

DIMENSIONS OF YOUTH IDENTITY FORMATION AT A REFORM JEWISH
SUMMER CAMP IN CENTRAL TEXAS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

For young Jews in North America, the discovery of Jewish identity—sometimes colloquially referred to as “Jewishness”—can often be confusing, exhausting, and even surprising. Many Jewish youth in America first become consciously aware of their Jewish identity formation in conjunction with the practice of their faith and with major Jewish life events (i.e., becoming a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, attending a Jewish day school or Jewish summer camp, or a trip to the State of Israel).

This study focuses on URJ Greene Family Camp (GFC), a residential Jewish summer camp in central Texas, primarily investigating dimensions of Jewish youth identity formation through an interdisciplinary theoretical framework in anthropology, organizational communication, and recreation and heritage studies. The dataset consists of nine (9) semi-structured interviews with current 12th graders who recently completed the counselor-in-training program in the 2013 summer season. These conversations reveal struggles with negotiating multiple identities as a result of summer experiences at GFC. In addition to analyzing common themes in the data, the researcher also leans on an atypical form of data analysis called poetic transcription to engage with the data creatively. Through auto-ethnography, this project allows the researcher to struggle with finding the balance between being an insider and an outsider in relation to Greene Family Camp and this thesis. This project revealed that each summer is a new phase of liminal experiences that contribute to campers’ ever-changing identities explored at camp and those expressed elsewhere because of camp experiences.

DEDICATION

To the two people who made possible my first summer at Greene Family Camp.

Nana, you may not be able to remember how much I love you and look up to you,
but I do with every beat of my heart.
Sundays are my favorite day of the week.

To the memory of my Pop, Saul Dangott z”l,
this thesis is also respectfully and lovingly dedicated.
I will always remember the scent of your aftershave,
the surprise of your sneezes,
the sound of your voice during story time.
June is never the same, but it is increasingly more special year after year.

Thank you for the gift of a lifetime, my home away from home.

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In addition to my committee members, there are several other groups of people that have helped me along the way, whether they know it or not. To Ann, you were

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GFC might be my home away from home, your house has always been my second home *at home*. Saying, “Thank you,” does not even suffice for how grateful I am for all of your hospitality and love over the years. To my family—Mom, Dad, and Josh—you know me better than anyone else. You have given me nothing but unconditional love and support throughout my entire life. I am grateful that ours is a family that can confide in each other, joke with each other, and encourage each other to have aspirations and to reach goals. I would change nothing, absolutely nothing.

NOMENCLATURE

ACA	American Camp Association
BBYO	B'nai Brith Youth Organization
CSI	Customer Satisfaction Index/Camper Satisfaction Insights
FJC	Foundation for Jewish Camp
GFC	URJ Greene Family Camp
NFTY	North American Federation of Temple Youth
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
URJ	Union for Reform Judaism

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A home away from home manifests differently from one individual to the next. For serial adventurers, a natural landscape away from other human contact serves as their other home. For professional musicians between performances, perhaps their home away from home is the road. Even for those who have not given label to this locale—the place, or space, that provides them with that sense of belonging and comfort of home—it is likely that such a setting exists for them as well.

There is an unusual atmosphere present at residential faith-based summer camps that is perhaps unparalleled by any other home away from home. This environment creates a temporary community for its short-term residents, always bursting with opportunities for a variety of experiences, interactions, relationships, and memories that are bound to last a lifetime, and undoubtedly aid in the growth of the individual and the collective. On the surface, this description may not do justice to the atmosphere found at residential faith-based summer camps, especially a Reform Jewish summer camp like Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) Greene Family Camp. Out of fifteen URJ camps in North America, Greene Family Camp is the only URJ camp in Texas¹. This project addresses the sense of belonging and safety that many campers claim to experience during their summer at Greene Family Camp, something that is not mirrored in their

¹ The Union for Reform Judaism's main website, www.urjcamps.org/camps/, lists fifteen camps in North America.

home environments where they are seldom part of the majority population. As such, a primary goal of this study is to bring this particular summer camp to center stage, specifically investigating how this camp creates an atmosphere where its campers feel a heightened level of comfort and security in discovering, developing, and expressing their Jewish identity. URJ Greene Family Camp (GFC) serves its campers, camper families, staff members, and contributing synagogues and donors in a manner that these stakeholders describe as magical. Though there is no magic at play, other phenomena—examined by several academic disciplines—often contribute to such a description.

In part, this summer camp is credited with various pivotal moments in the lives of hundreds of Jewish youth, which to them is something indescribable—something magical. Unlike other regions in the United States that are comprised of large Jewish populations (i.e., Northeast and West coast), many GFC campers do not live in a large Jewish community at home. Attending GFC provides them with this entirely Jewish surrounding that is otherwise not within their reach. Nestled in the hills at the end of Smith Lane in Bruceville-Eddy, central Texas is the 290-acre home of Greene Family Camp. Since 1976, streams of Jewish youth—primarily from Texas and Oklahoma—have found their home away from home at this particular summer camp. In fact, when it is time to return to their permanent homes, many “GFC-ers”² tend to reverse the identification of which home is which—their permanent home (away from camp) becomes temporary for 10-11 months, and their temporary home (at camp) becomes

² This term refers to people who have willingly devoted much of their time over a stretch of years to URJ Greene Family Camp. It is a colloquial term used at GFC.

permanent for 1-2 months³. Though potentially unusual to outsiders of GFC, it is all but unusual to devoted GFC-ers. Greene Family Camp provides a sense of belonging to most of its campers and staff members who spend assorted lengths of summer time within its gates⁴.

Tour of Camp

Upon arrival on Opening Day, the camp gates symbolize more than simply a path of entry into Greene Family Camp. These gates, shown in Figure 1, specifically represent a sense of security, familiarity, possibility, and connection. Likewise, on Closing Day, when campers journey home, these gates represent closure to their overall summer experience. It is a symbolic—and literal—closing of that chapter of their lives.



Figure 1. Front Gates at GFC. Photo by Jessica Dangott.

³ This is a phenomenon that I experienced as a camper in 2001-2003, and I remember it being described to me in various organic conversations with current campers and staff members during my time as a staff member in 2006-2013.

⁴ This does not mean that campers and staff members at other residential faith-based summer camps, or secular day and overnight camps, do not also feel this way; many certainly do. However, to stay within the scope of this project, this is a cross-examination that will not take place in this thesis.

In fact, in this case, these gates serve as perhaps the most physical and tangible representation of liminality⁵, of crossing the line—the barrier—into an environment where new opportunities and experiences await. Many of these experiences take place individually, but there are others that occur as a community—bunk, unit, or all-camp. Various evening programs and informal Jewish educational programs occur throughout the daily schedule, and are accompanied by a variety of secular sports and arts activities. Such activities are often taught or led in a way that incorporates Jewish values and lessons. Likewise, Figures 2, 3, and 4 display only a sample of these activities, but all three are symbolic of liminal sites at Greene Family Camp.



Figure 2. Sand Volleyball. Photo by Jessica Dangott.

To campers, the sand volleyball court at Greene Family Camp is simply another playground, but indeed it is much more. When I look at this volleyball court, I see another physical area and camp activity that suggests a liminal site. I envision each

⁵ Couched in anthropology, and further discussed in Chapter II, this phenomenon most simply indicates a state of being betwixt and between.

bump and spike of the volleyball over the net to be symbolic of both the achievements and struggles that campers experience while at camp in the summer, both individually and as a group (or team).



Figure 3. Pool Area. Photo by Jessica Dangott.

The pool also signifies a physical space where campers can push their personal boundaries and strive to achieve their goals. Swimming is a skill that comes naturally to some, but not to others. For campers who are learning to swim while at camp, this task can be daunting and overwhelming, and may even seem impossible to accomplish. Nevertheless, when campers conquer even the smallest feat—whether in the pool or elsewhere—it is certainly an achievement to be rejoiced. Moreover, when individual goals are reached, it is perhaps even more rewarding when the community surrounding this individual shows support for his/her achievements.

Ensuring that campers learn how to work and play as a team is a major goal in organized summer camps. Teamwork serves as an opportunity to make new friendships and reach group goals. On the open field, shown in Figure 4, various team sports take place, constantly allowing for social interactions to materialize.



Figure 4. Field for Flag Football, Kickball, Frisbee, etc. Photo by Jessica Dangott.

Though the above activities—and others—engage groups of campers, the most prominent community-based activity present at Greene Family Camp is the challenge/ropes course. GFC has four separate areas on camp designated for both high and low ropes activities. Figure 5 shows one piece of the High Ropes Course near the front of camp. The activities and exercises that take place at this course as well as the other high and low ropes courses are devoted to community building. Through

struggling together toward one common goal or task, a group or bunk learns that teamwork and support for peers is a valuable lesson both in Judaism and in other aspects of life. These ropes courses indicate additional examples of liminal sites at GFC; sites that allow for campers to push boundaries and achieve goals—individually and collectively.



Figure 5. High Ropes Course. Photo by Jessica Dangott.

A phenomenon known as place attachment⁶ is significant when considering specific sites or symbols in the faith-based camp setting. Specifically at GFC, there are a number of Jewish spaces and sites on camp that contribute to understanding this phenomenon of place attachment and its significance in this study. The space of this particular residential Jewish summer camp undoubtedly lends itself to campers' exploration of their (Jewish) identity(ies) while residing there in the summer.

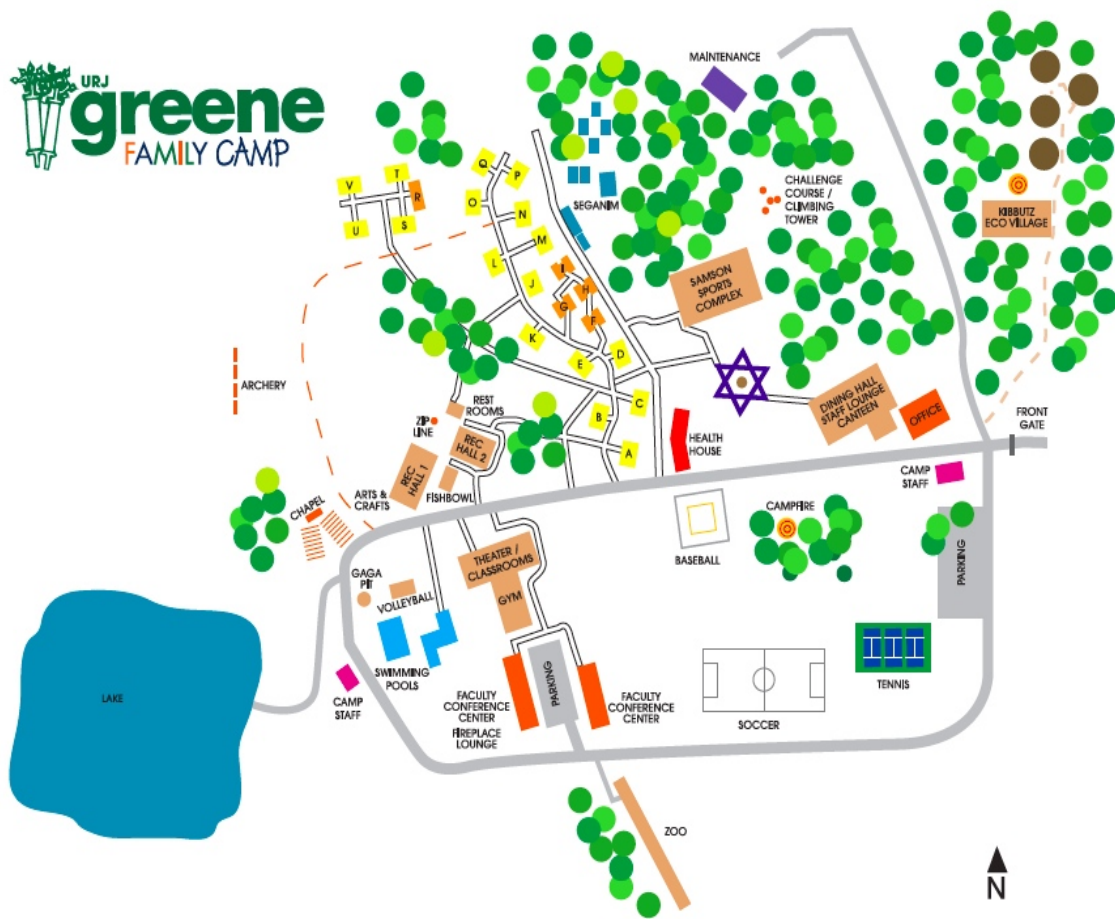


Figure 6. Map of URJ Greene Family Camp. Map courtesy of GFC.

⁶ This phenomenon is only introduced here, but will be discussed in Chapter II. Simply, place is central to identity exploration and other social processes that contribute to the transformation of a self.

Not only does the layout of the camp (Figure 6) suggest that it was designed with certain organizational intentionality, but also specific areas around camp suggest intentionality for such Jewish spaces and décor to be interpreted. Though the camp community itself may not recognize this camp and its organizational culture as a liminal space, it does not mean that it is not so.

Figure 7 shows a view of the dining hall at GFC, specifically showcasing the seven paintings above the kitchen doorways. These paintings are artistic representations of the seven days of creation, a story from the Hebrew Bible that is foundational in traditional Judaism—as well as other religions/belief systems. Likewise, these paintings are positioned in a central location on camp and positioned to be a focal point from many angles in the room.



Figure 7. Dining Hall. Seven days of creation paintings. Photo by Jessica Dangott.



Figure 8. Star of David Pathway. Photo by Jessica Dangott.

The pathway shown above in Figure 8 takes the shape of a Star of David. This sidewalk, seen more clearly in the camp map in Figure 6, was deliberately constructed as such so as to ensure that this symbol of Judaism, of the Jewish people, is always present. When campers choose one of the paths in this Star of David, en route to another destination on camp, I see this as symbolic of the different paths Jewish youth can take in life as well as in their journey of identity formation. Figure 9 shows the outdoor sanctuary, or house of prayer, at Greene Family Camp. This sanctuary is a Jewish site on camp that is only used for worship services during Shabbat night services every Friday. This space is specifically meant for Jewish practice of prayer, and as such, it serves as a sort of liminal site as well.



Figure 9. Outdoor Sanctuary. House of prayer. Photo by Jessica Dangott.

As a former camper of three years, and a summer staff member for eight years, I have spent a combined total of 25 months in temporary residence at Greene Family Camp. Looking back, only now am I able to view these Jewish spaces, symbols, and décor as liminal sites. The outdoor sanctuary, in particular, has held special meaning for me ever since my first summer at camp. For me, that space is a safe, sacred, and liminal space, and it only exists at Greene Family Camp. Over the summers, I have engaged in organic conversations with colleagues, supervisors, visitors, and even campers, during which I asked them to describe their overall experience of attending Greene Family Camp. When asked, many campers and staff members (most of whom are former campers) simply respond with versions of, “It’s just camp!” This response hardly requires explanation to a seasoned Jewish summer-camp-goer. It speaks volumes to

someone who attends, or has attended, a residential Jewish summer camp. However, to those who are unfamiliar with this environment, this short, obscure response says nothing. It is the deeper meanings and themes behind this simple and seemingly non-descriptive response that are explored in this study.

More specifically, my project focuses on understanding the phenomenon of residential Jewish summer camping as a whole, and investigates whether/how Greene Family Camp plays a role in the exploration and development of the (Jewish) identity(ies) of its young campers, who are undoubtedly a group of important stakeholders in this non-profit organization. In this thesis, I argue that the phenomenon of youth identity formation is a liminal process, a state of being betwixt and between. Additionally, I seek to investigate the following research questions in the context of URJ Greene Family Camp: (a) Why/how do residential faith-based summer camps stand apart from other summer camps in terms of its campers' experiences of identity formation? (b) Is this liminal process of youth identity formation in any way unique at a residential Jewish summer camp? (c) Why/how do GFC campers find it possible to explore their identity(ies) at this camp in the summer? Borrowing from theoretical perspectives and frameworks in anthropology, youth studies, organizational communication, and recreation and heritage studies, this study investigates why campers at URJ Greene Family Camp describe it as a safe environment to explore who they are becoming and to feel a sense of belonging.

Topic Background

A rich literature in the sphere of Jewish Studies has been growing steadily in volume and perspective for decades. From informal and formal Jewish education in various settings, to memories and experiences of ten-day heritage tours in Israel, to opposing views on whether Judaism has become “denominational-ized,” and to the discussion surrounding interfaith marriage, all have been considered. However, despite the breadth of subjects located under the umbrella of Jewish Studies, the topic of residential Jewish summer camping is merely alluded to within some of these other heavily examined and volatile texts.⁷ To date, only two articles based at URJ Greene Family Camp have been published in major scholarly journals; one focuses on informal Jewish education in a camp setting, and the other discusses opposed concepts of minority identity (Cohen and Bar-Shalom 2006; Cohen and Bar-Shalom 2010). Both articles focus on examining methods of informal Jewish education and expressions of religious and ethnic Jewish identity in this structured camp environment. Despite the contribution of these articles to this review, there still lacks a large amount of literature on this matter. Ultimately, such a void invites the opportunity for it to be filled with fresh perspective and new research, which is precisely one measure of significance defining this project. However, it is first important to engage in a brief look at the historical background of residential Jewish summer camping and how it is couched in the Reform movement in North America.

⁷ There are several reports and articles written specifically about Jewish summer camps that are part of Jewish non-profit organizations that are not the URJ. For the purposes of this study, though, these scholarly works will not be consulted or examined.

Reform Judaism in North America

Emerging in the 19th century, the movement for religious reform appeared after changes “had taken place in the external situation of the Jews and in their understanding of themselves” (Meyer 1995:10). This self-aware movement arose in an “effort to create new modes of religious thought and practice” (Meyer 1995:10). Both internal and external factors contributed to the foundation of the Reform movement, though changes gradually took effect in relation to various stages of acceptance and awareness of the developments that were unfolding.

