

**Three Dimensional Families:
Public, Private and Social Life Among
San Francisco Bay Area Jewish
Teenagers and Their Parents**

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Abstract

While much work-family literature is concerned with identity formation, it ignores civic and religious life and assumes that work and family are the primary sources for the construction of meaning. This study of Jewish identity among teenagers and their parents introduces a third, community dimension into the emerging work-family model of identity. I conducted open-ended interviews with 16 teenagers and 19 parents in 14 middle and upper-middle-class observant Jewish families. Most of my respondents, in both generations, seek in Jewish rituals and social networks a sense of emotional connection with one another and with other Jews. The results of this outreach depend on the family's larger approach to identity building and on the characteristics of the community they belong to. "Communalist" families construct solidarity and meaning through active, joint involvement in synagogues and other Jewish organizations. In these families, father, mother, and children share a desire for emotional connection through Jewish identity; and they are immersed in a Jewish community large and diverse enough to contain within its boundaries the opportunity for teenagers to form friendships and develop individual interests. But a substantial minority of families combines an "individualist" with a "familist" approach, where top priority is given to the competing commitments of individual family members to school, work, or hobbies, although individual obligations are periodically set aside to spend time at home with one another. In these families, community-building efforts are sporadic and easily derailed when their synagogues lack the resources to satisfy their desire for emotional connection.

Introduction: Jewish Communities and the Limitations of Work-Family Dualism

Zak Englander¹, 14 and Jewish, loves attending teen school on Tuesday nights at the Steven Wise Temple, a few miles from his suburban home in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has known some of the temple teenagers since he began attending Hebrew school ten years ago in kindergarten, and all of his closest friends are there. Even though he is a good student and attends the eighth grade at a small private school, Zak feels more comfortable with the other teenagers at temple than he does with classmates at school and views them as an extension of his family:

We don't spend a lot of time together, but it's just enough that we know that those are the people that I can come to more than anyone else. I have a more special bond with them than with anyone else.

Like a loving family, temple members can be trusted to accept Zak's individuality, to understand and sympathize with his beliefs. He owns an "AIDS bracelet," a birthday gift from a friend at temple. Sales proceeds, he explains, go to AIDS research. Whereas Zak's classmates at school "are very immature when it comes to ... racial issues, and sexual identity issues" and he would hesitate to wear it there, at temple he dons the bracelet with pride, as a sign of his liberal Jewish identity:

My mom's worked with a lot of AIDS benefits, and it's always been a big part of my life. And I do work for her. Sometimes I go to the... food banks. And every one at temple had [a bracelet,] and I really liked it, I really liked that it showed that I was, wanted to work, help find a cure and stuff.

In addition to trading bracelets, Zak and his friends have attended one another's bar mitzvahs, gone on weekend retreats together, played pool in the synagogue's Youth Lounge, danced at the Purim carnival (the Jewish equivalent of Halloween), flirted, and slept over at one another's homes with their parents' blessing. And in the year before I interviewed him, Zak was a teaching assistant in a Hebrew school class for younger children, an experience he describes as a turning point in his life largely because the teacher, a young woman in her 20s, had put him in charge of some classroom projects and even "done some friend things" with him: she took him and another friend from temple to a rock concert in San Francisco, for example.

Although Zak Englander's Jewish life is a particularly rich one and his ties to staff and students at his temple denser and deeper than they are for most Jewish teenagers, his experience is hardly unique within the world of organized American Judaism. This study shows how, for some middle-class Jewish

teenagers and their parents, the boundaries of family are extended through membership in synagogues and other Jewish groups. By centering their social lives around synagogue, Jewish summer camp, and after-school Jewish teen programs, Zak Englander and the other teenagers in my study could build autonomous identities while remaining within the framework of an institutional culture they shared with their parents. And by forming friendships with adults who knew their children and the children's friends, the parents could retain a measure of control without becoming too vigilant.

One of the predominant arguments in the work-family literature is that, as women have gone to work, workplaces have become second homes (Hochschild 1997) and the public sphere outside of work has been eviscerated. In response to the emergence of total quality workplaces, American workers have increased their emotional commitment to their jobs at the expense of their families.² Less family time means less family caring.³ The less people play, shop, and develop social networks in neighborhoods, churches, or community organizations, the less inviting those settings become because they lose the critical mass of human activity that allows them to function well as communities (Philipson 2000). In this environment, families are forced to resort to an individualist strategy in which family members concentrate on their development as individuals rather than as a family unit.

These findings by Hochschild and Philipson had implications for children, yet their fieldwork was primarily with adults. A recent comparative ethnography of family life (Lareau 1999) has brought the focus on children. Lareau found that in middle-class families, the time bind was an issue for children as well as their parents. In a sustained effort to help them become "well rounded," parents contracted with a succession of formal organizations—soccer leagues, ballet schools, drama clubs—to engage their children in short-term activities, sometimes only six to eight weeks long, and develop their talents.⁴ Little time was spent with relatives, who often lived far away, or with friends. There seemed to be little time for intimacy; children were too busy performing, and often siblings would fight with one another for their parents' attention.

Working-class and poor families were unlike the middle-class sample. They lived near kin, visited with them every week, and spoke by phone daily. Their children played unsupervised in the street or the backyard, with siblings and cousins. A lot of family time was spent watching television on the living room couch. Thus, the middle-class respondents had an individualist approach to "doing" family, where the child's talents were cultivated so intensely that there was little time left over for the family members simply to be together. The working-class respondents had a more familist approach

and spent most of their free time with each other, so that the children did not have as much of an opportunity as their middle-class peers to develop interests or hobbies.

Thus, the assumption in the work-family literature, including research on children, is that the two spheres of work and family dominate American lives. The community sphere is virtually invisible in this work. Yet the religiously observant families in my sample formed a third group that does not fit well in this framework. Their communalist approach to “doing” family was a blend of the individualistic cultivation of talents in the middle-class “time bind” model and the familistic emphasis on kin ties in the working-class. Many of the adults, though not all, had grown up close to kin, but moved away to attend college; they often felt a sense of loss. Although some of them did maintain close ties with extended kin in other cities, their local ties were often with other community members—fictive rather than biological kin—and centered around activities at synagogue. These community ties often served to defuse the emotional pressure cooker of the middle-class nuclear family while allowing more room for individuation than the familistic model in the working-class.

Synagogue membership offered a viable alternative to the workplace as a site for the construction of meaning, and it allowed entire families, not just individual employees, to belong. Moreover, it enabled communication between generations. Parents and children had a shared commitment to the Jewish community and made it a focal point for their sense of collective identity. Even though the synagogue environment allowed teenagers some autonomy from parents, their youth groups and friendship networks remained under the watchful eyes of other sympathetic adults who were community members. They were not solely in the company of their peers or of adults they barely knew.

The “community effect” was fragile, however. Because synagogue had so much meaning for them, my more observant respondents experienced the synagogue community at a deeply emotional level, and the intensity of their feelings was double-edged. If at least two family members shared a commitment to Judaism, the experience of membership took on psychic depth, and synagogue-based networks could contain their nuclear families within larger networks of supportive relationships. But the delight of belonging was easily undermined by conflict within the nuclear family over the level of observance or involvement. I found bitterness as well as joy in my interviews of respondents, mostly women, whose family members did not share their commitment to synagogue life.⁵

Theoretical Framework

Conflict is an integral part of family life. (Gelles 1997; Stacey 1998; Thorne and Yalom 1992) In every family I spoke with, some conflict was apparent, either between spouses or between parents and children. Depending on the practices of the family, conflict could be repressed or it could occupy center stage for most of the interview. Yet in all cases, it seemed to be an integral part of family life. Because parenting is inherently an ambiguous process (Ruddick 1995), parents often fought and disagreed.⁶ As teenagers went through the painful process of identity building (Elkind 1998) they received contradictory messages from parents because, on the one hand, the adults had growing work obligations (Hochschild 1997) and children were expected to prepare for independence, but on the other hand, the parents wanted the family to come together and preserve its collective identity. This dilemma has been documented in a recent ethnography of family meals (DeVault 1991) Building on the DeVault thesis, I found that fathers and children, as well as mothers, experienced tension between their development as individuals and their allegiance to the nuclear family.⁷

As I suggested earlier, three strategies were available to negotiate these tensions and construct a family identity. I refer to them as individualist, familist, and communalist. Although every family used all three approaches in various combinations, communalism was prevalent among the more observant families. Respondents turned to more individualistic or familistic strategies when the community option was not available to them, and later in the paper I explain some of the reasons that synagogue membership did not always bring community in its wake.

