jewish religion?

JEWISH SELF PERCEPTION

Now I would like to learn more about the Judaic woman you would describe yourself as. Can you please describe who you are?

- 48) How would you define a Jewish woman's role in current society?
- 49) Do you ever feel discriminated by people you associate with that are of the Jewish faith? If so, can you discuss this?
- 50) Do you feel society outside of the Jewish community discriminates against people that are of the Jewish faith? If so, can you explain why?
- 51) Have you closely studied Jewish laws?
- 52) Do you feel it is necessary for women of the Jewish faith to increase their knowledge of Jewish scriptures? If so, have you ever experienced any hurdles on trying to gain this knowledge from people within your community?
- 53) Do you feel you are an integral member of society?
- 54) Are you an active member of society outside of the Jewish culture? If so, please explain.
- 55) How much do your experiences with the traditions and culture of Judaism factor into the perceptions you currently hold about yourself?
- 56) Are there any changes to current Jewish laws and customs that you would like to see facilitated?

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