In fact, scholars struggled to trace the chain of events leading up to the Reform movement back to the 17th century, a time period that Reformers believed to be the origins of the Jewish enlightenment and the Reform movement with its roots coming from Sabbatianism.⁸ However, more significant than the position that the Reform movement originated from Sabbatianism is “the gradual penetration of European cultural elements into certain strata of central and west European Jewry, a process made possible by expanded social contacts with non-Jews” (Meyer 1995:11). Such acculturation took a toll on European Jewry, forcing many to become beggars and vagrants with no consistent or reliable charitable support. Moreover, many European Jews experienced bouts of religious laxity in various forms across all levels of the economic spectrum—low, central, and high. According to Meyer (1995), interactions between Jews and non-Jews “outside of business hours was becoming ever more

⁸ Sabbatianism is a messianic movement that began with Shabbetai Zevi in the mid to late 17th century. Scholar of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem, was determined to show that the Reform movement and the Jewish enlightenment originated from Sabbatianism. This was a view that was not widely accepted.

common as was a more positive attitude toward the study of secular disciplines” (12). Though today these changes and lax in religious tradition would not seem so significant, in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, such shifts toward religious reform indicated disorientation and detachment within the Jewish community. Likewise, external factors like government policies reducing “the sphere of Jewish autonomy and the effectiveness of Jewish community control” further diminished the intensity of and desire to maintain Jewish life and tradition (Meyer 1995:13).

Time and again, government intervention in Jewish life and religious tradition in Europe created obstacles for the development of the Reform movement. In the United States, such obstacles did not occur as much⁹, and thus provided an environment where implementation of this Reform program would be most successful. This environment, though “not entirely free of prejudice,” was more hospitable than Europe (Meyer 1995:226). In North America, the rise of the Reform movement flourished as a result of being transplanted from Europe already fully developed. From approximately 5,000 Jewish immigrants in 1825 to about 250,000 fifty years later, the Jewish population in North America was swelling and mostly comprised of families from German-speaking lands (Meyer 1995:236). The majority of this early wave of Jewish immigrants was slightly educated and sought better economic status in America. Not until the 1840s and 1850s did a “significant number of relatively more educated and affluent Jews make their way to the United States” (Meyer 1995:236). Regardless of the variety of reasons for immigrating to this new land, it was quite noticeable to the European Jewish

⁹ These obstacles did not occur as much in the United States, but they did occur.

population that in North America it would be possible to achieve modifications in traditional Jewish religious affairs. As such, many Jews resorted “to reforms as a channel of religious Americanization,” which served as their intellectual foundation (Meyer 1995:236). However, despite the desire for developing Reform Judaism in North America, there was still a need for a leader, someone to provide direction and unification in this monumental endeavor.

Isaac Mayer Wise, a Jewish schoolmaster from Bohemia, assumed this role. Wise arrived to North America in July 1846, and was soon appointed as rabbi of Congregation Beth-El in Albany, New York, where he remained for four years (Meyer 1995:241). Wise was a man of many extraordinary talents and could express himself rather easily and effectively in the written and spoken word. Though he did not receive much formal education prior to immigrating to North America, Wise’s prodigious memory, ability to articulate his ideas, his enthusiasm for America, and possession of “a psyche that endowed him with boundless energy,” geared him with the tools necessary to be a national Jewish leader in American Reform (Meyer 1995:238-9). Even though Wise faced a number of challenges in his role, he always remained enthusiastic that the Reform movement in Judaism would succeed, and that within reach was a free, enlightened, progressive, and united American Judaism (Meyer 1995:244).

The time periods leading up to, in between, and immediately following the World Wars were, to say the least, not a good time for religion in North America. Reform Judaism, in particular, experienced “great difficulty fostering enthusiasm for its cause” (Meyer 1995:297). External factors—most notably the world wars—were an

unpleasant stimulation to the American Jewry and, as such, Jewish awareness of and commitment to maintain the Reform movement began to dwindle. As a result, the waves of immigration diminished sharply and ultimately totally halting in the 1920s. In the late 1920s and into the 1930s, Reform Judaism in North America “applied its prophetic ethics directly and radically to social issues” (Meyer 1995:309). American Jewry succeeded in obtaining public attention for the Reform rabbinate, thus earning them a position from which to represent all American Jewry in matters of social action and justice. In the late 1930s, domestic issues in North America were less focused on movements for reform and more on the Jewish conscience. However, in 1937, the Columbus Platform was adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), a comprehensive and “concise liberal interpretation of religious Judaism” (Meyer 1995:319). This new platform reflected the new commitments to the Reform movement in North America and the Jewish peoplehood.

Despite developments through new platforms and prayer books during the middle decades of the 20th century, Jews in North America were still grappling with their identity as individuals as well as in relation to other Jewish communities across the globe. Two productive movements for American Jews contributed to a gradual, but hopeful, turn toward understanding their identity, individually and collectively. First, American Jewish activists aided in the successful immigration of thousands upon thousands of Soviet Jews to North America and Israel. Second, American Jewish feminists advocated for gender equality and increased involvement for Jewish women in

all religious aspects, especially in the synagogue. Most notably, the year 1972 marked the first opportunities for Jewish women to become ordained rabbis.

Even with the increased involvement of Jewish women in the Reform movement through the end of the 20th century, a constant struggle remains for American Jewry—dwindling population. Since the turn of the 21st century, searching for ways to emphasize and encourage the importance of continuity of the Jewish peoplehood has become the primary goal of American Jewry. For instance, a most prominent journey in the transformation of Reform Judaism in North America and its aim to maintain its contribution to the worldwide Jewish population is its relationship to the creation and development of Jewish summer camps.

Jewish Summer Camping

Organized Camping Movement in North America

To understand the organized environment of a residential Jewish summer camp, it is first necessary to examine how the North American organized camping movement began. According to the American Camp Association (ACA) (1980), *organized camping* is a “sustained experience which provides a creative, recreational, and educational opportunity in group living...[utilizing] trained leadership and the resources of natural surroundings to contribute to each camper’s mental, physical, social, and spiritual growth” (8). Such environments are typically sponsored by groups, organizations, or agencies focused on serving youth such as private corporations, schools, religious groups, even individuals. Day camps, residential camps, and travel camps alike offer a

wide range of opportunities for their campers. Though the organized camping industry has changed considerably since its inception, the authenticity, honesty, and genuineness with which camps are organized and managed remains a top priority among camp leadership.

The organized camping movement in North America is a unique cultural phenomenon across the globe. Camping programs strive to create an environment that instills a sense of familiarity and belonging in its residents, a feature that is characteristic of contemporary American life. Furthermore, many camping programs also promote the transformational values of personal growth and learning by doing, ideals that were initially promoted by two influential pioneers in the organized camping movement in North America, Luther and Lottie Gulick. They fully believed and supported “the idea that the camping movement would improve the quality of American society” (Zola 2006:10). Luther Gulick further insisted that organized camping programs would prepare children for learning how to live in the world (Zola 2006:10). This claim continues to be reinforced today as seen through the commitment of contemporary camp owners and directors to the idea that spending time at an organized summer camp could transform a child’s life.

Organized Camping Movement and American Jewry

From its earliest days, the values and goals of the organized camping movement have appealed to the Jewish population living in North America. Similar to organized camping being a distinctly American phenomenon, “so too does American Jewish

camping embody a remarkable fusion of cultural phenomena” (Zola 2006:11). In fact, Camp Lehman (eventually renamed Camp Isabella Freedman), perhaps the first Jewish camp in North America, was established in 1893 as a result of social reform initiatives like “Fresh Air” and the Settlement¹⁰ that surface during the last decade of the 19th century. Established by the Jewish Working Girls’ Vacation Society of New York, this camp, in particular, is only one outgrowth of movements for social reform that were so prevalent in the United States at the time. As Rabbi Gary P. Zola (2006) explains, at the turn of the 20th century, “hundreds of thousands of East European Jewish immigrants had jammed into New York, Philadelphia, and other large urban centers along the eastern seaboard and in the Midwest” (12). The inadequate conditions in which Jewish families lived and endured illustrate the social problems associated with this mass migration and process toward urbanization. Like fellow American Progressives, such an insufficient environment motivated Jewish social reformers to establish settlement camps exclusively designed for children of Jewish immigrants (Zola 2006:12).

Many founders of these camps embraced and supported the outdoors movement just as many other Americans in this period. As such, they insisted that an organized camping experience set in the outdoors “would help children to become more self-sufficient, self-aware, and self-reliant” (Zola 2006:12). Furthermore, privately owned Jewish camps set a primary goal to transform the lives of their campers. For some of these early founders of privately owned Jewish camps, this meant engaging their

¹⁰ Both “Fresh Air” and Settlement movement camps were organized at the turn of the 1900s. These organized camping programs were devoted to creating an opportunity for underprivileged children to experience fresh air and good conditions for two weeks. As these camping programs developed, the camping experience was coupled with vocational and educational enrichment (Zola 2006:6).

enthusiasm for the outdoors and “ideals relating to the use of Native American culture in camp programs” (Zola 2006:13). It was their sincere belief that Jewish children in North America could learn from and adapt the important Native American values of nature, respect for ancestors, and search for joy in everyday life. Zola (2006) continues, “Just as the Native American motif could be used to give American children a healthy respect for a precious though unappreciated cultural legacy, so too could the use of Jewish historical and cultural themes at camp bring Jewish children a renewed respect for their unique heritage” (13). The desire and drive to impart a healthy respect for and understanding of these important values and cultural traditions in Jewish living contributed to the ideological development and transformation of the Jewish camping movement in North America.

In the early 1900s, Charles B. Eliot, then president of Harvard University, expressed sincere support for the monumental contributions of organized summer camps, in general, to the education of youth in North America (Gannes 1966:88). By this, Eliot is implying that summer camp programs provide numerous, and sometimes ongoing, opportunities that contribute “vitality and significantly to the total development of the child as a member of a group and ultimately as a member of society” (Gannes 1966:88). Within the short time that a summer camp is in session, it offers to its campers the chance to gain confidence in a multitude of arenas. Ultimately, to echo Abraham Gannes (1966), “*self-realization* is the goal” (89). Moreover, Gannes dissects what it is like to engage in the activity of self-realization and expression in an environment like a Jewish summer camp:

[In] the Jewish [summer] camp, the decorations, the names of buildings and living facilities, the names of the divisions [or age units], the murals, the Sabbath dress and ceremonies, the artistic display of pithy sayings from Jewish sources, the pictures of Jewish personalities, the art objects, the permanent exhibits, the library, and the very name of the camp make for the creation of a pleasant Jewish environment, pleasing to the eye and heart. What is more, the milieu becomes imperceptively part of the children's apperceptive mass and provides them with knowledge and feelings which are not found in books and which are hardly taught in the formal school setting. The emotional impact is overwhelming in many instances. [Gannes 1966:89]

Undoubtedly, the residential Jewish summer camp most certainly belongs to the campers. The camp is their community, created for them, and strengthened and nourished by them. In camp, campers feel a sense of belonging, meaning, and togetherness, all of which are heightened at a Jewish summer camp because of the fully Jewish surroundings in an educational, social, and cultural context.

By the mid-1940s, the Jewish camping movement had expanded tremendously, to the point that Jewish educational camps were a familiar and expected presence in American Jewish life. During this period, leaders of various religious movements in American Judaism "began to recognize how organized camping could augment Jewish learning, develop leadership skills, and concomitantly strengthen ideological ties to their respective religious movements" (Zola 2006:17-8). Jewish historian Jonathan D. Sarna refers to this as the crucial decade of Jewish camping. For instance, many influential and pioneer figures in the development of early Jewish educational camps were likewise instrumental in the continued establishments of Conservative and Reform movement camps in North America. Such expansion and adaptation of Jewish camping has continued well into the new millennium. Clearly, as Zola (2006) observes, the Jewish

camping movement has touched the lives of a significant number of individuals. Contemporary leaders in American Judaism believe wholeheartedly that Jewish camping experiences provide Jewish youth opportunities to learn about and be an active member of the wider Jewish community, and perhaps even continue to do so as they grow older.

The history of Jewish summer camping is undoubtedly rooted in the organized camping movement in North America. From its earliest practitioners to contemporary camp directors and owners, it is evident that Jewish leaders—and educators—recognize that organized camping programs are just the right kind of environment to promote Jewish learning, to appreciate and respect Jewish heritage, and to strengthen and encourage the bond of the Jewish people among its youngest members.

Synopsis of Chapters

This study consists of six chapters. The first chapter serves to introduce the reader to the history of the environment that lies at the heart of this study. The second chapter provides a theoretical framework borrowing from several academic disciplines—anthropology, youth development and identity formation, organizational communication, and recreation and heritage studies. The third chapter reveals the research methodology designed and implemented specifically for this study. It also acknowledges a most present struggle with reflexivity.

The fourth chapter examines recurrent and overlapping themes that were uncovered during data analysis. Much of this analysis reveals the participants' negotiation with individual and collective (Jewish) identities. The fifth chapter is

devoted to a different form of qualitative data analysis, growing more popular in social science disciplines, that contributes a creative dimension to the typical or expected qualitative research design in cultural anthropology. A main goal of this study is to (re)present the personal narratives shared with me by the participants, and to create a portrait of these participants to then introduce to the reader. As such, the fifth chapter presents these portraits and snippets of narratives in the form of poetic transcription, a way to share the voices of the participants in their own words.

In the form of a discussion and presentation of conclusions, the sixth chapter recaps findings and suggests future research directions. Together, these chapters present a description of this residential Jewish summer camp as an environment where Jewish youth explore and express their (Jewish) identity(ies).

CHAPTER II

INTERDISCIPLINARY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I present the following literature review as a collection of existing material that effectively sets the stage for the arena of the residential Jewish summer camp industry in North America, and the complexities surrounding the phenomenon of identity formation within it. Much of this review draws from anthropology and other disciplines within the social sciences. There are occasional but very necessary forays into history, developmental and social psychology, and recreation and heritage studies. These seemingly disparate fields are in fact interrelated in several facets, and integrate with the primarily anthropological theoretical framework in which this thesis is rooted.

Liminality and Communitas

An atmosphere like a residential Jewish summer camp falls within the loose definition of *communitas*, a phenomenon in anthropology that signifies a group's pleasure and joy in sharing common experiences together, often giving their individual lives more meaning (Turner 2012:2). Communitas often manifests unexpectedly, but this should not discount its active presence. Edith Turner (2012) thoroughly examines the intersection of humanism, communitas, and identity, explaining how moments of change and possibility often free the collective from "the structures of life":

It does not merge identities; the gifts of each and every person are alive to the fullest. It remains a spring of pure possibility, and it finds oneness, in surprise. That is, it has agency, and seems to be searching. It has something magical about it. There appear to be innumerable threads of

crisscrossing lines of meaning, *flows* of meaning, in my words on *communitas*. That is, its nature. It comes unexpectedly, like the wind, and it warms people toward their fellow human beings. It arises when people let go into negative capability, which itself is a condition of creativity, a readiness without preconceived ideas. [3, emphasis included]

Though *communitas* often appears unpredictably, it always occurs through and because of the readiness of a collective. In conjunction, such readiness indicates a loss of ego, a deliberate releasing of one's pride and a sincere acceptance of and desire for togetherness (Turner 2012:3). Though these selfless and joyous actions are for the most part intentional, *communitas* is practically inseparable from liminality, a phenomenon that is not so controllable or deliberate. In fact, Turner (2012) claims "communitas is... a gift from liminality, the state of being betwixt and between" (4). If one accepts Victor Turner's (1967) assertion that "the liminal group is a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions," then one must also accept that *communitas* and liminality often¹¹ occur hand-in-hand (100). Furthermore, the state of in-between-ness that defines liminality and is ever-present in *communitas* also contributes considerably to the process of identity formation in youth.

During the age at which Jewish youth are able to attend such residential Jewish summer camps, they are in a continuous state of exploring who they are becoming, and have the opportunity to do so in a Jewish-based setting. Additionally, the setting contributes to an establishment of *communitas*, an environment that makes it possible for Jewish summer campers to engage in the liminal process that is identity formation during each summer at camp. Though unpredictable, *communitas* is always present in

¹¹ Often, though not always.

this setting during the summer season. As such, this project seeks to examine how GFC campers experience these liminal moments from one summer to the next.

Nic Beech, a professor of management at the University of St. Andrews, brings focus to this process of change and exploration in his research on identity construction and the self in-between. Specifically, he examines social identity construction, which typically takes place in communities that thrive on social interaction between its members. Beech (2011) incorporates liminal moments or practices in his claim that identity (re)construction is continuously partial, and sometimes incomplete, thus indicating that those enduring this process are “in-between” and liminal. Residential Jewish summer camps create an opportunity for its short-term residents to re-imagine and explore the possibility to identify themselves first and foremost as Jews, rather than focusing on status and social identities/hierarchies they may experience as a member of a minority population at home. The temporary reality of re-imagining, re-creating, and re-shaping one’s self-identity in the geographical and liminal context of a temporary, isolated Jewish community most certainly exists. Likewise, this temporary reality creates a sense of belonging for its members, and allows for them to momentarily detach from their other, more permanent reality or routine.

Youth Development and Organized Summer Camping

Related to the presence of liminal moments in a residential Jewish summer camp is the added strain of young campers coming of age in the 21st century, a gradual, in-between process experienced differently by all. The pressure to become self-sufficient

surrounds youth growing up in today's world with a force that was not experienced by past generations. This is not to say that youth in the past did not encounter difficulty, hardships, or confusion throughout their young life. Rather, there is a simultaneous external and internal pressure to achieve success, learn how to make choices and decisions, and consider future paths.

Emerging adulthood is a socio-psychological theory that offers “a way of conceptualizing the development of today's young people,” often stamped by the years from approximately 18 to 25, as it is “different in important ways from the adolescence that precedes it or the young adulthood that follows it” (Arnett 2006:4). The majority of an individual's identity discovery and development takes place during emerging adulthood, that in-between period when youth are most likely to explore various possibilities and avenues that life has to offer (Arnett 2006; Côté 2006). Such opportunities, experiences, and choices that contribute to an individual's coalescence of identities set the foundation for their future. During adolescence and emerging adulthood, youth “clarify their identities...[learning] more about who they are [becoming] and what they want out of life” (Arnett 2006:8). This process of identity exploration and clarification during emerging adulthood is a salient part of youth development.

In conjunction with the omnipresence of identity exploration, emerging adulthood allows youth “a great deal of autonomy in running their own lives” (Arnett 2006:10). In fact, for some emerging adults, there is a “necessity to make choices (which Reform Judaism has exalted in the form of ‘personal autonomy’)” (Zeldin 2006:103).

