Pedagogy, Practice, and Parity:

Prayer Experiences of Modern Orthodox Jewish Women in Toronto

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Abstract

Through the disciplinary lenses of Religion, Education, and Gender/Feminist Studies, my research discusses pedagogy, practice, and parity. I conducted research with 9 Jewish women who self identified as being part of Toronto's Modern Orthodox Jewish community. This stream of Judaism is unique, in that girls have the opportunity to be prayer leaders in school at a young age, even though there are no female prayer leaders in mainstream Modern Orthodox synagogues. Girls learn to pray together with boys for the first eleven years of their lives, while knowing that they will pray on the other side of a gender-partition when they become Bat Mitzvah at twelve years of age. And yet, despite being independent women with agency, and despite having many other options in Toronto's diverse Jewish landscape, many women choose to remain in this particular community in adulthood. This retrospective research endeavour asked participants to reflect upon their adulthood prayer practices, as well as their girlhood experiences of praying in Jewish day school. Connections were explored, leading to discussions about identity construction and conceptions of self, gendered experiences, and contradictory practices. My research seeks to uncover the relationship between prayer education and identity formation for girls, and the implications that this has on women's communal leadership roles in adulthood.

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I wish to acknowledge my family for their enthusiastic support, help, and encouragement. Specifically, I wish to acknowledge my parents, for being wonderful role models of pursuit and love of learning and commitment to Judaism.

Important Terms

Abba (noun, singular, Hebrew) - father

Bar Mitzvah (proper noun, Hebrew) - the age at which a boy must keep religious injunctions/commandments

Bat Mitzvah (proper noun, Hebrew) - the age at which a girl must keep religious injunctions/commandments

Chazzan (masculine noun, singular, Hebrew) - prayer leader

Chazzanit (feminine noun, singular, Hebrew) - prayer leader (female)
Chazzaniot (feminine noun, plural, Hebrew) - female prayer leaders

Daven (verb, infinitive, Yiddish) - to pray

Davening (verb, present tense, Yiddish) - praying

Halacha (proper noun, singular, Hebrew) - Jewish law

Halachic (adjective, colloquial mixture of Hebrew and English) - in accordance with Jewish law

Halachically (adverb, colloquial mixture of Hebrew and English) - in accordance with Jewish law

Havdallah (proper noun, singular, Hebrew) - lit. separation - this word is used to describe the ritual service that marks the end of Shabbat

Ima (noun, singular, Hebrew) - mother

Mechitza (noun, singular, Hebrew) - a physical partition that separates participants in a synagogue according to gender

Megilla (noun, singular, Hebrew) - lit. scroll, refers to one of the following: The Book of Esther, The Book of Lamentations, The Book of Ecclesiastes, The Book of Ruth, or Song of Songs

Minyan (noun, singular, Hebrew) - a formal prayer group, established when 10 men gather to pray (according to mainstream Orthodox Judaism)
Minyanim - (noun, plural, Hebrew) - more than one formal prayer groups each with a quorum of 10 men

Mishnah (proper noun, singular, Hebrew) - the major rabbinnic text compiled and codified around 200 CE, precursor to the Talmud, divided into six “orders”

Mitzvah (noun, singular, Hebrew) - a religious injunction/commandment
Mitzvot (noun, plural, Hebrew) - religious injunctions/commandments

Rabbi (noun, singular, Aramaic in origin) - Jewish spiritual leader

Rabbinic (adjective, colloquial mix of Hebrew and English) - in accordance with post Pentateuch law (e.g., law determined / interpreted by the authority of early rabbis)

Shabbat (proper noun, singular, Hebrew) - the Jewish Sabbath

Shiur (noun, singular, Hebrew) - a lecture/class

Siddur (proper noun, singular, Hebrew) - Jewish prayer book
Siddurim (proper noun, plural, Hebrew) - prayer books

Simchat Torah (proper noun, singular, Hebrew) - a Jewish holiday wherein the Torah is celebrated

Talmud (proper noun, singular, Hebrew) - the major work of Jewish rabbinic literature, composed of recorded discussions on the Mishnah between approximately 300-600 CE, divided into tractates

Tanach (proper noun, singular, Hebrew) - all of the books in the Jewish Bible; Hebrew acronym for “Torah, Neviim, Ketuvim” - Pentateuch, books of Prophets, and Writings

Tefillah (noun, singular, Hebrew) - prayer
Tefillot (noun, plural, Hebrew) - prayers

Tefillin (noun, plural, Aramaic) - phylacteries

Torah (proper noun, singular, Hebrew) - the Pentateuch, comprising the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

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Pedagogy, Practice, and Parity:

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Preamble: Lo Kashya

When learning Talmud, there exists an oft-encountered phrase "lo kashya". This is an Aramaic term that means "there is no contradiction." The Talmud is a transcription of conversations that took place between different rabbis in 400-500 CE. These conversations formed the basis of Halachah (Jewish law). The rabbis often disagreed with each other - and the stakes were extremely high. Halacha is "regarded as absolutely binding … the backbone of traditional Jewish religious life" (Fishman, 1995, p. 92). Whenever a disagreement arose, they arrived at their conclusions through scholarly debate and consensus; each rabbi bringing Torah sources, relevant anecdotes, and quotes from other rabbis to prove his point. Logically, each section of the Talmud should end with a resolution: one rabbi should be proved correct, and the other rabbi should lose the debate. But it doesn't always happen that way.

Sometimes you see the words "lo kashya" - and suddenly, the whole perspective changes. You understand that what seemed, at surface level, to be an argument about one topic was actually a passionate discussion about two completely different circumstances. You learn that there is room to hold both opinions about a given topic at once, because there never was a contradiction in the first place. And all of a sudden, your world gets a little bit larger. This is the case with myself and my entrée into this area of scholarship for my thesis. "Lo kashya" perfectly encapsulates my research on Judaism's Modern Orthodox ideology. I wholeheartedly posit that there is enough room inside of Modern Orthodoxy for debate and struggle, for confusion and inclusion, for innovation and growth and feminism. My research on pedagogy, practice, and

parity is located here - in the beautiful spaces between the contradictions. It is well-supported through an intentional Interdisciplinary approach, and will explore larger societal issues that affect mainstream Modern Orthodoxy, such as heteronormativity and prescriptive gender stereotypes.

Chapter 1: Introduction

My grade 2 students had just finished their daily prayers when "Bina" raised her hand. "I have a question," she began. "Why do you choose a boy *and* a girl to lead the prayers every day? Why don't you just choose a boy?"

As an Orthodox, Jewish, feminist woman, teaching in a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school, I was confused by this sentiment. I wanted every single child in my class to feel involved and engaged in their religious practices. I wanted them to know that they have a voice, and that they matter. The administration and the other teachers in the school felt the same way. During "professional development" days, in addition to discussing report cards and best practices, there was always a session or two about making religion in general and prayer specifically a relevant and personal experience. It is common practice in many Jewish day schools to choose one or two students to be the "prayer leaders" as a way to get them involved during prayer time. At the elementary school level, this means that they might sit at the front of the classroom, do an extra "good" job of praying to be an example for the other students, and maybe write the page numbers on the board. Most students look forward to their turn and would not want to give it up. But this was Bina, a serious student who thought carefully about each word before she spoke. I knew there had to be more to her question. "Because in a real synagogue," she continued, "there are no girl prayer leaders."

It was true.

In the synagogues that most of my students attended on Shabbat, the prayer services are all led by men, thus reflecting mainstream Orthodox practice. I answered that "in our class, it's okay for anyone to be the prayer leader, because none of the students are Bar or Bat Mitzvah yet." My students seemed satisfied with this answer, and we started our first lesson of the day - but I was not satisfied at all. My personal teaching philosophy is that rules concerning adult women in a synagogue should not carry over and affect young girls in a classroom. This, however, leads to a very important contradiction: the mainstream Modern Orthodox Jewish education system gives girls a taste of the enjoyment that can come along with being a prayer-leader - a position for which they will, in adulthood, be considered ineligible.

Many streams of Judaism are more modern than the one I am describing. In those streams, everyone prays together, before Bar and Bat Mitzvah, and into adulthood. There is no partition dividing the room into a strict gender binary when the children are young, and there never will be. Girls learn to be prayer leaders in their youth, and can continue to lead services as they get older, if they wish to do so. Conversely, some communities are stricter than the one I am describing; boys and girls learn in separate schools from the time they enter kindergarten. The girls in these communities will never experience leading prayers or services in a mixed-gender group, and if they stay within their community, it is both assumed and enacted that they never will. In both of these cases, there appears to be a natural progression from childhood to adulthood, and a cohesiveness in regard to what is learned in youth and practiced in adulthood.

The particular stream in which I will situate my research - mainstream Modern Orthodoxy - is unique, in that girls are prepared from childhood to be prayer leaders, while simultaneously learning that there are no female prayer leaders in their synagogues. They learn to pray together with boys for the first eleven years of their lives, while knowing that they will sit

on the other side of a partition when they get older. And yet, despite these contradictions, and despite having other options - so many women choose to stay in this particular community without focusing on the contradictions.

The lessons that girls learn in childhood, whether overtly taught or subconsciously internalized (through messaging, practices or other reinforcing structures), have a great impact on their lives and sense of self. By listening to first-person accounts of Jewish women invited to reflect upon their girlhood prayer and participation experiences, and striving to understand these formative experiences from their perspectives, I was able to gain a greater understanding of a sampling of Toronto's Modern Orthodox Jewish women, and their conceptions of their own place within their own Jewish communities.

My field of research is threefold: I have delved into the disciplines of Religion, Education, and Gender/Feminist Studies in order to form the basis of my thesis about Modern Orthodox women who live in Toronto, their current prayer practices, and the ways in which that relates to their prayer experiences in Jewish day schools in their childhood. Discussions about Jewish day schools (which follow a faith-based religious curriculum in addition to the Ontario curriculum guidelines) will feature prominently in my thesis. Discussion of Bat Mitzvah (the age at which a Jewish girl is considered responsible for her own religious practices - 12 years old in Orthodox communities) will also feature prominently. These discussions will be underscored and strengthened by feminist theories that relate to equity, prescriptive gender stereotypes, and internalized ideas about women's roles in society. My research engages with the problem of contradictions that appear to be inherent in the mainstream Modern Orthodox ideology. For a community that is so modern in so many respects, prayer is still an area in which participation opportunities are inequitable for women. This phenomenon can be seen clearly in the differences

in how girls are taught to pray in school when they are younger, as opposed to when they are older.

The aim of my research was to engage with Modern Orthodox Jewish women who live in Toronto, and to learn about the prayer experiences of their youth: the ways in which their prayer experiences in Jewish day schools may have been different before and after they became Bat Mitzvah, and how that may have impacted their current attitudes towards prayer. I have approached the research with the assumption that Modern Orthodox women do not have a false consciousness, and that they are aware that there are other life options for them aside from mainstream Modern Orthodoxy. I will be transparent about my biases, and note that I remember my own prayer experiences in school in my childhood. I am basing the premise of this study on personal experiences, and making the assumption that other women have had similar experiences.

My research includes facilitating conversations with Modern Orthodox Jewish women living in Toronto to reflect upon their girlhood prayer and participation experiences. Through engagement with women who meet this criteria, the study enables participants to reflect upon and share their experiences and opinions about prayer, making connections to women's roles in mainstream Modern Orthodox communities. This is an interdisciplinary study of contradictions: the intersection between religion, education, feminist values, and society at large, taking into account the different interpretations of gender roles and expectations of girls as they grow into women. It is an exploration of the cognitive dissonance that appears to be an integral part of some streams of Judaism: (a) the idea that girls can, should, and do have the same opportunities as boys - but only while they are young; and (b) the idea that girls *can* take on a leadership role during prayer - but not where there are boys anywhere in the vicinity. Most importantly, my

research is about prayer. It investigates the ways in which prayer experiences at school may be different for girls before and after their Bat Mitzvah, and the impact that these experiences may have on their identity and sense of self when they reach adulthood. In asking participants to reflect upon their girlhood prayer experiences and their resultant conceptions of their own place within their Jewish community, this research invites participants to consider (amongst other things) their inclinations to pray in adulthood when it is no longer a "required" school subject.

This introductory chapter will include a background, to further explain and explore the context of my research, and the gap that exists in the current research. This chapter will also discuss the research goals, research aims and objectives, and research questions. The significance of my research will be elucidated, the justification for my research will be expounded upon, and I will be transparent in acknowledging the limitations of my research. This chapter will conclude with a structural outline of the upcoming chapters.

1.1 Background

Modern Orthodoxy - Ideology

Traditional Orthodoxy is referred to by Fishman (1995) as "ghetto Orthodoxy" (Fishman, 1995, p. 89). Jews in Europe in the 19th century were physically living in segregated communities. They were also spiritually segregated, of their own volition. They chose to eschew modern advances, and instead to focus on the past, believing that "the present carried no religious significance of its own" (Fishman, 1995, p. 89). In the late 19th century, with influences from the Enlightenment movement and the Industrial Revolution, and following Jewish emancipation in Western Europe, some European Jews began to value "change rather than continuity" (Fishman, 1995, p. 90). This mindset developed into various Jewish communities, ideologies, and movements; among them, Modern Orthodoxy. Modern Orthodoxy developed

along two different, yet similar paths. The first path, led by Samson Raphael Hirsch, promoted "Torah and civic life" (Fishman, 1995, p. 90) - maintaining a religious lifestyle while being a part of the secular world. A second path, led by Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer and Yehuda Hai Alkalai, promoted the idea of Religious Zionism (Fishman, 1995, p. 91). This path focused on the importance of building a better life in Israel in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Both Traditional Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy conferred authority upon the rabbis of each generation to interpret the Torah and to advise them on Halachic (Jewish-law-related) matters (Fishman, 1995). However, Traditional Orthodox Jews continued to focus on the past, and to model their lives after the way their ancestors lived. Modern Orthodox Jews believed that "the Jewish present [is] religiously open to the universal world, both culturally and socially" (Fishman, 1995, p. 91). They engaged in arts, sciences, sports, and academia, and welcomed technological advances - as long as these things did not interfere with Shabbat or Jewish holidays (Fishman, 1995).

This Euro-centric view of Modern Orthodoxy is relevant insofar as it relates to the Toronto Jewish community - there exists here a large number of Jews who are descended from European immigrants. It must be <u>strongly</u> acknowledged, however, that Jewish communities existed in many other parts of the world, aside from Europe. Each community grew and developed in its own way, and it is imperative for them to all be considered equally valid in the rich tapestry of Judaism.

Modern Orthodoxy - Prayer, and Bat Mitzvah

The Mishnah (the religious document on which the Talmud is based; redacted in the second century), states that women are exempt from certain parts of the daily prayer service, but they are obligated in other parts of it. In contrast to this, men are obligated in all aspects of the

daily prayer service (Mishnah Brachot, 3:3). Traditional Orthodox communities would therefore find it necessary for a man to lead communal prayer services - it would not make sense for an individual with a lesser obligation to be leading prayers for individuals with a greater obligation. Mainstream Modern Orthodox communities also continue to appoint only men to be prayer leaders - despite their general affinity towards embracing more modern practices in other areas.

The word “Bat” means “daughter” in Hebrew, and the word “Mitzvah” means “commandment”. For Jewish children, participating in religious activities before their Bar (for boys) or Bat (for girls) Mitzvah is seen as “practice” for when they are older. Shoham (2018) traces the word “Bat Mitzvah” as it developed two distinct linguistic connotations and two lexical paths. The first meaning is “the designation of the new status of a girl who has reached maturity and is now deemed an adult, obligated by all the precepts of the Torah” (Shoham, 2018, p. 102). This is true whether or not a girl’s Bat Mitzvah is marked or celebrated in any way. Bat Mitzvah is the age at which a girl would begin formally and actively participating in her religious life - but unlike Modern Orthodox boys, Modern Orthodox girls do not begin this new stage of life by reading from the Torah, reciting blessings out loud in synagogue, or leading parts of the prayer service. The second meaning of “Bat Mitzvah” is “the event or ritual marking this milestone” (Shoham, 2018, p. 103). As the language changes, an important question arises: does “fluctuations in the signifier—the format of the ceremony and/or its name—indicate changes in the signified? (Shoham, 2018, p. 102). Shoham brings to light the fact that, depending on which definition of “Bat Mitzvah” a girl encounters, her conception of being a Jewish woman will be different.

Some synagogues - like *Shira Hadasha* in Jerusalem, or the "Partnership Minyan” in Toronto - seek to expand participation opportunities for women, while still remaining within

Jewish law. Women and men may take turns leading different parts of prayer services. However, synagogues such as these are certainly not considered to be "mainstream" Modern Orthodoxy. My own lived experiences as a Modern Orthodox Jew in Toronto have taught me that many Modern Orthodox people (women included) would not consider these synagogues to be Orthodox in any way, and would absolutely refuse to pray there.

Religious Education for Girls

In order to speak about girls in Jewish day schools, it is necessary to first discuss how this concept came to fruition. In 1903 in Poland, a rabbinic decision was reached rejecting organized religious education for girls. Despite this, Sara Schenirer, a Polish seamstress, founded the first religious girls' school in 1917 (Seidman, 2018). Starting with just 25 students, "the movement she founded had become well established, with perhaps 200 schools and 38,000 students throughout Poland and beyond" by 1937 (Seidman, 2018, p. 321). The Bais Yaakov movement grew to include full-time elementary and high schools, afternoon religious schools, vocational training programs, teacher-training seminaries, and a youth movement (Seidman, 2018). The "Bais Yaakov student" has been described as "the single most important development of twentieth-century Orthodoxy… whose knowledge and passion for Torah reinvigorated Orthodoxy" (Seidman, 2018, p. 322). Seidman argues that the success of Bais Yaakov lies in the fact that the movement "revolutionized Orthodoxy in the name of tradition" (Seidman, 2018, p. 323). By positioning Bais Yaakov as a "female-led, homosocial revolution in the name of a family-oriented tradition" (Seidman, 2018, p. 339), it became palatable and acceptable to rabbis and community members (Seidman, 2018). The challenges that Modern Orthodox schools face in the year 2023 are similar to the challenges that Bais Yaakov schools experienced in the early 1900s; striving to find the balance between participation for women, while not overstepping the

boundaries of what the community feels is appropriate behaviour for Jewish girls, according to the Torah and Talmud, and according to the prevailing rabbinic guidance of the times.

1.2 Research Context

Research that relates Modern Orthodox girls, prayer, and education, has already been conducted from a variety of perspectives. Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman (2013) summarize the current state of Modern Orthodox education when they say that "although the Orthodox world has been changing for some two generations…the day-school system has yet to catch up" (Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman, 2013, p. 209). Their research focused on the different ways that Modern Orthodox boys and girls are educated to pray, despite the fact that other aspects of their daily education do not differ according to gender. These differences are significant, especially when viewed in light of Drelich's (2016) research on the connection between prayer experiences in one's youth, and Jewish identity formation in adulthood.

Lehmann (2010) conducted research that highlighted the discrepancies between the teachers' attitudes towards prayer and the students' attitudes towards prayer in a Jewish high school for Modern Orthodox girls. Lehman also conducted research (2008) about the differences in attitudes that girls in a Modern Orthodox high school had towards their secular studies classes, as opposed to their religious studies class - the girls were more likely to display confidence and independent thinking in secular classes, and more likely to repeat already-established ideas in their religious studies classes. Cashman (2015) conducted research with Modern Orthodox high school girls in Toronto. His findings, regarding the girls' mindset in different classes, echoed Lehmann's findings - but he also found that the girls did not experience the expected cognitive dissonance. These three studies show that Modern Orthodox girls can pursue independence in most parts of their life, while simultaneously accepting religious structure.

