Abstract

Conversations about the intersection of race, ethnicity, and identity have dominated the American academic and political discourse for years, and the American educational research space for even longer. The incorporation of religion into the intersectionality discussion, however, is far less common; and little scholarly attention has been paid to the role of the minutiae of daily religious practices in adolescent identity construction. Although religiously observant Jews from throughout the world practice Jewish laws, rituals, and customs in remarkably similar if not identical ways, variations in liturgy, exegetical approach, and legal interpretation and enforcement have emerged between Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews since the Medieval period. Many schools rooted in Ashkenazic customs, culture, and practice teach Sephardic students, whose familial practices, values, and/or norms likely misalign with those of the Ashkenazic majority. In a Jewish day school, what might happen when a child's various bidirectional relationships are rooted in differing and sometimes opposing values, norms, and behaviors, with some relationships operating according to Sephardic ways of living and some with underlying Ashkenazic assumptions? What happens when the child's "Ashkenormative" American society does not fully recognize the child's Sephardic heritage, religious practices, and worldview? How might these potential cultural disconnects impact Sephardic adolescents' ability to navigate two distinct ecological worlds, and to sustain their cultural heritage? This study explores these questions via the constructs of cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, school belonging, and school climate.

This exploratory sequential mixed method study used the themes and findings from qualitative semi-structured interviews to generate a quantitative survey. Fourteen adults who self-identified as Sephardic and who had attended Ashkenazic day schools for K-12 comprised the sample for the study's qualitative phase. An iterative process using both etic and emic coding

strategies revealed prevalent themes in the interviewees' recalled experiences of K-12, including the impact of curriculum, prayer, attitudes about religious difference, and relationships with peers and teachers. Findings highlighted the particular religious behavioral discontinuities necessary for inclusion in the survey, as well as the importance of incorporating questions about school climate and immigration.

Modern Orthodox middle schools with policies and programs rooted in Ashkenazic customs and with substantial Sephardic student representation were solicited for inclusion in the quantitative phase of the study. Surveys were administered to seventh and eighth-grade students (N=378) in four schools. Data analysis to address the quantitative components of the research questions involved the use of independent samples t-tests, Pearson product-moment correlations, and multiple hierarchical regression models. Findings strongly indicated that Sephardic students experienced greater levels of discontinuity and home-school dissonance, and lower levels of belonging, than their Ashkenazic peers. Significant associations between cultural discontinuity items, home-school dissonance, and school belonging emerged for Ashkenazic students, but almost no significant associations emerged for Sephardic students. Beta-values from the moderation models indicated that teacher support, peer attachment, affirming diversity, and home-school dissonance each independently predicted school belonging, but that the relationship between home-school dissonance and school belonging was not significantly impacted by the school climate domains of teacher support, peer attachment, and affirming diversity.

The findings suggest that while Sephardic students do emotionally link their experiences as members of the school community with the degree to which they feel that their home and school ecological environments do or do not align, they do not pair dissonance with the specific items measured in the cultural discontinuity scale. Significant correlations between discontinuity

items and climate data suggest that norms of religious practice do relate to students' perceived school climate; interview data further demonstrate how the pedagogical methods, curricular selections, and interpersonal choices of teachers and other school personnel can be unconsciously interpreted and internalized by students as indications of teachers' values and assumptions.

This study demonstrates the relevance of applying discontinuity, dissonance, and belonging constructs to the study of American youth from minority populations whose identities extend beyond contemporary social understandings of race. Even further, the findings explore experiences, not just of a minority within a majority, but of various minority subgroups within a larger minority. Rather than implementing policies to sustain specific cultural behaviors, school educators may be better served by working on school climate and school culture initiatives that emphasize inclusivity and celebrate differences, in whatever forms they take.

A Minority Within a Minority: Sephardic Adolescents in Ashkenazic Schools

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Glossary[1]

brachot – "blessings," referring to benedictions said before and after eating certain foods, performing specific actions, and experiencing specific situations

Bukharian – referring to a group of Jews who trace their ancestry to specific regions of what is today Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

chagigah (*pl.* chagigot) – celebration with food and music

chametz – "leavened bread," referring to foods forbidden to eat on Passover

cholent – a traditional stew of meat, potatoes, and beans, commonly served on Shabbat among Ashkenazic Jews

frum – from the Yiddish, meaning "religious" or "pious"

gefilte fish – a traditional fish loaf, commonly served on Shabbat among Ashkenazic Jews

Gemara – the Talmud, a compendium of Jewish laws, stories, and wisdom dating from the 5th Century, CE

halakha, (*pl.* halakhot) – Jewish law

halakhic - related to Jewish law

halakhist – one who studies halakha and delivers practical rulings

haredi, (*pl.* haredim) – referring to groups of Jews characterized by strict adherence to religious law and ideology; in the United States, also known as ultra-Orthodox

Hasidim/Hasidic – referring to members of tight-knit religious communities, each centered around a dynastic rabbinic leader

Kabbala/kabbalist – Jewish mysticism, one who studies and/or practices Jewish mysticism

Kaddish – a prayer regularly recited during formal prayer services

kashrut/kosher – the body of laws related to Jewish dietary restrictions

kitniyot – a classification of food, including legumes, rice, and corn; according to Ashkenazic tradition, kitniyot are forbidden to eat on Passover

kugel – a traditional Ashkenazic side dish

mesorah – "tradition," referring to the transmission of Jewish beliefs and practices from one generation to the next

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[1] These definitions are deliberately succinct and simplistic. The purpose of this glossary is to provide enough information to enable a reader unfamiliar with Jewish religion, customs, and/or culture to understand the content of this dissertation. It is not intended to be comprehensive and/or authoritative.

minhag (*pl.* minhagim) – custom(s)

minyan – a formal prayer service, can also refer to the minimum of ten males aged 13 or older who are necessary for such a service to take place

mitzvah (*pl.* mitzvot) – religious commandment(s)

nussakh – liturgy; may also refer to liturgical melodies

passuk – a verse from the Bible

psak – a halakhic ruling

posek (*pl.* poskim) – a rabbinic figure who administers halakhic rulings

rishonim – a term referring to rabbinic scholars from the 11th-15th Century, CE

seudah shlishit – the "third meal" of Shabbat, eaten on Shabbat day before sunset

Shabbat/Shabbos – Sabbath, a day of rest beginning Friday night at sundown and ending approximately 25 hours later; Sabbath-observant Jews refrain from engaging in certain activities during this time, such as cooking or using electronics

Shabbaton – a retreat that takes place over a Shabbat

Shabbos goy – an individual appointed, often hired, by individual Jews or a Jewish community to do actions not permitted on Shabbat, such as turning on a light

Shulchan Arukh – written by Rabbi Yosef Karo in the 16th Century, the most widely consulted work of practical halakhic rulings; Ashkenazic variations on the contents were later supplemented by Rabbi Moses Isserles

siddur (*pl.* siddurim) – prayer book(s)

tallit – prayer shawl

tefillah (*pl.* tefillot) – prayer(s), can refer to a specific prayer and/or to the act of praying

Torah – literally referring to the Hebrew Bible and the oral tradition that emerged from it; also refers to a scroll containing the text of the Pentateuch

Chapter 1: Introduction

A few years ago, I was teaching at a Modern Orthodox day school, and we were attending the yearly school-wide Shabbaton. At prayer services on Shabbat morning, one faculty member noticed a group of girls sitting in their seats during the *kaddish*, and she sharply whispered to them to stand up.[2] One of the girls looked simultaneously surprised and confused, but she stood up anyway.

On the surface, this encounter appears to be about maintaining appropriate decorum during prayer services. The story, however, is emblematic of a more complex phenomenon: This student was Sephardic, and according to custom, she was not required to stand up during *kaddish*. The teacher, who was Ashkenazic and likely unaware of this Sephardic custom, was disciplining the student for what she perceived to be disrespectful behavior, treating the student as a wrongdoer. The student was thereby inadvertently criticized for behaviors that were for her, not only correct, but also tied to her religious practice and cultural heritage. She was, in other words, implicitly criticized for being Sephardic.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) provides a useful framework for understanding how minority subgroups are situated in majority-run educational and communal contexts. The principles of CSP have been a prime focus among contemporary educational researchers and practitioners who aim to combat the United States' history of inequities in education, particularly in diverse, pluralistic communities. Mainly focused on inequities rooted in race, CSP "seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism" and "explicitly calls for schooling to be a site for sustaining the cultural ways of being of communities of color"

[2] In Ashkenazic custom, congregational members are required to stand up during this prayer.

(Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1, 5). Lee (2017) expands the principles of CSP beyond the contemporary social and political construction of race, shifting the focus to ethnicity, defined as the "shared cultural practices that span across generations and are associated with both shared and distributed geographical space" (p. 265). Lee's approach recognizes the intergenerational, practice-based aspects of culture that transcend a specific political moment, looking to culturally-specific behaviors that reflect, reinforce, and perpetuate cultural communities:

> …this idea of international cultural practices offers an important warrant for the idea of culturally sustaining practices; that is, are there practices that communities have sustained over time (albeit in hybrid forms and transformations) that have sustained communities to be resilient in the face of challenge?...In these instances, membership in cultural communities…is defined by the participation in practices, and not by race or skin color. (p. 267)

Lee's emphasis on culturally-based practices is particularly resonant in religiously observant Jewish communities, in which religious behaviors are carried from one generation to the next and are embedded in daily life, as well as social, professional, and institutional spheres.

According to Lee's understanding of CSP, one could claim that cultural sustainability is the *raison d'etre* of Jewish day schools, particularly in American society in which Jews constitute a small minority of the population: Children and adolescents with culturally-specific histories, practices, and values are embedded in a series of nested communal, social, institutional, and political contexts, and day schools aim to help students sustain their Jewish culture as they navigate these multiple spheres. Such an understanding of Jewish day schools, however, elides the variety of histories, practices, and values within the American Jewish community. The term "Ashkenormativity" has gained colloquial traction in recent years, describing the "Ashkenazi, or

European Jewish, centricity in relation to dominant formulations of Jewish culture" (Jackson, Pappas, & Shapiro-Phim, 2021, p. 700).

Many American Jewish day schools, in which the vast majority of personnel and students adhere to Ashkenazic traditions, perpetuate the normativity of Ashkenazic practice and culture, both reflecting and reinforcing the status of Sephardic communities as "minorities within a minority" (Angel, 2019). For the purposes of this dissertation, an "Ashkenazic day school" is defined more by its lack of self-definition than its declared orientation. There are schools throughout the United States that were established by Sephardic donors and/or educators specifically with Sephardic students and communities in mind. The mission statements explicitly assert the schools' purpose of celebrating and inculcating Sephardic heritage, practice, and/or values, using language such as "Sephardic tradition," "Sephardic identity," and the like. Interestingly, a number of schools founded to serve the Sephardic community will reference both Sephardic and Ashkenazic traditions, nodding to the Ashkenazic students who attend the school and to their families. In contrast, as a whole, the mission statements of Modern Orthodox schools that were not explicitly founded to serve Sephardic communities do not indicate that they adhere to Ashkenazic practice; they are more likely to reference a "Torah way of life" or a "Modern Orthodox philosophy and lifestyle" without mentioning Ashkenazic or Sephardic traditions by name. These schools, typically founded by Ashkenazic lay leaders and run by predominantly Ashkenazic board members and educators, therefore implicitly equate American Ashkenazic heritage with Modern Orthodox practice. In these schools, the lack of self-reference is itself an indicator of Ashkenormativity.

The distinctions between Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews are simultaneously organic and constructed. Generally speaking, Ashkenazic Jews trace their ancestry to Yiddish-speaking

communities in Central and Eastern Europe, while Sephardic Jews represent regions as varied as Northern Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia, and South America. Although Sephardic Jews have lived in North America since the seventeenth century, a massive influx of Central and Eastern European immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dramatically shifted the demographics of American Jewry and established Ashkenazic language, culture, and practice as the dominant mode of American Judaism (Elazar, 1992; Wertheimer, 2018). In contrast, Sephardic Jews immigrated in smaller groups and over a more extended period of time in response to immediate world events. Though immigrants from countries such as Syria, Greece, and Morocco could hardly be painted with one homogeneous brush, what has united these disparate groups in America is that they are not Ashkenazic (Gerber, 2012; Wertheimer, 2018).[3]

Although religiously observant Jews from throughout the world practice Jewish laws, rituals, and customs in remarkably similar if not identical ways, variations in liturgy, exegetical approach, and legal interpretation and enforcement have emerged between Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews since the Medieval period (Dobrinsky, 2001; Dweck, 2020; Elazar, 1989; Zohar, 2007). Pragmatic distinctions between Ashkenazic and Sephardic religious practice, therefore, serve as daily signifiers of one's genealogical, cultural, and communal background. Scholarship suggests that those in the minority are often encouraged to adopt the behaviors and norms of the majority in order to achieve success (Ladson-Billings, 1995), a trend that carries into the Jewish realm as well: "Sephardim, since they are minorities in many communities in the United States,

[3] Although this dissertation generally presents the Ashkenazic majority and the Sephardic minority as two distinct groups, the lines between the two are blurred and complicated. Many American Jews, for instance, can claim both Ashkenazic and Sephardic ancestry, and there exist groups of Jews who do not identify as either Ashkenazic or Sephardic. Although questions of American-Jewish identity and heritage are complex, this dissertation treats Jewish heritage and practice as more of a binary, establishing Ashkenazic Jewry as the "normative" majority and Sephardic Jews as the "minority" group that operates within a majority-run context.

for instance, have learned quite well out of necessity to accommodate to and learn about many Ashkenazi customs. The reverse is not always true" (Glanz, 2007, p. 13). This phenomenon is particularly acute in Orthodox Jewish communities, where the minutiae of Jewish law are emphasized and celebrated; where broader cultural and religious trends are both reflected and perpetuated; and where even seemingly minor variants of religious practice and customs belie the distinct historical, cultural, and social traditions of Ashkenazim and Sephardim. Orthodox day schools in particular shape and facilitate students' worldviews, serving as a key site of adolescents' religious identity formation as observant Jews within a broader secular context (Krakowski, 2017).

Conceptual Frameworks

Bronfenbrenner's [Bio]Ecological Model of Development

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Development (1979) describes a child's development through the various "worlds" he inhabits (family, school, national culture, etc.) and the bidirectional relationships she forms within those worlds (child-parents, child-teacher, etc.). Within this framework, a child develops in a series of dynamic nested environments, akin to a Russian doll whose every symbiotic layer impacts the child at the center. The child is most immediately affected by the bidirectional relationships of the microsystem, in which the child interacts with parents, peers, teachers, and the like; the mesosystem is the sphere in which the microsystem relationships interact with one another, impacting the child at the center. Enveloping the micro and meso systems is the macrosystem, which describes the overarching cultural context in which the child's micro and meso interactions take place. In Bronfenbrenner & Morris's (2006) more recent iteration of this model—dubbed the bioecological model for its consideration of the child's physiological development—the child's interactions with "objects

and symbols" can nurture and/or impede the child's potential to physically, emotionally, and cognitively learn (p. 796). Misalignment, discontinuities, or conflicts between those interactions, however, can negatively impact a child's optimal development (Lee, 2017).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), the founding grounded theory on which Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) is based, was developed to counteract deficit models of pedagogy prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, in which the cultural histories, attitudes, and behaviors of racial minority—mostly Black—youth were seen as barriers to academic success that needed to be overcome. CRP sought to "[help] students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). Taking these ideas one step further, Gay's (2018) Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) explicitly brings culturally relevant ideas and content directly into curricula and instruction, "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 36). In its most ideal form, CRT extends to all aspects of a student's school experience, "encompass[ing] curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, classroom management, and performance assessments" (p. 39). If CRP is concerned with affirming students' cultures, then CRT models how students' culture may be woven into all facets of the learning experience.

Building on this tradition, CSP looks toward the future, "seek[ing] to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1). As described above, Lee (2017) expands the

principles of CSP beyond the contemporary social and political construction of race. The emphasis on culturally-based practices is particularly resonant in observant Jewish communities, in which religious behaviors are embedded in social, professional, institutional, and many other aspects of daily life.

Statement of Purpose

Many schools rooted in Ashkenazic customs, culture, and practice teach Sephardic students, whose familial practices, values, and/or norms likely misalign with those of the Ashkenazic majority (Angel, 2019; Taieb-Carlen, 1992). In the case of a Sephardic child attending an Ashkenazic day school, what might happen when the child's various bidirectional relationships are rooted in differing and sometimes opposing values, norms, and behaviors, with some relationships operating according to Sephardic ways of living and some with underlying Ashkenazic assumptions? What happens when the child's "Ashkenormative" American macrosystem does not encompass the child's Sephardic heritage, religious practices, and worldview? How might these potential cultural disconnects impact Sephardic adolescents' ability to navigate two distinct ecological worlds, and to sustain their cultural heritage? Modern Orthodox day schools provide a unique window into these questions since children and adolescents interact with the local micro and meso systems of their Jewish families and communities, which are rooted in religious practice, while they also engage with the broader macrosystem of secular society. This study explores this topic via the constructs of cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging.

Terminology and Constructs

Defining Sephardic

As an Ashkenazic woman who grew up in a predominantly Ashkenazic community, I am wary of assigning labels to a minority group without consideration for the point of view of those in that group, and of discussing nuances within that group from my "Ashkenormative" lens. Recognizing the difficulty of establishing a universally satisfying working definition of "Sephardic," I sought input from the adults interviewed for this study, all of whom self-identify as Sephardic. For these adults, the social, religious, and communal implications of being Sephardic were far more important than the terminology itself, and they generally regarded the question as inconsequential, more academic than relevant to their lived experiences. This dissertation therefore draws on a broad definition of "Sephardic" that hews closely to the definition offered by Joseph Papo (1987, via Bejarano & Aizenberg, 2012), which incorporates religious and social understandings: Sephardic Jews are "all those Jews whose religious rituals, liturgy and Hebrew pronunciation bear the imprint of a common non-Ashkenazi tradition, and who consider themselves to be part of the Sephardi world" (p. 4). This understanding describes a multi-ethnic social group tied by common religious practices, customs, and norms, whose individuals self-identify and communally affiliate as Sephardic in and of itself and/or in contradistinction to the Ashkenazic majority.

Cultural Discontinuity

Cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance both describe obstacles to success that subculture members may face in school environments governed by a dominant culture's norms. Alternatively labeled cultural conflict, cultural dissonance, cultural incongruence, cultural mismatch, or cultural misalignment (Boykin et al., 2005; Stevens & Townsend, 2015; Taggart, 2017; Tyler et al., 2008), cultural discontinuity emerges from John Ogbu's theory of cultural ecology and its descendant, cultural mismatch theory (Foster, 2004; Ogbu, 1982; Stephens &

Townsend, 2015), which “asserts that inequality is produced when the cultural norms in mainstream institutions do not match the norms prevalent among social groups which are underrepresented in those institutions” (Stephens & Townsend, 2015, p. 1304).

In school contexts, cultural discontinuity focuses on barriers to academic achievement, referring to “a school-based behavior process where the cultural value-based learning preferences and practices of many ethnic minority students—those typically originating from home or parental socialization activities—are discontinued at school” (Tyler et al., 2008). Although all students may experience some measure of discontinuity since school environments are definitionally distinct from home environments (Arunkumar et at., 1999; Ogbu, 1982), cultural discontinuity research mainly addresses experiences of subgroups whose cultural values diverge from the white, Eurocentric, middle-class hegemonic norms typically found in American public schools (Boykin et al., 2005; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Ogbu, 1982; Taggart 2017).

Home-School Dissonance

Students experience home-school dissonance when they sense that “their integrity and adequacy are threatened by real or perceived difference between home/self and what is valued within the school context” (Kumar, 2009, p. 463). Though similar to cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance describes a distinct construct. Both cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance address the discrepancy between values of the home and values of the institution; however, cultural discontinuity refers to *actual* discrepancies of values and norms while home-school dissonance refers to students’ *perceived* discrepancies of values and norms.

School Belonging

Numerous studies have explored the impacts of cultural mismatch on adolescents' cognitive and behavioral outcomes (Brown-Wright, Tyler, Graves et al., 2013; Brown-Wright, Tyler, Stevens-Watkins et al., 2013; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Lambrev, 2015; Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006; Taggart, 2017). Less attention, however, has been paid to the potential affective outcomes of cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance, particularly as they relate to adolescents' experiences of belonging in a potentially unfamiliar or uncomfortable school environment. School belonging, defined here as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (Goodenow & Grady, 1993), has been associated with increased academic achievement, academic motivation, resilience, and psychosocial adjustment (Arslan, 2019; Bond et al., 2007; Scarf et al., 2016); and inversely associated with at-risk behaviors, internal problem behaviors, school misconduct, drop-out rates, and depression and anxiety symptoms (Demanet & van Houtte, 2011; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Shochet et al., 2011; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). While school belonging and its concurrent support networks are clearly beneficial for all students, it "appears to be even more salient for minority groups…For these students, the acceptance of their peers, teachers, and parents has been found to be an important variable in developing prosocial behavior and a positive attitude towards school" (Allen & Kern, 2017, p. 60); conversely, "stigmatized social identity groups…are at a heightened risk of receiving disconfirming messages about whether they fit within academic spheres" (Gray et al., 2018, p. 97). In a world still recovering from the isolating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, widespread increases in anxiety, loneliness, and other mental health issues are particularly acute among "minorities and other groups that have been historically marginalized by mainstream cultures" (Allen et al., 2021, p. 89).

Statement of purpose

The associations between cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging, therefore, bear implications for the academic, behavioral, social, and emotional well-being of adolescents, particularly those who do not identify as members of a normative, majority group. To fully understand the experiences of Orthodox day school students from nondominant subcultures, this mixed-methods study endeavors to identify potential areas of discontinuity, ascertain whether and how those discontinuities manifest in schools, and determine whether and how discontinuity relates to students' feelings of dissonance and belonging.

Methodological Framework

In an exploratory sequential mixed methods design, the researcher explores an issue via qualitative methods and uses the findings to generate a quantitative component (Creswell, 2015). Most of the research on cultural discontinuity emerges from anthropological and/or ethnographic examination of the minority group in question (Boykin et al., 2005; Kleyn, 2010; Lambrev, 2015; Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006; Ogbu, 1982). Empirical examination of cultural discontinuity within populations, therefore, is typically rooted in preexisting qualitative research (Arunkumar et al., 1999; Taggart, 2017; Torres, 2017; Tyler et al., 2006). At the time of the writing of this dissertation, no scales specific to Sephardic minorities within Ashkenazic majorities existed; a new scale therefore needed to be developed after qualitative exploration of discontinuity. The concepts of cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging have been studied separately and sometimes in pairs, but the three have not yet been examined alongside one another, nor have the moderating effects of school climate been applied to this trifecta of constructs. This dissertation applies exploratory sequential mixed methodology to concepts—

home-school dissonance in particular—that have been examined primarily via quantitative and occasionally qualitative means alone.

Philosophical Framework and Researcher Positionality

My philosophical approach to this study is grounded in the philosophy of hermeneutics, the idea that "one can understand something observed only through the tinted lens of one's own experience" (Sutton, 1993, p. 423). In accordance with the methodological approach of Wilhelm Dilthey, this study draws from the "mechanism of 'lived experience.' This worldview [is] fundamentally a product of the social context in which the individual was socialized" (p. 414). The reality perceived by the individual, in other words, is a result of the ecological social spheres in which the individual has developed.

In this study the notion of "lived experience" applies to both the researcher as well as the research participants. Participants' lived experiences may be understood through the lens of the interpretive/constructivist paradigm, which asserts the existence of "multiple, equally valid social realities" (Havercamp & Young, 2007, p. 268). Whether participants feel as though their personal backgrounds are represented, whether they are subject to feelings of dissonance, and the degree to which they experience institutional and social belonging are all products of their personal experiences in school and the broader Jewish community. Though these experiences are individualized and subjective, they are nonetheless true for the participants themselves. The goal of this research is not to uncover one objective truth that applies for all individuals in all cases; rather, the research aims to find patterns in the true "lived experiences" of the participants.

As the researcher, I am conscious of my own "lived experience," as well as how it has shaped my priorities and focus as a researcher. My interest in this topic began when I attended Jewish day school in Queens, New York, the "most ethnically diverse urban area in the world."

In middle school, my “clique” included one girl who identified as Bukharian, one who identified as Persian, and one who identified as Georgian. The other girl and I, both of Ashkenazic descent, knew that we were Ashkenazic, but we didn’t actively incorporate our Eastern European ancestry into our respective senses of self. Later, as an English teacher in a Queens high school with a sizeable Bukharian student population, I became more aware of how unusual my ethnically mixed middle school cohort had been. From my observations as an educator, the Bukharian students, who identified as Sephardic, tended to be closest to one another and separate from their Ashkenazic classmates. They were inclined to gravitate away from certain school programs and activities and towards others. In class discussions as well, the personal experiences many of these students brought to our literary analyses revealed that they were somehow experiencing school differently than their Ashkenazic classmates. The first stages of my dissertation research were intended to explore the root of these differences and how they play out in the day-to-day lived experiences of Sephardic students.

The subsequent stages of my research involved an iterative process of meaning-making using philosophical hermeneutics, “the idea that understanding is an active, constructive process” in which the researcher “pursues a broadening of her or his viewpoint to fuse with that of the other, leading to a deeper rather than more ‘accurate’ understanding” (Havercamp & Young, 2007, p. 277). Initially drawing from my own experiences as a student, friend, and teacher, I devised interview questions to generate a fuller understanding of the context in which I was educated and to anticipate the experiences of today’s day school students. In conducting, processing, and analyzing my interviews, my understanding was further shaped by the memories and attitudes of the interviewees, which steered me to develop my survey in the way that I did. The survey results themselves have inspired me to adjust my thinking as well. My dissertation

research has been an ongoing process of exposing my own cultural, social, and religious blind spots; and of reconstructing my understanding of American-Jewish identity. My own "lived experience" has therefore been at the core of this entire undertaking.