Autonomy, according to Zeldin (2006), instills a sense of bewilderment in emerging adults so that they simultaneously experience a time of liberation and responsibility. Developmental and social psychologists Miri Scharf and Ofra Maysel (2010) posit that in a community, “creating an autonomous time bubble that focuses on the present allows youngsters to forge a sense of personal meaning and authenticity that subsequently paves the way to reintegrate into long-term life goals” (83). Such an “autonomous time bubble” certainly manifests at a residential Jewish summer camp. In fact, the atmosphere that a summer camp creates is often referred to as the “camp bubble.”¹² Summer campers are able to make decisions for themselves that may not have been circumstantially possible—or necessary—away from camp. Likewise, campers are introduced to a number of situations and interactions that otherwise may not be encountered.

These same new experiences take place at a Jewish summer camp with the added component that every¹³ individual, or member, of the camp community is Jewish. This sea of Jewish young adults (summer staff members) to look up to as role models indicates a piece of the intentionality behind how positive youth development and

¹² The “camp bubble” is home to many colloquial meanings in “camp language.” It is limited to the context of overnight summer camps, but not restricted only to residential Jewish summer camps. Most simply, it often refers to the physical parameters of the camp location, living day to day within secure gates along the property line. It can also be used to describe the overnight summer camp atmosphere and collection of experiences that take place in that environment, something that is so different from the “real world” outside of the gates. For instance, often when summer staff members are given a night off from camp, I have often heard some of them say upon leaving for the night, “Oh, I can’t wait to get out of the camp bubble, even just for a few hours!” In sum, “camp bubble” most commonly replaces “camp mode.”

¹³In some residential Jewish summer camps, due to a lack of available Jewish staff personnel in a given summer, non-Jewish young adults are sometimes hired to fill the gap. This does not occur at every Jewish summer camp, but it is also not uncommon. URJ Greene Family Camp, for example, often hires several local non-Jewish young adults in the surrounding areas to fill the waterfront team, other specialty sports, and even some maintenance positions.

change takes place in such an environment. Specialists in youth development report that “youth need to have opportunities to grow toward physical, emotional, civic, and social competence. Supports from family, community, and other institutions, such as organized creation and camping programs are critical for positive youth development” (Henderson et al 2005:n.p.). In a meta-analysis of multiple studies addressing self-esteem, self-confidence, and other self-constructs, Marsh (1999) concluded that summer camps indeed have a positive influence on self across all age groups, and in a relatively short amount of time. Further, camps were more likely to show positive change in youth development when programming was deliberately focused on enhancing self-constructs. As a result, Marsh reports that “the intentionality and deliberate programming done in camps to enhance self-constructs more often resulted in camper growth” (Henderson et al 2005:n.p.). To date, little is documented regarding whether there is a relationship between intentionality set forth by summer camp organizations and the resulting personal positive youth development.

Henderson et al. (2005) conducted a study specifically to investigate this relationship. The researchers conducted pre, post, and follow-up questionnaires with roughly 5,000 families across the United States, representing 92 summer camps. Statistical analyses were performed to determine if the positive change in youth development outcomes could be predicted by intentionality. The statistical data shows that intentionality does predict whether or to what extent campers experience positive change in self-constructs at summer camp. One result, in particular, from their study contributes intriguing information for this thesis. Henderson et al. (2005) reported that

“about 77% of the campers were in camps where the camp director indicated personal identity was either the first or second ranked outcome/goal of their program” (n.p.). Though this figure alone did not contribute enough quantifiable support for Henderson et al., it encourages further inquiry into the intricacies of youth identity formation, and begs to question why it is a main goal for such a significant number of summer camps.

“Finding and cultivating a sense of authentic self may be an important life goal for the current generation of emerging adults” (Scharf and Mayseless 2010:91). For emerging adults situated in *communitas* like a residential Jewish summer camp, this goal can be accomplished, at least partially, but the extent to which this self is authentic varies from one individual to the next. Scharf and Mayseless (2010) recommend that in order to reach this goal, emerging adults should create “an autonomous time bubble, which is focused on the present in which they are free of societal expectations and constraints, and in which they can experience their ‘true’ selves as part of a spontaneous flow of the present” (91). In this bubble, emerging adults can disengage from expectations and pressures placed upon them, and instead focus on the self and the present. This concept of creating an autonomous time bubble to aid in youth identity and authentic self-exploration, as offered by Scharf and Mayseless, seamlessly fits with Victor Turner’s concepts of liminality and *communitas* in that they all focus on the present.

Identity Theory and Multiple (Jewish) Identities

To social psychologists Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets (2009), identity refers to “the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person” (3). Fellow social psychologist Simon Herman (1989) explains that an individual’s identity is shaped through social interaction, an activity that holds an important role in the process of identity formation (30). The discourse surrounding identity necessitates a distinction between objective public identity (a person’s pattern of traits as they appear to others), subjective public identity (his perception of his appearance to others), and self-identity (the person’s private version of his pattern of traits)” (Herman 1989:30). Certainly, every individual is the host to multiple identities, a dimension of this identity discourse that is analyzed in detail by Jeffrey Kress, a scholar in Jewish education developments and a co-author with Charmé et al. (2008). Kress extends Herman’s claim to say that an individual’s identity (or identities) “develops in the course of interaction between the innate characteristics with which he is born and the influences of his social environment” (Charmé et al. 2008:33). Melanie Fogell’s (2006) depiction of her own identity exploration when a young Jew accurately illustrates the struggle situated within Kress’ supposition:

I was thrown into the middle of a story already in progress. I stepped into other people’s lives. This process is not unique. We are all born into a pre-existing story that began before we were born and will continue after we die. This fact goes unnoticed when we are children...I [was] looking for a place, even if it [existed] only in my own mind, where I [could] finally feel at home. [18-9]

For Fogell to claim that this process is not unique comprises only one layer of identity formation. To say that most, if not all, youth experience identity exploration would indicate that such a process is, in fact, not unique. However, individuals experience this journey differently, thus resulting in unique persons.

Not only is the journey of identity exploration different for individuals, the number and combination of identities is just as varied. Burke and Stets (2009) explain that “people possess multiple identities because they occupy multiple roles, are members of multiple groups, and claim multiple personal characteristics, yet the meanings of these identities are shared by members of society” (3). This is most present when considering Jewish identity formation. To echo Herman (1989), studying Jewish identity requires being cognizant “of the peculiar interweaving in such identity of national and religious elements” (36). Judaism is not simply a religion, and not only an ethnicity. For many years, Jews and (Jewish) scholars maintain that there is an everlasting connection between the Torah, the land of Israel, and the Jewish people. During a summer at a residential Jewish summer camp, campers are exposed to a variety of Jewish identities expressed very differently from one person to the next, but all connected through a shared history. Such exposure can lead to a heightened sense of confusion for a young Jewish individual already struggling with discovering their identity(ies). Yet, at the same time, it provides a safe environment where campers feel comfortable speaking about and exploring their personal identity in a community that, from the outset, already have much in common.

At URJ Greene Family Camp, this immediate sense of comfort and belonging is primarily couched in the harsh fact that Jews only make up 0.5% of the population of Texas and 0.1% of Oklahoma (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). In fact, most GFC campers attend public schools in their local school districts, and are typically only one of few Jewish students enrolled. Further, as social scientists Erik H. Cohen and Yehuda Bar-Shalom (2006) accurately point out, “most Jews in the United States have not experienced violent anti-Semitism;” however, “Jewish-Christian relations, particularly in the Southern “Bible Belt” have been complex, and at times uneasy, over the past several decades” (41). As a result, Jewish youth growing up in these areas occasionally endure circumstances that often necessitate their decision to hide or protect their Jewish identification, a concept that Cohen and Bar-Shalom introduce as “reactive identity.” Such an identity, one of defense, “is based on what one is *not* rather than what one is...[often] adopted by people who are constantly challenged on their beliefs and their values,” as is often the case for many Jewish youth living in Texas and Oklahoma (among other states) (Cohen and Bar-Shalom 2006:43).

In their 2006 mixed-methods study at GFC, Cohen and Bar-Shalom sought to investigate whether and how campers were able to form a proactive Jewish identity in such strong Christian-based surroundings. The researchers reported different responses based on the collected data, which consisted of interviews (qualitative) and questionnaires (quantitative):

In the interviews, the camp participants discussed the difficulties they face as Jews, the pressures from their Christian friends, their anxieties and questions. Their responses to the survey questions, on the other hand, indicate that young Jews attending [GFC] in Texas feel generally

comfortable in their surroundings, but with some desire for a stronger Jewish support system. The temporary community of the camp serves as a substitute in the absence of a year-round Jewish milieu. [Cohen and Bar-Shalom 2006:54]

From this it is clear that when given the opportunity for personal discussion, the participants in this specific study were able to voice concerns and challenges regarding their sense of place and belonging in their home communities. Moreover, Cohen and Bar-Shalom (2006) developed a typology of Jewish identity in this study that coincides with the argument that individuals have multiple identities (Herman 1989; Charmé et al. 2008; Scharf and Mayselless 2010; McNamee 2011). In this typology, in particular, sets of opposing identities—individual/collective and psychological/traditional—can be applied to a wide variety of people(s), but altogether they are arguably most applicable to a minority identity.

Youth, Communication, and Camp as an Organizational Culture

Another complex dimension uncovered when dissecting youth identity formation at a residential Jewish summer camp is the agency with which campers are prescribed. Likely unbeknownst to campers of all ages, they hold the title of being the most important customers in the camp network—perhaps also labeled the most important stakeholders. The organization discourse surrounding residential Jewish summer camping sets in motion implications for member identity, which is closely related to and occasionally fuels the agency of camp network stakeholders. Furthermore, there is an evident relationship between individual members (micro-level), the community, and the macro-level of a faith-based, non-profit organization or institution. Scholarship on

institutional messages, logics, networking, and organizational communication is on the rise, especially with those who acknowledge “the importance of considering religious organizations in applied communication research” (McNamee 2011:423). Constructing identity in organizations, especially at the individual level, is a manifestation of agency. For the camper-individual in a Jewish summer camp community, specifically, their actions, behavior, and responses—whether positive or negative—have the potential to influence various decisions, developments and outcomes at the macro-level. Such influence can be traced back to an individual’s exploration of their Jewish identity(ies), or more specifically, back to identity construction.

Patricia Thornton and William Ocasio (2008), scholars in management and organization, posit that the driving force behind the institutional logic approach is that “the interests, identities, values, and assumptions of individuals and organizations are embedded in institutional logics” (103). John C. Lammers (2011), a specialist in institutional theory, responds that the notion that agency is embedded in institutions shifts the discourse toward focusing on making a connection between agency and structure (160). Subsequently, connecting agency and structure can be achieved because all levels of society—institutional, organizational, and individual—are already interconnected (Lammers 2011; Thornton and Ocasio 2008). Nonetheless, Thornton and Ocasio (2008) maintain the argument that researchers have more to do:

[They still] need to better understand how macro-level states at one point in time influence individuals’ orientations to their actions, preferences, beliefs; how these orientations influences how individuals act; and how the actions of individuals constitute the macro-level outcomes. [120]

Even in a landscape like a residential Jewish summer camp, campers—who are positioned at the individual level—are still quite unlikely to recognize that they are important stakeholders in this organization. Nevertheless, it seems almost intuitive in the scheme of organized Jewish summer camping that agency is embedded at various levels in the institution.

A major paradigm shift in the discipline of organizational communication is the cultural approach, offering a different set of theoretical frameworks with which to examine organizations. Since its emergence in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the cultural approach has been applied to various lines of research in organizational communication, especially in an effort to understand how organizations operate. As can be expected, the majority of the knowledge about a cultural approach comes from the field of anthropology. In fact, organizational communication specialist Dennis K. Mumby (2013) relays a familiar concept from Clifford Geertz to describe this connection between the disciplines:

Geertz suggests that the ‘webs of significance’ that make up culture have a dual life. On the one hand, they are formed by people, who actively participate in the creation of their culture. At the same time, culture acts back on its members, shaping and constraining their conception of the world. [136]

From this cultural perspective, it is evident that an organization does not exist and cannot function independently from its individual members. Furthermore, Mumby (2013) asserts that an organization is “only *real* to the extent that [its] members engage in various communication activities” (137; emphasis added). As such, the cultural approach

as it is embedded in organization and communication studies most certainly manifests in the investigation of residential Jewish summer camps.

More specifically, an organization *is* a culture; it does not *have* a culture. This framing is key to understanding the organization-culture relationship, as well as the organizational reality, through the *cultural purist approach*. To reiterate Mumby's (2013) aforementioned claim, an organization only exists based on the measure of member (individual) engagement in various communication practices. Likewise, it is important to note, as well, that cultural purists often question whether and to what extent an organizational culture is manipulated in order for an organization to meet its many needs and goals.

From the cultural purist approach, an intriguing phenomenon has come to the forefront of organizational culture research in the form of *organizational storytelling*. Scholars of organizational culture “view storytelling as one of the most important ways in which humans produce and reproduce social reality” (Mumby 2013:149). It is a form of cultural expression that pervades everyday life, including that which occurs in the context of an organization. Rhetoric scholar Walter Fisher (1985) asserts that human beings are, in fact, storytelling beings. In this way, to identify as a human depends in large part “on our ability to construct coherent narratives about ourselves,” most commonly referring to the personal narrative (Mumby 2013:150). Such stories are often situated in particular contexts and specific places. Residential Jewish summer camps, for example, are cultural organizations—and organizational cultures—that exhibit instances of organizational storytelling. Moreover, the residential Jewish summer camp as an

organizational culture intentionally aims to create a holistic environment for its short-term residents (individuals/members).

Consequently, young Jewish campers often associate pieces of their identity(ies) with the camp itself as a place. Developmental education specialists Kaylene A. Sampson and Colin G. Goodrich (2009) assert that a community, or a communal environment, “provide the medium through which individuals are able to develop identity and belonging” (901-2). Place is central to identity exploration and other social processes that contribute to the transformation of a self. Arguably, a collective or shared identity and sense of belonging can also be explored and developed in a community or place—or place of community. This connection, or in some instances, attachment to place is defined as the “symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual’s or group’s understanding of, and relation to, the environment” (Low 1992:165). This concept of place attachment in part accounts for the sense of meaningful belonging created by a particular community or environment.

Overall, the ideas and concepts in this framework reach to and borrow from several academic disciplines that inherently weave together to create the theoretical foundation of this thesis. Through incorporating pieces of youth development theory, identity theory, and organizational culture with the anthropological phenomena of liminality and *communitas*, this foundation is strong in its ability to inform my primary research questions and project goals. Chapter VI examines this conversation between this interdisciplinary theoretical framework and my research conclusions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The choices made regarding how to produce this thesis reflect a methodology that is slightly unconventional, but not necessarily uncommon. Unconventional in that the blend of research methods employed throughout this project is unique to my personal style as a young social scientist. With a mixed background in American Jewish and Holocaust literature and political science, now accompanied by cultural anthropology, heritage studies, and communication studies, I have been exposed to a spectrum of methodological possibilities. Yet, within these seemingly disparate fields lay three common threads—words, the message behind those words, and sharing the message. Thus, I designed the following methodology to include data collection and data analysis techniques that overlap between the interdisciplinary pillars of this study—anthropology, heritage studies, and communication studies. This blend aptly recognizes the complexity of the words collected, the significance of the messages that these words come together to make, and the sensitivity I must use to effectively and accurately share the narratives that were so generously shared with me.

In this chapter, I begin by searching for the place of reflexivity and auto-ethnography in this project, and share pieces of my internal struggle as an insider and an outsider. After this, I provide specific details about data collection methods, which include semi-structured interviews and consulting a pre-existing camp survey. Moving into the section on data analysis methods, I briefly describe the coding system I

employed while analyzing the interview transcripts so as to explain how I came to identify recurring themes in the data. I also provide a short discussion on the importance of personal narratives in the context of this project. Lastly, with scholarly support, I introduce the most experimental segment of this research design—poetic transcription—a qualitative analysis technique that facilitated my ambition and duty to sensitively and accurately share the participants’ personal narratives. Samples of these poetic transcriptions are shared and discussed in Chapter V.

Auto-Ethnography and Reflexivity

As a Methodology

A certain strain of auto-ethnography methodology is more common than others, which is the type that is “written by people whose ‘master status’¹⁴ is obvious and important to their self-identity” (Hayano 1979:100, quoting Hughes 1945). This auto-ethnographic approach is called *reflexive (or narrative) ethnography*. According to Carolyn Ellis (2004), a pioneer in auto-ethnography, explains that reflexive ethnography focuses on a (sub-)culture, and “authors [then] use their life story in that culture to look more deeply at self-other interactions...[and] their personal experience is also important for how it illuminates the culture under study” (46). Familiarizing myself with Ellis’ work and that of other scholars who have written extensively on auto-ethnography, it became clear that this type of ethnography was innately present in this project in relation

¹⁴ This phrase does not signify an achieved status. Rather, “master status” merely refers to the primary identifier that an individual uses to describe or identify him/herself.

to my experience at Greene Family Camp. David M. Hayano (1979), the originator of the term auto-ethnography, promoted the idea that this form of ethnography is an opportunity for anthropologists, and now researchers in other disciplines, to conduct and write about their “own people.”

The participant population for this study was selected in large part because of my personal and professional affiliation with GFC. I was a camper at Greene Family Camp from 2001 to 2003. Then, as a student entering 12th grade in Summer 2005, I participated in the Avodah unit—the counselor-in-training program that the interviewees in this study recently completed in the 2013 summer season. In the following years from 2006 to 2013, I assumed various roles¹⁵ as a member of the summer staff at Greene Family Camp. Thus, as a former GFC camper and current summer staff member, I understand much of what current GFC campers¹⁶ think and feel in regards to why this summer camp holds such a dear place in their hearts. I experienced much of what they have been experiencing during their camper years, and now have the privilege of seeing those same experiences differently as a staff member and a researcher. Though one person’s experience—mine, in this case—is not wholly telling or representative of every GFC camper’s summer experience, I believe that it serves, at least, as a contribution to understanding the majority of GFC campers’ experiences.

