

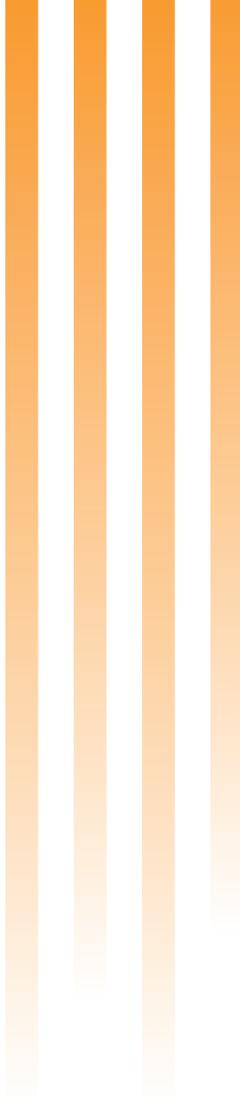


Jewish feelings, Jewish practice?

Children of Jewish intermarriage in the Netherlands

Barbara Tanenbaum / Riki Kooyman

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Table of Contents

page	
4	Prologue
8	Executive Summary
11	Introduction
12	Research Methodology
13	1. Identity
13	1.1 Jewish identity
14	1.2 Jewish feelings and Jewish practice
15	1.3 Defining moments
17	1.4 Downplaying Jewish ties
18	2. Areas of Jewish connection
18	2.1 Social and cultural
20	2.2 Religious and traditional
22	2.3 Israel
25	2.4 Living with the Memory of the Shoah
29	2.5 Antisemitism
30	3. Specific themes
30	3.1 Family relations
35	3.2 Influence of Jewish father, Jewish mother, Jewish grandparent
37	3.3 Choice or ancestry
38	4. Jewish community
38	4.1 Relationship with the Jewish community
39	4.2 Opinions about the Jewish community
41	Conclusion
42	Policy recommendations

Prologue

From Threat to Challenge?

Classic anthropology teaches that every human group creates its own rules concerning marriage and reproduction. These “structures of kinship,” to use a term coined by the famous anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, constitute powerful social tools that regulate the way a group ensures its continuity and ultimately sets the boundaries of belonging. Jews are no exception to this. Over time, a series of religious rules came to regulate conversions, membership criteria and Jewish status of the intermarried offspring. Among them, the mandate to in-marry and matrilineal descent as criteria of belonging seem to have become two of the strongest regulations in the religious realm. Yet, biblical sources provide a series of contradictory and ambivalent messages regarding intermarriage, proving that the issue remained in a grey zone for a long time. In fact, the ban on intermarriage seems to have been consolidated during the time of Ezra, around the year 444 BCE. Biblical sources tell us that at the time taking a foreign women as a spouse was a widely extended practice, not only among ordinary people, but also among the highest dignitaries of the Jewish people: “...the hand of the princes and rulers hath been first in this faithlessness” (Ezra 9:2). Appalled by this situation, Ezra prayed, “weeping and casting himself down before the house of G-d,” until, so the narration goes, “a very great congregation of men and women” approached him, and, while repentant of their actions, took the radical and dramatic decision of expelling all the non-Jewish women married to Jewish men along with their sons and daughters. “And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra: ‘We have broken faith with our G-d, and have married foreign women of the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our G-d to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of HaShem, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our G-d; and let it be done according to the law.’” (Ezra 10: 2-3).¹

Yet, biblical considerations aside, anthropology holds that in every human group there are usually gaps between social regulations and everyday practice. Today, mixed marriages rank at the top of communal anxieties and are regularly pointed to as one of the major threats to Jewish life in many community surveys. Jewish leaders and religious authorities consider marriage outside the ethno-religious group as a way towards assimilation (it is, in fact, already a manifestation of it) and, therefore, a factor that endangers the continuity of Jewish life as such. In effect, until not so long ago, intermarriage was a way to “leave” the community and to “repudiate” Judaism. Someone who married with a non-Jew was making, so to speak, a strong statement towards his or her relationship with Judaism. However, this strong link between intermarriage and disengagement tend today to be less self-evident. More and more research indicates that intermarriage does not equate to assimilation nor do the children of mixed couples grow uninterested in Judaism.

In the US this community preoccupation has been coupled with the interest of the social sciences regarding this phenomenon, giving place to interesting literature on the subject.

¹ I am grateful to Rabbi Yerahmiel Barylka for pointing out to me these and other passages of the Bible concerning the issue of intermarriage

Much less has been done in Europe. With the series of studies that JDC International Centre for Community Development (JDC-ICCD) has conducted in France, Germany and The Netherlands, we intend to fill this gap and to make a contribution to this subject. The premises of the studies were the following. Firstly, we were interested in exploring one of the actors that is becoming increasingly important in this issue: the children of mixed couples. Whereas there is already quite a significant bibliography focusing on the experiences of intermarried couples, less attention has been paid to this group. Secondly, we strongly believed that one of the most fruitful scientific approaches that we could adopt was to lend an ear to the children of mixed couples and to try to understand their motivations, anxieties and the emotional bond with their identities. Thirdly, it is within the context of their own cities, countries and communities and the particular type of Jewish institutional life developed, among others, where we should try to understand and contextualize their everyday lives. Last but not least, these research endeavors should serve to inform communal practice.

The following pieces of research reflect these premises. They were done by three different local research teams that worked under the close supervision of and in constant dialogue with the JDC-ICCD. Each of the reports, written in different styles and therefore reflecting the reality of each country, represent the final product of a long process of fieldwork and analysis. They can be read as a whole or on a country-by-country basis.

In spite of their local differences, one of the most important common findings of these studies is that they suggest that the road to “assimilation” is not as linear and inevitable as it was thought to be; that the children of mixed couples never quite disconnect from Judaism, much on the contrary, Judaism is widely recognized to be an element of their identity. A second important finding is the capital role that the families and the Jewish institutions play in the formation of a positive Jewish identity among the children of intermarriage. Those who grow up in a Jewish household or who have been affiliated with Jewish institutions tend to develop stronger Jewish identities. Last but not least, far from being a “passive” population, most of the interviewees that want to be connected to Judaism show a very active attitude towards the search for a suitable Jewish environment, one that can assure them both legitimacy and acceptance. Obviously, it must be recognized that things are far from being transparent and clear-cut. As the German report duly emphasizes, the way this population deals with its (Jewish) identity is not so different than the rest of society: it is a highly selective and individual practice, multi-identitarian, in other words, post-modern.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that many of the cases analyzed in these texts lie at the crossroads of two large-scale sociological phenomena with respect to Jewish life during the 20th and 21st centuries; on one hand, growing mass secularization and the integration of Jews in western countries and, on the other hand, the reassessment and recomposition of identity, aiming at “returning to,” “reassessing,” or “rediscovering” a type of Jewish awareness. If the first phenomenon, which began at the end of the 18th century, implied the emergence of a wide variety of forms of secularization that affected the traditional Jewish identity and led to social integration and assimilation, the second phenomenon is associated with late modernity and has been characterized as a “recomposition in terms of belonging and Jewish identity,” not under the traditional forms of intergenerational transmission, but as “individual, selective, multiple and non-exclusive” choices.²

This is why we believe that from a communal perspective the issue of mixed-marriages and, especially, that of the children of mixed couples, should be taken with a more thoughtful attitude. In what degree can and should Jewish institutions (congregations, cultural

² Régine Azria (2006), “Réidentification communautaire du judaïsme”, in Davie, Grace and Daniëlle Hervieu –Léger, *Identités religieuses en Europe*, Paris: La Découverte, pp. 266-267.

centers, Jewish schools and other Jewish spaces) play a role *vis-à-vis* this population? How should these instances react when someone with one Jewish parent reclaims for him or herself a Jewish identity?

In times when the boundaries of Judaism are becoming more and more contested whether from a gender perspective or from a so-called post-denominational perspective; where there are people who declare being “Jews without religion”³; when Jewish observance is becoming a more private, individual, and selective, is it not the time to start thinking about mixed marriages and their offspring as a challenge rather than as a threat?

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³ See A Portrait of Jewish Americans. Findings from Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews, October 2013.



Painting “My view on being Jewish” (2012) by Elja Polak, a child of intermarriage

Explanation by Elja Polak: ‘Judaism to me consists of two parts: the religious side and the feeling of coming home, culturally. The religion is visualized in the top part of the painting: dark and dangerous. This side of Judaism is entwined with the family that was lost in the Holocaust. There are, however, cracks in this dark side that represent hope. The colorful bottom of the painting represents strength, cheerfulness and beauty. My favorite musical instrument -the violin- is the voice of the Jewish people and touches me every time I hear it. The menorah is upside down as a traditional symbol of Judaism, because being Jewish to me is a feeling of coming home, culturally. The box that is open is where my grandmother kept all her War memories. She showed it to my sister and me once for less than 5 minutes. It made such a huge impression on me that I tried to capture that image. As you can see, an enormous power and energy flows from here that conquers all the danger. To be Jewish is to feel Jewish. And that is very powerful.’

Executive summary

Intermarriage within the Dutch Jewish community is on the rise. The numbers speak for themselves: out of the 52,000 Jews residing in the Netherlands 25% just have a Jewish mother and 30% a Jewish father. This ongoing trend is shaping the future of Dutch Jewry as not only it affects demographics but it also, in all likelihood, influences the community's very character in light of the fact that Jews with one parent relate to Judaism in entirely different ways.

Relevance

- Topics related to children of Jewish intermarriage are insufficiently researched in the Netherlands. The lack of thorough research prevents us from understanding what is at stake and as a result one runs the risk of seeing children of Jewish intermarriage completely drift away from the community.

Background

- This study is about the children of Jewish intermarriage in the Netherlands. To that end, we examined the Jewish identity of all participants, focusing on how they both connect and relate to Judaism as well as trying to understand the role and influence of their childhood and their Jewish parent in shaping their identities.
- 50 in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals between the ages of 20 and 40 who have one Jewish parent and have different levels of community involvement.
- The purpose of this qualitative study is two-fold: first, it will seek to better comprehend the Jewish identity of children of mixed marriages; secondly, it will utilize the new light shed on this matter as a basis to formulate policy recommendations to Dutch Jewish organizations.

Main conclusions

- All respondents identify with Judaism in some way. How people connect to Judaism varies from person to person. Most people feel Jewish although their level of Judaism depends on their personal situation. There is a small group that feels Jewish in every situation and another group that only has a minimal connection to Judaism (mostly holding on to memories of the Shoah passed on by their parents and grandparents).
- The fact that a large group of participants identifies with Judaism does not mean that they act upon it. Many individuals feel (strongly) connected to Judaism but do not practice Judaism in their daily lives. In other terms, their Jewish feelings do not correspond to their Jewish practice.
- Some have experienced what they recall as a 'defining moment': a specific moment in their lives that sparked a substantial change in Jewish practice with regards to their Jewish identity.
- Israel is another important area of Jewish connection. This holds true for those who have an Israeli parent, as well as for others, especially those who visited Israel. The participants feel connected to the country and as a result begin to incorporate Israel as part of their Jewish identity.
- The memory of the Shoah plays a very important role when it comes to how respondents relate to Judaism. A majority of participants belong to the so-called 'third generation', having grandparents who were born before or during the Second World War. There is

a substantial group for whom the Shoah represents the only connection to Judaism.

