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The Connection Between the Decision to Join a Secular Jewish-Oriented Group and Perceived Jewish Identity: A Comparative Study Between American and Israeli Joiners

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THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE DECISION TO JOIN A SECULAR JEWISH-
ORIENTED GROUP AND PERCEIVED JEWISH IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
BETWEEN AMERICAN AND ISRAELI JOINERS.

by

Nirit Bayrach-Avraham

Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The literature about self-identity views the self as socially constructed, constantly revised, and providing the individual with a narrative of continuity despite change (Shu-Fang Dien, 2000; McAdams, 1985). In this study, identity literature and the narrative approach were used theoretically and methodologically, to explore the connections between the decision to join a secular Jewish-oriented group (SJOG), and the joiner's perceived Jewish identity among joiners in Israel and in the U.S.

It was hypothesized that joining serves to reinforce, distinguish, and renegotiate a Jewish secular identity. Additionally, differences in the group's social context were expected to manifest through identity-negotiations content.

Results emphasized the importance of joining a group, and group identity, to the development of self-identity. Joiner's narrations revealed an attempt to bridge polarized self-identities and thus create a continuous and balanced self-story. The social context subtly influenced the decision to join a SJOG. Finally, in negotiating identities, individuals created outer social constructs to accommodate their identity needs.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Over the past 10-15 years, we have witnessed the emergence of different organizations and spontaneous groups that offer the opportunity for secular Jews to join various secular but Jewish-oriented groups in Israel. In addition, the 1990s in Israel may be characterized by a vital (and sometimes violent) debate on the Jewish identity of the Jewish State (Liebman, 1990). The modern secular view is confronted with religious, Jewish nationalistic views. In light of these phenomena, it is interesting to explore why secular Jews would choose to join a Secular Jewish Oriented Group (SJOG) that often deals with ancient Jewish texts and rituals that seem irrelevant or even opposed to their secular viewpoint.

In the U.S., in contrast, secular Jewish groups have existed since the 1900s, when a New York Magazine, *Yiddishe Volkszeitung*, attempted to represent new Jewish trends such as nationalism and socialism. Jewish secular organizations were established later, representing Judaism as a nationality with a historic culture rather than a religious community. Nowadays, these groups are spread throughout North and Central America (Goodman, 1976).

Why do secular Jews join these groups in Israel and what are their reasons for joining in the U.S.? How are these reasons alike and in what ways do they differ? These are the questions that this study addresses. The identity literature serves as the foundation to this research. Additionally, this research uses a narrative approach to personal identity. Self-identity and social identity theories are used as the theoretical foundation for understanding the reasons why both American and Israeli groups join secular Jewish organizations.

Self-identity is defined as a life story that is socially constructed and constantly being revised, providing a sense of continuity to an individual's life despite change (Shu-fang Dien,

2000). In brief, it is assumed that whereas a secure identity serves as a guide for future choices, conflict between identities can create a crisis that, in turn, will lead to a re-examination of one's identification.

This work adopts the notion that successful identity formation is driven by the need for self-unity (unity between different parts in the self), self-consistency (consistency of the self over time), and self-enhancement (attaching positive value to self when compared to others). These formations are achieved through maintaining a particular life narrative that is consistent and coherent. In addition, this work uses the assumption that identity is influenced by a social context and is structurally composed of interpersonal networks, group memberships, and inter-group relationships.

The case of secular Jewish joiners is of special interest. The secular social self is traditionally identified with a humanistic, modern, and liberal-individualistic agenda. In contrast, the Jewish Social Self is traditionally identified with Jewish ethnic identity that, in turn, is based on a collective, religiously rooted tradition and heritage. Thus, it seems that the act of joining a Secular Jewish Oriented Group potentially conflicts with both a secular humanistic narrative and a traditional Jewish narrative.

The purpose of this paper is to reveal the connection between the decision to join a Secular Jewish Oriented Group and the joiner's perceived Jewish identity as reflected through a narrative approach among secular joiners in Israel and in the U.S. It is hypothesized that joining a secular, Jewish-oriented group is done in order to reinforce and distinguish a Jewish secular narrative and that this new identity is negotiated both in terms of its value and its content. This work assumes group differences in the content of the identity negotiations.

CHAPTER 2: IDENTITY

Personal Identity

Identity can be explored from various points of view. Traditional modern views define identity as a “stable niche” created through the adoption of value hierarchies, beliefs, and ideals (Wheelis, 1958). Levita (1965) defined identity as the “inner core” of a person that is left after social roles have been pushed aside, thus assuming a unifying structure to the self. Erikson (1950) argued that personal identity evolves through the gradual interaction between different identities with which the individual interacts throughout his/her life. He viewed identity as a structure that reflects both resemblance to others and uniqueness compared to others. Lifton (1993) argued for a “protean self” that exists in both a temporal and a spatial sense and thus represents an adaptation to the modern view of the self in that it emphasizes various role-playing.

In contrast, postmodern schools of thought challenge the notion of a unity to selfhood that cuts across the multiplicity of contemporary social life. Some postmodernist approaches view the self as being in continuous construction and reconstruction throughout the social discourse without having one constant center (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Sampson, 1989a, 1989b, in McAdams, 1997). For example, the multiple-selves approach to identity assumes multiple aspects to the self, as well as a multiplicity of beliefs that the individual associates to other people (named “socius”). Thus, a multiple self includes the Ego and the Alter, a self-view and a consciousness regarding others. The “socius” (Baldwin, 1897) is regarded as a more comprehensive understanding of a person than self-conception alone, as it includes the relationships among multiple perceptions of the self as well the perception of significant others. These relationships are viewed as hierarchical in terms of subjective importance or psychological centrality (Baldwin). It is argued that the multiplicity of selves is not necessarily attached to personal distress. Rather, it reflects the social world in which the self is constructed and serves

the individual's need for self-consistency and self-enhancement (Lecky, 1945; Swann, 1983; Taylor & Brown, 1988, in McAdams, 1997; Rosenberg, 1997).

McAdams' notion of self-unity (1997) can be viewed as a synthesis between the "socius" and the Ericksonian "gradual interaction between identities." He used James's distinction between the subjective and objective aspects of selfhood (the "I" and the "Me"). Whereas the "I" (objective aspects) is regarded to be self-functioning, the "Me" (subjective aspects) refers to the reflexive conception of the self (a notion that was called "attitude toward oneself" by Mead, 1934). Thus, "identity in the 'Me' is the extent to which a 'Me' can be arranged as a unifying and purpose-giving story" (McAdams, 1997).

Bruner (1986) and Mandler (1984) provide further support for McAdams' approach. They argue that identity resembles a story in that it has structure and content including a specific setting, characters who strive for goals and engage in conflict as well as significant scenes on a broader level, and endings that (sometime) resolve the plot (McAdams, 1997). Moreover, identity refers to the capacity to keep a particular narrative going like McAdams' self-consistency (Giddens, 1991). Finally, the life story is constantly being revised due to life's changing circumstances (Shu-fang Dien, 2000).

This study adopts the notion that self-identity formation is driven by the need for self-unity, self-consistency, and self-enhancement, and that these are achieved through maintaining a particular identity narrative. It is interesting to explore this assumption in the case of individuals who chose to join secular oriented groups. One question to explore is how joining a secular Jewish-oriented group enhances self-unity, self-consistency, and self-enhancement, as it seems that the act of joining a Jewish-oriented group contrasts with the narrative as a secularist.

Social Identity - Social selves

The distinction between social and personal identity is oftentimes unclear. Some theorists argue that the distinction refers to the focus of self-perception at a given moment (Deaux, 1992; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Blackwell, 1987). Others suggest a structural difference, namely that social identities are “self-descriptions deriving from membership in social categories,” whereas “personal identities denote specific attributes of the individual, usually connected to personal relationships” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Finally, Brewer and Gardner (1996) distinguish three levels of self: 1) The personal self (the individuated self-concept), 2) the relational-self (the aspect that relates to interpersonal interactions), and 3) the collective self (the aspect that derives from membership in a larger group or social category).

Whether the social self is a result of momentary focus or structural difference, the common explanation for the shift from a personal to a collective identity refers to the cognitive process of depersonalization. Depersonalization enables the shift in individuals’ reactions to themselves and to others as representatives of their group rather than as individuals (Turner et al., 1987).

Social-identities are products of the interaction of the individual with the influences in the physical/social world and reflect descriptions of themselves, their group membership, or other meaningful categories within a society (Breakwell, 1986). Therefore, individuals obtain multiple social identities (Thoits & Virshup, 1997) that may be in contrast to other social categories (Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994).

For example, in the case of secular Jews who obtain both a secular social-self and a Jewish social-self, it is assumed that these selves are distinguished in their characteristics. Whereas the secular social self identifies itself traditionally with a humanistic, liberal, and

individualistic agenda, the Jewish social self identifies itself with a religiously based tradition and heritage as well as with a concrete ethnic identity. However, no one has explored to what extent secular identification is associated with group identity or a personal identity among secular joiners.

Most contemporary societies are multicultural in that they contain two or more social groups that are distinguishable in terms of culture (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, in Liebkind, 1992). An ethnic group is often defined according to biological, linguistic, cultural, or religious criteria, even in cases in which the criteria are historical or not visible. Most members of an ethnic group usually identify themselves with a group, have a common ancestry, and enact distinctive cultural patterns (Liebkind, 1992, in Breakwell, 1992). Ethnic identity is anchored in the identity process of social psychology analysis. The ethnic component of social identity is defined as that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from the following components: membership, commitment, sense of belongingness to her/his ethnic group, positive evaluation of the group, interest in and knowledge about the group, and involvement in activities and traditions of the group (Phinney & Alipourial, 1990). Liebkind also cites Wilpert's term "ethnic consciousness" as part of the components that compose ethnic identity (Liebkind, 1992).

The question of how one chooses to "be a Jew" in terms of group affiliation incorporates one's display of his/her ethnic identity. This question is especially interesting in the case of secular Jews since the religious component is absent in the identity composition. To what extent does joining a secular Jewish-oriented group reinforce the joiners' group identity, and to what extent does it reinforce personal identity? This is one of the driving questions of this thesis.

According to Liebkind (1992), the self-representation of one's ethnic identity is displayed both at the subjective and objective (perceived by others) levels. She argues that the subjective

level can be divided to an intra-individual (personal identity) level and an intra-group (social identity) level. This view resembles Tajfel's (1981) two components of self-image: personal identity and social identity. Liebkind describes the intra-individual level as composed of two aspects: "ethnic self-concept" and "ethnic ego-identity" (positive value attached to one's identity). The notion of "ethnic self-concept" refers to one's subjective ethnic identity content, such as psychological group membership, shared past and present with other group members, and ideal ethnic-self. The other aspect of the intra-individual dimension is described by Liebkind as the "Ethnic Ego Identity" and refers to the ethnic core identity locus of agency.

Another part of one's self-perceived (subjective) ethnic identity is the intra-group dimension (Leibkind, 1992). This also can be described through two different dimensions: the "ethnic group identity content" and the "collective ethnic identity content." The ethnic group identity content refers to the ethnic self-categorization shared by in-group members. Common ethnic Jewish self-categorizations include viewing themselves as "people of the book," stressing morality and family values, and being the chosen people (at least among the more traditional denominations). The collective ethnic identity content refers to shared emotional involvement. In Israel, one can view the emotional involvement aspect as being manifested in the state's laws that provide citizenship to every Jew simply based on their Jewish roots. Moreover, the notion of mutual aid among Jews lies at the core of the religious commandments concerning relationships.