¹⁵ In 2006-2008, I was a bunk counselor, living in the cabin with specific bunks of female campers. In 2009, I was an Assistant Unit Head for the entering 6th and 7th grade units, which have since been split into their own units due to a large increase in camper attendance for this age range. In 2010-2012, I was an Assistant Education Director, working closely with visiting clergy and Jewish educators to implement educational programs for all age units. Most recently, in 2013, I served as the Summer Education Director, doing much of the same tasks, but with a more managerial role, as the previous three summers.

¹⁶ For this study, in particular, this connection relates to the Avodah campers.

Rather than hindering the conclusions reached in this project, this background undeniably provides me with a greater familiarity of the GFC environment, community, programs, and routine than an outsider. Yet, as a researcher with an audio recorder, my role shifts slightly. I continue to struggle with the dueling roles of insider and academic outsider that I have endured throughout the course of this project. Further, I firmly believe that being an insider should not discredit my study in any way. Rather, this challenge merely adds an intriguing and constructive dynamic to my project. What I am experiencing is a common philosophy associated with fieldwork in numerous academic disciplines, both in humanities and science, known as *reflexivity*. This philosophy deliberately reintroduces the “I” back into research projects (Okely 1992). Admittedly, such an account contributes a very different perspective. However, it simultaneously acknowledges that every researcher carries pieces of his/her background into the field, and that such baggage could influence the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions.

As a Negotiation: Being an Insider and an Outsider

To say that learning how to negotiate my roles as an insider and an outsider throughout this project has been easy would be false. It is a task that is not easily mastered, if ever. Yet, finding the right balance between these two roles is a challenge disguised as a chance to learn about who I am—now—as an anthropologist, a writer, a critical thinker, and a self. I would be remiss not to explore it further.

As pointed out in Charmé et al (2008): “Ethnography is a tool that allows us to...study identity formation as an ongoing activity rather than a product that can be

fixed in time” (124). The same can be said for auto-ethnography. However, engaging in projects rooted in auto-ethnography must be handled with care and “ongoing self-awareness, self-reflexivity, and disclosure” (Charmé et al 2008:125). Remarkably, though perhaps not surprisingly, studies of American Jewish culture and identity formation are chiefly conducted by Jews. This requires both a qualitative and quantitative investigation of ways in which these Jewish scholars can be both an insider and closely invested in the purpose of their subjects (Charmé et al 2008:125). In fact, these scholars generally do not shy away from this “flux that is inherent in any qualitative researcher’s positionality” (Charmé et al 2008:125). Rather, Tali Hyman argues that they find ways to tailor a methodology that involves “critical proximity:”

Rather than working hard to maintain ‘critical distance,’ by keeping in check feelings such as abandonment, betrayal, loss, inadequacy, joy, delight, or love, lest they *obscure* one’s project, with something [Hyman is] calling a ‘critical proximity,’ a researcher works hard to *use* the full range of reactions that s/he has to being in the field, simultaneously as ‘insider’ and as ‘outsider’ (in different, and shifting ways), in order to *clarify* one’s project. [Charmé et al 2008:125]

Striving for clarification aptly describes my struggle with searching for the calculated balance between my insider and outsider roles. Perhaps, as Hyman suggests, I do not have to achieve this balance in such a meticulous and calculated manner. Instead, I simply need to recognize the presence of these dueling roles with a “critical proximity”, not distance, and then utilize that recognition to maintain the collection of feelings endured throughout this process.

Suddenly, the weight of this struggle lessens, gradually being replaced by a sense of relief and newfound confidence in the purpose and importance of this project. Here, I

find it necessary to clarify that confidence does not equate to conceit. Rather, it signifies a young anthropologist—and a young Jewish woman—growing up, and bravely acknowledging the process as it takes place.

The task of learning how to properly *use* my “Jewishness without *abusing* it” is “delicate, volatile, and often disorienting” (Charmé et al 2008:126). To even begin to achieve this successfully, I must ensure that I do not resist this challenge. Doing so will only add my name to the list of Jews who study Jews that “have fixated on healing the ostensible brokenness¹⁷ of contemporary American Jewish identity” (Charmé et al 2008:126). Certainly, that is not one of the goals for this project. I can only hope that this thesis will add a new reflexive perspective to existing American Jewish literature, as well as serve as a development in research methodology and interdisciplinary theoretical approach. I firmly believe that my attempt to achieve these goals is a result of using my Jewishness properly and proudly, not abusing it. After all, taking on such a task requires commitment and sincerity.

Furthermore, acknowledging that my insider/outsider self elicited certain types of responses from the participants, and vice versa, is most important in this discussion. This is to be expected and should not be dismissed, for “informants’ responses and reactions to the researcher’s self also become data, and sometimes very valuable data”

¹⁷ This is not to say that contemporary American Jewish identity is inherently broken and needs mending. Rather, this particular statement indicates that such a broken state is perceived, which understandably could be misconstrued to mean that all American Jewish identities connected to each American Jewish individual is, from the outset, doomed to be broken. Much of this perception comes from the growing distance between Diaspora Jews and the State of Israel, a phenomenon that threatens the continuity of the Jewish peoplehood. As such, this statement about healing broken American Jewish identities primarily points to a goal to stay strong and connected as individuals and a community in American Judaism.

(Charmé et al 2008:126). Being able to ascertain which aspects of myself as the insider/academic outsider matter during conversations with participants is difficult, but possible. Such reflexivity must happen regularly: “For the most rigorous application of a ‘critical *proximity*,’ the self-reflexivity must become an on-going and regular practice, built in to the research process. We must not only know ‘who we are,’ but ‘how we *become*’” (Charmé et al 2008:127).

Data Collection Methods

The primary research method consisted of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with nine (9) consenting¹⁸ participants who completed the counselor-in-training program for entering 12th graders known as *Avodah*¹⁹ during the 2013 summer season. During these audio-recorded²⁰ interviews, all but one²¹ were conducted via Skype. I utilized a list of questions that I constructed specifically for this study, though the responses I

¹⁸ Two parent signatures were obtained on a Parental Permission form in order for Avodahnikim to participate in this study.

¹⁹ The Hebrew word for “work,” Avodah is used at URJ Greene Family Camp as the name for the counselor-in-training program designed for entering 12th graders. At GFC, this particular program is unique from the other camper units at GFC that are designated for younger children of the age range for entering 2nd grade to 10th grade, specifically because it is tailored to span the entire length of summer whereas the younger units only last between ten days and three weeks. This program design has been in place since 2006. Prior to that year, the Avodah unit allowed its campers the choice of participating for one summer session only (three weeks) or the entire summer as is the case presently. For this study, there were no interview questions focused on the Avodah program in particular, but I believe this could be a worthwhile and interesting study in the future—either standalone or as an expansion on this thesis.

²⁰ I used the Livescribe Echo SmartPen to audio-record the interviews. This is a very reliable, useful, and compact device. I simply hit one button on the SmartPen to record the conversation, and was able to use it as a pen throughout recording. Every word and scribble on the specific Livescribe notebook (which comes with the SmartPen) was recorded as well. Once I connected the SmartPen via USB to my laptop, I was able to upload the audio-recorded interview as well as all of the notes I took down on the notebook. It is very simple and “no-fuss.”

²¹ The one participant whose interview did not take place via Skype instead occurred via phone. This participant did not have a Skype account, so a face-to-face video conversation was not possible.

obtained in each individual interview were open-ended and were occasionally expanded at the discretion of the participant and myself as the researcher. The specific group of GFC-ers that comprises the participant population for this study sits in the unique position of still being campers while simultaneously training to be potential staff members in the coming summers, a position that is itself liminal. The majority of these campers have attended GFC for several years—some consecutively, some intermittently—which defines the main reason for pursuing this group as the participant population for this study. Their years of memories and experiences at GFC—individual/collective and positive/negative—serve as the fuel for better understanding how this temporarily isolated Jewish community impacts the discovery and formation of its campers’ identities over time and why this process takes place differently than in other environments.

It is also important to address the fact that the participants of this study volunteered to participate, and as such, it should be acknowledged that the participant population could be slightly biased. This is not due to selection bias. Rather, of the pool of potential participants—the full 2013 Avodah unit—these nine participants felt compelled to participate likely because of their strong sense of belonging and connection to GFC and the experiences they endured there over the years. Likewise, perhaps the participants in this study bias the sample because they are likely to return to GFC in future summers due to their overall positive experiences as a camper.

As supplemental data, I also consulted pre-existing surveys²² conducted by Summation Research Group, Inc. that were designed for URJ Greene Family Camp to learn about customer/camper satisfaction after the summer season²³. This data provides a useful background²⁴ to understanding how GFC creates a unique Jewish environment and sense of belonging for its camper.

Data Analysis Methods

From Collection to Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software was not an option due to hardware constraints. Thus, and perhaps serving as a QDA “blessing in disguise,” I manually transcribed each interview individually. I call this a “blessing in disguise” mostly because it allowed me to become intimate with the words of the transcripts. I was able to replay segments of each interview, over and over, in order to catch the nuances and hesitations that truly make each interview different from the rest.

²² These surveys are a compilation of useful quantitative results produced from a Customer Satisfaction Index survey run for GFC by Summation Research Group, Inc. in cooperation with the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC). This particular survey is entitled “Camper Satisfaction Insights” (CSI). This is the second consecutive summer that GFC has utilized this survey. As such, the 2013 survey results include a comparison with the 2012 survey results in order to mark points of strength and areas for improvement.

²³ I obtained permission and access to these surveys from the Camp Director of Greene Family Camp. He received permission for my access to this data from appropriate personnel.

²⁴ The data from these surveys are not a focus in this study. Rather, I merely consult the surveys as supporting information for the atmosphere, environment, and “feel” of GFC. As such, no data from these surveys are used as strong support in the data analysis segment of this study in Chapter IV. It is important to note, as well, that these surveys were anonymous and self-reported by camper parents. Upon reviewing some of the open-ended explanations in the survey, I noticed that, in some cases, parents allowed their campers to sit with them while completing the questions. In fact, some questions were not possible to answer without the camper’s presence. I believe this could be a future research study as well. More specifically, investigating how parents being asked to complete the surveys—to speak for their children—might influence these survey results, and perhaps consider ways for campers to have a more significant role in this particular survey process.

Themes in the Interviews

During data analysis, I pored over the transcripts resulting from the semi-structured interviews, searching for recurrent and overlapping themes that proved relevant and intriguing in the context of this study. In order to recognize these common themes, I created a color-coded system in which a particular marker color represents a particular theme in the data. After printing each interview, I proceeded to put a small dot by each transcript line that contained a coded theme, thus signaling which themes were present in that part of the conversation.²⁵

Page after page, I began to notice one trend in particular that caught my attention. Beyond all of the filler words and simple “yes” or “no” responses, a few of these Avodahnikim shared some truly beautiful words with me that, at the time of the interview, I did not realize would be so powerful. Nonetheless, I was captivated and sought to investigate further. Specifically, I searched for different methods of qualitative data analysis that would allow me to showcase their words, and ensure that all meaning and emotion remained intact upon (re)presentation in this thesis. I acknowledge that there are elements in a thesis that require my critical analysis as an anthropologist, and researcher in general. Yet, there are others that are better (re)presented in their original

²⁵ Regarding this coding technique, my knowledge is rather limited in terms of who else has coded in this way. However, I decided to code in this fashion because it closely resembles the coding procedure utilized in MaxQDA, a specific QDA software that automatically codes data in this manner (based on commands given by the researcher). I recreated this process manually since I did not utilize such QDA software for data analysis. Coding for themes allows for a synthesis and connected understanding of what results the data produce. Likewise, color-coding for common themes also allows for me, as the researcher, to—at first, at a glance—notice which pieces of the transcribed interviews are most significant, dynamic, and rich with results.

state. As I rediscovered upon hours of manual transcription and coding, these Avodahnikim were telling me stories—fragmented stories that, when pieced together, illustrate their personal narratives.

Personal Narratives

“When a person tells a personal narrative, he or she invites someone to know him, to know her, intimately, personally” (Stahl 1989:x). Such vulnerability indicates interplay of bravery and trust between the storyteller (participant) and the listener (researcher). These vulnerable encounters, according to literary folklorist Sandra Stahl (1989), “carry the risk of rejection along with the promise of pleasure” (x). With such uncertainty surrounding the reception or interpretation of a personal narrative, such encounters are typically shared with those people whom the teller trusts and who want to know more about the teller as an individual, as a person. After all, we only get to know someone else through sharing experiences—whether together in the moment or in retelling past experiences. Stahl (1989) reminds us that these shared moments are a result of intimacy, an exciting sensation that often accompanies our perception of someone else in our own personal world.

Likewise, we must acknowledge that the sensation of intimacy and the exchange of personal narratives are manifestations of human action. From Hannah Arendt we learn that “narrative is the most distinctively human action because it, and it alone, responds to the question of *who*, rather than *what*, we are” (DeConcini 1990:111). Moreover, narratives are often exchanged in the company of at least one listener, thus

expanding upon Arendt's claim that this human action is simultaneously a human *interaction*—a social interaction. Stahl (1989) explains this human action and social interaction beautifully:

The successful teller of personal narratives engages the listener in an adventure—not simply the plot of a story, but rather the shared activity of exploring the teller's world, the teller's identity...The teller's identity is the listener's treasure; there is a treasure in each story—not the text, not the transcript, but the experience of hearing another voice, of seeing—if just for a moment—someone else in a subjective world. [x]

Not only is the storyteller branded with the agency and creative act of engaging a listener during the telling of a narrative, but also, in a way, this lively interaction allows for the storyteller to find comfort in their vulnerability. Indeed, the underlying function of a personal narrative is to aid in “the discovery of the teller's identity (especially in terms of values and character traits) and to maintain the stability of that identity for both the teller and listener” (Stahl 1989:21). Through the exchange of personal narratives, both the teller and the listener are welcomed into each other's reality(ies) and life stories, thus approaching a deeper level of trust, inclusivity, and intimacy.

Narratives play an important role in this study in that certain conclusions would not have been reached without the presence and intimate investigation of personal narratives. I believe it is imperative in a project like this to acknowledge the power of the narrative, of storytelling, and of the phraseology that comprise crucial aspects of qualitative data analysis in ethnography. Though this project is primarily dedicated to exploring youth identity formation and its interdisciplinary theoretical underpinnings, it is just as important and foundational in the recognition and examination of the personal narrative.

Poetic Transcription

There is a unique qualitative data analysis technique that is growing in popularity among social scientists called *poetic transcription*. This experimental writing form aids in my endeavor to share the powerful words of the participants in this study. Poet transcription is a creative writing form transformed by Corrine Glesne, a specialist in qualitative research methodology, allowing researchers to push the envelope with data analysis. Anthropologist Ivan Brady (2000) shares that poetic transcription extends to anthropology in that poetics is often concerned with texts as ‘cultural artifacts.’ He explains that like other disciplines, “anthropology is ‘literary’ in that it conveys its information primarily through writing. This textual base lets anthropology share with more conventional studies of poetics an interest in text construction [and] the production of meaning in discourse” (Brady 2000:949). In general, anthropology also endures the many critical problems associated with successful representation and communication of experience.

Likewise, poetic transcription serves as a creative compromise for the debate regarding “the place of art and science in the social sciences and the humanities” (Brady 2000:949). In fact, there is a specific term ascribed to this experimental writing form in anthropology called *ethnopoetics*. Poet-ethnographer Jerome Rothenberg is considered the “father of American ethnopoetics,” coining the term in 1968 (Tarn 1991:75). His contribution to this inquiry of thought “[illustrates] the diverse intellectual inspiration this movement owes to various social scientists, ethnographers, and poets” (Brady 2000:951). Dennis Tedlock (1992), a pioneer in the field, defines ethnopoetics as the

“study of the verbal arts in a worldwide range of languages and cultures” (81). The goal in such studies is not only to interpret various verbal channels of communication and storytelling, but also to access the exact words and details that illustrate the quality of these verbal works of art. In this way, the writer invites readers to live through the storyteller’s experiences and stories vicariously. Brady (2000) asserts that “ethnopoets strive for such experience and communication” in their writing, though it is not achieved without struggle:

“If the artist sees it, she believes she has some prospect of saying it poetically, of conveying with less prospect of empirical distortion the nature of the experience as panhuman emotion; if the scientist sees it or grips its ‘felt meaning,’ she can only hasten its transformation into something else (or some things else) by attempting to appropriate and express it through clinical forms” (959).

Despite the internal quarrel an ethnopoet tends to experience, finding a way to communicate such “things” in a more lyrical manner often reveals new dimensions of the topic under study, leading to insightful contributions to multiple discourses.

As is true in most academic disciplines, researchers differ in methodology, and more often, it is those who employ unconventional research strategies that reach incomparable conclusions. Anthropologists, in particular, seek ways to speak about and for people they study (or with whom they participate) in ways that fairly and accurately represent discourses that cannot be easily demonstrated through mainstream methodology. In the same vein, Geertz (1973) clarifies that anthropologists “inscribe” social discourse. More to the point, they write it down. He explains that by doing so, anthropologists—more specifically, ethnographers—turn this social discourse “from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account,

which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted” (Geertz 1973:19). Heeding the words of Geertz and Brady, I hope that this project will fairly (re)present and communicate the personal experiences and narrated journeys of identity exploration at Greene Family Camp through a distinctive and constructive methodology.

CHAPTER IV

MEMORIES, GENDER, AND IDENTITY(IES)

Nine participating Avodahnikim, eight hours of interviewing, twenty-two hours of transcribing and following-up, roughly 135 pages of coded transcription and an unknown amount of time dedicated to coding and analyzing. At first glance, it might seem like a chore to withstand these time-consuming necessities of qualitative research—but only at first. Through deeper magnification, it becomes clearer that, truly, the above pieces fit together to make a beautiful composition.

Nine participating Avodahnikim are actually nine extremely eager almost-18-year-olds, each of them sitting patiently at the edge of their seat in anticipation of the next question. Their eagerness comes from a desire and willingness to contribute to this study, but perhaps more so from the possibility that, by the end of the interview, they might discover something new about themselves and seek to explore it further. Eight hours of interviewing becomes 480 minutes devoted²⁶ to getting to know better these nine extremely eager almost-18-year-olds. Twenty-two hours of transcribing and following-up, which then turn into 135 pages of transcription, is the diamond in the rough. What for some researchers might be the most mundane and tedious task of the process is, for me, the most thrilling. Manually transcribing interviews saturated with

²⁶ I choose not to say I “spent” these minutes because, truthfully, it was my honor to listen to and interact with these Avodahnikim for 480 minutes.

open-ended answers is an opportunity to become more intimate with the data and uncover the raw beauty underneath it all.