Significance

As much of the research on Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is rooted in public schools or other nondenominational contexts, this dissertation will provide Jewish day school leaders with culturally-specific ways to apply the tenets of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy to their schools (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Because the discontinuity and dissonance scales refer to practices, habits, and customs, school leaders can isolate and address targeted items that apply to their respective school communities. More broadly, the author hopes this study illuminates ways in which Ashkenormativity has shaped the day-to-day experiences of day school students across the country, and encourages school leaders to reexamine the assumptions and values that undergird their institutions and to create school communities that are inclusive to students of all backgrounds.

Examinations of ethnicity, inclusion, diversity, identity, and the like have been at the forefront of the American educational research and political landscapes for years. These topics, however, have remained almost absent from academic discourse on Jewish day schools. This research is intended to expand the reach of these themes to the day school world and demonstrate their relevance to specific school communities. At the same time, this study aims to demonstrate to the American research community the value of examining Jewish day schools as worthy sites of inquiry about topics related to diversity and identity. Conversations about the intersection of race, ethnicity, and identity have dominated academic and political discourse for years, and the educational research space for even longer. The incorporation of religion into the

intersectionality discussion, however, is far less common; and almost no research examines the role of the minutiae of daily religious practice in identity construction. In my study, the details of religious practice dovetail with ethnicity, immigration status, and cultural values; findings offer a new understanding of adolescent identity construction in general, and insight into the dynamics of Orthodox day schools and Orthodox communities in particular.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review is arranged thematically, with two overarching sections. The first explores the sociohistorical context of Sephardim in America, highlighting the ways in which Sephardic migration patterns, customs, and intracultural encounters reflect and respond to the sociocultural backdrop of Ashkenormativity. I discuss the significance of Jewish day schools in understanding this backdrop, as well as the role of praxis in concretizing distinctions among various religious subgroups. While the first half of the literature review focuses on the Jewish-American world in which this research is situated, the second section explicates and consolidates the social science literature to which a Jewish lens is applied. This second section is arranged topically, covering significant developments in educational researchers' understanding of each of the relevant constructs: cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, school belonging, school culture, and school climate. Within each of these topics, I explore the ways in which secular educational research sheds light on the Jewish day school world, and in which incorporating elements of Jewish Studies and Jewish education into the general educational research discourse can inform understandings of adolescent belonging and identity more broadly.

Sociohistorical Context: Sephardim in an Ashkenormative Landscape

Defining "Sephardic"

The issue of who may be classified as "Sephardic" is a matter of debate. Some scholars distinguish between Sephardic Jews, who trace their ancestry to the Iberian Peninsula, and Mizrahi Jews, who claim Middle Eastern locales of origin (Benor, 2012; Perry-Hazan, 2019; Soomekh, 2016; Zimmels, 1976). Likewise, "Ashkenazic" could be defined along geographical lines, referring to those Jews who trace their family trees back to regions of Central and Eastern Europe, or using linguistic criteria such that speakers of "*leshon Ashkenaz*," i.e. German or Yiddish, would be included (Davis, 2002). Genealogical, geographic, or linguistic criteria alone,

however, do not account for dynamic migration patterns throughout Jewish history that blur distinctions between discrete ethnic and linguistic groups (DellaPergola, 2007; Taieb-Carlan, 1992), nor do they recognize Jewish subgroups who do not originate in these areas, such as Jews from Ethiopia, Central Asia, or India. Originally developed to describe immigrants to pre-State Israel, the term “Mizrahi,” literally “Easterner,” boasts a long political history and has been criticized for its colonialist implications, which associate specific subgroups with backwardness (Elazar, 1989); this history, moreover, focuses particularly on Israeli contexts and therefore bears limited relevance to populations elsewhere. Despite this etymological history, some North American organizations use the term Mizrahi to distinguish community members from descendants of Iberian Jews, even though that colloquial distinction has not been widely accepted. On the other hand, other organizations and research institutions report data on Sephardic and Mizrahi communities as one conflated category (Pew Center, 2021).

Setting aside the use of Mizrahi, other scholars prefer to distinguish between Sephardim and Ashkenazim based on adherence to the codified *halakhot* recorded by either Rabbi Yosef Karo or Rabbi Moses Isserles, respectively, in the sixteenth century (Davis, 2002; Elazar, 1989; Goldberg, 2008; Medding, 2007; Zimmels, 1976). This distinction, too, is imperfect, as some Jews adhere to a blend of Ashkenazic and Sephardic *halakhot* and traditions, and others engage in religious practices that differ from either category.

In a contemporary American context, moreover, categories rooted in countries of origin, ethnicity, and/or cultural practices are embedded in discussions of individual and group identities, which are seen as constructed and fluid. In the Jewish community, these intersectional identities are not consistently applied, and should not be understood using the same theoretical and historiographic frameworks as scholarship around race and ethnicity in America. Scholars

addressing the intersection of Judaism and racial identity have yet to develop a consistent definition or meaning of the term "Jews of Color," and discussions of who may identify as a Jew of Color are not neatly transposed onto commonly accepted American notions of racial categories. The categories of religious practice do not neatly map onto American racial categories either; some self-identified Jews of Color, for instance, might identify as Sephardic, Ashkenazic, or neither. Other Jews who, based on the color of their skin may be identified as Jews of Color by others, may not see themselves as such, self-defining along religious rather than ethnic or racial lines. Even many light-skinned Ashkenazic Jews do not see themselves as White due to personal and communal histories and experiences of discrimination (Schraub, 2019). Recognizing that the broader contemporary American discourse around race, ethnicity, and other minority identities will serve as a backdrop of the present discussion of American Sephardim, this study is not itself embedded in that discourse. Although originally a more empirical term rooted in history of place and *halakhic* practice (Medding, 2007), "Sephardic" has become complicated with social and communal implications that reflect the unique construction of Sephardic identity in North America, particularly in the United States.

As of the early twentieth-century United States, the designation "Sephardic" was reserved for those who claimed Spanish-Portuguese lineage, traceable to the Inquisitions and Expulsions of Medieval and Renaissance Europe (Ben-Ur, 2009; Elazar, 1989; Gerber, 2012). In response to the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the years preceding and following World War I, waves of immigration brought to the United States, New York City in particular, Jews who were clearly not linguistically, regionally, or *halakhically* Ashkenazic, but who also stood apart from the "true, uncorrupted, non-Oriental, upper-class descendants of the Jews of Spain and Portugal to whom the term 'Sephardi' was intended to apply" (Naar, 2016b, p. 83). Although,

like the Spanish-Portuguese Sephardim, many of these immigrants spoke Ladino or other forms of Judeo-Spanish, the established Sephardic community sought distance from the new immigrants, whom they perceived as backward and uneducated (Ben-Ur, 2009). To achieve this distance, the newly arrived subgroups were assigned labels rooted in regional identity—such as Oriental, Levantine, Balkan or Eastern—that had little intrinsic meaning to them prior to their arrival in America (Angel, 1973; Ben-Ur, 2009) and that accentuated minute differences between groups, encouraging tight-knit and isolated subcommunities (Gerber, 2012).

Over the first half of the twentieth century, however, groups of non-Ashkenazic Jews, united by the common experience of exclusion from the "normative" Ashkenazic Jewish community, banded together to expand the term "Sephardic." It would now include a disparate range of ethnic, geographic, and cultural subgroups, who were "implicitly proffered Iberian ancestry, even when it had never existed…in order to achieve political power, visibility, and acceptance" (Ben-Ur, 2009, p. 110-111). As a consequence of this unity, the distinct cultural markers of some of these subgroups were de-emphasized, sometimes forgotten: "If they joined together simply as Sephardim, their unique defining traits would be lost. But if they did not federate and unite, their broader Sephardic identity would be lost as well, as they melded with American Jewry" (Gerber, 2012, p. 50). Indeed, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1920-2013), a prominent rabbinic and political force in modern Israeli society until his passing, saw part of his life's work as reclaiming "Sephardi" for the non-Ashkenazic world, and unifying disparate ethnic groups under one Sephardic liturgical and *halakhic* banner (Saks, 2007).

This tension between the general Sephardic "umbrella" and more particular identities further complicates the task of defining Sephardim, as individuals and/or communities. In some communities, geographic, regional, and/or ethnic identity trumps affiliation with other non-

Ashkenazic groups. Cooper (2012) refers to this approach as the "Edah Paradigm," "defining diaspora groups as discrete units, *edot* [tribes], and…legitimizing and celebrating their unique histories and traditions" (p. 121). On the other hand, using the more particularized language of *edot* "exoticizes these groups by isolating them in space and depicting them as 'out-of-time'" (p. 126).

In contrast, identifying all non-Ashkenazic Jews as simply "Sephardic," regardless of diverse geographic, linguistic, and cultural histories, can define these groups in contradistinction to Ashkenazim rather than in and of themselves. Reflecting this approach, Gerber (2012) suggests that "What unites the many disparate groups and waves of immigrants who are loosely designated today as Sephardic is that they are *not* Ashkenazic" (p. 46). According to this twenty-first-century vernacular understanding, the term "has been reduced to refer to anyone who isn't Ashkenazic" (Dweck, 2020), positioning "Ashkenazic" as the normative, default mode of American Judaism, eliding distinctions between disparate cultural and linguistic groups, and simplistically positioning ethnically inspired Jewish identity as a fixed binary.

It should be noted that Ashkenazic Jewry features a variance of geographical origins and customs as well. For much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, self-described Ashkenazic Jews from regions of France and Germany saw themselves as distinct from Hungarian Jews, whose daily practices veered from the traditions of what was then "mainstream" Ashkenazic practice (Davis, 2002). Even today, Ashkenazic Jews can trace specific familial customs to particular regions of, for instance, Germany, Poland, or Lithuania. Adherents to Hasidic customs, the vast majority of whom claim ancestry from Central and Eastern Europe, add even more variation to Jewish practice, both in distinction from non-Hasidic Ashkenazic Jews and among different Hasidic sects. Despite this internal diversity, however, in

many communities, the American Ashkenazim of today are wont to see themselves as "Jews" or "Ashkenazim," rather than using more particularistic geographic identifiers.

As an Ashkenazic woman who grew up in an Ashkenazic community, I am wary of assigning labels to a minority group without consideration for the point of view of those in that group, and of discussing nuances within that group from my "Ashkenormative" lens. Recognizing the difficulty of establishing a universally satisfying working definition of "Sephardic," I sought input from adults who self-identify as Sephardic. Those who trace their ancestry back to Spain and Portugal did not regularly give the question much thought. Even the individuals who do not meet the historical definition of "Sephardic," such as those whose families originated from Iran or Central Asia and might in Israel be considered "Mizrahi," did not place too much emphasis on the specifics of terminology and jargon, nor did they express a strong preference for either a generalized or particularized identity. The social, religious, and communal implications of being Sephardic were far more important than the terminology itself. While I had originally assumed they would have had intricately developed attitudes towards the oversimplification of "Sephardic," they generally regarded the question as inconsequential, more academic than relevant to their lived experiences. Rather than using the Edah Paradigm to identify participants, I therefore opt for the more global "Sephardic," recognizing that this term is far from perfect, and that assigning identities via binaries is problematic as well.

With this in mind, this dissertation draws on a broad definition of "Sephardic" that hews closely to the definition offered by Joseph Papo (1987, via Bejarano & Aizenberg, 2012), which incorporates religious and social understandings: Sephardim are "all those Jews whose religious rituals, liturgy and Hebrew pronunciation bear the imprint of a common non-Ashkenazi tradition, and who consider themselves to be part of the Sephardi world" (p. 4). This understanding

therefore describes a multi-ethnic social group tied by common religious practices, customs, and norms, whose individuals self-identify and communally affiliate as Sephardic in and of itself and/or in contradistinction to the Ashkenazic majority.

Ashkenormativity in America

Although not a formally recognized term, "Ashkenormativity" has gained colloquial traction in recent years, describing the "Ashkenazi, or European Jewish, centricity in relation to dominant formulations of Jewish culture" (Jackson, Pappas, & Shapiro-Phim, 2021, p. 700). That Ashkenazic Jews have long been considered the "default" American Jews is nothing new. Yiddish phrases and words have seeped into the American vernacular, Jewish cuisine is frequently associated with matzoh balls and gefilte fish, and cultural phenomena—such as the writings of Philip Roth, the comedy corpora of Mel Brooks or Jerry Seinfeld, and sitcoms like *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* and *The Nanny*—present a markedly Ashkenazic presentation of American Jews (Gerber 2012; Kandiyoti, 2012; Matza, 1998; Naar, 2016b; Soomekh, 2016). Sephardic figures, customs, and cultural details are almost always absent from American pop culture.

American academia similarly sways almost exclusively toward the history and experiences of Ashkenazic Jews, often relegating Sephardic content to mere paragraphs or pages in a multi-hundred-page volume (Ben-Ur, 2009; Wertheimer, 2018), or to one or two lectures in an entire undergraduate Jewish history survey course (Ayalon et al., 2019*)*. Until relatively recently, numerous studies of Sephardic history or populations were written through an Ashkenazic lens, considering Sephardim as "exotic" Jews on the fringe of the mainstream (Cooper, 2012):

> Such studies unconsciously present Ashkenazic culture as a touchstone against which other Jewish communities are qualified and understood...Moreover, these studies assume the existence of an objective 'normative Judaism' to which all these communities in theory should conform in order to assert Jewish belonging. (Ben-Ur, 2009, p. 147)

More recent explorations of Sephardic history and culture have begun to redress this void, with scholars highlighting immigration patterns, historical contributions, and social integration of particular Sephardic communities in the United States (Ben-Ur, 2009; Bitton, 2019; Cooper, 2012; Elo & Vemuri, 2016; Gerber, 2012; Soomekh, 2008). Though significant in their own right, however, these academic contributions are proportionally limited within the field as a whole.

The Pew Center's demographic breakdown of American Jews reflects and reinforces the centrality of Ashkenazic Jewry as a standard point of reference (Pew Center 2013; Pew Center 2021). For instance, although the breakdown of Orthodox/Conservative/Reform Jewry is a construct of Ashkenazic origin (Bouskila, 2016; Solomin, 2017), survey respondents were asked to identify their religious denomination, regardless of whether they identified as Asheknazic, Sephardic, or other. The "Sephardic" option was a subcategory of "no particular denomination" in the 2013 version, positioning Sephardic practice within a denominational, "Ashkenormative" framework; in the 2021 survey, the "no particular branch" option contains no subcategories. Similarly, in a 2013 question that breaks down forms of Orthodox Judaism, "Sephardic" is mutually exclusive with liberal Orthodox, standard Orthodox, and just Orthodox, such that Sephardim are, simultaneously, identified denominationally and then also distinguished from "mainstream" Orthodox Jews. Based on the parallel question in the more recent survey, approximately 4% of American Jews identify as Sephardi and/or Mizrahi, with an additional 3%

identifying as Sephardi and/or Mizrahi in combination with other categories (Mitchell, 2022). That the reported findings collapse Sephardi and Mizrahi and include no follow-up questions about particular geographic, ethnic, and/or religious backgrounds suggests a limited understanding of Sephardic identity as experienced by actual Sephardim. The oversights of the study reveal the Eurocentric perspective of the survey developers and reflect broader oversights of American perceptions of Jews.

In an examination of interviews with Jews of Color, Levine-Rasky (2020) identifies “invasive tests of their belongingness" (pg. 6) as a prominent theme. Although experiences of American Jews of Color sometimes overlap with but by are by no means identical to the experiences of American Sephardim, the interviews reflect the Ashkenormative cultural norms in which both groups must navigate: “At best, I’m an exotic novelty. At worst, I’m ‘not a real Jew’ because my liturgy and cuisine doesn't align with Shlomo Carlebach and gefilte fish’” (pg. 7). This often-echoed sentiment reveals what it feels like to be defined in terms of what one is not, to know that one does not ascribe to the Ashkenormative ideal of how a Jew should look, and what a Jew should do.

Ashkenormativity in Orthodox Jewish culture

Ashkenormativity describes not only American cultural and sociological assumptions, but also religious expectations that present Orthodox Ashkenazic practice as the “authentic” mode of religious practice. Centuries ago, when Sephardic and Ashkenazic modes of practice were codified, respectively, by Rabbi Yosef Karo and Rabbi Moses Isserles, the two traditions were bound by far more similarities than differences, with “an underlying agreement on fundamentals” despite regional variations (Medding, 2007, p. vii). Both traditions, therefore, were seen as legitimate, normative interpretations of a common religious heritage (Davis, 2002).

Throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern period, *halakhic* practice evolved and regional customs emerged in response to specific historical events, as well as the frequency and nature of interactions with non-Jewish neighbors. In his thorough examination of the differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic rulings and customs, Zimmels (1976) significantly attributes the "strictness of the Ashkenazim as we see it today" to the German-Jewish tendency towards stringencies as a bulwark against centuries of persecutions. Isolated and often excluded from secular institutions, and denied access to branches of knowledge such as medicine, science, and philosophy, Ashkenazic Jews relied on the Talmud and its legal intricacies as a means of developing their religious worldview. Sephardic Jews in the Muslim world, in contrast, were less isolated and, as a whole, experienced less violence and discrimination than their Ashkenazic contemporaries. The "classic Sephardic model" was characterized by more openness to secular branches of knowledge, a tolerance for and even an acceptance of kabbalistic thought, as well as the belief that curricula should incorporate both Jewish and "general" topics (Bouskila, 2016; Zohar, 2007). In contrast to many Ashkenazic halakhists, who focused on the bottom line of practice, many Sephardic leaders "believed in reconstructing frameworks as precursors to practice," emphasizing "*why* we do what we do and *how* to think, rather than *what* we do" (Dweck, 2020, p. 90).

In many contemporary Orthodox Jewish circles, this trend still applies. In a landmark essay, Rabbi Haim Soloveitchik (1994) attributed Ashkenazic Jewry's strict adherence to the letter of the law to two major "ruptures"—the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) and the Holocaust—and their resulting "reconstructions": First, in response to the Enlightenment's philosophical embrace of secularism and the ensuing Reform movement, Ashkenazic rabbinic leaders cleaved even more tightly to the intricacies of Jewish law; second, when Jewish

communities were decimated throughout Europe during World War II, many mimetic traditions and human legal resources were destroyed as well, prompting observant Jews to turn to Jewish legal texts for guidance. Most Sephardic communities, however, did not experience these “ruptures" in the same way. The Enlightenment was a Western European phenomenon that touched but did not fundamentally alter Jewish communities elsewhere; similarly, although a number of Sephardic communities were indeed decimated during the Holocaust, their number was proportionally far smaller than the number of Ashkenazic Jews who were killed. As the retreat to and elevation of textual tradition restored Ashkenazic Jewry, the Sephardic world still relied on oral and mimetic traditions as their primary *halakhic* resources and were overall less exacting than their Ashkenazic brethren (Dweck, 2020). In some Ashkenazic religious circles, what centuries ago may have been considered stringent practices had now become the baseline; by extension, a leniency, rather than a legitimate alternative, had become subpar. In pre-State Israel, for instance, “the [Sephardim’s] Torah scholarship was not recognized as significant and their customs and ways were seen as foreign and not recognizably Jewish. This stigma introduced a profound sense of shame and self-consciousness among Sephardic Jews” (ibid., p. 86).[4]

“Ashkenazification” in America

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[4] Distinctions between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, and interactions among and within American Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities, may also be understood against the backdrop of the *Masorti* approach to Judaism. In the early years after Israel’s founding, the identifier *“Masorti”* —loosely translated as “traditional”—emerged as an alternative to the European-influenced denominational models of religious practice and to the then-widely accepted binary between “religious” and “non-religious” Jews, both frameworks that did not reflect the spiritual or behavioral religious approaches of many Sephardic and Mizrahi Israelis (Goldberg, 2013). Although *Masortiut* is primarily an Israeli phenomenon, immigration patterns and international contact has meant that many American Sephardim have almost certainly been exposed to and/or influenced by this approach to religiosity. Discussions of religiosity through the lens of American Orthodoxy—a denominational label associated with Ashkenazic Jews—therefore offers a relevant and useful but ultimately imperfect framework for understanding American Sephardic religious practice.

Although "Ashkenazification," the process by which non-Ashkenazic Jews mimic the behaviors and/or practices of Ashkenazim, has been documented in Israeli academic and social discourse for years,[5] the discussion of American Ashkenazification is relatively underdeveloped. Reports of American Ashkenazification are largely anecdotal, with scant academic examination of the ways in which Sephardic youth and adults socialize into "mainstream" Ashkenazic communities. As of the twentieth century, by which time the American Jewish population was overwhelmingly Ashkenazic, Ashkenazic religious traditions, far more prevalent and public than their Sephardic counterparts, had become the normative, "authoritative" mode of religious Jewish-American life. In some Orthodox circles, this has meant that to be normatively religious, one has been required to adhere to the strictures of Ashkenazic practice. Indeed, some scholars have noted the "Ashkenazification" of Sephardic youth and adults as they socialize into "mainstream" Orthodox communities, adopting markers of Ashkenazic identity to be seen as more authentically religious: "In the religious context, Ashkenazification not only reinforced Jewishness with whiteness and Europeanness, but also imposed an 'authentic' Jewish identity entirely associated with Orthodox Ashkenazi culture, history, traditions, and customs under the guise of 'religion'" (Train, 2013, p. 10). Similarly, in her study of *baalei teshuva*, formerly non-Orthodox Jews who choose become Orthodox and integrate into the Orthodox community, Benor (2012) notes that the Israeli, Sephardic-influenced pronunciation of Hebrew is associated with non-Orthodox and Modern Orthodox speakers, while Yiddish-influenced Ashkenazic dialect is considered more "frum"; *baalei teshuva*, even those from non-Ashkenazic

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[5] Scholars of Israeli society have used the term Ashkenazification to describe ways in which Jews from Northern Africa and the Middle East adopt practices and/or behaviors of Jews of European heritage, likening the Israeli trend to the American phenomenon of "passing" as White (Sasson-Levy & Shoshana, 2013). Israeli constructs of race and ethnicity operate differently than the equivalents in American society for reasons beyond the scope of this dissertation.

backgrounds, will pepper their speech with Yiddishisms and Ashkenazic-inflected Hebrew words as a means of signaling their affiliation with right-wing Orthodoxy.[6] Beyond the world of academia, communal lay leaders have also noted this trend within their communities. Bouskila (2016, p. 171), with vehement criticism of fellow Sephardic leaders, has noted a similar phenomenon regarding many Sephardic rabbis' modes of dress:

> Donned in black fedoras and black suits, a somber mode of dress as foreign to Sephardic Jews as the extremist ideology that comes with it, the majority of today's Sephardic rabbis (and many of their followers) have veered far away from the traditions and way of life of their parents and grandparents…they have chosen to denigrate their parents' traditions as 'not religious enough'...

The perpetuation of Ashkenormativity and the consequent Ashkenazification of Sephardim in America may be at least somewhat attributed to rabbinical schools and children's day schools. Because Ashkenazim so overwhelmingly outnumbered Sephardim throughout twentieth-century America, rabbinical training programs and day schools were largely founded and run by Ashkenazic rabbis, teachers, and lay leaders, such that "by the 1970s, Ashkenazic hegemony over Torah education and Jewish life was the dominant paradigm of the Jewish world" (Dweck, 2020, p. 87). This phenomenon was particularly acute in the United States. To illustrate, in a list of Sephardic responsa and prominent Sephardic halakhists in the second half of the twentieth century, only one of 281 listed was from the United States (Zohar, 2007). Today, a number of schools in which Sephardic students outnumber their Ashkenazic peers are still conducted according to norms of Ashkenazic culture and practice (Hirsch, 2019). Whereas

[6] Ashkenazification would be far less likely to occur in schools and communities operating according to Sephardic norms and behaviors. In the tight-knit Syrian community in Brooklyn, NY, for instance, Sephardim are the hegemonic social and religious group, and Ashkenazification would not be relevant.

Sephardic administrators and teachers may be proficient in both Sephardic and Ashkenazic pedagogical content, many Ashkenazic educators have themselves only learned in Ashkenazic institutions; their curricula and attitudes therefore reflect and perpetuate this "Ashkenazic hegemony." Educators who present Ashkenazic Judaism as "correct" may be perceived as implicitly criticizing Sephardic-practicing students, of exhorting them to adopt new modes of observance and to "Ashkenazify":

> There is a gap, often puzzling to the Sephardi students, between what is taught in the classroom and what they see and live outside it, especially in their homes. The school curriculum reflects only a subjective, partial view of Jewish reality, and because it is imposed as if it were the only Jewish reality, it is internalized by the students. (Taieb-Carlen, 1992)

Ashkenormativity in Jewish day school research

The United States, home to the second-largest Sephardic population in the world, has been largely ignored in studies of Sephardim in Jewish day schools. Insofar as academic research has examined the contemporary Sephardic schooling experience outside of Israel—and that research has been scant—most of the scholarly attention has been focused outside of the United States (Blank, 1993; Bejarano, 2008; Gross, 2006; Hirsch, 2019; Perry-Hazan, 2019; Train, 2013). These studies provide useful backdrops for understanding Sephardic-Ashkenazic dynamics more globally, but their demographic, historical, and cultural characteristics are analogously limited to the United States' context. Israel, for instance, home to the largest concentration of Sephardic Jews, bears a long and fairly well-documented history of discrimination against Sephardim that predates the birth of the State (Goldberg, 2008). Also, by some estimates, over half of all Israeli Jews are of Sephardic origin, not at all comparable to the

Jewish population of the United States (Mizrahi, 2019). Reports of discrimination against Sephardic students in Israel and in England have been filed in recent years, though mostly in *haredi* institutions (Perry-Hazan, 2019); if parallel situations have occurred in the United States, they have not been well-documented. Though some inquiries in Jewish schools in countries such as Canada, Australia, Mexico, and Argentina address relationships between Sephardic and Ashkenazic students (Bejarano, 2012; Blank, 1993; Cooper, 2012; Hirsch, 2019; Medding, 2007; Taieb-Carlen, 1992; Train, 2013), the American macrosystem's unique historical, sociological, political, and demographic context distinguishes the United States from these other areas and positions American Jewish communities as worthy sites of exploration (Alhadeff, 1995; Dweck, 2020; Glazier, 1988).