The individualist strategy was to avoid conflict with family members and respond to demands and commitments from outside the family by creating emotional distance and moving almost entirely in separate worlds – the father and mother at their jobs or volunteer work, the kids in their social networks at school and in extracurricular activities. This is a common strategy among middle-class families (Hochschild 1997; Lareau 1999), but it has costs; the more family members pursue their individual interests, the fewer the opportunities for intimacy and caregiving in the household.

The familist strategy is to spend a lot of time with parents, siblings, and children and cultivate a strong and inward-looking family culture, a strategy characteristic of working-class and poor families (Lareau 1999). Whereas the individualist strategy was appropriate when parents wanted to train children for middle-class life, familism was a form of resistance; family solidarity is a logical response to an outside world that is perceived as threatening or hostile (see Collins 1990). The danger here is that family members' needs for individuation get neglected. Nonobservant families usually alternated

between familist and individualist strategies; but family time was primarily with nuclear family members. Their high social status gave them access to individual advancement at work and school, but they also needed respite from competition, and the nuclear family continued to be their default source of emotional support.

The communalist strategy was adopted by religiously observant families. This strategy, which my data suggest was the most difficult to maintain, situates the family squarely within a larger setting which with some trepidation I refer to henceforth as a “community.”⁸ Communalist families contain their inevitable ambivalence about individuation and emotional connection within the framework of a synagogue-based culture local enough to feel like home, but large enough to dilute the emotional intensity of the single-family household. When several family members are enmeshed in the community, they can defuse internal family tensions by turning to community members for support. Although this strategy among my respondents was ultimately the most successful at maintaining the family as a vibrant institution, it was also more labor-intensive; family members had to build ties at synagogue deliberately if they were to become sources of support.

I define community here as a dense network of social ties characterized by social closure (Coleman 1988) and by a shared repertoire of cultural symbols (Geertz 1966). As I define it, community might just as easily be based at a school or within a political movement as at a synagogue; or it might consist of an informal social network that includes friends, neighbors and extended kin who come together on a regular basis. The families in my sample, however, were attempting communalist strategies centered around a synagogue. On the one hand, they sought to build close relationships with community members.⁹ On the other hand, they reaffirmed family ties through Jewish rituals and celebrations, at home or at synagogue.

In sociological literature, the closest parallel to this notion of community is what Karen Hansen has defined as the “social.” (Hansen 1994) The nineteenth-century working families of her study lived in a time before the telephone, and they made constant rounds of visits to the homes of relatives and neighbors — gossiping, exchanging news, spreading the gospel, and tending the sick. Friends and siblings exchanged frequent letters, and their writings often expressed a great deal of intimacy. In addition to the everyday practice of visiting, frequent gatherings such as quilting and harvesting parties, barn and farmhouse raisings, or church revival meetings provided people with the opportunity to work together while also socializing and building relationships. The pleasure of coming together, and the

offense of being rejected or ignored, appear to have been as intense during this “very social time” as they are today for my respondents who are involved in Jewish life.

However, there is one crucial difference between the social in ante-bellum New England and the community sphere I am speaking of here. The marketization of the economy since the early 19th century has reduced the need for cooperative work, and for the exchange of favors that probably forced even the most antisocial people to visit with each other. Households today are more self-sufficient because they purchase the goods and services that were bartered in those days. In antebellum New England the social was a sphere that people ignored at their peril, because so many goods and services were provided through the web of mutual obligations. But community membership today has for the most part been emptied of its dimension of material exchanges; the relational and emotional dimensions have become a much larger part of the community-building enterprise.

The specialization of community ties makes them more fragile (Wellman 1999; Wellman and Wellman 1992; Wellman et al. 1997). For my respondents, synagogue did not always deliver on its communalist promise. Two obstacles repeatedly surfaced in my data. First, the community could disappoint because it generated high expectations for care that were difficult to meet because of suburban geography, conflicting demands from workplaces and schools, and the weaknesses of synagogues as institutions. For one family I interviewed, a power struggle between the rabbi and the board of directors had destroyed the home-like atmosphere that was crucial to the maintenance of community at their temple. Second, the community-building process could be derailed by the gendered nature of commitment; many fathers were less interested than mothers in building ties partly because they were absorbed in work and partly because they appeared to crave autonomy rather than emotional connection. This gender difference in object relations has been documented elsewhere. (Chodorow 1978; Chodorow 1987)

Methodology and Cast of Characters

My subjects are all members of middle to upper-middle-class families who acknowledge some level of Jewish identity. I explore the implications of this identity for the development of self among two groups of families: those who are highly involved in the Jewish community and those who are unaffiliated or marginally involved. In recruiting my sample, I defined as *middle-class* those families in which one or more parents has a professional, technical, or managerial job. I did not feel comfortable asking about

family income. I used the following as indicators of a *strong Jewish religious identity*:

Synagogue attendance at least once a month, for committee meetings, religious services classes, or social events

Celebration of Jewish rituals on a regular basis e.g., Sabbath dinners on Friday night. Note that, according to this definition, attending Rosh Hashanah services once a year does not indicate a strong religious identity.

This paper is based on open-ended interviews with 16 teenagers and 19 parents in 14 middle and upper-middle class observant Jewish families. In 3 of the families, I spoke with only one parent and no children. In a fourth family, I spoke only to the teenager. Three families had two or more siblings who were teenagers, and 7 of 16 child interviews were with 3 groups of siblings – two sisters each in the Wexler and Rodman families, two sisters and a brother in the Walker family. Overall, I interviewed 34 respondents and conducted 29 interviews, of which 3 were with groups and 26 with individuals.

I asked my respondents probing questions about their life histories and their feelings: “When did you first get involved in the Jewish community?” “Why did it upset you that your daughter wanted to date a non-Jew?” I also prompted them to address contradictions in their accounts: “Why did you care about your kids getting religious training if you had such a terrible experience in Hebrew school yourself?” With the teenagers in particular, I sometimes told stories from my own Jewish history in an attempt to create some reciprocity and make them feel comfortable talking about conflict. Although I asked adults open-ended questions about the work they did and how they felt about it, I did not ask how many hours they worked or how much money they earned. I did not ask the children what grades they got in school.¹⁰ My view was that although such information might have been relevant to my argument, asking for it might have been perceived as an invasion of privacy and risked upsetting the intimate mood I was trying to create during the interview process. My sample is evocative, but not representative. My focus is on the families for which I had the richest and most complex data. I also use some data from participant observation at a religious school class for Jewish teenagers and informal conversations with temple and religious school staff.