Within the current literature, a gap that I have identified is in the area of Modern Orthodox women reflecting on the experiences of prayer education in their youth. This gap is significant, because adults, who are looking at their school-age with the benefit of life experience and perspective, will have a more nuanced point of view. Using Bat Mitzvah age as a benchmark to compare and contrast prayer experiences that occur before and afterwards is a perspective that needs more attention in the current body of work - especially considering how important this milestone is in Jewish life. Filling this gap with my research is crucial, as it will provide an additional entry point to understanding the mainstream Modern Orthodox community in Toronto. Where does this community draw that line at "modernity", and at what age does this boundary come into effect? My research suggests an answer: with women's prayer, at Bat Mitzvah age.

1.3 Research Goals

The overarching goal of my research is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that Modern Orthodox Jewish women have had in their formal prayer education during girlhood, the impact that this may have had on their conceptions of themselves as girls and as women, and their attitudes towards prayer in adulthood. Additionally, the methodological goal of my research is to facilitate conversations among community members in a way that both empowers and encourages them to explore, reflect upon and share their own perspectives and experiences in a climate of affirmation and respect. These goals were designed to further my engagement with the research question: Modern Orthodox women's conceptions of themselves and their own identities, through the lens of potentially contradictory community practices. Through my research, I will be participating in a long-standing Jewish tradition of critical thinking which involves asking questions and questioning the answers, in a self-reflective cyclical process that

never ends. As it says in the book of Pirkei Avot "Turn it [the Torah] over, and again turn it over…" (Mishnah Avot, 5:22), teaching that there is always more to learn.

1.4 Research Objectives

Opportunities to publicly participate in prayer - which seemingly should increase at Bat Mitzvah age - actually decrease for Modern Orthodox girls. Given this fact, this study aims to explore the prayer experiences of Modern Orthodox women who live in Toronto, and the influence that these experiences have had on their relationship to prayer and Modern Orthodoxy. My research objectives are as follows:

1. To identify key aspects of prayer education, as experienced by Modern Orthodox women in their childhood.
2. To compare and contrast the prayer experiences of Modern Orthodox women in a school setting, before and after their Bat Mitzvah.
3. To clarify connections between childhood prayer experiences and current attitudes towards prayer, in Modern Orthodox women.

Regarding epistemological reflexivity, researchers must reflect on their assumptions of the word and about how they conceive of knowledge (Dowling, 2006). It is therefore important to consider how the research questions have been defined, what limits have been imposed based on the ways in which the questions were stated, and what could have been done differently (Dowling, 2006). My questions presume that the participants were taught to pray in the Jewish day schools that they attended. It assumes that prayer experiences were, in fact, different after a girl's Bat Mitzvah. My questions acknowledge and play into the already-established gender-binary, even though there certainly are non-binary Jewish people. My questions limit the

conversation to the cis-gendered prayer experiences in formal educational settings, unless someone was transgender from a very young age.

1.5 Research Questions

My research engages with the following research questions:

1) How do Modern Orthodox women in Toronto engage with prayer in adulthood?
    a. What were their girlhood experiences with school-based prayer?
    b. Did their prayer experiences differ before and after the age of Bat Mitzvah?
    c. What are Modern Orthodox women's experiences and opinions about prayer?
    d. How do childhood prayer experiences influence women's roles in Modern Orthodox Judaism?
    e. What connections can be drawn between prayer and the conceptions that Modern Orthodox Jewish women may have of themselves - as women, and as women within the context of their Jewish community?
2) In what ways does prayer relate to gender roles and related pedagogical practices within Jewish day schools within the larger Jewish communities in Toronto and beyond?

1.6 Methodology

My research is qualitative and inductive in nature. It uses phenomenology as a method to find out about the lived experiences of individuals. Epistemologically, my position is that knowledge is subjective and based on individual viewpoints. Ontologically, my position is that each individual may view reality differently, based on their perspectives.

Interdisciplinarity

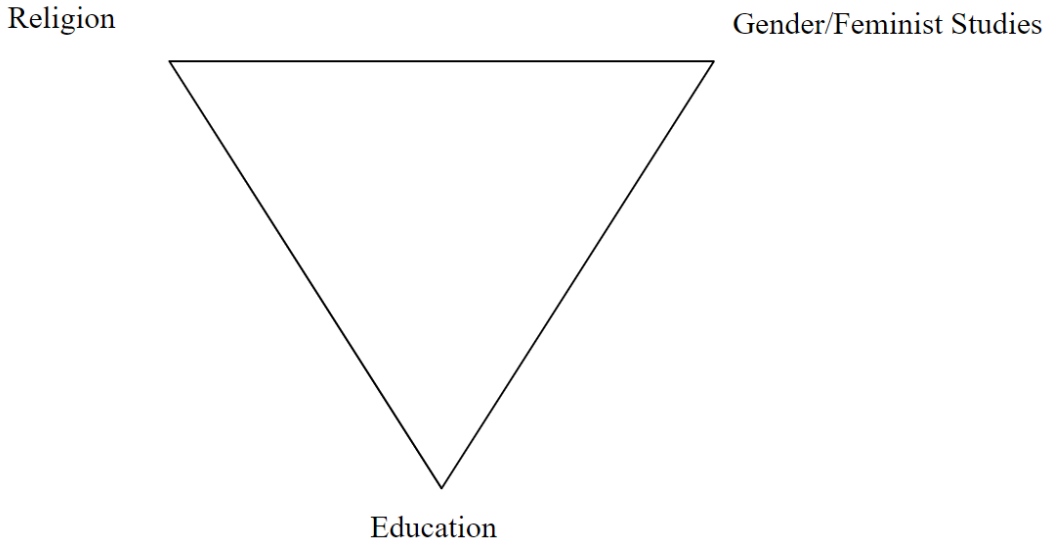
Repko et. al (2017) state in *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* that a knowledge society "needs both disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity" (Repko et. al, 2017, p. 41) The

meaning of a knowledge society is "one in which the development and creative application of knowledge is the primary engine of economic growth, prosperity, and empowerment of all developing sectors of society" (Repko et. al, 2017, p. 54). I will add an additional goal of knowledge societies, in that they should enable the empowerment of all individuals and communities living within a given society, thus ensuring multiple voices contribute to what is considered knowledge.

The following three disciplines informed my research implications: Religion, Education, and Gender/Feminist Studies. Each one holds personal significance for me, and influenced my research in a different way. Taking an interdisciplinary approach is only possible when one circles back to consider each discipline in three ways: independently, in conjunction with the other disciplines, and in a synergistic way wherein the final product equals more than the sum of its parts. Disciplines can be seen in figure 1.

Figure 1

Disciplines



a. *Religion*

Studying Jewish laws that relate to prayer and Bat Mitzvah is necessary, but this is not enough. My thesis will uncover the ways in which prayer and religion influences other areas of the lives of Modern Orthodox women.

b. *Education*

Pedagogical practices are supposed to change as students grow and develop; however, that does not mean that change is easy. Hearing women's experiences and perspectives on the education system will be informative in its own right, and can also provide insight on the ways in which pedagogical practices are implemented in educational settings.

c. *Gender, Feminist & Women's Studies*

The Modern Orthodox Jewish community does not exist in a vacuum. Gender-based inequity is widely documented across various communities, and my thesis contributes to growing scholarship exploring how gender inequity may be manifested in the Modern Orthodox Jewish prayer practices, specifically. Gaining a greater understanding of this will also provide general insight on the interplay between religious life and gender, and the important role of intersectionality in feminist research. It will allow my research to be guided by the concept of prescriptive gender stereotypes, and on the ways in which the formative experiences of girls influence their conceptions of themselves as women and their feelings of belonging in adulthood.

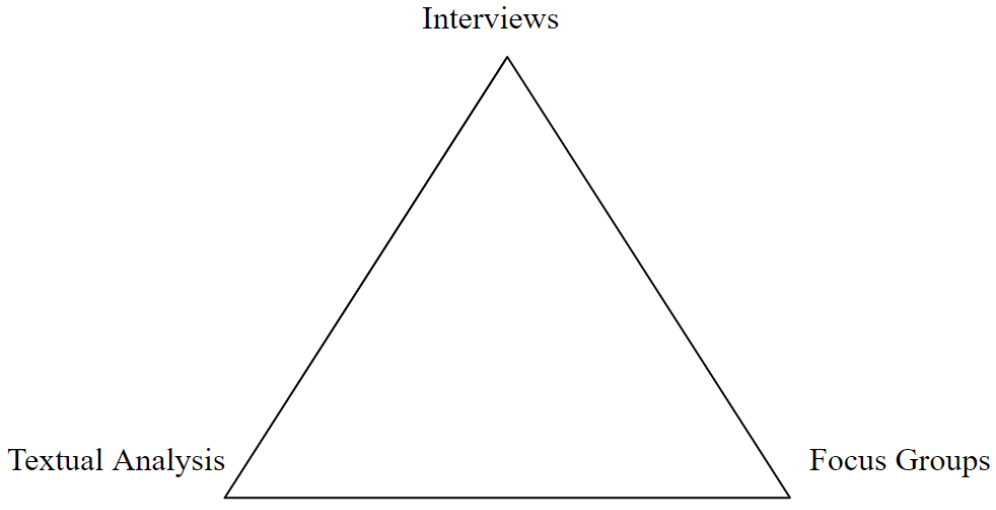
Research Methods

I engaged with my research questions in three ways, in accordance with taking an interdisciplinary approach to rigorous qualitative research:

Firstly, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with 9 participants. I recruited these participants by advertising on social media and in a local Jewish newspaper that is exclusively for advertisements (see Appendix A). These interviews took place over the online communication platform Zoom ©, and was a forum for these women to share their personal experiences and opinions. Secondly, participants from the one-to-one interviews were invited to participate in a focus group grounded in feminist research principles and practices. Group guidelines for shared and mutual respect and safety measures were enacted. The focus group provided a forum for the women to share aspects of their experiences that they felt comfortable sharing, and to find commonalities between themselves and the other research participants. They engaged in discussion regarding their thoughts since being interviewed, their views regarding emerging themes from the interviews, and proposed implications stemming from their participation in the study they deemed necessary to explore. Thirdly, I conducted a textual analysis of relevant literature. Figure 2 will provide a visual representation.

Figure 2

Methodological Practices

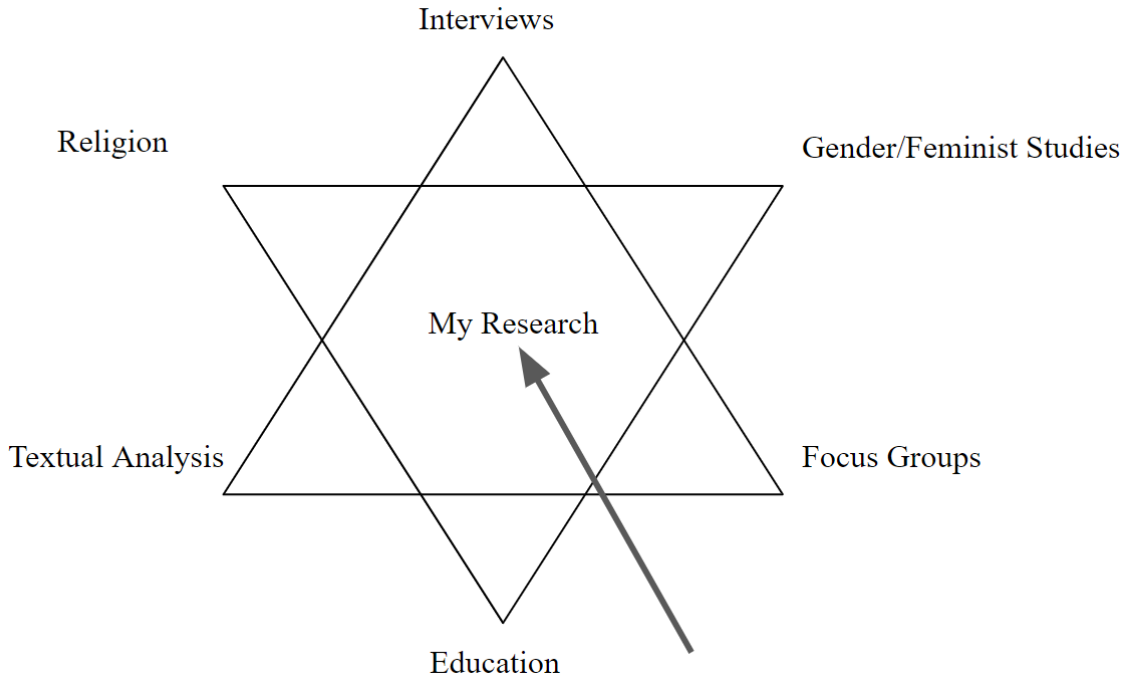


Triangulation

My study seeks rigor in two important ways. Firstly, I collected data through three distinct approaches; i.e., interviews, focus groups, and analysis of relevant literature. Secondly, I explored this work through the lens of three distinct disciplines. In order to fit the description of interdisciplinarity, my topic must be directly in the centre of the ways in which each individual discipline relates to each other, and to each methodological practice. Figure 3 will provide a visual representation.

Figure 3

Triangulation



1.7 Significance and Justification of Research

This research contributes to the body of knowledge surrounding equity, marginalization, and prescriptive gender stereotypes. Jewish girls and women are a sub-population of an

already-marginalized religious group; as such, it is vitally important that their perspectives be included in this conversation. This research will help address the highly relevant issue of balancing ancient traditions with modern views. The phenomenon of gender-specific inequities is not unique to the Jewish faith; gender differences are built into many other faith traditions as well. The ways in which Modern Orthodox Jewish women navigate their religious beliefs in conjunction with secular ideals will be highly relevant to modern streams within other religions.

1.8 Conclusion and Structural Outline

To conclude this introductory chapter, I will now outline the structure of the remaining chapters: in Chapter 2 I will provide an overview of the relevant literature, including sections on prayer and identity formation. In Chapter 3 I will provide a description of the methodologies employed in my thesis research, and include observations regarding rigour, and research methods. In chapter 4 I will provide a narrative description of the findings stemming from the data collection phase of my research, and in Chapter 5 I will provide interpretive analysis and discussion, informed in part by the theoretical underpinnings of my study as well as the relevant literature. Finally, in Chapter 6 I will discuss scholarly contributions, recommendations and emerging questions, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction and Chapter Goals/Structure

It is imperative for me to situate my research in the context of the existing body of work. As such, the main goal of this chapter is to explore some relevant published literature about the prayer experiences of Jewish girls and its relationship to identity formation. In order to keep this topic focused and specific, the literature being discussed in this chapter has been divided into three themed sections: "Education", "Prayer", and "Identity Formation". The "Education" section discusses the Bais Yaakov school system, one of the first instances of formal Jewish education for girls. It also gives a brief overview of the way in which the development of Toronto's Jewish community led to the establishment of Orthodox day schools. The "Prayer" section discusses the historical evolution of Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, and the ways in which these ceremonies do (or do not) include active participation in prayer services. It also discusses what constitutes a "mainstream" Modern Orthodox prayer service, and how this may differ according to region. Additionally, this section discusses research that was conducted with girls in Modern Orthodox days schools on the topic of prayer and participation. The "Identify Formation" section focuses on research that connects girls' identity formation and their prayer experiences. Since growing up and forming one's identity also relates to independence, this section also includes a discussion of a specific challenge that Modern Orthodox Jewish girls deal with: striving for autonomy while also conforming to religious authority. The findings from these sources blend together to inform my understanding of how Modern Orthodox Jewish women may conceive of their religious identities, and the ways that participation in prayer in Jewish day schools in their childhood played a role in their identity formation. This chapter will conclude

with a discussion of the reviewed literature, wherein I articulate what unique contribution to the field I wish to make through my interdisciplinary research.

2.2 Search Strategy

The databases through which I searched for relevant materials include the following: *Google Scholar*, the *Taylor and Francis* online database, the *ProQuest* online database, the *Vaughan Public Libraries* online database, and the *York University* online library database. More specifically, I searched through *Scholars Portal, EBSCO, JSTOR, ProQuest, Women's Studies International* and the *Jewish Data Bank*. Within those search engines, I used the following keywords individually and in combination: Jewish, Modern Orthodox, mainstream, girls, day school, women, Judaism, qualitative, ethnography, phenomenology, education, prayer, tefillah, daven, identity, and Bat Mitzvah.

2.3 Review of Literature

Education

Religious Education for Girls

When discussing Jewish girls' participation in prayer at school it is necessary to discuss Sarah Schenirer, the founder of the Bais Yaakov school system, and to give a brief overview of the development of this school system. Bais Yaakov was one of the first instances of formal Jewish education for girls, and Seidman (2018) traces the development of Bais Yaakov schools from their inception in 1917 Poland to their widespread acceptance in modern times. In discussing the evolution of the Bais Yaakov school system, Seidman explains the ways in which Schenirer used traditional values to promote a concept that was revolutionary for its time period – religious education for Jewish girls. Originally a seamstress living in Poland (Seidman, 2018), Schenirer was inspired to open a school that would provide Jewish girls with religious education.

This came in the aftermath of the 1903 “rabbinic rejection of education for girls”, and “active opposition from traditionalist elements in the Orthodox world. (Seidman, 2018, p. 323). Schenirer was inspired after hearing a rabbi in Vienna speaking about the Jewish heroine Judith. “I felt immediately that the main thing missing is that our sisters know so little about their past and this alienates them from our people and their traditions” (Seidman, 2018, p. 324).

In 1917, Schenirer gathered 25 girls in her seamstress studio (Seidman, 2018), establishing what would become the first Bais Yaakov school. This grassroots Jewish school later developed into multiple institutions, including elementary schools, high schools and teacher training programs. (Seidman, 2018). Graduates of the teacher training programs would then be sent to other parts of the country to establish new Bais Yaakov schools, leading to “about 200 schools and 38,000 students throughout Poland and beyond” (Seidman, 2018, p. 321). Bais Yaakov was not the first instance of Jewish girls’ religious education – girls were educated in the Hirsch school system in Germany in the 1850s – but it was a movement that expanded quickly and spread to countries around the world. Seidman classifies Schenirer’s endeavour as a “revolution in the name of tradition” (Seidman, 2018, p. 323), and names this as the key to Schenirer’s success. By working within the system and appealing to Jews’ love of traditional values, “the movement brought together innovative and conservative impulses in an unprecedented and distinctive set of rhetorical and cultural practices” (Seidman, 2018, p. 323).