Even with more recent academic attention to Sephardic history and culture (Ben-Ur, 2009; Cooper, 2012; Gerber, 2012, Naar, 2016a; Soomekh, 2008), little attention has been paid to the ways in which the Sephardic-American experience manifests and is influenced by Jewish day schools, particularly in the Orthodox community, where nuances of religious practice, customs, and norms—however slight—will be thrown into sharp relief. Orthodox day schools shape and facilitate students' worldviews, serving as a key site of adolescents' religious identity formation as observant Jews within a broader secular context (Krakowski, 2017).

Cultural Discontinuity

Much of the foundational work on cultural discontinuities in schools draws from anecdotal evidence emerging from anthropological and/or ethnographic observations. Although not the earliest examination of this topic, Ogbu's (1982) cultural discontinuity hypothesis establishes a framework and terminology utilized in subsequent studies. Using an anthropological lens, Ogbu distinguishes between universal discontinuities, which all children

experience to a degree since the school and the home are logistically and definitionally distinct; and primary discontinuities, which draw from fundamental cultural differences between various subcultures. Ogbu provides lengthy anthropological illustrations of non-Western groups whose language, values, and existing schemas are orthogonal to Western norms and would pose obstacles for students trying to learn in Western environments. Secondary discontinuities, which subcultures develop as a response to being among a dominant population and/or institution, can even develop deliberately as subculture members affirm their own identities and seek to distinguish themselves from members of the dominant group. A study of cultural discontinuity, it should be noted, examines discrepancies of values, norms, and behavior, but does not specifically delve into students' experiences of dissonance.

Stemming from anthropology and ethnography, much of the research on cultural discontinuity relies on qualitative methodologies. Boykin, Tyler, & Miller (2005), for instance, conducted over 150 hours of classroom observations to witness first-hand the existence and impact of discontinuities experienced by African-American students in grades 1-6. This qualitative study was necessary, claim the authors, because "before adequate and sustained educational reform can transpire, a strong and reliable knowledge of what pedagogical practices were currently in place needs to be captured" (p. 522). Drawing on prior ethnographic research, the authors coded their observations based on ten cultural themes, comprising five "mainstream" values/practices, such as competition and individualism, and five "ethnocentric" values/practices, such as verve and communalism. Cultural discontinuities presented throughout the data as students demonstrated "Afrocultural" values and behaviors at odds with the more "mainstream" expectations of their teachers. This finding is supported by other researchers' explorations of culturally-rooted language patterns in education, which identify the ways in which cultural

discontinuities derive from differences in vocabulary, storytelling patterns, and modes of interpersonal communication (Kleyn, 2010; Lambrev, 2015; Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006). Further developing this line of inquiry, a subsequent quantitative study conducted by the same research team also supports the findings of the 2005 study (Tyler et al., 2006). Though Boykin, Tyler, & Miller (2005) do not explore academic outcomes that result from discontinuity, systematically establishing that discontinuity does exist is itself an important contribution. The study is limited, however, in its exclusive focus on classroom observations. Discrepancies between behaviors and expectations likely also manifest in other facets of schooling, such as assemblies, bureaucratic procedures, dress codes, and the like. Observations of a more far-reaching scope would better capture students' holistic school experience.

Unlike Boykin, Tyler, & Miller (2005), Lambrev's (2015) inquiry draws clear links between cultural discontinuities and adverse academic outcomes. Using interviews and observational data from a two-year ethnographic exploration of three Roma communities in Bulgaria, Lambrev asserts the importance of culturally relevant pedagogies that will help to narrow the literacy and overall achievement gaps between Roma children and their "mainstream" Bulgarian counterparts. Roma communities' emphasis on oral and dialogic story-telling, for instance, may disadvantage students who are required to read and write stories and who need to sit quietly as they do so. The Roma values of independence, free exploration, and childhood responsibility can be diametrically opposed to schools' structures of strict timetables and codes of conduct and speech. A devaluing of Roma language and general condescension toward Roma communities compound students' difficulties in school. Lambrev's research provides stark evidence that cultural discontinuity is not a phenomenon restricted to minority communities in

the United States, and provides extreme examples of the ways that culturally irrelevant pedagogy perpetuates cycles of adverse academic outcomes.

In contrast, Torres's (2017) research with American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) populations questions the assumption that cultural discontinuity contributes to lower achievement. To assess cultural discontinuity, Torres devised a measurement using constructs from the culture-based education (CBE) curriculum administered in the sample population's schools, asking students about the degree to which they affiliate with their home cultures, and teachers and administrators about the degree to which the CBE objectives were implemented in schools. These data were analyzed alongside standardized fourth and eighth-grade achievement test scores. Contrary to cultural discontinuity theory, no significant results supported the contention that cultural discontinuity is inversely associated with academic achievement. Torres does acknowledge the difficulty of using standardized tests as a holistic metric of academic achievement, as well as the limited scope of this study's sample. He also suggests his results reflect the insufficiency of "blaming" cultural discontinuity for educational inequity when macro issues—poverty, systemic racism, etc.—are more likely the culprits. Even so, this study's system for measuring cultural discontinuity operates on the assumption that students internalize the school's curriculum in the way that teachers and administration intend without asking students about their perceptions of the curriculum and its relevance to their home cultures. Also, in looking at the associations between discontinuity and academic achievement, the study relegates students' social-emotional responses to a mediating steppingstone between the two constructs, without considering or measuring social-emotional responses in and of themselves. Deliberate measures for students' internal responses to cultural discontinuity would provide a more holistic view of the impact of cultural discontinuity on students' lives.

Home-School Dissonance

Arunkumar, Midgley, & Urdan (1999) were the first to define and measure “home-school dissonance.” Approaching their subject matter from a Bronfenbrenner-inspired ecological standpoint, the researchers posit that adolescents dwell in different ecological “worlds,” such as the realms of home and school. When the boundaries between the two are blurred, adolescents can integrate their worlds with relative ease; when the boundaries are more clearly defined, adolescents may have difficulty reconciling their different worlds. Building on prior research examining cultural discontinuities between European-American and other subgroups, the researchers focus not on the cultural differences themselves but on the potential distress students of undervalued cultures may experience. (The authors use the label “European-American” rather than “White.”) For their study, the authors drew on ethnographic research to develop six items on a 5-point Likert-type scale. To date, this is the only scale specifically designed to measure home-school dissonance.

The small but potent body of research exploring home-school dissonance has demonstrated its significant associations with decreased self-esteem, lower GPA (Arunkumar et al., 1999), disruptive classroom behaviors (Tyler et al., 2018), amotivation (Brown-Wright, Tyler, Graves, et al., 2013), academic cheating (Tyler, Brown-Wright, et al., 2010), decreased school connectedness (Jose et al., 2017), and decreased school belonging (Kumar, 2006). Empirical studies of home-school dissonance almost exclusively address the experiences of African-American students (Arunkumar et al., 1999; Henderson et al., 2020; Kumar, 2006; Brown-Wright, Tyler, Graves, et al., 2013; Tyler, Brown-Wright, et al., 2010; Tyler et al., 2016; Tyler et al., 2018), with some exceptions (Jose et al., 2017; Taggart, 2017).

As of the writing of this review, little empirical evidence has emerged to support the idea that home-school dissonance levels significantly differ by students' race or ethnicity, contrary to the principles of cultural mismatch theory (Brown-Wright, Tyler, Graves et al., 2013; Kumar, 2006). Since no home-school dissonance scale other than the Arunkumar, Midgely, & Urban (1999) version has yet been devised, the difficulty may perhaps lie in the measure itself. The survey questions, rather than homing in on specific cultural/ethnic values and/or practices, ask broadly about respondents' reactions to perceived differences between home and school. Responses may therefore indicate perceived differences that are unrelated to cultural or ethnic discontinuities. Even assuming that the home-school dissonance is overly general, however, studies utilizing this scale do contribute to an understanding of the broad contours of home-school dissonance, if not its particulars.

As part of their longitudinal study, Arunkumar, Midgley, & Urdan (1999) examine the effects on home-school dissonance as students transition from elementary to middle school. In addition to the newly developed Home-School Dissonance Scale, participants also answered self-evaluative questions about their emotional and academic well-being. After home-school dissonance scores were divided into three categories—high, medium, and low—results indicated significant academic and emotional differences between students with high home-school dissonance and students with low home-school dissonance, supporting the hypothesis that home-school dissonance is associated with adverse emotional and academic outcomes. During the transition from elementary to middle school, high-dissonance students experienced steeper declines in GPA and steeper increases of reported anger levels as well. Contrary to the researchers' hypothesis, however, no significant difference in levels of home-school dissonance was found between European-American and African-American respondents.

Building on her earlier research, Kumar (nee Arunkumar) (2006) again highlighted the transitional stage between elementary and middle school, when students adjust from a “mastery-focused” culture to a “performance-focused” culture. Kumar hypothesized that students who perceive their middle schools as “performance-focused” will experience increases in home-school dissonance during the elementary-to-middle-school transition; those who perceive their new schools as “mastery-focused” will not experience such increases in home-school dissonance; this hypothesis was supported by the data, though it should be noted that students’ responses reflect their *perceptions* of mastery vs. performance rather than an objective analysis of their school environments. Given the tumultuousness of this stage of adolescence, as well as a shift in academic expectations, increased dissonance may be a product of new academic expectations, regardless of what those expectations actually are. Similarly, reported levels of home-school dissonance may reflect levels of overall dissonance and do not provide specific implications for home-school dissonance. Kumar also administered Goodenow’s (1993) school belonging scale to assess the degree to which school belonging may mediate the relationship between perceptions of goal structures and home-school dissonance. Correlation analyses revealed a small but highly significant association between school belonging and home-school dissonance; student demographics, such as race, were not significantly related to dissonance. The relationship between home-school dissonance and school belonging begs further investigation.

Lynda Brown-Wright, Kenneth Tyler, and their associates have published a series of articles examining home-school dissonance and its academic and emotional correlates among African-American adolescents (Brown-Wright, Tyler, Graves et al., 2013; Brown-Wright, Tyler, Stevens-Watkins, 2013; Tyler, et al., 2010; Tyler et al., 2016; Tyler et al., 2018;). The consistent descriptions of sample populations and measurements indicate that all analyses were drawn from

the same data set, featuring two schools from the Southeastern United States. The articles and their findings will be discussed in chronological order.

Tyler, Brown-Wright, Stevens-Watkins, et al. (2010) adapted the existing research on home-school dissonance (Arunkumar et al., 1999; Kumar, 2006) to a high school context. The research team ran regression analyses on data collected via the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scale (PALS), which includes five of six items from Arunkumar et al.'s (1999) home-school dissonance subscale, to see whether home-school dissonance predicts a host of academic and psychological outcomes. Regression analysis revealed that home-school dissonance significantly predicted academic cheating, disruptive behavior, performance orientations, and self-reported English and math scores. Though statistically significant, the regression coefficients were all low, limiting the applicability of these results to other contexts and calling into question how meaningfully the results capture home-school dissonance's contribution to participants' academic and psychological welfare. Although this study did not correlate home-school dissonance with race, ethnicity, or culture, it is worth noting that the student bodies of both schools used as sites for this study were majority African-American, one school with 60% and one with 84%. Perhaps the statistics related to home-school dissonance would have been different with more demographically varied samples.

Whereas the 2010 article examined the association of home-school dissonance with a range of academic and psychological factors, a 2013 study (Brown-Wright. Tyler, Graves, et al.) analyzed home-school dissonance with amotivation and disruptive classroom behaviors in particular. Measurements included the PALS' classroom disruptive behavior subscale and the home-school dissonance subscale, the Academic Motivation Scale's amotivation subscale, and the schools' classroom disruptive behavior reports. Consistent with researchers' expectations,

home-school dissonance was significantly correlated with amotivation and disruptive classroom behaviors, and was significantly predictive of disruptive behaviors. Home-school dissonance was not, however, significantly associated with students' ethnicities. In a similar study, Brown-Wright, Tyler, and Stevens-Watkins (2013) used the aforementioned scales as well as self-reported levels of academic cheating, and found home-school dissonance to be predictive of amotivation and academic cheating. As with the study of home-school dissonance and disruptive behaviors, results did not differ significantly based on participants' race.

Continuing their work examining home-school dissonance among African-American adolescents, this time in middle school, Tyler, Stevens-Morgan, and Brown-Wright (2016) examined the relationship between home-school dissonance, student-teacher relationships, and school attachment. The research team's hypothesis, that respondents' perceptions of home-school dissonance would predict school attachment, was partially supported: Home-school dissonance predicted attachment in only one of several attachment dimensions, and student-teacher relationships seemed to neutralize the effects of home-school dissonance in general. Further, although African-American respondents did report more negative student-teacher interactions than their Caucasian and Asian-American peers, no other significant results were found that distinguished students by race or ethnicity. Thus far, therefore, home-school dissonance—or at least the home-school dissonance scale—does not significantly differentiate students by racial or ethnic variables.

Building on earlier work examining the relationship between home-school dissonance and disruptive classroom behaviors among high school students (Brown-Wright. Tyler, Graves, et al., 2013), Tyler, Burris, and Coleman (2018) further explored this relationship in middle school. Home-school dissonance was significantly associated with adverse academic, emotional,

and behavioral outcomes; and as hypothesized, home-school dissonance was significantly and highly correlated with disruptive behaviors. In this study, African-American students reported higher levels of home-school dissonance and disruptive behavior than their Caucasian counterparts. More empirical data would be necessary to establish a clear link between home-school dissonance and race/ethnicity.

Since little quantitative analyses have consistently linked home-school dissonance and race, Henderson et al. (2020) opted for a qualitative methodology to describe the relationship between home-school dissonance and parental involvement. Using interview data from parents and teachers, the research team illustrated the ways in which teachers and parents conceptualized the similarities and differences between students' home and school experiences, and how those perceptions related to parents' school involvement or lack thereof. Interview questions included items such as, "How much do you feel the school values things that are important to you?" and "How much do you feel your students' parents value things that are important to you as a teacher?" Overall, parents who described more positive communication and overall encounters with school personnel reported lower home-school dissonance; dissatisfied parents—all of African-American male students—reported higher home-school dissonance and more negative parent-school interactions. In the absence of consistent quantitative data, qualitative anecdotes express the reality for select individuals experiencing home-school dissonance. The findings of this study, however, are far from generalizable: Although a large sample size is not strictly necessary for a qualitative study of this scope, the limited interview pool in this case—two Caucasian mothers and four African-American parents—provides only a narrow window into isolated families' experiences. Perhaps even more significantly, all five teachers interviewed for

this study were Caucasian; as such, African-American teachers' perspectives on home-school dissonance are completely absent in this study.

As explained earlier in this review, much of the research on home-school dissonance has been conducted with African-American students. One exception is the work of Jose et al. (2017), which focuses on distinctions between New Zealand's Maori and European (ENZ) adolescents. Although racial inequities in the American public school system have been extensively documented, inequities in New Zealand schools are arguably more historically and institutionally intentional. European colonizers in New Zealand actively sought to eradicate native language and culture in public schools. Even though several decades ago Maori language and culture became more accepted in schools, a century's worth of purposeful monoculturalism could not be easily undone, and Maori students consistently reveal lower academic outcomes than their ENZ peers. Using Arunkumar's home-school dissonance scale (1999), this longitudinal study traced the relationship of home-school dissonance to various academic and emotional outcomes, sometimes as isolated correlations, and sometimes as the relationships evolved over a 3-year span. As predicted, researchers found a negative correlation between home-school dissonance on the one hand, and home and school connectedness on the other, supporting their belief that "individuals would be unlikely to strongly embrace two domains perceived to be at odds with each other" (p. 3). Three-year developments in home-school dissonance positively predicted adverse outcomes, such as avoidance, negative affect, and lack of autonomy; while they negatively predicted confidence, aspirations, and other positive outcomes. Maori students also reported significantly higher levels of home-school dissonance than their ENZ peers, though the effect size was small. Interpreting this finding, the researchers suggest that ENZ youth also experience home-school dissonance but lack the home-based institutional support systems to

help them work through their feelings of dissonance; perhaps examining the association between home-school dissonance and coping skills would shed light on this dynamic. A framework that identifies discontinuities (Tyler et al., 2008) as well as cultural norm preferences (Stevens & Townshend, 2015) would also illuminate the workings of home-school dissonance, even among "majority" populations.

School Belonging

Until relatively recently, school belonging was understudied as a construct in and of itself, instead viewed as a subset of the amorphously defined construct "school connectedness," also known as school "bonding, engagement, attachment, support and relatedness" (Garcia-Moya et al., 2019, p. 423). The National School Climate Center (2020) frames school connectedness as a subset of school climate, positioning connectedness in terms of students' relationship to the school as an institution, defining the construct as "positive identification with the school and norms for broad participation in school life for students, staff, and families." In contrast, the widely cited definition presented by the Center for Disease Control (2009), echoed by the American Psychological Association (2014), presents school connectedness as a construct distinct from school climate, defining it as "the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals." Research using the CDC/APA definition therefore examines the interpersonal, relational aspects of connection. This definition adheres closely to that offered by Goodnow and Grady (1993), who understand school belonging as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment." For Aldridge & Ala'i (2013), school connectedness and school belonging are nearly one and the same, and they define school connectedness as "a student's sense of belonging within the school environment" (p. 5).

Acknowledging the wide variety of definitions and terminology used in the literature, Allen & Kern (2017) conducted a survey of school belonging research to determine the most salient thematic similarities across the literature and to develop a framework by which to understand and measure school belonging. The authors observed that "across various definitions of belonging is a need to connect with other people," and that the degree to which an individual experiences belonging "reflects one's perceptions of his or her involvement in a social system or environment" (p. 6). Allen & Kern also identified three primary means by which school belonging has been operationalized: "(1) school-based relationships and experiences, (2) student-teacher relationships, and (3) students' general feelings about school as a whole" (p. 17). In a meta-analysis of 45 school belonging studies, the authors found that teacher support most strongly associated with school belonging out of all measured interpersonal variables. They also found strong support for the importance of "personal characteristics," such as self-esteem, social awareness, coping skills, and emotional regulation.

In school contexts, Garcia-Moya et al. (2019) noted a similar trend in their meta-analysis, observing that "relationships in the school environment seem to be the core element shared by all definitions of school connectedness" (p. 428). Although Garcia-Moya et al. used the term school connectedness more frequently than school belonging, their working definitions and examinations of measures address school belonging in content if not by name. The authors consolidated thematic understandings of connectedness/belonging as follows:

1. It refers to relationships taking place within the school environment
2. It is the individual's perceptions and feelings in those relationships which are considered important

> 3. It can be conceptualised at two different levels (or as a combination of both): either referring to feelings towards the whole school as an institution or community, or to those experienced as the result of specific one-to-one social interactions at school. (p. 436)

According to these authors, school connectedness has been measured via three primary means: "individual's perceptions and feelings of acceptance and care, respect and support from others at school (mostly teachers and other adults) and the extent to which students like/enjoy going to their school" (p. 433). Although Allen & Kern (2017) and Garcia-Moya et al. (2019) utilize different terms, they are essentially distilling the research on connectedness/belonging in the same way: School belonging is a product of a student's individualized perceptions of experiences and relationships in school, especially with teachers, and how those perceptions make the student feel towards other people in the school and towards the school institution itself.

School belonging has been associated with increased academic achievement, academic motivation, resilience, and psychosocial adjustment (Arslan, 2019; Bond et al., 2007; Korpershoek et al., 2019; Scarf et al., 2016); and inversely associated with at-risk behaviors, internal problem behaviors, school misconduct, drop-out rates, and depression and anxiety symptoms (Demanet & van Houtte, 2011; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Shochet et al., 2011; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). One study also found associations between school-based relationships and ethnic and moral identity among ethnic minority students (Aldridge & Ala'i et al., 2016). Not only does school connectedness predict these other outcomes, a longitudinal study of general social connectedness in adolescents found that school connectedness also demonstrates a bidirectional relationship with wellbeing outcomes, such that positive markers of academic,

social, and emotional wellbeing are predictive of strong school connectedness as well (Jose et al., 2012).

While school belonging and its associated constructs are clearly beneficial for all students, it "appears to be even more salient for minority groups…For these students, the acceptance of their peers, teachers, and parents has been found to be an important variable in developing prosocial behavior and a positive attitude towards school" (Allen & Kern, 2017, p. 60); conversely, "stigmatized social identity groups…are at a heightened risk of receiving disconfirming messages about whether they fit within academic spheres" (Gray et al., 2018, p. 97). Although researchers of school belonging do not overtly use the terminology of cultural discontinuity or home-school dissonance in this context, they have suggested that school belonging among racial minority groups is tied to these constructs: "Research suggests that Black students can develop a positive sense of belonging when the cultural values promoted in schools are compatible with the cultural values that they bring with them to school" (Gray et al., 2018, p. 102). In a world still recovering from the isolating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, widespread increases in anxiety, loneliness, and other mental health issues are particularly acute among "minorities and other groups that have been historically marginalized by mainstream cultures" (Allen et al. 2021, p. 89). School belonging is therefore more important than ever.

An ecological approach to school belonging

According to Allen & Kern (2017), most frameworks of belonging almost exclusively address the students' internal experiences of belonging without situating the students within broader social networks. With foundations in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), they refer to their updated framework as the bio-psycho-socio-ecological model of school belonging (BPSEM). The BPSEM contextualizes students' internal

experiences as they relate to the students' various ecological environments, redefining school belonging as "one's feeling of being connected to a school with a school social system" (p. 105). In their explanation of the BPSEM's concentric ecological spheres, they reimagine Bronfenbrenner's original model through the lens of school environments: As in Bronfenbrenner's model, the microsystem refers to the immediate social relationships between a student and peers, parents, and teachers. The mesolevel, which for Bronfenbrenner describes the interactions of the microsystem relationships, refers in the BPSEM to the school's implicit and explicit culture, such as "the mission statement, physical environment, norms around behavior and dress, competencies of staff, and school rituals and traditions…as well as…the underlying attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of its members" (p. 57.) In this framework, therefore, students' sense of belonging is intimately informed by the social norms, values, and practices by which the school community functions; belonging, in other words, is associated with school climate and culture.

School Culture

Though similarly describing the personality or environment of an organization, culture and climate are distinct concepts that require working definitions to be of practical use for this dissertation. With roots in anthropology and sociology, and studied via a range of primarily qualitative methods (Ashkenasy et al., 2000; Morrill 2008), organizational culture lacks a cohesive definition. At its broadest, culture is commonly understood as the "*why* of organizational behavior," with "climate as its manifestation...the *what* of the organizational culture" (Ashkenasy & Hartel, 2014). In other words, culture "is essentially about *sharedness*" (Dickson et al., 2014) and describes the underlying and oftentimes unconscious attitudes shaping the environment of an organization, with climate the outward perceptions of those unconscious

attitudes. Hoy (1990) describes culture as "a system of shared orientations that hold the unit together and give it a distinctive identity" (p. 157), but there is much disagreement among scholars about what those shared orientations are.

Schein's (1985) three-tiered model of culture offers one template for academic analysis (Ashkenasy et al., 2000; Day et al., 2014). "Assumptions," the most abstract tier, refer to the "taken-for-granted beliefs about reality and human nature" (Hatch, 1993) that are often unconscious (Hoy, 1990; Dickson et al., 2014). "Values" describe "social principles, philosophies, goals, and standards" (Hatch, 1993) based on inherent values that direct how organizational members seek to achieve their goals (Giorgi et al., 2015) and define parameters for success (Hoy, 1990). The most easily measured of the three tiers, "artifacts" are "visible, tangible, and audible results of activity grounded in values and assumptions" (Hatch, 1993), such as behavioral norms (Hoy, 1990), language or rituals (Schneider et al., 2011), and myths and stories (Schneider & Barbera, 2014).

Whereas the Schein model (1985) and its offshoots view artifacts as a product of abstractions, Pettigrew's (1978) model of organizational culture places artifacts at the forefront, introduced in a landmark paper that incorporated anthropology and sociology terms not yet widely applied to psychology. Culture is herein defined as a "family of concepts"—symbol, language, ideology, belief, ritual, and myth—that both capture accepted meanings for the organization and also reinforce those meanings, "interpret[ing] a people's own situation to themselves." Subsequent models of culture analysis tease apart this "family of concepts," focusing on one or more of these cultural markers. To illustrate, in their framework for analyzing school culture, Firestone & Wilson (1985 via Hoy, 1990) rebrand ritual—referring to ceremonies, such as rites of passage or routines—as a subcategory of symbol, and merge myths

and more fact-based legends together into stories, also a subset of symbols; icons, the third category of symbol, refer to physical artifacts, such as trophies or posters.

Rafaeli and Worline (2000) take this understanding of "symbol" further, including not only physical objects, but people and their performed behaviors, as well as aesthetics and spatial organization. In this conception of semiotics, symbols serve four functions: They reflect existing culture and internalized values and norms; evoke feelings and behaviors based on those internalized values and norms; provide frameworks and opportunities for members to discuss their experiences (a motto or logo change, for instance, creates a forum for discussion about the organization's values and role); and allow members to integrate the aforementioned functions into holistic meanings. In studying a school using these semiotics frameworks, assumptions, values, and the like are not absent but rather inferred from more overtly measurable symbols.

Other models integrate the hierarchical elements of Schein's design with the more concretized approach of Pettigrew. Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics model overtly builds on Schein's theory of assumptions, values, and artifacts by adding symbols as a fourth layer of the model, and emphasizing the "processual" aspects and interrelationships between the four components; the result is a circular rather than linear design in which culture emerges from "continuous cycles of action and meaning-making shadowed by cycles of image and identity formation" (p. 686).