Liebkind (1992) argues that identity negotiations take place between the self-presentation and the "alter casting." The alter casting refers to the way ethnic identity is defined/perceived by others. She argues that two elements compose this dimension: (a) public ethnic identity content, which refers to the categorization / perception of a person in terms of his/her membership in an ethnic group having ethnic stereotypes, and (b) public personal identity content in which the

identification of the individual by others is influenced by ethnic group membership in varying degrees (Liebkind).

Membership groups can be divided into ascribed and achieved categories (Liebkind, 1984). Ascribed components of identity are involuntary, such as sex and skin color. A person's ethnicity is ascribed in that one is born into it, but is achieved to the extent that the meaning it acquires for one's total identity is a matter of choice. It is assumed that Jewish ethnicity is often interpreted as an inborn social self, in that a person is ascribed into it, yet the extent to which it is salient is a matter of personal choice/achievement.

This work views the term "ethnic identity" as the *subjective self-representations* of individuals both on the personal level (intra-individual) and group dimensions. This includes biological, linguistic, cultural, and religious criteria, as well as having common ancestry. These criteria are also relevant on the alter casting dimension, i.e., the way that one's ethnic identity is defined/perceived by others. As mentioned earlier, it is assumed that these representations would be reflected in the joiners' narratives.

Identity Choices

Identity choices often follow a crisis (Tajfel, 1981). The personal identity paradigm emphasizes the importance of a moratorium or crisis phase in development, during which individuals reexamine and reevaluate their childhood identifications and explore their own interests, abilities, and options (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1993). According to this paradigm, a secure identity is achieved only after one has thought for oneself and made commitments in domains such as ideology, occupation, and lifestyle. These commitments serve, in turn, as a guide for future choices.

Similarly, in ethnic identity the reexamining and questioning of preexisting attitudes is

viewed as necessary toward identity achievement (Phinney, 1993). Phinney's understanding of ethnic identity formation stresses the social context. She argues that ethnic identity evolves through three stages. In the initial stage, ethnicity is not salient and is given little conscious thought. At this stage, the quality of one's ethnic identity would be highly influenced by the image presented by the individual's family or community. In the case of a positive image, the individual is likely to have a positive identification. In the second stage the individual searches for more information about his/her group. At this stage, experience is assumed to play a more important role. Finally, at the third stage, minority individuals develop a secure, confident sense of themselves as members of their group (Phinney, 1996). At this stage, they abandon anger toward the majority group and are generally open to other groups (Cross, 1991).

A positive sense about the in-group is attained through the ethnocentrism process (Tajfel, 1981). This process allows that when people are assigned to a group, any group, they automatically and almost reflexively think of that group as an in-group for them and as better than the alternative, out-group. They do so because they are motivated to maintain, achieve, or increase a positive and distinct self-identity. Ethnocentrism in the form of in-group preference and favoritism increases self-esteem by enhancing the value of a particular social identity (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel 1981; Turner et al., 1987).

Since belongingness to the Jewish ethnicity was ascribed to the subjects in this study by birth, the ethnocentrism process suggests that these subjects would seek to maintain and/or increase the positive distinct identity attached to this ethnicity. Since the subjects also viewed themselves as belonging to a secular/humanistic group, it was assumed that joining a Secular Oriented Jewish group would follow an identity crisis. One goal of this study was to shed light on the life events that precipitate this crisis in secular Jews in America and Israel through content

analysis of the joiners' narratives.

Relationships between groups, especially groups having unequal power, are broadly discussed in Tajfel's Social Identity Theory. The theory attempts to predict the conditions under which people (individually or collectively) choose to maintain their group membership and their inter-group situation, as well as to predict the circumstances that cause them to change their group-membership (Tajfel, 1981). Like Phinney, the assumption is that individuals are motivated to maintain, achieve, or increase a positive and distinct self-identity. In the case of group membership, it means that one belongs to a group that enjoys high status. This positive distinctiveness is achieved, according to Tajfel, through the process of "social-categorization." Social-categorization refers to grouping like and unlike stimuli. Tajfel found that social stimuli are linked to values and norms, and argued that this segmentation of the world imposes order on the environment and provides a locus of identification for the self. Moreover, the combination of knowing one's group membership, combined with the values, emotions, and norms that are attached to this membership, create the individual's Social-identity. Finally, as in personal-identity, people need their group to be distinctive and positive in order for them to feel distinctive and positive (Tajfel).

If individuals perceive their group as ceasing to be distinguished and positive, they will seek change. Within the process of change seeking, individuals will evaluate alternatives (Turner et al., 1987). Cognitive flexibility and the ability to adapt to situational contingencies may be common when multiple group membership is present (Allen et al., 1983, as cited in Liebkind, 1992).

In cases where exit from the disadvantaged group is not possible because the alternative is considered to be either non-stable or illegitimate, individuals could become engaged in several

options for action. They could attempt to absorb into the dominant group, redefine the previously negatively evaluated characteristics of the in-group, create and adopt new dimensions for their in-group, compare and reevaluate themselves, or get involved in direct competition with the dominant group (Liebkind, 1992).

Redefining previously negatively evaluated characteristics and creating new dimensions for one's in-group involves identity negotiations. Negotiating identity refers to the ways in which individuals or groups present themselves (self-presentation) and their wish for others to accept their definitions of themselves. At the same time, individuals/groups suggest particular identities for the other (alter-casting) and are confronted with the self-presentation and alter-casting of others (Rosenberg, 1981; Liebkind, 1989). The identity negotiations can take place between individuals or between groups.

The content of identity is mostly described as the various components of identity, referring to all the "building blocks" constituting human identity (Breakwell, 1986). Although individuals tend to share many of the content dimensions with others, the specific constellation determines their unique identity.

Identity negotiations can concern the value of identity as well as identity content. The content components will shift in relation to the social context in which the identity is situated. Also, the values attributed to the self-defining are open to revision (Breakwell, 1986; Liebkind, 1984). Therefore, this study utilized the narrative approach to enable both identity content and the context in which those identities are negotiated to unfold through subjects' narratives. One of the common ways by which individuals make sense (provide content) of their lives, within a changing socio-historical context is through the creation of a self-narrative (McAdams & Ochenberg, 1988). According to the narrative approach, strategies to enhance one's positive

identity will be reflected/echoed in either the construct or the content of the subject's stories. Individuals will strive to create a story that provides positive content and/or a consistent construct to their life.

Secular Judaism in Israel and America

Secular Jews in Israel and the U.S. provide an interesting opportunity to explore these identity concepts. Seculars in Israel are bound by an identity conflict that is both internal and external. By choice they belong to the secular group; however, by birth they belong to the Jewish ethnic group. Due to the ethnocentrism process, the reflexive thought of these individuals upon their group-memberships (secular and Jewish) is more positive than for other groups.

Moreover, even if they wished to exit these two social selves, exiting is blocked. For Israeli secular Jews, joining an external group, either religious or non-Jewish, is not a realistic option. Joining a religious group requires Jewish religious belief (a factor they lack), whereas joining a non-Jewish group requires a change of ethnicity (which is not possible since ethnicity is inherited and since living in a Jewish state binds one to his/her ethnicity).

The conflict between identities evolves as the secular culture often clashes with the religious culture. In other words, secular identity content is often in conflict with the Jewish identity content (e.g., the notion of "all men are created equal" versus the Jewish traditional notion of "being the chosen people"). It is argued that the Secular Jewish Group experiences gradual devaluation (or identity crisis) of its positive and distinctive Jewish group identity. This devaluation has been described by Israeli sociologists (Smooha, 1993; Taub, 1997), as well as by the Israeli media, as an "identity crisis." Since Judaism in Israel is constitutionally attached to Orthodox Jews, it is assumed that the Jewish identity negotiation in Israel will happen in reaction to traditional/Orthodox Judaism.

Resolving the conflict may be done in several ways. One may try to reduce the “secular” component in his/her identity. This strategy suggests absorbing into a traditional, religious group. Another option is to reduce the Jewish component. This strategy suggests enhancing one’s secular identity. The problem with this option is that it seems impossible to eliminate one’s Jewishness while living in a Jewish state. Finally, an Israeli secular-Jew may try to redefine his/her Judaism, create and renegotiate its meaning for him/herself, and integrate between his/her ostensibly conflicted social selves.

In the U.S., exiting from the “Jewish group” is possible (one may become an atheist, a non-affiliated individual, or simply have a loose connection with Jewish ethnicity). Therefore, it is assumed that joining a Jewish group already includes an acceptance of the “Jewish component” in one’s personal identity. Thus, the secular versus Jewish conflict assumes that American secular Jews will experience conflict on a more interpersonal level. That is, it is assumed that the conflict will be between the desire to be accepted both as a legitimate Jewish group by other Jewish denominations, and as a legitimate modern and moral congregation by the larger American community.

The assumption is that these secular groups will negotiate their identity - either their identity value or its content. Overall, this research attempted to understand the specific themes that are used to enhance a positive and distinguished identity, as well as to reveal the alter casting themes through the joiner’s narratives.

The Role of Learning in Identity Formation

Learning is traditionally viewed as being on a path toward more participation (Lave & Wagner, 1991). Participation is not only the internalization of knowledge or the display of learned skills, but also the negotiation of the meaning of the world. Therefore, learning is a

critical dialog in the formation of one's identity. Moreover, the understanding of learning as participation locates the meaning of the learning act within the subjects themselves (El-Or, 1998). Namely, it supports the impact of the narrative one uses to describe him/herself in identity formation and maintenance. Since learning can be seen as another form of ascribing positive attributions to one's group (a knowledgeable group/individual) and thus establishing a positive group identity, comparing the role of learning among Israeli and American joiners was an important concept to explore.

CHAPTER 3: THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOCIAL CONTEXT ON THE FORMATION OF GROUP IDENTITIES

The Influence of Israeli Society on Secular Group Identity

The link between society and identity is extensively discussed in the sociological and social psychology literature. Breakwell (1986) describes the social context of identity as structurally composed of interpersonal networks, group memberships, and intergroup relationships. Thus, social influence resides in psychological processes. For example, the content dimension of one's identity composes the characteristics that individuals ascribe to themselves. These characteristics may well reflect their belonging to a specific social group or their desire to belong to such a group. In other words, one's personal self is highly connected to the social self, entailing reference to those individuals and groups whose opinion matter.

This study explores some of Breakwell's realms of influence on identity within the subjects' narratives, such as the effects of social change upon identity, the relation of identity to action, joining a group, and the influence of social context on identity formation.

Smootha (1993) identifies the Israeli society as suffering from five major conflicts: The political conflict (right wing versus left wing), the secular versus religious conflict, a class conflict, an ethnic conflict (refers to the origins of various Jewish groups such as Sefaradi versus Ashkenazi origins), and finally a national conflict (Jews versus non-Jews). All these splits, especially those between Secular and Religious groups, create tension and risks that threaten the social and political stability in Israel.