CAST OF CHARACTERS							
Pseudonyms, ages, and relationships are tabulated below.							
The names of respondents I actually interviewed are highlighted in bold.							
<i>Family</i>	<i>RODMAN</i>	<i>GREENBERG</i>	<i>LEBERSON</i>	<i>BRUDER</i>	<i>MIRETSKY</i>	<i>SHAPIRO</i>	<i>FRIEDMAN</i>
<i>Mother</i>	Linda: housewife	Lucy: part-time acupuncturist	Renee: housewife	Lena Schmidt: doctor	Ellen Klein: director of volunteers at nonprofit	Roslyn: housewife	Simone: physical therapist
<i>Father</i>	Mark: psychiatrist	Rich: attorney	Harold: HR exec at oil company	Saul: book dealer	Frank: software engineer	Edward: attorney	Spencer: attorney
<i>Children</i>	Ruth 16 Lena 13 Aaron 27	Mica 14 Eli 10	Saul 14 Sam 10	David 14	Bobbie 13 Scott 16	Mark 15 Adam 13 EJ 7	Sarah 14 Dina 11

<i>Family</i>	<i>ROSEN</i>	<i>DIAMOND</i>	<i>WEXLER</i>	<i>WALKER</i>	<i>ENGLANDER</i>	<i>MC CORMICK</i>	<i>ROBBINS</i>
<i>Mother</i>	Claudia: social worker	Wendy (divorced): former scientist, now on disability	Claudia: former social worker, now part-time bookkeeper, husband's orthodontic practice	Gwen: secretary, former housewife	Sarah: part- time cabaret singer	Diana: housewife	Lisa: nurse
<i>Father</i>	Jake: psychologist	Bill: Former scientist, now on disability	Don: orthodontist	Adam: musician, court administrator	Oscar: business owner w.50 employees	Ian: attorney	Ben: doctor
<i>Children</i>	Lucille 16	David 16 , lives with father	Ruth 19 Holly 15	Chloe 17 Tamar 14 Aaron 21	Zak 14	Thomas 15	Seth 15 Jason 13

Findings

I present my findings in three sections, which correspond broadly to different parts of my argument. In the first section, I present evidence that my respondents – primarily parents, but also children — made conscious attempts to “do” family. They painstakingly built solidarity through shared stories, secular leisure activities, and Jewish ritual observance. Yet, even with these efforts, family life remained a process ridden with conflict and danger. Like other family

researchers (Coontz 1992; Rubin 1976, 1994; Stacey 1998), I found that nuclear families, even in the upper middle-class, are frail institutions, often buffeted about by social and psychic forces beyond their control, and frequently scarce in the resources necessary to provide care and security to their members. In the second section, I describe how some of the families defused tensions and gained emotional resilience by participating in the Jewish community.

When they experienced synagogue as meaningful, teenagers as well as parents could use Judaism to individuate from family while staying in family territory. Even during intense family conflict, the shared discourse of Judaism provided a framework for mutual understanding. In the last section, I attempt to describe some of the limitations of Jewish communities as family territory. Geography and gender undermined the power of synagogue life to act as a safety net and a meaning maker for families. On the one hand, the low population densities of some East Bay suburbs and the small numbers of Jews in the area made for synagogues that were either inaccessible to many respondents or too small to sustain a critical mass of activity. On the other hand, the hegemony of work, school, and career, particularly among upper-middle-class men and boys, made it difficult for families to sustain an interest in community life. Even fathers who were committed to “being Jewish” felt obliged by their conditions of employment to dedicate more time than they wanted to their jobs; they saw themselves as providers and believed that the family’s survival depended on their success at paid work.

Family Solidarity and the Uses of Ritual

The families in my sample tended to have a traditionalist structure. Unlike the time bind families of Amerco (Hochschild 1997), or the clients interviewed by Philipson (2000), my respondents did not talk about the workplace as a second home. The mothers repeatedly expressed a desire to put much of their time and effort into children, family, and community.¹¹

All the families owned their homes, and except for Bill Diamond who was divorced and had custody of his son David, consisted of a married couple with their own biological children. 7 of the 14 mothers were housewives or worked part-time. With the exception of Saul Bruder, a self-employed bookseller, and Bill Diamond, who was dying of cancer, all the husbands were primary breadwinners. Hochschild and Philipson have both shown how employees at “total quality management” companies use home and family metaphors to describe the atmosphere at their workplaces. In my sample, however, the metaphor of *family* was used only to describe the religious community.

Moreover, some of these families put heroic efforts into solidarity building. Ellen Klein waged her battle around the dinner table; she was determined to prepare a sit-down dinner for her family every night even though few of her neighbors and friends did so:

I may sound like a real dinosaur here, but we generally eat dinner, real dinner – we cook and we eat dinner. Um, my kids have a lot of friends who graze all through the day – they would never have dinner. I mean, nobody cooks, and then, you know, microwave pizza, and they eat ice cream at six, and have a hot dog later; I mean it's just – you know, just, just, different, that's all. It works for them; they're too busy. I would have a lot of time if I didn't shop and cook and eat too. But, you know, that's what you got to do if you want to do it, and I feel very much in the minority sometimes because we have dinner.

Although Ellen may have felt like part of a minority, she was not alone in her desire to deepen family ties. The Rodmans, the Wexlers, and the Robbinses almost always lit Sabbath candles on Friday night and held a short religious service around the dinner table before beginning to eat. With their parents' encouragement, Holly Wexler and Ruth Rodman usually invited their friends to come for dinner and sleep over on Shabbat, literally uniting peers and family under the same roof. In the Robbins household on Shabbat, the parents and two teenage boys took turns talking about the good things that had happened to them that week. In the father's words:

We sit down together, we put the tablecloth on the table, we light the lights, we say the prayers, and the family knows that's a time we're going to sit down — we always eat dinner together, but we're going to have a nice...relaxing dinner. And that's a time when we're going to be together, and it's a vehicle for bringing the family together.

Families used secular as well as religious strategies, and these ranged from the modest – watching baseball on TV – to the luxurious – travelling together to Europe over spring break.¹² There were also gendered rituals, which created solidarity between fathers and sons or mothers and daughters.¹³

The effect of all this solidarity building was to reaffirm the emotional ties between family members and to make them more important factors in individuals' lives. For the Wexlers, where the family circle included grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, this meant a great deal of time invested in cultivating relations of solidarity. At the time of her interview Ruth Wexler was attending college in the northeastern city where her parents had themselves attended college and her mother had grown up. Ruth saw her grandparents and aunts and uncles on a regular basis, and when her grandfather suddenly died, she was on hand to console and keep her grandmother company.

Ties between parents and children were also strong. Although the Wexler girls were teenagers, an age that popular culture associates with separation, they shared their parents' commitment to maintaining close family relationships. Ruth liked her distance from her parents and viewed it as an opportunity to develop her own social networks independent of them, but she planned to return home for graduate school and settle down close to her parents. Younger sister Holly was not making plans for college yet, but like Sarah, she knew that family "is really important to me." Every Friday afternoon she helped her mother bake challah, an egg bread usually eaten on Shabbat, and she delighted in her special role in the process, wherein she remained side by side with her mother in the kitchen even as she took charge of a task that her mother could not do. In the process of baking challah together, of having her friends sleep over for Shabbat, Holly felt enveloped, cared for, and emotionally connected:

I just feel really comfortable, and I feel like I'm really close to my family, and like, a lot of people don't have that, you know? And I feel like I'm really lucky, to be with my family, you know, shared meals, and—but it's not just like...a meal. It's not just like a regular weekday meal. I don't know. It's a Jewish meal.

Gwen Walker and her daughters took shared pleasure in Jewish rituals as well. Tamar described with some fondness how she remembered as a young child wandering into the synagogue, sitting alone, and enjoying the solitude while her mother was volunteering in the gift shop. She traced the origins of her religiosity to this childhood experience. Lena Rodman described her father, Mark, a big bearded man in his late 50s, as "a really great dad" and a "good person," and told me how he had read Bible stories to her at bedtime when she was a child.

Yet the experiences of Holly, Ruth, Tamar, and Lena were not typical of all my respondents; in many cases, ambivalence overwhelmed solidarity. For all the efforts, often successful, to “do” family, conflict never disappeared. For example, Ruth Wexler and her mother, Claudia, had been involved in an ongoing conflict throughout Ruth’s visit to San Francisco. The bone of contention was that Ruth was dating a young man who was not Jewish; Claudia found this very upsetting and said quite candidly that she felt threatened by it. She had fallen in love with her husband, Don, when she was Ruth’s age—

19. Ruth was equally candid, expressing anger at her mother but also understanding:

My mom has like, a *really* big problem with it [my boyfriend not being Jewish], and we have constantly fought about it. Constantly. And I'm just outraged because I think that...she's being, like, really narrow-minded. I understand why she wants me to be with a Jewish person, but it makes me like, resent Judaism. What I feel like she's telling me is...not even...[that] it makes it easier because you can easily raise your children Jewish, but ...[that] we're, like, superior or something.