While coding, I noted which themes seemed to be recurring most often across the nine interviews, and considered whether and how these recurrences would contribute to the goals of this project. Overall, there were three main themes in the data—memories, gender, and identity(ies). In this chapter, specifically, I share the sub-themes and motifs of these recurring themes.

Demographic Profile of Participant Population

In summer 2013, Avodah—the counselor-in-training program at URJ Greene Family Camp—was home to 42 individuals due to enter 12th grade in the coming months. All but one of these participants are citizens of the United States, the one being from Israel. In this pool of 41 American Avodahnikim, only one lives in Oklahoma while the remaining 40 live across Texas. Additionally, in this same pool, there are eighteen (18) male²⁷ Avodahnikim and 23 female Avodahnikim. The criteria to participate in this study excluded those living outside of the United States, thus I only recruited from the pool of 41 American Avodahnikim. Table 4.1 shows relevant demographic details pertaining to the nine (9) consenting participants of this study.

²⁷ Merely for sake of simplicity and clarity, I decided not to say “those who identify as male” and “those who identify as female.” This is information that I was not privy to upon receiving other information appropriate for recruitment, so I simply use “male” and “female” throughout sections of this thesis because I believe it would be unethical to speculate otherwise. It is also not information that contributes to the scope of this study, so I did not inquire about the sexual or gender identity of the participants during interviews.

Participant ID	Pseudonym	Male/Female	Age (at time of interview)	Home State
PF1	Kim	F	17	TX
PM2	John	M	17	TX
PF3	Melissa	F	17	TX
PF4	Elizabeth	F	18	TX
PF5	Laura	F	17	TX
PF6	Kate	F	17	OK
PM7	Brent	M	17	TX
PM8	Andrew	M	18	TX
PF9	Elicia	F	17	TX

Table 1. Basic Demographics of Participant Population. A total of nine (9) Avodahnikim consented to participating in this study. In this participant population, the female to male ratio is 2:1, and only 1/9 of the participants are from Oklahoma. All nine participants' parents consented for pseudonyms to be used in place of their children's real names.

During each interview, I constructed a variety of questions (Appendix B) to aid in directing the conversation. It is important to note that depending on the individual, not all of these questions were asked. This was determined only during the interview with each participant. Throughout the course of each interview, mostly based on previous answers or how the participants responded to earlier questions, I was able to determine which questions were still pertinent to each individual conversation. Additionally, some questions were asked in the interviews that were not initially included in the list of interview questions. Again, depending on responses to earlier questions in each interview, I maintained a flexible approach to asking further questions in each interview. This created a very natural and organic flow to each conversation, and allowed for different paths to be taken with each participant based on their individual personal

narratives. Thus the beauty of semi-structured interviewing—flexibility and the opportunity for teller and listener to engage and learn from each other.

In the excerpts that follow, taken directly from my original transcriptions, I decided to maintain all utterances of “um,” “uh,” and “like,”²⁸ among other noticeable colloquialisms. Such words often signify the participant taking a moment to ponder or remember, and as such, I believe these to be key in the telling of personal experience narratives. For this same reason, I kept all punctuation indications from the original transcriptions. When I could not decipher a word or phrase from the audio recording, I include (???) to convey this uncertainty. Rather than using an ellipsis to indicate a leap in speech or cut in transcription, I apply it to show when, and for how long, a participant took pause. For reference, a regular ellipsis denotes a relatively short break in speech (...), and multiple ellipses are strung together for longer interruption in speech. Likewise, very seldom are there full and grammatically correct sentences. Instead, much of the transcriptions contain run-on sentences with phrases or (pieces of) thoughts separated with a comma. I decided to transcribe their responses in this manner in order to show when participants did not clearly begin a new thought, but rather when they verbally strung together multiple thoughts or phrases into one long sentence. Ultimately, I hope to highlight and recreate for the reader the speech patterns of the interviews, and preserve the style with which the participants shared their thoughts and experiences.

²⁸ The use of the word, “like,” is rather abundant and overwhelming in the transcriptions. However, it is a common utterance of adolescents and emerging and young adults in today’s society.

Remembering Camp Experiences

Throughout the interview process, it became increasingly evident that the participants enjoyed thinking back to their time at GFC, specifically focusing on activities or programs that made an impact on them in some way. When asked to draw memories from their first summer at camp, which for the majority of the participants was during Bonim (entering 2nd to 4th grade), there was some difficulty with memory recall. This was expected. However, when asked to think about favorite and memorable activities, programs, and social interactions in the context of their Avodah summer in 2013, the responses were much longer, enthusiastic, and clearly meaningful to the participants. Below is Melissa's response:

JD: From this past summer when you were an Avodah, was there a favorite activity or program or interaction, either in the Avodah program or in the unit that you were assigned to?

Melissa: Um...my favorite unit program that we did was the one that we planned, it was, um, Finding Niviimo. It was really cute actually, and it was really fun to plan it. And afterwards, um, we didn't use some of the water balloons that we tied, so after all the Niviimers went to bed, we had a water balloon fight with all the Niviim Avodahs, it was really fun. And um, we were pouring water on each other, and "S" was being "S". It was just really fun. And, I remember there were times when I was just like, when I had certain conversations with some Avodahs and bonded with them, and that really made it special for me.

Quite clearly, Melissa has a strong and confident recollection of Avodah year, more so than when she was a young 2nd grader, as can be expected. Moreover, the tone of her response indicates a sense of joy, pleasure, and a hint of pride in sharing this memory and experience with me. When considering this question, she immediately has an answer

and it happens to be about an individual and group accomplishment, thus accounting for her diction and expression: “that really made it *special* for me” (emphasis added). This particular program, “Finding Niviimo,” that Melissa so proudly describes was mentioned by several other participants as well, all of whom expressed that they felt a great sense of achievement.

Another participant, Kim, explained that her Avodah summer was her first experience at Greene Family Camp. Though not unusual for some GFC-ers to first attend summer camp as an emerging adult—in Avodah—instead of as a young child, Kim is the only participant in this study who fits this description.²⁹ When asked about her favorite activity or program this past summer, this was her reply:

Kim: To be honest, there’s so many that I loved. Like, I could say Israeli dancing was like awesome.

JD: How often was that?

Kim: That was every Shabbat, so every Friday night. Um, what's another thing? Evening programs were always soooo fun. I had the littlest kids, Bonimers, so they were just like, the cutest little programs and like, they were just so much fun.

Though not her first year, like Kim, Elizabeth has also only recently experienced Greene Family Camp in the summer. Participating in Avodah was Elizabeth’s third summer affiliated with GFC, but only her second on-site. Her first year at camp was in Kibbutz

²⁹ It is much more common that an Avodahnik has attended GFC since the earliest age possible. The reasons for this are not explored in this study. Rather, this particular observation comes from conversations that I have had with fellow GFC-ers during summer seasons.

as an entering 10th grader, followed by a trip to Israel³⁰ the next summer in 2012. When recalling favorite programs or activities from her first summer, Elizabeth chose to share with me a program from Kibbutz that no other participant identified as their favorite:

JD: Share with me, if you have one, a favorite activity or program or an all-camp event, or even just an interaction with a couple people or one person, from your summer in Kibbutz. It can be anything really. Anything that sticks with you now.

Elizabeth: Um...hm...so many things.

JD: You can give me a list if you want.

Elizabeth: Hm...um...most kids would definitely disagree with me (*giggles*), but (*keeps giggling*), I really enjoyed actually when we would have the educational talk about what we were going to do with the money that we had to donate. And we would discuss the Jewish values and causes, and for me, I really enjoyed it and remembered it because you know you were able to help someone out. And like, for me, helping others is huge, so, I remember that really well. I really liked that. But the “for fun” things, we turned the Kibbutz Moadon³¹ into a slip and slide for an activity. And that was really, really fun. It was disgusting, and we did that to clean it.

JD: (*laughs*) Wow. That seems dangerous.

Elizabeth: (*laughs*) It was SO dangerous.

³⁰ There are several organized trips, or tours, in Israel devoted to educating Diaspora Jewish youth about the State of Israel and its history. It is important to note that Greene Family Camp provides one such tour opportunity for its campers who are entering 11th grade. The summer leading into their junior year of high school, GFC campers have the option to participate in this tour, a program called Garin Greene. During that particular summer (entering 11th grade), campers who do not participate in Garin Greene also do not attend GFC on-site in Bruceville, Texas. For campers who chose to participate in this tour opportunity, they endure numerous experiences throughout the journey—individually and collectively—that also create liminal spaces and moments. Though this tour experience, and others like it, is not the focus of this thesis, I find it necessary to acknowledge that other liminal experiences offered through organized camping programs—like URJ camps, for example—also allow for the process of youth identity formation to take place.

³¹ “Moadon” is a Hebrew word meaning a club, clubhouse, or lounge space. At GFC, it is used as the name of a recreation building where programs and activities take place.

For Elizabeth, it was not a basic everyday kickball game, or the like, that came to mind first—and as her favorite. Instead, it is clear that her understanding of a “favorite activity” at camp symbolizes an educational or meaningful program with a distinct purpose of learning about and engaging in selfless acts for a wider community.

For other participants, like Brent, the social interactions and friendly encounters during a summer at Greene Family Camp define a favorite “activity.” A particular interaction that Brent chose to share with me involves a fellow bunkmate during his first year as a Bonim camper:

JD: Thinking about your summer experiences over the years, if you can remember back to your first summer, describe for me a favorite activity or evening program from that summer.

Brent: So...two. I just remembered...I did fencing and archery, and I think cooking, but mostly fencing and archery were my activities in Bonim, and I did them every single year I came back to camp. Like, last year as an Avodah I would always try and get coverage for fencing and I would always come home and tell people like, “Yeah, I’m a fencer now, I did it for two weeks in camp, it’s no big deal.” So, I always really loved fencing, and like, even though I like never associated fencing with camp, that was always like...I just loved it. And then, the other one, is, I just remember this guy named “M” who was in my cabin in Bonim, and I don’t even know his last name anymore, but he was just like...he like reminded me of like those really cool high school kids in movies even though he was a Bonimer and I was just always like, man, this guy is like really cool (...) I wanna be that guy when I grow up.

Brent’s story about his Bonim bunkmate epitomizes the types of unforgettable, and at times peculiar, interactions that take place every day at Greene Family Camp. It is truly remarkable that he was able to recall so vividly a brief encounter from roughly ten years prior.

A Gendered Camp Experience

While discussing various aspects of a summer at Greene Family Camp, I asked all nine participants whether they believe male and female campers experience camp differently. Unless I was specifically asked to provide an example or clarification, I did not do so; I simply let the participants interpret the question in their own way. One of the most insightful conversations on this subject occurred with Elicia, a longtime GFC camper:

JD: Would you say that male and female campers experience camp differently?

Elicia:Yeah (*looks up and to side in thought, squints*)

JD: Yeah? How so?

Elicia: I mean, yes and no. I feel like they both...like, girl campers, it's always been like much more cabin-based or less cabin-based, it's all about friendships. And girls are all through camp talking about boys and this and that, and like, just that sort of stuff. And boys are very like, very into themselves, I guess. And girls are more into the social aspects, whereas the guys like, go in cabins together and have cabin jokes and cabin bonding and different things and weird things, and like...that's much more...like, I just remember Kohanim...we were all talking about Shabbat and who had a Shabbat date, and we were pointing over to the boys bunks to pick people and they were having a milk chugging contest! So, I don't think it's inherent in the camp experience, it's just that boys and girls are so different and you really see that in camp in the ways that they interact with each other.

JD: Do you think that it changes with age? From younger to older units?

Elicia: Like, within the genders, or...

JD: (*interrupts*) Do they experience camp differently, by gender, and then by unit? Is there more interaction between girls and boys as they get to the older units?

Elicia: Definitely as we get older. And in the younger units, it was very like, there was a lot of cabin bonding and cabin friendships and cabins were just their own little groups. As you get older, it's a lot more like you have your individual friends in other cabins and it's a lot more, just like, on the individual level. You just have...we'll take a lot more initiative for friendships instead of just going with the pack.

Elicia's view on whether and how camp is a gendered experience, generally, serves as a summary of all responses I received from the other participants. Seemingly, there are stark differences in the level of and desire for social interaction across genders and at different ages. However, Melissa chose to focus her response on social interaction within each gender, separately:

Melissa: I feel like they experience camp differently because the setting of each cabin is so different. Like, a guys' cabin, they're really joking and like they kind of fight, but play fight. And I don't know, I feel like they have a strong bond and with girls it's kind of, sometimes it's a strong bond, but then sometimes it's hard to connect, but then eventually it will connect. I feel like it's slower, but it's still fun. Sometimes some girls don't have fun because you know girls can be catty. So, I feel like boys have like, I don't want to say like more fun 'cause girls do have fun. I don't know. I just feel like it's very different in each cabin.

Melissa expresses that not only are there issues with social interaction and creating bonds within one gender, but also that the atmosphere of the cabin varies from one to the next, a phenomenon that Elicia also described. Brent takes it a step further, and attempts to explain how a gendered camp experience involves a different set of interactions and encounters in the older ages as an entire unit, not individual bunks or cabins.

Brent: Okay...I think...at the beginning, yeah...um...like, on the Niviim³² level, and even the Kohanim³³ level really, yeah, and then something kinda happens in Melachim³⁴ when kids get older and hooking up is like, a thing. And like, speaking to someone who was like super fat for the majority of my early life, like, it kind of, I think girls...and I might be totally off-base here, but I think girls are segregated a little bit less about it earlier on, like, they're still...like, there are girls who hook up when they're in ninth grade and there are girls who don't and they're all still really close. Like, guys, like I was in the lame person bunk...

JD: (*interrupts*) Wait, what?

Brent: (*laughs*) I know, right! Like, straight up! Like, I was like the king of the lame kids bunk, and I was cool with that, it was fun. But there was definitely this really defined schism between like, that group of kids and my group of kids. And then like, as you get up to like Avodah...that schism like kind of goes away. So like, the guy group is really cohesive and the girl group is really cohesive and the guy-girl group is really cohesive...

Brent believes there to be a group shift in gendered interactions and experiences. As campers get older and continue to attend camp over a span of years with that same group of campers, the group dynamic changes. Earlier, Brent was more focused on explaining a particularly individual (Jewish) (male) camper experience—*his* experience. Though with the above excerpt, he is now sharing that an entire unit of campers experiences a development in its collective dynamic and perhaps also its identity. I agree with Brent's perspective that both individual (male and female) and collective identity formation takes place in a setting like Greene Family Camp. Another male participant, Andrew, shares a slightly different perspective:

³² Niviim is the age unit for entering 4th and 5th grade campers.

³³ Kohanim is the age unit for entering 6th grade campers.

³⁴ Melachim is the age unit for entering 8th grade campers.

Andrew: It's just that the drama is different between males and females.

JD: In the bunk?

Andrew: Well, in the bunk...in the guys', just want to have fun, the girls always seem to have something that they need to do.

JD: Like an agenda?

Andrew: Yeah.

JD: In any unit? Even in Bonim?

Andrew: Oh yeah!

JD: Really?

Andrew: 'Cause the girls don't want to be with the guys. They have a whole different thing.

JD: Were you with Bonim both sessions?

Andrew: Yeah.

JD: So you really got to see all of this happen?

Andrew: Yeah.

JD: Does your answer partially come from what you observed as a camper from Niviim all the way up to Avodah?

Andrew: Mhm! Yeah. When I was there, and what I've seen as an Avodah. All of it.

Perhaps Andrew's view, and slight hint of annoyance, comes primarily from his experience working with Bonim all summer during the counselor-in-training program. Working with campers of this age (ranging from 2nd to 4th grade) can be very difficult, overwhelming, and exhausting—though also rewarding. In 2007, I was a bunk counselor

in Bonim for the entire summer. Based on that experience, I do not recall campers of this age engaging in or experiencing any sort of drama. This is not to say that six years later the camper community, of this age unit specifically, is not different from when I was a staff member of that unit. Though, it is rather intriguing that Andrew believes female campers have an “agenda.” During our conversation, I never quite obtained a descriptive answer regarding the use of this term, but I wonder if he meant to say that the female campers did not show much interest in comingling with the male campers in that unit. Perhaps I, as the researcher, should not have even asked for clarification by using the word, “agenda.” Regardless, I believe Andrew, like Brent, is implying that at such a young age (2nd to 4th grade), camp experiences often allow for individuals or single bunks of campers to develop and explore. As campers get older, however, the dynamic of the collective will change as well.

Jewish Identity(ies)—At Camp and Because of Camp

Though this project is grounded in an investigation of youth identity formation, I deliberately only asked the participants directly about their (Jewish) identity(ies) in one question during the initial interviews in an effort not to inadvertently influence the nature of their responses. Further, when a participant mentioned his/her Jewish identity, I included additional questions about identity that would aid in the discussion. As such, several blocks of questions inquire about different arenas in the participants’ lives in relation to Greene Family Camp, their home Jewish community, their high school environment and experiences, considering their future in a Jewish context, and

contemplating the concept of identity itself. In doing so, I retrieved an interesting collection of thought provoking and, at times, inspiring responses. A particularly interesting discourse surfaced from the interviews pointing to complexities among a participant's identity(ies) in relation to Greene Family Camp as a place.

In order to better know about the participants' connection to GFC and whether/how this summer camp plays a role in who they are becoming as young Jews, I wanted to know whether they believe they act differently while at camp. During my conversation with Brent, he shared with me some of his struggles and insecurities that, until one particular summer at camp, were weighing him down.

JD: When you are at camp in the summer, do you feel like a different person than when you are at home?

Brent: So for the longest time, yea, I felt like a very different person at camp. Um, and, honestly a lot of that just stems from the majority of my life until the last two years. I was just really uncomfortable with who I was as a person, and so you're around different people at camp. And so, I don't know how that evolved, but around the people I always bunked with, I had this power dynamic where I was some kind of leader, and that was really cool, because people thought I was funny even though I said stupid things, I was like okay that's fun. Uh, so yea, I used to feel like a very different person at camp, and um...especially like, this summer in Avodah, I felt like a very different person. I remember...I flat out told so many people, like, I can't remember the last time I was genuinely happy but like here at camp like this year I've been genuinely happy not just because I'm having fun but like with who I am. I got home this year and that kind of persisted, so I used to feel like a very different person and now camp Brent and dancing on the stage in gold short shorts³⁵ Brent have kind of come full circle.