Schenirer grew up in a Hasidic community, and she sought the blessing from the rabbi of her community (signifying his stamp of approval) before undertaking this endeavour. She also had the support of a rabbi from a different Hasidic community, who sent his daughter to a Bais Yaakov school (Seidman, 2018). This prompted the rabbi’s many followers to do the same. Another reason that Bais Yaakov school garnered communal acceptance was because Schenirer

refrained from equating Bais Yaakov schools to yeshiva schools (religious education schools for boys), and she maintained gender segregation within the schools (Seidman, 2018). Additionally, Schenirer did not allow Talmud – a traditionally male subject – to be taught in Bais Yaakov schools because of rabbinic passages that "explicitly forbid or denigrate such study for girls" (Schenirer 2018, p. 232). These standards made the idea of girls' religious education more acceptable to those who would oppose it. Finding textual proof in the Torah to validate girls' religious education also helped Schenirer's cause. A verse in the book of Exodus (Stone Edition, 2001, Exodus 19:3) states, "so shall you say to the house of Jacob and relate to the children of Israel" (Seidman, 2018, p. 328). This verse refers to the revelation at Mount Sinai, at which all of the Jews were present. Rabbinic sages questioned why the Jews were divided into two categories: the "house of Jacob" and the "children of Israel". They interpreted that "house of Jacob" refers to the Jewish women, while "children of Israel" refers to the Jewish men. Taking this a step further, the sages interpreted that Moses addressed the women at Mount Sinai before he addressed the men (Seidman, 2018) - based on the fact that "house of Jacob" is mentioned first. Schenirer named her girls' school "Bais Yaakov", which in English means "house of Jacob". Inherent in her schools' name is "Biblical proof" (Seidman, 2018, p. 23) that teaching Torah to females is permissible according to the Torah. Schenirer's Bais Yaakov schools transformed teaching Torah to girls from something unacceptable to something necessary. The rhetoric surrounding Bais Yaakov is that of a "pious seamstress who saw the need to teach girls Torah lest they be swept away from Orthodoxy by the lures of modern life" (Seidman, 2018, p. 322). Girls learning Torah was no longer a "modern" activity; rather, it was constructed as something that would prevent girls from becoming involved in modern secular society.

Proving that something is acceptable according to Jewish law does not mean that community norms and practices will change. Every change to tradition carries the possibility of distancing oneself from the traditions of one's ancestors, so hesitancy is understandable. Bais Yaakov schools are an example of how accepted practices change within Orthodoxy – very, very slowly, over the course of many years. Bais Yaakov schools – once considered to be highly revolutionary and extremely controversial – are now favoured by Ultra-Orthodox families, due to the school system's commitment to upholding traditional values. While other girls' schools (and co-educational schools) grew out of the Bais Yaakov model and adopted more modern practices, Bais Yaakov schools still strive to remain true to the values and practices that Sarah Schenirer held so many years ago. In modern times, mainstream Modern Orthodox schools may include a co-educational environment, Talmud classes for girls, or a relaxed dress code – none of which would be even remotely acceptable in a Bais Yaakov school. However, the fact that Modern Orthodox education is available and widely accepted is because of the precedents that were set by Bais Yaakov schools, one of the first institutions to provide girls with a religious education. Mainstream Modern Orthodoxy owes its flexibility, in large part, to its positionality within various Jewish ideologies. It is fitting that Modern Orthodoxy, which comes with its own set of contradictions, is descended from the Bais Yaakov movement - "a combination of often contradictory cultural influences" (Seidman, 2018, p, 324). This is the background against which Modern Orthodox education for girls in Toronto is set. A Bais Yaakov high school was established in Toronto in 1965, and a Bais Yaakov elementary/middle school opened in 1969. Other types of Bais Yaakov high schools have also been established in Toronto since then.

Jewish Education in Toronto

The types of Jewish educational institutions that are available in Toronto were and are impacted by the values and practices of the Jews who live in Toronto. Kayfetz's (1972) brief overview of the development of Toronto's Jewish community is therefore instructive. Large waves of Eastern European Jews immigrated to Toronto from 1880-1920. Many surviving Jews also immigrated to Toronto from Poland and Hungary after WWII, from displaced person's camps. Within European Jews, there were many different groups: Socialists, Communists, Anarchists, and various factions of Zionists. Until the 1930s, "Toronto was essentially a community of East European Jews" (Kayfetz, 1972, p. 11). This changed in the 1960s, when Jews immigrated to Toronto from Morocco. Many South African Jews also migrated to different Jewish communities in the 1980s, some of them arriving in Toronto (Horowitz & Kaplan, 2001). At the time of Kayfetz's article, the question being asked was how the Jews from Morocco could "preserve their special Jewish identity within an overwhelmingly predominant Ashkenazi [Eastern European] community" (Kayfetz, 1972, p. 16). The prevalence of Eastern European Jews explains why the Jewish schools that were established largely followed Ashkenazi traditions. At the time that the article was written, there were two major educational institutions in Toronto - Associated Hebrew Schools and Eitz Chaim - both of which were Orthodox elementary and middle schools (Associated Hebrew Schools is now a community school, rather than specifically Orthodox). It is significant to note that three years after this article was written, the Ohr HaEmet Sephardic School was established in Toronto - an Orthodox elementary and middle school that taught Jewish traditions and liturgy from a Sephardic viewpoint (the ways that Judaism is practiced in certain Western European and Northern African countries). This is the back-drop against which Orthodox education in Toronto was established: at a time when some

members of the Toronto Jewish community were eagerly embracing more Reform traditions (Kayfetz, 1972), while other members were continuing to uphold the traditional practices with which they were familiar.

It is important to note that the term "Modern Orthodox" may be used colloquially - at different times and by different people - to describe various Toronto schools. It may also be used to describe Bnei Akiva Schools (an Orthodox high school in Toronto, established in 1973), as well as another significant Orthodox elementary and middle school in Toronto - Netivot HaTorah Day School, established in 1985. However, none of the schools mentioned in this chapter include the term "Modern Orthodoxy" in their mission statement. This strengthens the purpose of my research - to learn from my participants about the elusive quality that signifies modernity within Orthodoxy.

Prayer

Bat Mitzvah, Prayer, and Participation

Salkin (2006) discusses the evolution of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs. He notes the difference between Biblical times to modern day. Biblical Judaism considered twenty to be the age of majority (Salkin, 2006). Salkin's statement is supported by numerous verses in the Torah stating that twenty is the age at which a man can be counted as a member of the Jewish nation (Exodus, 38:26, Numbers 1:18, Numbers 26:2, Numbers 26:4). Accordingly, twenty is the age at which a man was obligated to give ritual offerings (Exodus, 30:14) (something no longer practiced in post-Biblical Judaism). Salkin goes on to say that "postbiblical Jewish law lowered the age of maturity to thirteen, at which time a Jewish boy would be obliged to fulfill the *mitzvot* (commandments of Jewish life)" (Salkin, 2006, p. 381). It became widely accepted that boys become Bar Mitzvah at thirteen years old, although the rituals surrounding this are "customs

with no force of law" - they simply followed "'standard' procedures" (Salkin, 2006, p. 383) which changed over time. Bar Mitzvahs originally involved saying a blessing before the reading of a Torah passage. The late Middle Ages saw the inclusion of giving a speech become part of the Bar Mitzvah ritual (Salkin, 2006, p. 383).

And what of Bat Mitzvah celebrations for girls? In the 1800s, a Jewish girl might give a speech at a celebratory meal to commemorate becoming Bat Mitzvah (Salkin, 2006). In the early 20th century, there were celebratory meals in Italy, Poland, Germany, and Egypt for Bat Mitzvah girls (Salkin, 2006). The first Bat Mitzvah celebration in North America took place in New York, by Judith Kaplan Eisenstein. She was the daughter of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of the Reconstructionist Judaism movement. Judith stood at "a very respectable distance" from the Torah scroll in a synagogue, said the blessing out loud, and read from a printed Bible rather than from the Torah scroll itself (Salkin, 2006, p. 384). In current times, some Orthodox communities may allow girls to read from the "prophets" or "writings" section of the Bible to commemorate their Bat Mitzvah, as opposed to reading from a Torah scroll itself (Salkin, 2006). There are also some Modern Orthodox communities that allow girls to read from the Torah during a service that is exclusively for women - "no men allowed!" (Salkin, 2006, p. 384). By and large, "in mainstream Orthodoxy, the bat mitzvah ceremony is basically a [speech], followed by a festive meal… girls are seldom allowed to read directly from the Torah scroll" (Salkin, 2006, p. 384). Nulman (1996) conducted historical research on women-led prayer groups as early as the 1600s. Her research shows that there is a clear precedent for women taking their personal prayers and making them communal by reciting them on behalf of other women who could not read (Nulman, 1996). These prayers "emphasized religious events in their lives" (Nulman, 2006, p. 35), and engendered feelings of Jewish community (Nulman, 1996).

Mayne (2022) adds to this conversation by including examples of women's prayer groups in modern times. She notes that formal women's prayer groups were in existence in the early 2000s, both in Orthodox schools in New York City and in Orthodox synagogues in the United States and Israel (Mayne, 2022). By 2010, women's prayer groups were considered "normative within Jewish communities and Halakhah (Jewish law)" (Mayne, 2022, p. 93). Mayne notes the newer phenomenon of Orthodox women preferring to avoid women-only prayer groups, due to the fact that some mixed-gender Mainstream Modern Orthodox prayer spaces "often include a range of leadership possibilities for women" (Mayne, 2022, p. 93). She conducted anthropological research wherein she observed and participated in women's prayer groups in Brooklyn. Her research discusses the "Women's Tefillah Network" that was established in New York in the 1980s - a platform to answer questions and assist women in building the foundation for women's prayer groups. These women-only prayer groups followed the basics of a "traditional" Orthodox service, and included saying blessings on the Torah and reading from the Torah. Some groups conjugated certain prayers to be in feminine language (Mayne, 2022). One of Mayne's research participants stated that "It isn't, 'I am feminist, hear me roar!' but rather, 'I want to do Jewish stuff and you're blocking me'" (Mayne, 2022, p. 107).

This relates to Salkin's (2006) explanation of the correct way to use the phrase "Bat Mitzvah" in a sentence - in the context of "becoming". "For the speaker understands that bar/bat mitzvah is a status that the child *becomes*" (Salkin, 2006, p. 380). "Becoming" is a concept that is very important in Judaism; an example being the Torah character of Joseph, who became mature due to his suffering (Salkin, 2006). Based on this premise, Bat Mitzvah celebrations have the possibility of forming a girl's identity as a Jewish adult, as it focuses on what type of adult the girl will become.

Jewish Day Schools, Prayer, and Participation

Drelich (2016) conducted research about the role of prayer teachers in prayer education. He makes the case that prayer instruction - done properly and positively when children are young - can help them develop a Jewish identity in adolescence (Drelich, 2016). In addition to making the connection between prayer experiences when children are young and when they get older, Drelich also argues that positive experiences can also lead to a "lifetime commitment to prayer" (Drelich, 2016, p. 1). Additionally, Drelich discusses the various forms that prayer can take in the Jewish school system. He focused on the differences between middle school and high school in the Modern Orthodox day school in which he conducted his research. Drelich identified differences in location, as well as the type of prayer groups that were available to girls in the school; for example, single-gender versus co-educational (Drelich, 2016). While Drelich discusses differences between middle school and high school, Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman (2013) find gender-based differences that occur as early as kindergarten in Jewish day schools. They note that boys and girls have different experiences of Judaism almost immediately upon entering the school system. This is especially evident during "Shabbat parties", wherein ritual practices are role-played by the young students (Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman, 2013). Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman observed boys in kindergarten being invited to recite the traditional blessing over grape juice, while girls in kindergarten were encouraged to light (pretend) candles and say the corresponding Sabbath blessing (Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman, 2013). These mimic the practices that Orthodox males and females stereotypically engage in on the Sabbath when they reach adulthood. As the students get older and learn more blessings and prayers, the boys make use of "props" in their rituals, such as phylacteries, the Torah, and ritual fringes [on their garments] (Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles

Sztokman, 2013). Girls, not being obligated by Jewish law to partake in these rituals, "just stand there" (Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman, 2013, p. 106). They note that this causes feelings of passivity for the girls.

Lehmann (2010) conducted research at a Modern Orthodox high school for girls, with a direct focus on prayer. She notes that the teachers viewed prayer as an "indisputable religious obligation." (Lehmann, 2010, p. 299). This, she found, was in contrast to the students, who conceived of prayer as encroaching on their independence. One student expressed that she was upset about the way that prayer was handled in the school, explaining that they were forced to participate in the afternoon prayer services even if they did not want to (Lehmann, 2010). "She objected to being coerced into services" (Lehman, 2010, p. 305). Another student that Lehmann interviewed felt that she and other students should be permitted to "withdraw from services entirely" (Lehman, 2010, p. 306).

Weiss (2007) also conducted research with girls who attended a Modern Orthodox Jewish high school. The girls explained that they were more likely to pray if they had a reason - for example, praying on behalf of someone in need. Weiss also learned that prayer helped girls deal with tragedy and that it relates to resilience (Weiss, 2007). Brand (2012) conducted research on the topic of prayer, through the use of surveys. She researched with boys and girls in a Modern Orthodox Jewish high school, and often divided the results based on gender. One of the things that she explored and reported on was the reason behind prayer. She found that girls were more likely than boys to praise and give thanks to G-d, especially when positive things occurred in their lives (Brand, 2012).

Identity Formation

Prayer and Identity

Weiss (2007) had discussions with girls who do enjoy praying, and it is very clear that the personal identity of the girls became tied up in their prayer behaviour. One girl spoke about how she considers herself to be emotional and spiritual, and evidences this by the fact that she prays (Weiss, 2007). A connection can be made between Weiss' findings and the findings of Kohn (2020). Both of their research relates to the need for prayer to be meaningful. In his research at a Modern Orthodox girls' high school in Israel, Kohn focuses on the teachers' experiences in attempting to get their students interested in prayer. One teacher expressed that "it could be that if my own prayers were more significant for me I would be able to have a greater influence on my students. Though I pray with the students, I don't get too excited about it, so how then should the students feel about it?" (Kohn, 2020, p. 55). It is worthwhile to note that all of the teachers who participated in Kohn's research were graduates of Modern Orthodox high schools in Israel. The teachers found a strong correlation between prayer and Jewish identity, although they differed regarding how to approach this. Some teachers believed in a "formalistic orientation" (Kohn, 2020, p. 51), wherein students must be taught to pray because it is a part of Jewish practice. Other teachers believed in a "spiritual orientation" (Kohn, 2020, p. 51), wherein prayer is more of a unique and personal experience. The teachers' opinions informed their practice, leading to different classes having different prayer experiences (Kohn, 2020).

Greninger (2010) explores prayer and identity in Jewish women. Greninger constructs prayer as "behaving, believing, and/or belonging" (Greninger, 2010, p. 411), viewing the practice as a way of forming and expressing one's Jewish identity. She reports on the experiences of two women who were part of the Reform Jewish community in the United States. Each woman favours a different style of prayer, but both believe that prayer should move people - "emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually" (Greninger, 2010, p. 384). These women, though not

teachers, express similar sentiments to those of the teachers who participated in Kohn's (2020) research.

Greenberg's research (1981) makes the point that girls and women are attempting to construct their identities without having first-hand knowledge of the full picture. This is due to the fact that traditionally, girls and women did not study Talmud, which is the basis for many Jewish laws that relate to prayer and Jewish life (Greenberg, 1981). Text study for women is vitally important because "the law presupposes a passive woman whose destiny was controlled by men" (Greenberg, 1981, p. 81). However, simply looking at the reality of powerful and spiritual Jewish figures, both in the Torah and in Jewish history, would challenge that assumption (Greenberg, 1981, p. 88). Borts (2021) states that "the control women had in the home was to implement… that which was decided elsewhere by the men" (Borts, 2021, p. 106). She relates this to the idea of time-bound commandments – religious obligations that must be performed within a certain time frame. Even though the Talmud does not obligate women to observe these commandments, there seem to be many exceptions. Borts believes that men who would exclude women from active participation in communal prayer are not taking into account the flexibility that is already built into Jewish law (Borts, 2021).

Autonomy and Identity

Weiner's research (2020) with girls who attended a Modern Orthodox high school brings forth an important argument for the necessity of girl-centred research. It asserts that "researchers and academics alike should consider Jewish girls as a distinct population" (Weiner, 2020, p. 18). Her research illuminates the extent to which some Orthodox Jewish girls will go to have agency in their lives. One girl explained how she purposely went against her school's dress code, and expressed an intention to continue flouting the dress code until the school changed its parameters

- which they eventually did. She found her identity in this rebellion, and felt proud of herself (Weiner, 2020). Weiner's findings on identity construction surrounding rebellion is not unique. Lehmann (2010), spoke with a high school student who occasionally pretended to be running late to prayers, or asked a friend to sign her name on the attendance list for her, rather than attending prayers herself (Lehmann, 2010).

In a study exploring prayer among Modern Orthodox high school girls, Weiss (2007) encountered students who didn't enjoy praying because they felt that it was a forced experience. The girls expressed that they would enjoy praying more if their teachers were praying as well, as opposed to walking around and supervising (Weiss, 2007). Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman (2013) speak about this supervisory role in the context of "panoptical gaze" (Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman, 2013, p. 219). This is a method of controlling people in institutional settings, such as jails or hospitals for individuals with mental disorders. The institutionalized individuals are seen, while the people in charge oversee them. Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman observe similarities in the way that teachers oversee prayer experiences in school. The teachers watch the students intently during prayer time, and their gaze keeps the students behaving properly (Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman, 2013).

Through a discourse analysis of English and Chumash (Torah) classes at a Modern Orthodox high school, Lehmann (2008) explores concepts of independence and authority in Modern Orthodox education. In teasing out two distinct discourses - that of either autonomy or authority - she illuminates how the first is found to promote Western values of modernity, thereby placing the students' opinions and interpretations at the centre of the educational framework (Lehmann, 2008). In the Modern Orthodox high school in which Lehmann conducted her research, the girls acted as though they supported the discourse of autonomy during English

class. They stated their views "actively and outspokenly" (Lehmann, 2008, p. 311). In their Chumash class, however, they acted according to a discourse of authority, trying to answer the teacher's questions by referring to knowledge that has already been established and validated in the Jewish community (Lehmann, 2008). Lehmann's research findings suggest that correlations could be drawn between classroom experiences and the complex process of identity construction.

Cashman (2015) followed Lehmann's binary of autonomy and authority in his research with Modern Orthodox high school girls, and found similar evidence of identity construction. The girls with whom he researched vacillated between expressing their opinions with the word "I think" in their secular classes and "we think" in their religious classes (Cashman, 2015). While the girls displayed different modes of thinking in their secular classes compared to their religious classes, he notes that the expected cognitive dissonance did not occur. He discovered that this was because the girls were able to do what they wanted outside of school hours. They viewed certain religious restrictions as being school rules that they needed to follow only when they were in the building, rather than laws that dictated their practices in their personal lives (Cashman, 2015).

Safer's research (2003) also related to students' engagement with text-based study, and the ways that they responded to what they learned. Safer conducted research with girls who attended an ultra-Orthodox high school. Even though the high school was ultra-Orthodox, there were Modern Orthodox students who attended and participated in his research. A main finding of this study is that, through text-based study of prayer books, the girls learned a new language that they then "tried on" in class. This occurred when teachers stated a concept, and the girls would then absorb the words into their own lexicon the next time they participated in class (Safer, 2003). An example of this is when a student raised a question about having free will. In response

to the teacher's answer, a student said "Hashem [G-d] is very wise and knows what we're going to do" (Safer, 2003, p. 122) - at which point the student who had originally asked the question said "Hashem knows whatever we're going to do" (Safer, 2003, p. 122). Safer noted that she did not make this statement with conviction; rather, she said it as though she was trying to figure out how it would feel to say those words. The teacher then backed up this claim with a passage from a prayer book, thus cementing the connection between prayer and religious beliefs (Safer, 2003).