- Maintaining social ties with other members of the community generally constitutes an important component in the participants' lives. Nevertheless, participants expressed how certain situations or being in the presence of specific groups could cause them to cast doubts on their Jewish identity. Meanwhile, Jewish culture, including books, music and museums are perceived as valuable aspects of Judaism. This can be explained by the fact that, being informal and subjective, Jewish culture is perceived to be more accessible than religion. Although not everyone was found to be involved in Jewish culture, many seek to include Jewish culture in their lives.
- We also explored other themes that shape Jewish identity. It was found that upbringing played a major role. This was especially true for respondents with a Jewish mother who were brought up Jewish. They were more likely to remain involved in Judaism later on in their lives. For some, their relationship with their grandparents played a role as well, both with regard to the Shoah and when celebrating the Jewish holidays.
- Having a Jewish partner undeniably represents a positive influence on the Jewish identity of respondents. All respondents with children say they will seek to pass on their Jewish heritage as well as share their family's experience during WWII.
- Many differences exist between respondents who have a Jewish father and respondents who have a Jewish mother. The main reason for this is the fact that people with a Jewish mother regard themselves as Jewish and are regarded as Jewish by the Jewish community. Even if they do not practice or feel Jewish, they do accept that they are in effect Jewish and are conscious of the fact that if they eventually decide to become more active in the community they will encounter no restrictions. In contrast, those with a Jewish father tend to develop a more complex Jewish identity. Many hold a connection to Judaism, but are not regarded as Jewish by others. Many of them have experienced rejection at at least one point in their lives either from Jewish associations, members of the Jewish community and sometimes even from members of their very own family.
- The relationship with the Jewish community is generally speaking complex and problematic. A small group of respondents is actively involved, but most people are not. People with a Jewish father feel excluded, while people with a Jewish mother have a choice whether or not to participate. Even though informal spaces exist where people can feel comfortable about their Jewish identity, these spaces are limited and tend to be hard to find for those outside the Jewish community.

Respondents' opinion of the Jewish community

- Many respondents, both with a Jewish father and a Jewish mother, mention how unwelcoming and closed off the Jewish community seems to be, especially towards those who have a Jewish father, but also for newcomers in general.

Policy recommendations

- Welcome new members into the community; be open and inclusive to all people with a Jewish background who express a slight or substantial interest, but especially to those with a Jewish father. Invite people in and strive to make them feel welcome and accepted. There are many people who are potentially interested in non-religious activities but for whom the threshold to join is very high due to negative experiences within the Jewish community.



- As a Jewish upbringing greatly influences the development of a Jewish identity, special attention should be paid to the children. Find ways in which children can become involved in community life. The number of options and opportunities should be widened for children who do not have a Jewish mother in order for them to become familiar with Jewish traditions at a young age.

Introduction

An increasing number of people within the Dutch Jewish community are born into mixed marriage families. This has been a historical trend since the 1930s in the Netherlands, which has most likely been emboldened by two separate factors: a relatively low level of antisemitism coupled with the integration of Jews into mainstream society. By 1940, of the 156,000 persons with at least one Jewish parent 9,000 married a non-Jew and 15,000 children were born into a mixed marriage family. The persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands led to a completely different situation in 1946: children of mixed marriage and Jews in a mixed marriage (in total ca 23,000 persons) constituted 46% of the 30,000 Jews who had survived and lived in the Netherlands¹.

In 2009, people with two Jewish parents accounted for 45% while 25% only had a Jewish mother and 30% a Jewish father. Differences between children who have two Jewish parents and those who solely have a Jewish mother or a Jewish father are significant². Along with having a Jewish partner and Jewish schooling, this dichotomy accounts by far as the single most important factor that influences how and to which extent individuals relate to Judaism. Those who have two Jewish parents identify most intensely with Judaism while those who only have a Jewish father tend to identify most feebly with Judaism (their ties are, to a greater degree, determined by memories of the Shoah and antisemitism). The way children who have a Jewish mother relate to Judaism stands somewhere in between these two extremes.

Since the Second World War, someone with two Jewish parents had a better chance (ca 50%) of finding a Jewish partner whereas those with only one Jewish parent had a smaller chance (ca 20%). These results were illustrated in a representative sample from the 2009 Demographic study of the Jews in the Netherlands:

52% of respondents' fathers had a Jewish partner

44% of respondents had a Jewish partner

26% of respondents' children had a Jewish partner

15% of the respondents' grandchildren had a Jewish partner.

The data above shows that the intermarriage rate has risen significantly with each generation. The rate increases even more quickly when people only have one Jewish parent. One must bear in mind that a non-Jewish partners' influence with regards to Judaism is not by definition negative. Notwithstanding the lack of acceptance for children with solely a Jewish father, it is shown that 30% of non-Jewish partners encourage their partner to increase their level of Jewish involvement.

Research data on Dutch Jewry supports the view that a "positive" connection to Judaism, in terms of religion and tradition, community involvement, acceptance of cultural heritage and ties to Israel, is strongest for those with two Jewish parents and weakest for those with just a Jewish father³. Meanwhile, people with a Jewish mother stand somewhere in between. On the contrary, when one looks at the "negative" connection to Judaism (i.e. mainly relating to Judaism through memories of the Shoah and during resurgences of antisemitism), those with solely a Jewish mother or Jewish father have an equally strong or even stronger connection to Judaism than those with two Jewish parents.

¹ E. van Imhoff e.a., *Schatting individuele verdeling Joodse tegoeden*, Den Haag, 2001.

² Hanna van Solinge e.a. *De Joden in Nederland anno 2000*, Amsterdam, 2001; Hanna van Solinge e.a., *De Joden in Nederland anno 2009*, Amsterdam, 2010.

³ Ibid..

Research Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study is two-fold: first, it will seek to better comprehend the Jewish identity of children of mixed marriages; secondly, it will attempt to formulate policy recommendations for Dutch Jewish organizations. In terms of research population, the goal was to find 50 people with one Jewish parent (Jewish mother or Jewish father) between the ages of 20 and 40, with both strong and weak levels of community involvement.

The Netherlands Institute for Demographic Research sent out 109 letters to those born after 1960 with a Jewish father (59) or mother (50), who participated in the Demographic Study of the Jews in the Netherlands in 1999. 32 people responded positively (response rate of 34%). Out of 32 positive responses, 18 participants were selected from this representative sample. After receiving the responses, it turned out that people with one Jewish grandparent were also included in the 109 letters, because it was not possible to distinguish between these groups. In total, 12 people with one Jewish grandparent responded. This was the entire population that participated in the Demographic Study in 1999. This is extraordinary since normally these types of studies have a bias towards people who more strongly identify with Judaism. We chose to include a sample of 7 people with one Jewish grandparent to better reflect the reality of mixed marriages in the Netherlands. Some of the participants with a Jewish grandparent were keen on expressing the joy they felt as a result of contributing to research related to the Jewish community as this study might represent a way of acknowledging their Jewish identity.

Since it was not possible to attain 50 participants from the representative sample, 32 participants were found through the snowball sampling method. The researchers searched within their own network of friends, acquaintances, (former) colleagues and social media, such as Facebook, and diversified their pool of research to find a variety of people with both strong and weak ties to Judaism. This was difficult for the reason being that their sense of Jewish identity was often only made known during the interview.

Of the total number of participants, 23 had a Jewish mother, 20 a Jewish father, and 7 one Jewish grandparent. We also included 8 participants with one Israeli parent since the percentage of Israelis in the Netherlands is quite high (ca 20% of the Jewish population). Therefore, it was important to include this group in the sample.

When all 50 participants were summoned, Riki Kooyman and Barbara Tanenbaum conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Kooyman interviewed 30 participants all over the Netherlands and Tanenbaum interviewed 20 participants in the Amsterdam area. On average, the interviews lasted 2 hours.

Two biases can be identified in this study. First, only people interested in the topic generally participate. Concerning the people with a Jewish grandfather: they apparently felt recognized as part of the Jewish community. The second bias was seen as a result of the researchers' position. Both Kooyman and Tanenbaum made appointments as staff members of JMW (Jewish Social Services). Coming from a Jewish organization, the interviews were most likely biased towards the Jewish aspects in the participants' lives.

Finally, the research process turned out to be eventful. Throughout the interviews, a great deal happened to the participants. A few became emotional while talking about their Jewish father.

1. Identity

Identity is usually not fixed, but a flexible state of being that changes over time. Judaism can be part of someone's identity along with other forms of identity. Those different parts overlap and the matter of importance can differ from time to time and from situation to situation. For many children of intermarriage, Judaism is a process in which they grow and that changes over the years. Identity formation is connected to factors like parents and upbringing, the social environment, and the Shoah. There are certain moments in life that enhance or speed up a certain direction, such as the death of a parent or grandparent or a birthright trip to Israel. We will discuss this specific topic later on in the section "defining moments."

In this chapter, we will explore the ways in which the children of Jewish intermarriage identify themselves and we will look at various patterns in their lives. We want to begin by emphasizing the uniqueness of everyone's personal story and history. Consequently, the way people identify with Judaism is complex and greatly varies. Jewish identification is related to factors such as the birth country of parents, Jewish law and matrilineal descent, societal pressure, the experience and memory built around the trauma of the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands and the Shoah. Though there are many variations, there are also similarities.

1.1 Jewish identity

One of the major findings in this study is the large group of participants that identify with Judaism. There is not a single person in this study who does not connect to Judaism at all. Whether this connection is practical or emotional, social or religious, it plays a role in their Jewish identification.

When looking at how the participants identify themselves, there are three main groups that can be identified. The first group consists of people for whom Jewish identification is more or less constant throughout their (daily) life. For the second group, their Jewish identification depends on the situation or moments in their lives. And the people in the third group do not identify as Jewish, but do maintain a connection to Judaism.

1.1.1 Being Jewish and feeling Jewish

The first group regards itself as Jewish and feels Jewish in everyday life. They have a strong connection to Judaism. This connection does not change in different situations. All people in this group have a Jewish mother. All the people in the study with an Israeli mother are in this group as well.

Orli (28, Israeli mother) describes herself as follows:

'There are no situations in which I don't see myself as Jewish. I am Jewish.'

For Orli, religion does not play a role in her life, nor is she connected to the Jewish community, but this does not make her feel less Jewish. This Jewish feeling is always present.

1.1.2 Feeling Jewish, but....

The second group of children of intermarriage feels Jewish, but at the same time there is something holding them back. They feel that they cannot say 'I am Jewish' because they don't consider themselves 'real Jews' or 'fully Jewish'. A 'real Jew' is perceived to be someone who is religiously observant, raised Jewish, has a lot of knowledge about Judaism and most of all has a Jewish mother.

A majority in this group has a Jewish father, and because of the rule of matrilineal descent, regarding themselves as Jewish becomes problematic. They do, however, feel Jewish and maintain a strong connection to Judaism.

Linda (34, Jewish father) is a good example:

'It's difficult. I am not fully Jewish (because my mother isn't Jewish). I can't really say I'm Jewish without blinking because I can't say something that isn't true. But I do feel Jewish. At the same time, I can't say I'm not Jewish because I look Jewish and I feel Jewish and I went to Sunday school for many years. I know too much about it to be non-Jewish. It's very difficult for me.'

The people with a Jewish mother in this group do regard themselves as Jewish but feeling Jewish depends on the situation or on other factors, like whether they look Jewish or were raised Jewish.

John (41, Jewish mother) explains how he feels about it:

'My Jewish identity is not very secure because I wasn't raised Jewish. I feel a misplaced outsider because I need to explain my Jewish background to people. I always feel that people think that I am not a Jew. I always feel the need to defend myself: yes, I am Jewish, even though I don't have a Jewish name or a typical Jewish face.'

1.1.3 Not feeling Jewish, but feeling a connection to Judaism

The third group of participants does not consider itself Jewish, does not feel Jewish, but nevertheless does feel as though they have a connection to Judaism. This third group is rather small and consists of people with a Jewish father or grandmother/grandfather (maternal or paternal). There is no Judaism in their daily lives, apart from having a Jewish name or an emotional bond to the family history during the Shoah.