According to Liebman (1990), the tension between secular and religious Jews in Israel derives from the State's identity: "Israel is a Jewish state not only by virtue of its population composition but by virtue of the manner in which it conducts its public life at both the symbolic and the practical level"(p. 46). Thus, the Israeli society is still struggling to form its identity (an

identity in which the secular and religious groups struggle for power and control). This struggle is limited by a Jewish context. This point may be demonstrated from several perspectives. In 1988, a group of jurists submitted a proposal for a constitution to Israel. The proposal denoted that, for Israel, “the character of the society is and ought to be rooted in Judaism” (Liebman). This notion is an example of a “self-imposed limit” that secular Jews adopted in their struggle for the future identity of the Israeli society. However, all the religious parties denounced the constitution proposition as dangerous to religion. It seems that the struggle centered on the question: Will the Jewish State be governed by law or by Halacha, ancient laws and practices outlined in the book of Leviticus and later refined through rabbinic interpretation (Liebman). Shamir and Shamir (1996) found that the value preferences of the Jewish population in Israel are toward a “Jewish” state in which Jews are the majority. This supports the notion that the Jewish title as a Jewish state is not debated among the different groups, but defining its content (how would Judaism be displayed in law and setting priorities) is negotiated.

Secularism in Israel.

Don Yichja and Liebman (1983, as cited in Oz, 1996) argue that the Zionist revolution gave birth to a secular religion in Israel in that this revolution created a theoretical framework to understand and interpret the traditional symbols and ideals into secular myths. The old tradition was redesigned to adapt to the new pioneer patterns necessary in the early establishment of the state of Israel. However, old tradition gave legitimacy to the Zionist collectivist values and united the Israeli society under the umbrella of a common identity and destiny.

The relationship between the personal and the social in Israeli society

The relationship between the personal and the social/national-collective is especially close in Israel. This closeness is understood as deriving from a mutual idea that gathered all

Jews, the idea of the return to Jerusalem: “Next year in the rebuilt Jerusalem.” Both ultra Orthodox Jews and Secular Zionist Jews share this ideal (Liebman and Don Yehiya, 1983). Despite the mutual sharing of this ideal, Shalit (1995) argues that Zionism changed the Jewish group identity from a weak and resistant one to an independent and active one. However, although Zionism was described as a rebellion (exercised mostly by secular Jews) against the traditional way of life, its identity, symbols, and myths were influenced by traditional Jewish myths. Among those myths are the ideals of return to ancient Israel roots and redeeming the land, as well as personal and collective redemption. From the identity point of view, these myths enable one to associate the private life with the collective. The expectation of oneself to be highly associated with the collective became the core of the Israeli social construct (Shalit).

Current relationships between Zionist descendants and the heritage of a collective-self remain debated. Shalit (1995) describes it as incomplete differentiation in that many experience the need for a new relationship between the personal self and the collective (group) self. The new nature of secular Zionist descendants is, therefore, related to its members’ personal selves.

Oron (1993) argues that Israelism, which was an attempt to build an identity on positive foundations, has collapsed and that the Jewish components of a non-religious individual who grew up in Israel are based on negative elements. By way of example, one identity definition of secular Jews relies on negative attitudes toward religion and tradition. Another component of Israeli secular identity is characterized by feelings of alienation toward Jews who live outside of Israel.

In terms of social identity theory, secular Jews in Israel may experience an identity crisis as a result of unbalanced (more negative) attributions. For example, these individuals may view themselves as non-religious, less knowledgeable in Judaism, and so on. In addition, it is

assumed that the identification of a secular group is processed in relation to other groups (such as religious Jews or Arabs) and, therefore, companioned by a power struggle between groups over the future identity of the Israeli society. In sum, these processes suggest that the identity negotiations following the identity crises would involve negotiations of identity content and would possibly account for joining a secular Jewish group.

According to El-Or (1998), the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Rabin in 1995 can be viewed as a murder aimed to preserve the “honor of the family.” The “family,” according to El-Or, is the “Jewish family.” The peace process that led to Rabin’s assassination questioned the division between Jews and Arabs in Israel.

The partnership between Jews and Arabs in the peace process, prior to the murder, led some to view the pro-peace Jews as if they had stopped being committed to the whole Jewish collective (Jewish family). For the group of religious national Jews in Israel, this partnership between Jews and Arabs was an impossible situation. Since the “holiness” of the national house was damaged and its unity and moral level was perceived as declining (Rabin was denounced as a traitor), it was the job of a family member to “fix” the damage. That is, someone must kill the traitor and return the family its dignity and wholeness (if not holiness). The discourse around Rabin’s death resembled, therefore, a discourse that takes place in the family (El-Or, 1998). Arabs were not an active part of the mourning that took place after the murder. Also, the spontaneous dialog that took place at Rabin’s Square received formal support from various Jewish organizations (secular, religious, left wing, right wing). In other words, El-Or suggests viewing the murder as an act that reunited the Jewish group (secular and religious) and secluded them from the Arab Israelis.

Secular people started to meet with religious people in dialog groups, both in

institutionalized and informal settings. In addition, there was a growing interest in ancient Jewish sources among secular people, and many joined groups that studied Judaism. The Israeli media named this phenomenon, “The return to the Jewish book shelf” (Be'er, 1988). Many of these study groups were led by secular Jews and populated by secular Jews.

It is interesting to explore the reasons for this sudden interest in Judaism and Jewish identity. Was studying text an attempt to deal with the “Jewish” part in Israeli secular identity? This research is interested in exploring the explanations that were given by joiners using social identity theory and narrative approaches.

Recent secularism in Israel is influenced by additional factors, including the collapse of the pioneer collectivist vision, the holocaust memory, and the rapid penetration of “Americanization” (i.e., materialistic values). Among these changes in secular identity, it seems that values that were traditionally associated with Israeli secular pioneers have become gradually associated with current national religious Jews. Among the notions that were once associated with secular pioneers and are now claimed by national religious Jews are being pure and righteous; conquering the land; loving and being connected to the country; being the authentic Jew, who is truly connected to its roots; possessing the “Just Way of Life”; holding values; and fighting for your belief against all odds (Oz, 1996).

The secular group has gradually become associated with relativistic values, materialistic values, or no values, such as those commonly attributed to the X generation (Taub, 1997). Thus, seculars may find themselves with diminished identities due to either their own self-perception or to out-group perceptions of them. Moreover, their distinguished group identity is questioned (Oz, 1996). It would be interesting to explore whether these social characteristics are connected to the identity crisis associated with Rabin’s assassination. This view suggests that joining a

Jewish group was perceived as a means to redefine belongingness, gain knowledge, and obtain other resources that would enhance the positive Jewish identity of these secular Jews.

The influence of the American Jewish society on secular group identity.

The Jewish community in America can be traced back to colonial America, yet its contemporary characteristic was shaped mostly through the past 120 years of Jewish immigration. Jewish immigrants came mostly from Germany, Russia, and Poland (Lazerwitz, Winter, Dashefsky, and Tabory, 1998). They “brought with them a rich fund of culture, a world outlook, and closeness to their roots of origin, as well as a language (Yiddish). They also brought an unstable mixture of religious views and radical thought” (Arnold, 1995). The Jewish immigrants evolved due to their exposure to industrialization, urbanization, modernization, and secularization (Goldscheider, 1986, as cited in Lazerwitz et al., 1998). According to Liebman (1983), entering the American mainstream required that these Eastern European Jews redefine their understanding of *how to be a Jew*, namely to alter the notion of being a member in an ethnic community to a member in a religious community. This transition was largely due to the fact that a young Jew was now an American and not a foreigner. Therefore, identification as a Jew took place through the religious community affiliation. Unlike other groups that carried different names for their ethnic and religious affiliation, “Jews” remained a descriptive name for peoplehood, ethnicity, or religiosity (Herberg, 1960).

Due to the dominance of individualistic values within the American society, Americans regard religion as a private and individualistic choice that does not necessarily involve commitments to a specific group (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton, 1985). However, America is characterized by “religious vitality” (Lazerwitz, Winter, Dashefsky, & Tabory, 1998), and religious affiliation is still a major category through which Americans

identify themselves (Warner, 1993, as cited in Lazerwitz et al.). Moreover, the choice and preference of a denomination membership reflects the meaning of being a Jew in the United States (Greeley & Michael, 1988), as Jewish denominations are perceived to be part of the United States' denominational society. In other words, although religious involvement in the U.S. is privatized and voluntary, it is still an idiom by which Americans identify themselves. Moreover, denominationalism involves being a particular kind of American, committed to society's highest values (Lazerwitz et al.).

Lazerwitz et al. (1998) argue that in light of the voluntarism and individualistic way of life in America, the following questions influence Jews' choices about their religious affiliation: (a) On which foundation should Jewish identity be laid - modern or "Halacha" (ancient Jewish law), and (b) What should be the nature of Jewish identity; "should it be religious and concentrated around temple life, or should it be based on history and tradition?" (p. 8). Thus, for Jews, the choices concerning denominational preferences are expressions of what one believes it means to be a Jew in the United States.

Whereas most American Jews affiliate with one of the major denominations (Orthodoxy, including ultra-Orthodox and modern variants; Conservative denominations, including the Union for Traditional Judaism and the Reconstructionists; and the Reform movement), there are others who are secular, humanistic, or religious liberals. This latter group views Jewish ritual, liturgy, and theology as outdated. They include those who prefer to focus on moral and ethical lessons of Judaism, especially those that are consistent with the basic values of American society, such as democracy and the belief in equality of all humankind (Lazerwitz et al., 1998). Thus, this secular Jewish denomination attempts to blend traditional Jewish ethics and morality with the American value system of democracy and equality.

Unlike the Israeli society, the boundaries within and between major faith groups in America are fluid and permeable. Moreover, the individualistic and free nature of the American society contributes to the opportunity of individual Jews who were raised in one denomination to join another denomination, or disconnect from Jewish denominations (Lazerwitz et al., 1998).

At the turn of the 20th century, Jewish immigrants created a “cultured immigrant milieu.” Although some assimilated, most Jews maintained separate communities and cultural activities (Silver, 1998). At the same time, many became distant from their Jewish traditional sources. The unwritten agenda became assimilation, although political and cultural initiatives were mostly directed in Yiddish. In addition, many Jewish mutual aid societies and social clubs were initiated at that time (1998).

The Yiddishist movement emerged and, like Zionism, was a form of national secularism; the Jewish people were to remain Jewish and a people but without the religion of the Jews. Like Zionism, the Yiddishist Movement based itself on socialistic ideology (Silver, 1998). Between the years 1910-1920, non-religious Jewish schools were established in the United States and Canada. These schools based themselves upon Yiddishism, nationalism, and socialist ideals (Arnold, 1995).

However, secularism experienced an ideological crisis in the thirties as it became apparent that the gains of emancipation in Europe were vanishing, and, from within, American-born Jews ceased to use the Yiddish language (Goodman, 1973). Thus, the movement went through a reevaluation period.