Because she felt close to Claudia, Ruth was able to keep the conflict in perspective. Both mother and daughter knew it was a temporary disagreement and not a fundamental breach in trust, so like the Rodmans and the Robbinses, they could put aside their grievances at Shabbat and celebrate being together. But containing conflict was not always possible and it was sometimes predominant in my interviews. The Walkers tried to celebrate Shabbat as well, but waxed almost comical about their regular Shabbat fights:

Gwen: It's nice to come together for Shabbat. Shabbat for me does not mean you have to sit in temple. It's a bonding moment, anywhere.

Christopher: You spend Shabbat together.

Gwen: Oh, we usually start it with a family fight, on Friday night [with ironic humor]. It's Shabbat, and we have all this tension from the week...

Chloe: And every-one is like, "Oh, it must be Shabbat!"

Gwen: It's because every one is really tense from the week, and you finally come home, and... but Saturdays are usually better.

Although Gwen wanted to believe that conflict was simply the result of the ordinary stress of a week's work, the family fights had flashpoints, one of which was their 21-year-old son Aaron's level of Jewish observance and conformity with the family. Aaron was still living at home, but he was heavily involved in an underground music scene; his back was covered with tattoos of tangled snakes.¹⁴ And Gwen, who had been a Zionist all her life, found it painful that he was no longer involved in religion, despite his years of Jewish education:

Aaron: I kind of agree with what um, this governor, is that his name now, Ventura?... What he said in that one interview, is, um, "Organized religion is for the weak and the crippled, who need the structure to stand up with."

Gwen: It's only because you have a good foundation that you can say that, Aaron. I'm betting that I'll have Jewish grandchildren from my daughter [Chloe]. Him [points to Aaron, makes a face and shakes her head]—ih ih ih ih ih!

The source of Gwen's frustration appeared to be simply that she felt an increasing distance from Aaron, who did not share the beliefs that brought her and her daughters together. As a result, he seemed to be drifting away from the family.

I was privy to a conflict in the Greenberg family as well. Their flashpoint was the perception of Lucy and Rich, the parents, that their son, Mica, lacked discipline and a sense of personal responsibility. According to his parents, Mica was a talented musician and athlete, but an unenthusiastic student and somewhat egocentric. His mediocre school performance was of a piece with his dependence and immaturity. They wanted him to grow emotionally, to become less self-absorbed and more self-reflective:

Lucy: We're having a lot of trouble with him at school.

Rich: I think the long-term goal here both with religion and school is for him to learn some sense of personal responsibility, that he's part of a larger world than his own.

Lucy: He's a very self-involved young man. Like all 14-year-olds I suppose.

Rich: Which is not a surprise, at his age...For him to see there's a world beyond his laptop is pretty tough at his age.

Christopher – But you're worried about him not doing well in school?

Lucy and Rich: He *doesn't* do well in school.

Lucy: It's not that he's not capable. He's just a very wilful kid, with his own agenda. It's soccer, music, socializing.

Rich: He's not a thinking, examining, interior type of kid at all. He's focused on doing. He's got no interest in self-examination, no interest really in the thinking process. He's not a philosophical kid at all.

On the day I was expecting to interview Mica, Lucy and Rich were asking him if he had practiced his saxophone. In order to coax him into doing his algebra homework Lucy and Rich sent him up the street to the house of a family friend who was a diligent student in his grade, so they would study together. They believed the boy would be a good influence on him. Mica unsurprisingly resented the pressure and claimed during the interview we scheduled a week or so later that his parents “even made playing the saxophone seem like work.”

Even as they were harsh critics, Rich and Lucy tried to keep their emotions in check. They were aware that the “power of feelings” (Chodorow 1999) could distort their reading of the signs of Mica’s future as an adult (Thorne 2000). They knew that their high expectations and hopes for him might be unrealistic given his age and developmental stage. Nonetheless, this was a difficult conflict to resolve because it was not over a specific issue where parent and child could compromise but rather an undefined, global conflict over the kind of person Mica would become, between the identity his parents wanted for him and the identity that he was shaping for himself. Hence it had the potential to create chronic friction within the family and erode the caring, supportive environment that everybody wanted.

The intensity of conflict in these families demanded some strategizing. The communalist approach was to seek out emotional support at synagogue, a strategy I describe in the next section. But although it had the potential to be very satisfying, it was a risky, labor-intensive, and belief-intensive strategy. For some families, it was easier to alternate between the individualist approach, in which each family member pursued separate interests, and the familist approach, in which members of the nuclear family spent time together but not together with anyone else.

Religious Community and the Broadening of Family Territory

The parents I spoke with often believed that synagogue could to some extent reproduce the atmosphere of Jewish neighborhoods, now displaced by suburbanization, where many of them had lived when they were growing up. Synagogues could envelop the family in a world that “felt” Jewish. They provided familiar landmarks, shared public space, and festive events; they created an island of safety within the anonymity and danger of modern life. Secondly, the friendships that formed among active members sometimes became the functional equivalent of the extended family networks that like Jewish neighborhoods, had faded— a casualty of class and geographic mobility. Synagogue friends were people with whom to share holidays and celebrate

turning points; they would protect you, keep you company, and offer a hand and a sympathetic ear if you were having troubles.

The Wexlers, the Rodmans, the Englanders, Ellen Klein and her sons, Lena Schmidt and David Bruder—all used synagogues for several intertwined purposes. As they did volunteer work and participated in religious rituals, they also stayed in touch with their family members and reaffirmed their fictive kin networks. Like “community othermothers” (Collins 1990), the mothers in these families were activists on behalf of their children. My evidence also suggests that the children, whom Collins does not discuss in great detail in her work, followed their parents’ example and became activists as well.

Citizenship often began at shul.¹⁵ The synagogues my respondents attended, like the ethnic neighborhoods of the 1950s (Gans 1966), were protected cultural spaces with room for members to engage in civic activities. The larger synagogues sponsored a wide range of Jewish-themed rituals, community events, and subgroups, from Purim carnivals and teen programs, to bar mitzvah support groups and *havurot* (friendship groups). This smorgasbord of activities provided both teenagers and parents with the opportunity to meet one another and participate in community life on a weekly or monthly basis. By spending time with peers at synagogue or developing relationships with other adults who worked, taught, or volunteered there, teenagers could develop some autonomy from their parents while sustaining an emotional connection to them.

Of my 34 respondents, 17 parents and 16 teenagers volunteered in synagogues, local public schools, and community agencies.¹⁶ Volunteering was meaningful because it created a sense of shared purpose for families; it allowed them to be engaged in productive, autonomous activity, not as individuals at work or school, but as family and community members serving one another and their neighbors. Linda Rodman, a homemaker, volunteered as president of the PTA, served on the board for her daughter’s Hebrew school, and was active on the synagogue’s building committee.

She described herself as a “privileged person” and was glad to have the “opportunity to make differences in the community.” Gwen Walker did volunteer catering for events at the family temple and always asked her kids to contribute labor. Her daughter, Chloe, explained that “catering is fun because you make all this food and people really enjoy it and you feel good about it.” And the Wexlers, in addition to observing Shabbat every week, all volunteered in some capacity at their synagogue. Don was a lay cantor for religious services at their temple. Claudia had served on the board of trustees. Ruth had started a community service program during her senior year at the temple religious school; she and her classmates volunteered at a shelter for homeless families. And at the time I interviewed her, 15-year old Holly was teaching younger children in Hebrew school classes – as Ruth had done at her age.

Volunteering was not limited to the synagogue setting. Rich Greenberg was a former corporate lawyer who had left the field because he disliked the work hours and the competitive pressure. Now he had his own legal practice and rarely worked later than 6:00 P.M. He coached his two sons’ soccer teams because he enjoyed the sport and the contact with children. And with institutional backing from their synagogue, whose bar mitzvah process included a public service requirement, they encouraged Mica to take on volunteer projects as well. He asked friends and relatives to sponsor him on bike rides and donated their contributions to charity.¹⁷ His Hebrew school classmate, David Bruder, fulfilled the requirement by tutoring poor elementary school students at a church-based nonprofit organization in Oakland and liked it so much that he was continuing with it almost two years later. Mica and David both used volunteering as an arena to display their competence and independence. Yet their parents knew what they were doing after school and could take pride in how they were “turning out”: good boys with a sense of social justice.