Also rethinking the "shape" of cultural models are Giorgi et al. (2015), who define culture in terms of five major building blocks. Abstract "values," as in Schein's model, refer to "desirable goals that direct behavior," and comprise one bookend of the diagram (p. 4). On the other end of the model lie "toolkits," a "repertoire" (p. 13) of skills, behaviors, habits, or approaches culled from a variety of fields on which organizational members draw to respond to

distinct situations. Toolkits emphasize action rather than the values that undergird them, as "bits and pieces of culture [that] can be differently assembled, opening up the possibility of a variety of outcomes, even given the same values" (p. 13). Between the bookends of values and toolkits, "stories" are narratives that organizations use to construct unique identities; "frames" define circumstances by "inclusion and exclusion," and draw parameters around and within concepts by "separating what is in a frame from what is out of it" (p. 11); and "categories" define groups or concepts by "clustering entities that are similar and differentiating them from those that are distinct" (p. 17). The three center building blocks influence each other and are in turn influenced by values and toolkits. On the one hand, organizational members can make decisions rooted in underlying values; alternatively—and, as these authors claim, more likely—they may act in accordance with practical considerations that supersede ideological motivation. In other words, culture is not only something that describes and drives an organization; "culture is also something people *do*" (p. 30). Similarly, according to Peterson & Smith (2000), much of organizational members' meaning-making emerges from an organization's social structure, such that rules, principles, or norms are less impactful than identified "categories" of people. Values, norms, or other culture markers are intuitively and unconsciously analyzed in context of the individuals who perpetuate, encourage, or flout those values and norms. (An inferred message from a superior, for instance, weighs differently than that same message from a peer.)

As the Giorgi et al. (2015) and Peterson (2000) models suggest, an emphasis on knowable behaviors over more abstract values and norms has gained traction since scholars suggest that no organization can "uniformly instill values and norms in their members" and that individuals often act in conflict with their beliefs (Giorgi et al., 2015). An organizational member's self-interest may also override any personal adherence to organizational values and/or

norms in a given situation (Ashkanasy & Hartel, 2014). Although day-to-day activities do reflect and shape organizational culture, downplaying or muting the role of underlying values limits the scope of organizational analysis and overlooks how toolkits or in-the-moment responses are themselves a reflection of values. The decision to prioritize situation-driven toolkits or other expedient responses is itself a value judgment on the importance of values, ideologies, or other abstract motivations.

What might this mean for the culture of the ethnically diverse Jewish day school? As per Schein (1985), behaviors, norms, and practical day-to-day interactions may indicate more deeply rooted value systems and unconscious assumptions about how the world works; and, as per Pettigrew (1979), practical routines and rituals create and reinforce distinct cultural systems. As much of the practical difference between Ashkenazim and Sephardim operates on the level of behavior, ritual, and language, practical distinctions likely suggest distinct ecological spheres, a la Bronfenbrenner (1979). The difficulty of empirically measuring the unconscious assumptions that comprise culture has been extensively noted (Hatch, 1993; Hoy, 1990; Morrill, 2008; Schneider et al., 2017). Researchers can therefore look to behaviors, rituals, language, and other symbols from which to extrapolate culture-specific assumptions and values (Tyler et al., 2008).

School Climate

The nuances of organizational climate, how best to measure it, and its conceptual relationship to organizational culture are topics of discussion among climate scholars. Thankfully, more agreement exists about the basic definition of climate than about culture. With origins in psychology and social psychology (Lewin et al., 1939)—as opposed to culture's origins in sociology and anthropology—climate generally refers to shared perceptions of an environment and its members' behaviors (Hoy, 1990; Ashkanasy & Hartel, 2014); though also a

product of "sharedness" in an organization, climate concerns the conscious attitudes of organizational employees rather than the often unconscious values/assumptions/norms that drive culture (Ashkanasy & Hartel, 2014), and climate may therefore better capture members' day-to-day lived experiences (Keyton, 2014).

Climate is associated with individual, psychological impressions rather than collective understandings (Schneider et al., 2011). Individual organizational members can therefore hold contradicting emotions or impressions simultaneously (Ashkanasy & Hartel, 2014). A student may, for instance, feel apprehensive and disrespected while walking through a metal detector into the school building, all while feeling accepted and supported by the faculty. The internally multifaceted nature of individual perceptions, as well as the internally multifaceted nature of organizations, has led scholars in the field of climate research to home in on specific climate dimensions in their analyses, rather than attempting to capture climate as a monolithic entity (Aldridge et al., 2016; Chan, 2014; Schneider et al., 2011; Schneider & Barbera, 2014). Narrowing climate into relevant dimensions also increases outcomes' validity as there are fewer variables with which to contend (Schneider et al., 2011). Transferring employee analogs from the business world, many earlier understandings of school climate refer exclusively to teachers' perceptions of their workplace (Hoy, 1990). More contemporary discussions, however, expand the definition of school climate to include and even prioritize students' perceptions (NSCC, n.d.; Aldridge & Fraser et al., 2016). Of interest in this dissertation are student participants' perceptions of teacher support, peer attachment, and affirming diversity as defined by Aldridge & Ala'i (2013), discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3: Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1

How do Sephardic middle schoolers experience cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance, as measured by the Sephardi/Ashkenazi Cultural Discontinuity Scale and the adapted Home-School Dissonance Scale? How do cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance differ between Sephardic and Ashkenazic middle schoolers?

Hypothesis 1a: Sephardic middle schoolers will experience greater cultural discontinuity than Ashkenazic middle schoolers.

Hypothesis 1b: Sephardic middle schoolers will experience greater home-school dissonance than Ashkenazic middle schoolers.

Research Question 2

What associations exist between cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging among Sephardic middle schoolers? How do these associations compare to those of their Ashkenazic classmates?

Hypothesis 2a: Cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance will positively associate with each other, and will negatively associate with school belonging.

Hypothesis 2b: Cultural discontinuity will more highly associate with home-school dissonance in Sephardic middle schoolers than Ashkenazic middle schoolers, and will more negatively associate with school belonging in Sephardic middle schoolers than Ashkenazic middle schoolers.

Research Question 3

To what extent are the relationships among cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging moderated by the school climate dimensions of teacher support, peer attachment, and affirming diversity?

Hypothesis 3a: Teacher support, peer attachment, and affirming diversity will significantly moderate the relationships between cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging.

Research Question 4

How do Sephardic middle schoolers' experiences of cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging differ by Sephardic subgroup, geographic context, and other demographic factors?

Chapter 4: Method

Design

This study was completed first with an exploratory sequential mixed methods design, in which the researcher explores an issue via qualitative methods and uses the findings to generate a quantitative component (Creswell, 2015). While designing this study and considering the research questions, it became clear that surveys of middle school students would be the most effective means by which to see the relationships between cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging in adolescents. In particular, sufficient samples of both Sephardic and Ashkenazic students would establish the extent of the differences between the two groups. As I am of Ashkenazic descent and have therefore never experienced being a Sephardic "minority," qualitative inquiry was first necessary to determine which key ideas to include in the survey, as well as to incorporate the voices of those who have personally experienced the phenomenon of study, so that the survey would be constructed with as much authenticity and integrity as possible. Themes from interview data underscored the importance of including school climate subscales as potential moderators in the quantitative phase; and provided the raw information necessary to develop the Sephardi/Ashkenazi Cultural Discontinuity Scale. A convergent mixed methods design then integrated the quantitative findings with the original qualitative findings.

Methodological rationale

Most of the research on cultural discontinuity emerges from anthropological and/or ethnographic examination of the minority group in question (Boykin et al., 2005; Kleyn, 2010; Lambrev, 2015; Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006; Ogbu, 1982). Empirical examination of cultural discontinuity within populations, therefore, is typically rooted in preexisting qualitative research (Arunkumar et al., 1999; Taggart, 2017; Torres, 2017; Tyler et al., 2006). Since culture differs by

population, any scales that measure discontinuity need to be specific to the minority subpopulation, as well as its majority population context. At the time of the writing of this dissertation, no scales specific to Sephardic minorities within Ashkenazic majorities existed; a new scale therefore needed to be developed after qualitative exploration of discontinuity.

Participants for initial qualitative phase

Interview participants were recruited via a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. With the exception of one participant, all interviewees were in their mid-20s to late-30s, and all self-identified as Sephardic adults who had attended Ashkenazic day schools for K-12. Nine identified as female, and five as male. Adults were selected as interview participants, rather than adolescents currently in day schools, because adults have the benefit of hindsight. Being removed from K-12 environments for a number of years has enabled them to consciously reflect on and make meaning of their K-12 "Ashkenormative" experiences, cumulatively considering individual encounters as part of a broader pattern. Adolescents who have been and are still immersed in K-12 educational spaces will likely have more difficulty critically examining those spaces on an institutional level.

Interviewees represented the three major hubs of American Sephardim—New York, Seattle, and Los Angeles—and a range of Sephardic communities, cultures, and customs. The Sephardic community in Seattle emigrated primarily from Turkey and Greece, while the Sephardic community in Los Angeles is predominantly composed of Persian, sometimes called Iranian, Jews (Angel, 1973; Feher, 1998; Naar, 2016b). The three participants from Seattle, who identify as Turkish and/or Greek, and the two from Los Angeles, who both identify as Persian, were therefore representative of their respective geographic areas (Ben-Ur, 2009; Bouskila, 2016; Dobrinsky, 2001; Soomekh, 2008).

Because New York is home to a broad range of Sephardic subgroups, the New York-based interviewees reflected this diversity of community, culture, and custom (Ben-Ur, 2009; Cooper, 2012; Gerber, 2012). Two identify as Bukharian, one as Georgian, one as Israeli, three as Persian, one as Moroccan, and one as Syrian.

Procedures for initial qualitative phase

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over the phone or over Zoom. They were all recorded with permission from the interviewees, who were informed that their responses would be transcribed but not made public. They were also informed that any identifying information would not be shared. All interviews were transcribed by the interviewer and saved in a password-protected cloud-based storage account. The interviews were initially coded and organized around the primary categories of practical discontinuities, value-based discontinuities, dissonance, belonging, communities, and overall school climate for diversity. Throughout the coding process, further codes were developed as needed; transcripts were recoded in an iterative process until a coding scheme was solidified and checked for inter-rater reliability (Appendix A). Interview questions are included in Appendix B.

The discontinuity codes were splintered further to identify salient discontinuity "items" that had been experienced by the interviewees, such as prayer books, language use, and food. The items were then transformed into quantitative Likert-style questions for the Sephardi/Ashkenazi Cultural Discontinuity scale (Appendix C.) The prevalence of "school culture," "peer," and "teachers" subcodes of belonging revealed the necessity of examining these climate subsets as moderating variables. Specific demographic information that repeatedly emerged during interviews, such as parents' immigration status, was incorporated into the survey as well, as the data would potentially become confounding variables or covariates.

Participants for quantitative phase

Ashkenazic schools with substantial Sephardic populations were solicited for inclusion in this study. I contacted administrators of coed, Modern Orthodox K-8 schools in the greater New York area and Los Angeles. Four schools participated in this study, with three from the New York City area and one from Los Angeles. Surveys were administered to all seventh- and eighth-grade students in these four schools, with a total *N* of 378 (Table 1). Responses were mostly evenly split between seventh graders and eighth graders, and between males and females. Students were asked to self-identify as Ashkenazic, Sephardic, half-Ashkenazic/half-Sephardic, or Other; if they selected Sephardic or half-Sephardic, they were asked to indicate to which Sephardic subgroup(s) they belong. Based on self-identifying Sephardic participants' descriptions of their Sephardic subgroups, string responses were hand-coded into five categories based on frequency of responses. The three most frequently named categories were Persian, Central Asian (Bukharian, Afgani, and/or Georgian), and North African (Moroccan, Algerian, Egyptian, and Tunisian). The "Other" category encompassed ethnicities/nationalities that did not each claim enough numbers to warrant their own categories (Syrian, Greek, Spanish, Yemenite, Italian, Spanish, Iraqi, and/or Israeli). The "Unspecified" category included those who did not provide a specific subgroup (Table 2). Participants also indicated their parents' immigration status by selecting whether both, one, or neither of their parents were born in the United States (Table 3).

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Demographic Category	Label	*n*	% of Total
School			
	New York 1	113	29.1
	New York 2	39	10.1
	New York 3	174	44.8
	Los Angeles	62	16
Grade			
	7	177	46.8
	8	201	53.2
Gender			
	M	186	51
	F	179	49
Religious Identification			
	Ashkenazic	240	63.5
	Sephardic	107	28.3
	Half-Ashkenazic/ half-Sephardic	16	4.2
	Other	15	4.0
Sephardic subgroup			
	Persian	49	40.89
	Central Asian	16	13.3
	North African	17	14.2
	Other	22	18.3
	Unspecified	16	13.3
Parents' immigration status			
	Both born in US	226	61.7
	One born in US	71	19.4
	Neither born in US	69	18.9

Table 2

Students' Religious Identification by School

School	Religious Identification	*n*	% of School Total
New York 1 (*n* = 113)			
	Ashkenazic	48	44.4
	Sephardic	55	50.9
	Half/Half	3	2.8
New York 2 (*n* = 39)			
	Ashkenazic	27	73.0
	Sephardic	7	18.9
	Half/Half	2	5.4
New York 3 (*n* = 174)			
	Ashkenazic	135	78.9
	Sephardic	20	11.7
	Half/Half	9	5.3
Los Angeles (*n* = 62)			
	Ashkenazic	30	48.4
	Sephardic	25	40.3
	Half/Half	2	3.2

Table 3

Parents' Immigration Status by School

School	Parents' Immigration Status	*n*	% of School Total
New York 1 (*n* = 113)			
	Both born in US	44	38.9
	One born in US	23	20.4
	Neither born in US	35	34.3
New York 2 (*n* = 39)			
	Both born in US	24	68.6
	One born in US	7	20.0
	Neither born in US	4	11.4
New York 3 (*n* = 174)			
	Both born in US	131	77.1
	One born in US	27	15.9

	Neither born in US	12	7.1
Los Angeles (*n* = 62)			
	Both born in US	27	45.8
	One born in US	14	23.7
	Neither born in US	12	7.1

Since data were collected during 2021, administrators of participating schools were asked to describe their respective schools' Covid-19 policies, the ratio of in-school to at-home instruction, student and teacher Covid-related absences, and the virtual opportunities offered by the school. This study is concerned with school belonging and in-school interpersonal relationships, which are likely impacted by remote instruction and activities. Information related to Covid-19 was therefore considered as a potential covariant of the belonging and climate subscales.

Power analysis

Analyses required 80% power to be deemed adequate, were 2-tailed, and used a $p < .05$ cutoff. Due to the limited research that has been done examining cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews in Jewish day schools, power was calculated assuming small to medium effect sizes for the analyses in order to ensure detection of modest but not trivial (i.e., very small) effects in the sample. To detect small to medium effects using t-tests for independent means ($d = .35$), a sample of 260 was required. A sample size of 190 would allow for detection of small to medium ($r = .2$) correlations. Thus, the target sample size was at least 260 participants.

Procedures for quantitative phase

Passive consent was requested from parents of seventh and eighth graders at participating institutions (Appendix D). The consent form was emailed to parents by the school principal or

another administrator. Unless a parent emailed me with a question about the study, I did not have access to the parents' or students' contact information. No identifying information was requested, and there were no known risks associated with participation.

Students completed the survey via Qualtrics on tablets or Chromebooks provided by the school (Appendix E). Had devices not been not available, students would have been asked to fill out hard copies with pens or pencils, but this contingency proved unnecessary. Students approved to participate in the study by clicking "I agree" before beginning the survey. They were told that since this is not a test, there is no right answer; and were assured their results would be anonymized and that they would be able to stop the survey at any time. They were asked not to discuss their responses while taking the survey. It was estimated that the survey would take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The results were stored in the researcher's password-protected cloud-based account.

Measures

Cultural Discontinuity

Cultural Discontinuity was operationally defined as the total score on the Sephardi/Ashkenazi Cultural Discontinuity Scale, developed for this study. The scale is modeled on the methodology suggested by Tyler et al. (2008) for turning qualitative understandings of home-school differences into quantitative survey questions. According to the authors, a survey must identify both home and school culture markers separately in order to then effectively contrast them. In Schein's three-tiered model of organizational culture (1985), behaviors and norms reflect and reinforce underlying values and assumptions about how the world works. Since these values and assumptions are often unconscious and thus difficult to measure, behaviors can serve as proxies for the values and assumptions in which they are rooted. When

behaviors between home and school differ, values and assumptions likely differ between the two contexts as well. The frequency of a behavior therefore indicates the degree to which it is embedded in the participant's worldview.

The scale therefore asks participants to respond to paired 5-point Likert-type questions that indicate the frequency with which they engage in a specific behavior in school, and then the frequency with which they engage in that same behavior at home. The discontinuity score for a particular behavior is the in-school behavior response subtracted from the at-home behavior response. Some potential discontinuities between Sephardic and Ashkenazic "worlds" could not be effectively captured using Tyler et al.'s (2008) method, so a few 5-point Likert-type questions in the scale are unpaired. The total cultural discontinuity score is equivalent to the sum of paired questions' differences combined with unpaired question scores.

Since this is a new scale, psychometric tests of reliability and validity were conducted after data collection.

Home-School Dissonance

Home-school dissonance is operationally defined as the total score on the home-school dissonance subscale. As of the writing of this dissertation, the scale developed by Arunkumar et al. (1999) is the only scale specifically designed to measure home-school dissonance as defined in this dissertation. The scale has been met with criticism, however, since little empirical evidence has emerged to support the idea that home-school dissonance levels significantly differ by students' race or ethnicity, contrary to the principles of cultural mismatch theory (Brown-Wright, Tyler, Graves et al., 2013; Kumar, 2006; Tyler et al., 2016; Tyler et al., 2018). The six original survey questions, rather than homing in on specific cultural/ethnic values and/or

practices, ask broadly about respondents' reactions to perceived differences between home and school. As Tyler, Stevens-Morgan, and Brown-Wright (2016) point out:

> Regarding home-school dissonance, the complexities of the construct are not fully captured by the measure in its current form. For example, it is unclear whether perceptions of dissonance between home and school are linked to issues regarding culture, learning preference, social interaction, or perhaps a combination of these factors… (p. 18).

Expanding and personalizing the survey to the specific sample population may therefore reveal more significant differences in home-school dissonance between various cultural/ethnic subgroups than have been expressed thus far. For this dissertation, the original scale has therefore been supplemented with two population-specific questions that adhere to the same format as the original six 5-point Likert-style questions.

The original Home-School Dissonance Scale was tested for reliability with a sample of 475 students after two pilot tests. The researchers ran chi-square analyses to ensure equal representation in high-dissonance and low-dissonance groups. No significant differences were found in gender, socioeconomic status, or race. A factor analysis of the original six questions confirmed the existence of one factor with 43% variance. Internal consistency reliability was measured with a Cronbach's alpha of .73.

School Belonging

School belonging is defined as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80) and is operationalized as the total score on the abridged Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) scale. Goodenow's (1993) original scale, an 18-item 5-point Likert-

style questionnaire designed to assess school belonging in adolescents aged 9-14, was finalized after three iterations of progressively fewer questions. Initial examination of the PSSM confirmed reliability for suburban students (Cronbach's alpha = .884) and an urban sample (a = .803); scores of internal consistency reliability among various demographic sample subsets ranged from .77 to .88, suggesting overall reliability of the questionnaire. Tests of construct validity generally suggested validity as well, though some hypothesized group differences were not supported. Later work extended the scale's applicability to pre-adolescent students (Wagle et al., 2018), high school students (Hagborg, 1994), and college undergraduates (Alkan, 2016), further supporting the validity of the scale.

Since the PSSM's inception, numerous research teams have employed the questionnaire to measure adolescents' belonging (Cemalcilar, 2010; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Forbes et al., 2019; Jose et al., 2012), and the scale has been adapted for various cultural contexts (Alkan, 2016; Cheung & Hui, 2003; Kapoor & Tomar, 2016). Some tests for internal reliability, however, have cast into doubt the questionnaire's utility as a unidimensional measure. For instance, Hagborg's (1998) factor analysis indicated that 7 of 18 PSSM items test for constructs distinct from school belonging. You et al. (2011) supported and extended this line of investigation, concluding via factor analysis that the PSSM breaks belonging down into caring relationships, acceptance, and rejection. In a follow-up psychometric analysis, Ye & Wallace (2014) attributed "rejection" to negative wording in the questions and not to a distinct dimension; they instead identify three "clean-cut" dimensions of school belonging: belonging to the school as an institution, belonging with peers, and belonging with teachers. The multidimensional nature of the measures is not necessarily a detriment, however, and may in fact serve as a more accurate barometer of the many ways adolescents experience belonging in school (Garcia-Moya

et al., 2019). This measure therefore offers avenues by which to analyze the associations of distinct dimensions of school belonging.

School Climate

The What's Happening in This School? (WHITS) questionnaire was designed specifically to measure climate in schools with diverse student bodies (Aldridge & Ala'i, 2013). The questionnaire consists of six subscales, three of which are incorporated into this dissertation. All subscales are administered via 5-point Likert-type questions. To determine face validity, the questionnaire was initially administered to a pilot sample of 53 eighth-grade students and then administered en masse to a sample of 4,067 Australian adolescents, ages 12-17. Factor loadings and an internal consistency reliability measure supported criterion validity. Cronbach's alpha, calculated for each of the six dimensions, ranged from .891 to .934, demonstrating the WHITS questionnaire's high reliability. Discriminant and concurrent validity were confirmed via factor analysis and ANOVA, respectively; and one-tailed correlations were run between the dimensions and a scale for bullying, indicating the WHITS questionnaire's predictive validity.

School climate for teacher support. Teacher support is operationalized as the total score for the teacher support subscale of the WHITS questionnaire. Aldridge & Ala'i (2013) define teacher support as "the extent to which students perceive that teachers at the school are supportive and helpful" (p. 55). Although other scales to measure teacher support or teacher attachment exist, the WHITS specifically includes questions to assess teachers' attitudes towards students' backgrounds, such as "At this school, teachers take an interest in my background."

School climate for peer attachment. Peer attachment is operationalized as the total score for the peer attachment subscale of the WHITS questionnaire. Of particular relevance to this dissertation, Aldridge & Ala'i (2013) define peer attachment as "the extent to which students

feel that there is contact and friendship between students from diverse cultures and backgrounds" (p. 55).

School climate for affirming diversity. Climate for affirming diversity is operationalized as the total score on the WHITS "affirming diversity" subscale. The dimension is herein defined as "the extent to which students with differing cultural backgrounds and experiences are acknowledged and valued" (p. 55).

Data analysis

Data analysis to address the quantitative components of the research questions involved the use of independent samples t-tests, Pearson product-moment correlations, and multiple hierarchical regression models. All analyses were 2-tailed and used a $p < .05$ cutoff. All data analysis, whether descriptive or inductive, was conducted via IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0.

Descriptive data, such as mean, median, and standard deviation, were included in the analysis to identify outliers, indicate general trends, and ascertain whether demographic information, such as country of origin or parents' immigration status, would manifest as covariates or confounding variables. I first computed raw data into measurable variables for home-school dissonance, school belonging, teacher support, peer attachment, and affirming diversity. Paired cultural discontinuity items were transformed to single variables in accordance with Tyler et al.'s (2008) suggested method for comparing discrepancies between home and school behaviors, as described in Chapter 4 (Sephardic *siddur*, Ashkenazic *siddur*, Sephardic *minyan*, Ashkenazic *minyan*); unpaired cultural discontinuity items were transformed into independent measurable variables (e.g. Hebrew pronunciation, food, *halakha*). For some analyses, the discrepancy variables were combined into one variable, prayer. All cultural

discontinuity variables ranged from 1-5, with 1 indicating low discontinuity and 5 indicating high discontinuity.

I conducted reliability tests on home-school dissonance, school belonging, teacher support, peer attachment, and affirming diversity. Since cultural discontinuity variables were treated as independent items, no reliability tests were necessary. Cronbach's Alpha values were calculated for each of the five aforementioned constructs, all of which demonstrated high reliability (home-school dissonance, $n = 8$, $\alpha = .869$; school belonging, $n = 18$, $\alpha = .923$; teacher support, $n = 8$, $\alpha = .921$; peer attachment, $n = 8$, $\alpha = .918$; affirming diversity, $n = 5$, $\alpha = .842$).

The data were screened for outliers, missing data, or other unusual responses. String items were hand-recoded into usable quantitative data. For string items related to identity and ethnicity, I made determinations based on my research into and understanding of contemporary Jewish communities and adolescent identity development.

Q1

Two t-tests for independent means were conducted to compare Sephardic and Ashkenazic middle schoolers' responses on the Sephardi/Ashkenazi Cultural Discontinuity Scale and Home-School Dissonance Scale. To ascertain whether Sephardic students in Ashkenazic schools experience significantly greater cultural discontinuity and/or home-school dissonance than their Ashkenazic peers as a whole, the initial test compared overall scores for each subscale. T-tests were then used on specific items of the Sephardi/Ashkenazi Cultural Discontinuity Scale to determine the significance of specific sources of potential discontinuity, such as the type of prayer book used in school or teachers' knowledge of Sephardic legal practice. Students who

self-identified as half-Sephardic/half-Ashkenazic or who declined to self-identify were excluded from this analysis.

Q2

A series of Pearson product-moment correlations were obtained between cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging. Correlational matrices were generated to yield descriptive information of the sample as a whole. Distinct data were obtained for Sephardic students and for Ashkenazic students and were then compared.

Q3

Hierarchical multiple regressions were employed to run twelve moderation models. The predictors were home-school dissonance, *siddur* discontinuity, *minyan* discontinuity, and *halakha* discontinuity; the criterion was school belonging. Each of the four predictors was tested three times, one for each of the three possible moderating variables: teacher support, peer attachment, and affirming diversity. It was expected that if students scored higher on the moderating variables, the negative association between the predictors and the criterion would be weaker.

Q4

The last research question is exploratory in nature and draws on mixed methodologies for analysis. One-way ANOVAs were used to determine the effects of ethnic/communal subgroup (Syrian, Moroccan, Greek, etc.) and parents' immigrant status on cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging. Correlational tables were then generated to see how associations between cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging varied by subgroup and family history. Findings from t-tests (see above) that compared specific

discontinuity items were cross-referenced with qualitative codes labeling those same discontinuity items to compare adolescent and adult experiences.