Francine (35, Jewish father) explains:

'I do not feel Jewish. I consider myself a working mother from Amsterdam. I do feel a connection to Judaism though. My Jewish background is completely entwined with my family's War history and this connection becomes stronger around May 4th (remembrance day). Only then do I realize where my roots lie.'

Being Jewish, feeling Jewish or having a connection to Judaism are the major variations within this group. The first group consists of people with a Jewish mother, the second group consists of people with either a Jewish mother or a Jewish father and the third group consists of people with a Jewish father or Jewish grandparent.

1.2 Jewish feelings, Jewish practice

We have just seen that the majority of people in our study feel strongly connected to Judaism. Interestingly enough, their feelings do not correspond to their actions. Most people do not practise Judaism on a daily basis. Their feeling of being Jewish stems from a connection to their family, through the memory of the Shoah; they feel a connection to Israel, but at the same time Judaism is definitely not a part of their daily lives. They are not involved in the Jewish community; they are not members of religious or social organizations; they are not part of a predominantly Jewish environment.

There is a group of people, however, that wishes to participate more given that they had more time or were shown the way in. They are genuinely interested in Jewish culture or cultural events or in social activities. This group of people mainly consists of people with a Jewish father or Jewish grandparent.

The group of respondents that is active in Judaism is rather small (12 people). They are active because they are active members of the synagogue or leaders in Jewish youth clubs; they have extensive knowledge of Judaism; they keep the Jewish calendar and celebrate the Jewish holidays; they have Jewish friends; they eat kosher style and some have a Jewish partner. There is an interesting division between those with a Jewish mother and those with a Jewish father. The people with a Jewish mother have always been active in Judaism: they were raised Jewish, while the people with a Jewish father have become active later on in life and found their own way into practicing Judaism.

The substantial difference between feeling Jewish and not practicing Judaism was expressed by Kim (24, Jewish paternal grandmother):

'If you look at what I do, I would give myself a 2 out of 10, because I hardly do anything. But if you look at how I feel, and how I think about Judaism and how I experience my way of being Jewish then I would grade myself with a 6 or 7.'

As seen, there is a large difference between feeling Jewish and acting Jewish. This balance, however, can change throughout someone's life.

In the next section we will discuss these "defining moments" in the lives of the participants.

1.3 Defining moments

For almost a third of our respondents, a specific moment in their lives can be identified that caused a significant change in their Jewish identity. This moment resulted in an increase and only in a few cases in a decrease in Jewish feeling or involvement. We shall refer to these moments as "defining moments."

A distinction can be made between "positive" and "negative" defining moments. This is not meant in a normative way. In our case, "positive" means an increase and "negative" means a decrease in Jewish involvement or feeling. The positive defining moments can be divided in two types: trips to Israel and other Jewish-related places, and the social environment. The negative defining moments are mainly characterized by rejection or negative experiences from the Jewish community. Needless to say, defining moments are always related to someone's personal history. Nevertheless, it was possible to pinpoint such defining moments for many of the respondents.

These moments do not necessarily result in a lasting situation, however. As time passes by the situation can change again. In those cases, defining moments can be regarded as a moment within the process of identity formation. Furthermore, one person can experience several defining moments, whereas others have not experienced any moments in their lives at all. Those respondents either have a "stable" identity, or their identity is being formed gradually in a long-term process.

1.3.1 "Positive" defining moments

Trip to Israel or Jewish-related places

For a number of respondents, a trip to Israel (and in a few cases a trip to another Jewish-related place such as Auschwitz) made them more involved in Judaism, both in terms of feeling and practice, whereas prior to their trip they were not involved in Judaism. This was usually the case for organized trips such as birthrights trips; trips organized by the

Jewish youth organization Habonim, or a program from the Dutch Jewish Auschwitz Association. Also, this defining moment usually took place between the age of 18 and 25 (although in some cases later on).

For Noah (29, Jewish father), a birthright trip to Israel was an eye opener:

'Ever since I went to Israel on a birthright trip everything fell into place. Talking to the people on my trip, who all went to Jewish schools and could explain Jewish issues on my level, was an eye opener to me. I befriended these people quicker and our connection was more intense than the people I have known for years from my hometown. We all have the same background.'

After the trip, Noah became very active in the organized Jewish community; this was the case for a few other respondents as well.

For some other respondents, the trip to Israel made them feel more Jewish. As Kim (24, Jewish paternal grandmother) explains:

'The connection to Judaism only came after I went to Israel. I never felt like I belonged anywhere. I was never part of a club or group and in Israel I felt as if I belonged there.'

Social environment: family, friends and work

Other positive defining moments occurred within the respondent's social environment: around family, friends or in their jobs. First we will mention the family. Having a Jewish partner led to a greater involvement in Judaism through for example the celebration of Jewish holidays (see chapter "Family relations" as well).

Els (29, Jewish mother) experienced several positive turning points in her life:

'I started to look for my Jewish identity after a trip to Auschwitz, but another major turning point was when I started my relationship with my current boyfriend, an orthodox Jewish guy. He keeps kosher and observes all the holidays and I like to go along with this.'

Furthermore, some respondents took the initiative to become more involved in Judaism during their childhood, and took the family along on this journey.

Mark (23, Jewish maternal grandmother), decided to celebrate Rosh Hashana after he saw a show about it on television:

'I saw something about the Jewish New Year and it drew my attention. It was my initiative to celebrate it with my family and now we celebrate it every year. I want it to become a tradition, as an homage to Judaism.'

In addition, some defining moments occurred outside of the family context, such as at work, at school or around friends. Working at a Jewish organization, attending a Jewish school or having Jewish friends led to a significant increase in Jewish feeling or involvement.

Jonas (34, Jewish father) explains how his involvement in Judaism changed after he started working at a Jewish organization:

'Now that I work at this organization, I'm more oriented towards Judaism in my personal life. I started reading the NIW (Dutch Jewish weekly). I go to the Jewish Historical Museum. I'm better informed about what's going on in the Dutch Jewish community. I have to be informed for my job, but I'm also interested in it personally.'

1.3.2 “Negative” defining moments

Negative defining moments can be described as moments or events in someone’s life that led to a decrease in Jewish feeling or involvement. These negative defining moments did not occur as often as positive defining moments. A decrease in Jewish involvement is often a process and the result of a combination of (negative) experiences.

Nevertheless, some respondents did experience a negative defining moment. Whereas before they were somehow involved in Judaism, it decreased once the negative defining moment occurred. Two types of negative defining moments can be distinguished. The first type is a decrease in Jewish involvement after rejection or a negative experience from the Jewish community. This applies mainly to individuals with a Jewish father.

As Maaïke (34, Jewish father) explains:

‘I’m done with Judaism and the Jewish community, because they don’t accept me and I don’t feel welcome. It’s such a pity, since I feel Jewish, I have a strong bond to Judaism and was enthusiastic to organize all kinds of activities and I was active in the community. And still I’m not welcome. Yes, that’s hard for me.’

Second, a sudden decrease in Jewish involvement can be triggered by certain life events such as moving to another country or the death of a family member. Some respondents’ main connection to Judaism was the celebration of the Jewish holidays with their grandparents. However, when these grandparents pass away, the celebration of these holidays comes to an end.

As Anne (26, Jewish father) explains:

‘After my grandmother passed away, I celebrated Pesach twice at my aunt’s. But those were the last times I celebrated it. I didn’t like it as much as with my grandmother.’

1.4 Downplaying Jewish ties

Not only is there a great distinction between feeling Jewish and acting Jewish, and not only do defining moments in people’s lives characterize their personal history and affect their feeling or involvement concerning Judaism, there is also a fair number of people who downplay the Jewish aspects in their lives. The participants mention that having Jewish friends is a coincidence; that they did not specifically look for Jewish friends. They explain how working for a Jewish organization is a coincidence; that they did not specifically look for a Jewish job. And they mention that having only Jewish boyfriends is a coincidence; that they just happened to just fall in love with only Jewish boys. What can be concluded is that they downplay all the Jewish choices they make in their lives. After taking a closer look, though, they realize that perhaps their choices are not completely arbitrary.

For example, Fay (33, Jewish mother) says:

‘During a conversation like this (the interview), I come to see that maybe I’m more Jewish than the identity that I labeled myself with. It doesn’t mean though that I feel Jewish or that I practice Judaism.’

Frances (21, Jewish mother) leads a very Jewish life. She feels Jewish and her daily life is filled with Judaism, but still she feels this is a coincidence:

‘In the end, I do lead an –unconsciously– Jewish life with all my Jewish flatmates and my Jewish friends in my daily life that every day I have to think about making kosher food, not for me, but for my friends. I say it’s doesn’t matter to me, but... and I always have Jewish boyfriends. It happens automatically. I make this choice unconsciously.’

In the end, they conclude that maybe the Jewish aspects in their lives are not so random as they thought. Maybe they connect well with other Jews because of their common background and shared history. Maybe their Jewish background does play a subconscious role in their lives but they do not come to realize this until they meet people who have the same background and history.

2. Areas of Jewish connection

As seen throughout the interviews, people view their Jewish identity in a wide range of ways. There is also a stark difference between feeling Jewish and practicing Judaism. Furthermore, the interviews also demonstrate that Jewish identification can grow stronger or weaker as a result of a defining moment. We will now look at the specific areas, which play an important role in the participants' connection to Judaism.

2.1 Social and cultural

Maintaining social ties, the feeling of belonging to the Jewish people and to other Jews is expressed as being an important connection to Judaism for many participants. There is a heightened sense of Jewish identity when the social group is Jewish. This is not always the case, however, especially for the participants whose Jewish identity depends on the situation. Some people feel a strong connection to other Jews, while for others it depends on the level of religiosity of the Jews in question. These people do not connect to orthodox Jews, while they do connect to the more secular Jews. This connection is about feelings of belonging, belonging to a larger group, whether it is with regards to other Jews all over the world or other Jews in your circle of friends. Linda appreciates being part of the Jewish people. She feels a strong connection to Jews all over the world.

Linda (34, Jewish father):

'I travel a lot for work, and wherever I am and people see my Magen David necklace, especially Americans, they say: Oh my God are you Jewish? And we start a conversation. That's great. I've never met anyone who said: you're Catholic, let's talk about it. It is a warm group that is connected all over the world. Wherever you're from, you got something in common with other Jews. That's very special.'

As mentioned, the type of connection is more complex. For some people meeting other Jews feels warm, like coming home. It feels like an instant connection, but for others it creates a distinct and uncomfortable feeling. While for others it is both a warm feeling and an uncomfortable feeling.

For Shira (30, Israeli father) it is both warm and uncomfortable:

'When I see other Jews, or when I hear Hebrew, I feel a connection. It's like coming home.'

But at the same time, she feels uncomfortable in a group of Jews:

'It's my own perception because my mother is not Jewish. At the same time I think: I'm a lot more Jewish than a Dutch Jew who's never been to Israel and who's not active in Judaism but who happens to have a Jewish mother. But I didn't make the rules.'

The way Jewish law (the Halacha) is perceived in the Netherlands is an important factor. We will come back to this in the section "Jewish father, Jewish mother and Jewish grandparent."

2.1.1 Friends

Apart from the feeling of belonging to the Jewish people, the participants also feel a strong connection to other Jews in their inner circle. Most participants have predominantly non-Jewish friends. Many have some Jewish friends. But there is also a small group of participants who predominantly have Jewish friends. The people in this group regard themselves as Jewish. They feel Jewish and are active members in the Jewish community. Their Jewish identity plays out more within their group of Jewish friends. One can conclude that people who are involved in Judaism also have a large circle of Jewish friends.