³⁵ When Brent says, "dancing on the stage in gold short shorts," he is referring to a role he played in a theatre production at his high school.

JD: Do you think that has anything to do with your experiences at camp in the past few summers, or is it more to do with when you came out of your shell before Israel?³⁶

Brent: I think that without camp I never would have come out of my shell. Um...a lot of why I had a shell in the first place was just really, really bad weight issues...and honestly, what was really cool about Kibbutz is that summer is when I decided to get on it and lose weight and I did that at Kibbutz, um, and like a lot of people like knew that that's what I was trying to do so they were just really supportive and that was really nice. And then I guess the cool thing about camp...is...there's just so fewer things to feel bad about, I guess...and everyone's like...I just remember "R," specifically, is just someone who was always really cool to me even when I like knew no one, and I always thought that was really cool and now him and I are like super best buds.

Even though this passage does not include an outright recognition from Brent that he attributes pieces of his identity formation/exploration to Greene Family Camp, he does say that he would not have made those life(style) changes without camp. In this sense, he explains that Greene Family Camp creates an environment that allowed him to feel ready and supported in this commitment.

Brent also mentioned that after this past summer as an Avodah, the person he is at camp persisted at home as well. This is a phenomenon that I noticed in other interviews as well. Take, for example, the following excerpt from my interview with Elizabeth. This portion of the conversation, in particular, shows her outwardly struggling to clarify what she experienced this past summer during Avodah.

Elizabeth: Um, believe it or not, I'm really shy.

³⁶ Earlier in our conversation, Brent told me he went on the Garin Greene trip to Israel the year before Avodah, and that it was a wonderful experience because he came out of his shell the year before in Kibbutz.

JD: Okay.

Elizabeth: At school at least, I'm very quiet and kind of hide in the back. But at camp I'm very outgoing and very willing to voice my opinion and step up and be a leader. Um, or at least I try to be.

JD: Why do you think that is?

Elizabeth: I'm really confident and comfortable with these people. They make me feel like I can be confident in myself, and be the best person I can be and push me to push myself. To test my limits, in a positive way of course. So, I don't know, I'm very inspired by the people at camp. So, yea, but it's starting, within this past year, the person I am at camp has followed me back a lot.

JD: You said that started this year?

Elizabeth: Yeah.

JD: Is that because of the Avodah program or just personal realizations you had during the summer?

Elizabeth: I think it's a mix of both. I think Avodah really showed me that, like, if I can be like this at camp, why can't I be like this at home?

These insights about bridging the gap between their individual identity(ies) in two different places—camp and home—illustrates a potential progression in their understanding of who they are becoming³⁷. Other participants explained that they still feel as though they are different at camp, even if only slightly. Below are excerpts from my separate interviews with Elicia and Melissa.

³⁷ This is not necessarily specific to Jewish summer camps. Undoubtedly, youth who attend various types of summer camps—faith-based, secular, day, overnight, and so on—have the opportunity in those camp settings to explore and begin to understand who they are becoming. This is a phenomenon experienced by youth, not only Jewish youth who attend residential Jewish summer camps.

Elicia's response

Elicia: Um.....(*looking up in thought*)... I just feel like as I've grown up I've become like a lot more comfortable with myself and like, when I was younger, I was comfortable with myself at camp but I was a lot more relaxed at camp and I worried a lot less, but when I was at home, I'd get really, really like, anxious, and I'd like worry all the time about what other people were thinking and impressing other people whereas at camp I kinda like, I just felt like...I didn't have to work. Like at home I worked really hard to be accepted everywhere, and I feel like at camp...I didn't...And, but, then like, as I've gotten older it's become less prominent of a difference.

Melissa's perspective:

JD: When you're at camp in the summer, do you feel like a different person than when you are at home?

Melissa: Yes.

JD: Do you act differently?

Melissa: Mhm.

JD: Okay. Can you explain it for me?

Melissa: Um...I don't know. I just feel more at home at camp, and I feel more confident about myself. I don't know. I feel like I could be more friendly, more myself around these people than I can with the people at my school.

JD: What is it that helps you with your confidence at camp? Is it your surroundings, like the people or the environment or the mission of camp?

Melissa: Um, I think it's mostly the environment, um...I know that everyone is Jewish there so I can talk to them about anything without them having to ask a million questions about it. Also, the fact that you live with them, um, the more time I spend with people the more confident I get and comfortable.

Melissa's choice of words is particularly interesting. In fact, what she is expressing is another common phenomenon at Greene Family Camp: "I just feel more at home at camp." For many GFC campers, camp has become their second home. It is a place where they feel a sense of safety, belonging, and connection to the locale and the people, a community where they feel comfortable to explore who they are becoming.

For several participants in this study, and I suspect for the majority of GFC campers, this camp-home provides a safe place that is often not present in the school setting. Mostly in the public school environment, Jewish youth in the South are too often confronted with conflict, difficulty, and disrespect just for being Jewish. Primarily, many GFC campers' families reside in areas of Texas and Oklahoma where there is a small Jewish community, if one at all. Growing up as a member of a minority population in North America, and even more so in Texas and Oklahoma, is a difficult journey. For emerging adults, therefore, the experience of living in a place where they are the minority can be even more harmful and detrimental to their development. In the excerpt that follows, Laura describes what her experience is like as one of five Jewish students in a student body of approximately 1,400 seniors at her public school.

JD: Do you know what the student body is in your high school?

Laura: Um, I don't know exact statistics, but I do know in my grade there's 1,400 students, and...um, out of those 1,400 students there's probably 10 Jewish kids maximum. And, several of those Jewish kids are Messianic Jews, they're Jews for Jesus, so... (*giggles*).

JD: Wow.

Laura: So, there's only like five of us that I know of that are like "Jewish"³⁸ Jewish, or practicing Jews.

....

JD: So (...) from non-Jewish students, do you ever hear or receive comments that are derogatory or based in negative behavior about you being Jewish?

Laura: Um, I definitely hear that, and then when people kind of discover that I'm Jewish, they kind of back off. And I'm pretty, like, okay with like, certain comments to an extent. But like the one thing that I cannot handle is like hearing Holocaust jokes. So, even if I'm like, I don't know the person and I hear that, I will confront it. But once someone knows that I'm Jewish, they won't continue derogatory comments to an extent.

JD: So you confronted some people about making Holocaust jokes. Can you describe that a little more for me?

Laura: Well if I just hear someone just saying to their friend, like (...) the pizza joke with, I can't remember exactly...what's the difference between a pizza and a Jew?...Yeah.

JD: Something about baking...?

Laura: Yeah, and then which tastes better....Anyways...

JD: Oh wow...that's terrible...

Laura: Yeah, and so I just confront the person and I'm like, "Hey are you okay? What's going on?" And they're like, "What do you mean? I don't even know you. And I'm like, "Oh, well, I just heard you make like a horrible...it wasn't even a joke. It wasn't even funny. I just heard you say something horrible and wanted to make sure you were okay 'cause I just could not believe that would ever come out of someone's mouth. It's like 11 million people you're talking about. Man, that's...wow."

JD: That's an interesting confrontation technique. Very confident. Do they usually respond well? Do they apologize?

³⁸ When Laura says, "'Jewish' Jews," she is describing practicing Jews in a way to differentiate from the Messianic Jewish students she mentions.

Laura: They'll be like, "Oh, I'm so sorry, like, I didn't mean it." And I don't know if they actually take it to heart, but it kinda embarrasses them in front of their peers and kinda makes a statement.

The example that Laura provides above is, unfortunately, a commonality she shares with a few other participants as well as many Jewish youth living in Texas and Oklahoma. Other common jokes, both of which John has experienced countless times at his public high school, takes root in the misconception that Jews only marry other Jews and that Jews are penny-pinching.

JD: Do you know how many Jewish students are at your high school in your grade and then also in the whole school?

John: I mean, okay...*(smiling)*...there's me, and one other girl in my grade who are, like, actively Jewish.

JD: Out of how many?

John: 452.

JD: Wow, that's exact.

John: Um, juniors....there's more juniors...

JD: That seems like a lot.

John: I don't know...Twenty in the whole school might be pushing it. Our year has the least, but the other years have more...four, maybe?

JD: Okay...maybe fifteen?

John: It's not a lot.

...

JD: Okay. So, knowing that you are one of two Jewish kids in your grade, and one of very few in your high school, can you describe for me what that's like from day to day?

John: Uh, I don't know, like, my friends know I'm the only Jewish kid...um, like, people automatically assume that, like, whenever people want to give me shit like, they'll be like, "Oh you and 'A'?" 'Cause [she's] like the one other Jewish person. I mean that's pretty typical.

JD: So do they tease you, or joke with you, but not in a derogatory way? Or are there times when other people who know you're Jewish act derogatory toward you?

John: I mean, people don't like really mess with me, but like, uh, I'll be walking down the hall and somebody will say, like, this happens allllll the time, somebody will be like, just talking about something totally unrelated to me and be like "Ah, he's such a Jew!" You know, and they'll look up and see me and be like, "Oh sorry."

JD: Wow.

John: That happens A LOT!

JD: What do they mean "such a Jew?"

John: Like...

JD: Are they talking about someone else and then you walk by and they say, "Oh sorry?"

John: Yeah.

JD: And so they're describing this other person as "such a Jew?"

John: Yeah...

JD: What does that mean?

John: Allllll the stereotypes. Like stingy is the biggest one.

John's experience at his high school, being one of only two Jewish students in his senior class, is also a rather typical occurrence for many Jewish youth living in the southern region of North America. Though it seems as though John is quite accustomed to

hearing such jokes in his school hallways, he does not clearly indicate whether he is offended by these situations. During our interview, I believed that he has just come to accept that this is something that will happen day to day in his school, and that there is not much that he can do to provide a remedy. Perhaps, too, being a senior and constantly looking to the future that lies so close ahead has a hand in this mere acceptance rather than feeling a strong need to confront his peers like Laura does.

Elizabeth shared that she has not experienced a great deal of conflict from her non-Jewish peers in high school, but that in middle school she was the victim of some rather harsh verbal attacks from her fellow students.

Elizabeth: Um, in high school I haven't really seen much of that, but middle school...I got some weird comments about like, "You're gonna go to Hell because you don't believe in Jesus." Things like that that at the time I was really offended by, but now I don't really let stuff like that really faze me. I get a lot though in high school like, "Oh she's the Jewish kid...She's like all into Judaism." Nothing's REALLY rude though. I get some like, I'm the Jewish kid (*raises palms up to the sky, like "raising the roof"*).

JD: I mean, that's such a simple phrase, but it sounds like there's a lot more meaning to it for you. Can you tell me why those few words really do...or why you find them rude, or why you think it might be wrong to say about someone, "Oh, she's the Jew."

Elizabeth: Um, I just think there's more to a person than their religion. And, by labeling them by their religion, I think for me it brings back times of the Holocaust and how people were labeled then and mistreated. Of course I don't see that mistreatment as much in school, but when they're like, "Oh, she's Jewish," it's like, "Why is this a big deal?" And I just think it's kinda rude to point out the differences because we are I guess a minority. And, I don't know...but when someone says that, it's not rude because they hear me, like I'm in a team leadership class, and they hear

me talk about some of the things I do during NFTY³⁹ and they know it's inspiring for me. And so it has very different meaning for me in different atmospheres.

JD: It almost sounds like when they say things like that, and this might just be my interpretation, it might just be one of those pocket phrases they just pull out when they don't know what else to say or they want to fit in with a certain group or something.

Elizabeth: I think that's exactly what it is at times. I can see it.

JD: Are you the only Jewish student in your grade?

Elizabeth: There's SO many of us, but it's not that many. There's at least twenty of us in my grade, not counting my siblings.

JD: So that's 12th grade. What about the whole high school?

Elizabeth: Um...

JD: That you know of at least.

Elizabeth: That I know of...without the senior class, there's probably thirty others.

JD: So, let's say about 50 total?

Elizabeth: Yeah.

JD: And how big is your whole high school?

Elizabeth: I'm not very sure, but I know my graduating class is 780...

...

JD: So, going back to thinking about the interactions you have with non-Jewish students based on things they've said to you, or things you overhear them talking about...do you have a certain way that you react to or cope with that behavior?

³⁹ NFTY stands for North American Federation of Temple Youth. It has regional youth groups as well, and Elizabeth serves in a major leadership role for the Texas and Oklahoma region.

Elizabeth: Um...if it's something like a reference towards like actual ways we practice Judaism, I normally correct them. If their information is incorrect, just because I think everyone should be educated, just like if I were to say something about Christianity I 100% know they would correct me if I was wrong. So, it's like a learning thing. I talk...when I hear Holocaust jokes and stuff like that, I straight up say, "That's really disrespectful and please refrain from saying those things because you may think it's funny but it's really not."

...

JD: That's really interesting that you hear some Holocaust jokes here and there. Are you able to guess about how many times in one week you would hear a joke about the Holocaust?

Elizabeth: Maybe once. Um, the times they really come up is like when we're talking about those parts of history...and it's the smart aleck, "think-they're-cool" kids.

JD: They say this in class?

Elizabeth: Yeah. Oh yeah! That's when you hear them and you're just like "mmmmm no!"

JD: Yeah. When you hear something like that or other invalid comments about Judaism or Jewish practices, do you ever talk to the other Jewish students in your grade?

Elizabeth: Um...sometimes...when I have a class with someone and we hear these things, we kinda give each other a look like, "What are they talking about? This is like ridiculous! Oh gosh! Stop!"

Like Laura, Elizabeth explains that she confidently approaches her peers who she overhears downgrading or disrespecting Jews or Judaism. What is most interesting to me, however, regarding this excerpt from Elizabeth's interview, is the presence of Holocaust jokes in classrooms. Though Elizabeth and I did not discuss whether her teachers control the situation, I am curious if this is the case. It would be even more

disheartening if some of her teachers did not put a stop to such situations in the classroom.

At Brent's small public high school, there was a serious situation recently that required his school's leadership and district office to get involved. This situation was not specifically an anti-Semitic case, but the person at the core of this story has a direct relationship to Judaism, in a very atypical manner.

JD: How many Jewish students are in your class?

Brent: A LOT! Um...it's really cool actually, just because I guess (???) I don't know how it works. I was really surprised 'cause I like live in a really Jewish neighborhood (...), and I like got on the bus on my first day of school as a freshman and I looked around, and I was like, "Wow, there are so many Jewish people here, I did not expect this." So like, I'd say a good 20% of my school, maybe 30...probably that's overshooting, but there are A LOT of Jewish people and also lots of like vaguely Jewish people who say they're not, but then celebrate Hanukkah and that sort of thing.

JD: Wow, that's a pretty high percentage, especially with your entire student body being a quarter of the size of other public schools.

Brent: It's a really cool environment.

...

JD: Are you ever exposed to negative behavior or any derogatory comments about being Jewish?

Brent: Actually yeah...um, yeah...and I like, usually when people ask me that question I say no, but then I'm actually thinking about it right now and so there's two things...like one of them, because we're all kinda cool with each other and there's so many Jewish people, I have friends who make Jew jokes and they're not...very offensive Jew jokes, but I mean, they're still Jewish jokes. But actually, there is...I feel like there's this one case I can't not mention which is this guy actually got kicked out of our school last year, not for being anti-Semitic, he actually like anonymously threatened to multiple people and National Honor Society and made a joke about bombing the school because he was mad he didn't get into NHS.

Brent: Um, and so he got kicked out of the school, but before he got kicked out, he was actually...I had grown up going to temple with him, so he was Jewish as a kid, um...but I guess something happened that made him really hate just everything about being Jewish because he like stopped going to temple and I'd ask him...and his brother still went to temple but he didn't. And I'd always ask him like, "Hey, remember we used to go to temple together?" And he'd be like, "What? No, that never happened." And he always made really bad Jew comments (...) So that's the most that's happened there...

Brent: And like, the school district was so scared about it, they have to be, because you know it was an anonymous bomb threat even though it was like not...it was never gonna be a real thing. But so we had to go through metal detectors every day...

Though, as previously stated, this is not directly an example of anti-Semitism or other difficulties experienced by Jewish youth in the Texas and Oklahoma region, it still shows types of serious and scary situations that take place in schools today. Furthermore, Brent's childhood friendship—or, at least, acquaintance—with this particular student is quite interesting. Brent states, "I guess something happened that made him really hate just everything about being Jewish." Although we cannot and will not know what that "something" was for this student, something did happen and it caused him to entirely depart from Judaism.

In my conversation with Melissa, another interesting way for Jewish youth—as members of a minority—to confront and/or educate their peers in their school setting materialized.

JD: Well, since you are one of very few out of four grades in a public school, can you describe for me what that's like? What's it like being one of four Jewish students and potentially one of the most active?

Melissa: Um, it's different. A lot of my friends don't know what Judaism is about, so I get a lot of questions, um (...) I know every year my mom and I, like, try to do like a party or something... We had a latke party last night and invited some of my friends over to show them what Judaism is about and what Hanukkah is about. So we do that sometimes. But it's just like my friends, it's like really different for them. They don't know. But it's kind of cool teaching them about it. I find it... I don't know... I'm very interested in learning about different cultures and stuff, so when they ask me about my religion I tend to ask them about their religion and we have a nice talk about it.

These Jewish holiday-themed parties that Melissa and her mother host for her friends is a truly remarkable and innovative approach to helping non-Jewish youth understand, appreciate, and respect Judaism as a culture and religion as well as the people who identify as being Jewish. Later in our conversation, Melissa mentioned that some of what she knows about Judaism comes from her experiences at Greene Family Camp, and consequently some of these values and lessons make their way to these get-togethers with her friends.