Complementary qualitative analysis methods were used to provide texture and explanation to quantitative findings, which reflect respondents' of-the-moment impressions but do not provide context or motivating factors behind those impressions. In an iterative process, interview transcripts were further coded along primary categories of home-school dissonance, school belonging, and school climate, especially as they related to Sephardic subgroup and family immigration histories. See Appendix A for a full list of relevant codes.

Chapter 5: Findings from Quantitative Data

Data analysis to address the quantitative components of the research questions involved the use of independent samples t-tests, Pearson product-moment correlations, and multiple hierarchical regression models. All analyses were 2-tailed and used a $p < .05$ cutoff. All data analyses, whether descriptive or inferential, were conducted via IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0. (Descriptive data for all variables are found in Table 4.)

Screening the data

The data were screened for outliers, missing values, or other non-normal responses. Frequency tables were generated for all continuous variables, revealing some mildly skewed and/or kurtotic variables. Using Tabachnick and Fidell's (2007) benchmark of $z < 3.29$, six items were identified as having outliers, four positive and two negative. Outlier data were transformed into square-root variables; variables that remained highly skewed were transformed logarithmically. As needed, subsequent processes were run with and without transformed data to determine the impact of non-normal data on the overall dataset.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Variables

Variable	M	*SD*	Min	Max
Age	12.92	.69	12	14
*Siddur	.46	.82	.00	4.00
*Minyan	.97	1.33	.00	4.00
*Tallit	.11	.48	.00	4.00
Pronunciation	2.58	1.25	1.00	5.00
Food	3.46	1.40	1.00	5.00

Halakha	2.34	1.11	1.00	5.00
*Friends	.63	.83	.00	4.00
Teachers' Knowledge of Ashkenazic *Halakha*	4.39	.93	1.00	5.00
Teachers' Knowledge of Sephardic *Halakha*	3.50	1.24	1.00	5.00
Home-School Dissonance	2.37	.93	1.00	5.00
School Belonging	3.77	.80	1.28	5.00
Teacher Support	3.60	.97	1.00	5.00
Peer Attachment	4.14	.85	1.00	5.00
Affirming Diversity	3.80	.95	1.00	5.00

*Variable indicates a discrepancy score

Power analysis

Analyses required 80% power to be deemed adequate, were 2-tailed, and used a $p < .05$ cutoff. Due to the limited research that has been done examining cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews in Jewish day schools, power was calculated assuming small to medium effect sizes for the analyses in order to ensure detection of modest but not trivial (i.e., very small) effects in the sample. To detect small to medium effects using t-tests for independent means ($d = .35$), a sample of 260 was required. The present sample of 378 fulfilled the requirements of the power analysis.

Testing for effects

Data were tested for gender, grade, and school effects. No grade effects were present, and small gender effects related to prayer may be explained by boys' greater likelihood of praying with a *minyan*. As school effects were found for multiple items, correlation processes were controlled accordingly. School effects may be explained by differences in the proportion of Sephardic students relative to the student body as a whole; for instance, 50.9% respondents from New York 1 were self-identified Sephardim, compared to 11.7% in New York 3.

RQ1: How do Sephardic middle schoolers experience cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance, as measured by the Sephardi/Ashkenazi Cultural Discontinuity Scale and the adapted Home-School Dissonance Scale? How do cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance differ between Sephardic and Ashkenazic middle schoolers?

Hyp 1a: Sephardic middle schoolers will experience greater cultural discontinuity than Ashkenazic middle schoolers.

Hyp 1b: Sephardic middle schoolers will experience greater home-school dissonance than Ashkenazic middle schoolers.

Students who self-identified as half-Sephardic/half-Ashkenazic or who declined to self-identify were excluded from analyses related to this research question. A series of t-tests for independent means compared Sephardic and Ashkenazic middle schoolers' responses to the cultural discontinuity items (Table 5). With the exception of *tallit* usage, the two groups significantly differed on all cultural discontinuity variables with moderate to strong effect sizes. These findings suggest strong support for Hypothesis 1a.

Table 5

Differences in Cultural Discontinuity Between Sephardic and Ashkenazic Middle-Schoolers

Variable	Sephardic *M* (*SD*)	Ashkenazic *M* (*SD*)	*t*	*df*	Cohen's *d*
Siddur	.96(1.05)	.21(.52)	-8.56***	325	.73
Minyan	2.41(1.46)	.33(.60)	-18.104***	323	.95
Tallit	.20(.64)	.08(.42)	-1.45	163	.50
Pronunciation	2.99(1.29)	2.35(1.17)	-4.40***	323	1.21
Food	4.03(1.26)	3.15(1.38)	-5.42***	322	1.34
Halakha	2.88(1.04)	2.02(.99)	-7.06***	322	1.01
Friends	.83(.89)	.55(.80)	-2.74**	322	.83

*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$

In terms of home-school dissonance, Sephardic students ($M = 2.67$, $SD = .96$) significantly differed from their Ashkenazic classmates ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .89$) as well: $t\ (310) = -3.42$, $p < .001$. Hypothesis 1b, therefore, has been fully supported. Because findings were significant at the $p < .001$ level, it was not necessary to rerun the tests without outliers.

Sephardic students ($M = 3.61$, $SD = .87$) also significantly differed from their Ashkenazic peers ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .75$) on reported levels of school belonging: $t\ (309) = 2.90$, $p < .01$. Although this statistic does not directly address one of the research questions or hypotheses, it provides context for the research questions and hypotheses that follow.

RQ 2: What associations exist between cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging among Sephardic middle schoolers? How do these associations compare to those of their Ashkenazic classmates?

Hypothesis 2a: Cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance will positively associate with each other, and will negatively associate with school belonging.

Hypothesis 2b: Cultural discontinuity will more highly associate with home-school dissonance in Sephardic middle schoolers than Ashkenazic middle schoolers, and will more negatively associate with school belonging in Sephardic middle schoolers than Ashkenazic middle schoolers.

A series of Pearson correlations was obtained between cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging, controlling for school and gender effects (Table 6). Home-school dissonance was negatively associated with school belonging, and positively correlated with five of seven cultural discontinuity items: *siddur*, *minyan*, *halakha*, friends, and food. School belonging was negatively associated with a number of cultural discontinuity items as well: *siddur*, *halakha*, pronunciation, and food. The findings suggest strong support for Hypothesis 2a.

Table 6

Associations Between Cultural Discontinuity, Home-School Dissonance, and School Belonging

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Siddur	-								
2. Minyan	[b].38***	-							
3. Halakha	[a].19***	[a].17**	-						
4. Friends	[a].07	[a].07	.13*	-					
5. Tallit	-.03	.05	.07	-.04	-				
6. Pronunciation	.22***	.17**	.30***	.20***	.06	-			
7. Food	[b].24***	[b].25***	[a].32***	.11*	-.06	.23***	-		
8. Home-School Dissonance	[b].22***	.24***	.18***	.12*	.12	.08	.18**	-	
9. School Belonging	-.14*	[a] -.10	-.33***	[a]-.01	-.05	-.15**	[a] -.28***	-.35***	-

*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$
[a] = partial correlation controlling for school effects
[b] = partial correlation controlling for gender effects

Data were then split by students' Sephardic or Ashkenazic identity (Table 7). Interestingly, in a comparison of the associations between cultural discontinuity items and home-school dissonance, home-school dissonance was significantly correlated with *siddur*, *minyan*, *halakha*, friends, and food for Ashkenazic students, but only with *tallit* for Sephardic students. A similar pattern emerged for the associations between cultural discontinuity items and school belonging. For Ashkenazic students, school belonging was negatively associated with *siddur*, *minyan*, *halakha*, pronunciation, and food, but no significant associations emerged among Sephardic students. These findings refute Hypothesis 2b.

Table 7

Associations Between Cultural Discontinuity, Home-School Dissonance, and School Belonging for Ashkenazic and Sephardic Middle Schoolers

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Siddur	-	[b].24***	[a].17*	[a].09	-.06	.16*	[b].14	[b].16*	-.17*
2. Minyan	[a] -.08	-	[a].16*	[a].01	.02	.06	[b].21**	[b].18**	[a]-.17*
3. Halakha	[a] -.04	[a] -.25*	-	.16*	.08	.27***	.27***	.18**	-.27***
4. Friends	[a].02	[a].03	[a].09	-	-.02	.23***	[a].16*	.16*	[a]-.07
5. Tallit	-.09	-.07	.05	-.10	-	.03	-.07	-.05	-.15
6. Pronunciation	.12	.00	.23*	.07	-.25	-	.26***	.07	-.17*
7. Food	[b].18	[a] -.03	.18	[a].05	-.13	.11	-	[b].22**	-.27***
8. Home-school dissonance	[b].19	[b].19	.02	-.07	.32*	.08	[b] -.03	-	-3.8***
9. School belonging	[a] -.06	.07	-.20	.11	.10	.03	[a]-.15	-.35***	-

Note: Responses for Ashkenazim are shown above the diagonal; responses for Sephardim are shown below the diagonal.
**p*<.05; ***p*<.01; ****p*<.001
[a] = partial correlation controlling for school effects
[b] = partial correlation controlling for gender effects

For the sample as a whole, the cultural discontinuity items were all correlated with one another, with the exceptions of *tallit* usage and friends; the former was not significantly associated with any other discontinuity items, and the latter was significantly associated with *halakha* and pronunciation but not with *siddur* or *minyan*. As with the correlations between discontinuity, dissonance, and belonging, the picture changed once the data were split between self-identified Ashkenazic and Sephardic respondents. Among Ashkenazic students, nearly all cultural discontinuity items were significantly correlated with one another, whereas among

Sephardic students, fewer significant correlations emerged, with small to moderate associations of *halakha* with *minyan* and pronunciation.

RQ3 To what extent are the relationships among cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging moderated by the school climate dimensions of teacher support, peer attachment, and affirming diversity?

Hypothesis 3a: Teacher support, peer attachment, and affirming diversity will significantly moderate the relationships between cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance with school belonging.

Variables were first standardized via transformation to *z*-scores. Hierarchical multiple regressions were then employed to run twelve moderation models. The predictors were three cultural discontinuity items (*siddur*, *minyan*, and *halakha*) and home-school dissonance (HSD), and the criterion was school belonging. Each of the predictors was tested three times, one for each of the three possible moderating variables: teacher support (TS), peer attachment (PA), and affirming diversity (AD). For each regression model, the predictor and moderator were both entered, followed by the centered product term, which was calculated by multiplying the *z*-score for the predictor with the *z*-score of the moderator. It was expected that if students scored higher on the moderating variables, the negative associations between the predictors and the criterion would be weaker. As demonstrated in Table 8, beta-values indicated that teacher support, peer attachment, affirming diversity, and home-school dissonance each independently predicted school belonging, but the relationship between home-school dissonance and school belonging was not significantly impacted by the moderating variables. Because no interaction values were

significant, follow-up processes were unnecessary. Hypothesis 3a, therefore, was not supported by the data.

Table 8

Effects of the Interactions of Home-School Dissonance with Teacher Support, Peer Attachment, and Affirming Diversity on School Belonging

	Teacher Support			Peer Attachment			Affirming Diversity		
		β	ΔR^2		β	ΔR^2		β	ΔR^2
Step 1									
	Home-School Dissonance	-.22***		Home-School Dissonance	-.26***		Home-School Dissonance	-.26***	
	Teacher Support	.72***	.62***	Peer Attachment	.65***	.55***	Affirming Diversity	.56***	.43***
Step 2									
	HSDxTS	-.03	.001	HSDxPA	.004	.00	HSDxAD	-.07	.005
Step 1									
	Siddur	-.04		Siddur	-.14***		Siddur	-.10*	
	Teacher Support	.76***	.58***	Peer Attachment	.69***	.50***	Affirming Diversity	.60***	.34***
Step 2									
	SIDDURxTS	.01	.00	SIDDURxPA	.03	.001	SIDDURxAD	-.04	.001
Step 1									
	Minyan	-.10**		Minyan	-.11**		Minyan	-.09*	
	Teacher Support	.76***	.58***	Peer Attachment	.70***	.50***	Affirming Diversity	.60***	.38***
Step 2									
	MINYANxTS	.04	.001	MINYANxPA	.06	.004	MINYANxAD	.03	.001
Step 1									
	Halakha	-.09*		Halakha	-.19***		Halakha	-.18***	

	Teacher Support	.73***	.59***	Peer Attachment	.65***	.51***	Affirming Diversity	.55***	.40***
Step 2									
	HALAKHA xTS	-.02	.00	HALAKHA xPA	-.09*	.01	HALAKHAx AD	-.07	.01

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

RQ4: How do Sephardic middle schoolers' experiences of cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, and school belonging differ by Sephardic subgroup and family history?

The last research question is exploratory in nature. Although no formal hypotheses have been proposed, it was expected that ethnic identification and parents' immigration status would play a role in students' experiences of discontinuity, dissonance, and belonging. A series of one-way ANOVAs was used to determine the effects of ethnic/communal subgroup (Syrian, Moroccan, Greek, etc.) on cultural discontinuity items, home-school dissonance, school belonging, and school climate constructs (Table 9). Of all cultural discontinuity items, only *minyan* participation significantly differed based on subgroup, *p*=.027. Sephardic subgroups also significantly differed on perceived teacher support, *p*=.011.

Table 9

Differences in Cultural Discontinuity Variables, Home-School Dissonance, School Belonging, and School Climate Variables by Sephardic Subgroup

	Persian (*n* = 49)		Central Asian (*n* = 16)		North African (*n* = 17)		Other (*n* = 22)		Unspecified (*n* = 14)		
Variable	M	*SD*	M	*SD*	M	*SD*	M	*SD*	M	*SD*	*F*
Siddur	.81	.98	1.31	1.09	.71	1.00	.86	1.06	1.21	1.25	1.17
Minyan	2.61	1.49	2.16	1.45	2.29	1.28	1.59	1.47	1.71	1.65	2.37$

Pronunciation	2.96	1.26	2.94	1.12	3.13	1.45	3.09	1.41	2.57	1.28	.43
Food	4.02	1.22	4.25	1.13	3.75	1.24	3.86	1.49	3.86	1.46	.39
Halakha	2.96	1.04	2.81	.98	2.69	1.08	2.57	.93	3.00	1.18	.69
Friends	.86	.96	.69	.60	.69	.79	.81	.81	.57	.94	.39
Home-School Dissonance	2.54	1.08	2.50	.64	2.70	1.05	2.52	.95	2.86	.98	.37
School Belonging	3.74	.85	3.37	.98	3.95	.70	3.45	.85	3.18	.67	2.23$
Teacher Support	3.78	1.05	3.26	1.04	4.09	.79	3.39	.72	2.93	.57	3.45*
Peer Attachment	4.16	.96	4.03	1.09	4.54	.71	3.93	.87	3.48	.92	2.39$
Affirming Diversity	3.72	.93	3.54	1.10	4.08	.55	3.11	1.14	3.62	.94	2.23$

$p<.1; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

The effects of parents' immigration status on cultural discontinuity, home-school dissonance, school belonging, and school climate constructs were also explored via one-way ANOVAs. Respondents identified whether their parents were both born in the United States, whether one was born in the United States and one abroad, or whether neither was born in the United States. All participants were included in the one-way ANOVA, regardless of Sephardic or Ashkenazic identity (Table 10). Significant differences at the $p < .00$ level were found between all three groups for the constructs of home-school dissonance, school belonging, and affirming diversity. The cultural discontinuity items of *siddur*, *minyan*, Hebrew pronunciation, food, and *halakha* significantly differed by parents' immigration status as well, with friends group differences on the cusp of significance (p=.051).

Table 10

Differences in Cultural Discontinuity Variables, Home-School Dissonance, School Belonging, and School Climate Variables by Parents' Immigration Status

Variable	Both Born in US (n = 215)		One Born in US (n = 70)		Neither Born in US (n = 68)		
	M	*SD*	M	*SD*	M	*SD*	*F*
Siddur	.27	.60	.45	.73	1.07	1.16	28.93***
Minyan	.47	.87	1.19	1.41	2.30	1.51	68.90***
Pronunciation	2.40	1.24	2.78	1.16	2.93	1.30	6.01**
Food	3.23	1.41	3.52	1.38	4.12	1.17	11.17***
Halakha	2.09	1.05	2.51	1.12	2.91	1.08	16.4***
Friends	.54	.80	.77	.89	.75	.85	3.00$
Home-School Dissonance	2.25	.90	2.42	.91	2.67	.98	5.31**
School Belonging	3.87	.78	3.72	.74	3.52	.87	5.03*
Teacher Support	3.66	.98	3.57	.91	3.44	.98	1.32
Peer Attachment	4.23	.79	4.04	.95	4.02	.90	2.10

$*p*<.1; **p*<.05; ***p*<.01; ****p*<.001

Similar to the procedure for Hypothesis 2, correlation tables were generated to determine associations between cultural discontinuity items, home-school dissonance, school belonging, and school climate constructs. Data were split by ethnic/national subgroup to determine whether and how associations might vary between Sephardic subgroups. Several differences of note emerged between Persian and Central Asian groups (Table 11). Among self-identified Persian students, cultural discontinuities emerging from *halakhic* practice were negatively associated with school belonging and all three of the school climate variables. In contrast, for the Central Asian students, discontinuities of *halakha* were not significantly associated with any other

variables; discontinuities related to *siddur* usage, however, were significantly associated with the school climate variables of peer attachment and affirming diversity.

The few significant associations found among students who were categorized as North African or Other did not follow a discernible pattern and may be random. For North African students, cultural discontinuity of *siddur* usage was correlated with home-school dissonance, $r = .53$, $p < .05$, and for “Other” students, school belonging was associated with cultural discontinuity related to Hebrew pronunciation: $r = .57$, $p < .01$. No significant associations emerged in the Unspecified group.

Table 11

Associations Between Cultural Discontinuity, Home-School Dissonance, School Belonging, and School Climate Constructs Among Persian and Central Asian Students

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Siddur	-	.00	.19	-.03	-.03	.20	.24	.21	-.22	-.28	-.22	-.03
2. Minyan	-.12	-	-.01	-.05	.09	-.03	.25	.22	.15	.16	.22	.14
3. Halakha	-.19	-.57*	-	.04	-.03	.40**	.08	.12	-.44**	-.37*	-.45**	-.40**
4. Friends	.21	.14	.01	-	-.26	.05	-.05	-.06	.07	.01	.21	.15
5. Tallit	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	-	-.06	.08	.18	.03	.01	-.09	.16
6. Pronun-ciation	.10	-.24	.41	.07	N/A	-	.37**	.18	-.20	-.37*	-.34*	-.32*
7. Food	.47	-.15	-.02	.12	N/A	-.15	-	.10	-.20	-.37*	.16	.25
8. Home-School Dissonance	.33	.01	.40	.09	N/A	.15	.25	-	-.56***	-.41**	-.36*	-.36*
9. School Belonging	.50	-.44	.30	.05	N/A	-.17	.10	-.38	-	.84***	.81***	.79***
10. Teacher Support	.51	-.33	.06	.15	N/A	.01	-.06	-.68**	.75**	-	.74***	.70***
11. Peer Attachment	.70**	-.41	.24	.25	N/A	-.03	.34	-.35	.84***	.58*	-	.78***

12. Affirming Diversity	.58*	-.02	-.31	.50	N/A	-.12	.43	-.56*	.47	.70**	.56*	-

Note: Responses for Persian students are found above the diagonal; responses for Central Asian students found are below the diagonal.
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

When the data were split by parents' immigration status, interesting correlation patterns emerged as well. For respondents with two immigrant parents, cultural discontinuities related to *halakhic* practice were significantly associated with peer attachment and affirming diversity; home-school dissonance was moderately associated with school belonging and all three school climate variables, and school belonging was strongly associated with climate variables (Table 12). For students with one parent born in the United States, school belonging was also strongly associated with school climate, but no significant associations were found between home-school dissonance and any other variable. As with children of two immigrant parents, this group also associated discrepancies of *halakhic* practice with other variables (Table 13). For students with two parents born in the United States, a host of cultural discontinuity variables were significantly correlated with one another and negatively associated with home-school dissonance, school belonging, and school climate variables (Table 14).

Table 12

Associations Between Cultural Discontinuity, Home-School Dissonance, School Belonging, and School Climate Constructs Among Students with Neither Parent Born in the US

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Siddur	-											
2. Minyan	.03	-										
3. Halakha	.01	-.10	-									
4. Friends	-.09	.12	.09	-								
5. Tallit	-.15	-.10	.15	-.06	-							
6. Pronun-ciation	.24	.00	.14	.01	-.14	-						
7. Food	.08	.08	.06	-.09	.06	.00	-					
8. Home-School Dissonance	.08	.07	.13	.10	.18	.04	.08	-				
9. School Belonging	-.08	.10	-.18	-.03	.15	-.01	-.12	-.48***	-			
10. Teacher Support	-.17	.03	-.20	-.05	.07	-.13	-.19	-.45***	.81***	-		
11. Peer Attachment	-.16	.13	-.30*	-.03	-.21	-.03	-.17	-.38**	.71***	.63***	-	
12. Affirming Diversity	-.04	.19	-.31*	.09	.29	-.05	-.26*	-.25*	.66***	.57***	.64***	-

$*p<.05$; $**p<.01$; $***p<.001$

Table 13

Associations Between Cultural Discontinuity, Home-School Dissonance, School Belonging, and School Climate Constructs Among Students with One Parent Born in the US

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Siddur	-											
2. Minyan	.27*	-										
3. Halakha	-.03	.03	-									
4. Friends	.12	.10	-.03	-								
5. Tallit	.10	.07	-.04	.14	-							
6. Pronun-ciation	.09	.03	.21	.05	-.11	-						
7. Food	-.03	.10	.13***	-.15	-.36*	.24*	-					
8. Home-School Dissonance	.06	.20	-.07	.00	.30	-.15	-.06	-				
9. School Belonging	.06	.10	-.29*	.27*	1.4	-.19	-.17	-.13	-			
10. Teacher Support	.17	.23	-.47***	.12	-.04	-.31*	.02	.07	.72***	-		
11. Peer Attachment	.08	.16	-.19	.25*	1.0	-.15	.03	.15	.73***	.58***	-	
12. Affirming Diversity (AD)	.89	.11	-.18	.06	1.7	-.38**	.04	.05	.62***	.64***	.55***	-

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 14

Associations Between Cultural Discontinuity, Home-School Dissonance, School Belonging, and School Climate Constructs Among Students with Two Parents Born in the US

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Siddur	-											
2. Minyan	.36***	-										
3. Halakha	.26***	.21**	-									
4. Friends	.11	-.03	.16*	-								
5. Tallit	-.05	.00	.02	-.12	-							
6. Pronun-ciation	.17*	.17*	.32***	.27***	-.02	-						
7. Food	.21**	.20**	.30***	.22**	-.07	.31***	-					
8. Home-School Dissonance	.20**	.24***	.21*	-.14*	.00	.12	.22**	-				
9. School Belonging	-.15*	-.16*	-.34***	-.07	-.18	-.15*	-.33***	-.34***	-			
10. Teacher Support	-.22**	-.06	-.31***	-.08	-.14	-.23***	-.29**	-.17*	.76***	-		
11. Peer Attachment	.06	-.06	-.19**	.04	-.27**	-.05	-.14	-.14*	.67***	.47***	-	
12. Affirming Diversity (AD)	-.72	-.04	-.29***	-.06	-.08	-.20**	-.26***	-.21**	.57***	.63***	.55***	-

**p*<.05; ***p*<.01; ****p*<.001

Chapter 6: Findings from Qualitative Data

The findings included in the following section capture multiple themes relevant to the Sephardic experience vis-a-vis Jewish day schools and my research questions. Although wide-ranging topics of interest emerged organically throughout the interview process, a curated selection has been presented here.

Curriculum

In my interviews, participants recollected their K-12 classes focused on *halakha.* Throughout our discussions, interviewees identified particular Sephardic legal rulings and religious behaviors as seminal to their identification with Sephardic heritage. Primarily two curricular types emerged: one in which Ashkenazic *halakha* was primary, with Sephardic *halakha* either secondary or completely absent; second, where both Ashkenazic and Sephardic traditions were included as equally important modes of practice. The first category will be referred to as the "one-way" mode, and the latter as the "multiple ways" mode.

Interviewees recounting the one-way mode expressed a range of emotional reactions, which, in addition to school environment, are tied with their family history and socioeconomic status, peer and teacher relationships, and personality types. There were, however, trends across the board. One group of interviewees was unbothered that in their "one-way" schools Sephardic laws and customs were never mentioned, or only mentioned sparingly. According to one woman from southern California: "These are Ashkenaz schools, I wouldn't expect them to do more Sephardi *halakhot*…The default was the Ashkenaz *halakha*, and then they put the Sephardic second. The *halakha* rabbis that we had were Ashkenaz, so I think that was the default." Put differently, she matter-of-factly accepted that, by choosing to attend a predominantly Ashkenazic school, her own laws and customs would be underrepresented; she did not think it was the

school's responsibility to teach Sephardic *halakha*. Across the country, a male interviewee from the New York area described a similar experience:

> "In passing sometimes I think Sephardic *halakha* was mentioned. But it was taught to a predominantly Ashkenaz class, and the [rabbis] were predominantly Ashkenaz. So they weren't going to teach Sephardi *halakha*...Most of the Sephardic *halakha* that I've done has been on my own from Sephardi texts."

This group revealed a compartmentalized *halakha* education, in which schools teach Ashkenazic tradition, while Sephardic education may be self-directed and/or family-driven. They do not recall experiencing the curricular dissonance that one might expect of adolescents in this situation.