2.1.2 Social gatherings and social organizations

Other situations in which children of Jewish intermarriage identify more with Judaism are social gatherings and membership of social organizations. A fair amount of participants take part in social gatherings like *Limmud*, courses as *Crescas* (Jewish educational centre), *Habonim* (Youth Zionist organization) and *Monthly Minyan* (mixed group of individuals that celebrate shabbat together once a month). All these organizations are inclusive and open to anyone who has a Jewish background. Being in a Jewish environment like this heightens their sense of Jewishness. Most of these smaller initiatives are not well known among people who are not inside or active within the Jewish community. When they are on the periphery, like most of our participants are, they have never heard of these initiatives.

2.1.3 Professional connection

It's not just that Judaism plays a role in people's social lives; it can also play a role in their professional lives. There are also a fair number of people (12) who studied Hebrew studies or Jewish studies or work for a Jewish organization. Studying Hebrew or Jewish studies keeps the connection to Judaism during their college years, while working for a Jewish organization can deepen their connection to Judaism and influence their Jewish identity. There is a group of people that work in a (predominantly) Jewish field. For example, they work in the creative industry (movie or media), in (Jewish) cultural or welfare organizations or in a Jewish field in the academic world.

Jonas (34, Jewish father) is a social worker at a Jewish organization in Amsterdam. He has become more involved in Judaism since he started working at there.

'Now that I work here, I am more oriented towards Judaism in my personal life. I started reading the NIW. I go to the Jewish Historical Museum. If I go to a bookstore, my eye catches Jewish books. I'm better informed about what's going on in Dutch Jewish community. I have to be informed to inform my clients, but I'm also interested in it personally.'

2.1.4 Cultural connection

Besides having a social connection to Judaism, many people have a cultural connection. A cultural connection is informal, individual, has a low threshold and can take place in the private sphere. They do not have to become members of a group; they can pick and choose what they like. People like going to the Jewish Historical Museum, eating typical Jewish dishes. Many people keep kosher style. They enjoy Jewish cookbooks, books by Jewish authors or on Jewish themes; they watch Jewish movies or documentaries about the Shoah or visit the Jewish Film Festival; and they listen to Jewish music.

Rivka (25, Jewish mother) loves typical Jewish dishes:

'When my grandfather told me about the 'boterkoek' (buttercake, traditional Dutch-Jewish delicacy) his mother used to make and that he liked so much, I looked up the recipe and tried it out.'

As mentioned before, there is also a group of people (all having a Jewish father or Jewish grandparent) who would like to be more active in cultural activities, but do not have the time, or were never shown the way in. We shall discuss this in more detail in the section "Jewish father, Jewish mother, Jewish grandparent."

In conclusion, the social environment is an important factor in the lives of the children of intermarriage, but it can just as well create difficulties and feelings of uncertainty concerning their Jewish identity. Jewish culture, through Jewish books, music, movies, is informal and individualistic, but also easily accessible and thus it is a way to express their connection to Judaism.

2.2 Religious and traditional

One can have a long discussion as to whether Judaism is a religion or an ethnicity, but we have seen in this study that almost all people feel Jewish without being religious. Although most people are not religious, they are active in certain traditional aspects of Judaism, with for instance the celebration of Jewish holidays. In this section we will discuss the (lack of) religion and membership of religious institutions, certain traditions, as well as surname and "Jewish looks."

2.2.1 Religious connections

Most participants see Judaism as a religion, but hardly anyone is religious, thus identifying as a Jew becomes problematic to them. They would like to follow certain traditions, but their image of the religious tradition constitutes a barrier of entry. These are mostly people with a Jewish father.

Naomi (41, Jewish father) is not religious, although searching for a space where her Jewish feelings are in place:

'I'm looking for ways to integrate this (Judaism) into my life, but because I don't believe in God, it feels a bit silly. If I were to go to synagogue, it would be because I go for the symbols and the rituals but not because I want to be closer to God. It's a struggle. I do feel a strong connection to the War, but that's nothing but misery, so what's the bright side (of Judaism)?'

2.2.2 Membership of religious institutions

There are six people in this study who are members of a religious Jewish community. All six of them have a Jewish mother (except one man who is in the process of converting). If we compare this to the demographic study conducted in 1999 (where this group consists of 16% of the population), the percentage is slightly less, possibly due to the fact that the younger generation holds memberships less often.

Stefanie (25, Israeli mother) has been to the liberal Jewish synagogue but feels the community imposes certain traditions on her which she does not feel comfortable about:

'I would be afraid to say I eat pork in the liberal community but I feel I should be able to. I will be just as Jewish if I do (eat pork). I don't keep kosher because I think it's useless and pointless. It's an example of showing how much influence the Rabbi's have in Israel. I understand where it's from, in the past, and I think you should keep traditions, but I feel you should pick the traditions you want to keep.'

2.2.3 Connection to God

There are four people that more or less believe in God. Shira (30, Jewish father) does not believe in God, but she does believe in a higher being:

'I don't pray to God, but I do think there is someone there, a higher form. Maybe I should say: I believe in something but whether that's God... But I call him God. I see him as one person. Maybe it's because of the Christian school I went to. I believe people make choices and not God. He put us on this earth and told us: it's up to you now. You need to do it yourself. Everything that happens in this world are our choices; they're not God's choices.'

In the demographic study dating back to 1999, there was a question about whether or not the participants believe in God. The percentage of people that did not believe in God was much higher than the percentage of people in Dutch society as a whole. In other words, the majority of Jews did not believe in God. This study, although not representative, seems to confirm this trend.

2.2.4 The holidays

Even though most children of intermarriage are not religious, the majority still celebrates the Jewish holidays. Interestingly enough, most of these people have a Jewish mother. The Jewish holidays are celebrated much more often than the Christian holidays, about twice as much. They are mentioned even more than the Sinterklass (a Dutch holiday) and New Years.

Stefanie (25, Israeli mother) is very anti-religious, but she loves the tradition of the Jewish holidays:

'Holidays to me means coming together with family and I like what it stands for, like Rosh Ha' shana is the New Year and that you hope the New Year will be good one. And the Pesach story is a very nice story. I don't know why it's important. I don't know why I think the bible is important because I'm not religious. I just like the stories and it's part of me and because I've heard these stories my whole life.'

Sander (37, Jewish father) does not see himself as a Jew, but rather as someone with a Jewish background. Now that he has children, his Jewish feelings have become stronger and he wants to pass on some of the Jewish traditions:

'Pesach is about Moses and surviving the plagues. Celebrating Pesach had to do with my son. I had the feeling that I wanted to transmit that part to him. He was the first boy in the family that could pass on the paternal family name. Until then, I was the only one who could pass on the name. It felt as something very important to pass on that Jewish part and to continue the family line. That's how we started to celebrate Pesach. Everybody brought food and we read from the Hagaddah.' (Sander proudly shows the Hagaddah to the interviewer). Now they celebrate Pesach every year with the whole paternal family.

2.2.5 Keeping kosher style

Jewish food in general is important in the lives of the participants (not unlike other Jews), but interestingly enough there is a large group that actually keeps kosher style. Keeping kosher style is also an aspect of tradition, which ties the children of intermarriage to Judaism. Keeping kosher style can range from not eating pork to keeping milk and meat separate.

Leah (21, Jewish maternal grandmother):

'I don't eat pork. Once in a while I'll eat salami, but I think pigs are dirty animals. That's what my mother taught me: 'don't eat animals that in turn eat dead things, because it isn't kosher'. I don't eat shellfish either, although I'm also allergic to them.'

2.2.6 Surname connection

Although a surname is not a choice in the lives of the children of intermarriage, we found that it was an important connection to Judaism for those who have a Jewish father. Your last name is passed down to you from your father and grandfather and ties you into family history. A last name is also an external marker and can be both a positive and a negative connection to Judaism.

Naomi, for example, (42, Jewish father) is very attached to her Jewish last name:

'When I got married I never for a second thought about adopting my husband's name. My family history lies within my name. I also wanted my children to have a Jewish (first) name, even though when you look at the blood line, they're only a quarter Jewish.'

2.2.7 Jewish looks

Stereotypical Jewish appearance is also an external marker, which is mentioned by the participants in what makes them relate to Judaism. There is certainly nothing that can be regarded as a standard "Jewish looks" but some people refer to a stereotypical Jewish appearance. Some people see themselves as Jewish, which makes them feel more Jewish. For others, it's a connection to the Jewish people, because they feel part of the larger group.

Leah (21, Surinamese-Jewish mother):

'Sometimes when I look in the mirror, I think I look very Jewish.'

Noah (27, Jewish father) thinks people recognize him as a Jew, that he fits into the image of a Jew. When he went to Israel for the first time, it was an eye opener to him:

'It was easy, when I met other guys who were Jewish (on my birthright trip to Israel), they could have been my brothers. If I look at pictures... it's strange how much we look alike.'

2.3 Israel

Israel is another important area of Jewish connection. The extent to which Israel is part of one's Jewish identity ranges from people for whom Israel is the most important part of their identity, to people for whom Israel is just another country. We can distinguish three groups here. The first group consists of respondents with an Israeli parent. For a majority of them, Israel is the most important part of their Jewish identity. The second group consists of people who have a certain bond to Israel, ranging from a very strong bond to a weaker bond. The third group consists of respondents who do not have a connection to Israel. In addition to these groups, this section will take a closer look at the respondent's view on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The question that was raised was the following: do people who are very critical of Israel have a weaker bond to Israel and vice versa?

2.3.1 Strong bond

We interviewed 8 respondents with an Israeli parent. They can be distinguished as a group, because for most of them Israel is a major part of their Jewish identity. This is clearly illustrated by Judith (33, Israeli mother). Israel is a large part of her Jewish identity, because her roots are there:

'My bond to Judaism is largely linked to Israel. I've got family there, I speak Hebrew. For me it's more cultural and social than religious. I'm not religious.'

This group especially feels Jewish when they are "confronted" with Israel. As Orli (29, Israeli mother) points out:

'I feel Jewish when confronted with news or criticism on Israel. It's my country, it's the country I originate from and because I have an Israeli mother.'

Most respondents in this group have a strong connection to Judaism in general as well, but the majority has a Jewish mother, therefore we can't be sure whether this has to do with their Israeli background or the fact that their mother is Jewish.

2.3.2 Middle to strong bond

About half of the respondents have some connection to Israel, ranging from a middle bond to a very strong bond. More than half are respondents with a Jewish mother, less than half have a Jewish father. Remarkably, more than half of the respondents with a Jewish grandparent belong to this group as well. Most of these respondents visited Israel, and this seems to be an important point: visiting Israel often leads to a (stronger) connection to the country.

As Frances (21, Jewish mother) explains:

'Israel wasn't part of my identity when I was younger, but after I had been there many times, it became part of me.'

Trips to Israel can lead not only to a stronger connection to the country, but also to a significant change in Jewish feelings, as mentioned before. As Sander (37, Jewish father) explains:

'I'm a lot more involved in Israel since I visited the country. Both my connection to Israel and my connection to Judaism became significantly stronger after I visited the country. It is special to me that there is one place where all Jews can go to safely. I feel connected to Israel.'

For those with a strong connection to Israel, it is hard to describe what that bond to Israel is exactly. It is often a feeling of "coming home." Marleen (32, Jewish mother) tries to explain this feeling:

'It's hard to describe, it's a feeling. I always like to go there on vacation. I feel at home there, I love the country. Even though the mentality is harsh, I love to be there. It is more special to me than any other country.'

Another group of respondents has a connection to Israel, but not unconditionally: it can be characterized as a "middle bond". As Henk (39, Jewish mother) explains:

'I liked the country a lot, but I like the people less. I am proud of the State of Israel, but only to a certain extent. I feel ashamed of Israeli politics sometimes.'

Whereas most respondents are critical of Israeli politics, this is often not directly related to one's bond to Israel. Respondents with a strong bond are still very critical, as will be shown in the next section. However, for a group of respondents, the ambivalence of liking the country, on the one hand, and having difficulties with Israeli politics, on the other hand, characterizes their connection to Israel.