Ross (2016) makes a connection between Modern Orthodoxy and feminism in an unexpected way. She discusses the differing perspectives of two rabbis who have had great influence on the Modern Orthodox communities: Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Kook. Rabbi Soloveitchik was a proponent of limiting the extent to which Jews interacted with secular society. This was because he felt that participating in the "secular benefits of modernity... will undermine the primacy of Jewish norms and values" (Ross, 2016, p. 374). In contrast to this, Rabbi Kook did not believe in this "compartmentalization"; rather, he believed that the distinctions between "sacred and profane" (Ross, 2016, p. 374) should be overcome. The same kind of debate plays out in the realm of radical Feminism, which sees binary distinctions as a "masculine preference", and the "dissolution of dichotomies as a feminine proclivity" (Ross, 2016, p. 375). Liberal feminists held the goal of promoting equal rights for women, while radical feminists challenged the societal structure entirely, and envisioned a world in which the masculine view was not the standard (Ross, 2016). Ross' points are significant to my research, in that they complicate the definition of participation. When discussing women's girlhood participation in prayer, I must challenge my own viewpoint, which has been trained to look at participation through the perspective of what the boys/men in the synagogue have already been

doing for many years – rather than conceiving of a new form of participation that does not use male standards as a normative benchmark.

Lehmann's research (2008) and Cashman's research (2015) relate to certain modes of thinking being used in certain classes in Jewish day schools. Safer's research (2003) about certain language usage being present in certain classes at a Jewish day school plays out on a national scale in Ross' research (2016). She notes that Jews who live outside of Israel can construct an "artificial bubble of holiness" (Ross, 2016, p. 400) as a way to reconcile the contradictions between their religious beliefs and the secular society of which they are members. In these "bubbles", Jews can engage in practices that are "designed to create barriers between themselves and their secular surroundings" (Ross, 2016, p. 400). Jewish day schools, therefore, are a microcosm of this phenomenon. Just as high school girls may leave their dress code behind upon leaving their school, Jews are free to "flirt with modernity to whatever limited extent they wish" (Ross, 2016, p. 401), because their "borders" between these two parts of their lives are clearly defined (Ross, 2016, p. 374).

2.4 Discussion of the Literature

When analyzing Salkin's work (2006), something significant becomes apparent: Bar Mitzvah celebrations for boys began with a focus on the Torah - saying a blessing over the Torah and/or reading from the Torah. It was only in later years that it became common practice for Bar Mitzvah celebrations to include more party-like aspects. The development of Bat Mitzvah celebrations for girls developed in exactly the opposite way - they began as celebrations that were unconnected to synagogue or to the Torah, and it was only in later years that it became somewhat acceptable for girls to incorporate some aspects of Jewish rituals that may involve a Torah. In addition to this discrepancy, a huge contradiction can also be seen: when a Modern

Orthodox boy's Bar Mitzvah celebration focuses on reading from the Torah, it is construed as traditional. When a Modern Orthodox girl's Bat Mitzvah celebration focuses on reading from the Torah, it is often construed as non-traditional, and for some, even controversial. Viewing the contradictions of Modern Orthodoxy through the lens of what is normative within the Toronto Jewish community is an important component of my research, as it may have had an impact on my participants' experiences of prayer and their resultant Jewish identity formation.

The dichotomy of authority versus autonomy is an excellent lens through which to view my research. This is because, as girls become Bat Mitzvah, they should, in theory, gain autonomy - being newly considered adults who are now responsible for their own actions. Some girls actively begin their foray into adult life by reading from the Torah in front of an entire synagogue or in an all-women prayer group. Other girls begin their journey into adult life by quietly taking their place in the women's section of a synagogue, and listening politely while the religious practices are completed by men. The latter is the population of women with whom my research was conducted. As Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman (2013) show in their example of a female Jewish neurosurgeon who is relegated to the women's side of the partition in synagogue, girls from this stream of Modern Orthodoxy have the opportunity to grow into women who hold high-power careers in the secular world - even as they continue to pray in synagogues that embrace a discourse of authority (Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman, 2013). Authority, in this case, refers to rabbinic authority – the rabbis who established the norms of Orthodox prayer services. Even among Modern Orthodox schools that purport to provide equitable opportunities, the resulting research found that girls were far less likely to be afforded participatory roles in classroom services. Even opportunities to recite a "Dvar Torah" (a short speech expounding upon a Jewish topic) - something that is technically unconnected to prayer,

but that usually occurs during or after prayer time - were reported far less among female students than among male students (Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman, 2013).

This circles back to Kohn's findings (2020), demonstrating how the same thing is occurring in both Israel and North America. "A built-in tension exists between students studying in a religious environment embedded in a secular culture" (Kohn, 2020, p. 45). At this apex point, my research becomes a relevant addition to the current body of work. It explores how some Jewish women in Toronto have come to terms with their Modern Orthodox identity, through the lens of their childhood prayer experiences in Jewish day schools. Ross' research (2016) follows a similar vein. She notes that it is more difficult for Jews in Israel to have strict divisions between religious and secular life; this is more easily accomplished in North America (Ross, 2016). Her research has allowed me to understand that my own research approach follows liberal feminism rather than radical feminism. It brings to light the fact that the paradigm through which I am viewing prayer participation is a male one; this is because men are the model that can be seen actively participating in synagogues. Her writing inspires reflection: what would prayer participation look like if, instead of thinking about equality from the perspective of what males are already doing, one considered lenses that promote female viewpoints?

Facilitating conversations with adult women about girlhood prayer experiences in Jewish day schools is a significant and unique contribution to the body of work, as it provides a different perspective than girls or women speaking about their current experiences. For example, Cashman's research participants (2015) did not experience cognitive dissonance at the time that the research was conducted - while they were still teenagers, surrounded by peers who were engaging in similar activities, and being interviewed while inside of their school building. Years later, with time away from school possibly affording them greater perspective and more life

experience, it is possible that women's reflections would bring about memories of contradictory practices that were not apparent at the time. It is interesting to wonder whether Modern Orthodox women, in adulthood would still be able to accept religious authority and structure, but do so in a self-affirming way.

Another contribution my research can make is related to experiences specific to location and community. When Mayne (2022) speaks about the leadership opportunities that mainstream Modern Orthodoxy has begun offering to women, she focuses on certain communities in the United States. The Toronto Jewish community has been slowly evolving since the 1880s, when Reform Judaism was introduced to an Orthodox synagogue in Toronto. The Reform ideology was not accepted as early or as readily in Canada as in the United States (Kayfetz, 1972). Additionally, Jewish communities in the United States adopted English as a common language thirty years earlier than Jewish communities in Canada (Kayfetz, 1972). With this background in mind, it is easy to understand why the Toronto Jewish community is known for its religious stringency. Mayne's research (2022) discussed how something that was originally controversial (women's prayer groups) became mainstream in the United States. In the case of Toronto's Modern Orthodox Jewish community, women's prayer groups that include Torah reading have not yet become mainstream.

An overarching theme found in much of the reviewed research regarding Jewish girls and prayer in school is a disconnect between prayer teachers and their students. Despite how important the teachers believe prayer to be, the studies report that the students do not necessarily share these views. Prayer becomes just another thing that is mandated by the school, and as such, potentially becomes something against which to rebel. Rather than developing an identity from their prayer experiences, some girls seem to develop their Jewish identity around the fact that

they purposely try to skip prayers whenever possible, or develop an identity wherein they are happy to be Jewish, but want almost nothing to do with prayer. Many girls expressed that they would like praying more if they understood what they were saying and had more opportunities to actually participate. This calls into question the pedagogical practices of Jewish educational institutions, and Modern Orthodox schools specifically - which invokes prayer time as mandatory. Is making prayers mandatory taking the spirituality out of it? I question whether, if prayer time were not mandatory, girls would be likely to attend. The novelty of having a choice may inspire some girls to pray at first, but after a while, the question remains whether this would continue, especially since independence seems to be an important component of Jewish identity formation.

2.5 Conclusion

There is a rich tapestry of information that relates to Jewish girls and women's experiences of prayer and identity formation. There are also gaps in the current research that the interdisciplinary nature of my thesis is able to fill, at least in part. A key gap is the post-girlhood reflections of adult women. Some research has been conducted with school-aged girls, while other research has sought out the perspectives of adult women. My research will bridge this gap, giving readers a retrospective view of the intersection of the education system, prayer, and the construction of a Jewish identity. Another gap in the research is the ways in which becoming Bat Mitzvah changes the way that prayer is taught in a school setting. Research such as Kohn's (2020) and Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman's (2013) alludes to the changes in prayer across age and grade levels, but the implied underlying cause of these changes - the changed status of the students as they become Bar or Bat Mitzvah - deserves to be discussed in greater detail. Therefore, I am confident that I will be able to make a unique, necessary, and

relevant contribution. Looking back and reminiscing allows my research participants to connect their formal prayer experiences before and after their Bat Mitzvah, and to give further thought to its impact on their identity development from Jewish girls to Jewish women.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

"All research represents a political enterprise that carries significant implications"

(Streubert and Carpenter, 2011, p. 19**)**

3.1 Introduction and Chapter Goals/Structure

The purpose of my research is to learn about gendered prayer experience in the mainstream Modern Orthodox community, with a particular focus on Jewish women's reflections about their girlhood prayer experiences. This qualitative, phenomenological study asked 9 Modern Orthodox women who live in Toronto to describe their girlhood experiences praying in Jewish day schools, in order to find out how participation opportunities differed for them before and after their Bat Mitzvah, and what meanings they ascribe to these differences. Using individual interviews in addition to a focus group, this study followed the principles of inductive research, with an underpinning of Feminist Theory and Standpoint Theory. It achieves the goal of centering the inherent personhood of each participant. According to phenomenological inquiry, "what is important is the experience as it is presented, not what anyone thinks or says about it" (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011, p. 87).

Following this introductory section, this chapter is divided into four sections. The "Methodological Rationale" section will discuss research assumptions. The "Participants" sections will include demographic and sampling information. The "Research Design and Procedures" section will include recruitment, data collection methods, data analysis methods, dissemination, and parameters of the research. It will also include limitations of the research. The "Ethics and Rigor" section will explain the steps I took to ensure that my research respected the rights of every person involved, and the standards that I followed to ensure accurate

representation of my participants' experiences. A concluding summary of the most salient points from this chapter will also be included.

3.2 Methodological Rationale

My decision to frame this inquiry in phenomenological approaches to qualitative research furthers my research aims and questions in many important ways. Yilmaz (2013) states that qualitative research is "not arrived at by statistical procedure or other means of quantification" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 1). This is because, as discussed by Streubert and Carpenter (2011), certain things cannot be quantified and lived experiences fall under this category. My research approach relates to my ontological and epistemological stance, which are the philosophies that underpin my research.

Qualitative research necessitates an inductive approach (Yilmaz, 2013). My research is inductive because the goal of inductive research is to find out about the specific experiences of my research participants, which may then be extrapolated to apply to more general experiences (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011). This is in contrast to a deductive approach, wherein the researcher applies general findings to a specific situation. My research could therefore contribute to academia in a variety of ways. In addition to inductive research, I used the research approach of phenomenology. This is because my research will explore the "lived experiences of individuals" (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011, p. 23).

Using a phenomenological approach as a method, the researcher must first avoid any evaluation or opinion, and instead pay attention to the phenomenon as it is being described by the participants and the meanings that this evokes for them (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011). Within the tenets of phenomenology exists critical hermeneutics, which posits that individuals with societal privilege are more likely to have their experiences valued. Conversely, "the lived

experiences and personal voices of persons who are not members of privileged groups are often discounted" (Lopez and Willis, 2004, p. 730). Since Jewish women are a sub-population of an already-marginalized group, my research seeks to center, validate and amplify their lived experiences and truths.

Paradigms

My research methodologies are informed by a constructivist interpretivist paradigm, a critical-ideological paradigm, and Feminist Standpoint theory. Constructivism-interpretivism posits that reality is constructed in the minds of the individual, and that there are "multiple, apprehendable, and equally valid realities" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). A critical-ideological paradigm is also a useful and relevant viewpoint. It acknowledges assumptions of power dynamics and systemic inequality; these are significant factors that contribute to people's experiences (Ponterotto, 2005).

Streubert and Carpenter (2011) view bracketing as an essential part of phenomenological research; it is what causes the researcher to begin the "reductive process" of research (Streubert and Carpenter, 2011, p. 77). Dowling (2006) explains that bracketing is the "suspension of all biases and beliefs regarding the phenomenon being researched prior to collecting data about it" (Dowling, 2006, p. 10). While this is an ideal to consider, in reality this is impossible to fully achieve, as I, like any researcher, am entering the field with my own perspectives; in my case, it is the importance of prayer, and the importance of adhering to religious traditions while still making room for more modern practices. I was able to find the balance between bracketing my own perspective by continually referring back to my research paradigms and my research assumptions to keep me on track. As well, preparing my main questions in advance helped me to avoid asking leading questions that could have led to pre-determined conclusions.

Naples and Gurr (2014) discuss the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and how it challenged the current conception of "knowledge" (Naples and Gurr, 2014). Components of feminist theory underscore my research; specifically regarding how "'truth' can be multiply defined or understood and that knowledge is political" (Naples and Gurr, 2014, p. 15). This informs my study's ontology and epistemology. Naples and Gurr pose two poignant questions that guide my research: (1) "How are feminists, with a concern for social justice grounded in gendered experiences, to understand 'truth' in knowledge?"; and (2) "How can feminist scholars account for their methodological practices in ways that do not reproduce the power imbalances potentially embedded in more traditional theoretical and methodological approaches?" (Naples and Gurr, 2014, p. 15). The answers to these questions lie in Standpoint Theory.

Rather than following traditional empiricism - a lens that stems from male university students in Renaissance-era Europe - some proponents of Feminist Theory promote the use of Feminist Empiricism (Naples and Gurr, 2014). This lens uses empirical methods but does not posit that knowledge "exists outside of social context"; instead, it focuses on women's experiences and strives to "reveal the androcentric biases inherent in much of the physical sciences" (Naples and Gurr, 2014, p. 16). Feminist Standpoint Theory takes this a step further. It focuses on "attention to diversity of individual experiences" (Naples and Gurr, 2014, p. 20), and centres the social context according to "economic and demographic measures" (Naples and Gurr, 2014, p. 20). Naples and Gurr state that "knowledge produced from the point of view of subordinated groups may offer stronger objectivity due to the increased motivation for them to understand the views or perspectives of those in positions of power" (Naples and Gurr, 2014, p. 21). In accordance with Feminist Standpoint Theory, the epistemological integrity of my study is sound. My participants' self-knowledge is a valid form of truth.

Assumptions

Naples and Gurr point to the lens of "Epistemic Authority" to question whose knowledge is recognized, and whose is silenced (Naples and Gurr, 2014). In the area of qualitative research, epistemology, which relates to what can be known, conceives of knowledge as relationships between the researcher and the research participants (Yilmaz, 2013). The characteristics of epistemological beliefs are the researcher's "attempts to lessen the distance between himself or herself and that being researched (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 316). Therefore, my epistemological stance is that my research participants are the experts in their own lives, and that is why it is important for me to listen to what they are saying. This is how I will gain knowledge as a researcher. In so doing, it is important for me to challenge the very principles of who is seen as an expert who possesses knowledge. "Those who have and use the opportunity to be *known* as authorities, and in being known as authorities, become privileged to speak further" (Napes and Gurr, 2014, p. 21). For this reason, research that amplifies the voices of minority populations is integral.

My epistemology is further informed by feminist principles and analyses. "Feminist thought has… been forthright in its ethical and emancipatory challenges to positivist science" (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995, p. 9). This means that it is possible to "know" things, but not in an objective way, as quantitative research purports to do. Furthermore, my research practices emphasize women's experiences "on their own terms" (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995, p. 9) - rather than seen through the lens of a male-centred perspective. While epistemology discusses what can be known, ontology deals with the nature of reality (Yilmaz, 2013). The characteristics of ontological beliefs in qualitative research are that "reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by the participants in the study" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 316). Therefore, my ontological stance is that different people can experience reality in different ways. Each of my participants will engage

with and discuss the phenomenon of interest in different ways. Axiology relates to the role that values play in shaping a narrative (Yilmaz, 2013). My axiological stance is that values (Jewish, feminist, both, or other) will certainly influence the memories that the participants have of their childhood prayer experiences.

3.3 Participants

Demographic Information

My research participants for this study were Jewish women (ages 18+) who live in Toronto and self-identify as Modern Orthodox. All of the participants have attended a Jewish day school both before and after their Bat Mitzvah. All of the participants marked the occasion of their Bat Mitzvah at the age of 12, rather than 13 (as is seen in Reform communities). Additionally, none of the participants celebrated their Bat Mitzvah by reading from the Torah (as is seen in Reform, Conservative, and non-mainstream Modern Orthodox communities). These specific criteria allowed me to focus on the mainstream Modern Orthodox community, while still acknowledging that Modern Orthodoxy is a broad title for many types of beliefs and practices.

Sampling

When engaging in sampling, Robinson (2014) suggests taking into account the sampling universe, sampling size, and sampling strategy. My sampling universe was homogenous; the inclusion criteria was adult women who identified with the Jewish Modern Orthodox community, and currently reside in Toronto. They must have celebrated their Bat Mitzvah at 12 years old, and must not have read from the Torah during their celebration. They must have attended a Jewish day school before and after their Bat Mitzvah. My sampling size was nine research participants.

My sampling strategy was that of criterion, wherein I pre-selected a set list of inclusion factors and included just those interested participants who met these criteria. Given my desire for a criterion-based sample, my sampling is also characterized as purposive. This is based on my assumption that "certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured" (Robinson, 2014, p. 32). Only participants who could speak to my particular phenomenon of interest were accepted to participate in the study.

In doing phenomenological research, my sampling is idiographic. Therefore, it is not expected to be generalizable, while also being instructive to the research questions posed. Idiographic sampling "focuses on understanding the individual as a unique, complex entity" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128). In an idiographic study, individual people should have a "locatable voice" within the study (Robinson, 2014, p. 29). This aligns well with my feminist commitments within this study, which strives to centre the narratives of the participants as lived truths. According to Streubert and Carpenter (2011), a researcher will know that they have reached saturation when they have heard the same themes from many of their participants - no new themes or pieces of information are being brought forward. However, in a phenomenological qualitative study such as this one, data and thematic saturation is not my goal. Rather, the goal is to understand what my particular participants have experienced and to share these in discussion with the research questions.

3.4 Research Design and Procedures

Recruitment

Participant recruitment made use of online and print advertising . I posted advertisements on Facebook, and in the "Community Link" - a booklet of printed advertisements available to the

Toronto Jewish community (see Appendix A). I provided my contact information, and then followed up with prospective participants in the way that they preferred (phone or email). Robinson (2014) states that "the process of recruitment is often influenced by the researcher's own background, location and connections, and if that is the case, appropriate reflexive acknowledgement of any conflict of interests or possible bias also aids transparency" (Robinson, 2014, p. 38). This is something that I took into account, as some of the women who contacted me were individuals with whom I was previously acquainted. Dowling finds it vital to bring forth potential issues of power inequity (Dowling, 2006). It is important to acknowledge that there is always a power imbalance inherent in situations wherein one person is asking the questions and others are responding to them. While I was not in a position of power over these participants, these considerations factored into my ongoing reflexivity regarding ethics and rigour.

All participants engaged in active consent procedures, including an opening explanation of the study shared in writing and explained verbally, followed by the signing of an informed consent document. Participants had the right to remove any aspects of their contributions and to resign from the study at any time. Each participant received a $10 gift card as honorarium, as a way of thanking them for their participation.