Not every experience for Jewish youth in their home or school setting is like Melissa's above, but what is common among them all is that the difficulties, disrespect, and conflicts that they are faced with are unsolicited and unnecessary. For campers at GFC, they find a safe place with instantaneous familiarity among other Jewish youth who might also be experiencing similar situations at home and school. As such, for many campers, they feel "at home at camp," just like Melissa describes. The themes that lie within the larger motifs of memories, gender, and identity(ies) that were introduced and analyzed in this chapter will be further discussed in conjunction with some of the theoretical underpinnings in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER V

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Poetry turns everything into life. It is that form of life that turns everything into language. It does not come to us unless language itself has become a form of life. That is why it is so unquiet.”
(Meschonnic 1988:90)

One ambition for this study is to accurately and fairly (re)present the personal narratives shared with me during participant interviews. Many of the stories and memories that were described to me are not much different from one another. Yet, it is the way in which these stories and memories were told that are particularly unique to each storyteller. As such, I hope to share the voices of these storytellers through their own words, but in the prose of poetic transcription. I sincerely believe that (re)presenting their words in this manner allows the participants to speak for themselves better than I could ever do for them.

Corinne Glesne (1997) assigns three loose rules for poetic transcription: (1) The words in the poetic transcriptions must be the interviewee’s, not mine; (2) I can pull an interviewee’s phrases from anywhere in the original transcript and juxtapose them; and (3) I must keep enough of the interviewee’s words together to (re)present his/her speaking rhythm and the way he/she says things. Just like with common methods of qualitative research analysis, poetic transcription is filtered through the researcher, but it involves word reduction while illuminating the interconnections of the participant’s thoughts. Through this experimental writing form, I am letting the reader know my participants in a different way, creating an intimate portrait in the hopes that the reader

will come to know these individuals and their personal narratives through only a few words—their words. I want the reader to see what I heard.

As the creator of these poetic transcriptions, I also want to share the precise steps taken to produce these creative and experimental pieces. Initially, I followed Glesne's guidelines very closely, but ultimately decided that for the purposes of this study, it was necessary to tweak these guidelines ever so slightly. I only revamped the second guideline to a format which did not allow me to choose segments of the interview from anywhere in the transcript. Instead, I grabbed a full chunk of transcript lines, from one intact segment, and then proceeded to incorporate the third step as outlined by Glesne. Then, I simply deleted the insignificant words (i.e., “um,” “uh,” “like,”), removing the unnecessary pieces of the selection to reach the message in their words.

I find it necessary to admit that by engaging in this creative and poetic process, I play a significant role in the development, shape, and final product of these poems. That being said, though I believe these poems to be fair and accurate presentations of the participants' perspectives, ideas, feelings, and stories, I cannot ignore that my reflexive understanding of their words also has a place in this creative process of analysis. This role of reflexivity does not manifest in the form of interpretation, but instead as a connection through shared experiences from my own time at GFC. Despite this remarkable relationship through words and experiences, these poems are not products of my personal interpretation of what the participants are saying. Rather, these poems *are* what they are saying. Appendix D includes the selected intact transcript text that I used to curate these poems into the version that appears in this section. By doing so, I hope

that it is clear that as the curator of these poetic transcriptions, I am merely that—a curator. I am taking work already completed and shared by the artists (participants), and offering their inspiring pieces as an exhibit for others to view and interpret.

Eight poetic transcriptions follow—*Tough Girl*; *One in a Sea of Thousands*; *That Was the Summer*; *Every Year Was My Favorite Year*; *Like a Camper, At Camp for the Very First Time*; *At Home at Camp*; *Keeping Judaism Alive in College—Frat Style*, and *I Don't Know*. I created, assembled, and titled these poetic transcriptions so as to offer a glimpse into some of the struggles as well as personal developments and achievements facing these participants in a variety of situations, environments, and versions of self in their identity exploration as a Jewish emerging adult.

I provide a brief foreword before each poetic expression describing which self⁴⁰ is being introduced in the poem. Additionally, the order of these poetic transcriptions is deliberate, and the reader is expected to read the following works in this way. This particular organization strives to resemble a combined, chronological representation of typical experiences of the youngest or first-time campers through to Avodahnikim, with an additional focus on possible futures. Lastly, there is no explanation following each poetic transcription, which is a technique that some qualitative researchers employ. Instead, I simply invite you, the reader, to read and interpret the participants' words. Attempt to hear them telling these stories and expressing their innermost feelings directly to you.

⁴⁰ “Self” does not refer to a specific participant from this study. Instead, I employ “self” to indicate that each individual has multiple selves, and that in this creative analysis section, all of these poetic transcriptions describe experiences or stages of the “self” (or different selves within one individual camper) that could be, and often are, experienced at camp—and at Greene Family Camp, in particular.

In the words of Laura, this is the version of a self who is ready for anything and everything, even when surrounded by new faces in new places as a young camper.

Tough Girl

It was the very first day
I remember my parents leaving

Later that night
Everyone in my cabin was crying
They were missing their parents
I, personally, was not homesick at all

Why were people crying?
Every night I would look around
At everyone sniffing in their beds
Thinking, "What is wrong with me?"

I guess I was really excited
To experience everything

In the words of Kim, this is the version of a self who seeks a sense of belonging among like people and in a safe environment where instances of anti-Semitism are not an issue. This self often finds this desired comfort and belonging at a Jewish summer camp, a place where he/she is no longer the only one.

One in a Sea of Thousands

It sucks
It's feeling like you can't relate to anybody
You like talking about it
But you have no one to relate to you

I feel labeled
People say, "Yo, that's the Jew!"
I don't think they mean it to be derogatory
But people know me as "Jew"
It's like a joke
I know they're kidding

But when you really dig deeper
It sounds derogatory and it's immature

In the words of Brent, this is the version of a self who, because of camp, finds strength within and encouragement from peers. The decision to make a commitment to changing one self is always a pivotal moment for an individual, and when it can be shared with a supportive community, the feelings of insecurity tend to melt away.

That Was the Summer

The most definitive memory
Of why I've always liked camp
Isn't a specific activity

I wrestled with really bad insecurities
I never felt that at camp
I just didn't

Doing everything at camp
Was always better than
Doing anything at home

Without camp
I never would have come out of my shell

Kibbutz
That was the summer
When I decided to get on it
A lot of people knew that that's what I was trying to do
They were really supportive
That was really nice

The cool thing about camp is just,
There's just fewer things to feel bad about

In the words of Kate, this is the version of a self who is always surprised when camp outdoes itself from previous summers. This is a self, camper or staff member, who is able to find the good in even the most negative situations. This is someone who acknowledges and appreciates every experience at camp, knowing full well that it will make them a better individual and enrich their relationships with fellow Jewish youth.

Every Year Was My Favorite Year

People always say,
“Each year at camp is your favorite year”

You think, “This is the best year!”
But then you go again
And you say, “No, this is the best year!”

I think that’s true
Every year was *my* favorite year

There’s this experience that you get
From establishing relationships

With other Jewish people
In a Jewish context
That makes something different

About your relationships
With other people

Camp is the best place I have to get that

In the words of Kim, this is the version of a self who feels like a camper even though he/she is in training to be a counselor. For this self, whose first summer at camp is as an Avodahnik, the experience can often resemble that of a first-time camper. Seeing everything for the first time gives this self an extra sparkle in his/her eye for exploration and adventure.

Like a Camper, At Camp for the Very First Time

It being my first year
I got almost a camper experience
This summer

I noticed myself getting really into everything
And loving every moment
Not even realizing
How caught up I was in the magic

For me, I was a camper
Camp is so magical
How do they make everything happen?

In the words of Melissa, this is the version of a self who, simply, feels more at home at camp. This self finds comfort and a sense of belonging at camp; it is a safe place where, instantly, everyone shares a commonality—being Jewish.

At Home at Camp

I feel more at home at camp
I feel more confident about myself

I feel like I could be more myself
Around these people
Than I can with the people at my school

It's the environment
I know that everyone is Jewish
I can talk to them about anything
Without them having to ask a million questions

The more time I spend with people
The more confident I get
And comfortable

In the words of John, this is the version of a self who is contemplating how to continue living in a Jewish way while away from home. In college, there are a number of opportunities on and around campus for Jewish students to stay connected to Judaism and become part of a local Jewish community. For many Avodahnikim, this Jewish community often comes in the form of a Jewish fraternity or sorority. This and other possibilities are common topics of conversation among Avodahnikim during that particular summer, especially because the next chapter of their lives is quickly approaching and decisions must be made.

Keeping Judaism Alive in College—Frat Style

If I don't do that⁴¹
I could very easily see myself
Getting caught up in college
Not being Jewish at all

I always assumed that's what would happen
Until recently
Or, really, this summer

Jewish fraternity never really crossed my mind
I thought about joining
But I didn't really know anything about it
I didn't know anybody in it
But then at camp
Half of them are Sammys⁴²
And now I hang out with them

It's new

⁴¹ By "that," John is responding to a question about his interest in joining a Jewish fraternity in college next year.

⁴² "Sammy" is a large Jewish fraternity that has national chapters at numerous major universities in the country.

In the words of Elizabeth, this is the version of a self who is overwhelmed by the decisions to come, his/her (Jewish) future within fingers' grasp. This is a concern that also consumes the minds of Avodahnikim. Though unsure how or when to make decisions about Jewish life in college, many Avodahnikim are keenly aware that these decisions will be made in due time. This awareness often manifests as the pointblank understanding and acceptance of the uncertainties that lie ahead.

I Don't Know

Some Jewish aspects
Will definitely remain
A big part of my life

Will it be as big as it is this year?
I don't know.

Through an experimental and creative writing form, this section was designed to allow the participants to speak for themselves, directly to you. Deep within their words, I believe that there are threads of significance that engage my research goals of portraying identity formation as a liminal process, which will be discussed further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A main goal for this project was to investigate a process that has been studied for decades, and attempt to offer a different case study and theoretical approach to unpacking this interdisciplinary discourse. Investigating a process like identity formation calls for additional supporting aims grounded in a predominantly social science theoretical framework. As such, one accompanying goal for this project focuses on understanding whether and/or how Greene Family Camp plays a significant role in the (Jewish) identity exploration and formation of its campers both as individuals and a community. This study also put particular emphasis on investigating why campers at Greene Family Camp describe it as an environment that creates a warm sense of belonging, a place where they feel comfortable exploring who they are becoming. In addition, as this project is firmly rooted in cultural anthropology, an underlying argument in this thesis is that the phenomenon of youth identity formation is a liminal process wherein the campers experience a feeling of being betwixt and between.

To refresh, the primary research questions under study in this project are as follows: (a) Why/how do residential faith-based summer camps stand apart from other summer camps in terms of its campers' experiences of identity formation? (b) Is this liminal process of youth identity formation in any way unique at a residential Jewish summer camp? (c) Why/how do GFC campers find it possible to explore their identity(ies) at this camp in the summer?

After conducting semi-structured interviews with all of the participants, I collected a remarkable amount of rich qualitative data. There were three main themes that I derived from my analysis of this data—memories, gender, and identity(ies)—that contribute to the discussion of whether my research questions have been answered. Chapter IV first introduced and analyzed these themes and briefly considered their significance. It is here, however, that I will further examine these findings and comment on how my conclusions interact with the theoretical framework grounding this project.

For several participants, their first year attending Greene Family Camp was in Bonim, the age unit designed for 2nd to 4th graders. Almost ten years later now, it was quite difficult for them to arrive at an answer as to what, for them, is a favorite or memorable experience or interaction from that first year. Some participants replied that they liked certain sports activities, and one participant in particular even signed up for the same activities every summer, even as an Avodah. Upon arrival at home, he would explain to his friendship circle there that he was a professional in those areas of sports. Additionally, several participants expressed—both vaguely and explicitly—that social interactions between fellow bunkmates or counselors were more meaningful to them and represent their favorite moments from those first camper years. In fact, one participant explained that he aspired to grow up to be like one of his bunkmates in Bonim. This participant was able to remember specific details about this individual and interactions they had with each other. Though on the surface it would seem that this particular inquiry holds little significance for the goals of this project, this is not the case. Instead, the participant responses contribute to the basis of identity formation, for it is a process

that takes shape because of social interaction. The active environment during a summer at Greene Family Camp is designed to offer its campers an atmosphere where their face-to-face time with their peers is constant—in the bunk, in activities, during free time, during meals, and so on. Thus, there are numerous opportunities for campers to interact with their peers, which then allows for memories to be made and tucked away as intangible souvenirs from their adventures at Greene Family Camp.

The reason why campers are able to engage and enjoy social interactions at camp has much to do with the camp environment representing a bubble. In this bubble, much like Miri Scharf and Ofra Mayseless (2010) posit, campers disengage from expectations and pressures placed upon them, thereby reassigning their focus on the self and the present. Further, in order to search for and possibly find their authentic self, campers must engage in experiences that encourage or enhance self-constructs (i.e., character building or identity exploration). Within the walls of this bubble, these engaging encounters indicate the presence of *communitas*, which signifies a group's pleasure and joy in sharing common experiences together, often giving their individual lives more meaning (Turner 2012). Ultimately, these experiences contribute to the construction of identity, allowing for campers to explore their individual identity and how they are connected to the collective.

Though interviews with the participants did not focus on discussing the presence or embodiment of gender as it pertains to them as individuals or the entire camp community, an interesting theme surrounding this topic was produced from these conversations. When simply asked whether male and female campers experience camp

differently, the range of responses pointed in all directions. However, it is not so much the answers themselves that I wish to discuss. Instead, I want to take this opportunity to shed light on an unexpected response pattern when participants were telling me about the gender dynamic at camp.

There was a distinct gendered response from female participants and male participants in this study. This particular inquiry evoked a stark difference in the extent to which male and female participants answered. Almost all of the female participants explained the difference between male and female campers' experiences in rather lengthy, emotional,⁴³ and caring manner. Often, the female participants paused before responding and then proceeded to share a list of reasons as to how and why this difference occurs. In fact, some even seemed to speak of this topic as though they felt confident in their viewpoints. There was a noticeably more confident, and at times defensive, tone in their responses. Moreover, I noticed a hint of a desire for change or lament for experiences they might have had as campers, which were not shared during the interview. They acknowledged how female campers act toward each other in the bunk, and that social encounters and friendships are of great importance in this setting. However, several female participants also shared that at times these could be negative experiences, which is when in their response that they would shift to describing male campers' experiences. In doing so, they often explained what they witnessed of boys' bunks as campers, all the while there was a hint of jealousy for the assumed male

⁴³ By emotional I mean in the sense that through their choice of words and the length of response, they displayed a heightened sense of care for this particular topic.

camper experience. The female participants used words indicating that they think male campers have more fun.

Interestingly, the responses from male participants in this study were entirely different from the female participants. Most notably, the length of response from male participants was much shorter, perhaps only one sentence or two in transcription. Unlike the female participant responses, they gave me direct and succinct answers. I could tell that every word was genuine, but was intrigued by how the way in which they responded differed so greatly from the female participants. In only a few words, the male participants were able to provide me with a sincere perspective on the matter. Additionally, a common thread in these responses from male participants is that the hint of jealousy expressed by the female participants was entirely absent. Perhaps their replies indicate that in remembering themselves as young campers, they recall not wanting to have the assumed female experience. It is also very likely that they were unaware that females were experiencing camp differently from them. These gendered responses were anticipated from the outset of the interview process. Yet, the way in which this discourse has materialized within the larger discourse of identity formation at Greene Family Camp, specifically in regards to various social interactions, was truly unexpected. Though I assumed that gender certainly has a place in the conversation about social interaction in a co-ed youth residential setting like GFC, I did not come across much mention of this in my theoretical research for this project. As such, I merely remained under assumption rather than setting expectations as to whether and/or how this would surface in data collection and analysis.

Another rather unexpected theme that emerged from the data concerns the participants' responses to whether they believe they are different people at camp than at home or elsewhere. I anticipated for this inquiry to assist in my examination of whether campers associate pieces of their identity(ies) with GFC, and so it did. What was unexpected was the shared response of a few participants that they are not different at camp. At least, as they explain it, as of this past summer in Avodah they returned home as the same person that they were at camp. These participants expressed moments of personal realization that they were comfortable with and confident in the version of self they became last summer, thereby indicating the process of youth identity formation in full swing. Moreover, this self-recognition suggests that these participants are maturing and acknowledging that this is a version of self that will be confident in making decisions for the future.

It is evident that for all campers, each summer is a new phase of liminal experiences that contribute to their ever-changing identities expressed at camp and those expressed elsewhere because of camp experiences. Every summer offers a new set of opportunities for campers who are feeling in-between, in any area of life, to explore the reasons for this in a welcoming and supportive environment. Furthermore, many campers may not even be aware that they are in a liminal state, but this does not discount the fact that through experiences at camp, they are also experiencing liminality. Nevertheless, the point remains that the process of youth identity formation, exploration, and expression in relation to Greene Family Camp is grounded in a liminal context. Furthermore, it should not be ignored that the liminal process of youth identity

formation functions and develops through both positive and negative experiences. According to Victor Turner, liminality is the state of being betwixt and between; however, he does not clarify whether the experiences endured while in this state must solely be of a positive nature. In fact, in some instances, I believe it is the struggles, tensions, and conflicts—individual and collective—that contribute more to the understanding of liminality, and subsequently, to dimensions of identity formation.

While liminality is a phenomenon of the present, Greene Family Camp is an infusion of the past, present, and future in a Jewish context. With its Jewish décor and symbols that adorn the walls of every building, GFC creates a Jewish environment and culture for its community that suggests a certain level of organizational intentionality. The culture, environment, and place of Greene Family Camp curates an atmosphere where Jewish youth feel a sense of security in exploring who they are becoming in a supportive community. The participants that we all got to know in this thesis helped us to understand that this is true at Greene Family Camp. It is a place where so many campers feel like they finally belong somewhere, a place where they have no fear and feel safe. The attachment to this place that campers express may not be unique to Greene Family Camp, as it is a phenomenon that surely exists in other organized camps—faith-based or not. However, what sets this camp—and this project—apart from the rest is the collection of personal narratives so generously shared with me by nine GFC camper alumni. Through sharing past experiences and personal memories, current struggles and thoughts, and goals for their future as Jewish young adults, the participants in this study told their stories. They gave me permission, and the honor, to listen to them tell these

stories—I wonder if they know that they are storytellers. It was my duty to them to (re)present their narratives in a manner that would accurately portray not only their exact words at times, but also the deeper meanings behind those words. I can only hope that I was able to do them this service, and accurately communicate their messages about who they were, who they are becoming, and who they could be.