As Fred (23, Jewish father) explains:

'I feel connected to Israel, but I don't agree with the way Israel treats the Palestinians.'

2.3.3 Weak bond to no bond

The last group consists of respondents who have no bond or a very weak bond to Israel, compared to the other two groups. Most people in this group have never visited Israel. Most of them have a Jewish father; the others have a Jewish grandparent or a Jewish mother. As pointed out before, a bond to the country often came out more after visiting it. A vast majority of the respondents that have no bond or a weak bond to Israel, did not visit the country.

Some of them mention this as reasons for their connection, such as Miranda (28, Jewish father):

'I don't have a strong relationship (to Israel), mainly because I haven't been there. I do think that Jews have the right to be in Israel because they were persecuted during and after WWII. At the same time I'm critical of Israel because I don't agree with the politics.'

Few respondents have no connection to Israel, but would like to visit the country one day, such as Anne (26, Jewish father):

'I have no connection to Israel. I have never been there, but I would like to go one day. However, it is not a priority to me. I think the culture and history are interesting, but I'm not especially interested in Judaism.'

Finally, some respondents -who either visited the country or did not- feel no connection to Israel at all. As Hans (33, Jewish father) explains:

'I went on vacation to Israel once. I liked the country a lot, but it was intense as well because of the visible presence of the conflict. I don't feel a personal connection with Israel and I don't feel like going there in the future.'

2.3.4 The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Israel cannot be discussed without mentioning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It plays a big role in Western media, and respondents are therefore often confronted with the conflict. What seems interesting was that almost all respondents are critical of Israeli politics. Regardless of having a strong or weak connection to Israel, many of the respondents do not agree with the settlements and the way Palestinians are treated. The respondents can be divided in three groups with regard to their attitude towards the conflict (these attitudes may overlap for some persons). First of all, a great part of the respondents stands somewhere in between with regard to the conflict. They defend Israel in non-Jewish company, but defend the Palestinian side in a more pro-Israel, Jewish environment.

As Daan (25, Jewish paternal grandmother) points out:

'With regard to the conflict, it's a difficult country. When I'm in Jewish company, I try to be more nuanced about the conflict and critical of Israel as well. However, in non-Jewish

company I usually defend Israel. It is difficult for me to discuss the conflict with non-Jewish people.'

The second group is very critical of Israeli politics and says: "they should know better because of their own history". As Jonas (34, Jewish father) points out:

'The Jews should know better. If you have been oppressed, you shouldn't oppress others.'

Finally, a group of respondents distances itself from the conflict by saying it is complicated and they admit not knowing enough about it. As David (42, paternal grandfather) explains:

'It's difficult for me to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because I don't know enough about it and it is a very complicated conflict.'

Another aspect that bothers many respondents is that many non-Jews immediately link the Jewish background of the respondent to the conflict or hold them responsible for it. As Aaron (23, Jewish mother) explains:

'It annoys me that people immediately link Judaism to the political situation in Israel. When they hear I'm Jewish, they immediately say "you're doing this and this". Then I tell them that I'm Jewish and not Israeli.'

Non-Jews often perceive the respondents automatically as pro-Israel, because of their Jewish background. As Rivka (25, Jewish mother) points out:

'Sometimes I have the feeling that people see me as pro-Israel because I'm Jewish. I feel the need to justify my position on this matter to others.'

2.4 Living with the Memory of the Shoah

For many of the children of intermarriage in the Netherlands, Jewish identity is a complicated and constantly changing process, especially because of the Shoah. The Shoah has had a tremendous impact on the Jewish population. Of the 156,000 Jews with at least one Jewish parent before World War II, only 30,000 were left in 1946. The Shoah has not only influenced the community in numbers, but has changed the community as a whole. It has influenced the lives of every person, every family, children growing up without aunts and uncles and cousins or without (grand-) parents. Children who were born after the War, in the late 1940s and the 1950s grew up in a time of rebuilding the community, looking ahead, rather than looking back. The whole community had to be redefined and reinvented. The Shoah was not a topic of discussion in many families. This came much later, if at all. The children growing up in the aftermath of the War knew not to ask and not to burden their parents with their problems. They were the children "who had to make it all right." They were often raised in an overprotective way because of fear of something happening to them. Many Jews turned their back to Judaism after the War, because they could not continue something that had brought them so much misery. Others did continue certain Jewish traditions, but Judaism often remained something frightening, and many avoided being recognized as Jewish⁴.

The NIDI demographic study on Dutch Jews shows that the Shoah is still very important for many Dutch Jews (NIDI 2009), not as a positive identification but as a negative Jewish identification. We interviewed respondents from both the second and (mostly) the third generation. Without a doubt the Shoah plays a big role concerning the Jewish identity

⁴ A.J. Agsteribbe, C.M. Kooyman. De Joodse na-oorlogse generatieproblematiek anno 2007. Amsterdam, 2007.

of the second generation, whose Jewish parent was born before or during WWII. In this study we interviewed six people with a Jewish parent that was born before or during the War. However, the Shoah continues to play a large role for those whose (Jewish) parent was born after the War. Therefore we can speak of a “third generation.” A vast majority of the respondents we interviewed are part of the third generation with grandparents born in Europe. Some respondents had Jewish grandparents that lived outside of Europe (USA, Middle East, former Dutch colonies) during WWII and therefore have a very different family history in which the Shoah hardly plays a role.

2.4.1 The second generation

Jewish identity

In this study we interviewed six individuals of the so-called second generation. As their parents were born before or during the War, it is almost evident that the effects of the Shoah play a large role in their lives and the Shoah therefore is an important part of their (Jewish) identity. In fact, for almost all of the second-generation respondents, the Shoah is their main and sometimes even the only connection to Judaism.

As Naomi (42, Jewish father) explains:

‘I don’t feel like a Jew because I don’t know enough, but it’s a part of my identity because of my history; because my father was imprisoned in the camps during the War, because his biological parents and many family members were murdered during the War. The family history has impacted who I am. I don’t feel Jewish, but I feel connected because of my history.’

As their parents and/or grandparents were heavily affected by the Shoah with many of them turning their back on Judaism, respondents of the second generation grew up ignoring many aspects of cultural Judaism, such as the Jewish holidays.

Courtney’s (38, Jewish father) father (born in 1938 and lost both his parents in the Shoah) did not want to do anything with Judaism:

‘My father was traumatized by the War. (...) He always said: ‘I don’t want to be recognized as a Jew and I don’t want to be linked to Judaism in any way.’

Thus, traditional or cultural aspects of Judaism are often absent in the lives of those for whom the Shoah constitutes the main part of their Jewish identity.

Family structure

The Shoah and the trauma’s, which resulted from the Shoah often led to distorted family relations. Many persons of the second generation have troublesome relations with their parents or siblings, and therefore many of them are not in touch with certain relatives. This obviously has its impact on the second generation. Also, as many family members were murdered, many people grew up without grandparents or uncles, aunts. This resulted in distorted family situations and many families were very small.

Henk (39, Jewish mother) never knew his Jewish grandparents:

‘Indirectly, the War has a great influence on my life. My mother suffered a lot because her parents were murdered. (...) This had its impact on my mother, and consequently on me.’

David (34, Jewish mother) has a very small family:

‘The War has had a great influence on my personal life. Commemorations are very important to me. I commemorate my Jewish grandparents that I never knew (...) There

are some things you don't think about when you're younger, like the fact that you have a small family. Now I know almost my entire family was killed in the War. It makes me extremely sad to think about the family I never knew.'

Upbringing and character

The above described distorted family relations and the War traumas of their parents have influenced the upbringing and character of the respondents; all second-generation respondents grew up with parents who were severely affected by the Shoah. They transmitted this burden to their children. This resulted in trust issues, fear of registration or being recognized as a Jew, etc.

As Courtney (38, Jewish father) explains:

'The War had a huge impact on my life. It influenced my character because one of the things I heard all the time growing up was to never be dependent and only trust myself. Both my parents taught me that you can never rely on others. You have only yourself to rely on.'

Future

All respondents want to teach their (future) children about the Shoah and about their family's history. Courtney (38, Jewish father) wants to transmit her family's history, but not the fear she was brought up in:

'I would like to teach my son about the Jewish culture, but I'm afraid that because the way I feel about it, the focus will be more on the War history. The history, that's part of me, but I don't want to transmit fear.'

2.4.2 The third generation

Jewish identity

A vast majority of the respondents are so called third generation. They all have one or two Jewish grandparents who suffered from the Shoah. For many of them, the Shoah still plays a large role and is part of their Jewish identity, but slightly less compared to the second generation. For roughly one third of the third generation, the Shoah is the only connection to Judaism.

For Miranda (28, Jewish father) the Shoah is very important:

'Judaism to me is primarily a religion, which brings about a way of life and has been shaped by the War. I am not Jewish, according to the orthodoxy and to the religion, because I am not religious and my mother is not Jewish. I was "made" Jewish through my past, because of the War. Because so many terrible things happened in the War, that is part of my upbringing and that is the Jewish part of me.'

The group, for whom the Shoah is the only connection to Judaism is, for the most part, not involved in cultural aspects of Judaism, such as the celebration of holidays. For the people for whom the Shoah is not their main identification, they are often involved in some form of cultural Judaism.

Loes (25, Jewish mother), for example, is active within the Jewish community. The Shoah is not her only Jewish identification:

'I feel Jewish when I'm around family and on the Jewish holidays. I feel Jewish as well when I'm confronted with the Holocaust (...) The War still has its impact on me, indirectly.'

Parents and grandparents

For many of the third generation respondents, their connection to their grandparents and their stories about their War experiences influenced them a great deal.

As Linda (34, Jewish father) explains:

'My grandparents played a huge role in my life with regard to Judaism. As a six-year-old girl I saw my grandfather's camp number on his arm. From the age of six, I started to ask questions. My grandfather could talk about it freely and we spoke about the War almost on a weekly basis. My grandmother couldn't talk about it. However, this was the beginning of Judaism to me, this is how it all started.'

Second-generation parents brought up the third generation, therefore the effects of the Shoah still had a great impact on the third generation. As Sophie (41, Jewish mother) explains:

'The War plays a huge role in my history. I cannot disconnect that. My grandmother experienced a lot and this influenced my mother, and my mother in her turn influenced me. That's the biggest Jewish part within me.'

Future: Not passing on the burden, but passing on the history

Most third generation respondents think they are the last generation that will experience the burden of the Shoah. However, it is very important to them to pass on the history of their families and the Holocaust to their (future) children. As Kim (24, Jewish paternal grandmother) points out:

'I think I'm part of a generation in which I can make an end to it. My grandmother, my father, and now me. I took the burden from my father. It was hard for him to talk about the War and he sighed a lot. I don't want to pass that through to my children.'

Also, some respondents see it as their responsibility to continue Judaism because of what happened to or as homage to their grandparents.

As Judith (33, Jewish mother) explains:

'One of the most important reasons for me to continue and pass through Judaism, is for my grandmother and everyone she has lost. We have to show we're here and that we're going nowhere. The Second World War is one of the strongest reasons I feel this way and why I think it's important to pass it on to the next generation.'

Finally, many of the third generation respondents frame their family's War history through antiracism and a sense of justice.

As Francine (35, Jewish father) points out:

'I want to convey to my children that different people exist, but that everyone is equal and should be treated equally. I might use examples from my Jewish family's history to explain this.'