Data Collection

In accordance with an interdisciplinary approach to rigorous qualitative research, I engaged with my research questions in three ways: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and engaging with relevant literature. McGrath et. al (2018) describes qualitative interviews as a "rigorous data collection tool" (McGrath et. al, 2018, p. 1005). All data was collected solely by me as the principal investigator between the months of November 2022 through to February 2023. Data collection took place over the online communication platform Zoom ©, and all data

was collected from my participants with their express permission. Discussion questions for both interviews and the follow up focus group were prepared in advance and provided to participants for anticipatory preparation if they desired. Feminist research principles and practices were enacted before and during these discussions, in accordance with Henwood and Pidgeon's connection between qualitative research and feminist goals (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995). These included personal reflection on power dynamics before commencing the interviews, as well as intentionally centering my participants' viewpoints during the interview, rather than trying to verify a pre-drawn conclusion (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995). This allowed me to establish a climate of dignity and confidentiality, wherein participants understood that I viewed them as the experts in their lives and lived experiences.

Next, participants who wished to do so participated in a focus group that included 2-3 other participants, as well as myself, to discuss commonalities of experience and share perspectives with each other. They engaged in discussion regarding their thoughts since being interviewed, their views regarding emerging themes from the interviews, and proposed implications stemming from their participation in the study they deemed necessary to explore. Group guidelines regarding confidentiality and mutual respect were discussed at the beginning of each focus group. Finally, participants were offered an optional opportunity to reach out and to clarify what they had said if they wished to do so, or to raise any further points that they had realized, upon reflection, that they wanted to add. This ensured the fidelity of the data that was collected. After collection, I transcribed the data myself, with some assistance from the *Otter AI* © online transcription service.

My research represents a cross-sectional study, as all of the data was collected over the course of a few months. This time horizon fits with my research aims and my research questions.

A cross-sectional study was an appropriate choice, as the participants were reflecting on specific experiences that they had had in their childhood. A long-range study was not necessary, as there was nothing that I was observing in the participants that would be currently in the process of changing or developing (aside from their relationship to religion, which could be in a constant state of change over the course of their whole lives).

Data Analysis

Data arising from the interviews and focus group was analyzed using thematic analysis - "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (Liamputtong, 2009, p. 135). This methodology was helpful for "through analytic processes the researchers turn the data, which is often voluminous, into a clear, understandable, insightful, trustworthy and even original analysis" (Liamputtong, 2009, p. 133). Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (Liamputtong, 2009, p. 135). In order to engage in thematic analysis, the researcher must first read through the interview transcript, and then engage in identifying small bits of data, and labelling them as codes, which is then followed by axial coding. "Axial coding is the step that allows researchers to connect different codes identified in the initial coding into categories and sub-categories" (Liamputtong, 2009, p. 135). Additionally, my process of thematic analysis involved the six steps outlined by Braun and Clark (2006). Phase one involves familiarizing oneself with one's data (Braun and Clark 2006). I did this by listening to the recording, transcribing, and taking initial notes. The next phases include "generating initial codes" and "searching for themes" (Braun and Clark 2006, p. 87). The next steps involve "reviewing the themes" and "defining and naming the themes" (Braun and Clark 2006, p. 87). The final phase is producing a report.

Dissemination

Graduate student scholarship must contribute to the discovery of truths, perhaps not asked before. This is a part of my goal in pursuing this area of scholarship; as such, a dissemination plan must be a portion of this endeavor. "The aims, purpose and scale of the research study will inform the dissemination strategy" (Flynn and Quinn, 2010, p. 601). Finding academic as well as community-based dissemination options will enable deeper understanding of women in the mainstream Modern Orthodox community, including their prayer experiences as girls. It can lead to more respect for their day-to-day experiences, foster shared knowledge between Jewish women and foster a greater understanding of the religious values that they hold. As such, my dissemination strategy involves striving to ensure that the findings are available to other Modern Orthodox Jewish individuals, rabbis, and female leaders within the mainstream Modern Orthodox communities in Toronto. I will do this by speaking about my research at a local synagogue and applying to have my work published in Jewish publication journals such as the *AJS Review.* I will submit proposals to relevant disciplinary conferences to share the knowledge that I have gained through engagement with my participants. Conferences to which I may apply include the "Academicsera" conference, the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies conference, and the Canadian Society for Jewish Studies conference. Further, in an effort to bring aspects of Jewish Girlhoods to Girlhood Studies in Canada and beyond, I will endeavour to bring this work to York University's Center for Feminist Research's Girlhood Studies Cluster as well as Girlhood studies conferences in general.

Ethics and Rigor

There are many ethical considerations to take into account when conducting research that involves human participants. I assigned each participant a pseudonym in my notes and subsequent publications, to ensure anonymity and to ensure that that no identifying details were exposed. During the research process, I checked in with the participants to ensure that I had correctly understood what they said, and that their words and sentiments had been represented accurately. I used verbatim quotations when I transcribed the audio recording, and when writing my findings. This ensured veracity of information. To ensure confidentiality, I did not reveal anything that participants told me in any other settings or contexts. No published work will contain identifying details of any of the participants or of institutions that they may have referenced.

Printed field notes and other relevant writings were kept in a locked filing cabinet. They will be subsequently shredded. Electronic data was stored on a password protected computer, and will be subsequently deleted. These processes ensure data privacy and security. Field notes were taken, in order to confront biases and engage in praxis and reflection. Berger (2013) states that "the idea of reflexivity challenges the view of knowledge production as independent of the researcher producing it and of knowledge as objective" (Berger, 2013, p. 220). The *JBI Checklist for Qualitative Research* provides an objective framework for planning and executing one's research. (see Appendix B)

Attention to rigor in my research was addressed by attending to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four components of trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry: credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Triangulation of data, member checks and reflexivity was central. Additionally, in acknowledging that no research is bias-free, I

fully recognize the centrality of the researcher's identity, background and lenses in qualitative research. As an important part of rigor, I acknowledge my own biases and value transparency. While my research may lead to certain conclusions, I cannot presume that the experiences of one or some will reflect the experiences of others. According to Berger (2013), "reflexivity in qualitative research is affected by whether the researcher is part of the researched and shares the participants' experience" (Berger, 2013, p. 219). My own biases and experiences are not necessarily a shortcoming but rather create a caution mitigated, in part, by ongoing reflexivity. According to Berger, the positionality of a researcher can greatly assist in the research process. Participants may be more likely to share when they see the researcher as being sympathetic to their particular experiences (Burger, 2013). As a (Modern) Orthodox woman who went to Jewish day school myself, the participants may have been able to relate to me as someone who shares their experiences. This is also a potential pitfall of which to be wary of. An important part of rigour is acknowledging my place within the community in which I am conducting research. As an "insider", I am able to detect nuances in my participants' responses. Berger draws from Kaicin and Chaitin's work (2006) arguing that in addition to understanding nuances, an insider already has a head start regarding understanding the topic at hand (Berger, 2013).

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the rationale for the study, the research setting and context, the research sample and data sources, the data collection methods, the data analysis methods, rigour-related concerns and how they should be mitigated, limitations of the study, and data dissemination. I have ensured that there is congruity between the various parts of my research (methodology, philosophy, research approach, research dissemination), and that there is general cohesion that all stems from my research question and research goals. To summarize: I

conducted a thematic analysis of information that was gathered using the mediums of individual interviews and focus groups. The ideas that informed my actions are the paradigms of constructivism-interpretivism and Feminist Standpoint Theory, and a phenomenological approach to qualitative research (more specifically, critical hermeneutics). This context and background paves the way for the chapter on research findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

Claire and Naomi both attended co-educational elementary schools, where both boys and girls had the opportunity to be prayer leaders. Claire embraced the opportunity. She loved the positive reinforcement that she received from her teachers and classmates. Naomi was hesitant to be the prayer leader. She didn't enjoy being the center of attention and she was always worried that she might make a mistake.

Judith attended synagogue each week as a child and sat with her mother in the women's section. Sarah also attended synagogue regularly as a child; she helped lead the prayer services at Junior Congregation. Both Judith and Sarah knew from a young age that women in mainstream Orthodox synagogues sit separately from men and do not lead the prayers. Just like wearing a different uniform at school or being given a locker, this was a sign that they were growing up.

Sarit and Shoshana both attended middle school prayer groups where the girls and boys sat separately, and the services were led exclusively by the boys. They saw the same dynamic reflected in the synagogues that they attended on Shabbat. Sarit now prays regularly in mainstream Orthodox synagogues, because that is where she feels most comfortable. Shoshana tries to avoid mainstream Orthodox synagogues, because the unequal gender roles make her feel excluded.

Ruth and Hannah both attended a mixed-gender high school that had a traditional Orthodox prayer group, where the male students led the services and read from the Torah. In adulthood, both Ruth and Hannah believe that women should be permitted to take an active role in prayer services. While Ruth seeks out opportunities to personally participate in these roles, Hannah is happy to pray quietly to herself – while supporting her friends who choose to take on a more public role.

Devorah attended a single-gender elementary school, middle school, and high school. She was only taught about the parts of a prayer service that are said by women in mainstream Orthodox synagogues – so the Torah-reading service remained a mystery to her. As an adult, Devorah sometimes wishes that she was taught more about what goes on in the "men's section" of a synagogue.

4.1 Introduction and Chapter Goals/Structure

Similarity of background does not necessarily lead to similarity of beliefs, and similarity in beliefs does not necessarily engender similarity in action. All of my research participants attended Jewish day school in elementary school, middle school, and high school. They all currently live in Toronto, and all initially self-identified as being Modern Orthodox Jewish women - although some wanted to amend this identity once we began speaking. While having

many similarities, each of their experiences and attitudes related to prayer are as unique as the individuals expressing them are. It was a privilege to have had the opportunity to learn from my research participants. Each person's memories and perspectives offer a great deal of depth and meaning, and I am grateful for the trust that they placed in me when they shared their stories. I invite the reader to follow on an in-depth journey into my participants' experiences, values, and opinions that inform their practices.

The goal of this chapter is to present the findings stemming from my time in the field with my participants in such a way as to honour the veracity of my participants' views, stories and narratives. This chapter paves the way for my analysis of these findings and the subsequent discussion of emergent themes in relation to the current literature, my theoretical lenses, and the implications thereof. The information in this chapter reflects the findings from my data collection efforts and is structured in relation to the study's research questions. As such, the structure of this chapter will be as follows: it will begin with a brief overview of participant demographics, which includes an overview of each participant's schooling and self-identification. It will state the research questions, and will then progress to the findings, which have been clustered in relation to the research questions and categorized to assist in a clear presentation of the study's findings. The chapter concludes with a summary, linking to the next chapter.

4.2 Demographics, Schooling and Self-Identification

I interviewed 9 Jewish women who live in Toronto and identified (at the time of recruitment) as Modern Orthodox. They all celebrated becoming Bat Mitzvah at age 12, and none of them read from the Torah at their Bat Mitzvah celebration. They were all over the age of 18 at the time of interviewing. Aside from ensuring that these inclusion criteria were present, I did not ask my participants additional questions about themselves (race, sexual orientation, etc.).

Instead, I asked each participant if there were any additional aspects of their identity that they would like to disclose, so as to give them the opportunity to express their identities in a non-prescriptivist way.

Each interview was conducted individually, using Zoom ©. Each participant was also given the option to participate in a follow-up focus group, wherein they would meet with other participants and discuss commonalities of experience and viewpoints related to prayer and identity. Three of the women agreed to participate in a focus group, which was also conducted on Zoom ©. The remaining six women expressed that they would like to participate in the focus group, but were not able to attend due to scheduling conflicts or other obligations.

School-based Prayer Experiences and Instruction

Since my research is about girlhood prayer experiences in Jewish day schools, it was important to learn about the nature of the prayer experiences that my participants had. The following table provides information regarding the types of Jewish day schools in which my participants received prayer instruction. It will note whether classes were mixed-gender or single gender, and whether prayer was conducted in a mixed-gender or single gender group. This is significant to my research, as it demonstrates that opportunities for girls' leadership in Modern Orthodox Jewish in-school prayers are only available to elementary school students (when everyone is under the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah), or in a female-only prayer group. In a mixed-gender prayer group in middle school or high school (when the students are already considered "adults" according to Jewish law) the prayers are led exclusively by boys. Please note that each of the names is, of course, a pseudonym.

Table 1

Participant Experiences of Prayer in School

	Elementary school	Middle school	High school
Sarah	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender communal prayers – led by students of any gender	Single-gender classes for Judaic studies classes only Mixed-gender prayer, separated by a partition Prayers were led by the boys	Single-gender classes Single-gender prayers - led by a female student
Claire	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender communal prayers – led by students of any gender	Single-gender classes Mixed-gender prayer, separated by a partition Prayers were led by the boys	Single-gender classes Single-gender prayers - led by a female student
Ruth	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender communal prayers – led by students of any gender	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender prayer, separated by a partition. Prayers were led by the boys	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender prayer, separated by a partition. Prayers were led by the boys
Devorah	Single-gender classes Single-gender communal prayers - led by a female student	Single-gender classes Single-gender prayers - led by a female student	Single-gender classes Single-gender prayers - led by a female student
Sarit	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender communal prayers – led by students of any gender	Single-gender classes Mixed-gender prayer, separated by a partition Prayers were led by the boys	Single-gender classes Single-gender prayers - led by a female student
Shoshana	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender communal prayers – led by students of any gender	Single-gender classes Mixed-gender prayer, separated by a partition Prayers were led by the boys	Single-gender classes Single-gender prayers - led by a female student
Hannah	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender communal prayers – led by students of any gender	Single-gender classes Mixed-gender prayer, separated by a partition Prayers were led by the boys	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender prayer, separated by a partition. Prayers were led by the boys

Judith	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender communal prayers – led by students of any gender	Single-gender classes Mixed-gender prayer, separated by a partition. Prayers were led by the boys	Single-gender classes Single-gender prayers - led by a female student
Naomi	Mixed-gender classes Mixed-gender communal prayers – led by students of any gender	Single-gender classes Mixed-gender prayer, separated by a partition. Prayers were led by the boys	Single-gender classes Single-gender prayers - led by a female student

Devorah attended an elementary school and middle school that was entirely single-gender. Ruth attended an elementary school and middle school that was entirely mixed-gender. All of the other participants attended an elementary school that was mixed-gender, and a middle school that had single-gender classes, although with boys and girls in the same building. Sarah, who had single-gender classes in middle school, noted that at her school, the gender segregation was only for Judaic Studies classes; for secular studies (math, science, English, history, etc.), the classes remained mixed-gender.

Hannah and Ruth both attended a mixed-gender high school. All of the other participants attended a single-gender high school. Claire, Sarit, Judith, Shoshana, Sarah, and Naomi attended a single-gender high school that was affiliated with a counterpart boys' high school. The boys' school was on a different campus, but the boys' and girls' schools shared some faculty members, some after-school clubs, and had a joint graduation ceremony. Devorah attended a single-gender high school that did not have a counterpart boys' school.

Modern Orthodox Identities

Identifying as Modern Orthodox was one of the inclusion criteria of this study. Upon signing up to participate, each participant initially self-identified as Modern Orthodox. However, when discussing demographic information at the start of each interview, some participants

expressed that the term "Modern Orthodox" didn't sufficiently encapsulate their religious identity.

Hannah said that she "would most obviously fall into Modern Orthodox" but explained that there is a broad spectrum of identity within each sect of Judaism. Ruth explained that she prefers the term "post-denominational" because she does not like using labels on herself. Including the term "Orthodox" in her religious identity makes her feel as though she is "stuck in a box." Sarit explained that the Modern Orthodox community includes many different systems of Jewish practice – including individuals who do not keep Shabbat or Kashrut in a strictly Orthodox way. She personally does follow strict Orthodox practices in these areas, and she wants that to be clear to others; therefore, she describes herself as "centrist Modern Orthodox" or "right-wing Modern Orthodox." When talking about modern Orthodoxy, Hannah said, "I feel like the defining lines of Jewish sects are... not very good. Also, there's such a spectrum within each division, each sect, in the way that people define themselves."

Claire, Devorah, Naomi, Judith, and Sarah all identified as being Modern Orthodox, with no additional qualifiers to this identity – although Sarah did acknowledge that "there are a lot of flavours of Modern Orthodoxy." Shoshana said she does not think that she identifies as Modern Orthodox anymore. This is because, as she stated, "I find that the label is very situation dependent, and I do not agree with all the values that I grew up with. So because of that, I do not identify with that label anymore." In keeping with the authenticity of my research, I have chosen to nevertheless include Shoshana's perspectives and opinions in this chapter.

Additional Aspects of Identity

When asked if there were any additional aspects of their identities that they would like to bring forward, most participants identified as being Ashkenazi. Being Ashkenazi means that

one's ancestors are from Germany, Poland, Hungary, Russia, or other countries in central/Eastern Europe. One participant, Claire, identified as being part Sephardi. Being Sephardi means that one's ancestors are from Portugal, Spain, Morocco, or other countries in Western Europe/Northern Africa. There are some liturgical differences in Ashkenazi prayer books and Sephardi prayer books, as well as some differences in specific religious observances. Claire also identified as being an intersectional feminist, saying, "I'm a feminist. An intersectional feminist. So that colours how I see the past." Ruth identified as being the descendent of immigrants to Canada and of Holocaust survivors.

4.3 Research Questions

To situate the presentation of the findings in this chapter, below are the questions asked of my participants during the one-to-one interviews and the optional follow-up focus group. Additional prompts to seek clarity were at times included depending on participants' responses to the questions.

Table 2

One-to-One Interview Questions

1. Do you identify as Modern Orthodox?
2. Are there any other aspects of your identity that you would like to bring forward?
3. Can you tell me about your childhood experiences with prayer?
What were girls doing during prayer time?
What opportunities were there for girls to actively participate in prayer?
4. Was school prayer a positive experience?
5. How was prayer different before and after Bat Mitzvah?
6. Do you feel likely to pray now, in adulthood? / How likely to pray do you feel now?

Do you feel that this relates to the way you learned to pray in school in childhood? 7. Do you think that childhood prayer can impact women's roles in the Modern Orthodox community?

Table 3

Focus Group Questions

Setting the Context: "The purpose of this focus group is to talk about pedagogical practices in Jewish day school - the way that Tefillah is taught. All of you have told me about your Tefillah experiences when you were younger. You've told me a little bit about your prayer now - if you feel likely to pray, your attitude towards prayer. Now I want to have a conversation about the way that Tefillah is taught in school, and the way that women have roles in Modern Orthodoxy - it could be communal roles or societal roles." ***Question****:* "Do you see any kind of connection between girlhood prayer experiences, the pedagogies of the teaching, and women's roles? If so, what might they be?"

My research is about the ways in which school prayer in girlhood may impact prayer in adulthood. As such, I have chosen to organize my findings in a way that is representative of this: first, presenting my findings about adulthood prayer; then presenting my findings about my participants' childhood prayer experiences; and finally, circling back and presenting my findings about the connection between adulthood and childhood, and how my participants feel that the two are connected.