In addition to volunteering, the Wexlers also held semipublic celebrations at their home for a number of Jewish holidays, which almost always involved festive meals – Passover seders, Chanukah parties, dinners on Rosh Hashanah [the Jewish new year], and meals to break the fast of Yom Kippur [the Day of Atonement]. And they made a point of showing up for every wedding, funeral, and bar and bat Mitzvah they were invited or expected to attend.

Through volunteerism and the personalization of religious ritual, the observant teenagers in my study affirmed their individuality in a communal context. The Wexler girls invited their girlfriends over for Shabbat, dinner, they taught at the synagogue where their parents volunteered, and they were present, with their friends, at all their parents' parties. Their parents' friends' children were also their friends. Holly, in particular, delighted in her family's religiosity and their association with the synagogue. She described the synagogue as an extension of her home:

Everybody knows me [there]: I've been there since preschool. I know all the rabbis, I have good relationships, I know a lot of the teachers, and I guess that makes me feel really good. And I feel...special, and...really safe in that kind of environment, and ... so it's like a sacred place, you know...Religion [makes] my life interesting.

The Rodman girls, Ruth and Lena, had also developed an autonomous interest in Judaism. Ruth, 16, prayed every night "to thank God for everything I have" and went on "very spiritual" weekend retreats with other Jewish teenagers. She had just returned from an exhilarating summer trip to Israel where "you're discovering your roots... and you're with all of these great people from all over the country." Ruth's 13-year-old sister Lena had just begun Midrasha, an East Bay program for Jewish teens. Like Holly, she was surrounded there by people she had grown up with, and she had a similar enthusiasm for the experience:

Lena: I just do it because I want to do it! it's really fun...We have, like, 15-minute passing periods [between classes]. Fifteen minutes to just like, stand, and talk, and eat bagels.

Christopher: That sounds like fun.

Lena: It is!!

If synagogue-based events and rituals helped counteract the physical and cultural isolation of mobile suburban living, the emotional support available to my respondents from synagogue-based social networks was a counterweight to suburbia's emotional isolation (Wuthnow 1991; Wuthnow 1994; Wuthnow 1998). Temple was the nerve center for the friendship networks of a number of my respondents, both adult and teenager, who would meet in youth groups, havurahs, temple functions, or committees. Moreover, my respondents' accounts suggested that synagogue-based friendships had an emotional depth, an ineffable quality of "familiness," that could not be found elsewhere.

For the Wexlers, friendships made through synagogue became, in effect, a fictive kin network and took the place both of biological kin that both Don and Claudia had grown up with on the East Coast, and of the more specialized ties they had before the births of their daughters pulled them into community life. Don Wexler explained:

When the kids came [were born], we got this whole group of people we met through the kids, and that's our close friends now. And they've become our extended family. These people are pseudo-aunts and uncles to our kids. And these kids have become pseudo-cousins.

Simone Friedman became close with other women while serving on the education committee for her synagogue, and she took care to distinguish between the emotional depth of those connections from the more pragmatic, specialized ties she had with other parents at her children's extracurricular activities:

[With my acquaintances outside temple] ... you have a relationship... defined by, "Oh, we're crew parents together," [her older daughter rowed crew at her school] or "Oh, we're choir parents together" [both of her daughters sang in a children's choir]...At temple, it's more like... you get to know each other more as whole people...We connect ... on a more core level than just taking care of the minutiae that need to get done, more core than "We'll drive together for this, or we'll carpool for this" [laughs].

Like their parents, the teenagers often identified fellow temple members as their closest friends. Zak Englander had familylike relationships with other teenagers at Steven Wise Temple, one of whom—Marjorie—had been part of his parents' Havurah. And Marjorie, who was a student in the religious school class I was teaching, said: "My mother is really strict. She won't let me near boys at all. But Zak and I were in baby pictures together. As far as she's concerned, he can sleep over at my house any time he wants."

Synagogue was also a place to turn for emotional support during crises. David Diamond, 16, had been attending his temple since the third grade. In the last two years, his parents, both scientists, had divorced and were both on disability. His father was slowly dying from a chronic form of cancer; his mother was clinically depressed. He volunteered at Sunday school because:

It gives me something to do on Sundays... so I'm not just wasting my time wandering around the house...I see people I know here, like, once or twice a week, talk to them. For some—you get support from them, like if you've had a bad week or something. Somebody you can talk to.

David Diamond went to synagogue to seek out the care that his parents were unable to provide him because of their own tremendous life crises. When he was at synagogue, he taught, worked in the education office, attended services, saw friends, and talked to as many people as he could about his own bad days.

Ruth and Holly Wexler's grandfather had died two months before our interview. During the ten days after his death, fellow congregants came to their home to sit shiva—keep their father company while he was in mourning. The living room mantelpiece was covered with condolence cards. When the Rodmans' house burned down in the 1991 Oakland fire, fellow synagogue members threw a shower for them and for another family and brought gifts; almost ten years later, Linda Rodman remembered that the rabbi had come by with two Shabbat candles.

The Pull of Work, School and Market: Limits of Containment

At this point, I must temper my optimism: synagogues did not always deliver on their communalist promise. Why not? First, they were somewhat fragile neighborhoods because of intermarriage in Jewish families, varying levels of religious belief, and the small Jewish population of some Bay Area towns. Second, they did not always succeed as fictive kin networks because neither staff nor members could always meet the high expectations placed upon them by families seeking support. Third, the communalism of synagogues was fragile because of the gendered nature of religious commitment.

The Fragility of Synagogue as Neighborhood. Despite families' best efforts, the synagogue did not always succeed as a neighborhood because it did not have the resources to provide a wide enough array of activities or contacts. Tamar Walker was 14, about Holly Wexler's age, and had, like Holly and like Lena Rodman, gone to Hebrew school and had a bat mitzvah. She and Holly also both described themselves as religious Jews. Like Lena, Tamar attended public school. And while they were growing up, Tamar, Lena, and Holly all had mothers who had been housewives or worked part-time, although Tamar's mother had returned to work about 2 years before the time of the interview. Yet Tamar lived in a very different Jewish world than the other two girls. Whereas the Wexlers belonged to a big city temple in San Francisco with nearly 2000 members and a wide variety of programs, and the Rodmans lived in Berkeley, which had a large Jewish community and four synagogues, the Walkers were members of a small suburban temple, with perhaps 150 families, in a

town with a very small Jewish population. Their social network was smaller and more spread around the bay than was the case with the Wexlers, whose friends were almost all from San Francisco, or the Rodmans, who had lived in Berkeley for 30 years. Unlike the Wexlers or the Rodmans, whose fathers were a dentist and a psychiatrist, respectively, they had never been able to afford to send their daughters to elite private schools because Adam was a government official. Moreover, Don and Claudia Wexler, and Mark and Linda Rodman, had all been raised Jewish, but Adam Walker had converted and did not circulate as comfortably among Jews. Because of where they lived and the (comparatively) limited resources at their disposal, the Walkers did not have the means to create as protected, as Jewish, as *homogeneous* an environment as did the Wexlers. Tamar, like Holly, explained that her religion helped her feel more centered in her identity. But she did not talk about the joy of religious worship or about feeling comfortable at synagogue because everyone knew her. Rather, her faith and her knowledge of Jewish liturgy helped her resist the temptations of public school:

Tamar: [I know] what the Torah [the first five books of the Bible] says about, like, you know, dishonoring people.

Christopher: And do you relate to that..?

Tamar: Yeah...Once I got to high school I saw a lot more people doing drugs and stuff, and then you can think back to, like, stuff you learned [so you don't do what they're doing].