Concluding, one third of the total number of participants identify mainly with the memory of the Shoah. Undeniably, the Shoah has a greater direct influence on the second generation, as the Shoah is literally closer to them in time. Nevertheless, it is still an important theme for the third generation as well. The grandparents played a large role in their lives, as they were often the ones that told them about their own War experiences. The Shoah is often not the main Jewish identification for the third generation that is

also involved in the cultural aspects of Judaism. The second generation might struggle with not wanting to pass on the burden of the Shoah, the third generation seems more determined: many of them wish to pass on the history but not the burden.

2.5 Antisemitism

In addition to the “negative” aspect of the memory of the Shoah, antisemitism is another negative identification and even the main “trigger” of Jewish consciousness. The demographic study on Dutch Jews conducted in 2009 demonstrates the importance of the memory of Shoah. For younger generations, even though it is still significant, the feeling has clearly waned down; however, on the contrary, the importance of antisemitism hardly decreases from one generation to the next. The results of this study do not seem in line with the demographic study, because antisemitism does not seem to be of great importance concerning our respondents’ Jewish identification. Our results do show that one fifth of the respondents did experience antisemitism and many respondents mention that antisemitism still exists in the Netherlands today.

One explanation might be that antisemitism is often expressed in borderline remarks or jokes that were actually not that funny. Many respondents stated they did not experience antisemitism, however, “there was this joke or remark someone made...” It is often regarded as a “stupid” joke and respondents often recall the ignorance of those who make it. As Thomas (35, Jewish father), who is a family doctor, points out:

‘A while ago I had a meeting with other family doctors. One of them said something about a certain therapist; he referred to her as ‘that Jewess’. I was shocked and told him he can’t say things like that. He said: ‘but she is Jewish, isn’t she?’ I asked how he knew that. He replied: ‘you can tell by looking at her’. He didn’t mean any harm in this; he didn’t mean it in an anti-Semitic way. But it did agitate me immensely.’

Another example comes from Shira (30, Jewish father):

‘Someone told a really nasty joke once. He put a cigar in his shoe and asked me: ‘what is this? -a Jew who was blown away at the bus stop.’ It wasn’t funny at all; it was very dumb. People don’t realize what they say and that a remark like that can be hurtful to others. It doesn’t hurt me but I don’t want to waste my energy on it.’

These remarks or jokes do agitate many respondents, but according to them it does not influence their Jewish identity. Antisemitism is often situated in a grey area, insulting the respondent, but not “severe” enough to them to consider it as being of antisemitic nature.

Another explanation for the seemingly lesser importance of antisemitism might be the fact that many respondents think they are not outwardly recognizable as Jews and therefore less vulnerable.

As Fay (33, Jewish mother) explains:

‘I’m not identified as Jewish. I think I would have had problems if I looked typically Jewish.’

A remarkable result of the study is that 6 of our respondents were severely bullied in their youth for having a Jewish background. Anne (26, Jewish father), who was not even aware of her Jewish roots at the time, talks about her experiences at school:

‘In the second class of elementary school, I was bullied severely because I was an excellent student and because of my Jewish background. Somehow they found out that my father is Jewish. They called me “shit Jew”, said anti-Semitic things and drew

Swastikas. My parents didn't know what they heard and immediately drew me out of school and enrolled me into a new school. Looking back, I think the bullying was insane.'

This had a great impact on those respondents at that time, but many said it did not significantly influence their Jewish identity.

Areas of Jewish Connection. Conclusion

The most important area in which the participants of this study feel connected to Judaism is through the memory of the Shoah. One third of the total number of participants identify mainly through the Shoah. Although the Shoah is more distant for the third generation, it still has a large impact on the lives of the participants. Grandparents often play a crucial role in this. Not only do they keep the Jewish traditions alive through celebrating the Jewish holidays, but they often tell their grandchildren stories they may have never told their own children.

Another important area in which the participants feel connected to Judaism is Israel. This is rather obvious for those who have an Israeli parent, but it holds true for others, especially those who visited Israel. They feel a connection to the country and they start seeing Israel (more) as part of their Jewish identity. On the other hand, Israel becomes a difficult topic of conversation due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It annoys many people that non-Jews hold them responsible for the political situation in Israel. Not only do they feel they are held responsible, they are critical themselves. Even those who feel a connection to Israel, feel critical about the political situation.

The social connection is another important factor in the lives of the participants, but it can just as well create difficulties and feelings of uncertainty concerning their Jewish identity depending on the situation. Jewish culture, through Jewish books and music is informal and individualistic, but also accessible and thus it is an easy way to express their connection to Judaism.

3. Specific themes

In the previous section, we have shown the influence of the memory of the Shoah. We brought to light the participants' connection to Israel and their relationship to Jewish culture and the Jewish people. In other words, we looked at different areas in which people connect to Judaism. Now we will look at specific themes that influence the formation of one's Jewish identity.

3.1 Family relations

In this section we will discuss three themes: childhood, grandparents, partner and children that influenced the way the Jewish identity was developed starting at an early age.

3.1.1 Childhood

We will start with the respondents' childhood. Were the respondents raised Jewish? What was the most important Jewish influence? Are the people who were brought up Jewish still involved in Judaism? We can roughly point out three ways in which people were brought up, ranging from being brought up with Judaism at home to having no Jewish holidays or Jewish culture at home. The only connection to Judaism in this last group was through the memory of the Shoah.

Jewish upbringing

A minority of our respondents had a Jewish upbringing. Jewish holidays were celebrated at home, many of them ate kosher style and many of them took part in the organized Jewish community. They went to Jewish Sunday school or were members of a youth association like Habonim. Most of these respondents have a Jewish mother; a few have a Jewish father. Almost all respondents with an Israeli mother are included in this group. For these respondents especially, the influence of the Jewish mother is important in passing on Judaism to their children. Jewish life starts early on, both in the family and in the organized community. As Nina (23, Jewish mother) points out:

'Judaism was very important for my mother. I can't imagine her not giving us a Jewish upbringing. (...) Sometimes I had "Super Jewish Weekend". Then I would go to synagogue, Jewish class and Habonim.'

Most of these respondents did not consider themselves children of a mixed marriage. The non-Jewish parent was often very supportive of the Jewish upbringing and participated in many Jewish traditions and celebrated the holidays with them. As Judith (33, Jewish mother) explains:

'At first, my parents decided to give us a "neutral" upbringing. However, my mother raised us with Judaism eventually because it was just part of her. I had the perfect example at home of how well a mixed marriage can turn out. That's the reason I wanted to participate in this study. Apparently I feel the need to prove you're not just half a Jew if you grow up in a mixed marriage. I don't think I would have felt more Jewish if I had a Jewish father as well.'

Some people believe it is easier to be involved in the Jewish community when living in or near Amsterdam, as the majority of the Dutch Jews live in Amsterdam and many Jewish organizations are located there. However, out of fourteen respondents that were active in a Jewish organization during their childhood, only three lived in Amsterdam. There were many respondents that grew up in Amsterdam and that were not involved in any Jewish organization at all.

A majority of the respondents with a Jewish upbringing is still active in the Jewish community or still celebrates the Jewish holidays although sometimes less than they did. Strikingly, almost all of the respondents that are not involved in Judaism anymore have a Jewish father. They have had several negative experiences in the Jewish community later on in life, because their mother is not Jewish. They were not (fully) accepted in the community and eventually distanced themselves from Jewish involvement. As Tamar (42, Jewish father) points out:

'I like the fact that I have a Jewish background, but I don't feel the need to belong anymore. When I started university, one of my friends became a member of IJAR (Jewish student association), but I wasn't allowed to become a member. That played a role as well. At a certain point I had had it. I didn't want to make a big deal out of it, but you're confronted with it every time. In the course of time I distanced myself from Judaism.'

Some Jewish upbringing

This second group consists of 12 respondents; the majority has a Jewish father. They did not particularly have a Jewish upbringing, but they did celebrate some holidays and there was some Jewish culture in the home. The holidays were often celebrated with the grandparents. The grandparents were an important influence and sometimes the only Jewish influence. As Benjamin (25, Jewish father) points out:

'We celebrated some of the holidays with my grandparents, like Pesach and Hanukkah. Now that they are too old, they stopped hosting the celebrations and now I don't feel the need to celebrate the holidays anymore.'

Often the Jewish parents of the respondents who were brought up somewhat Jewish were either not raised with Judaism themselves, were anti-religious, or did not have sufficient knowledge of Judaism to pass it on to their children. These parents are almost all part of the second generation and the Shoah had a great -and many times negative- impact on their upbringing. Judaism was not part of the daily lives of these respondents and they were less aware of their Jewish roots compared to the group with a Jewish upbringing. As Noah (28, Jewish father) points out:

'The whole family got together every Friday evening, but I was never told for which reason. Only when I started to be active in the Jewish community in Amsterdam a few years ago, I realized it was for Shabbat. I never realized this as a child.'

This group did not experience their upbringing as mixed either. There were some Jewish elements present, but being mixed did not factor in. Half of these respondents, most of them with a Jewish mother, are still somewhat involved in Judaism; they celebrate some of the holidays for example. Two of them are more involved in Judaism now than they were in their childhood.

No Jewish upbringing: Shoah is the connection to Judaism

The last and largest group was not raised Jewish and did not celebrate the Jewish holidays. There was barely any Jewish culture present in their upbringing. Most people in this group have a Jewish father or a Jewish grandparent. All the respondents with a Jewish grandparent are part of this group. For almost all of the respondents, the Shoah was the only connection to Judaism in their youth. Many of the Jewish parents in this group were traumatized or heavily impacted by the Shoah. As Fred (23, Jewish father) points out:

'Judaism in our family is about what happened between 1939 and 1945 rather than about the Jewish traditions.'

Also in this group, the role of the grandparents is often very important. They are often the ones who told their grandchildren about their War experiences.

As Francine (35, Jewish father) explains:

'My Jewish grandmother lived around the corner. My sister and me visited her every Sunday for a cup of tea. She told us many stories about the War and what had happened to the family. I don't feel Jewish, but through these stories I feel some kind of connection.'

Whereas this group was not raised with Jewish traditions or holidays, some of them did have a Jewish parent or grandparent who "acted Jewish" in terms of humor, customs or use of certain Yiddish words. Some of them had "Yiddishe Nesjomme", a Yiddish "spirit". As Kees (28, Jewish father) points out:

'We didn't celebrate Jewish holidays at home, but there was some kind of Jewish atmosphere. My father really is a Jew. That sounds strange, but the way he acts, it's just Jewish.'

In conclusion, hardly anyone considered himself or herself a child of a mixed marriage, whether they had a Jewish upbringing or not. Looking at the respondents that are involved in Judaism now, two aspects that are somehow intertwined stand out. First of all, a Jewish upbringing at home had a major influence on the formation of a Jewish identity and on

being involved in Judaism now. However, and this is the second aspect, having either a Jewish mother or a Jewish father makes a big difference. The respondents with a Jewish mother are more likely to have a Jewish upbringing and stay involved in Judaism, than those with a Jewish father. Also, people with a Jewish mother are more likely to become involved in Judaism later on, even if they did not really have a Jewish upbringing. Still, a small group of respondents that either has a Jewish father or a Jewish grandparent, was not raised with Judaism, but nevertheless became involved in Judaism later on in life.

3.1.2 Grandparents

In a majority of the cases, there are two areas in which the relationship to the Jewish grandparents plays an important role in the formation of the respondents' Jewish identity.

The first area is the role of the grandparents in relation to the Shoah. As Thomas (35, Jewish father) points out:

'I had a very warm relationship to my Jewish grandmother. We saw each other a lot, because she lived nearby. Even in high school I would visit her several times a week after school. Her greatest influence on me was the stories she told me about the War. The War was always present in her life and she talked about it a lot.'

The second area is the role the grandparents played in the celebration of the Jewish holidays. The respondents also learned about Judaism from them. As Simon, (30, Jewish mother) explains:

'Together with my mother, my grandparents taught me a lot about Judaism and they had a large (Jewish) influence on me.'