Since the 1960s, several secular groups have become active. The Society for Humanistic Judaism, with fifty communities or congregations, joined the Secular Judaism movement and formed the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews that grew branches in the U.S.,

Canada, Israel, South America, Europe, and the Former Soviet Union (Arnold, 1995). These organizations often have sub-organizations. For example, the Jewish Cultural Society is part of the larger Secular Humanistic Judaism movement and envisions its goal to “enrich, enjoy, and transmit the Jewish heritage” (Jewish Cultural Society Handbook for Members, 1996). The Birmingham Temple, a U.S congregation that is part of the national organization, serves a congregation of Humanistic and non-theistic Jews. This organization views as its goal to translate its Jewish humanistic beliefs into meaningful experiences such as promoting Jewish heritage, holidays, and life cycles, and providing youth and adult education (Birmingham Temple, 2002)

In addition to organized secular groups, there are spontaneous gatherings of Jewish secular groups. These gatherings are hard to track due to their informal nature. Yet informal groups are sometimes supported or partly affiliated with well-established Jewish secular groups.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES

The social identity literature suggests that American and Israeli joiners' perceptions of their social identity will be reflected in themes that describe them as representatives of their group (Turner et al., 1987), rather than themes related to personal features. Therefore, the question of how joining a secular Jewish-oriented group was related to one's life history raised the following hypothesis: (a) Joining would be perceived as a continuance of one's life path in both groups in that joiners would express their desire to integrate both their secular social self and their Jewish social self through various techniques of redefinition; (b) Specifically, the continuance aspect will be reflected through redefinition of this integrated social self as a creation of an alternative Jewish identity for both group members in that it would include a combination of both their secular social selves and their Jewish social selves; and (c) Joining would strengthen a positive and distinguished identity by identifying positive characteristics of the group, as well as by contrasting characteristics of the chosen group with outer-groups.

In keeping with McAdams' (1997) view of the relationships between multiple aspects of the self, the reasons for joining were expected to include the process of maintaining a narrative of self-consistency, self-enhancement, and self-unity in both groups. This question can be viewed as an extension to Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (1981) in that it examines identity negotiations between different social selves within the individual realm from a narrative perspective.

Finally, the question of how the social context in which the individual operates impacts the narrative for joining was addressed through the comparison between American and Israeli reasons for joining. Differences between the group narratives were viewed through the social context lens. It was hypothesized that joining would be done alone among Israeli joiners and

perceived to be an act of resolving a personal identity conflict. It was assumed that joining in the U.S. would be done with family or friends as part of congregation seeking.

Tajfel's Social Identity Theory suggests that identity choices and identity negotiations often follow a crisis (Tajfel, 1981, Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987, Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Therefore, it was hypothesized that both Israeli and American joiners were driven to join as a result of a crisis. For the American joiners, it was hypothesized that joining would be done as a reaction to perceived rejection of other religious groups and the desire to be part of the denominational nature of the American society. For the Israeli joiners, a re-narration of the Zionist pioneer vision was expected to be present in the data, as well as descriptions of joining in reaction to the increased social power of national religious groups.

It was hypothesized that identity content and identity value would be negotiated in both groups, yet each group would choose different identity negotiation strategies to regain a positive and distinguished identity. More specifically, it was hypothesized that the American group would try to meet social affiliation needs and would emphasize congregational life in an attempt to be absorbed into the American congregational culture, and would retain practice of some Jewish traditions as means of creating a distinctive identity. At the same time, American secular Jews would ban themselves from a religious Jewish context. The group's Jewish context would be redefined in light of the traditional context and secular/humanistic needs. In contrast, it was expected that Israeli joiners would negotiate their identity through redefining previously negatively evaluated characteristics and adopt new dimensions for their in-group, such as emphasizing secular interpretations of Jewish knowledge and Jewish studies as means of establishing their identity.

CHAPTER 5: METHOD

Overall, the relationship between reality and the various stories that people tell may be described through two approaches. On the one hand, reality can be seen as something depicted in stories, and the stories are evaluated according to the accuracy of the facts describing the individual's life. Another approach to viewing the relation between reality and one's life story is to regard the story as ideals that people strive to live up to (Widdershoven, 1993). Thus, the narrative we construct either echoes the society we live in or reflects the values and social structure we seek to own.

In either case, the narrative emphasizes the place of our different social roles in the formation of our identity. Thus, narrative approaches attempt to answer questions of meaning and significance. The questions asked in this study were: Who joins secular groups? Why do they join? How do they join? And what is the context, personal or social, of this act? (The complete interview is presented in Appendix A). The narrative approach was chosen for this study as it best serves to detect major themes, nuclear stories, and motivations for secular individuals to join secular groups without preimposing them on the subjects.

Responses to open-ended interviews provided the data for this study. The goal was to reveal the major themes and reasons for secular Jews to join a secular group, and the relation of these themes to the subject's perception of their group identity. Content analysis and narrative ethnography (description in a cultural/social context) were used to interpret the interview data. Multiple data-gathering techniques were used to confirm measures and validate findings.

The advantages of using open-ended interviews include the likelihood that subjects will address questions more seriously in a personal and supportive environment. Therefore, they will share more detailed intimate stories, including negative self-disclosures. This research used an

open-ended, structured interview. The rationale was to offer each subject approximately the same stimulus so that responses to the questions ideally can be compared (Babbie, 1995).

A common problem with the interview method is the "social desirability" bias in self-report data (Matteson, 1993). This problem may be overcome through an open interview combined with interviewing skills such as neutrality and thorough probing. The interview is not a self-report instrument, in that the respondent is not aware of the categories being used. It is possible that responses to some questions were affected by social desirability, but it seems unlikely that the cumulative effect of socially desirable responses to particular items resulted in an incorrect categorization of an interviewee (Henson et al., 1977, as cited in Matteson, 1993).

CHAPTER 6: DATA ANALYSIS

Subjects

The study included secular joiners of Secular Jewish Oriented groups in Israel and the U.S. All subjects were adults, ranging in age from 21 to 50 years old. The decision to limit the age of the subjects was made to bypass issues related to identity formation processes that are associated with youth and early adolescence. Subjects were required to meet four criteria for participation in the study: 1) Be at least above 21 years old but no older than 50; 2) Be identified with a secular group; 3) Be a member of a Secular Jewish Oriented group; and 4) Identify oneself as Jewish.

The American subjects were selected from three different Secular Jewish Oriented groups in the U. S. The first group of subjects attended a synagogue that is part of the Humanistic Judaism movement. This group is “A non-theistic Jewish branch that is congregational in form and substance” (Humanistic Judaism home page, 2002). Its temples provide Jewish education and celebration of the holidays, traditions, and Jewish life cycle events. The second group included members of the Jewish Cultural Society (JCS), a humanistic, secular-Jewish congregation that emphasizes Jewish culture and pluralism. Finally, the third group was composed of members of a local “Chavura” (literally, “a gathering of friends”), a social group that identified itself as an informal, atheistic, Jewish humanistic group. All groups were located in southeast Michigan.

The Israeli subjects were selected from three different Secular Jewish Oriented groups in Israel. The first group of subjects included members of a Jewish humanistic congregation in Jerusalem. The second group was composed of members of a liberal arts center for the study and advancement of Hebrew culture and contemporary Jewish identity (founded in the late 1990s). This center states its commitment to the approach that Jewish texts and sources should belong

and be accessible to all, regardless of religious or political affiliation” (Al-ma College for Hebrew Culture, 2002). Finally, the third group was an informal gathering of about fifteen secular individuals in a private home in Herzelia, who met on a weekly basis for Jewish studies. The group leader was a thirty-year-old secular woman interested in Jewish texts and culture.

In both the American and Israeli groups, individuals were contacted through personal introductions. Interviewees were asked to recommend other group members who they thought would be willing to participate. A total of 30 subjects participated in the interviews (15 Israeli and 15 American joiners), five from each setting described above.

Secular was defined as “does not identify as a religious believer.” *Joiners* were defined as those who attended group meetings on a regular basis and viewed themselves as group members. This description was based on self-report. For the purpose of this paper, subjects were regarded as *Jewish* if they identified themselves as Jewish. That is, they reported feeling identified with the history, culture, or people of Judaism. No biological based criteria were used. *Israelis* were any subjects who were citizens of Israel and attended a group in Israel. *American* subjects were citizens of America and attended a group in America. A *Jewish Oriented Secular Group* () was defined as a group of secular Jews who study or practice Jewish-oriented rituals or study Jewish texts/scriptures from a non-traditional point of view. This point of view includes ideas related to secular humanism. *Secular humanistic* Jews believe that men create values and ethics and that G-d is a human creation. These people believe that they have the freedom to interpret the Jewish life they intend to live (Malkin, 2000). This is in contrast to traditional Jews who lead their lives by attempting to practice the interpretation of G-d’s intentions through 613 commandments that dictate everyday life rituals. Traditional Jews believe that change within the tradition should be done solely through Halachic (ancient Jewish law) means and are not

receptive to modern interpretations based on sources external to rabbinic literature.

Interview and Procedures

The interview for the subjects consisted of two parts: an open-ended, structured part and a close-ended part. The open-ended part contained questions focusing on 4 dimensions: (a) The joining process (How did you come to join?), (b) The reason for joining (Why did you join?), (c) Descriptions of the joiners and the groups (Who else joined your secular group?), and (d) Reflections upon the joining process (What was the context, personal or social, for this act?). The close-ended part provided demographic information such as age, education, religious identification, economic situation, political tendency, marital status, place of birth, and family religious origins.

A complete copy of the interview is provided in Appendix A. A copy of the informed consent form is provided in Appendix B. All interviews were tape recorded, after participant consent, and later transcribed verbatim. Responses to the way joining is related to one's life history were elicited through broad and open questions. For example, participants were asked: "What were your reasons for joining the group? Was there a specific event that triggered your decision to join? How is your joining the group related to other things you did in the past?" If reasons for joining were unclear from responses to these open-ended questions, subjects were also asked specifically if joining was a continuation of their life history or a novel experience.

Interviews tended to take longer among the Israeli subjects, and they tended to provide more detailed responses than did the American subjects. This may be due to cultural differences in responding to open-ended questions or because it was easier for Israelis to be more expressive in their responses with a Hebrew-speaking interviewer than it was for Americans.

Thematic Field Analysis

Thematic field analysis involves reconstructing subjects' systems of knowledge and their classification of experiences into thematic fields (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; McAdams, 1985). The assumption is that a life story consists of a chain of experiences that receive their meaning through a biographical structure of meaning. Thus, events are not randomly presented. Moreover, it is argued that the narrated story evolves around a specific thematic focus, derived from past episodes and future expectations (Rosenthal, 1993). Life stories can be explored throughout seven related features that function as unity makers: the narrative tone, imagery, themes, ideological settings, nuclear episodes, imagoes (an idealized personification of the self that plays the main role in the narrative), and endings (McAdams, 1997). The approach to data analysis taken in this study was to examine the themes presented in response to open ended questions.

The initial approach in organizing the collected data in this work was derived from our theoretical model. Our model for why people might join a Secular Jewish group proposed two distinct identity patterns: (a) personal identity, focused on self-perception at a given moment, and (b) social identity, identification with one's group membership or other meaningful category within society (Breakwell, 1986; Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1997; Shu-fang Dien, 2000; Tajfel, 1981; and Turner et al., 1987). Our model was specifically interested in the interplay between these aspects of self and one's decision to join a Secular Jewish Oriented group.

Therefore, in organizing the responses people gave, we looked at Identifying with Judaism and Identifying with more personal and universal themes, and initially divided comments into these distinct classes. Developing classes based on theoretical models is in keeping with the procedures for coding qualitative data as outlined by Harold, Colarossi, Mercier, Freedman-Doan, Lynch, Palmiter and Eccles (2000) and suggested by the work of

Altheide (1987) on conceptual coding. Conceptual coding involves identifying and sorting comments that represent a specific theme into classes, categories, and characteristics.