4.4 Findings: Prayer Practices of Modern Orthodox Jewish Women in Toronto

The first question that my research seeks to answer is how Modern Orthodox Jewish

women in Toronto engage with prayer in adulthood. While this may seem like a simple question, the reality is much more complex. As people go through life, they collect experiences. They also internalize the messages that are being conveyed by those around them – both explicitly and implicitly. As such, the ways in which Jewish women act and relate to the world in adulthood is often connected to the life experiences that they have had in childhood and youth. In order to engage with the question of how Modern Orthodox women in Toronto pray in adulthood, it is necessary to learn about how my participants learned to pray in childhood, when they were enrolled in Jewish day school. A discussion of the ways in which prayer changed for my participants when they reached the Jewish age of adulthood (age 12 – Bat Mitzvah) is also highly significant. Of course, learning about the prayer practices of Modern Orthodox Jewish women in Toronto was not sufficient; it was important for me to also understand the reasons and the meaning behind their practices. Answering my first research question meant learning about my participants' overall experiences and opinions regarding prayer, and the ways in which childhood prayer experiences can influence Modern Orthodox women's roles within the Jewish community.

Prayer in Adulthood

Each participant was asked if they feel likely to pray now, in adulthood. The purpose of this question was to learn about whether my participants feel an inclination to pray in their daily lives, now that they are no longer in a school environment which builds prayer into the daily routine. After listening to the participants' responses, I then asked whether they felt that their childhood experiences with school prayers influenced their current prayer practices.

Continuity and Routine

Some of my participants, such as Sarah, Judith, and Sarit, engage in consistent prayer in adulthood. Sarah stated "I daven [pray] every day." When asked if she felt that praying every day

is connected to how she learned to pray in school, she said, “the fact that I daven every day? No. I feel that that's just who I have become and who I am.” Sarah made a distinction between childhood prayer and adult prayer: “I don't think that kids really value the opportunity to pray when they’re six and when they’re eight and when they’re ten. I think that as you get older and you study different things, you develop. I think maybe that’s where you need that centering.” Sarah spoke about connecting to music during prayer time as an adult – for example, when certain prayers are sung out loud in synagogue. "I always responded to the musical aspects of davening. Like if I go to shul [synagogue] and I hear a really nice Musaf [part of the Shabbat morning service]. Or I can sing with the davening, or something like that, that pulls me in a little bit more.” School prayer was simply another part of Sarah’s daily routine. “What did you do at school? You take off your boots, you hang up your coat, you put it on the hook, you take your backpack... you know, it was all part of the routine. First you took out your siddur [prayer book], then you took out your notebook."

Judith prays in adulthood, and she said that she feels likely to continue to do so. She said, “I definitely pray. That is something I do, and something I consider myself likely to continue doing.” She credits school prayer for teaching her how to navigate a weekly prayer book, and her mother for teaching her to navigate a Shabbat prayer book. Judith said:

> The skills that I have in terms of navigating a siddur, partially I will definitely credit to my mother because I would sit next to her in shul on Shabbat and she would show me things. But I would also say that part of navigating the daily tefillot [prayers] and knowing where to find them is definitely something that I would say I learned how to do in school, just because that's where I did the weekday Tefillot - them being different.

Judith differentiates prayer skills from prayer inclination. Judith does not believe that the

reason she prays, or the reason that she is likely to continue praying, is because of school prayer, stating, “Navigating [a prayer book], I would say, that's something that I would attribute to day school. But I would not say that the reason I pray or the reason I am likely to continue doing it is because I went to Hebrew day school.” When speaking about her likelihood to pray, Judith said, “I'm not sure if the reason I do is influenced by [school prayer]. It might be because, that's what you do.” Sarit prays in adulthood, and when asked if she thinks that this is connected to how she learned to pray in school, she said, “Yes. I grew up praying Orthodox, and I would feel uncomfortable praying in a manner that was not in an Orthodox manner of praying.

Striving for More

Some participants, such as Naomi, Claire, and Hannah, spoke of feeling that they could be praying more than they currently are. Naomi does not pray every day, but when the opportunity presents itself – for example, if there are prayers preceding an event that Naomi is attending – she participates because, “Why not? It's an opportunity to daven and I'm supposed to be davening. I guess that’s kind of followed me from school.” Naomi did express that there are times when she enjoys participating in prayer, saying, “I do find there are times when I do want to daven or I like to participate in davening.” When asked if this is connected to how she learned to pray in school, she responded, “Only in one way, in the sense that it’s obligatory.” Naomi learned in school that she is supposed to pray on a daily basis, multiple times per day. “Even if I don't practice that, I get that sense, and that stays with me.” Another way that school prayer influenced Naomi’s adulthood prayer is related to the tunes that she learned in childhood. The prayers that have corresponding tunes are the ones that she knows better, and the ones that she feels more comfortable saying now. Naomi said:

The prayers that I feel so comfortable with and that I enjoy saying are the ones from

> grades three, four, and five. There were tunes, there were rhythms. It wasn't like, 'Rush rush mumble under your breath.' And those paragraphs that I only started having to say in grade six and higher, I don't know as well. I don't know them off by heart, they don't flow easily off the tongue.

Claire finds prayer on Shabbat to be "By far, hands down, the easiest time to daven," and says that she enjoys going to synagogue. Claire goes through periods of time during which she engages in daily prayer, and periods of time when she does not engage in daily prayer. She said that would like to pray twice a day, every day. In order to work up to this, Claire set a goal of saying morning prayers every day for a month, without skipping any days. When talking about this goal, Claire said that it's "not a great one, obviously. But definitely a stepping stone to where I want to be." Claire is judging her current prayer habits by the standards that she had when she was younger, saying, "I'll try to work my way back up to two times a day, which is where I was at in high school." However, when Claire was asked whether her inclination to pray now relates to the way she learned to pray in school, Claire said no, with the exception of one instance – an experience that she had in middle school:

> [No, e]xcept this one class I had with Mrs. X in grade seven or eight. Those two years blended together because she taught us for both of them. Where she just went through the Shemoneh Esrei prayer - like through the entire prayer I'm pretty sure. And just translated it to us and explained it to us in a very plain language. When I prayed, and still to this day when I pray, I'm like, 'Ah, yes, this bracha [blessing] is about that and THIS bracha's about that.' And so it's very helpful. It helps me focus when I know what it's about, obviously. So other than that, no.

Hannah does pray in adulthood, saying, "I do feel likely to pray now. But it's not

consistent.” When she does pray, she attributes her fluency to “years of practice” in school. She said:

> I think the fluency within which I do pray when I pick it up or when I have the opportunity, that does come from just years of practice. And it being like second nature. And I do kind of like that, that it's something familiar to me. It's not difficult to get back into.”

Hannah would like to pray more often, and notes that she could make use of the structure that is in place in the community. She said, “I guess I could - I could use the structure that’s kind of in place, which is the minyan [prayer group] in the community. But within my daily life, I don’t have so much of a structure to keep me in… like to have the habit of going to minyan every single day, so I don't have an aversion to praying. It's just, it just doesn't happen as much as I'd like it to.” However, Hannah’s school experiences have taught her that praying as a girl is not always easy: “I have to put in that extra effort just to start. Just to get to page one, you have to put in that extra effort.” In Hannah’s high school, there were times when the partition in the prayer room was arranged in such a way that accessing the women’s section was difficult or impossible.

> I had to squeeze through to get into the women's section. That is not an exaggeration. Or there were times where the women's section was just blocked off. And there were days where I just didn't feel comfortable getting [the male students] to open it up and so I just wouldn't go in.

Hannah notes that in some of these instances, it was because “women didn’t show up very often.” She described an attitude that she felt was present, saying, “So there was this, like, ‘Ah, you know, if they come, we'll make a space for them.’” However, Hannah said that going

up to a group of men who were already praying and asking them to make space for her could be uncomfortable and embarrassing. “If you are more vocal, you might be ruffling feathers. It's kind of uncomfortable to have to go up to a whole group of men, especially if they've already started davening. And you're like, ‘can you make a space for me?’" Individual prayer also had logistics involved that made it prohibitive for Hannah. She would look for a space in school that was not too loud, and in which other students would not be moving around or watching her. She said, “It was a lot harder to find the space to pray both comfortably and authentically as I moved up in my school years... I feel like that has a little bit influenced my relationship with prayer. That is, I have to put in that extra effort just to start.”

Left Out

Shoshana’s experiences with exclusionary practices led her to change the manner in which she prays in adulthood. She said, “It bothers me that every time that I go to a minyan where men have the main role, I just don't feel like I'm needed or wanted. So, I really stopped.” When Shoshana was in high school, she realized that she was bothered by the situation of girls not being allowed to lead the prayers in a mixed group. In adulthood, Shoshana now attends the Toronto Partnership Minyan - a non-mainstream Modern Orthodox prayer group - when she is available to do so. When talking about the Toronto Partnership Minyan, she said, “I really liked the fact that there are women reading from the Torah. Which is something that shouldn't be a big deal. But when you come from a community where it's forbidden, it's like a breath of fresh air.” Shoshana describes it as a community of people “who want to change the status quo.” She explained that this prayer group is different from a mainstream Modern Orthodox prayer group because women read from the Torah and participate in more parts of the service. As a woman, “It makes you feel more represented.”

Parenthood and Prayer

Some participants, such as Devorah and Ruth, find their prayer practices in adulthood are impacted by their children. Devorah answered "not so much" when asked if she is likely to pray in adulthood. She does not feel that this is connected to her school experiences, however; rather, it is due to the fact that Devorah is busy and has young children. When talking about her high school experience, Devorah said, "In [my school] they really… they tried." She remembers that in addition to morning prayers, "There was even a class on teaching Tefillah and its meanings. More for those who couldn't seem to participate so well in regular Tefillah." When asked if anyone could attend, Devorah answered, "I think there were definitely certain girls who were chosen. But probably if you wanted to, you could have asked."

Ruth also has young children, and this has affected her prayer habits in a specific way: Ruth seeks out opportunities to pray in a way that demonstrates to her children that participation is possible for anyone. She explained that during the holiday of Simchat Torah a few years ago, "I just made the comment, 'It's everybody's Torah.' So that [my daughter] would understand that – to make her aware that it's for everybody. The Torah's for everyone." Ruth prefers to attend synagogues where women are permitted to participate in leading services and reading from the Torah. When talking about the synagogue that Ruth attends, she said, "I still very much go to what would be like Orthodox synagogues. I would like to see more participation of girls… And I try to bring my daughter to different minyanim [prayer groups] that would provide Orthodox women with opportunities." She went on to say:

> Prayers is not exactly the way that I like connecting to myself spiritually… I actually find a lot of joy in cooking, because maybe it's just the connection to my ancestors coming through. I think if there were more opportunities to me, like if [Synagogue X] was a little

> bit more family-friendly than what it's currently in right now, sorry to say - I would go. Like if I was still living where I was before, the [downtown] Toronto Partnership Minyan is definitely where I'd be going more or less. Because I want - not just my daughter, but my son to see that women can participate. It's not just the men. I want my daughter to know that she can pray and that she can participate. That she is a welcome member, not just a relegated member.

When Ruth is at home, it is important to her to be able to show her children, "Oh, look, Ima's practicing Megillah. Ima's practicing the Torah. Ima's practicing to lead Hallel [a celebratory prayer]." This outlook also impacted where Ruth chose to send her children to school, saying, “I wish there was a little bit more Jewish Studies for her, yes. But at least she can see that she can communally participate.” In her children’s school, “everybody has a chance to do any of the services,” as opposed to certain prayer roles being ascribed to certain genders. Ruth said:

> I think my experiences in childhood have led me to wanting to make sure that my daughter understands there are opportunities to her, and my son understanding that there are opportunities to women, and if they [women] express the desire to do, so you should give them the space.

Girlhood Prayer Experiences in School

What was prayer like for girls in Jewish day school? For my participants, prayer in elementary school involved all of the students praying together in their classroom. Each student sat at their desk and used a prayer book, and the prayers were led by the teachers – who would sometimes appoint students to help lead the prayers. Praying in elementary school was a positive experience for many participants, due to factors that were largely unconnected to the actual

prayer liturgy. For example, Naomi enjoyed praying in elementary school because the students were encouraged to shout the prayers as loudly as they could. Sarit loved praying in the younger grades as well, because "I liked that my teachers liked me." Sarit recalls a system of positive reinforcement that involved getting stickers and having your name written on the "good board" for participation. In retrospect, Sarit questions, "Did I love davening, or did I just love the positive reinforcement that came with davening?"

In middle school, participants who attended a mixed-gender school no longer prayed in their classrooms; instead, they joined a "middle school minyan [prayer group]" where boys and girls prayed separately, with a partition in the middle of the room separating the boys and the girls. Ruth said:

> By the time I got to middle school and kids were becoming Bar and Bat Mitzvah, that was when I would say the gender roles became a little bit more apparent because [my school] followed an Orthodox teaching. So the boys had more of a leadership role in terms of Tefilla in the following years. They would lead the services. Or if there was a Torah reading, they would read from the Torah and stuff like that. And I just remember, the girls side was notoriously chatty.

The participants found that there was overall less communal singing and less positive reinforcement in middle school. Naomi summarized the prayer expectations that changed for girls as they got older: "First, you were supposed to sing really loudly. And then it was participate and not talk. And then it was just not talk." Naomi spoke about the prayer roles for the middle school girls:

> Naomi: Our davening in grade six, seven, and eight wasn't necessarily important. The boys were doing the davening. But it was important that we didn't talk and that we stood

> up when we're supposed to stand up and sat down when we were supposed to sit down. I guess that's like my childhood in school.
>
> AM: When you say the boys were "doing" the davening, what does that mean?
>
> Naomi: They had to put on Tefillin [phylacteries]. They were reading services. Their voices were just louder, so it was more important for them to say Amen and stuff. Opening the ark, closing the ark. And then rabbis walking around making sure that they were doing it right, I guess. On the women's side we didn't have, I would say, any role at all, except to not talk during davening."

Naomi remembers getting a "vague sense" of what was happening on the other side of the partition, because it was "translucent and dark." Shoshana also said that there was a partition in her middle school prayer group, but that she could see over the partition. "I was tall, so yes. I think most people can [see over it], yes."

Hannah spoke about middle school prayer and the partition, and about the girls who were too short to see over the partition, saying, "We kind of just had to guess what was going on. Part of the fun was, you would hear who was doing Torah reading and we'd guess who that was based off their voice. 'So, is it this guy or this guy?' And there was one guy who had a very distinct voice. And you're like, 'Oh, it's that guy reading.' For us, that was like a little bit part of the game." In describing this "game," Hannah explained:

> We kind of had to just guess what was happening. It would have been nice to actually see a little bit what was happening. But at the same time, I'm somebody who kind of likes to feel like - I don't like to feel seen when I'm praying. I know that for other people, they don't like the mechitza [partition] and the division. But I kind of like it because it sort of minimizes how much I feel watched by other people in this moment where I'm just trying

> to connect to G-d or connect to myself. I like to be within the community, like, alongside the community, but I don't like to feel watched. So I kind of like that sense that the mechitza was a wall and I could just be next to the wall and do my own thing, but alongside the rest of the community. But at the same time, it would have been nice to actually see what was going on.

Ruth said that the partition in her middle school and high school "wasn't even translucent. It was like a darker colour, is what I remember. It was like one of those moveable ones. But yeah, you were able to see over it. Or through it."

When asked whether school prayer had been a positive experience before or after Bat Mitzvah, Devorah answered, "It was probably in some ways nicer before. More emphasis on singing and that. Probably after Bat Mitzvah it was more like, 'Okay, we say things to ourselves more.'" In the older grades, Naomi felt that prayer became "you have to do it." Prayer became less positive for her in grades 4 and 5 because "you have to do it every day, and it's longer, and there's not a learning component to it. Then it already started becoming more of a chore that I didn't want to do." She enjoyed prayer time in middle school more than in elementary school because the gender-separation gave her more opportunities to socialize with her friends. Naomi explained:

> You were sitting among your girlfriends. And it was like, could you sneak in a quick conversation without your teacher seeing? Because it doesn't really matter if you're actually davening. It just matters if you stand up at the right time and sit down at the right time and don't get caught talking. So it was still annoying to have to be there and sit in a chair and listen to the same thing or say the same thing every single day. But it was almost a bit of a more social experience.

When Shoshana started middle school and began praying communally with all of the middle school students, she noticed that the girls prayed more quietly than the boys. This caused her to pray more quietly as well. She commented:

> One thing I didn't notice when I was in grade six is that… I didn't understand why the girls were more quiet than the boys. And there was no reason. But I just remember thinking that because, before then, they were equally as loud, the girls and boys. But then I remember in grade six, the girls were very quiet and I thought there was a reason for that. So I just also became very quiet. And I never knew why.

Participants who attended a single-gender high school were provided with opportunities to lead prayers. When presented with the opportunity to lead the prayers in high school, Claire used to volunteer frequently. She found that she was able to focus more when she was praying on behalf of others. Other participants did not enjoy leading the prayers. Sarit described the idea of having prayer leaders in high school as "stupid," and said, "That was actually hell on earth, being the chazzanit [prayer leader]." Sarit said that the students felt, "We don't need to do this. This isn't adding to anyone's davening." On the topic of having a female prayer leader in a single-gender high school, she added:

> "The institution of having a chazzanit , while I think it's important, if no one cares enough to have it and institute it properly, it's just not it - if there's no institutional memory of it being important, it's just going to disintegrate. So when you get there in grade nine and being chazzanit is stupid, and also you can't have davening without a chazzanit. And we'd sit there for like 15 minutes waiting for one person to raise their hand to be chazzanit. And it's like, 'Please, will anybody be chazzanit?'"

Sarit felt that having a female prayer leader felt forced on the girls by the school, as she

recalls that no one wanted to volunteer to lead the prayers, yet they were not allowed to begin praying until someone had volunteered. “No one wants to do it. So why are you making us do it?” Devorah also questioned why girls were leading the prayers in her high school, stating, “We’d all daven in the gym. And there I do remember we’d have girls leading. I don’t remember exactly what that would entail. It’s a good question. We could all certainly daven on our own.” In Ruth’s high school, prayer was optional. “There was the optional ‘minyan bus,’ as it was called. I did not want to get up at 7 in the morning to catch that bus. No thank you.” Ruth remembers a female friend who attended the high school prayer service every day, saying, “She went every day for four years. And it was really only her on the women's side.”

Claire explained that middle school prayer caused the students to adopt the same type of gendered roles that adults have in a synagogue. She said, “They [the boys] did the minyan stuff. And so, then we [the girls] kind of took, we did like what women's roles in Orthodoxy, in Orthodox shuls are relegated to in them for the most part, which is just kind of like witnessing, and kind of participating on a more bystander approach.” In Shoshana’s perspective, gender separation during school prayer time was something that the girls actually looked forward to. She said, “I think that they feel like they actually want to have that separation because it makes them feel like adults. And [feel] older.” Shoshana went on to say, “When you're a kid you want to be like the adults. You want to do what everyone else is doing. So I think that… when I was in middle school, I didn't feel any different about myself or what I was doing. You want to be like everyone else… and then in high school, that changed for me.” Ruth described the feeling as, "Oh, we're growing up. And I feel like a big kid." Like Shoshana, Ruth also began to feel differently about prayer in high school. She said, “I would say grade 10 was more of a turning point with me in terms of realizing where I've wanted to be in terms of my Judaism and how to

observe it, because I really was not a fan of the fact that women were so relegated."

Impact of Teachers

When discussing childhood prayers, the centrality of teacher involvement emerged as a consistent category within which to present the findings. Teachers' actions impacted school prayer in a significant way. Whether teachers encouraged prayer through positive reinforcement, deterred misbehavior through negative reinforcement, or were staunch advocates of girls' participation – this was noticed and remembered by women long after they had left the Jewish day school system.