For other respondents in one-way schools, however, their Ashkecentric *halakha* courses are associated with feelings of social isolation and insecurity. One interviewee, whom I will call Rachel, said the following: "It was like, on Pesach, we don't eat *chametz* or *kitniyot*. Next…" When describing an Ashkenazic Passover custom, her teacher said *we* do such and such, equating the "right way" with Ashkenazic customs, and presenting a custom as a law, omitting Sephardic custom as an acceptable mode of practice. Rachel then described feeling insecure about the potential social consequences of bringing her Sephardic heritage into the classroom:

> So then I would have to sit there and be like, 'Do I say that we're allowed to have corn [on Passover]? Should I, will I get laughed at? Do I want to single myself out right now?'...It causes you to second-guess yourself, where you're like, are we doing something wrong…That's the biggest issue in all of it.

Her teacher presented one mode of practice, Ashkenazic practice, as the definitive *halakhic* Judaism, prompting Rachel to wonder, "are *we* doing something wrong?" and suspect that her family's customs, and by extension, Sephardic customs, were somehow illegitimate.

Another interviewee, whom I will call Shira, looked to her school, rather than her home, as the primary source of religious instruction. Implicitly accepting the words of her teachers as truth, she only realized in hindsight, years after graduating high school, how exclusionary her *halakha* courses had been:

> I got kind of upset about it later…The rabbis and the teachers knew I was Sephardi…and they allowed me to learn Ashkenazi *halakha* without even telling me, like, look you're Sephardi, your *halakha* is different…I don't remember anybody ever saying, 'this is Sephardi, this is Ashkenazi, and you should do what your family tells you to do.' There was one way of learning *halakha* and that was it…this is the answer.

Shira, and several other interviewees who responded similarly, "discovered" their Sephardic customs in later adolescence, sometimes only after graduating high school. As one interviewee put it, "Sophomore year of college, I was like, I know the life I want when I'm married, I know the kind of Judaism I want to have in my house, so I better start getting more consistent. And that just led to learning, which led to me realizing I'm Sephardi." While attending Jewish day school, there had been a disconnect between her *halakhic* practice and her cultural knowledge and experiences of being Sephardic. Only after leaving the Ashkenazic environment of her K-12 school did she "realize" she was Sephardic and actively bridge that gap.

For interviewees who attended "multiple ways" schools with more balanced *halakha* curricula, their relationships with Sephardic *halakha* generally follow a different trajectory. These interviewees describe K-12 experiences that actively incorporated both Sephardic and

Ashkenazic *halakhic* traditions into the classroom. As one interviewee put it: "Even the Ashkenazi teachers were very aware of Ashkenazi/Sephardic differences and they made a point of…mentioning that in class, so I always felt represented as a Sephardic person in high school…and I kind of just thought that was normal." All members of this "multiple ways" group used the term "pride" to describe their Sephardic identities as K-12 students. The culture shock between ecological spheres came from the dissonance, not between K-12 and the home, but between K-12 and other Ashkenormative contexts, such as summer programs or university campuses. An interviewee, whom we will call Miriam, described the Ashkenormative approach of her post-high school classes:

> It was always a fight, I was always…on guard and especially attuned to making sure that the teacher was really clear. When he said, 'and this is the *halakha*,' I was like, 'for whom? Are you saying that as a blanket statement for all Jews?...When you say that, are you thinking about Sephardim also?'

Having developed her Sephardic identity in an inclusive K-12 environment, Miriam knew firsthand what a balanced *halakha* curriculum could look like, and she endeavored to shape her new context to align with a "multiple ways" view of religious identity and provide a "multiple ways" perspective for her classmates.

Although in K-12 Miriam had known in theory that she was a member of a minority group within the Jewish community, it was after graduating high school, when she was in an Ashkenormative environment with an Ashkenormative curriculum, that Miriam associated Sephardic identity with minority identity:

> I remember a few times in *halakha* classes just feeling so unbelievably bored…we would spend literally hours going through all these Ashkenazi [sources] that had no impact on

my practice whatsoever…and then we would spend maybe, you know a few minutes on…the key…'token' Sephardic [scholars] and that was it…I was just struck by how naive my classmates were to any semblance of a Sephardic experience. It showed me…how one-dimensional their entire education has been…And I was like, wow, that's a problem.

The interviews demonstrate how curricular experiences lay the groundwork for behavioral, emotional, and ideological responses far beyond K-12. The nuances of *halakha* and its manifestations in schools serve as a microcosm of the relationships between Ashkenazic and Sephardic religious modes in general and the questions of what constitutes acceptable *halakhic* practice.

Prayer

Across the board, interviewees related that, even more than a school's curriculum, *tefillah*, prayer, was the foremost signifier of Sephardic identity and practice. As one male interviewee put it, "The *halakhic* system plays out when it plays out, but *tefillah* plays out consistently three times a day every day." Modern Orthodox day schools begin the day with group prayer, usually led by a teacher or fellow student. By middle school and high school, male students are required to attend formal school prayer services once in the morning and once in the afternoon. Some schools require female students to attend formal services, or give them the option to do so; in many schools, female students pray together as a group or as individuals, but not as part of a formal *minyan*.

With the exception of one elementary school that taught all students both Ashkenazic and Sephardic liturgies, the interviewees' elementary schools provided them with Ashkenazic *siddurim*, and used Ashkenazic liturgy, pronunciation, and melodies. By middle school, some

interviewees recall their schools' efforts to include and accommodate Sephardic students' liturgical customs, though how schools would do this would often vary by the makeup of the student body. According to the interviewees, in the first half of the school year, their middle schools usually had just enough boys of eligible age to make up one *minyan*, and in deference to the Ashkenazic majority, services almost always adhered to Ashkenazic liturgy and custom. Sephardic students would have had opportunities to lead services, but rarely would there have been enough eligible Sephardic students to form a separate Sephardic *minyan*. Females, who usually did not participate in a formal service, would pray together informally using the Ashkenazic liturgy. No one whom I interviewed expressed resentment towards their middle schools for conducting prayer services in this way, since they largely attributed this manifestation of Ashkenormativity to a function of numbers rather than an ideological agenda or cultural oversight. These middle school prayer experiences, however, do reveal an institutional privileging of Ashkenazic custom over Sephardic custom and contribute to the perception of Sephardic practice as separate from the mainstream.

By high school, schools with sufficient numbers of Sephardic male students were more likely to offer parallel Ashkenazic and Sephardic services. As with curricular differences, interviewees reported a range of behavioral and emotional responses. For some interviewees, the opportunity to pray with a Sephardic *minyan* in high school was met with enthusiasm: "I started with an Ashkenaz [*siddur*] until I kind of switched myself. I was like, I'm not Ashkenaz, let me join the Sephardi *minyan*." For this male interviewee, part of claiming and exploring his Sephardic identity included embracing Sephardic liturgy as well.

For other interviewees, however, opting for a Sephardic service generated less positive emotional associations. One female interviewee specifically chose an Ashkenazic service in high school, even though she had had the option to attend a Sephardic one:

> I think [middle school] was really when I started to *daven* every day in school and it was the Ashkenaz *siddur*. And when I went to [high school] and they had a Sephardic *minyan* and an Ashkenaz *minyan*, I actually joined the Ashkenaz *minyan* because I felt more comfortable with it.

In this case, familiarity took precedence over cultural identity.

For one male respondent, the ability to choose a service posed more conflict than when he had had an Ashkenazic option only:

> When I started to want to become more Sephardi, I feel like there was a little bit of…an outsider kind of feel within the Ashkenazi shul and within the Ashkenazi school…We were permitted to have our own *minyan* and we were given a space for our own *minyan*, but that means we weren't with everyone else…So in order to be Sephardi within an Ashkenazi institution [it] required me to…separate myself from everyone else, and it kind of gives you a feeling of being left out.

For this individual, claiming a Sephardic identity and "becoming more Sephardi" meant adhering to Sephardic customs and attending Sephardic services; but he had to make a daily choice of whether to act on his Sephardic identity at the risk of social exclusion, or to suppress his Sephardic identity in order to fit in with the majority group.

Although the specifics of their experiences differ, across the board, the interviewees followed a remarkably similar trajectory: Individuals who attended schools with Ashkenazic prayer options only tended to stick to the Ashkenazic liturgy and prayer customs with which they

were familiar throughout childhood and early adolescence. The males I interviewed began exploring their Sephardic heritage via prayer as they approached middle and later adolescence; most of the female interviewees did not begin to regularly pray with a Sephardic siddur until college or later. This gender discrepancy requires further examination, and generalizations cannot be extrapolated from my small sample size. I would like to suggest, however, that one contributing factor may be the Orthodox community's defined gender roles vis-a-vis prayer. When they hit the age of 13, most Sephardic young men in the community begin to wear a *tallit* on a daily basis, as opposed to their male Ashkenazic peers, who usually wait to wear a *tallit* until they are married; every day, therefore, these young Sephardic men don a physical representation of their Sephardic heritage. The frequency of formalized prayer also generally differs for male and female students. Since male students pray at least twice daily with a *minyan* that may or may not adhere to their personal customs, they are regularly reminded of the ties between their background and their liturgy. Young women, who in Modern Orthodox circles do not wear a *tallit* and do not usually pray with a weekday *minyan*, are less likely to experience these daily public reminders.

Sephardic "leniency"

When discussing the Ashkenazic and Sephardic approaches to *halakhic* practice, interviewees generally accepted the premise that Sephardic practices and rulings are, as a whole, more lenient and less exacting than their Ashkenazic counterparts. The interviewees' emotional responses to this premise, however, were varied, reflecting a mix of proud, neutral, and bitter attitudes, and differing by social context and personality. One interviewee summed up these hybrid responses:

> We were always viewed as the more lenient type amongst our Ashkenaz peers. There's always that running joke of the Sephardic kid is the Shabbos goy, you know? We were more flexible in certain areas…I guess as a student I always felt a sense of pride, 'Yeah, yeah, I feel bad for you guys,' that sort of thing. Whereas some made it…a derogatory thing, or at least that was the way it was experienced.

For some of the interviewees, Sephardic practices were acknowledged as different than Ashkenazic practices, but they didn't interpret those differences as discontinuities. As one woman put it, "Like you notice, oh, this is different from what I do at home, but it's not, you know, I didn't think of it as Ashkenazic vs. Sephardic. I was just like, oh, this is just different."

Other interviewees described their pride in their *halakhic* traditions, using language such as "authentic" and "pure" to describe their own practices, which have yielded comparatively fewer iterations over the centuries than Ashkenazic practices. One woman from Seattle, for instance, recalled how learning about the development of *halakhot* strengthened her Sephardic identity and pride:

> It was cool to go through how everything came about…like the *Shulchan Arukh* took from the Rambam, the Rif, and the Rash. Those are mostly Sephardic *psak*. And then the Ramah came in and gave his opinion. So I remember appreciating learning how that came about and…Sephardim, in terms of our *nussakh* and in terms of certain *poskim* that we follow, like the Rambam…I feel like the *mesorah* stayed very tight on certain things like that…I think there's a certain appreciation for the authenticity.

One woman, also from Seattle, did not accept the premise that Sephardim were more lenient, instead framing Sephardim as the baseline and Ashkenazim as excessively stringent:

> I think there's this perception that exists that like Sephardim are more lenient in general about *halakha*, and I don't think that's true…Sephardim are very traditional because they often take the *halakha* for what it is…From my experience, a lot of the time the Rambam and the *Shulchan Arukh* are not so far divorced from the *Gemara*, like in the Ashkenazi *rishonim* where the *halakha* becomes a lot different…I think that there's a perception that the Sephardim are like innovators because they're lenient, when in reality I think they're like, we are like closer to the way *halakha* was written in the *Gemara*.

For these interviewees, therefore, the premise has been recast from a standard of Sephardic leniency into one of Sephardic authenticity.

Although as adults these interviewees have grown to appreciate their own customs, as adolescents, they were sometimes made to feel self-conscious about the discrepancies between their family's practices and those of their Ashkenazic peers. One interviewee explained why her family chose to send her to an almost exclusively Ashkenazic school:

> Now I understand how a lot of Sephardim are maybe less observant but very spiritual, and it doesn't seem like a contradiction to me as much because as you get older you realize people are multifaceted and all Jews can choose, you know, spirituality is so individual, but as a young child, it seemed like a contradiction…And so [my father] purposely chose to raise us in an environment that felt like, for lack of a better word, was more white…

This excerpt reflects the ways in which adolescents are particularly prone to feelings of *halakhic* dissonance, internalizing behavioral discrepancies as hypocrisy. One interviewee, in a discussion of how she assumed her mother did not keep *halakhot* correctly because her teachers never

acknowledged Sephardic customs as legitimate, recalled how she perceived her family's customs as shameful and as something that needed to be kept hidden:

> When I would talk to my friends about this stuff, about how like, you know, we don't fully keep Shabbat at home, and it would be like a secret identity…I remember we always used to complain, uch, if only we were Ashkenaz, because that meant religious and on the same page, we'd say if only we were Ashkenazi then everything would be normal and we wouldn't have to feel like we were hiding this, and we wouldn't have to feel ashamed.

Of course, as an adult, this interviewee has come to realize that her mother did in fact keep the laws of *kashrut* and Shabbat in accordance with Sephardic *halakhot*; at the time, however, feelings of home-school dissonance made her wish she could adopt a different cultural identity.

The most common source of *halakhic* discontinuity in the interviews related to laws of physical modesty; perhaps unsurprisingly, these discrepancies were reported exclusively by female interviewees. The women acknowledged that, as adolescents, Ashkenazic authority figures, such as teachers and parents, were more likely to adhere to and encourage stricter codes of dress than Sephardic authority figures. To illustrate:

> A lot of my Sephardic friends, they would wear tank tops and shorter sleeves, shorts or jeans or leggings, but my Ashkenazic friends, I would say their parents forced them to dress a certain way…Me and my [Sephardic] friends, we kind of just wore what we wore, and no one was too revealing, too strict…Like a lot of my friends, on their own, they chose to dress modestly because they wanted to do it, not because they were forced to…There's always that one teacher who's going around saying your skirt's too short…and those teachers all happen to be Ashkenazic.

In this excerpt, the interviewee treats modes of dress neutrally rather than as a set of laws embedded in a deeper value system, describing discrepancies she noticed without extrapolating deeper meaning from them. Another woman made a similar observation about the first time she found herself in an almost exclusively Ashkenazic environment:

> Everyone was wearing a shirt to their elbow and I was wearing a short-sleeved T-shirt…I don't know, I guess there are just sort of unspoken standards in certain communities. Like you don't talk about them, and nobody writes them down, but like, you look around and everybody's following a social norm…I felt that I was really easily on the same page with that social norm in the Sephardic community here, but that was not the same, those were not the same unwritten rules in New York…

Discontinuities between expectations in Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities were treated here as unspoken social norms rather than as an indication of values.

Some interviewees, however, recalled times when they felt that Ashkenazic figures translated clothing choices into character assessments. For instance, one woman described her first year in college after attending majority-Ashkenazic middle and high schools: "Obviously I dress modestly, fine, but [there was a] mentality of 'this is not good enough the way you're coming to school,'...the gentle discrimination there [in high school]. I didn't have to deal with any of that [in college], so it felt good, you know?" Whether or not her high school teachers had been consciously looking down on her due to her mode of dress, her perception of discrimination created internal tension and a diminished sense of belonging. Another interviewee described a similar perception when she and her Sephardic friends would attend services at the local Ashkenazic synagogue:

> I remember my friends would go, uch, we have to go to [the Ashkenazic shul] today, and we're going to get stared at because our knees are showing…I'm not saying this is all Ashkenazim, but going to that shul specifically, we felt very judged when we would walk in, like, oh, there's those Sephardim walking in with their knees and elbows showing.

Again, whether or not the Ashkenazim were in fact noticing and judging these teenagers' clothing choices, the adolescents *felt* as though they were being judged and were not fully welcome in Ashkenazic spaces.

In some cases, however, authority figures' value judgments were more explicit. One interviewee described a conversation she had in her early twenties with an Ashkenazic mentor:

> She was explaining to me, like, why it was important for me to dress differently. And she was like, 'you know, you don't know who you're going to end up wanting to marry…If you don't dress a certain way, nobody's going to want to come eat at your house because they're going to think your house isn't kosher.' And I was like, Oh my G-d, I would never think that about somebody…I've gone to so many people's houses here where the women don't cover their hair or wear pants, and it doesn't call their *kashrut* into question ever…I couldn't believe that that was the way things were evaluated…I really viewed that as symptomatic of, I guess a New York, Ashkenazi perception…

In this case, negative feelings about these cultural discrepancies were not turned inward, but were rather directed at those authority figures who placed undue importance on physical appearance and clothing choices.

Interviewees reported a number of other religious discontinuities they experienced as adolescents, though many were mentioned as incidental discrepancies that did not seem to have had major social or emotional consequences, such as nuances related to *brachot* or whether parents name their children after the living or the deceased. The question of attending a post-high school women's seminary in Israel, brought up by a number of female interviewees, does potentially create dissonance and can impact young women's sense of school belonging. During the senior year of high school, many day schools host information sessions and other programming related to seminary applications, interviews, and acceptances. Although young Sephardic women have begun to take a gap year in Israel more regularly in recent years, this trend has not yet become the expected rite of passage for Sephardic women as it is for Modern Orthodox Ashkenazic women. Those who do or do not attend seminary in Israel may split along predominantly Ashkenazic-Sephardic lines, and a school's seminary-related programs therefore indirectly exclude those students for whom a year abroad is not a cultural given.

The influence of peer groups

Particularly in middle school, parents' impact on a child's development begins to wane as adolescents progressively individuate from the home influences that predominated in the elementary school years; instead, peers' influence becomes increasingly impactful. As would be expected in discussions of schooling and adolescence, all interviewees noted the significance of peer relationships in Sephardic identity, dissonance, and/or school belonging.

Several interviewees described the comfort they felt with their Sephardic peers, as opposed to Ashkenazic peers who, though also friendly, did not share the same frames of reference or cultural ties. One woman described how with Ashkenazic peers, she would have

been considered “exotic” or “interesting,” but with her Sephardic friends, she felt an implicit understanding:

> Our grandparents were from similar places in the world…That felt like kind of a special connection, and it also felt like, these people understand me and my life on a deeper level that I don’t have to explain. Whereas I have to tell like an Ashkenazi person, oh my grandparents are from Greece, and it’s like, that's exotic…

These similarities transcend the bounds of the school day. Some interviewees described the comfort they felt in their Sephardic peers’ homes on Shabbat: “In high school when I went to [Sephardic] people’s houses for Shabbat, I recognized all of the food, and I was like, yeah, this is normal…It’s totally normal to have never tasted kugel, and it’s also totally normal to not like it.” As her remarks indicate, her Ashkenazic friends were surprised when she divulged that she did not regularly eat Ashkenazic “staples” such as cholent or gefilte fish, which, in America have become synonymous with “Jewish food.” Another interviewee described the difference in the general atmosphere between the Shabbat table of her Sephardic and Ashkenazic friends:

> I remember having one friend in high school who was Sephardi and I would go to her house for Shabbat, and I just felt at home, it was so comfortable…You sit down, and the father starts blessing all the kids, and it’s loud and singing and on the top of their lungs, and they're throwing the challah, and there’s all the sauces, and like, everything is colorful…I would go to other [Ashkenazic] friends’ houses and…you have to sit nicely and quietly, and you get up, and you stand in line to wash, and in the other [Sephardic] house, they're throwing the towel at each other, and they're picking up the little kid and throwing him over the shoulder…There’s a different vibe.

Several interviewees also mentioned Sephardic community centers, camps, or other meeting spaces at which they would bond with similarly raised peers.

Interviewees' recollections of relationships with Ashkenazic peers were more varied. For a number of the interviewees, these relationships were consistently positive, characterized by mutual acceptance. Occasionally, however, interactions with Ashkenazic peers left the interviewees conflicted or even resentful. The interviewees from this study generally did not personally experience bullying because they were Sephardic, but many did describe events they witnessed as adolescents. Some described overt instances of bullying, in which Sephardic girls were teased for their appearance or language; or "ribbing" among teenage boys that, while not intentionally malicious, creates an environment in which adolescents are socially divided by ethnicity. For the most part, however, the interviewees describe the subtle impressions they perceived in Ashkenazic peers' facial expressions, tones of voice, or body language that conveyed a sense of separateness from Sephardic students.

Though none used the term explicitly, several interviewees described experiences adjacent to the phenomenon of "passing," a sociological concept that describes the ways in which an individual with a stigmatized identity may choose to hide markers of that identity, thus "passing" as a member of a non-stigmatized group and avoiding the negative social consequences of carrying that stigma (Hobbs, 2014). In the context of American racial history, "passing" usually refers to members of a racial minority whose physical features enable them to "pass" as White. In the context of Ashkenazic-Sephardic dynamics, some interviewees described the ways in which they downplayed their Sephardiness, sometimes concealing it entirely. In one example, a woman described the shame and fear she felt in middle school as a bystander to bullying:

> I remember noticing that there were two transplants, two Bukharian girls, and they spoke different and they dressed different and they looked different, and people immediately just didn't want to be friends with them. They felt they were weird. I remember feeling in those moments like, I'm really one of them and nobody knows, and don't say anything…I was a blonde kid. I'm not super dark-skinned. I didn't stand out as Sephardi.

"Passing" among Ashkenazic peers meant that a few of the interviewees were let in on conversations about Sephardic communities that they would not have otherwise heard: "There were people who would say stuff like, oh, you know, the Bukharians, they all cheat. But not you!...It was because I seemed so Ashkenazi it was okay for them to say stuff like that. It's not okay." Another interviewee, whose parents were born in Iran but grew up in Israel, described how in her school environment, she did not pass as Ashkenazic but as a more "acceptable" type of Sephardi:

> When I was in elementary school, I didn't really feel myself anything different between Ashkenaz and Sephardi as much because I was viewed as Israeli…I think in that school it was the Persian kids that were treated differently…[In high school], the administration there didn't, they saw me as Persian, so there that's when I felt it, being treated differently.

Teachers' backgrounds and attitudes

As impactful as peer attitudes can be on adolescents' burgeoning identities, teachers and other school-based authority figures wield a significant influence as well. As with peer groups, interviewees described the comfort and familiarity of having teachers from a Sephardic background. "I felt I related to them more and they understood me better," says one man who

had a mix of Ashkenazic and Sephardic day school teachers. "The fact that we went to the same synagogue on Shabbat, and on holidays seeing them in the pulpit…So it's the familiarity part, and it's also I think the slang, being able to throw Arabic terms in while learning…made them more relatable in that way."

A number of interviewees are or have been educators themselves, and they describe the responsibility they feel for providing their students with this familiarity: "I definitely think it makes the Sephardim feel more comfortable, especially the Persians…when they have a [Persian] teacher in the school…and feel like there's somebody that, there's a certain familiarity that helps them." One woman explained that she also felt a responsibility to be a Sephardic representative for her Ashkenazic students: "It was important for them to hear the way that a Sephardic person reads a *passuk*, and it's important for them to hear the way a Sephardic person approaches Torah…I wasn't always going to be a subject of [a balanced] environment, but if I was a teacher I could set the tone of the environment."

Such a tone goes beyond Hebrew pronunciation or methods of Torah study—Setting an inclusive classroom climate involves a more holistic philosophy and attitude toward *halakhic* and cultural variance. The interviewees spoke about the potential and responsibility of the teacher to create a climate of awareness and acceptance of Jewish diversity. One interviewee, an educator, said that such an outlook "has to be part of the mission" and should be "embed[ded] into the culture consistently." The first step, suggested multiple interviewees, is for educators to understand the Ashkenormative circumstances in which many of them operate. A number of interviewees drew on the discourse of white privilege to explain this idea:

> Maybe you don't see your own personal biases…it's just innate. So I think the first step is always being conscious of the situation, understanding that there are differences. It

> might not manifest itself behaviorally, at least to your own eyes, but it's there…And once you're kind of aware of those differences, I think just being well-versed, being informed, understanding that there is nuance, especially when it comes to Judaism…

One interviewee referenced white privilege explicitly:

> You can't wrap your mind around it because you're so lost in your white privilege…I related to the idea that people were unaware of their biases because they had never walked in a Sephardi person's shoes and understood what it was like to be unwelcome somewhere. Or to make an offhand comment, not realizing that there are Sephardi people in the room, not realizing the effect that it has.

Interviewees also noted the importance of teacher knowledge about Sephardic *halakhot*, customs, and history, and encouraged them to learn from their students about Sephardic culture and practice, "empowering them to not feel like, hey, I have to hide it, and bring that out." In doing so, teachers can cultivate an environment of acceptance by expanding notions of what Judaism might look like. Said one interviewee:

> I think just normalizing that…having people just becoming accustomed to the fact that there are different cultures from different people, and all of it is beautiful…I would want them to just say, like, everybody's different, everybody has different customs, let's bring it all out there. What's your custom? That's cool. What's your custom? That's cool.

Prejudice, discrimination, and the power of perception

As discussed throughout this chapter, the interviewees discussed unconscious biases about Sephardim they have encountered in school and beyond, but for the most part, they did not report instances in which they were subject to overt prejudice or discrimination because of their Sephardic heritage. For the few interviewees who recounted personally experiencing

discriminatory treatment, encounters that have engendered a feeling of "othering" were characterized in primarily two ways. The first, referred to here as "explicit prejudice," includes overt instances of prejudiced or discriminatory behavior, and is subdivided into negative and positive types. The second major category of interviewees' experiences relates to unspoken, "perceived discrimination" that conveyed tacit messages to the interviewees about who in the school is rewarded or punished, and who belongs as part of the school community.

In the anecdotes provided by the interviewees, negative explicit prejudice involved casting Sephardim as social, cultural, and religious outsiders. One woman described how her classmates and their parents would say, "Oh, all these Bukharian people are moving in…taking over," indicating that they were displeased at the changing demographics in the neighborhood. In some cases, this sentiment extended to teasing Sephardic students about their appearance, dress, or language; and in some instances, leaving Sephardic students off the guest list for Bar and Bat Mitzvahs. In one horrifying example, one woman provided a second-hand account of an overheard conversation between two Ashkenazic girls about whether Sephardic girls should be allowed to use the same water fountain as their Ashkenazic classmates. She also shared a story about a school administrative assistant who at first refused to connect a Sephardic parent with the schools' admissions committee but was much friendlier when the parent called again and introduced herself as "Mrs. Goldberg," a common Ashkenazic name. This interviewee, as well as several others, blamed adults, not school children, for sowing prejudice: "This kind of thing, it comes from the home. This kind of behavior, whatever you're hearing comes from the home, so that means their parents think that way, you know? And that's really unfortunate…but don't generalize it to everyone."