Categories of Responses

From the two large classes of Identifying with Judaism and Identifying with personal themes, we identified several categories of responses. This secondary level of coding was developed after coders reviewed the joiners' stories. The categories evolved as each coder assigned comments/stories to a category and then categories to a class. It is interesting to note that whereas the theoretical model drove the classes, their characteristics were not imposed by the theoretical model solely, but rather emerged from the data. This inductive process (the meaning given by joiners) of identifying categories is in keeping with the procedures outlined by Harold et al. (2000). The interplay between induction and deduction is in keeping with the procedures outlined by Strauss (1987). The approach of coders identifying comments related to a specific concept is known as a sample of conceptual coding (Altheide, 1987).

Two coders were trained and worked independently, sorting the interview raw data into themes/issues that later evolved into categories and classes. Once the coders completed the sorting of the data into categories and classes, they compared their decisions. When the coders disagreed, a discussion was held and a final decision was made about where the comment would be placed. The number of statements for each category (and class respectively) varied from subject to subject and between the samples. Classification of the comments was not mutually exclusive. For example, a comment that was classified as a reason for joining a SJOG was also classified as supporting joining in continuance to family traditions. Finally, some categories held a variety of characteristics that differed between the samples. For example, for the category of free interpretation of Judaism, Jewish texts, and rituals, the Israeli sample emphasized study and

interpretation of Jewish texts, whereas the American sample emphasized the interpretation of Jewish rituals.

Finally, Chi-square analyses were run to test whether the differences in the identity characteristics revealed in the responses of the Americans and the Israelis subjects were different enough to be generalized from this particular subject sample to the broader population of Israelis and Americans.

CHAPTER 7: RESULTS

Reasons for Joining

Our model for why people might join a secular Jewish group proposed two distinct identity patterns, one derived from personal identity and the other from social identity. For the Israeli interviewees, 218 statements regarding the reasons for joining the study group were elicited from 15 subjects. For the American sample, 150 statements were elicited regarding the reasons for joining a JOSG from 15 subjects. These statements were examined by two researchers and were sorted into two major classes: a) statements identifying with some aspect of Judaism and b) statements that dealt with aspects of personal identity.

Of the 368 total statements given, 280 statements reflected a desire to identify with some aspect of Judaism, while 88 statements reflected personal identity themes. After dividing the statements into the two classes, each class was further divided into categories reflecting different themes.

Statements Identifying with Some Aspects of Judaism

Statements identifying with some aspects of Judaism included five categories. The categories are outlined below. Examples of statements reflecting each category are provided.

Connection to Judaism, Family Roots, and Jewish Group Identity

In general, responses in this category mentioned family ancestors that lived according to the Jewish tradition or/and were knowledgeable about Judaism. In addition, responses in this category often reflected the need to reconcile between different group identities such as secular and Zionist, Israeli and Jewish, and American and Jewish. This category included responses such as:

- “...being connected to my Jewish roots,” “I wish to become closer to

Judaism,” “..to try to find where it all begins,” “...claiming my Jewish identity,” “...identification as an Israeli and a Jew combined.”

- “...especially being here in the Midwest where you still meet people who have never met a Jew ...a place to go where I could just talk... use my smattering of Yiddish vocabulary.”
- “ My whole family is not around, and I have no Jewish contact except for a few friends.”

Gaining Knowledge About Judaism

In general, the following statements reflected a lack of knowledge of Judaism and the desire to learn Jewish scriptures. This category included responses such as:

- “The choice of study materials is dictated by the lack of knowledge in Judaism....”
- “We are connected anyway, thus gain knowledge about Judaism.”

Creation of an Alternative for Traditional Judaism

For this category, respondents indicated that they joined because they wanted to relate to Judaism from a humanistic, atheistic, gender non-discriminative, and liberal perspective. In this category, respondents also indicated that joining a religious group is not an avenue for them since they lack religious beliefs. Additionally, some respondents described their need to create an alternative to traditional Jewish institutions as a social and political act. This category included responses such as:

- “...create an alternative for seculars.”
- “I cannot join a synagogue because people will identify me as religious.”
- “ I could not join a temple, it wouldn’t have been comfortable there. I would’ve felt dishonest because I don’t believe in G-d.”

- “...create an opposition to religious monopoly over Judaism.”

Free Interpretation of Judaism, Jewish Texts, and Rituals

For this category respondents indicated that they joined because they wanted to feel free to read and interpret Jewish texts in their own way. In general, statements reflected the desire to combine humanistic views with traditional Judaism. This category included responses such as:

- “...have courage to truly relate and read the text.”
- “We do not discount problematic issues in the text as opposed to the religious approach.”
- “...freedom to connect and interpret Judaism.”
- “Our orientation is different because we look at it through the lines of secular humanists so we believe that all documents were written by people. We are empowered and entitled to pick and choose what has meaning for us.”

Comparison with Traditional Religious Groups

For this category, respondents indicated that they joined as a reaction to religious parties and Israeli politics. Responses in this category also mentioned that joining was done in order to enhance the perception of one’s self by traditionally religious individuals and groups. This category included responses such as:

- “Reaction to the Charedi (an orthodox, religious political group in Israel) monopoly over Judaism.”
- “I envy their (religious people) ability to cite freely from Jewish texts such as Talmud, Mishna, Rambam.”
- “...as reaction to religious people, you know, like knowing your enemy.”
- “Participation causes religious colleagues to perceive me as more valuable.”

Statements that Concerned Aspects of Personal Identity

Statements that dealt with aspects of personal identity included five categories of statements. The categories and exemplary statements are provided below.

Gaining Knowledge as an Intellectual Need

For this category, respondents indicated that they joined to fulfill an intellectual drive, indicating that they wanted to gain knowledge to match their perceived self as an educated human being. This category included responses such as:

- “...fill other holes in the cheese.”
- “...complete my education.”
- “...studying becomes part of my life.”

Personal Growth

For this category, respondents indicated that they joined for personal reasons related to one’s self-aspirations, personality tendencies, and identity negotiations. This category included responses such as:

- “I want to connect to this hidden part in me.”
- “I identify with biblical figures. King Saul was first perceived as the weak one because he did not come to terms with who he was. Yet, at the end, I realized what a hero he is.”
- “...reinforce who I am.”
- “...certainly in humanistic or secular humanistic Judaism the woman has much more opportunity. I mean there I was, up on the Bima...doing services.”

Enriching Everyday Life and Family Activities

Responses in this category emphasized the relevance of the participation to daily life experiences, such as the performance of family rituals or reflecting upon Jewish content. This category included responses such as:

- “I incorporate knowledge gained in the group to holiday rituals with my family.”
- “I connect Jewish content to every day life.”

Being Involved in an Accepting Non-Judgmental Social Setting

For this category, respondents indicated that they joined so they could be part of an accepting, tolerant, and open-minded group of people and have their opinions respected. This theme included responses such as:

- “...a place where you are accepted with love, tolerance and open-minded.”
- “Had I not been in a free and pleasant environment, I wouldn’t have stayed.”

Belonging to a Community

For this category, respondents indicated that they joined so they could belong to a congregation, celebrate the holidays and Jewish life cycle events, attend Jewish events with the family, benefit from a gender non-discriminative attitude, and meet other single Jews. This theme included responses such as:

- “We celebrate all of the holidays, we celebrate all of the life cycle events.”
- “I love being in a community setting, and I love holidays and I am a humanist; in a conservative or reform temple, my ideology would have no place.”
- “Especially as a woman, I never as a woman had so many opportunities to lead, certainly not like in that congregation....”

Table 1 outlines the data of the Israeli and American responses to reasons for joining a

JOSG. As mentioned before, two classes of responses were identified: statements identifying with some aspects of Judaism (Class A) and statements related to some aspect of personal identity (Class B). Table 1 reveals that a higher percentage of Israelis gave Class A responses than Americans. However, Americans and Israelis both gave, on average, the same percentage of Class B responses.

Table 1. Reasons for joining a JOSG

Class A- Identifying with some aspect of Judaism		# statements (total # of Israeli statements=218; total # of American statements=150)	# joiners who made statement	% of joiners	Chi-Square
Categories					
A1	Connection to Judaism/family roots/Jewish group identity				
	Israelis	64	12	80%	n.s.
	Americans	23	10	67%	
A2	Gain knowledge about Judaism				
	Israelis	20	6	40%	n.s.
	Americans	21	4	27%	
A3	Alternative for traditional Judaism				
	Israelis	23	11	80%	n.s.
	Americans	41	10	67%	
A4	Free interpretation of Jewish texts and rituals				
	Israelis	37	11	73%	n.s.
	Americans	22	10	67%	
A5	Comparison with religious groups				$\chi^2 =$
	Israelis	24	8	53%	3.58*
	Americans	5	3	20%	
	Total Class A responses				
	Israelis	168	15	-----	
	American	112	15	-----	

Table 1. Reasons for joining a (cont'd)

Class B- Personal identity		# statements (total # of Israeli statements=218; total # of American statements=150)	# joiners who made statement	% of joiners	Chi- Square
Categories					
B1	Gain knowledge as intellectual need				$\chi^2 =$
	Israelis	14	9	60%	9.60***
	Americans	1	1	7%	
B2	Personal growth				
	Israelis	22	9	60%	n.s.
	Americans	13	10	67%	
B3	Enrich every day life and family activities				$\chi^2 =$
	Israelis	7	5	33%	3.33*
	Americans	1	1	7%	
B4	Involved in an accepting social setting				
	Israelis	7	3	20%	n.s.
	Americans	10	4	27%	
B5	Belonging to a community				$\chi^2 =$
	Israelis	1	1	7%	7.78***
	Americans	12	8	54%	
	Total Class B responses				
	Israelis	51	15	-----	
	American	37	15	-----	

Notes. SJOG - Secular Jewish-oriented Group.

n.s. - not significant. For a more detailed chi-square analysis see Appendix B.

* P < .01

** P < .05

*** P < 0.01

Within Class A, five categories were identified. Categories (A1-A2) demonstrate that in general, participation is consistent with Jewish ethnicity, culture, knowledge, and traditions. Connection to Judaism, Jewish family roots, and Jewish group identity (A1) was important to both groups, with more than 80% of both samples providing this explanation. Chi-squared analysis revealed that there are no significant differences between the American and Israeli samples in percentage of people who made these statements. Gaining knowledge about Judaism was not emphasized, with less than 50% of both samples providing this explanation. Chi-squared analysis revealed that there are no significant differences between the American and Israeli samples in percentage of people who made these kind of statements. In the next three categories (A3-A5), the responses emphasized the need to create a secular identity while remaining connected to Judaism and Jewish texts. Here, the two most prevalent categories were the need for an Alternative to traditional Judaism (A3) and the desire for Free interpretation (not limited to orthodox interpretations) of Jewish texts and rituals (A4). To have an alternative for traditional Judaism was important for both groups, with more than 80% of both samples providing this explanation. Chi-squared analysis revealed no significant differences between the American and Israeli samples. In addition, the creation of Free Interpretation of Jewish texts and rituals was important for both groups, mentioned by more than 80% of both samples. Chi-squared analysis revealed no significant differences between the American and Israeli samples. More Israelis mentioned joining as related to a Comparison with religious groups (A5), although this was not a prevalent theme in either of the samples. Chi-squared analysis revealed significant differences between the American and Israeli samples, with more Israelis mentioning this category than would be

predicted by chance (see Table 1) [χ^2 (1,N=15)=3.58, $P \leq 0.1$]. In addition, American and Israeli samples emphasized different aspects regarding this subgroup. American statements reflected the need to create a familial Jewish setting that will replace the joiner's Jewish family of origin, provide a secular yet Jewish education for their children, and allow a secular-humanistic interpretation of the Jewish rituals and holidays. The Israeli statements reflected the need to freely interpret Jewish texts with no emphasis on rituals or holidays. Respectively, Israeli statements did not address the need to educate the children in light of the Jewish tradition, probably because Jewish education is imparted within the Israeli public school system.