Teaching Prayers

In addition to enforcing a prayer routine, teachers were also the ones who taught the prayers. They introduced the prayers at a young age, often with catchy tunes. They help the students become familiar with the prayers and navigate their prayer books. Devorah said, "I just remember a teacher kind of coaching, 'Okay, this is where you stand, this is where you sit. These parts we sing and this part you say to yourself.'"

The amount of prayers taught increased with each school year, with teachers of the younger elementary grades leading their students in only the main parts of the prayers, and teachers in the older elementary grades leading their students in a larger quantity of prayers. Naomi said, "Grade three, you learned to daven like the bare essentials. And then four or five is like a little bit more. And then grade six all of a sudden, it's like so much. Shacharit [the morning prayers] just like tripled in size." By middle school, the students were saying all of the prayers that are traditionally included in the morning prayer liturgy. Judith spoke about the way students in her school learned the prayers:

There were certain things we started out saying. Sort of the basics. The simple things for

> kids. And then as time went on, we would add more and more things. And then we eventually got to a point where we would join a prayer group with more grades all together, not just our class. Then we would say the whole thing.

Impressing one's teacher was a common desire among my participants. Naomi explained that she did not enjoy praying for its own sake in elementary school; rather, she was focused on impressing her teacher. Sarit describes the role of the teacher as "head prayer master." They led the prayers, and they were in charge. Sarit said:

> It's very complicated for kids, because you're telling them, 'You're doing this for G-d.' But also you're doing it for your teacher. Your teacher is like the liaison for G-d. And then it puts the teacher in a weird position from the kids' point of view.

Positive Reinforcement

A significant finding of my participants' elementary school prayer experiences was the positive reinforcement that they received from their teachers when they participated in prayer. Writing students' names on the board, sometimes with a star drawn next to it, and distributing stickers were common methods that the participants' elementary school teachers used to motivate students to pray loudly and enthusiastically – and these methods were highly effective. Sarit remembers flipping the prayer book pages for her classmates who weren't following along, in the hopes of winning a spot on the "good" board. Claire remembers the positive attention that she used to get from her teachers and classmates when she led the class in prayer in elementary school. This made her enjoy being the prayer leader. The alternate prayer class in Devorah's high school had a unique form of positive reinforcement - the students in this class got to go on a ski trip "to connect with the beauty of G-d."

Promoting Girls' Participation

When my participants spoke about having opportunities to actively participate in prayer during their childhood, these instances were accompanied by reminiscences of the teachers who created the conditions necessary for girls' participation. Some teachers created opportunities for the girls to celebrate certain Jewish holidays with dancing. Hannah said, "You're very involved, and we were encouraged to dance." Shoshana remembers being allowed to lead a certain prayer for other girls in her class after she turned Bat Mitvah age. Finding a space for girls to pray on their own wasn't easy in a co-ed school. Sarit remembers that one of her teachers used to occasionally kick the middle school boys out of the prayer room, and send them to pray in the library - thus securing the prayer room for the exclusive use of the middle school girls. With the boys gone, the teacher would then appoint two of the oldest girls to lead the prayers, and would even choose a girl to open up the Torah ark. Claire remembers a middle school teacher who noticed that the girls were less engaged with the prayers, because they didn't have an active role in the services:

> She was always shushing us, like, 'No, no – focus.' She literally went out of her way to say things like, 'Your davening matters too. You better be focused.' And I appreciate what she was trying to do. Because she knew. As soon as there was no kind of global accountability, because we're [not] all saying things out loud, and women have nothing to do afterwards. You're going to have that inevitably.

Judith remembers that some girls in middle school had trouble focusing on their prayers in middle school, due to the increased length of the prayer service. One of her teachers used to speak with those girls and advise them regarding which prayers were the most important ones to say, and which ones they could skip if they weren't able to say all of them or if they didn't feel

connected to some of the prayers. Hannah said that one of her teachers let girls over the age of Bat Mitzvah participate in a certain prayer. “So when I just turned Bat Mitzvah I was able to do it so that was a big deal for me.”

Overseeing

In order to ensure that the students were praying, there were always teachers assigned to oversee the prayers. The study participants recalled many examples of being watched by their teachers. At the elementary school level, Sarit remembers that teachers watched the students to see if they deserved to have their names written on the “good” board, or if they should be written on the “bad” board instead. Teachers would circulate around the room, making sure that the students were on the right page of their prayer books and that they were following along in the right spot. In middle school, many participants remember that there were teachers present in their middle school prayer group – female teachers on the girls’ side and male teachers on the boys’ side. When talking about teachers overseeing prayers, Sarit remembers that in her middle school prayer group, there were several male teachers overseeing the boys, and one female teacher overseeing the girls. She said, “No one could keep those boys in order. But Mrs. X ran a tight ship.”

Participant Views on Prayer

When asked whether school prayer had been a positive experience, Sarah and Judith challenged the premise of my question. They explained that prayer in school was neither a positive experience nor a negative experience; it was simply a part of the school day routine. Sarah explained, “Honestly, Tefillah was just part of the regular routine as a little kid... we sat at our desks, we pulled out our siddurim [prayer books]. And that was how we started our day.” Judith explained that she does not view her school prayer experience as being positive or

negative, stating, “I would just describe it as, ‘Yeah, that was something we did’... the way I grew up, in my community, that's what you did.”

Claire felt connected to certain prayers, but not to all of them. She was also skeptical of the concept of praying “for” something, saying, “I don’t know if this helps.” Rather, Claire considered prayer to be “more as a self-reflection and therefore kind of meditative experience.” Sarit enjoyed prayer before Bat Mitzvah age, saying, “Yeah, I loved davening. I also liked davening in high school and middle school also. It was just very different. Like each state presented itself very differently to me.” When asked to explain how the prayer was different, Sarit said, “I think with different teachers, different peers. And also as I matured, different ideas of who G-d was – is.”

Naomi spoke about elementary school prayer, and the gender-separation in middle school. She said, “If it started off so egalitarian, and it doesn't matter if you're a boy or if you identify as a boy or girl - how it just matters that you're participating in prayer. I think that that's a great message to send to youth.” The following is an excerpt from our conversation about this:

> AM: That's kind of what my research is getting at - what happens in between, and how do people feel about that? How it starts off one way for Modern Orthodox people, and then it kind of flips immediately at Bat Mitzvah, and it's a different way.
>
> Naomi: But it wasn’t surprising; it was almost like we knew it was inevitable. When I would visit my dad in shul in the men's section, I was only going to be welcome there until Bat Mitzvah, and I always knew that. And then when my friends started turning Bat Mitzvah and they weren't able to come to the men's section, that was just the way it was.

Judith also did not feel surprised at the gender separation during prayer time at Bat Mitzvah age. She spoke further about the differences between school and synagogue:

> Men and women would sit separately in shul, little kids would run in between [the sections] or run around. So at a certain point, people are like, 'Oh, oh, but you're getting too old to go to the men's section.' Like, you can't do that anymore. And so it sort of happened around the same time, I guess. Because whether it's a Bat Mitzvah thing and then that's when you're supposed to sit separately, or whether it's like, you're noticeably not a little kid anymore, you're like a full child - you know, you can't go running around, you have to have some level of decorum - whether it was one or the other, or a mixture of both is possible... there was never a moment where I said, 'Oh, this is weird.' Because I kind of just saw it as like a school versus shul thing. And then I said, 'This is now happening in both places.'

When asked if school prayer before Bat Mitzvah age was a positive experience, Claire said that it wasn't:

> For me in particular, no. Just because there was a lot of confusion around my identity when I was younger. They [the teachers] didn't really ask, but they were like, 'People are Sephardi or Ashkenazi, so they pray differently.' Even though they give us all Ashkenazi siddurim. And so for a while, I just assumed I was Ashkenazi. And then I was like, 'Oh my G-d. I'm not Ashkenazi, I'm Sephardi.' But then the Sephardi kids were like, 'You're not Sephardi enough.' And Ashkenazi kids were like, 'That's kind of weird.'

Re-learning how to pray was challenging, and it still sometimes impacts the fluency of her prayers in adulthood:

> To this day, I actually can't [say the Grace after Meals prayer] out loud anymore, because I learned Ashkenazi when I was younger, but then I converted to Sephardi… so I can't say either of them out loud, otherwise I'll mix them up.

Circling Back: Connecting Adulthood and Childhood

All of the participants were asked whether they feel that school prayer impacts women's prayers in adulthood. Sarah said that she wasn't sure that the question could be answered upfront, and she turned the question back to me. Her suggestion, "I think that's... something that you'd have to reflect on," was an important reminder that the burden of analysis does not rest on the study's participants. Shoshana felt that some individuals want to pray in a more egalitarian way in adulthood (which could afford them more leadership roles among members of their community), while others simply do not want to pray that way. She did not feel that childhood prayer impacts this mindset.

Prayer and Women's Roles

All of the participants were asked whether childhood prayer experiences can have an impact on women's roles within Toronto's Modern Orthodox community. Women's roles in the community feel disconnected from prayer for Claire, because of the lack of opportunities that are presented to women as adults. "When you're younger, you're given all these opportunities to pray. And when you're older they're just like, 'Stand nicely on this side of the room, thanks.'" She also remembers being told in middle school, "It makes sense that women aren't obligated in timely prayer because we have motherhood things to do. That doesn't make us inferior." Judith finds a connection between childhood prayer and women's roles. She feels that when there is a lack of female leadership in a space, this causes women to assume that it is not possible to take on a leadership role in that space. Judith spoke about conversations that she has had with women in her community:

> Maybe this is a generational thing. Like maybe my generation is questioning things more and changing things, which, you know, would be good. Like, depending on what the

> changes [are]. But I think, what I've seen in some of the older women who have gone through similar education, is they'll complain about - not necessarily complain, but they'll mention something, like, 'What if this was different?' And then someone will say something about it like, 'Oh, sure, let's go talk to someone about it.' They'll be like, 'No, no. It's fine. It's okay. Don't worry about it.' Or they'll say, 'We should do this.' And I'll be like, 'Great, you do it!' And they'll say, 'No, *I* don't want to do this, we can get somebody else to do it.' And the reason I'm saying that I see that connection is that, it's in the way of, there's a lack of female leadership in this space, then they'll kind of assume, if women don't have a place to learn how to lead in that space. They grow up, or we grow up, kind of saying, 'Oh, it's not on us. That's for somebody else. Somebody else takes care of that.' And so you can comment on it, you can say you want something different, but at the end of the day, it's not you who changes it, it's somebody else… They're more than capable – you're talking about 30- or 40-year-old women who are no longer 12 and in a day school – they could easily take charge. But some of them are uncomfortable with it. Because for whatever the reason might be, but I think there is also an aspect of it that is like, they didn't have that space to learn how to do that. To have those opportunities to lead. So they just say no, because it's not something they ever, like, got the experience [of]."

Judith brought an example of women in the Modern Orthodox community who were discussing the possibility of holding a holiday celebration at which women would dance with the Torah. She noted, "It is often controversial in the Orthodox community or Modern Orthodox community as to whether or not the women should hold the Torah." When the women were faced with the realization that the event would only happen if they took on a leadership role –

learning how to hold and put down the Torah according to Jewish law - they backed down. "Nobody else wanted to do that. Because everyone was like, 'No, I'm afraid it's too much, I can't,' or whatever." Judith used this situation as an example of her point:

> "That's just another space to show that if women were shown earlier on that they can, and they're perfectly able, and they're perfectly capable of learning how and being able to do all the things that men do so often, I think it would probably happen more often."

Judith, Claire, Sarit, Hannah, and Ruth connected leadership roles in the community to leadership roles in the synagogue. Judith spoke about women she knows who think they could never take on the role of prayer leader because they can't sing. "Yeah... but I've heard a chazzan [male prayer leader] that's worse than you, and he sang in front of like 50 or 100 people - you're fine." Claire spoke about how, in elementary school, both boys and girls would sing out loud together. In middle school, the girls – and the boys who were not leading the prayers - were more reserved and more likely to pray silently. This is because "When you're not an active participant in the ritualistic parts of it, you're disrupting if you're so loud." However, she noted, "Men nowadays have no shame. Like when they're older. You hear the most out-of-tune men just contributing their voices."

While Judith and Claire focused on the singing aspect of synagogue roles, Hannah spoke about another form of leadership in synagogue – giving a speech to the community. Hannah has attended a Modern Orthodox synagogue in Toronto that does not have a divider down the middle of the room to separate men and women; rather, the men sit on the first floor and the women sit upstairs in the balcony. She described it as follows:

> Even if it was like, 'Yeah, sure, a woman could come down and speak to the community,' it would be so much more difficult, because they would have to go down a floor. That

> kind of stuff, it definitely shows women sort of being less... I don't know if less involved is the right word, but having less leadership opportunities. And along with that kind of comes this sense of, a little bit like - it sounds harsh, but like, 'Know your place.' Like, 'Here is a space for you. Do what you can within the space for you.' But there are certain spaces that it's kind of taboo for you to be in, to take a leadership role in, and to be a participant in. And so, I don't know if that so much affects the way that I function outside of the Jewish community. But there is definitely a sense within the Jewish community, when I'm present within the Jewish community of kind of knowing my place, and knowing if I do sort of step out of that place that it's something I'm aware of. It's a calculated decision about whether I'm going to make waves or not, or potentially be making other people uncomfortable by doing something that might be out of the ordinary. Because in order to be a leader or be a certain kind of participant, I'd have to take that extra step. And it ruffles feathers."

Ruth spoke about another leadership role in the synagogue: being a youth leader. She recalls an experience that she had as a youth leader in high school. The male youth director required the female youth leaders to follow a dress code such that their sleeves reached their elbows. This standard of dress was actually more stringent than what the adult women wore when they attended this synagogue – they wore capped sleeves in the summertime – and Ruth felt upset because she was being forced to dress in a way that wasn't "her."

Sarit spoke about a female middle school teacher who she believed was more knowledgeable than the male teachers. However, due to being female, this teacher was not able to be the main leader of the middle school prayer service. Looking back, Sarit wonders if this was a difficult position for the teacher to be in, and said, "Maybe she wants to be an inspiration

for the girls to move on, and do greater things within the prayers. She wants them to come to pray and be taken seriously."

Prayer, Gender Roles and Pedagogies

An important goal of this research is to explore, through the participant's reflections, a possible connection between prayer, pedagogy, and identity, and this was a key discussion point within the focus group in which Sarah, Judith, and Claire participated. They shared stories about sexism and what the participants themselves identified as double-standards in the Modern Orthodox community. Claire shared about a conversation with a rabbi who told her that women are so competent and capable that they *shouldn't* be part of a prayer quorum – because it would cause the men to stop being involved:

> "He said, 'It's always been that way. In any area of education, aside from engineering maybe, women far surpassed the men that are there.' Like there are more women getting educated and they're doing better than the men. He goes, 'And I actually think it kind of supports my idea of why women can't be part of minyan.' And I was like, 'Mhm.' And he goes, 'Women are so much more capable and competent at doing things that if women were involved in minyan they would just do much better than the men and eventually take it over and kick them out. Not like actively kick them out. But just kick them out. Like the men would just stop being involved.' And I was like, 'Hmmm.' Took me so by surprise."

Claire described this as "toxic masculinity, I think at its finest," and continued with the following conversation:

> Claire: Why is this the biggest case of apologetics I've probably ever heard? So I have to take a sideline in my religion, because men can't step up their game? They're not

confident in their ability to step up?

AM: Men need women to be less than in order for them to be willing -

Claire: Yeah. I was like, 'What a f****** cold take.' I was like, 'That's horrible. That's actually a really horrible thing for you to say.'

Claire clarified that this is what she was thinking. "I didn't say it to him, because I was just so taken aback." Later on in conversation, Claire said, "Patriarchy is still really alive and thriving in Modern Orthodox communities, in case you were wondering. Just in like different forms. In some parts of the community in the original pure form. But in ours, just like in this weird one."

Sarah, Claire, and Judith spoke about how men often enter the women's section of a synagogue during prayer time – to get a book from a bookshelf, or simply to take a shortcut and exit through a second door – even though it would never be acceptable for women to walk into a men's prayer space. Judith explained, "In the Halachic sphere, there's the idea of a man can't daven where a woman is, but a woman can daven where a man is." She went on to say, "Halachically it [men coming into the women section] is a double standard. And it's interesting that nobody has picked up on it just from a common courtesy aspect, having nothing to do - or, not much to do with the Halacha aspect - but just the courtesy of, 'I don't come into where you daven, so why are you coming into where I daven?'"

Two focus group participants had attended the same women's prayer service in a Toronto synagogue, and spoke about it in the focus group:

Sarah: Some guy walked in to get something out of the bookshelf.

Judith: Yes, this man walked in… and he needed to get things from the bookshelf at the back of the room. And he walked in the door at the front of the room and went to get the

things in the back of the room - walked straight through everyone. Not to mention that these were things he could have found in a completely different room. And also being that we were all singing and everything, there were people that were uncomfortable continuing with him in the room. So it was quite disruptive and I just - we were very upset at the time and I can't imagine what would have happened if we had decided that we needed something from the room that HE was davening in, and had walked through his Tefillah to go get things from the bookshelves.

Claire: Correct me if I'm wrong, because when I remember you telling this story - not only did he do that. He came in, kind of like signaled for everyone to stop –

Judith: Yes, I did forget the part. He walked into the room, kind of made some sort of hand motion that I took as him saying, 'Can you pause for a moment?' I don't know if he meant it in some other way, but that's how I took it… and it was just a lot of like, would this ever happen if the roles were reversed? Like, if the roles were reversed, would anyone even - like, would the thought even come across their mind to do something like that? Because I know personally, I would have said, 'Oh, people are davening in this room. The bookshelf is on the other side of the room. I won't be able to get to it, I'll go find it somewhere else.'

In some Toronto synagogues, it is not accepted practice for women to enter the men's section of the synagogue even *after* the prayer service has already ended. Women are thus prevented from speaking from the pulpit. Sarah recalled a time when a prominent female speaker came to Toronto, and she was asked to speak at a certain synagogue: "We all had to actually pick up and decamp from the sanctuary to [a different room]." Through this conversation, it came out that Judith had been in attendance at this event as well.

Judith: I remember this.

Sarah: Because they couldn't have a woman addressing the shul from the pulpit on Shabbat.

Claire: Which I think carries its own kind of implications and nuances and ideas of where a woman belongs and 'Can she be in a holy place speaking?' This is my thought that comes along with that. The fact that 'We can't have a woman speaking in the shul.'

Not being permitted to enter the men's section also prevents women from taking leadership roles on certain synagogues' boards. In one Toronto synagogue, as Judith explained, certain board members' roles are to sit next to the rabbi during prayers, and make announcements at the conclusion of prayers. "So you can only reach a leadership on the board up to a certain point as well." Connecting this to prayer and Bat Mitzvah, Sarah brought up the fact that Bat Mitzvah girls at a Toronto synagogue are not allowed to address the congregation from the pulpit. "Because there was a whole issue about, well, what would happen, they would have to walk through the men's section in order to get there, and it wasn't modest for the girls to be walking through the men's section."