Interviewees also described instances of "positive" prejudice in which othering was couched in praise. Multiple interviewees described the Sephardic students as "cooler" or "faster" than their Ashkenazic peers, sometimes exoticized for their "interesting" cultural practices. According to the interviewees, this social descriptor was not necessarily harmful—one interviewee proudly called Ashkenazim "white bread"—but it did serve to create a social barrier between the Ashkenazic mainstream and the "other," more exotic Sephardim. Other compliments toward Sephardim, however, were met with less appreciation. "My husband's friends joke with him," one woman said, "'I'll only come over if she makes that spicy Moroccan stuff. Tell her to put her witch potion on the fish'…It's a backhanded compliment…It's like a 'witch fish' because it's Moroccan." Another interviewee described what has become known as the soft bigotry of low expectations: "A lot of our girls are all like doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, whatever, and they're really smart women who just didn't have access to Jewish education. Ashkenazi women… they'll say, 'Wow, she was so smart! She was so well-spoken!' Unfortunately, very surprised." In this case, accomplished Bukharian women were perceived as an exception among the unaccomplished norm.

The situations described above involve obvious, spoken instances of prejudiced thinking. In other examples, however, it is unclear whether discrimination or prejudice were actually at play, and/or whether interviewees perceived discrimination and prejudice in ways that reflect and reinforce their sensitivities to cultural and ethnicity-based othering. A few interviewees described what they felt to be discriminatory actions taken by their school administrations. Two women, one on each coast of the United States, felt they were denied honors at graduation because they were Sephardic. Said one of these women:

> There was the math and science award. I got straight A's in all the honors and APs, and they didn't give anyone the award. They said no one deserved it. And I spoke with my math teacher, like, what is this? I got straight A's all throughout and everything! [She said] 'Oh, I guess we didn't realize it could be you,' or something like that. So I was like, you'd rather just not give it to anyone than give it to me.

Other interviewees recalled what they thought were discriminatory disciplinary actions against Sephardim, describing how teachers singled out Sephardic students while letting Ashkenazic students off the hook for similar offenses. In one case, an interviewee said that she and the other members of her carpool were given detention for tardiness, while other carpools—noticeably comprised of Ashkenazic students—were not.

Were these school leaders' actions motivated by ethnic discrimination? One interviewee claimed that some of her fellow Sephardic students' perceptions were a product of "victimization," of attributing blame to prejudiced teachers rather than acknowledging they had broken school rules. Ultimately, however, it seems that, regardless of educators' intentions or unconscious attitudes, students' perceptions of prejudice and discrimination have a very real impact: "You never know what the intention is and what the motivation is," acknowledged one of the interviewees. "But when you are different and you feel different, and it's this underlying feeling that this minority is looked down upon among your peers, you take that chip on your shoulder with you everywhere you go. It's certainly a real thing." The lived experience of discrimination exists, whether or not the discrimination itself does.

Chapter 7: Discussion

What follows in this chapter is a discussion of the implications of the data described in Chapters 5 and 6. Both quantitative and qualitative findings are considered to present a more holistic, textured analysis of the findings and implications.

Cultural Discontinuities, Home-School Dissonance, and School Belonging

Data from this study offer strong evidence that Sephardic adolescents experience greater levels of cultural discontinuity and home-school dissonance, as well as lower levels of school belonging, than their Ashkenazic peers. A strong negative correlation between home-school dissonance and school belonging further indicates that students' experiences as members of the school community are emotionally linked with the degree to which they feel that their home and school ecological environments do or do not align, for both self-identified Sephardic and Ashkenazic adolescents.

Correlations among cultural discontinuity variables, however, suggest that while Sephardic students do pair home-school dissonance with belonging, they do not pair dissonance with the specific items identified in the cultural discontinuity scale, even for the prayer items for which they experience high levels of discontinuity. It is possible that there are cultural and religious variables, not included in this study, that may more highly associate with dissonance and belonging. One might also suggest that adolescents' emotional connections with other individuals and with the school lie orthogonally to the nuances of their religious practices.

Findings from the qualitative portions of this study supplement these quantitative results and offer potential frameworks for understanding the quantitative data. Interviewees who remembered feeling emotional tension due to prayer discontinuities generally recalled impactful instances from high school and beyond; the middle-school respondents of the survey may in time experience similar tension, but these emotional reactions have not yet surfaced. For some

interviewees who first “discovered” their Sephardic practices and liturgy after graduating high school, cultural discontinuities were often attributed to differences between home expectations and school expectations in general, but not to particular discrepancies in cultural practices or values. It is possible that middle-school students did not pair dissonance or belonging with cultural discontinuities because those discontinuities have thus far gone unnoticed.

The correlational data among the specific cultural discontinuity items also provide interesting context in which to examine dissonance and/or belonging. For Ashkenazic students, the discontinuity items were mostly correlated with one another, suggesting overall consistency in at-home religious behaviors. For Sephardic students, however, almost no significant correlations were found among cultural discontinuity items, and the two correlations of significance were weak. Taken together with the one-way ANOVAs presented in Table 9, for which no significant difference was found between Sephardic subgroups, the data suggest little consistency among Sephardic students’ home-based religious and cultural practices. Given the range of ethnic subgroups represented in the data, this lack of consistency is reasonable. Further, even within subgroups themselves, the data show little consistency. If the range of Sephardic practices is indeed as broad as the data suggest, then the absence of significant associations among cultural discontinuity items and between cultural discontinuity and the other measured constructs is understandable, if not expected. The lack of significant findings, in other words, may affirm the diversity of the sample in question.

If the Sephardic students in this study report greater levels of home-school dissonance and lower levels of school belonging, and if the items defined in the Sephardi/Ashkenazi Discontinuity Scale do not pair with participants’ dissonance or belonging, then with which culturally or ethnically-specific factors might the dissonance and belonging be associated? One

possibility is that religious behaviors other than the ones addressed in the survey would have yielded different results for Sephardic students. More likely though, the explanation lies beyond the scope of religious behaviors. Findings from the interviews offer potential suggestions. A number of interviewees expressed that Sephardic peer groups and social functions have a distinct and indefinable "vibe." Interviewees described how they perceived and internalized these differences, ranging from family attitudes toward school, to food choices, to noise levels and types of celebrations, to language use, and more. Because of the range of Sephardic groups surveyed in this study, culturally-specific questions were not included in the cultural discontinuity measure. Perhaps future research could home in on one or two specific subgroups and identify group-specific cultural discontinuity items that may associate with home-school dissonance and/or school belonging.

Some interviewees, whose parents immigrated to the United States in the late 1980s and/or early 1990s, contrasted the "vibe" of their immigrant households with their peers' Americanized environments. The outsider feeling expressed by this group is reinforced by the quantitative data. Compared to students with one or two parents born in the United States, those with two parents born abroad reported significantly higher levels of home-school dissonance and lower levels of school belonging. Also, no significant correlations were found among cultural discontinuity items, suggesting even less consistency in religious behaviors than among self-identified Sephardic students as a whole. Although immigration was not the primary focus of this study, adolescents' family immigration history does appear to play an important role in their personal experiences of dissonance and belonging. An alternative framework and line of questioning seem to be necessary for examining this topic through the lens of immigration.

Although cultural discontinuity data on prayer, teacher knowledge, and language do hint at educators' Ashkenormative tendencies, no questions addressed Ashkenormativity directly; similarly, the home-school dissonance subscale asked students about how they perceived themselves as minorities within a majority-dominated context, but the questions did not ask about their perceptions of the school environment vis-a-vis discontinuity or dissonance. Such a line of questioning would likely clarify the parameters of the "vibe" interviewees perceive to be the distinguishing feature of Sephardic communities.

The Role of Demographics

A closer examination and comparison of the various school and student body characteristics provide implications about the relationship between students' identities, school belonging, and school climate. Table 1, described in Chapter 5, presents each school's student population by self-identified religious group (Ashkenazic, Sephardic, half/half, or other) and parents' immigration status (neither, one, or both). The descriptive data indicate contrasts in the communal context of each school, even within a broader geographic area. For instance, in the schools labeled NY1 and NY3, both in the greater New York area and only ten miles from one another, students self-identify as 44.4% Ashkenazic and 50.9% Sephardic, and 78.9% Ashkenazic and 11.7% Sephardic, respectively. Although data analyses were controlled for school effects such that these differences did not significantly impact the overall trends in the data, the demographics of each student body likely influence the ways that individual students see themselves among their peers. For instance, based on the patterns of means, students in the schools with the highest reported Sephardic populations, NY1 and LA, also reported the highest levels of cultural discontinuity with respect to prayer items (*siddur* and *minyan*); similarly, the students of NY2, who reported the highest level of teachers' Sephardic knowledge, also reported

the highest levels of school belonging and the lowest levels of home-school dissonance. Although these correlations were not statistically significant, these anecdotal patterns are worth mentioning, as they provide potential context for other, more significant findings.

The descriptive findings on parents' immigration status also lead to more questions than answers. Based on data compiled by the Migration Policy Institute's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, 33-35% of New York-based parents with children aged 0-10 were not born in the United States (Hofstetter & McHugh, 2021). Three of the four schools included in this study meet or approach this statistic, yet it is unclear to what extent these schools' policies, procedures, curricula, and the like account for such a high second-generation student population. Whether these schools are outliers in the day school landscape cannot be determined, as no comprehensive data have yet been collected about immigration in Jewish day school families. Research suggests that children of immigrants grapple with questions of assimilation and dissonance, and that strong ethnic identity can serve as a protective factor against negative mental health outcomes (Asfari & Askar, 2020). The field of Jewish educational research, however, has yet to seriously consider the interplay of religious identity, immigration, and social-emotional wellbeing. Further complicating these interactions, in a Chi-square comparing the overlap between participating students who identify as Sephardic and participating students who report one or two parents born outside of the United States, an astonishing 80% of students fell into both categories. Among Ashkenazic students, the portion of students reporting at least one immigrant parent was 19%, too low of a percentage to deduce meaningful findings about this demographic. The findings of this study do not clearly distinguish whether students' experiences of discontinuity, dissonance, or belonging may be attributed to their Sephardic heritage, their family immigration history, or a combination of both. Further study of this interplay is necessary.

Implications for Religious Identity Development

Despite the interviewees' different schools, professions, and locations, several patterns emerged with respect to the trajectories of their Sephardic practice from adolescence and into adulthood. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the interviewees who described schooling and community environments steeped in Sephardic culture and *halakhot* sustained their childhood and adolescent practices into adulthood. The majority of interviewees, however, had attended predominantly Ashkenazic schools in line with the "one-way" approach to curriculum and "discovered" their Sephardic behavioral heritage in late adolescence or early adulthood, usually of their own initiative. A number of these interviewees explicitly associate their "switch" to Sephardic liturgy and practice with their burgeoning Sephardic identity, claiming that "becoming Sephardi" or "discover[ing] that I'm Sephardi" required them to actively and independently seek out resources to teach them how to practice in accordance with Sephardic tradition. The quantitative findings on cultural discontinuities in middle school are consistent with this pattern as well. Compared to their Ashkenazic peers, the Sephardic participants experienced significantly greater levels of discontinuity between the religious practices of home and school, indicating that the religious curricula, programming, and procedures in schools are not conducive to Sephardic religious practice.

From the lens of developmental stage theories, this pattern makes sense. As they leave childhood, adolescents develop an approach to religion that reflects the attitudes and behaviors that are valued and practiced by those in authority (Fowler, 1981). As adolescents grow into adulthood, the pull of these prescribed boundaries and authoritative modes of thinking tend to loosen their hold, and the integrity of authoritative bodies is no longer a foregone assumption. In this study, individuals, who as young adolescents had accepted educators' religious authority,

individuated as they grew older, taking on religious practices in line with their newly discovered identities. As adults in their late 20s to late 30s, these interviewees have gone through this progression and have arrived on the other side. These individuals have "sustained" their cultural heritage, not via schools' conscious implementation of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy but despite its absence.

The pattern, however, bears concerning implications for adolescents in dissonant contexts with conflicting sources of religious authority. As adolescents become increasingly concerned with discovering their respective identities, they often do so by defining themselves in terms of group affiliation and in contrast with perceived characteristics and values of other groups (Tajfel et al., 1979). Sephardic adolescents in Ashkenazic environments may internalize competing messages about which behavioral modes are "correct" and authoritative, which identifiers most accurately define them, and which group characteristics and values are preferred or rejected. They would then be less likely to experience social connectedness and school belonging (Allen & Kern, 2017). Day school educators may play a pivotal role in minimizing such dissonance and in encouraging connectedness and belonging by consciously shaping inclusive and culturally sustaining environments.

The Importance of an Inclusive School Culture and Climate

As defined in this dissertation, school culture describes the underlying and oftentimes unconscious attitudes shaping the environment of a school, and school climate refers to the school members' perceptions of those unconscious attitudes. Given the difficulty of objectively measuring an organization's underlying attitudes and assumptions, this study has used observable "artifacts" (Schein, 1985)—such as behavioral norms (Hoy, 1990), rituals (Schneider et al., 2011), performed behaviors (Rafaeli & Worline, 2000), and institutional myths and stories

(Schneider & Barbera, 2014)—to infer the values by which school communities operate, and the extent to which those values diverge from those of students' families. In this study, school climate was addressed via the Sephardic/Ashkenazic Cultural Discontinuity Scale, which drew on students' at-home and in-school behaviors and relationships to inductively analyze whether and how participating schools operated according to Ashkenormative assumptions and norms.

This study is grounded in the interpretive/constructivist paradigm, which asserts the existence of multiple social truths and posits that participants internalize the world around them and define their own realities. Regardless of the measured cultural discontinuity levels, therefore, students' perceptions of their school environments—in other words, their assessments of school climate—reveal their individual lived realities in terms of teacher support, peer attachment, and affirming diversity. Although Sephardic students did not pair cultural discontinuity with home-school dissonance or school belonging, they did indicate a significantly lower perception of school climate for diversity than their Ashkenazic peers, and those perceptions reveal and inform their lived experiences in school.

Coupled with significantly higher levels of cultural discontinuity overall, the climate data suggest that the participating schools are at least somewhat conducted along Ashkenormative lines. In particular, cultural discontinuities related to *siddur* usage, *minyan* attendance, and *halakhic* practice demonstrate significant negative correlations with all three school climate variables, suggesting that norms of religious practice do relate to students' perceived climate.

Although it is difficult to consciously change embedded school cultural values, observable manifestations of those values—the "artifacts"—can point to a school's assumed norms and can yield suggestions for improving school climate. Based on the findings of this study, especially from the interview data, the school culture is shaped not only by overt policies

and procedures, but also by seemingly innocuous day-to-day decisions about teaching and programming, and the stories school members tell about themselves and the school as an institution.

Climate via teaching and curriculum

The pedagogical methods, curricular choices, and interpersonal choices of teachers and other school personnel can be unconsciously interpreted and internalized by students as indications of teachers' values and assumptions. The teachers described in these interviews brought varying levels of *halakhic* and cultural knowledge into their classrooms. For adults who recollected "one-way" curricular approaches, *halakhic* discontinuities between home and school did not necessarily breed dissonance. As described above, for some of the interviewees, deciding to attend a predominantly Ashkenazic school meant matter-of-factly accepting their own "minority" status and compartmentalizing their Sephardic practice from their Ashkenazic curricula. For most of the interviewees in "one-way schools," however, *halakhic* discontinuities engendered a sense of "otherness" and confusion. The adults who reported the least home-school dissonance and the greatest belonging had "multiple ways" class experiences in common. In these classrooms, teachers were knowledgeable about both Ashkenazic and Sephardic *halakhot, minhagim*, and liturgy, and did not place primacy on one over the other. These teachers refrained from using exclusive language, such as saying "we" to refer to Ashkenazim, and did not assume that religious behaviors and prayers were identical for all students. The diversity of Jewish practice was assumed as a given, decreasing potential dissonance and barriers to belonging.

The impact of teacher knowledge on inclusive climates manifests in the survey data as well, though not in a statistically measurable way. In my initial conversations with administrators from the participating schools, we discussed what, if any, Sephardic programming and/or teacher

education was present in each school. The leaders of the school herein identified as NY2 have been making concerted efforts to enhance knowledge of Sephardic culture and religious practices among the faculty and students. At the beginning of the year, Judaic Studies teachers are given information to incorporate into their curricula about the differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic practices, and the middle school boys attend a Sephardic-style *minyan* once a week. When the discontinuity and climate variables are divided by school, the pattern of means indicates that, compared to students in the other three schools, students in NY2 rate their school as having the strongest climate for affirming diversity and rate their teachers as having the most knowledge of Sephardic *halakha*. These data points are not statistically significant, and the number of participating students in this school (n = 39) is too small to be generalizable to the entire sample, let alone to Jewish day schools in general. This information, however, does offer anecdotal evidence of the link between teacher knowledge and curricular initiatives with school climate for diversity.

Climate via physical space and objects

As noted by Pettigrew (1979) and the subsequent scholars of organizational theory who focus on symbology and culture, the physical space in which an organization operates, and the items within that space, also convey underlying assumptions about who or what is valued in that space. For instance, when bulletin boards feature portraits of famous rabbis and other prominent Jewish “heroes,” schools with a high ratio of Ashkenazic to Sephardic representatives subtly convey the prioritization of Ashkenazic over Sephardic heritage. Similar messaging is inferred from the physical items in the school building, such as the *siddurim* that are available for students. If a school stocks only Ashkenazic *siddurim*, students whose families use a different liturgy will either settle for what is available despite their preference, or will bring *siddurim* from

home and literally prevent them from being on the same page as most of their classmates. In the case of some of the interviewees, for instance, they only familiarized themselves with the Sephardic weekday liturgy once they graduated high school, whether because they had no access to Sephardic texts or because they had become so accustomed to the Ashkenazic texts and tunes that their own cultural modes of prayer were not embraced. For adolescents concerned with developing their religious and cultural identities, the surrounding objects and available resources can influence a sense of self and direct behavioral choices.

Climate via programming logistics

The seemingly inconsequential logistical features of school events can also be laden with cultural messaging. To illustrate, when pressed to clarify what made a community Shabbat program feel particularly Ashkenazic in tone, one interviewee said, "*Seudah shlishit* was just egg salad." The food, in other words, felt so out of sync with his own culture that thirty years later he still associated this menu option with his Ashkenormative environment. Although he was referring here to a community Shabbat program and not a school event, he established a link between food choices and climate. The Sephardic survey respondents indicated significantly more cultural discontinuity related to food than their Ashkenazic peers. Although they did not pair this discontinuity with home-school dissonance or school belonging, it may contribute to an overall perception of school culture.

Another interviewee made similar comments about the musical selections at school-wide *chagigot* and other celebrations. Accustomed to Israeli and Arabic music, the singers' Western-influenced pronunciation and styles were jarring to her ear: "I wasn't into that style of music…I didn't feel like…that was my way of celebrating. I felt very detached." For this interviewee, the school leaders' musical preferences inadvertently imbued a school-wide celebration with

Ashkenormative culture, diminishing her desire to engage in school, and ultimately making her feel less welcome. Even when the content of a program is "culture-neutral," these examples illustrate the ways in which small logistical decisions can have outsize influences on students' experiences of climate.

Climate via narratives of success

As described by Giorgi et al. (2015), the stories institutional members tell about themselves and about the institution can serve as artifacts that represent the institution's undergirding values. A perusal of a school's recruitment materials or press releases, for instance, will demonstrate which student achievements are worthy of publication, and which students serve as the "faces" of the institution. In other words, the materials that school personnel disseminate about the school are themselves an expression of the school's values and the school's definition of success. As described in Chapter 6, a number of interviewees felt that they were denied graduation awards because, as Sephardim, they did not align with the school's ideal picture of a model student. Although these perceptions may not reflect the actual decision-making processes of the school leaders in question, according to the interviewees' lived experiences, their school leaders preferred to celebrate a certain type of student over another, revealing which students truly represented the institution and belonged.

Publicity aside, even within the institution itself, the school climate is shaped by who is represented in positions of leadership. For instance, school leaders may unconsciously signal preferences for certain groups of students over others when students are chosen for leadership roles. When speakers are invited to address the study body, the characteristics of those speakers and the forms of success they embody also convey messages to students about how success is defined and who is worthy of emulation. The demographic makeup of a faculty, school board, or

parent-teacher association may also indicate to students which groups of people deserve representation and whose input is solicited or ignored.

This study did not formally examine participating schools' mission statements and policies with respect to diversity, but it would be interesting to evaluate whether and how school culture and climate reflect and/or shape students' ethnic religious identities.

Implications for day school educators and Jewish community leaders

The importance of fostering and maintaining a school culture of inclusivity has been discussed at length in this dissertation. Findings from this study have pointed to ways by which teachers and administrators can harness curricula and school programming to cultivate environments in which students from a range of religious and ethnic backgrounds are represented. If occasional self-contained lesson plans or guest speakers constitute the extent of these initiatives, however, these efforts will likely be perceived as nice "token" additions to an existing school culture rather than as a move to refocus its approach to inclusion. According to Bronfenbrenner's framework (1994), all of the ecological spheres in which a child operates can have an impact on the child's personal development and outlook. School culture initiatives therefore need to account for and harness the full scope of students' ecological worlds on a regular basis.

Within the school building itself, a commitment to balanced and inclusive representation should be consistent and holistic, a value that is woven into all facets of school life. With awareness and reflection as a starting part, educators should be conscious of which narratives of Judaism are presented and which are excluded, the extent to which *halakhic* Judaism is presented as a one-size-fits-all model, and the extent to which multiple narratives of *halakhic* Judaism are discussed and celebrated.

The quantitative data from this study, as well as the anecdotal recollections of former day school students, suggest that day school teachers generally have less knowledge of Sephardic history and customs than they do about Ashkenazic heritage. Although less prominent than resources from Eurocentric lenses, curricula on Sephardic content are available for day school educators to fill in their knowledge gaps. For instance, a compendium of units, lesson plans, and other sources—published by the Institute for Ideas and Ideals in collaboration with the Sephardic Education Center (2019)—is available for educators to incorporate into their lesson planning. Says the editor of this volume: “There is no need to overhaul any curriculum or lesson plan. It simply is about educators being informed, and then adding several comments throughout the year to enrich the discussions and to broaden the playing field of interpretation for their students” (Angel, 2019, p. 7). To illustrate, the volume provides educators with *halakhic* responsa by significant Sephardic rabbinic figures whose work may not typically appear in a day school syllabus. As another example of a resource available to educators, the recently published *Bridging Traditions* reviews the evolution of *halakhic* differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic traditions, and addresses nuances within contemporary Sephardic practice (Jachter, 2021). Judaic Studies teachers, even those who may not have significant numbers of Sephardic students, can use these and other resources as a means of better understanding the range of what might be considered “normative *halakha*” and how to integrate notions of inclusivity into their classrooms.

Educators’ impact on adolescent development and identity accord with Bronfenbrenner’s conception of the child’s innermost ecological spheres. To review, at the heart of the model lies the microsphere, comprised of the child’s most common interpersonal relationships, such as those with teachers, peers, and parents. Beyond that lies the mesosphere, in which the

relationships of the microsphere interact with each other and impact the child at the center. In the mesosphere, the interactions of the child's school and home relationships work to construct the child's most immediately impactful environment. Educators, in other words, can be most effective when they work together with students' families.

That teacher-parent communication is important for a child's success has been extensively discussed and makes obvious sense: When an educator is aware of a child's homelife, the teacher can shape academic and interpersonal encounters around the child's needs. The findings of this study take this assumption a step further, suggesting that the teacher should also learn about students' cultural values and behaviors to attenuate the impact of cultural discontinuity, minimize home-school dissonance, and strengthen school-based relationships. Regular interactions with students' families and communities can also facilitate understanding and acceptance of the different assumptions with which cultural subgroups view the world and the child's role in it. As the interview findings demonstrate, lifelong ideas, beliefs, and biases heavily emerge from experiences in school, and yet a school is but one ecological sphere in which the child develops. Also of developmental significance are the home, the synagogue, camps, and other communal institutions in which adolescents' worldviews are shaped and nurtured. The more educators are in communication with representatives of these other spheres, the greater continuity students can experience as they shift from one sphere to the next.

Likewise, educators can bring to the school their knowledge of the broader American macrosphere vis-a-vis Jewish representation within the broader American-Jewish community and throughout American society at large. Media representations of American Jews hew almost exclusively Ashkenazic, and popular Jewish imagery, iconography, and phrasing nearly always references artifacts of Ashkenazic culture. Given the messaging students receive in their day-to-

day lives about who or what makes a "normative" American Jew, day school educators can consider how they can both acknowledge the reality of societal Ashkenormative assumptions while counteracting that messaging with models of Jewish diversity and acceptance.

Implications for educators beyond Jewish day schools

This study bears implications for educators outside the world of Jewish day schools. Existing literature on cultural discontinuities, home-school dissonance, and school belonging in American schools primarily explores the experiences of Black students compared to their White peers. In particular, principles of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy have been developed and implemented with Black students in mind. This study demonstrates the relevance of discontinuity, dissonance, belonging, and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy to American minority populations beyond contemporary social understandings of race.

Even further, the findings explore experiences, not just of a minority within a majority, but various minority subgroups within a larger minority. Although in the context of this dissertation, Sephardic Jews are framed as the minority group compared to the Ashkenazic majority, Jews themselves constitute a small minority of Americans in general, with religiously observant Jews often misrepresented and/or misunderstood by American society at large. The participants of this study—Ashkenazic, Sephardic, or otherwise—are all members of a minority population with a culture separate from that of the mainstream American population. Self-identifying Sephardic participants therefore represent a minority within a minority, sharing most of the cultural markers of the Jewish minority population while maintaining some distinct cultural values, practices, and norms. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and similar philosophies regarding education and race tend to examine race and/or culture of a minority group vis-a-vis the majority, but not within members of the minority group itself. This study offers a model for

exploring the educational experiences of students who identify as members of a minority within a minority.