Within Class B, five categories were identified. The two most prevalent categories were statements related to characteristics of Personal Growth and to Gaining Knowledge as an intellectual need. Gaining knowledge as an intellectual need (B1) was important for the Israeli subjects, yet only 8% of the American joiners mentioned this explanation. Chi-squared analysis revealed significant differences between the American and Israeli samples [χ^2 (1,N=15)=22.533, $P \leq 0.01$].

As Table 3 indicates, more Israelis and fewer Americans made this statement than expected by chance. Personal Growth (B2) was important to both groups, with more than 80% of both samples providing this explanation. Chi squared analysis revealed no significant differences between the American and Israeli samples. The other three categories addressed social needs of the self such as Being Involved with an Accepting Social Setting (B4), Enriching Everyday and Family Life (B3), and Belonging to a Community (B5). Enriching every day and family life was not a major reason for the Israeli joiners, mentioned by only 40% of the Israeli subjects, and even a weaker reason for the American joiners, mentioned by fewer than 10% of the joiners. However,

the Chi squared analysis revealed a significant difference between the American and Israeli samples in the probability of making this statement, indicating that it retains more significance for the Israeli group (see Table 4) [χ^2 (1,N=15)=3.33, $P \leq 0.1$]. Being involved in an accepting social setting (B4) was a weak reason for joining within both samples, with less than 40% of the subjects providing this explanation. Chi squared analysis revealed that there are no significant differences between the American and Israeli samples. Nevertheless, the samples differed qualitatively as to the emphasis in this category. While the American sample emphasized acceptance in regard to mixed marriages, the Israeli sample mentioned acceptance on an ideological basis, namely statements and stories emphasizing the superiority and authenticity of the humanistic interpretation to Judaism over traditional interpretations and rituals.

Finally, Belonging to a community (B5) was important for the American subjects, with almost 70% providing this explanation versus less than 10% of the Israeli sample providing this explanation. Chi squared analysis revealed significant differences between the American and Israeli samples [χ^2 (1,N=15)=7.78, $P \leq 0.01$]. Such that more Americans made this statement than expected by chance (see Table 5).

Relationship Between Joining and Life History

Our model for why people might join a Secular Jewish group suggested that throughout the process of identity negotiations, individuals strive to create a story that provides a consistent, meaningful construct to their life. Therefore, the narrative method was chosen in this research in order to detect themes in response to open-ended questions. For the Israeli sample, 70 statements were elicited in response to the question: “How does joining relate to your life history?” For the American sample, the two coders for the same question collected 41 statements, respectively. These statements were elicited from all interviewees (N=30). The classes for these responses

evolved from the initial description of the class, namely that joining is either a continuance of one's life history or that it is a novel experience that changes one's life history. However, the final description of the classes was also dictated by the data. Three classes emerged from both the theoretical model and collected data. These classes were 1) Continuance to personal life experiences, 2) Continuance with group/family experiences, and 3) Novel experience.

Continuance to Personal Life Experiences

For this class, respondents compared joining a SJOG to some aspect of their personal identity or previous life experiences. This class included the following three categories:

Joining to Achieve Self-Enhancement

Responses in this category reflected the need to attach positive value to one's identity when compared to desired self or others, implying that this process is a continuance of their development and personal growth. The following statements reflect this category:

- “ Dealing with Judaism enables me to embody a holy aspect to my life.”
- “ Joining is like a developmental stage.”

Joining to Achieve Self-Unity

Self-unity refers to the unity of the different parts of the self such as compliance between one's actions and personality tendencies at a given moment or between one's potentially conflicting identities (McAdams, 1997). The quest for self-unity included responses such as:

- “ ...there was something organized in the religion, something you can count on. It is something that exists in my personality.”
- “ As I am both Israeli and Jewish, I wished to explore the meaning of being Jewish.”
- “ Joining is related to my personal tendency to do things in the difficult way, bouncing my head against the wall.”

Joining to Achieve Self-Consistency

Responses in this category refer to the consistency over time of one's choices and actions. Thus, respondents indicated previous exposure to Jewish content or previous interest in an informal approach to Judaism. This theme included responses such as:

- "...was attracted to religion as a child."
- "Joining was in continuance to my MA in theology."
- "I always wanted to learn Judaism yet not in an academic framework."

Continuance with Group / Family Experiences

This class contained the following categories.

Continuance with Family / Group Traditions.

For this category, responses reflected the wish to follow family or other group traditions.

This theme included responses such as:

- "...spending time with grandma drove me to quest our family history."
- "...continuing my mom's heritage and connection to traditional Judaism."
- "I did other Judaism related groups in the past, such as a "Rosh Chodesh" (Jewish women's study group that meets on or around the new moon of each month) group when I lived in Jerusalem."

Comparison and Reevaluation Processes.

In this category, responses indicated that joining a SJOG was done in reaction to a comparison to other groups or individuals, mostly in reaction to religious parties. This theme included responses such as:

- "I always admired those who had knowledge of the bible."
- "My friends and relatives are Zionists and ignorant in Judaism."

- “ This was my attempt to understand settlers in the West Bank.”
- “ As I was disappointed from the religious interpretation of the text...”

Joining as a Novel Experience

For this class, there were no distinct categories. Responses indicated that joining a SJOG is a new experience and a transition from one’s life history. This theme included responses such as:

- “Joining a group is a new experience.”
- “No connection to things I have done in the past.”
- “ I had no connection to Judaism at home.”

Table 2 reflects the 3 classes and the respective categories of joiners’ perceptions of joining in relation to their life history. As can be seen in Table 2, a higher percentage of both Israeli and American joiners gave Class B responses, statements related to Joining in Continuance with group/family experiences. The next most frequently identified category was responses from Class A within both samples. Finally, Class C had only 30% of the responses for both samples.

Table 2 - Is joining the in continuance to life history

	Class A- Continuance to personal life experience	# statements (total # of Israeli statements=70; total # of American statements=41)	# joiners who made statements	% of joiners	Chi- Square
Categories					
A1	Joining to achieve self - enhancement				
	Israelis	7	4	26%	n.s.
	Americans	9	6	40%	
A2	Joining to achieve self-unity				
	Israelis	8	8	53%	n.s.
	Americans	5	5	34%	
A3	Joining to achieve self- consistency				$\chi^2 =$ 3.96**
	Israelis	10	7	46%	
	Americans	2	2	14%	
	Total Class A responses				
	Israelis	25	15	----	
	American	16	15	----	

Table - Is joining the SJOG in continuance to life history (cont'd).

	Class B- categories related to joining in continuance with group/ family experiences	# statements (total # of Israeli statements=70; total # of American statements=41)	# joiners who made statements	% of joiners	Chi-Square
Categories	<hr/>				
B1	Continuance with family/group traditions				
	Israelis	18	8	53%	n.s.
	Americans	16	8	53%	
B2	Comparison and reevaluation process				
	Israelis	19	8	53%	n.s.
	Americans	5	5	34%	
	Total Class B responses				
	Israelis	37	15	---	
	American	21	15	---	
C	Class C- Novel experience	# statements (total # of Israeli statements=70; total # of American statements=41)	# joiners who made statements	% of joiners	
		7	5	33%	n.s.
		3	3	20%	
	Total Class C responses				
	Israelis	7	15	---	
	American	3	15	---	

Notes. SJOG - Secular Jewish-oriented Group.

n.s. - not significant. For a more detailed chi-square analysis see Appendix B.

* P < .01

** P < .05

*** P < 0.01

Within Class A, three categories were identified. Joining to achieve self-consistency (A3) was emphasized by the Israeli sample, almost 50%, followed by joining to achieve self-unity and then joining to achieve self-enhancement (26%) (A1). For the American sample, 40% mentioned joining to achieve self-enhancement (A1), 34% joining to achieve self-unity (A2), and 14% joining to achieve self-consistency (A3). In explaining the Chi-Square analysis, only category A3 was significant [$\chi^2(1, N=15)=3.96, p \leq 0.05$] as Table 7 indicates. Israelis mentioned joining to achieve self-consistency more often than expected by chance.

Within Class B, no differences were found between each sample in regard to these categories. However, the Israeli sample gave the same percentages of responses (53%) to both B1 (Continuance with family/group traditions) and B2 (Comparison and reevaluation process), and the American sample seemed to emphasize joining in continuance with family/group traditions. Chi squared analysis revealed no significant differences between the American and Israeli samples for both categories.

Finally, Class C had only a small percentage of the responses for both samples. Chi squared analysis revealed that there are no significant differences between the American and Israeli samples.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

The reasons for the decision to join a secular Jewish oriented group and joiners' perceived Jewish identity as reflected in American and Israeli joiners' narratives are discussed below. The Secular self and the Jewish self are unique and distinct groups. Each of these selves stems from a unique school of thought and values. Whereas the secular social self is traditionally identified with a humanistic, modern, and liberal-individualistic agenda, the Jewish social self is traditionally identified with Jewish ethnic identity based on a collective, religiously rooted tradition and heritage. Thus, it seems that the act of joining a Secular Jewish-oriented group potentially conflicts with both a secular humanistic narrative and a traditional Jewish narrative. Why would secular, non-religious Jews choose to join a Jewish oriented group that often deals with ancient Jewish texts and rituals that seem irrelevant and sometimes opposed to their secular humanistic viewpoint? Why did secular Jews join these groups in Israel, and what were their reasons for joining in the U.S.? How were these reasons alike and in what ways did they differ?

Although Jewish identity (regarded as ethnicity) was ascribed to the subjects in this research by birth, joining was described as an attempt to negotiate this identity so it would better fit their secular values and lifestyle and may be understood as an attempt to reach a positive and distinguished Jewish group identity. Clearly both groups viewed their choice to join as an act reflecting continuity to their previous group/family experiences and perception of self. The processes of identity negotiation can be also understood through the concept of ethnic consciousness (Liebkind, 1992; Phinney, 1993), namely that joiners' narratives reflected reexamination of preexisting attitudes related to the way one chooses to be a secular Jew.

The narrative approach used in this research highlighted the importance of the self-enhancement, self-consistency, and self-unity aspects within the process of identity negotiations.

The emphasis on achieving self-unity in both groups suggests the desire to create a more balanced narration between polarized social selves. Therefore, viewing the data through the Social Identity Theory suggests broadening the definition of crises and including unbalanced group identities within the self as a part of the crisis definition and thus a drive for identity choices and identity negotiations. Data supported joiners' attempts to reinforce and distinguish a Jewish secular narrative through negotiating both value (joining to achieve self-consistency or/and self enhancement) and content, namely the meaning attached to the act of joining as well as the aspects highlighted through the group's activities.

The narrative approach in this study emphasized the connections between identity choices and the social environments in which they operate. As will be further outlined, identity negotiations were expected to vary between Israeli and American interviewees due to the different social contexts in which they live. Subjects often incorporated the social context in a subtle way within their narratives. However, the comparison between the Israeli and American samples revealed group differences, emphasizing the influence of the social context over the decision to join a SJOG.