In a separate interview, Gwen (Tamar's mother) explained that Tamar had been out one evening with friends from school who had shoplifted. Although Tamar had not participated, Gwen's account of the event was high-pitched, emphatic, laced with anxiety. She believed that her daughters "had a strong home life" and "a good sense of morals." Yet she was also painfully aware that Tamar moved out of her reach when with her friends, and feared that the girl might fall in with the wrong crowd.

Well the other thing is that if you didn't have a strong home life, if you didn't know who you were, then it's easy to fall into a trap for somebody else's beliefs... The one thing [her friends] all told me was—she didn't do it... So I was "Well I really hope not. I'm really glad you're telling me about that, and I hope that's the truth." I don't know.

The information came to Gwen circuitously, by way of a printed copy of an e-mail conversation among Tamar and her peers. One girl had printed it out for her mother, and the mother had passed onto the other mothers.

James Coleman (1988) defines social closure as a situation in which the parents of two friends

know one another and can check in with each other about their children's whereabouts, their homework assignments, and so forth. His emphasis is on the potential it has to increase parental monitoring and productivity at school. The Walkers had social closure of a sort because Gwen was able to successfully monitor Tamar by contacting her friends' parents. But while the Wexlers experienced social closure through the synagogue as an end in itself because it created a nurturing, emotionally rich environment, for the Walkers, it was a matter of damage control rather than community building. Gwen was in touch with other mothers about this shoplifting incident, yet there was no evidence in the interview that the adults' relationships with one another went beyond emergency measures to keep their children under control. The girls did not live in a protected sphere of synagogue and Jewish community. Gwen, in fact, perceived the world of teenagers as dangerous and filled with temptations and had taught her children to rely on their own strength of character to guide them, rather than a support network of other families.

G ... They came through that little period, [and] ... they did tell me that Tamar didn't do it. And it's like, "Very reassuring, nice of you to tell me that, but you're all telling me that to reassure me. I don't know if that's true." I believe in my heart that Tamar didn't do it because she does have a good sense of morals. She does understand right and wrong, you know.

Tamar, like some other teenagers in my study, found her center of gravity in the arenas of school or extracurricular activities, and Gwen felt that she was outside the parental sphere of influence. Although Tamar did not shoplift, Gwen reasoned, she was friendly with teenagers who did. The family and the peer group were less intertwined with one another than they were for the Wexlers or the Rodmans, and Gwen felt more like an anguished observer of her daughter than a participant in her social network.

For the Miretsky family, who lived in a wealthy area and sent their sons to an elite private school, the dangers of the streets—real or imagined—were not as pressing a concern as for the Walkers. Nonetheless, when Scott, 16, dropped out of Midrasha, the Jewish after-school program for teens, in order to attend basketball practice, his mother Ellen was upset for the same reason as Gwen – she felt an increasing distance between herself and her son.¹⁸ She argued with him that he was sitting on the bench [he was not one of the top players] rather than “learning stuff” in his Midrasha classes, and she described his decision as “unfortunate.” Her argument sounded rational at first blush, yet the

vehemence with which she expressed her disappointment and the intensity of their conflict seemed out of joint with the actual content of what he was learning at Midrasha, a fairly easygoing educational program whose goal was primarily to help kids make Jewish friends. Given Ellen's passionate commitment to family solidarity, demonstrated in her efforts to have a family dinner together, and her determination to raise her sons Jewish even though her husband was Protestant, it seems plausible to argue that the troublesome issue for Ellen was Scott's lack of emotional allegiance to synagogue life. His close friends were at his private school. He felt out of place during the group singalongs on weekend retreats and did not want to take a group trip to Israel because it was "too Jewish."

Yet it was not surprising that Scott felt unattached to temple. He had begun attending Hebrew school in sixth grade, and it was a foreign culture to him. Moreover, the Miretskys had never developed ties at synagogue, as had the Rodmans and the Wexlers. Ellen and Frank wanted their kids' Jewish learning to serve as moral education, as insurance, in effect, against unacceptable behavior: "We're there to learn, and we're there to get some support...in raising the kids. We have somebody else saying, 'This is why we do what we do, and how to be a good person, and this is stuff you should know about.'" Ellen was perhaps regretful that she and Frank had not started earlier with Scott's Jewish education. But because her husband had been raised Protestant, he had never felt entirely comfortable at the synagogue. He did not know the prayers, and he was not used to the splashy bar mitzvah celebrations:

I think there's some stuff that he doesn't like about it. It's so *Jewish* sometimes, not just abstract, or just spiritual...I mean, this whole bar mitzvah routine—you have a lot of expectations, you know. It's not just, "Well, we're going to learn about spirituality here." No, we're going to learn about Jewish. And... it just turned out to be so much bigger than we expected.

As a result, the synagogue had never become a neighborhood, and it remained fairly peripheral to their lives. Ellen warned me before I came for the interview that they would not have much to say about temple life because they did not do much there. The strategies the family used to care for its members remained a hybrid between familism and individualism: holidays were celebrated at home, the family read stories to each other, and the father took his sons on camping trips.¹⁹

The limits of synagogue as extended family. Just as the synagogue was a fragile neighborhood, fellow congregants sometimes failed to come together as a fictive kin network. The Englanders had

belonged to a havurah which fell apart because of a failed joint business venture among the men; in the wake of failure, one havurah member failed to honor his debts to the others and none of the men trusted each other enough to remain friends. I learned about other instances of betrayal in my interviews. Some ten years before Gwen and I met, she had been brushed aside by the rabbi of the synagogue where she had grown up at a time when she had counted on his support. She had contracted a serious liver disease. Her husband, Adam, whom she described as “afraid of his feelings,” was not giving her the emotional support she needed. So she had asked the rabbi for help; what could she say to Adam that would make him understand? The rabbi’s response was a tremendous disappointment for her:

He was a complete jerk. There were some big *macher* [important man] members there that day, and he wanted them to make some big donations, so he didn’t pay any attention to me. He mumbled something off the top of his head that Adam should recite a couple of psalms and went back to talking with them.

Adam also expressed some bitterness about the temple where they were currently members. They had both served on the board and resigned because of conflicts with other volunteers. Although he did not want to divulge any details, his comments seemed to suggest that one source of conflict might be around member commitment. Despite an ideology of lifetime involvement with synagogue, in reality, many members would shepherd their children through the bar mitzvah ritual and then drop out of the community.

For Roslyn Shapiro, the great disappointment was the collapse of three havurahs at her family’s conservative synagogue in the East Bay suburbs. After growing up in a Jewish neighborhood in New York City, Roslyn had met her husband, Edward, while attending an Ivy League college, and they had married and moved to the Bay Area, far away from their families. Anxious to maintain her Jewish identity and instill it in her sons, she convinced her husband, an atheist, to join a synagogue. She was not working—she had quit her job as a corporate lawyer in order to concentrate on raising her sons—so Roslyn also made sure the family celebrated Shabbat. Her hope with synagogue was that they would form friendships there while giving their children a Jewish education. The second goal was realized, but never the first. The synagogue staff placed them in a havurah with families who had joined at the same time they did and with whom they had little else in common. All the families had children of different ages and lived in different areas of the East Bay. So the first havurah stopped meeting, and although they tried joining two others, neither of those got off the ground either. Moreover, two of her

three sons never made any friends at the synagogue:

So I said, you know—we're driving this far, so many times a week, where there's nobody to carpool with, there's nobody that the kids connect with. As much as we like the rabbi and the cantor and the services, there has to be more.

Mark Shapiro, whom I interviewed, had felt comfortable at that synagogue because he was a talented singer. He had been invited by the older men there to lead services when the cantor was absent. Although he did not have close friends at the temple, he relished the opportunities to perform and to feel special and needed. The rest of the family, however, felt no sense of connection there. After eight years, they gave up and moved to Steven Wise Temple, which was closer to their home and had more members from their town. By this time, however, Roslyn felt burned out because her earlier attempts at community building had failed.