Many respondents hardly celebrated the Jewish holidays at home such as Pesach or Hannukah, but they did celebrate these holidays with their grandparents. As Jonathan (22, Jewish father) points out:

'My grandmother always invited us for the holidays. It was a tradition that she would cook the same dishes every year. Those evenings were a lot of fun and I enjoyed reading and discussing the stories from the Haggadah.'

However, when these grandparents became too old or passed away, the celebration of the holidays stopped, as these respondents only celebrated these holidays with their grandparents and not at home. As Anne (24, Jewish father) points out:

'After my grandmother passed away, I celebrated Pesach twice at my aunt's. But that was the last time I celebrated it. I didn't like it as much as when we celebrated it with my grandmother.'

For a few respondents, the grandparents played a role in both the Shoah and the Jewish holidays. For other respondents, their grandparents did not play a role in the celebration of Jewish holidays and did not talk about the Shoah. These grandparents did, however, pass on some kind of Yiddishe nesjomme, a Yiddish spirit in terms of language, humor and behavior.

3.1.3 Partner

More than half of our respondents have a partner. They are either married or unmarried. In this section, we will take a closer look at the influence of the partner on the respondent's Jewish identity. Many respondents would have liked to have a Jewish partner, but do not

really mind if this is not the case. For others, it does not matter whether their partner is Jewish or not. Only a few respondents sought a Jewish partner. One can discern two ways in which the partners influence the respondents.

Positive influence

In the first group, a minority of the total share of partners, the partner had a positive influence on the Jewish identity and Jewish involvement of the respondent. The partner is not only positive about Judaism, he or she also stimulates the Jewish involvement of the respondent. We can distinguish between Jewish partners and non-Jewish partners with a positive influence. Three of our respondents have a Jewish partner. For all three it resulted in a stronger Jewish feeling and a greater involvement in Judaism. Judaism became a greater part of their daily lives and the involvement is especially characterized by their celebration of Jewish holidays. As Dina (38, Israeli father) points out:

'Judaism plays a larger role in my life than it would having a non-Jewish partner. My partner knows what to do with the holidays, like the Seder. Also, tradition is important to him. We have discussions about Judaism as well and I discovered that I had thought about certain things more than he did.'

The other respondents who have a non-Jewish partner are influenced positively concerning their Jewish identity, considering the respondent was already involved in Judaism or felt Jewish before they met. The partner is not only positive about it, but encourages the respondent to be involved in Judaism. As Sander (37, Jewish father) explains:

'My wife is very proud of her Jewish family name. Also, she stimulated me to be involved in Judaism, it was her idea to celebrate Pesach after the children were born.'

Neutral influence

A majority of the respondents have a partner whose influence on their Jewish identity is neutral. These partners may feel positive or neutral about Judaism, but they do not encourage the respondent to get involved in Judaism. Half of this group is somewhat involved in Judaism or feels Jewish. For them, their Jewish identity is something personal, something they do not want to share with their partners. However, their partners let them choose whether they want to be involved. As Linda (34, Jewish father) explains about having a non-Jewish husband:

'If he had been Jewish, it would have been easier to go to Jewish places or to be a member of some kind of organization. I would not sacrifice my relationship for it, but somehow I think it's a pity. The Jewish feeling I have, I can't describe it, but Jewish people together understand it, that's something I can't share with him. He doesn't understand it and some things are strange to him. But he respects me, values me and lets me do whatever I want.'

The other half of this group is not involved in Judaism. Judaism hardly plays a role in their daily lives. Their partners do not bring about a change in this situation. As Fay (33, Jewish mother) points out:

'Except for the War related problems, I am not Jewish. I don't feel Jewish. I don't know anything about the customs. My partner isn't Jewish and he doesn't care about it. If he would say, 'let's go to Israel and explore our roots...', but he doesn't. Judaism is not an issue for us.'

3.1.4 Children

About one fifth of our respondents have children. A minority raises their children in the Jewish culture. Judaism is present in their daily lives, ranging from the celebration of some Jewish holidays to a very Jewish upbringing. Most of these children have Jewish names, and the parents actively convey Jewish traditions or Jewish culture. As Dina (38, Israeli father, Jewish husband) points out:

'My partner and I talked about the upbringing of our daughters and we came to the conclusion that if we didn't pass on any traditions, they would grow up without any traditions.'

Also Judith raises her daughter with Judaism (33, Jewish mother, non-Jewish husband):

'My daughter has a Jewish name. It is very important to me to convey Judaism to her. I want to pass on everything I was brought up with myself. I am supposed to say that my daughter should have freedom of choice, but that's very difficult to me. I hope she will feel the same way as I do.'

All these respondents either have a Jewish mother or a Jewish husband.

For a majority of the respondents (two third) Judaism does not play a role in the daily life of their children. Some people explain that their children are not Jewish because they do not have a Halachic Jewish mother. Others say it is up to the children if they want to identify with Judaism. As Rivka (25, Jewish mother) points out:

'I don't know whether I want my daughter to identify with Judaism, she should make her own decisions.'

However, many of them will talk to them about their Jewish heritage and culture, about the Holocaust or a combination of these subjects. As Thomas (35, Jewish father) explains:

'My son doesn't need to identify as Jewish. He isn't circumcised and he doesn't have a Jewish name. I would like to convey Jewish humor and Jewish culture -books and music- to my son and I want to tell him the stories about the War. I want my son to know where he's from; that he knows what happened to his family. I would like to learn more about the Jewish religion, so I can teach my son about the background of the holidays.'

3.2 Influence of Jewish father, Jewish mother, Jewish grandparent

3.2.1 Jewish father

What becomes obvious from everything said here, is that there is a notable difference between those who have a Jewish mother and those who have a Jewish father. Those who have a Jewish mother consider themselves Jewish whether they are practicing or not. However, those with a Jewish father, whether they are involved in Judaism or not or whether they feel Jewish or not, are not regarded as Jewish. Their Jewish identity is often problematic, because they do feel a certain belonging to Judaism and the Jewish community, but this feeling of belonging is often rejected. As Shira (30, Jewish father) points out:

'What I find difficult is when people say: you're not Jewish. I don't want to start that discussion. I don't like that at all. It's like they're denying my personality. It's like when I say: I'm Shira and someone says: no, you're not. Then there're other people who say: but, it's about how you feel. But I don't agree with that. For example if I want to marry

in synagogue, I'm not allowed to, so even if I feel Jewish, it doesn't help me: I can't act upon it.'

The problematic Jewish identity of so-called father-Jews may be due to the interpretation of the Halacha, which states that only children born to a Jewish mother are considered Jewish. This interpretation is prevalent in most Jewish congregations in the Netherlands — orthodox and liberal. People with a Jewish father can participate within the liberal congregation, as can their children, but they cannot become a member without “a confirmation of their Jewish status” (1 or 2 years of study and appearance before a Beth Din). As Dina (38, Israeli father and Israeli husband) points out:

'I never felt accepted by the Jewish community. When my husband and I spoke to the LJC (liberal congregation), I was pleasantly surprised that I could participate without becoming a member. However, it's very strange to me that very modern Jews with a Reform lifestyle obey the orthodox rules, such as matrilineage descent. Practically, I would like to do a giur, but principally I don't want to do it.'

As mentioned, respondents find the way the Halacha is interpreted in most Jewish congregations and many Jewish associations in the Netherlands to be very excluding. As some respondents experienced, this is very different in the United States. Anne (26, Jewish father) talks about her visit to her Jewish relatives in the US:

'For me it was already programmed that I'm not Jewish, because I only have a Jewish father. The Reform Jews there (in the US) were completely astonished and told me I was Jewish. For them it was crazy I didn't see myself as a Jew. The way they deal with Judaism there seems more normal to me, it gives you the chance to make a choice.'

Another factor is that a substantial group of children with a Jewish father is not only critically regarded by organizations within the Jewish community, but also by its members. Members of the Jewish community, whether they are family members (or even the Jewish fathers themselves) have often told them they are not Jewish. It is difficult to say whether the impact of having heard time and time again that you are not Jewish makes them say they are not Jewish or whether it is something they feel from inside. Dina (38, Israeli father) explains this as follows:

'I tend to answer that I don't feel Jewish. I don't feel I have the right to say I am Jewish. I'm very afraid people think I'm forcing myself in, because it was made very clear to me: you don't belong. When I finished high school, I really wanted to visit Israel, but my father didn't allow it. He told me that I wouldn't be accepted there because I don't have a Jewish mother. I've heard it so often that I started to see it that way as well.'

As the section on childhood demonstrated, people with a Jewish father are less likely to have a Jewish upbringing and in turn are less likely to be involved in Judaism later on in their lives. This could be because the Jewish father does not regard his child as Jewish, or because, when the mother is not Jewish, chances that the children will be raised in the Jewish faith are much slimmer, for it is often the mother who has a dominant role in the upbringing of children. It is striking that almost no one with a Jewish father and a Jewish upbringing, is involved in Judaism now. This was mostly due to the above-described reasons: the rejection from the Jewish community and/or rejection by its members.

Finally, respondents with a Jewish father are sometimes regarded as Jews by non-Jews, but often in a more negative way. Father-Jews do experience antisemitism and are held responsible for, for example, the settlement policies in Israel. Concerning these two matters, many non-Jews do not differentiate between people with a Jewish father or with a Jewish mother. As Thomas (35, Jewish father) points out:

'I don't like it when non-Jews think that Israeli politics and Jews are the same thing. I hate it when they hold me personally responsible for the situation in Israel. What can I do about it?'

3.2.2 Jewish mother

The situation concerning people with a Jewish mother is quite different. They regard themselves as Jewish and are regarded as Jewish by the Jewish community and thus have an active choice whether to participate or not. Compared to the respondents with a Jewish father, those with a Jewish mother are more often involved in Judaism. Many of them had a Jewish upbringing and this has had a great influence on the shaping of their Jewish identity. However, this does not mean that all people with a Jewish mother are fully involved in Judaism. Many feel they are not a 'full Jew' because they do not practice, because they are not religious or because they feel they do not know enough. Eva (28, Jewish mother) is a good example of this:

'Sometimes (around religious Jews) I think: I'm not Jewish at all. I don't know anything. I can join in to a certain extent, but really it's all a show, because I don't know anything and I'm not religious. Do I really belong here? At times like that I feel like I'm an imposter.'

Many compare themselves to other Jews; there is always someone who is more Jewish. Simon (30, Jewish mother) is a traditional Jew, but he does not describe himself as orthodox:

'For some people you are orthodox if you eat kosher and keep Shabbat, but in comparison to the orthodox I'm not orthodox at all.'

To conclude, people with a Jewish mother seem to have internalized the idea that the Jewish identity is transmitted via matrilineal descent. So, even if they do not practice and do not feel Jewish, they do accept that they are in effect Jewish and are conscious of the fact that if they eventually decide to become more active in the community they will encounter no restrictions. For people with a Jewish father, however, the choice has already been made for them. Their feelings of Jewish belonging are put aside.

3.2.3 Jewish grandparent

Seven people with a Jewish grandparent participated in this study. As described in the methodology chapter, we had a high response rate from this group. Because of this, and because of the fact that they are part of the Dutch-Jewish reality, we decided to include them. Half of them are Jewish according to Jewish law, as the mother of their mother was Jewish. A few of them considered themselves father-Jews, as their father had a Jewish mother. Compared to the respondents with a Jewish mother or a Jewish father, those with a Jewish grandparent had the weakest bond to Judaism. Remarkably, two respondents (both with a paternal Jewish grandmother; they consider themselves father-Jews) did become involved in Judaism later on in their lives and feel Jewish. Although these numbers are too small to draw a substantial conclusion, it might suggest that they are not the only ones in the Dutch Jewish community with a Jewish grandparent who feel a strong connection to Judaism.