Because this study involved so many subgroups, the data call into question the utility of using behavioral markers as a proxy of culture-specific values among minority-within-minority populations. In this study, the lack of behavioral consistency among Sephardic participants suggests that, without a massive sample size, objectively quantifying culture would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. Also, assigning particular behaviors and/or values to an ethnic group, especially an understudied one, risks reducing a culture to a series of discrete characteristics that may or may not align with the ways individual group members see themselves and their culture. Rather than implementing policies to sustain specific cultural behaviors, school educators may be better served by working on school climate and school culture initiatives that emphasize inclusivity and celebrate differences, in whatever forms they take.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This study of Sephardic adolescents in Ashkenazic schools has examined the nexus of cultural discontinuities, home-school dissonance, and school belonging, three constructs that, though conceptually related, had not yet been examined in concert with one another. Focusing on an understudied population, this study extends earlier research on how members of minority groups experience discontinuity, dissonance, and belonging. At the same time, the findings expand on existing understandings of these constructs by demonstrating the intersection of race, ethnicity, and culture with religion.

Limitations

The first major limitation of this research relates to my own background. As a light-skinned Modern Orthodox Ashkenazic Jew married to another light-skinned Modern Orthodox Ashkenazic Jew, I fit the normative model of how a *halakhically* observant American Jew should look and practice and have therefore not personally experienced many of the issues that have emerged in this research. Although I tried as much as possible to objectively capture the participants' experiences of otherness and/or acceptance, I recognize that my own limited perspective has likely affected my take on the topic at hand.

The study is also potentially limited by the discrepancy in participants' life stages. Although the adult interviewees could recall their own experiences with the benefit of hindsight, their impressions do not necessarily represent the perspectives of adolescents currently enrolled in Jewish day schools. Further research into contemporary middle schools and high schools would help to ascertain the extent to which this study's interviewees' experiences align with the experiences of today's adolescents.

Although quantitative data reveal information about adolescent participants' religious behaviors and attitudes, their day-to-day social experiences and interpersonal interactions with

teachers and peers were not deeply explored. Most of this study's data collection was conducted in 2021, when strict Covid-19 policies dictated who was or was not permitted in the school building and under which circumstances. I was therefore not able to personally visit the participating middle schools, instead gathering contextual information from conversations with school administrators and from artifacts such as school mission statements, curricula, and extra-curricular offerings. To witness how Sephardic students experience predominantly Ashkenazic day schools, more extensive site visits and other forms of ethnographic exploration are recommended.

The participating schools represent a self-selected group of educational leaders who are open to having their schools' policies and cultures available for scrutiny. For instance, while finding schools to participate in data collection, I spoke with one administrator who unequivocally refused, saying that tensions among the student and parent bodies were so high, that surveying students about religious and/or ethnic differences—even from the lens of seemingly innocuous behaviors—would exacerbate these tensions to the detriment of the students. Had the survey been administered in this school or others like it, the findings would likely have been different, perhaps with more pronounced clusterings of Ashkenazic and Sephardic student responses. Results would also likely have been different in schools with very few Sephardic students. To achieve the necessary *n* for this study, I sought schools with substantial Sephardic representation. Perhaps without robust numbers of similarly raised peers, cultural discontinuity and/or home-school dissonance would be more pronounced; alternatively, perhaps those students would be more inclined to adopt practices and attitudes aligned with the majority population, assimilating into the dominant culture.

This study is also of limited utility in examining specific Sephardic communities or in comparing distinct Sephardic subgroups. Because the sample represented a variety of geographic and ethnic communities, identifying ethnically specific behaviors and values was not realistic given the *n* that would have been necessary for such an endeavor. Also, as a researcher of adolescents, I was reluctant to incorporate ethnicity-specific items into my survey, wary of inadvertently exposing and/or aggravating stereotypes among the student participants. By focusing the demographic and discontinuity questions on religious behaviors as opposed to ethnic or cultural values, I sought to minimize categorical ambiguity and quantify religious identity. That said, reducing such multifaceted constructs into objective data can only be an imperfect process, as culture and identity are inherently unquantifiable. The interviews—conducted before the designing of the survey—revealed the many tangled threads of identity related to religion, ethnicity, culture, and immigration. Perhaps quantitative methodology in general may indeed capture a narrow slice of ethnic/cultural constructs; however, as the lack of correlations found between discontinuity and the other variables suggests, this quantitative strategy was insufficient for understanding the ways in which students' heritage may relate to school belonging. The field would benefit from a deeper understanding of how discontinuities related to immigration, parenting styles, affect, physical appearance, non-religious cultural behaviors, and the like would impact adolescents' potential home-school dissonance and/or school belonging.

Setting aside the utility of using religious discontinuity as a proxy for culture, the discontinuities explored in this study would have been better understood with more information about student participants' specific family practices. The cultural discontinuity survey assumes that students are practicing religious behaviors both in school and at home. For instance, the

survey asked students to rate the frequency with which they prayed with an Ashkenazic or Sephardic *minyan* at home as opposed to school. Assuming that students pray regularly in both settings, the difference between these ratings would constitute a reasonable measure of discontinuity. If, on the other hand, the students and his/her parents rarely attend prayer services on Shabbat, a discrepancy score may reflect discrepancies in the frequency of prayer itself rather than a marker of the family's liturgical custom. Additional questions about family backgrounds and behaviors would have provided better reference points to which school-based behaviors could be compared.

Suggestions for further research

This study has examined cultural discontinuities, home-school dissonance, and school belonging among Sephardic adolescents. The same cluster of constructs, however, may also be examined in other populations. At the simplest level, the measures may be administered to high school or post-high school students in Jewish educational contexts to see whether and how age impacts experiences of these constructs. Aside from questions specific to Ashkenazic/Sephardic religious practice, the same methods may also be used to examine experiences of discontinuity, dissonance, and belonging for any subgroup of students who do not fit the school's "normative" demographic. For instance, how might more religiously modern students experience a more strictly religious environment or vice versa? What about a student in a predominantly liberal community who hails from a family with more conservative values? What about students with one or more parents who have converted to the faith and/or immigrated from another country? At heart, this dissertation is about how students respond to feeling different, in whatever form that difference takes.

Further research is recommended to explore the nuances of Sephardic adolescents' home and school lives. Ethnographic studies of specific schools would highlight the ways in which specific school policies, communities, and personnel impact adolescents' experiences of dissonance and/or belonging. Using specific groups of students as case studies or in focus groups could provide additional insight into their relationships with their teachers, peers, and families. Interviews and/or focus groups with parents of Sephardic students would provide an alternative perspective on these issues and enrich our understanding of students' multiple ecological spheres. Parents of Sephardic students would themselves be a potential sample population for an examination of how parents from underrepresented groups experience dissonance and/or belonging as members of the school community.

In Allen & Kern's (2017) version of the bioecological model of development, students' personal characteristics are considered to be a correlate of school belonging. Future studies of school belonging among minority adolescents could incorporate questions to assess dispositional qualities such as resilience, grit, or self-esteem. In the interviews conducted for this dissertation, various interviewees described similar situations in which they each experienced widely differing reactions. Exploration of personality traits in relation to dissonance and belonging would provide avenues for understanding adolescents' responses to cultural discontinuities. Similarly, including indicators of anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns would provide a more holistic view of individual students' experiences of belonging.

Concluding remarks

This study focused on schools with a mix of Sephardic and Ashkenazic students; it stands to reason, therefore, that educators in such contexts would invest in promoting an inclusive school environment tailored to the needs of the student and parent bodies. Within the

walls of those schools, educators and students could redefine the American Ashkenormative assumptions of what a Jewish person looks like or how a *halakhically*-minded Jew must practice. Beyond those schools, however, the conventional notions of normative American Jewry would likely remain unchanged.

As the findings of this study demonstrate, Sephardic adolescents' experiences in schools are embedded in broader communal, social, and institutional frameworks that reflect and perpetuate existing norms. Regardless of whether they feature or target Sephardic members, Jewish schools and other communal institutions have the capacity to shift away from a monolithic narrative of American Jewry, and to encourage a multilayered, multicultural view of American Jewish communal and religious life. The focus need not only lie with the minority experiences of dissonance or belonging, but on normalizing cultural variety and discontinuity and on celebrating and sustaining difference.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Coding Scheme

Code	Definition	Examples	
Ashkenormativity	relating to the idea that Ashkenazic is the majority, is normative; can be explicit or inferred	"Okay, we go to an Ashkenazic school, you know, that's just part of it. We kind of accepted it. Okay, this is what you get, you know? They're Ashkenazic, they're going to know the Ashkenazic halakha...that's what it's going to be...it didn't really feel like Sephardim were getting kicked under the rug. It wasn't like a derogatory anything like that...We just accepted it, like okay, that's part of it."	"Especially as an adult watching TV shows, knowing more about history...just politics and current affairs, everything, it's a shadow on everything...In America, someone says Jews, they don't think of me, they think of you. They think of the Chassidim in Brooklyn..."
Belonging	relating to a sense of belonging, membership, connection to school or other social environment; may also manifest as lack of belonging	"...I felt really out of place. Like they're all Ashkenazi, really, there's no Sephardim here. And I felt like, am I affirmative action?"	"I think there was something about the fact that like when I could talk to people about where their grandparents were from and our grandparents were from similar places in the world, that felt kind of special...Whereas I have to tell an Ashkenazi person, oh my grandparents are from Greece, and it's like, That's exotic."

Community and context	describing specific history, customs, etc. of a particular ethnic and/or geographic community	"I feel further that certain sects of Sephardim have tried to, I guess this is a bad word, but assimilate into Ashkenazic culture vs other sects of Sephardim that have...tried to stay separate..."	"In Seattle we don't really have any Persian or Syrian Sephardim. It's really just the Greek and Turkish."
Culture	related to non-religious aspects of Sephardic culture (e.g. food, attitudes)	"The way they have their parties is very different from an Ashkenaz party...They have very, very loud music. They have these costumes that they wear..."	"Like, when you had cupcakes for a party, Ashkenazic would be like, how many students are there in the classroom? 24? Okay, and how many teachers? 2? Okay, I'm going to buy 26 cupcakes. Sephardim are like, okay, let's just buy 3 packages. It's like, Ashkenazim are very much systematic, and Sephardic are more just like go-with-the-flow.”
Curriculum	describing ways that Jewish content and/or approaches were taught in schools, whether explicitly or implicitly	"In passing sometimes I think Sephardic halakha was mentioned. But it was taught to a predominantly Ashkenaz class, and the rabbeim were predominantly Ashkenazic. So they weren't going to teach Sephardi halakha.”	"There were statements like, this is the way that this holiday is practiced, as if there was no other way. When in fact, like, there are many ways that holidays are practiced...but the way that Judaism was presented was very one-dimensional."

Gender	considerations of how experiences of men and women may differ re halakha/minhag/culture	"Not that [their daughters] shouldn't be intellectual, but they're not worried that they're going to Ivy League schools. They want to make sure that their girls have good midot and that they're going to be wholesome."	"They're girls so when a girl gets married she adopts her husband's minhagim, and they're very likely, some of them, maybe all of them, will marry Ashkenazim...We haven't been pushing our daughters to daven or bensch Sephardi."
Halakha/minhag	relating to differences in halakhot/minhagim b/w Ashkenazim and Sephardim; discussing religiosity, especially vis-a-vis Ashkenazim and Sephardim	"The Sephardic community also seemed like it was, I mean, not my family, but seemed like it was more modern than the Ashkenazic one...They had a lot more people that would drive to shul...The Ashkenazic community a lot of people cover their hair...my mom, she doesn't cover her hair...."	I'm friends with Ashkenazi people and I would go to their house for Shabbat, and then I would talk about like...I did this on the platta, and then the whole table turns to me, you can't do that, and I came home and I was embarrassed...until I told somebody and they're like, no, we're allowed!"
Immigration	discussion of family's history with immigration and its impact on family relationships and dynamics; and/or discussion of immigration in US in general	I was also like first generation vs second generation American because our parents were just more, you know, old school about stuff...I had a couple of friends who were also first-generation Ashkenazi, and I ...gravitated towards being their friends..."	"A lot of my experience didn't necessarily come from the fact that I'm Sephardi, they came from the fact that my parents are immigrants...That was the dominating factor of my childhood is that kids had the coolest things, and I didn't even have the language to ask my parents for what I wanted...I

			didn't even ask for it."
Language	related to culturally-specific slang, pronunciation (especially Hebrew)	"I would like pronounce a word and people would say, like, what is that?...One time my chavruta asked a question in class and she said arvit instead maariv, and the teacher was like, what?...What is that? And, you know, that sounds funny to some people, but when it happens to you it's really not. It's, it's the way that you feel the odd one out for doing something that's totally normal to you, and it's totally normal for thousands of people, but like, for the people in the room it sounds kind of funny because you're being misunderstood. and that's not funny."	"Maybe I was embarrassed of the accent that I had. Like my mom has an Israeli accent so I took that, and everyone else was speaking with not an Israeli accent. I was ashamed of it at the beginning."
Parents	discussion of parents' attitudes/impact on interviewees experiences vis-a-vis Ashkenazic/Sephardic issues	"A big part of it is the family. Are the parents going consistently to shul? Where are they going to shul? Because that's messaging too. A Sephardi father going to an	"I think another factor that plays a role is how Sephardi you yourself are, meaning some people may have grown up in a home that technically, let's

		Ashkenazi shul, that's a little bit of messaging too, right?"	say their father is Persian or their father is Syrian but culturally it's a very American home or a very Ashkenazi home, may go to Ashkenazi shul."
Peers	relationships with peers vis-a-vis Sephardic/Ashkenazic issues; peers' attitudes and behaviors as it relates to school and other social contexts	"Even though my mother encouraged me to connect with Persians...for the most part, people I felt connected with were mostly Ashkenazi...that sort of probably colored a lot of how I related to Ashkenazim in school and how much I was trying to be different."	"I had friends in both and I actually had a strong Ashkenazic friend base...I did have some sort of, more of a relationship with the Sephardic because of the weekend and after school playing basketball at the community center, which was primarily Sephardic as well...I still keep in touch with Sephardic and Ashkenazic friends, but obviously more the Sephardic because I see them more in the community,"
Prayer	related to liturgy, siddurim, minyan, synagogues, etc.	"I started an Ashkenaz [siddur] until I kind of switched myself. I was like, I'm not Ashkenaz, let me join the Sephardi minyan. That was a big thing, like, well, I'm Sephardi."	"I just remember thinking, huh! Shabbat davening is so different! I didn't realize that it was Sephardi davening...It's weird that I was kind of institutionalized to daven Ashkenazi my whole life and it was never even an option, you know?"

Pride	about ethnic/cultural identification on spectrum from pride to shame	"It was important for them to hear the way that a Sephardic person reads a passuk, and it's important for them to hear the way a Sephardic person approaches Torah and things that that...I wasn't always going to be a subject of that environment, but if I was a teacher I could set the tone..."	"I somehow fit in, nobody knew I was Sephardi if I didn't mention it...There were two transplants, two Bukharian girls, and they spoke different and they dressed different and they looked different, and people immediately just didn't want to be friends with them....I remember feeling in those moments like, I'm really one of them and nobody knows, and don't say anything."
the term Sephardi	attitudes towards the use of "Sephardi" as a catch-all for non-Ashkenazi	"Not Sefard. Like I would correct people, it's not Sephard, it's Sephardic...Sephardi would just be in Hebrew."	"I don't put any significance on it. Edot hamizrach? Yeah, edot hamizrach is too much of a mouthful to say."
Stereotypes	any discussion of stereotypes, biases, prejudices, microaggressions about Ashenazim, Sephardim, or specific subgroups; may also include "positive stereotypes"	[Regarding BLM]: ...Nobody understood the struggle because you can't wrap your mind around it because you're so lost in your white privilege...I related to that...not related to black culture...but I related to the idea that people were unaware of their biases because they had never walked in a Sephardi person's shoes and understood what it was like to be	"To generalize, the Sephardi men are much more, like, macho, masculine, and that was something that appealed to me...if I would date Ashkenazi boys that were like really shy and meek, that didn't so much appeal to me."

		unwelcome somewhere. Or to make an offhand comment, not realizing that there are Sephardi people in the room."	
Teachers	teachers' attitudes and behaviors, especially as it relates to curriculum and belonging	I'm not saying that teachers or educators are lazy. But I do think there there's a resistance it'ss like, this might be too much for them. If I'm an Ashkenazi kid or I'm a Sephardi kid and this is the halakha for one and this is the halakha for the other, I might be like, whoa, I'm having a hard time grasping one halakha, now you want me to tell the difference?"	I think it makes the Sephardic students more comfortable...I feel like I'm able to relate to the Ashkenazi students well and they don't view me as being a Persian teacher or a Sephardi teacher...but I definitely think it makes the Sephardim feel more comfortable, especially the Persians...When they have a Mashadi teacher in the school...I think it does make them feel more comfortable and feel like...there's a certain familiarity."

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. Do you have any general thoughts about the topic before I ask more specific questions?
2. Please tell me about your background, specifically focusing on school.
    a. What do you remember about your experiences in elementary school as someone who is Sephardi? Middle school? High school? After high school?
    b. From what you remember, what was the demographic makeup of your schools? Neighborhood?
    c. How did your friends identify?
3. The term Sephardi:
    a. How do you and your family identify? (e.g. Sephardi/Sephardic, Mizrahi, more specific)
    b. What are your thoughts on using the term Sephardic to refer to individuals without Spanish-Portuguese ancestry?
4. Practical differences:
    a. Do you remember any practical differences between your religious practice and the religious practices of your Ashkenazic friends? (prompt if necessary – siddur, pronunciation)
    b. To what extent did those differences play out in school itself?
        i. In the *halakha* curriculum?
        ii. With *davening*?
        iii. With school programming?
    c. How did you feel about those differences?
    d. Are there any specific instances that stand out in your memory?

5. Value differences:
    a. Do you remember noticing differences in values or cultural assumptions between your Sephardic friends and your Ashkenazic friends?
    b. Do you remember noticing differences in values or cultural assumptions between your family and your Ashkenazic friends' families?
    c. Did these differences play out in school?
    d. Are there any specific instances that stand out in your memory?
6. "Ashkenormative" –
    a. Have you ever heard of the term "Ashkenormative"?
    b. What are your thoughts on that term? Does it ring true to you?
7. In terms of the differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic kids, do you think that Sephardic boys and girls experience school differently? Why or why not?
8. What would you say to Jewish day school educators about these issues?
9. Is there anything important that I haven't asked because I don't know enough to ask? Is there anything else I should know?

Appendix C: Sephardi/Ashkenazi Discontinuity Scale

Please indicate how frequently you do each of the following either at school or at home:

(1) Never (2) Sometimes (3) About half the time (4) Most of the time (5) Always

1. I use a Sephardi siddur **at school**.
2. I use a Sephardi siddur **at home**.
3. I use an Ashkenazi siddur **at school.**
4. I used a Sephardi siddur **at home**.
5. I pray with a Sephardi minyan **in school**.
6. I pray with a Sephardi minyan **on Shabbat**.
7. I pray with an Ashkenazi minyan **in school**.
8. I pray with an Ashkenazi minyan **on Shabbat**.

Display This Question:

If Gender = Male

Please indicate how frequently you do each of the following:

(1) Never (2) Sometimes (3) About half the time (4) Most of the time (5) Always

9. **In school**, I wear a tallit, or plan to wear one when I turn 13.

10. **At home**, I wear a tallit, or plan to wear one when I turn 13.

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

(1) Strongly disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) neither agree nor disagree (4) somewhat agree (5) strongly agree

1. My limudei kodesh teachers pronounce Hebrew words similarly to the way my parents pronounce them.
2. At school events (not regular lunchtime), the food that is served is similar to the food I have at home.
3. The friends I have in school come from families that practice halakha the same way my family practices halakha.
4. The friends I have outside of school come from families that practice halakha the same way my family practices halakha.
5. The halakhot I learn from my teachers are the same halakhot I learn from my parents.
6. My teachers are very knowledgeable about Ashkenazi customs and laws.
7. My teachers are very knowledgeable about Sephardi customs and laws.

Appendix D: Parental Consent Form

Dear Parents,

My name is Elana Riback Rand, and I am a doctoral student at the Azrieli Graduate School, working towards a PhD in Jewish Education.

_______[administrator] has graciously agreed for me to administer a survey to the seventh and eighth graders at [name of school]. The survey will be asking questions about the way your family practices Judaism, how that makes your child feel, and how connected your child feels to other people at [name of school]. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

This survey is completely anonymous and will not ask for any information that could be used to identify your child. There are no known risks to filling out the survey. The survey is optional, and your child can stop taking it at any time.

If you do not wish for your child to participate in the study, please email [administrator] and your child will not take the survey. If you allow your child to participate, no further steps are required.

Thank you for your time,

Elana Riback Rand

Doctoral Fellow

Azrieli Graduate School, Yeshiva University

Appendix E: Survey

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.
This survey will be asking you questions about the way you and your family practice Judaism, how that makes you feel, and about how connected you feel at school to the people around you. It should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete.
This survey is completely anonymous and will not ask you for any information that could be used to identify you. There are no known risks to filling out the survey.
The survey is optional, and you can stop taking it at any time, with no penalty to you.

By clicking "Agree," you agree to start the survey.

Please answer the following questions by choosing the answer that most accurately describes you.

What grade are you in?

7

8

How old are you?

11

12

13

14

Gender

Male
Female

I prefer not to say

Which of the following is true for you?

Both of my parents are Ashkenazi.

Both of my parents are Sepahrdi.

My mother is Ashkenazi and my father is Sephardi.

My mother is Sephardi and my father is Ashkenazi.

Other ___________________

Which of the following is true for you?

I identify as Ashkenazi.

I identify as Sephardi.

I identify as half-Ashkenazi, half-Sephardi.

Other ____________

Please identify the group[s] of Sephardim to which you belong (e.g. Persian, Greek, Tunisian, etc.). Write as many as apply to you.

____

What is your family's country of origin? Choose as many as apply to you. (Ctrl+click to choose multiple options.)

Which of the following is true for you?

Both of my parents were born and raised in the United States.

One of my parents was born and raised in the United States.

Neither of my parents was born and raised in the United States.

In which state is your school located?

▼ Alabama (1) ... I do not reside in the United States (53)

Please indicate how frequently you do each of the following either at school or at home:

(1) Never (2) Sometimes (3) about half the time (4) most of the time (5) always

I use a Sephardi siddur **at school**.

I use a Sephardi siddur **at home**.

I use an Ashkenazi siddur **at school**.

I use an Ashkenazi siddur **at home**.

I pray with a Sephardi minyan **in school**.

I pray with a Sephardi minyan **on Shabbat**.

I pray with an Ashkenazi minyan **in school**.

I pray with an Ashkenazi minyan **on Shabbat**.

In school, I wear a tallit, or plan to wear one when I turn 13. (For male students only)

At home, I wear a tallit, or plan to wear one when I turn 13. (For male students only)

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

(2) Strongly disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) neither agree nor disagree (4) somewhat agree (5) strongly agree

My limudei kodesh teachers pronounce Hebrew words similarly to the way my parents pronounce them.

At school events (not regular lunchtime), the food that is served is similar to the food I have at home.

The friends I have in school come from families that practice halakha the same way my family practices halakha.

The friends I have outside of school come from families that practice halakha the same way my family practices halakha.

The halakhot I learn from my teachers are the same halakhot I learn from my parents.

My teachers are very knowledgeable about Ashkenazi customs and laws.

My teachers are very knowledgeable about Sephardi customs and laws.

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements are it applies to you.

(1) Strongly disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) neither agree nor disagree (4) somewhat agree (5) strongly agree

I think a lot about how my life at home is different from the home life of many students at this school.

I am concerned because what's important to my parents is not always what's important to my teachers.

I often think about how my family's worldview is different from my teachers' worldview.

I think a lot about how my family's minhagim are different from the minhagim of most people in my school.

I feel upset because my teachers and my parents have different ideas about what I should learn in school.

I don't like to have my parents come to school because their ideas are very different from my teachers' ideas.

I feel troubled because my home life and my school life are like two different worlds.

I feel upset because most people in school practice Judaism differently than I do at home.

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following:

(1) Not at all true (2) mostly not true (3) somewhat true (4) mostly true (5) completely true

I feel like a real part of my school.

People notice when I'm good at something.

It is hard for people like me to be accepted here.

Other students in this school take my opinions seriously.

Most teachers at my school are interested in me.

Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong here.

There's at least one teacher at this school I can talk to if I have a problem.

People at this school are friendly to me.

Teachers here are not interested in people like me.

I am included in lots of activities at my school.

I am treated with as much respect as other students.

I feel very different from most other students here.

I can really be myself at this school.

The teachers here respect me.

People here know I can do good work.

I wish I were in a different school.

I feel proud of belonging to my school.

Other students here like me the way I am.

Please indicate how often each of the following statements applies to you.

(1) almost never (2) not often (3) sometimes (4) often (5) almost always

At this school…

Teachers know my name.

Teachers try to understand my problems.

Teachers listen to me.

Teachers take an interest in my background.

Teachers treat me fairly.

Teachers support me when I have problems.

Teachers go out of their way to address my needs.

Teachers are willing to listen to my problems.

At this school…

I get along with other students.

I belong to a group of friends.

I make friends with students from different backgrounds.

I socialize with students from different cultures.

Students talk to me.

Students support me.

Students help me.

I feel accepted by other students.

At this school…

My cultural background is valued.

I am encouraged to understand the cultures of others.

My own background is known by students and teachers.

I am taught about the backgrounds of others.

My culture is understood.

My cultural background is accepted by students.