Roslyn: I'm starting to wonder if it's us! ... I'm the person who's the sort of coordinator... but people just have not made it a priority. So we plan these events and nobody shows. So— it's not working out too well. This is not a good time to talk, because I'm really depressed, the Havurah's falling apart!...I know there are a lot of people here who are really nice. Part of it is I haven't put in that much time and energy at this temple. I haven't joined committees, I haven't tried to get really involved because I'm getting—it's becoming less of a priority to me.

Christopher: How come?

Roslyn: Because I'm burned out of trying.

The Gender Politics of Community. The third factor undermining the communalist potential of synagogues was men's reluctance to participate in community building. Rosalyn's feelings of "burnout" also seem related to the attitude of her husband Edward, who had no interest in being active in a Jewish community.²⁰ Although unlike Saul Bruder, he did not actively oppose his children's religious education, his indifference toward religion was in direct conflict with his wife's efforts to create a religious environment for their children.²¹ And his attitude was not unique. A number of fathers had been bored or humiliated during their own compulsory Hebrew school training as children, which led them to reject Jewish education and community life as adults. Fathers were willing to speak with me in only 7 of the families I interviewed.²²

The girls in my sample emulated their mothers and happily attached themselves to synagogue if they did. But boys tended to look to father first, and mother second, for guidance in building

their identities, so they faced a dilemma that the girls did not. Faced with dad's skepticism and detachment from synagogue, they had two choices. They could either detach themselves from synagogue, as did Scott Miretsky, or they could take it on as a private, individualist project. In such cases, the synagogue did not function as a neighborhood or a fictive kin network. The boys could improve their skills there and become friendly with peers. Jewish identity might even have a deep emotional resonance for them. Yet, they did not appear to form the kinlike friendships that Zak (the boy with the AIDS bracelet) had formed at Steven Wise Temple, which was intertwined with his family history.

David Bruder, whose father, Saul, was Jewish but refused to participate in organized religion, had begun taking an active interest in Judaism when he was seven years old, after he and his parents attended a big reunion of his father's family and he discovered many cousins who were active in Jewish life. But religion seemed to remain an intellectual interest for him; none of his close friends was from synagogue.

Mark Shapiro, too, had inherited a strong Jewish identity from his childhood, when Shabbat was celebrated at home. And he liked belonging to a temple because "it feels sometimes like the entire religion is kind of a club or something." But his desire to participate in the community seemed limited to his work in the Hebrew school classroom, helping teachers and working with younger children. Attendance at teen school was required in order to volunteer as a teaching assistant, yet he thought his peers at the teen school were "just assholes," or they were nice alone but "whacked out when they are with their friends." He did not attend any weekend retreats for Jewish teenagers because the touchy-feely component – group singalongs, trust-building games, handholding and so forth—made him uncomfortable. And unlike his classmate Zak he never attended sleepovers with other teens from temple, or temple events such as the Purim party. Synagogue membership was useful to Mark, and his experience at the previous temple had been exciting because he had a lot of responsibility and visibility, but it did not seem to be a place he turned to for emotional sustenance. Roslyn's experience with synagogue life had disappointed her, and she had lost much of her interest in developing communalist ties, and Mark had probably picked up on her disappointment.

Conclusion

The Jewish families in this study are for the most part upper middle-class. No one is very hungry or sick or denied job opportunities, and every child has his or her own room. By conventional standards for the quality of life, they have nothing to complain about. Yet complain they did, parents and teenagers both, because they were hungry for the emotional support, the company, the sociability that work-family researchers (Hochschild 1997, Lareau 1999, Philipson 2000) and social theorists (Bellah et al 1985, Putnam 1995, 1995a; Wuthnow 1991, 1994, 1998) have argued are missing or declining in upper-middle-class suburban neighborhoods. My respondents needed to be cared for, and some synagogues were well suited to providing care.

The religious parents often had peculiar life histories that made them receptive to the idea of synagogue as neighborhood and extended family. The Rodmans (both parents), the Wexlers, Gwen Walker and the Englanders had grown up immersed in Judaism, and the religious environment of their own childhoods had been a source of security and emotional connection that they wanted to pass on to their children. Some parents had felt socially isolated growing up and found, for the first time, a sense of belonging when they joined the Jewish community. This was the case with Lena Schmidt and perhaps with Adam Walker. Adam had converted, Lena had not, but she was still involved with other community members at the synagogue where her son had been bar mitzvahed. And finally, a number of parents had been raised in heavily Jewish neighborhoods, often in cities with a larger Jewish population than the Bay Area, and wanted to preserve their emotional connection with the culture of their own parents and of the communities they had grown up in. Although the religious Judaism of their childhood often seemed meaningless or emotionally empty, the easiest place to maintain their Jewish identity in the Bay Area, which does not have Jewish neighborhoods, was at synagogue. Moreover, the adults I interviewed seemed to concur that Jewish education had itself become much more inviting since their own childhoods.²³

But within these families, there is no easy coexistence between work-centered identity and an identity based in the Jewish community. All of my religious respondents seemed to have made a conscious commitment to put their eggs in the community rather than the work basket. The fathers I interviewed—generally the Jewishly committed ones—had jobs where they set their own hours, or they left promptly at five. The fathers who turned down interviews were immersed in their jobs. The women I talked to often worked outside the home part-time or not at all. Lena

Schmidt, although she worked long hours, had found her friends in her neighborhood and at synagogue and hardly mentioned her job in our interview.²⁴

Moreover, it was difficult for synagogues to provide the kind of community that the more communalist families were looking for. Unlike the workplace, whose official institutional goal was to generate profits for shareholders, or the public school, whose staff was evaluated on the basis of their success in preparing youth for college and workplace, the ideology of the synagogue was usually to preserve and strengthen Jewish families. Activities “for the family” were officially encouraged, and synagogue staff believed their mission was to facilitate intimacy and friendship among, and within, Jewish families. Yet the reality of community life was more complex. Like extended families, synagogues were often the theater for feuds and rivalries. When they expected loyalty or unconditional emotional support from other community members, family members were often let down. Promises were broken and feelings were hurt. Moreover, synagogue staff—as for example, in the case of the Walkers’ old temple—did not always plan events or provide services based on the desires of their congregants; organizational priorities often took precedence over the priorities of families because the synagogues needed a steady stream of funds to stay alive.

Synagogues and their members are fighting the hegemonic worldview in the United States that a meaningful life is to be found through work, first, and family, second, but not in civic participation or in neighborhoods and extended kin networks. Among my respondents for whom the Jewish connection seemed more tenuous, the main sources of identity were indeed work (for the fathers), school (for the kids), and to a lesser extent, family for the mothers. Among the children, a passionate devotion to extracurricular activities seemed to presage an adult devotion to work. In the Miretsky family, for example, the boys seemed ready to relinquish their Judaism if more compelling sports-related activities came up.

Although Hochschild (1997) points out that life becomes inherently insecure when meaning is constructed at the workplace whose ultimate concern is profit, and not the protection of its employees, she also shows that the community many adults find at work, for all its limitations, does provide them with emotional support and companionship. And Lareau (1999), in a parallel finding, suggests that the children in her study enjoyed the constant rush of competition, were used to being in the spotlight, and formed friendships in their activities.

Arlie Hochschild called for a time movement; I would like to sound the clarion call for community building. We need to construct sources of meaning in our lives that are viable alternatives to the workplace, that take the needs of children and families into account, and whose attractiveness is great enough to create an incentive for people to work less hard. But the contradictory needs that communities must fulfill – for emotional security and care on the one hand, for autonomy and the expression of individuality on the other – make the project extremely difficult. One way to begin would be to do some systematic research into the wide variety of communities where such work is going on, from synagogues and churches to charter schools and community organizations.