Producing this thesis has allowed my mind to wander in many directions, especially considering how this project can lead to new avenues for future research. There remains a void to be filled in literature on residential Jewish summer camps and the presence of youth identity formation in such a setting. There are numerous scholarly works in both arenas, but only a handful merging the two together in an interdisciplinary and exploratory manner. Specifically in relation to this thesis and expanding its scope in future research, I believe it would add depth to this discourse if conversations with soon-to-be Avodahnikim were also included. In such a comparative study, it would be possible to investigate the differences between those who are preparing to participate in the Avodah program and those who just recently completed the program. More to the point, this proposed study could explore the motivations and pre-program perspectives of soon-to-be Avodahnikim juxtaposed an examination of how recent Avodahnikim describe their experience in the program after completion. Additionally, it would be worthwhile to consider how Jewish educational programming contributes to the process of Jewish youth identity formation in the summer camp setting, either solely at GFC or across URJ camps in North America. Better yet, I think it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study of youth identity formation at different faith-based summer

camps. Finally, more research should be conducted at residential Jewish summer camps in exploration of the sense of connection to Jewish heritage that campers feel while they are at camp.

Months ago, my vision for this thesis was monumentally different than what you are currently reading. True, only then was it in the beginning stages; or, so I thought. As it turns out, the beginning was a long time ago, and this thesis is only another beginning. It is the beginning of understanding how Jewish youth in a Jewish-based summer camp environment explore and become aware of who they are becoming. Charmé et al (2008) explain, “we must not only know ‘who we are,’ but ‘how we *become*.’” (127). Moreover, there is no end to “who we are.” Rather, “how we become” the next version of our self (“who we are” at any given time) is what contributes to our identity(ies). In other words, our selves are continuously developing, though likely not consistently. As such, it is the different paths taken and experiences encountered that nourish the definition of “who we are,” be that as an individual or a community. Greene Family Camp is a place where certain paths can be chosen and crossed, leading to the exploration and understanding of who we are becoming and how we are becoming that self. For this reason, it is a place dear to many and will continue to be for years to come.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

DIVISION OF RESEARCH
Office of Research Compliance



DATE: October 25, 2013

MEMORANDUM

TO: Cynthia Werner
TAMU - College Liberal Arts - Anthropology

FROM: Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: Initial Review

Protocol Number: IRB2013-0726

Title: Examining the Influence of URJ Greene Family Camp on the Jewish Identity of its Avodah Campers

Approval Date: 10/25/2013

Continuing Review Due: 10/15/2014

Expiration Date: 10/15/2014

Review type: Expedite

Documents Reviewed and Approved:

Title	Version Number	Version Date	Outcome
recruitment e-mail	Version 1.0	10/11/2013	Approved
sample interview questions	Version 1.0	10/11/2013	Approved
parental permission form	Version 1.0	10/11/2013	Approved
information sheet for under 18	Version 1.0	10/11/2013	Approved
information e-mail letter from loui dobin	Version 1.0	10/11/2013	Approved
Informed Consent Form	Version 1.0	10/11/2013	Approved

Comments: Documentation of Consent: Written Consent
Minor Risk assessment: not greater than minimal risk
Minor Assent from Some or All
Parental Permission: 2 parent signature

This research project has been approved. As principal investigator, you assume the following responsibilities

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed by the expiration date in order to continue with the research project. A Continuing Review application along with required documents must be submitted by the continuing review deadline. Failure to do so may result in processing delays, study termination, and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** Upon completion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Completion Report must be submitted to the IRB.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Unanticipated problems and adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-compliance:** Potential non-compliance, including deviations from protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an Amendment to the IRB for review. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented.

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<http://rcb.tamu.edu>

6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form or information sheet, you must use the IRB stamped approved version. Please log into iRIS to download your stamped approved version of the consenting instruments. If you are unable to locate the stamped version in iRIS, please contact the office.
7. **Audit:** Your protocol may be subject to audit by the Human Subjects Post Approval Monitor. During the life of the study please review and document study progress using the PI self-assessment found on the RCB website as a method of preparation for the potential audit. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate study records and making them available for inspection. Investigators are encouraged to request a pre-initiation site visit with the Post Approval Monitor. These visits are designed to help ensure that all necessary documents are approved and in order prior to initiating the study and to help investigators maintain compliance.
8. **Recruitment:** All approved recruitment materials will be stamped electronically by the HSPP staff and available for download from iRIS. These IRB-stamped approved documents from iRIS must be used for recruitment. For materials that are distributed to potential participants electronically and for which you can only feasibly use the approved text rather than the stamped document, the study's IRB Protocol number, approval date, and expiration dates must be included in the following format: TAMU IRB#20XX-XXXX Approved: XX/XX/XXXX Expiration Date: XX/XX/XXXX.

The Office of Research Compliance and Biosafety is conducting a brief survey for the purpose of programmatic enhancements. Click here to take survey or copy and paste in a browser

https://tamu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1CgOkLNU45QebvT

This electronic document provides notification of the review results by the Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

NOTE: This is the list of questions I had with me during every interview. Depending on the individual, some of these questions were not necessary to ask, and some questions that were asked are not included this original list.

Introduction and Participant's Background at GFC

- How many summers have you attended Greene Family Camp?
- Why did you decide to attend that first summer?
- Did you first attend with friends from your hometown?
- How did you hear about Greene Family Camp?
- Do you have siblings who have attended/still attend GFC?
- GFC first opened in 1976. Did your parents attend GFC when they were younger? Did they attend any overnight Jewish camp, if not GFC?
- Do you know the mission of GFC? If yes, can you share it with me? If not, what do you think it might be?

Participant's Sense of Identity/Belonging in Jewish Settings Outside of GFC

- Do you belong to a congregation in your hometown?
- What is the name of your congregation?
- Do you know how many families are members of your congregation? If not, do you know enough to make a ballpark guess?
- What kinds of congregation-wide events take place? Age-specific events?
- Can you describe an example of one of these events?
- Do you participate in these events? Why? (Why not?)
- Are there many young folks your age at your home congregation who attend GFC as well?
- Are you a member of NFTY-TOR⁴⁴ or BBYO⁴⁵? If so, why did you choose to join? If not, why not?

⁴⁴ This is the abbreviation for the Texas and Oklahoma region of the North American Federation of Temple Youth—NFTY-Texas and Oklahoma Region.

⁴⁵ This is an acronym for another Jewish youth group organization. It stands for B'nai Brith Youth Organization. Some Jewish youth are members of both NFTY and BBYO, while others choose one over the other.

- (If individual is a member of the above mentioned groups): How often do you attend events/kallot/conclaves/etc?
- (If individual is a member of these groups): Why do you attend these events? Can you describe a typical event for me?
- (If individual is a member of these groups): Does being an active member in this group contribute to your personal Jewish identity? If so, can you explain? If not, can you explain?
- (If individual is a member of these groups): Are there many young folks in this group who attend GFC as well?
- Do you attend a Jewish day school? If so, why? If not, do you wish you could attend a Jewish day school?
- (If individual attends a Jewish day school): Can you describe a typical day at a Jewish day school?
- (If individual attends a Jewish day school): Does attending a Jewish day school contribute to your personal Jewish identity? If so, can you explain? If not, can you explain?
- (If individual attends a Jewish day school): Are there many young folks your age at your Jewish day school who attend GFC as well?
- (If individual does not attend a Jewish day school): How many Jewish students are there at your high school? Do you know all of them?
- (If individual does not attend a Jewish day school) AND (If there is a small number of Jewish students at their public high school): Can you describe for me what it is like to be one of only a few Jewish students in your high school?
- (If individual does not attend a Jewish day school) AND (If there is a small number of Jewish students at their public high school): Can you describe for me how non-Jewish students treat you and the other Jewish students? Give me an example of this treatment/behavior.
- (If individual does not attend a Jewish day school) AND (If this treatment of Jewish students is negative): How do you react to and cope with this behavior?
- (If individual does not attend a Jewish day school) AND (If this treatment of Jewish students is negative): When this sort of situation happens during the school year, do you find support and comfort from your friends who also attend GFC?

Participant's Typical Summer Experience at GFC Over the Year(s)

- Could you share with me a favorite activity/program/event/interaction/etc from your first summer at GFC?
- If you cannot remember that far back, what is a favorite activity/program/event/interaction/etc from all of your summers at GFC?
- What is a favorite activity/program/event/interaction/etc from your most recent summer at GFC?

- Why are these activities/programs/events/interactions/etc your favorite memories/moments at GFC? What makes these particular experiences stand out more than all of the others?
- Do you think that male and female campers experience camp differently? To what extent, and why/why not?
- Is there a particular GFC staff member who you view as a Jewish role model in your life—either just at camp or also when you're not at camp? If so, what is it about this person that sets them apart from the rest of staff as a role model?
- (If individual has a Jewish role model at camp): When you think of this GFC staff member and why they are your Jewish role model at camp, do you believe this person has a strong Jewish identity? Why/why not?
- (If individual has a Jewish role model at camp): Do you know if this role model attended GFC as a camper, too?
- When you are at camp in the summer, do you feel like a different person than when you are at home? Do you act differently?
- If so, why do you think that is?
- Do you view GFC as a safe place—or space—for you? For other campers?
- If so, what makes GFC a safe environment?
- Could you describe for me how you feel on the last day of the session and it's time for you to return home?
- How do you feel once you're home?
- Do you often think about your experiences at GFC throughout the year when you are not there?
- If so, why do you think that is?
- Would you say that GFC plays a big part in who you are as a Jew? As a Jew in North America? As a Reform Jew?
- Could you explain why?

Participant's Jewish Goals for the Future

- What are your plans for the near future?
- If college, are you applying to universities that have a strong Jewish community or Hillel?
- Do you plan to keep Judaism as a major part of your life once you've moved away from home? In what way?
- Does marrying a Jew matter to you? Why or why not?
- Do you attribute any of these personal decisions about Jewish way of life to your experiences at GFC? If yes, which decisions and why? If not, why not?

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

NOTE: These follow-up questions were sent via e-mail to all nine participants approximately three weeks after completion of the interviews. Only three participants replied with answers.

1) How do you self-identify? (Meaning, if you're meeting someone for the first time and they say to you, "So, tell me a little about yourself," what would you say? What about you do you think is important to share in your response to this person about things that describe you?)

2) Do you think you have multiple identities? (Not personalities.) Whether yes or no, please explain in detail.

3) Is it difficult for you to come up with answers to these questions about identity? Again, whether yes or no, please explain for me.

4) Do you think the continuity of the Jewish people is important? Why or why not?

5) Do you think that a Jewish place like Greene Family Camp will help in the continuity of the Jewish people? How so?

6) Do you think that there is heritage present at GFC? Or, is there something about GFC that makes it possible for you to become more aware of your individual heritage, or at least a desire to become more aware?

APPENDIX D

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPTS FOR POETIC TRANSCRIPTION

NOTE: The following transcript excerpts were selected for poetic transcription because the words and underlying messages from the participants in these segments were inspiring, meaningful, and heartfelt. The **yellow highlighted phrases/words** indicate the words that I used to curate all seven poetic transcriptions. The ~~striketroughs~~ are the segments that were filler phrases/words that the participants used, my questions, or pieces of their response that did not speak their message as clearly or profoundly as the highlighted words. The reader will notice that all of the highlighted phrases/words are located **ONLY** in the participant responses; none fall under places in the conversation when I was speaking. This is one of the guidelines for creating poetic transcriptions. The reader will also notice that no line designations are present. This is because I deemed it unnecessary for the purposes of this appendix. These excerpts are not meshed together from random places in each interview transcription. Instead, I selected one *intact* excerpt from these specific participants' interviews.

Tough Girl

Laura: I remember, like, this is...I think **it was the very first day, and it's not really something like important or anything, but I just remember my parents leaving and um our counselors like took me and all the other girls to go eat and then later that night we were eating again, and like everyone in my cabin was crying because they were missing their parents. And I, personally, like, was not homesick at all. And I was just like, "Why were people crying? Is there something wrong with me 'cause I don't, like, what's wrong?"** And **every night I would just remember I would look around at everyone like sniffing in their beds, and I was just like thinking, "What is wrong with me?"**

JD: (...) Were you just really excited to be at camp?

Laura: Um, yeah, **I guess I was really excited 'cause you know I'd seen the videos and a person had come to our temple, and um, I'd just kinda heard a lot about it. And, my mom and my grandma were like, "Oh, honey, you're gonna love it. You're gonna do this and do that."** So I was really excited **to experience everything.**

One in a Sea of Thousands

JD: Okay. So, if you could, can you describe for me what it's like being one of a few Jewish students in a sea of 3000 kids your age? I mean, what's that like?

Kim: It kind of sucks (*giggles*). In school, it's like feeling like you can't really relate to anybody. Like, 'cause the first night of Hanukkah, you're excited and get to go home and light candles but there's nobody to tell. It's just like, like when I wear my Cocoa-Cola shirt in Hebrew that I got from Israel, everyone's like what is that? What does that mean? Oh, it's Coca-Cola in Hebrew, when I went to Israel, I'm Jewish. Like...you just feel very, like, kind of unique (question mark) in a good way, but like you like talking about it but you have no one to relate to you. It's like the majority of the time. Like, I have a class with Rachel, and we're like "Passover tonightttt what's up"

JD: So, do you feel excluded at all? You know, talking about being able to relate to other high school students, do you feel excluded by not being able to share that kind of information, or worried about them not understanding?

Kim: Not necessarily excluded, but I feel more labeled than excluded.

JD: More labeled? Can you explain that?

Kim: Like, being Jewish....I go to Jewish events, I'm gone every weekend doing something "Jewish" and a lot of people say, "Yo, that's the Jew!" I don't think they mean it to be derogatory, but it's like people know me as "Jew." It's like a joke.

JD: As "Jew..." So, but you seem comfortable with sharing with people that you are Jewish and that you're definitely not ashamed of it, which I can tell because of how active you are. But does it bother you when they say, "Hey, Jew, what's up?" (...)

Kim: I get it sometimes.... to be honest like, the overall thing is I know they're kidding, I know they know I'm Jewish, it's kind of just like a playful "Ohhh Jew" like whatever. But um, when you really dig deeper, it's kind of like, "Oh, it kind of sounds derogatory," and it's kind of immature to call someone straight up Jew.

That Was the Summer

Brent: Like, the most definitive memory of like why I've always liked camp isn't a specific activity so much as the fact that for like a really long time I like wrestled with really bad insecurities 'cause I used to be like really overweight and stuff and I never like felt that at camp. I just didn't. It's like, really doing everything at camp was always better than doing anything at home and I just liked that.

...

Brent: I think that without camp I never would have come out of my shell. Um...a lot of why I had a shell in the first place was just really, really bad weight issues...and honestly, what was really cool about Kibbutz is that was the summer when I decided to get on it and lose weight and I did that at Kibbutz, um, and like a lot of people like knew that that's what I was trying to do so they were just really supportive and that was really nice. And then I guess the cool thing about camp...is...there's just so fewer things to feel bad about, I guess...and everyone's like...I just remember "R," specifically, is just someone who was always really cool to me even when I like knew no one, and I always thought that was really cool and now him and I are like super best buds.

Every Year Was My Favorite Year

Kate: There's just like this experience that you get from establishing relationships with other Jewish people in a Jewish context that I don't know, it makes something different about your relationships with other people. And um, I feel like camp is the best place I have to get that.

JD: So, um, I guess you can take this opportunity to tell me if there's anything else you want to share with me, something that you thought of...while we were talking, um, you're welcome to tell me now.

Kate: Um...I guess...Hm.....I don't know if this is important but, people always say that, um, like, each...each year that you have at camp is your favorite year...like, you think, "Oh, this is the best year!" But then you go again and you say, "No, this is the best year!" And I definitely think that's true. And I don't know what it is about it, but I do feel like every year I went I was like, "Oh, this is my favorite year." I definitely felt like that about Avodah.

* **Note:** For Kate's poem, the only rearranging I did was put this second block ahead of the first in the poem itself. This still abides by the poetic transcription guidelines because it does not reach from random places in the original transcript. It is clearly still in the same block of text.

Like a Camper, at Camp for the Very First Time

JD: Cool. Is there anything else that you want to share with me about your experience at camp or how it has shaped you or solidified things for you?

Kim: Um...i think one thing I wanted to add was being half a staff member (laughs) and also it being my first year, I think I got a whole different, almost a camper experience...this summer because I noticed myself being really amused with um, like, all the door signs and all of Maccabiah and all the activities we did like, I noticed myself getting really into everything and loving every moment, like, not even realizing how caught up I was getting in the magic of it. And everyone else was like, yeah they always do this. And being a staff member, yeah this is what happens. But for me it was more like I was a camper and camp is so magical, like how do they make everything happen? It was incredible overall (laughs).

At Home at Camp

Melissa: Um...I don't know. I just feel more at home at camp, and I feel more confident about myself. I don't know. I feel like I could be more friendly, more myself around these people than I can with the people at my school.

JD: What is it that helps you with your confidence at camp? Is it your surroundings, like the people or the environment or the mission of camp?

Melissa: Um, I think it's mostly the environment, um...I know that everyone is Jewish there so I can talk to them about anything without them having to ask a million questions about it. Also, the fact that you live with them, um, the more time I spend with people the more confident I get and comfortable.

Keeping Judaism Alive in College—Frat Style

JD: Well good luck! Okay, so considering to be in a Jewish fraternity is that how you plan on keeping Judaism alive for you in college, or do you think you'll go to high holiday services at Hillel with some friends?

John: I mean, like, if I don't do that, I could very easily see myself like outside of camp just getting caught up in college and like not being Jewish at all you know. And I always kinda assumed that's what would happen until like recently, or, really, this summer. Yeah, I never like...Jewish fraternity never really crossed my mind, and I thought about joining a fraternity but I didn't really know anything about it yet 'cause I didn't know anybody in it, but then like at camp, like half of them are Sammys you know, so like I

and S and all them and like now I hang out with them, like this past weekend actually. I've seen the Sammy house and everything and I've been to the AEPi house, so...

JD: It's a whole new world.

John: Yeah, it's new.

I Don't Know

JD: Do you plan to keep Judaism as a major part of your life once you've moved away from home?

Elizabeth: Um, I thought about it. It really depends on where I go. Um, some Jewish aspects will definitely remain a big part of my life. Will it be as big as it is this year? I don't know.