By way of example, it was expected that among the Israeli sample, identity negotiations would highlight the secular/humanistic aspect of Jewish identity. The basis for the expectation that Israelis will highlight the secular/humanistic aspect of their Jewish identity lies in the Israeli social context, namely the social and political power struggles between secular and religious Jews in Israel. Indeed, data retrieved from the Israeli sample revealed that engaging in text studies was partly an attempt to prove that seculars are as knowledgeable as their religious peers in knowing their Jewish roots. In social identity terms, these were attempts to attach positive attributions to their Jewish secular identity. Moreover, the Israeli emphasis on free interpretation

of Jewish texts further indicates the need to create a unique and positive group identity, balancing it with their secular/humanistic group identity.

Finally, connections between the narration content and the social structures that retain this content emphasized the interconnections between the self and social structures (Crossley, 2000). The use of the narrative approach in this research facilitated the emergence of identity content. Exploring the identity content that emerged expanded on the understanding of the social structures that were created to accommodate the different needs of the Israeli and American joiners.

Social Identity Implications

The findings of this study are also interesting in light of the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981; Turner et al., 1994) in that indeed joiners obtained multiple social identities (Secular and Jewish), and joining in both samples attempted to balance unequal power between the joiners' secular and Jewish group identities. This suggests that joining (and the consequence of becoming a group member) served to negotiate identity not only in cases when joining a different group was blocked, but also when the individuals' various self-identities (such as in secular versus Jewish) were not balanced.

Applying Cross's (1991) view of identity negotiations, when looking at Seculars both in Israel and America as minority groups within the more traditional Jewish groups, joining reflects the stage in which individuals develop a secure, confident sense of themselves as members of their group. This confident and secure sense of themselves is reached by creating a unique set of values and rituals, as well as a unique social construct that retains these values. Indeed, anger towards a more traditional group was not a major theme in both samples. Rather, the construction of a group setting that accommodates specific secular needs and values emerged

from the data.

Data from this study revealed the connection between identity choices and the joiners' social environment. For both samples, themes related to the joiner's social-self (in this context a Jewish group identity), such as consistency with Jewish ethnicity, culture, knowledge, and traditions, were found to be an overall more common reason for joining than themes related to aspects of personal identity. Between samples, the Israeli group tended to have less emphasis on aspects of personal identity. These findings support the centrality of one's group membership and ethnicity, as outlined by Phinney and Alipurial (1990), to the overall formation of group identity.

Since joiners lacked religious beliefs and oftentimes came from mixed marriages, joining a traditional Jewish group in order to enhance their group identity was not a realistic outlet for them. Therefore, narrations focused on identity negotiations. Joining was expected to reflect the desire to create an alternative Jewish identity that would integrate joiners' secular social self and/or secular needs and joiners' Jewish social-self through various techniques of redefinition for both groups.

Data strongly support joiners' attempts to integrate their secular social self and Jewish social self through renegotiation of their Jewish group identity. Table 1 categories A3-A4 reflect the desire to create an alternative for traditional Judaism and freely interpret Jewish texts and rituals. These were the strongest categories for both Americans and Israelis. Nevertheless, American and Israeli samples emphasized different aspects regarding this theme. While American statements reflected the need to create a familial Jewish setting that will replace the joiner's Jewish family of origin, provide a secular yet Jewish education for their children, and allow a secular-humanistic interpretation of the Jewish rituals and holidays, the Israeli statements

reflected the need to have a social setting/study group where they could freely interpret Jewish texts with no emphasis on rituals or holidays. Respectively, Israeli statements did not address the children's education as an important motivating factor. In this respect, A1 could be understood as a more general connection to the ethnicity aspect of joining, whereas A3 and A4 suggest the specific terms in which this connection will take place. In other words, joining was part of a joiner's attempt to create meaningful narratives that form a compromise between their Jewish and secular identities and a social construct that will retain this meaning. Both meaning and the social constructs that retained these meaning systems (Polkinghorne, 1988) differed across samples. These differences may be best understood as a means to balance unequal power between different group identities/social selves of the joiners (as in secular-humanistic versus Jewish for the Israeli sample) as outlined by the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981). Whereas the Israeli group could be best characterized as a gathering of individuals focused on studying and interpretation of traditional Jewish texts (Chi squared analysis revealed significant differences between the American and Israeli samples $P \leq 0.01$), the Americans were more concerned with accommodating communal needs, such as interpretations and celebration of holidays and education for the children (Chi squared analysis revealed significant differences between the American and Israeli samples $P \leq 0.01$).

Finally, A5 (joining as a comparison with religious groups) was a relatively negligible theme for both samples. This may suggest that group identity will be negotiated not only when perceived as having unequal power to another group, but also when different group identities within the self are unequal in value.

Implications for Personal Identity

Another hypothesis proposed was that the samples would differ in regard to personal identity needs of the joiners. For the Israelis, it was expected that gaining knowledge, as an intellectual need, would be a major theme, because gaining knowledge would serve to balance unequal power between perceived Jewish identity and perceived secular-humanistic identity. For the American sample, it was expected that being part of an accepting social setting, specifically in regard to mixed marriages, would be the dominant theme, balancing unequal power between perceived legitimate Jewish identity and one's perception as a secular-humanist. Results indicate that indeed gaining knowledge, as an intellectual need, was important for the Israelis and a negligible reason for joining for the American sample (Chi squared analysis revealed significant differences between the American and Israeli samples, $P \leq 0.01$). Although some American joiners mentioned "being involved in a social setting that accepts their non-Jewish partners" as a reason for joining, this was not found to be a significant reason. Israeli joiners did not mention mixed marriages as a reason for joining. Nevertheless, in examining the statements that construct the categories, some comparison can be made in regard to both groups' need for acceptance. Whereas the American sample mentioned acceptance in regard to mixed marriages, the Israeli sample mentioned acceptance on an ideological basis. Israeli statements in this category emphasized the superiority and authenticity of the humanistic interpretation to Judaism over traditional interpretations and rituals.

It is interesting to note that American joiners emphasized their desire to belong to a community, a reason that was rarely mentioned by the Israeli joiners (Chi squared analysis revealed significant differences between the American and Israeli samples $P \leq 0.01$). This theme

suggests that Americans' decisions to join were influenced by the diversity of culture in the U.S. and the great emphasis on identifying with a community.

Interestingly, personal growth was important to both groups, with more than 80% of both samples providing this explanation. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the most prevailing personal identity reasons for the Americans were their need for personal growth and belonging to a community. These findings further support Americans' needs to be part of a denominational construct of meaning and, more specifically, that the way to personal growth, according to these joiners, is intertwined with belonging to a community. One possible understanding of this data is that the American culture attaches positive attributions to individuals who belong to a community, especially when such a community is associated with family and social values. Also, since great emphasis is placed on individualism, the voluntary choice to share and contribute to others may be perceived as a positive attribute of one's self, thus promoting personal growth.

For the Israelis, it seems that intellectual needs and personal growth were perceived as intertwined. Israelis live in a social construct that automatically provides a Jewish community. Israel, after all, is a Jewish state. Moreover, the state's social construct requires social responsibilities by law (i.e., Each Jewish citizen is required to do a mandatory military or national service of at least two years for women and three years for men, with a yearly one month mandatory reserve service for men up to the age of 45 years old). Consequently, belonging to a community of Jews was not a salient theme. Rather, it seems that subjects connected between personal growth and intellectual growth (within the Jewish realm). Moreover, gaining knowledge about Judaism was oftentimes described as reinforcing a secular narration of one's Jewish identity, thus gaining social power.

To enrich everyday and family life was not a major reason for the Israeli joiners and even

a weaker reason for the American joiners, mentioned by fewer than 10% of the joiners. This suggests that joining was not perceived to be synonymous with hobbies and other leisure time activities. Rather, joining appears to serve a broader role in the identity formation of the joiners.

It was also hypothesized that joining would be described as a continuation of a joiner's identity narrative rather than as a turning point decision (an identity transformation) for both samples. Findings supported this assumption. Not only was joining not described as an identity transformation, joiners from both samples emphasized joining in continuance to their group/family experiences as a leading narrative over joining in continuance to personal life experiences.

Within the categories related to joining in continuance to personal life experiences, joining to achieve self-unity and self-consistency were highlighted in the Israeli narratives. The self-unity aspect may be seen as connected to the general attempt to resolve polarized social identities through the creation of a more integrated self-narrative. The connection of the self-unity of the Jewish identity aspect may reflect the desire to attach one's identity to the more general historic Jewish group identity. Indeed, self-unity was highly important for both American and Israeli joiners.

The self-consistency aspect may be related to the attempt to retain the groups' positive value. Indeed self-consistency turned out to be more important for the Israeli joiners (Chi squared analysis revealed significant differences between the American and Israeli samples, $p \leq 0.01$). This is further supported by the categories related to joining in continuance with group/family experiences, where Israelis mentioned joining in continuance with family/group (Jewish secular group) traditions and as part of a comparison and reevaluation process (A5 in Table1). These findings highlight the importance of identity content aspects and the social

context in which the Israeli narratives are constructed.

For the American joiners, self-enhancement and self-unity were the reasons emphasized for joining in continuance to personal life experiences. These findings highlight the desire to negotiate joiners' self-value within their group membership (being American secular Jews). These findings may also be related to data regarding the connection between Americans' need for personal growth and their connection to belongingness to a community, as if joining facilitates personal growth. In social identity terms, joining the group would enable self-enhancement. Further examination of these findings may be explained by the individualistic nature of the American society.

Social Context Implications

Finally, the social context for joining was expected to vary among the samples. For the Israelis, it was expected that joining will be mentioned as connected to a group identity crisis, such as the decline of the secular Zionist pioneer vision, the assassination of the late Prime Minister Rabin, and/or the social power struggles with various orthodox groups. The American joiners were expected to reflect rejection of other Jewish religious groups (group identity crisis) as a reason to join.

Another expected social impact was that American joiners would choose methods of absorbing into the all-American group and as part of the denominational nature of the American society. They would also retain practice of some Jewish traditions as a means of creating a distinctive identity (ban themselves to a Jewish context).

No evidence was found for joining as a reaction to a specific outward crisis. For the Israeli sample, the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin was never mentioned in the joiners' narratives. However, group identity crises, such as the decline of the secular Zionist pioneer

vision and the social/political power struggles (implies secular decline in political and social power) with various orthodox groups, were prevalent themes within the narratives for joining. For the American joiners, the comparison to other social groups, either Jewish or non-Jewish, was rarely mentioned, and no specific social event was mentioned as a reason for joining.

Data support joining as reflecting the need to belong to a community with some Jewish content among the American sample. This need was negligible among the Israeli interviewees.

The Contribution to a Social Identity View of Group Identity Processes

Reviewing the findings in this work may further support the idea that joining within both samples attempts to bridge polarized identities within the self rather than to negotiate their terms toward an outer group. Specifically, when the secular group identity conflicted with the Jewish ethnic identity, individuals made attempts to find a common ground for both identities. Through identity negotiations, their group identity was re-narrated to incorporate those components of both identities that together forged a positive, consistent, and coherent identity story.

Furthermore, findings suggest that the social context reflects either a subtle influence or an unconscious influence within joiners' narratives. That is, the social context that may or may not forge identity does not appear to be salient to the individual undergoing the transformation. This was evidenced by the fact that political and social forces were not mentioned in the narratives of the Americans and rarely mentioned by the Israelis.