Notes

- ^{1.} All names have been changed to protect the identity of the subjects.
- ^{2.} Hochschild claims that there has been a decrease in the time working adults spend at home or with their families. As a result, the work of childrearing and maintaining a family has become Taylorized. . As work has become more “like home,” home has become more “like work.” Her arguments are partially supported in a May 1999 report by the Council of Economic Advisors, which claims that parents today have an average of 22 fewer hours a week available to spend with their children than did parents in 1969; almost all of this decrease can be attributed to mothers’ increased hours in the workplace.
- ^{3.} Because work and other obligations—eating, sleeping, taking care of household business—consume most of the day and leave little time for spontaneity, the primary victims of the time bind, according to Hochschild, have been the young children who are deprived of relaxed time with their parents. (Hochschild 1997: 218-25) But her interviews were with the parents, so her focus was mostly on the guilt they felt about the time they did not spend with their kids. She did not present much data from the perspective of the children themselves.
- ^{4.} Middle-class families in Lareau’s study did have family time, but most of it was spent at kids’ athletic and artistic performances, in the car driving from soccer games to piano lessons to karate classes, or standing around large wall calendars in kitchens, planning and organizing the logistics of the children’s activities. Unlike the working-class and poor families that Lareau observed, middle-class children did not spend a great deal of time with relatives, who often lived far away. Even when relatives were close by, children were encouraged to give higher priority to their organized activities than to time with their families. When they were at home, family members didn’t spend a lot of time together, but often were in their separate rooms.
- ^{5.} A recent ethnography (Davidman 1991) has shown how Jewish women at two New York synagogues returned to Orthodoxy hoping to meet good men and start close families, and were sometimes bitterly disappointed by the sexism and petty power struggles they found in their new communities. The anger expressed by some of my respondents seemed similar to this; in both cases, it stemmed from a frustrated yearning for connection, support, and recognition (Benjamin 1988; Benjamin 1995)
- ^{6.} Although the ups and downs of conjugal relations are not the focus of this paper, conflicts between parents often revolved around issues similar to those faced by parents and teenagers. When and how much should the family come together and show solidarity? What was the appropriate level of individuation – how much energy should spouses invest in work or in friendships outside the home?
- ^{7.} All the mothers were protective of their husbands, but a number were openly unhappy with the men’s work schedules and wanted them to spend more time with the family or in the community. One father

complained that his wife wanted him to make more money because she'd been raised in an upper-middle-class environment, even though he had chosen to limit his work hours so that he could spend more time with the family. He had given up a job at a high-powered corporate law firm to open his own small practice. And there were all sorts of conflicts between parents and children. Several parents were worried that their children were too self-involved or had too great a sense of entitlement. One son complained that his parents were putting so much pressure on him to be a high achiever that they were taking the fun out of all his activities. One mother was upset that her daughter was in love with a non-Jew and might distance herself from the family. One father had the opposite concern; he wanted his 21-year old son to move out of the house and become more independent.

⁸ “Community” is an overused word, constantly bandied about in conversation and the mass media. Nobody can agree on what it means or on when it exists. For these reasons, like “culture,” community is a term that sociologists shy away from. Yet its deep emotional connotations also make it extremely powerful. Community evokes a sense of being loved and cared for, safe and secure – precisely the feelings that we seek out in the family. My respondents often said that they wanted to find a “sense of community” at synagogue. Thus, for all its vagueness, the word is still useful when discussing the emotionally deep ties that tend to develop within a religious setting.

⁹ One mother explained “The kids today have it really tough – the only people they can ever talk to is their parents, and who wants that? I always could complain about Dad and Mom to my aunt or my cousins or something because they came over every Sunday!”

¹⁰ There are both advantages and disadvantages to this in-depth interviewing. On the one hand, the quest for a deep understanding can push the researcher and the respondent toward a greater intimacy than do more cursory forms of qualitative research. This growing intimacy may enable the researcher to see the world, for a while, from the perspective of the respondent. Yet, although the researcher's emotions during the encounter can be an essential tool for understanding, there is also a risk that they will become overwhelming. The distortions of transference may weaken the emotional connection between researcher and respondent, and the respondent will share less information as a result. In order to get the most reliable information possible from psychoanalytic interviewing, I tried to manage my emotions in the interview process —neither ignoring them nor swimming in them, but using them as tools for information gathering.

¹¹ One mother was a doctor. She worked longer hours than her husband and was not even Jewish, yet it was she, not her husband, who systematically went about cultivating good relations with neighbors, with the parents of her son's classmates, and with members of the synagogue where he was bar-mitzvahed.

¹² The Rodmans spent every summer at Linda's family's home on Cape Cod, in Massachusetts, which they shared with Linda's brothers and sisters. Lucy and Rich Greenberg, who had met when they were both working in the New York theater world, were amateur actors and musicians; so they brought

their sons to jazz clubs and Broadway musicals in San Francisco. The McCormicks, who were among the wealthier families in my sample, took vacations during the children's spring break, most recently to Europe and Hawaii. Finally, because the Friedman girls both sang in a local children's choir that was going on tour to Eastern Europe, their parents were planning to meet them over the summer in Prague, hear them perform, and take a trip together at the end of the tour.

^{13.} In families with a predominance of males, father and sons often shared an interest in sports. Rich Greenberg volunteered as a soccer coach for both of his sons' teams. Frank Miretsky took cycling and hiking trips with his sons. Oscar and Zak Englander loved to talk about baseball, and Oscar occasionally took Zak sailing. Mothers and daughters also had bonding strategies. Gwen Walker went every year to a local Renaissance Fair with her two daughters, who were both interested in theater, and they always dressed in full Elizabethan costume.

^{14.} After the interview, when he drove me to the BART station, Aaron Walker (the 21-year-old son) told me of his plans to open a high-class strip club. I do not know if he was joking and wanted to shock me or if he really viewed that as a possible career. He was taking business classes at the local community college when we did our interview.

^{15.} "Shul" the Yiddish word for synagogue, is often used by observant American Jews.

^{16.} Yet the attractiveness of the public sphere as a place to spend time was also due in part to the liveliness of the communities to which my respondents belonged. Respondents from Berkeley, Oakland, Piedmont, and Alameda, all suburbs built before World War II, lived within waving or strolling distance of their neighbors. The synagogues they belonged to also had a critical mass of members, which made it interesting to serve on committees or attend events and possible to find friends with whom they felt compatible.

^{17.} As part of his bar mitzvah preparation, Mica asked family friends and relatives to sponsor him, at the rate of 25c a mile, on a mini bikeathon to raise money for an East Bay charity, raising more than \$500. He also started a correspondence with an Ethiopian child who was emigrating to Israel and agreed to a ten-year commitment during which he would write the boy letters, make donations for his education, exchange pictures, and so forth.

^{18.} Had we not specified that the interviews were one-on-one, for example, she would have wanted to hear what her sons and her husband would say during their interviews.

^{19.} Ellen went to temple occasionally to take classes and volunteer, and was on good terms with the rabbi. Her younger son continued to attend Midrasha once a week and to teach younger children at Hebrew school on the weekends. Frank and Scott were not involved, however; they bonded with each other and with Bobby through sports instead.

²⁰ Roslyn discouraged me from attempting to interview Edward because “he would never do something like this.”

²¹ Roslyn said: “I wouldn't let my husband talk to them about the fact that he doesn't believe in God when they were growing up...If Daddy says there's no God, why should we care, why should we believe [nervous laughter]?”

²² Although fathers disliked synagogue life, they did have close relationships with their sons. Saul Bruder was actively opposed to practicing Judaism in the house. According to Lena, his Orthodox mother had abused him, and he refused to have any contact with her; she came to visit only once, and only because Lena invited her. If they had Passover services at home, Saul got up from the table and walked away. Although he had finally consented to drive David to Hebrew school occasionally, he had refused for six years. When he walked in one night and saw me at their kitchen table talking to Lena, he nodded and smiled and ran quickly up to his room. Yet because he ran his own book dealing business from home, Saul spent a lot of time with David. He drove him to school, cooked dinner for him when Lena was at work late, and was around the house on weekday afternoons.

²³ In the 1950s and 1960s, Jewish learning was taught by European refugees who emphasized rote memorization and repetition. Since then, according to Jewish educator Debbie Enelow, Jewish education – particularly at larger and wealthy synagogues —has incorporated experiential learning and student participation.

²⁴ It is possible that many of her most emotionally resonant experiences were at work and she simply thought that work was not a topic of the interview, but I have found that the most important emotional ties in people's lives will usually come up in interviews.

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