3.3 Choice or ancestry

Another interesting theme, which has been mentioned throughout this report on a number of occasions, is the fact that Judaism is not seen as a choice, but as something

that is determined as a result of their biology and ancestry. Being born from a Jewish mother makes you Jewish. If you are not born from a Jewish mother, it does not matter whether you feel Jewish, your choices concerning participation in Jewish life are much more limited.

Thomas (35, Jewish father) summarizes this as follows:

'I think someone is Jewish when they have two Jewish parents. Even if you don't identify with Judaism and don't feel Jewish, you still somehow are a Jew. It's more of a birth right, it's not a choice to be a Jew.'

Or, as Els (29, Jewish mother) puts it:

'To me, being Jewish is something passed on through generations and the rule happens to be that it has to be your mother. This, of course, is safe for me because I'm on the right side.'

According to our observations, many participants with a Jewish father, while admitting their strong connections and feelings towards Judaism, seem to have internalized the Halachic rules of matrilineal descent. Therefore, this feeling leads to "self-exclusion," preventing them from participating in Jewish spaces.

4. Jewish community

We have seen the impact of having a Jewish father, Jewish mother and Jewish grandparent. It is close to impossible to separate the Jewish parentage from our next section: the way the participants see themselves in relation to the Jewish community, but it is important we mention this again. In addition to the relationship to the Jewish community, we will focus on the respondents' opinions of the Jewish community.

4.1 Respondents' relationship to the Jewish community

Many respondents have some type of connection to the Jewish community. Some are involved in some form or another, but as we mentioned before, most people are not involved in the Jewish community. This holds true for both people with a Jewish mother and people with a Jewish father. People with a Jewish father feel excluded by others and people with a Jewish mother, though considered Jewish by others, don't feel Jewish enough because they are not religiously observant, not raised with Judaism or feel they don't know enough.

There is a bunch of people who were active for some period in their lives (usually during their early twenties), but stopped being active at a certain point for some reason.

Maaïke (34, Jewish father) was a very active member of the Jewish community in her student years, but not anymore:

'I'm done with Judaism and the Jewish community, because they don't accept me and I don't feel welcome. It's such a pity, since I feel Jewish, I have a strong bond and was enthusiastic to organize all kinds of activities and was active in the community. And still not welcome, yes, that's hard for me. And I think, what a loss for them. It leads to assimilation this way.'

Sivan (24, Israeli mother) has different reasons why she stopped being active in the Jewish community:

'I was very involved in the Jewish community around the age of 20, but now I'm fed up with it. There are many things about the Jewish community I don't like anymore and which make me feel uncomfortable. I don't like it when people within the Jewish community see me as anti-Semitic when I'm being critical of Israel. I don't like it when people within the Jewish community talk negatively about other groups in Dutch society (Muslims). And I don't like the dividedness and gossip within Dutch Jewry.'

The Jewish community is a broad concept. There is not simply one organized Jewish community, but people often talk about the Dutch Jewish community meaning all its members as well as its religious and social organizations. Even though the Jewish community is fragmented into various organizations and clubs, many organizations keep a strict door policy (people with a Jewish mother are in, people with a Jewish father are out), even in the more informal or alternative spaces. Furthermore, if people are not part of the in-crowd (usually meaning they were raised in Amsterdam and went to the Jewish schools) it is hard to find out about these informal organizations. Most respondents have not heard about them. And, again, even if they have heard about them: the threshold of going is very high.

In conclusion, there are only a few people who are active in the various organizations within the Jewish community and there is only a handful that actually feels accepted and non-ambivalent about the Jewish community. Mostly, the Jewish community causes ambivalent feelings or outright negative feelings. In the next paragraph, we will further examine the opinions people have about the Jewish community.

4.2 Opinions about the Jewish community

During the interviews, we asked the participants about their feelings towards the Jewish community. We asked them about things they did not like and things that could be improved. The major findings on the opinions concerning the Jewish community are easily summarized. First of all, some people do not have a clear image of the Jewish community at all, because they are not part of it and they have no idea what the Jewish community is exactly. But for the most part, opinions and feelings are not very positive. What is mentioned foremost is how unwelcoming and closed off the Jewish community is, especially towards those who have a Jewish father. They feel people with a Jewish father should have the same rights of becoming members of Jewish organizations as people with a Jewish mother. There are variations on this theme, like how high the threshold of getting in is (in both literal and figurative terms), how restrictive the Jewish community is.

Floor (24, Jewish mother) has a strong Jewish identity and was raised Jewish, but because she was severely bullied at her Jewish school, she has turned her back on the Jewish community in the Netherlands:

'The community is a closed community. There is no room for newcomers or for people who think differently. Everybody knows each other. I get claustrophobic thinking about it. Be open and let people in! My suggestion would be to include people that are less involved in the community, take them by the hand and welcome them in. That's what I would really like to happen.'

Both Rivka, Daan and Benjamin have experienced exclusion and interrogation by Jewish organizations. Rivka (25, Jewish mother) remembers being invited to a bar mitzvah once. Before she could enter the synagogue, she was interrogated extensively by the security at the door. They wanted to know what she was doing there:

'I found it strange. I was invited to go there, and it was as if I had to beg in order to be let in.'

Daan (25, Jewish paternal grandmother):

'Chabad organizes Shabbat meals and I wanted to go there with a friend. However, we weren't sure whether I could go there, because their events are usually only for Halachic Jews. My friend asked them just to be sure and they said that it was difficult and that it was better not to come.'

Benjamin's (25, Jewish father) Jewish grandfather passed away recently. There was a Jewish funeral, and Benjamin was closely involved in the organization. The whole funeral made a huge impression on him. But at the funeral itself, he was not allowed to hold a speech or carry the coffin:

'It's extremely painful and insulting if you can't fully participate in your grandfather's funeral.'

Frances (21, Jewish mother) pleads for the acceptance of people with a Jewish father:

'If people feel Jewish and are raised Jewish, then they should be accepted. The rules, on which this is based, are outdated. The community should be glad there are children who want this (Jewish youth clubs, Jewish schools). There won't be that many left if you turn them (people with Jewish father) down.'

Apart from the most heard opinion that the Jewish community is closed off and unwelcoming, there are two other opinions that we would like to include in this report.

Some people mentioned they do not like the way there is a lot of divisiveness within the Jewish community.

Loes (25, Jewish mother):

'There is always so much discussion between all the groups, the liberal, the orthodox, political and non-religious groups. I want to tell them: the Jewish community in the Netherlands is very small. We should stop fighting and start respecting each other!'

And finally, some people mention that they feel the public reactions of the Jewish community are very defensive. People hardly give examples but this is mentioned quite a few times, so we thought it was important to mention here. Kees (28, Jewish father) sums this up as follows:

'The Jewish community is often in the news in a negative way, for example when it responds to a remark that someone made. I think that the community should react in a less defensive way. I think it would contribute to the acceptance of Jews in the Netherlands. If something is wrong, they should do something about it instead of defending themselves.'

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to get a better insight into the Jewish identity of children from Jewish intermarriage in the Netherlands and to provide policy recommendations to Dutch Jewish organizations. The main conclusion of this study is that the identity of the children of intermarriage is complex and depends on many factors. The most important factor is the tremendous influence of the law of matrilineal descent. This rule of descent, often in combination with the reaction of the Jewish community, influences the Jewish identity of the children of intermarriage in a negative way. The majority of the participants feel that this rule is outdated and should be revised. Those with a Jewish father have heard time and time again throughout their lives by members of the Jewish community, sometimes including their own father, that they are not Jewish. They have internalized this and accepted it as a fact. At the same time they struggle with this because their connection to Judaism is very strong. They feel denied as a person. The people with a Jewish mother do not agree with the rule of descent either, but feel lucky because they are on the “right side” of the descent rule.

The second main conclusion is that feeling Jewish is an important part of the participants’ identity, even though identity is fluid and can vary from situation to situation and can change in the course of time. Feeling Jewish, however, is not the same as being involved in the Jewish community. A majority of the participants feel Jewish, while only a small group is active in the Jewish community. In addition, their Jewish identity is flexible throughout their lives and can change at specific moments. We pointed out what we call “defining moments” in people’s lives that caused an increase or decrease in Jewish feeling or involvement. For example, their Jewish identity and in some cases their Jewish involvement becomes stronger through a birthright trip to Israel or it can decrease through the rejection of the Jewish community.

Another important conclusion is that the memory of the Shoah plays a tremendously important role in the respondents’ connection to Judaism. The majority of the participants are so-called third generation, which means their grandparents were born before or during the Second World War. There is a substantial group for whom the Shoah is the only connection to Judaism. This is interesting, because we would assume that the effects of the Shoah would have diminished almost 70 years after the Dutch liberation.

And the last area of Jewish connection, which we need to mention, is the social and cultural connection. The social Jewish community is an important factor in the lives of the participants, but it can just as well create feelings of uncertainty concerning their Jewish identity depending on the situation or depending on the group they are around. In addition to the social Jewish community, Jewish culture, through Jewish books, music and Jewish museums is an important connection to Judaism. Because of its informal and individualistic nature, it is easily accessible. Although not everyone is involved in Jewish culture, there are many people who would like to have more Jewish culture in their lives if they knew where to find it or if they had a way in.

Our final conclusion entails the relationship to the Jewish community. A small group of respondents is actively involved, but most people are not. People with a Jewish father feel excluded and have been excluded, while people with a Jewish mother have a choice whether or not they want to participate. Even though there are some informal spaces people can join and feel comfortable about their Jewish identity, these spaces are few and hard to find if people are not active within the Jewish community. And even if the respondents have heard about them, the threshold of going is very high.

Policy recommendations

One aspect that stood out in almost all of the interviews, whether it was from respondents with a Jewish mother, a Jewish father or a Jewish grandparent was their perception of the Dutch Jewish community. This perception is more often negative than positive. According to a majority of the respondents the Dutch Jewish community is a mostly religious, closed-off community that is not very welcoming. For some respondents, this was based on their experiences, for others it was their perception of the Jewish community. Therefore most of our recommendations are focused on the (organized) Jewish community and how the threshold can be lowered. Another major point is the fact that the Shoah still has a huge impact on the third generation.

- Welcome new members into the community; be open and inclusive to people who are interested. Invite people in and really make them feel welcome and accepted. There are many people who are potentially interested in non-religious activities but for whom the threshold to join is very high due to negative experiences within the Jewish community.
- Specifically welcome those with a Jewish father because this is a large group that doesn't feel welcome but is potentially interested in being part of the community.
- Not only invite people in, but also show them the variety of social-cultural events going on within the Jewish community, not just in Amsterdam, but also in other cities all over the Netherlands. There are many people who are potentially interested in non-religious activities but who have not found their way to these activities.
- Show the wide variety and diversity within the Jewish community. People who feel like they're outside of the Jewish community often say: 'I'm not really Jewish', because they are not religious. Apparently the dominant view of a 'real' Jew consists of a religious Jew. Furthermore, the majority of the Jews in the Netherlands are not religious.
- As a Jewish upbringing has a great influence on the shaping of a Jewish identity, special attention should be paid to the children. Help the parents to get the children involved. There should be more options especially for children who don't have a Jewish mother in order for them to get familiar with Jewish traditions at a young age.
- Acknowledge that the Shoah still has an impact on the third generation. The memory of the Shoah obviously plays a greater role for the second generation, but it also plays an important role in the lives of the third generation. In fact, for some the memory of the Shoah is the only connection to Judaism. It is important to recognize this.

The JDC International Centre for Community Development (JDC-ICCD) was founded in 2005.

It aims to identify, understand and analyze ongoing changes and transformations taking place in Europe that impact particularly Jewish communities on the continent.

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