Future Directions

Improvements to this research would include using a larger sample of subjects to achieve more validity. The samples varied significantly in terms of interview length; Israeli interviews lasted on average 20-30 minutes more than the American interviews and, as a result, less data emerged for the American sample. It is suggested that cultural considerations, such as using an

Israeli interviewer with Israeli subjects and an American interviewer with American subjects in future research, may best bridge this gap. In addition, the use of more than two coders in the data sorting stage may contribute to better external validity. In light of the findings, future research would benefit from adding questions regarding the extent to which different group identities are perceived as polarized. A richer understanding of identity crises would benefit from understanding the decision to refrain from joining a specific Jewish group in a sample of secular Jews who chose to be alienated from Jewish groups.

In addition, consequences of joining can be explored and possibly reveal what aspects of identity were given up to maintain this choice. Additional questions or questionnaires could have been used to detect the social context influence over the decision to join a Jewish secular group. A longitudinal study of these groups may further reveal whether the creation of these groups turned out to be an enduring solution to their unbalanced identities.

Finally, future research may want to examine gender differences within the realm of group identity formation. The case of joining may be of special interest in respect to variations between men and woman in their need to belong to a group as part of their identity formation process.

Conclusions

This research emphasizes the importance of group identity and ethnicity to the development of self-identity. It may add to the understanding of the self as a narration that seeks to balance different group identities within the self through identity negotiations. This may be seen as an extension of Tajfel's (1974) notion of identity negotiation to balance unequal power with an exterior group. This research contributes to our understanding of the negotiation process and suggests that individuals embody more than one social self and wish to achieve consistency

and unity between their different selves. Moreover, this research suggests that this striving does not take place solely in one's inner mind. Rather, individuals strive to create outer social constructs, such as a secular Jewish group, to embody these inner needs. The comparison between Israeli and American joiners helped to detect the influence of the social context over the decision to join. Emphasizing that whereas the need for self-unity is more universal (emphasized by both Israelis and Americans), motivations such as seeking self-enhancement or self-consistency depends on the social context in which the individual lives.

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APPENDIX A: The Interview

Starting time_____

Hi, My name is Nirit Bayrach-Avraham and I am conducting research on behalf of the Clinical Psychology department in Eastern Michigan University, as part of my M.A thesis.

The purpose of our research is to better understand the reasons for joining a Jewish group. In Accordance with our research standards, we will report the study results in a general way, without identifying the subjects and we promise confidentiality.

First, Please tell me about yourself some general details, whatever comes to your mind.

Now, I would like to ask you some Questions related to your joining the group.

1. When did you first join the "Judaism study group"?

*month_____year_____

2. How often does the group meet?

*How many times per week / month?

* How often do you attend the meetings?

3. Where do you meet?

4. How many people meet together each time?

* Are these the same people every meeting?

5. Are there any common denominators among the group members?

*Religious background

*Social background

*Education general / Jewish education

*Age range

*Gender

*Culture activities

*Marital status

* Personal virtues

*Other:_____

6. Which of those attributes describe you as well?

7. Who leads the group?

* Changing or regular teacher?

* How would you describe the leader/teacher?

* Is he/she religious/Secular/ converted?

8. Could you describe the joining process?

*How did you first hear about the existence of the study group?

*What did you find attractive in this group?

9. What were your reasons for joining the group?

What were you curious to know?

What did you hope to achieve through participating in this group?

Was there a specific event that triggered your decision to join?

10. Of the reasons you mentioned, what were the main reasons you joined the group?

11. How did you choose your group?

Did you have friends who already studied there?

Was there a special significance to the activities the group offered?

What was the role of its distance from where you lived (in influencing your decision to join?)

Was there any pressure on you from the part of friends, family, and partner, to join the group?

12. Did you join the group by yourself or with others (partner / friend)?

In case you joined with other/s, why did you go together?

If not, did you try to take with you more friends to the meetings?

In case you tried to bring more friends to the group, why did you do so?

In case you joined alone, was there a specific reason not to bring others with you?

13. How is your joining the group related to other things you did in the past?

*Is it in continuation to things you did in the past or a turning point?

14. How is your joining the group connected or related to the way you identify yourself?

In what way?

15. Did you join other study or social groups before?

Which groups did you join?

16. Have you been involved with a Judaism group in the past?

Now lets focus on the meetings:

17. Can you please describe for me the things you do in the group?

Practice/ study, what?

How do you practice/study?

Is most of the time devoted to that? Or are there other topics or issues raising?

In case there are, what are you talking about?

18. Do you celebrate Jewish holidays or perform other Jewish rituals within the group setting?

19. Would you define meetings as a social event?

*In what way?

20. Have you studied Judaism in the past?

In case you did, were have you studied?

Have you studied Judaism in informal frameworks, like among your family?

Have you studied Judaism within a formal framework? Which one?

21. What led you to be interested in Judaism?

- * When did you start to get interested in Judaism?
- * Was there a specific event that influenced this interest?

In case of Judaism studies

22. In what way are your studies of Judaism like those of orthodox religious-people?

- * In what way, do you feel similar to the people who are studying in those groups?

23. In what way are your studies of Judaism different from those of orthodox religious people?

- * Is your attitude toward the materials different from orthodox religious?
- * In what way does your Judaism differ from the one that they (orthodox religious people) have?
- * In what way do you feel different from the people who study in those groups?

24. Now, after joining the group, how do you evaluate the joining influence upon your feelings as a Jew?

25. How would you describe your connection to Judaism? ?

26. Did you reach the goals that led you joining the group at the first place?

- *In which way?

27. What are the reasons that lead you to remain in the group?

In which conditions would you think of leaving the group, or joining a different one?

How long do you think you will continue to be part of the group? why?

28. In what way is Judaism as you experience it in your group different from traditional Judaism?

29. Based on your experiences with the group, do you think your group have/will have an impact upon its surroundings?

* What?

Upon who?

How?

30. How would you categorize yourself in terms of group affiliation?

The group/ groups within society with whom you identify the most.

31. Is there a group/groups within society to whom you feel opposed?

Thank you, we are almost finished. Before finishing the interview I would like to ask you few questions that will help us resolve some statistics analyses.

32. Birth date? _____ (----years)

33. Education:

- a. high school
- b. certificate studies
- c. BA
- d. Master Degree
- e. Doctoral Degree
- f. Other_____

34. How would you describe yourself?

- a. Secular
- b. Re-constructionist
- c. Reform
- d. Conservative
- e. Orthodox
- f. Other_____

35. How would you describe your economic situation? (Circle one)

- a. Much above the average
- b. Above average
- c. Average
- d. Below average
- e. Much below average

36. How would you describe your political tendency?

- a. Republican
- b. Democrat
- c. Other_____

37. How would you describe your marital status?

- a. Single
- b. Live with a partner
- c. Married
- d. Separated
- e. Divorced
- g. Widow/er

38. Born in (country)_____if you moved to the U.S. from another Country_____

39. Ethnic origins:

- a. One of my parents is Jewish: father / mother
- b. Two of my parents are Jewish
- c. Both my parents aren't Jewish

Thanks a lot for your cooperation.

For interviewer:

Finishing hour_____ Date _____ subject #_____

General description of the interview: _____

Question # 1	9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16
Question # 2	11, 12
Question # 3	9, 30, 31
Question # 4	17, 18, 22, 23, 28
Question # 5	9, 10, 18, 19, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28
Question # 6	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16
Question # 7	1-8, 17, 18, 19, 29

APPENDIX B: CHI-SQUARE TEST FOR TABLE 1 AND TABLE 2

Table B1 Chi-Square analysis for Table 1 Category A1

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	12	3	15
Israelis expected	11	4	15
American observed	10	5	15
American expected	11	4	15
Total	22	8	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 0.6818, p \leq 1$$

Table B2 Chi-Square analysis for Table 1 Category A2

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	6	9	15
Israelis expected	5	10	15
American observed	4	11	15
American expected	5	10	15
Total	10	20	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 0.68, p \leq 1$$

Table B3 Chi-Square analysis for Table 1 Category A3

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	11	4	15
Israelis expected	10.5	4.5	15
American observed	10	5	15
American expected	10.5	4.5	15
Total	21	9	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 0.158, p \leq 1$$

Table B4 Chi-Square analysis for Table 1 Category A4

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	11	4	15
Israelis expected	10.5	4.5	15
American observed	10	5	15
American expected	10.5	4.5	15
Total	21	9	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 0.158, p \leq 1$$

Table B5 Chi-Square analysis for Table 1 Category A5

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	8	7	15
Israelis expected	5.5	9.5	15
American observed	3	12	15
American expected	5.5	9.5	15
Total	11	19	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 3.588, p \leq .1$$

Table B5 Chi-Square analysis for Table 1 Category B1

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	9	6	15
Israelis expected	5	10	15
American observed	1	14	15
American expected	5	10	15
Total	10	20	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 9.6, p \leq 0.01$$

Table B6 Chi-Square analysis for Table 1 Category B2

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	9	6	15
Israelis expected	9.5	5.5	15
American observed	10	5	15
American expected	9.5	5.5	15
Total	19	11	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 0.143, p \leq 1$$

Table B7 Chi-Square analysis for Table 1 Category B3

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	5	10	15
Israelis expected	3	12	15
American observed	1	14	15
American expected	3	12	15
Total	6	24	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 3.33, p \leq 0.1$$

Table B8 Chi-Square analysis for Table 1 Category B4

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	3	12	15
Israelis expected	3.5	11.5	15
American observed	4	11	15
American expected	3.5	11.5	15
Total	7	23	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 0.186, p \leq 1$$

Table B9 Chi-Square analysis for Table 1 Category B5

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	1	14	15
Israelis expected	4.5	10.5	15
American observed	8	7	15
American expected	4.5	10.5	15
Total	9	21	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 7.78, p \leq 0.01$$

Table B10 Chi-Square analysis for Table 2 Category A1

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	4	11	15
Israelis expected	5	10	15
American observed	6	9	15
American expected	5	10	15
Total	10	20	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 0.6, p \leq 1$$

Table B11 Chi-Square analysis for Table 2 Category A2

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	8	7	15
Israelis expected	6.5	8.6	15
American observed	5	10	15
American expected	6.5	8.5	15
Total	13	17	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 1.22, p \leq 1$$

Table B12 Chi-Square analysis for Table 2 Category A3

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	7	8	15
Israelis expected	4.5	10.5	15
American observed	2	13	15
American expected	4.5	10.5	15
Total	9	21	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 3.96, p \leq 0.05$$

Table B13 Chi-Square analysis for Table 2 Category B1

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	8	7	15
Israelis expected	8	7	15
American observed	8	7	15
American expected	8	7	15
Total	16	14	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 0, p \leq 1$$

Table B14 Chi-Square analysis for Table 2 Category B2

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	8	7	15
Israelis expected	6.5	8.5	15
American observed	5	10	15
American expected	6.5	8.5	15
Total	13	17	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 1.22, p \leq 1$$

Table B15 Chi-Square analysis for Table 2 Category C1

	Made	Did not make	Total
Israelis observed	5	10	15
Israelis expected	4	11	15
American observed	3	12	15
American expected	4	11	15
Total	8	22	30

Note. The values represent the number of joiners who made (or did not make) relevant statements.

$$\chi^2 (1, N=15) = 0.68, p \leq 1$$

APPENDIX C: HUMAN SUBJECT CONSENT FORM