After hearing these stories, I asked, "Do you think that this shul would let a man come into the women's section when shul was over?" Sarah spoke about a Toronto synagogue that has a health and safety committee with both male and female members. "Whoever is the most qualified or the closest or the nearest or whatever should be the one going in and helping. And yet it was always set up like the men could come into the women's [section] but the women could not come into the men's." She then brought up a time when she tried to join a volunteer paramedic association, but the only thing she was allowed to do was "work the phones." Sarah said:

> They feel that it's somehow okay for a man to walk into a woman's home - you know, a male paramedic - to walk into a woman's home and that's totally fine. And yet for a woman to walk into a man's home, it's not fine. And similarly, a woman might feel more comfortable seeing another woman than seeing a man. But even though THAT's the case, they still won't allow women to do it, which I don't understand. I'm a little bit far afield from prayer - but you asked about men going into the women's place as opposed to women going into the men's place.

I ended the focus group by asking the participants whether a line can be drawn between girls' prayer in school and women's roles in the community. Sarah answered, "I don't know whether you can really draw a line from how Tefillah is being taught to all of this. I think that, you know, traditions run deep. For a very long time, there were just certain things that women didn't do. And I don't think that necessarily the way people are taught to daven is the reason for all of these kinds of things… I don't know. I just don't know that you can join those dots." Claire added, "I don't necessarily think that it directly causes something. But do I think that this is one of the first initial phases where young women are told, 'You know what? You're not - *ad kan* [a Hebrew phrase that Claire later translated as "until a point"]? It is. It is the earliest - one of the earliest times. Because think about it. Up until that point you're not Bat Mitzvah'd. You have the same obligations as anybody under Bar Mitzvah."

> Sarah: Sure, little girls - little girls in kindergarten are chazzanit, and little girls in grade one are chazzanit.
>
> Claire: WITH a chazzan.
>
> Sarah: There's usually a chazzan and a chazzanit together.
>
> Claire: Which I think is actually a very important emphasis because there is that parity.

Sarah: Yeah.

Claire: You have chazzaniot in high school, but that's because there are no men around.

Sarah: Right. But like I say, I mean, there's always a girl and a boy [leader]. They learn to daven at the same time…. And then all of a sudden - I don't think it happens exactly when people are turning Bat Mitzvah, I think it happens earlier. They start going to minyan [prayer group], like more structured minyan, and then all of a sudden, maybe, I don't know, grade three, grade four. That's where they start going to those structured minyan as opposed to just davening in the classroom. And I think once they're attending a more structured minyan, that's when it starts to be the boys doing more.

Claire: Well, I would actually venture to argue. Because [school X] had a structured minyan, it was quite literally like until grade six, you had a boy leader and a girl leader, and then in grade six, they were like, 'No.'

4.5 Conclusion

This study's research participants were in a unique spot on the religious spectrum in that most had prayer experiences equivalent to boys before reaching Bat Mitzvah age, only to lose those opportunities after Bat Mitzvah age. As a central goal of my thesis, I have done my best to present my participants' voices and perspectives transparently, ahead of my thematic analysis and discussion, which will now be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Analytic Discussion

5.1 Introduction and Chapter Goals/Structure

The topic of prayer and participation has deep meaning for both myself and my research participants. The study's purpose was to gain a greater understanding of the experiences that Modern Orthodox Jewish women in Toronto have had in their formal prayer education during girlhood, and the ways in which these experiences may have impacted their conceptions of themselves as girls and as women, and their attitudes towards prayer in adulthood. An additional purpose of this research was to facilitate conversations with Modern Orthodox Jewish women in Toronto in a way that empowered them, and encouraged them to explore, reflect upon and share their own perspectives and experiences in a climate of affirmation and respect.

A main finding of my research was that opportunities to actively participate in school prayer were more prevalent in elementary school, less prevalent in mixed-gender elementary schools and high schools, and more prevalent in single-gender high schools (though not always appreciated by the students). Another interesting finding was that my participants did not experience cognitive dissonance upon participating in egalitarian prayer in elementary school during the week, and seeing gender-separated prayer in synagogue on the weekend. A finding that surprised me was that each of my participants had originally self-identified as Modern Orthodox; however, over the course of our interviews, some participants expressed that "Modern Orthodox" is not the best term to encapsulate the complexity of their religious identity. These are only some of the salient things that will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.

The goal of this chapter is to both present and discuss the themes and code categories that emerged through a thematic analysis of the data in a way that illuminates some of the answers to the questions that guided this study. I do not have all the answers, and as such will also include emerging questions that beg to be explored. The chapter will make connections to relevant

literature and will boldly propose the influence of larger societal factors at play that may be considered salient when thinking about Modern Orthodox women's prayer experiences now and as girls.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. In the first section, I will discuss my analytic process. I will note how the data led to code categories, which then formed my four themes. I will make connections between each theme and relevant literature, and explain how the themes relate to each other and to my research questions. In the second section, I will engage in a scholarly reflexive discussion, wherein I speak about the implications of my results, and look at my findings through the overarching lens of heteronormativity and prescriptive gender stereotypes.

5.2 Thematic Analysis

My thematic analysis is directly connected to the purpose of my study, and to my research questions. These questions are re-stated below:

1) How do Modern Orthodox women in Toronto engage with prayer in adulthood?
    a. What were their girlhood experiences with school-based prayer?
    b. Did their prayer experiences differ before and after the age of Bat Mitzvah?
    c. What are Modern Orthodox women's experiences and opinions about prayer?
    d. How do childhood prayer experiences influence women's roles in Modern Orthodox Judaism?
    e. What connections can be drawn between prayer and the conceptions that Modern Orthodox Jewish women may have of themselves - as women, and as women within the context of their Jewish community?

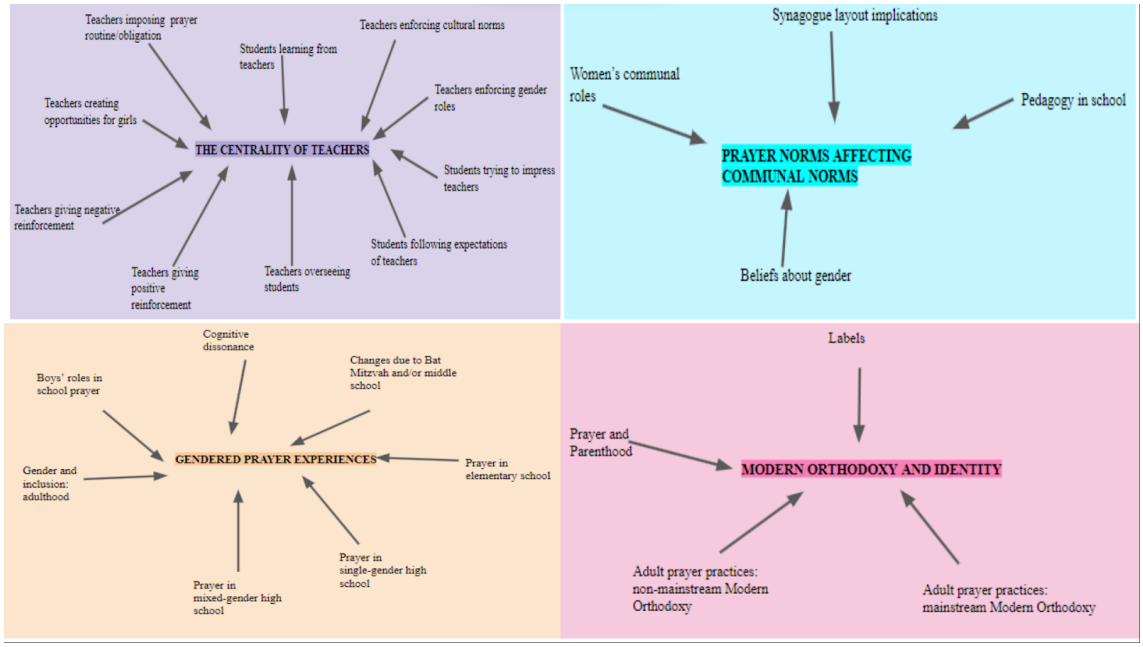
2) In what ways does prayer relate to gender roles and related pedagogical practices within Jewish day schools within the larger Jewish communities in Toronto and beyond?

Analytic Process

Transparently representing my participants' responses was central to my approach to data analysis. I engaged in Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, arriving at codes, code categories, and themes. Infused into my thematic analysis was attention to rigour, including self-reflexivity. Each of my themes was generated directly from the data, and will be used as a lens through which to view the data. My thematic analysis led to four main themes: The significance of teachers, prayer norms affecting communal norms, gendered prayer experiences, and Modern Orthodoxy and Identity. The following code map shows the ways in which my code categories evolved into four separate, yet connected, themes. For the purposes of further transparency and rigour, a more detailed map with individual codes can be found in Appendix C.

Figure 4

Code Categories Leading to Themes

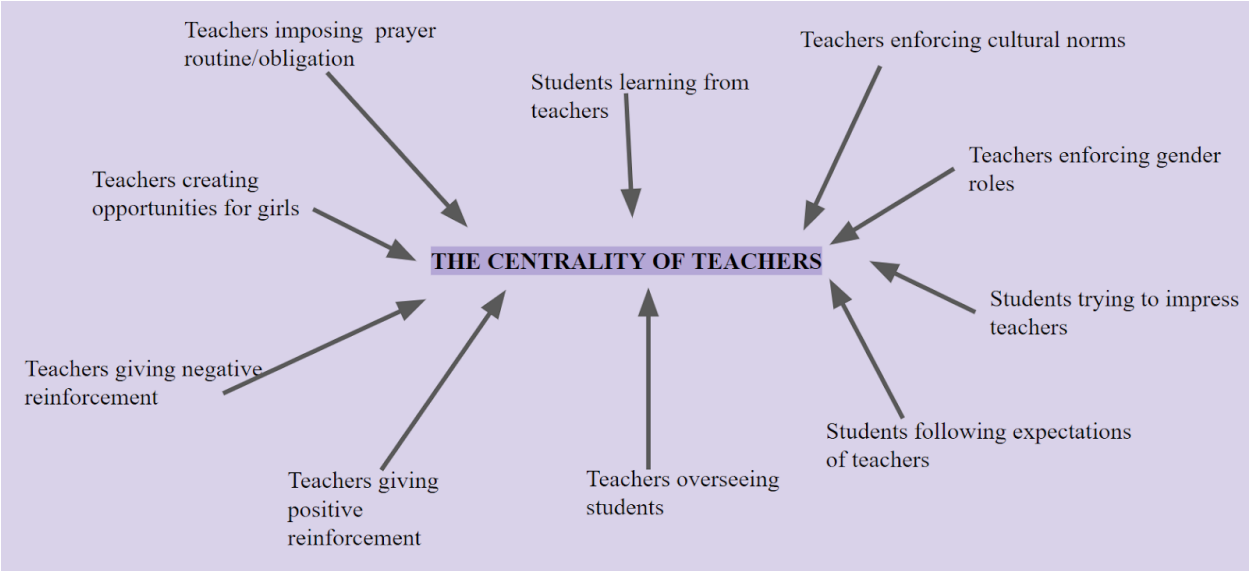


I will now discuss each section of the code map individually.

The Centrality of Teachers

Figure 5

Code categories associated with "The Centrality of Teachers"



When my participants shared their childhood experiences with school prayer, much of their memories centered around their teachers. The impact that teachers have on students' prayer experiences is far-reaching. Teachers' actions affect students' attitudes towards prayer at the time, as well as many years later. Because elementary school prayer takes place in the classroom, girls learn to pray at a young age from their classroom teachers. The participants expressed that their teachers decided which prayers were appropriate for them to learn at each age. The process begins with elementary school teachers teaching about prayer, and implementing prayer as part of the classroom routine. Students try to impress their teachers in order to meet their expectations, and receive positive reinforcement when they succeed. In middle school, the style of prayer changes to a format wherein the prayer leader prays out loud, and everyone else follows along quietly. The girls, who will not get a turn to be the prayer leader, simply must be

quiet and non-disruptive. Some participants expressed the sentiment that a lack of opportunities to participate led them to feel a decrease in motivation.

Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman discuss the “panoptical gaze” (Rosenfeld Gorsetman and Maryles Sztokman, 2013, p. 219) in the context of school prayer. Individuals in institutional settings are kept under control through surveillance. In a similar way, students’ behaviour during prayer is regulated by the supervising teacher. As study participant Sarit described, the teachers overseeing her school’s middle school prayer group had mixed success with controlling behaviour. The girls’ side of the partition had a female supervisor who ensured that the girls were behaving well. The boys, however, “would run around, and they were pacing, and they could not regulate themselves.” Sarit attributes this difference to the fact that the male teachers on the boys’ side of the partition were not “scary” enough.

> “I don't think it could even be brought down to ‘oh, girls are more chill than the boys, they're more mature’. No, we were like 11. If someone's not scary to 11-year-old girls, they'll go mental. And I think it's the same for boys. If you're scary with 10-year old, 11-year old boys, they'll listen to you.”

When the motivation to pray comes from a teacher rather than from one’s internal beliefs, this affects students’ prayer. Students will not be as motivated to pray in a situation where teachers are no longer providing external validation or consequences. As discussed by my participants, students continue to be closely supervised during prayer time in school as they get older; however, the positive reinforcement does not continue. The problem arises when the students transition from elementary school to middle school, and suddenly the focus for girls is on simply not talking, rather than on being fully engaged in prayer. As Naomi said about being told not to talk in her middle school prayer group, “I can do that without being engaged”.

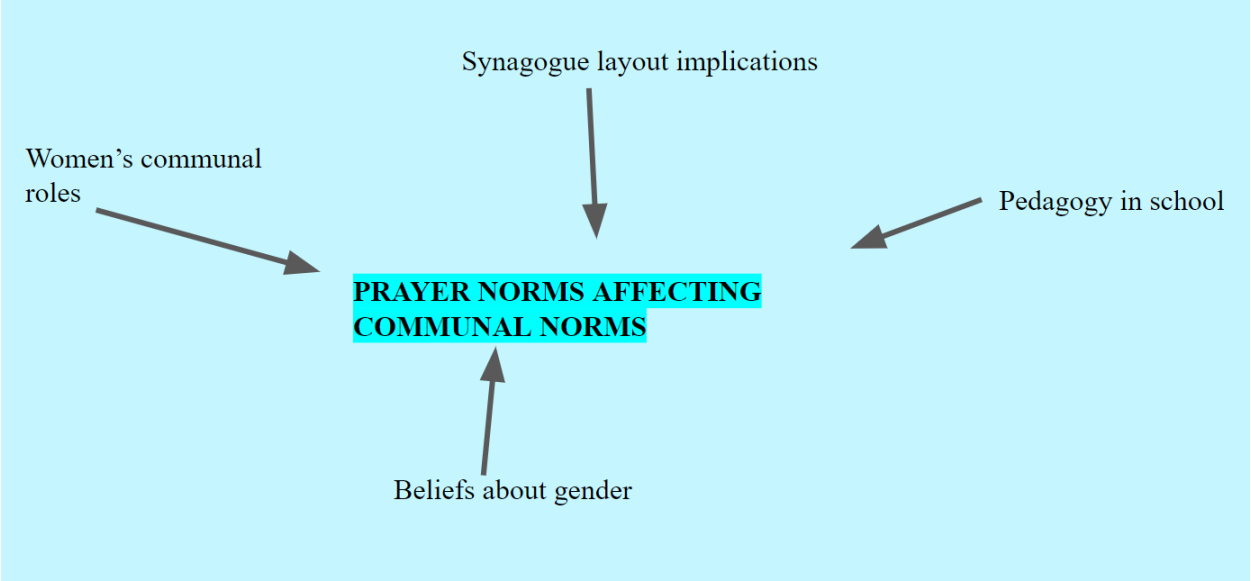
Bruckman (1999) explains the ways in which educators err in trying to make learning fun. As an example, Bruckman discusses the game "Math Blaster." Students answer repetitive math question, and each correct answer gives the player a bullet. When the player has amassed a certain number of bullets, they get a "break" to play a shooting game (Bruckman, 1999). The intention of this game is to present math to students in a fun way, but Bruckman explains that this does not actually happen. Instead, the students learn that "learning is unpleasant, but we're going to sugar-coat it. Math stinks, but there are cool space ships on the screen for decoration, and if you're done you can do something more fun; shoot things" (Bruckan, 1999, p. 75). Giving positive reinforcement for prayer can lead to a similar mindset. Students may desire the positive reinforcement, but may not actually want to pray.

The implications of "students trying to impress their teachers" and "students following the expectations of teachers" is that the students' prayers become teacher-focused, rather than spiritual or reflexive. The code categories of "teachers overseeing students", "teachers giving positive reinforcement", and "teachers giving negative reinforcement" are all offshoots of this; if the students truly found prayer to be meaningful, their behaviour would likely not need as much oversight. The category of "teachers creating opportunities for girls" can be viewed either in conjunction with, or in contrast with, the category of "teachers imposing prayer routine /obligation." Depending on a teacher's pedagogical practice, the students may be influenced to view prayer as just another part of the classroom routine, or they can be inspired to view prayer as a means of connection. Unquestionable, teachers are central to this process.

Prayer Norms Affecting Communal Norms

Figure 6

Code categories associated with "Prayer Norms Affecting Communal Norms"



The category of "women's communal roles" encapsulated the presence of this idea as articulated repeatedly by my participants. Girls and women have both spoken and unspoken roles within Modern Orthodox communities. These roles are expected. Knowledgeable women and Bat Mitzvah girls being permitted – or not permitted – to speak in front of a synagogue congregation affects the nature of that congregation. This relates strongly to the layout of synagogues, as the layout and communal gender norms are intertwined. This interdependence is meaningful as it contributes to and reinforces a cycle of gendered exclusion, and is reflected in what one of my participants said about trying to join a prayer group and finding that there was no designated women's section. She was told by the males afterwards that if they had known she was coming, they would have made room for her. Synagogue layout often takes into account the idea that only men will need access to certain parts of the room, and that only men will be performing certain actions and rituals. This sets the tone for how women must act in these spaces, and the women's consequent actions then serve to further justify the layout of the space. In this way, "beliefs about gender" underpin both "women's communal roles" and "synagogue layout implications."

The code category of "pedagogy in school" is vitally significant as school is the location in which girls encounter prayer the most. Praying in school for five days a week, ten months of the year vastly outstrips even girls who pray in synagogue every single Shabbat. There is immense possibility here – for reinforcement of gender roles, for innovation and creativity, and for celebrating the contributions of all students. For this reason, the theme of "prayer norms affecting communal roles" relates so strongly to the theme of "centrality of teachers".

There are situations wherein women in mainstream Modern Orthodox communities are expected to follow the same structure that they would be following during prayer time, in situations where they are not praying. This can include active participation in synagogue events. When girls enter middle school, they are treated as if they are Bat Mitzvah during prayer time, whether or not they have already turned twelve. They learn that they can participate in prayer only to a certain extent, and no further. In high school, girls can lead a girls-only prayer group in single-gender schools. If the girls' school attends a mixed-gender prayer group or a synagogue for a special event, the boys "horn in on" the prayers, as one participant stated, and lead the prayers in their stead. In mixed-gender schools the prayers are led by the boys, and the girls may not be able to find a place to pray if the partition is not set up with enough space on the girls' side. These categories connect to each other because the layout of synagogues, influenced by beliefs about gender, also serve to influence beliefs about gender. This then affects women's communal roles - or lack thereof. Some participants believed that if girls were taught to be leaders, they would be more likely to take on leadership roles in adulthood. Others did not note a connection between these two things, instead saying that less opportunities to participate in childhood could lead to more egalitarian modes of prayer in adulthood.

Women are declining to take on leadership roles in all-female prayer environments, despite the fact that this is accepted within mainstream Modern Orthodoxy. This is because they do not feel confident taking on leadership roles. Even for women who do wish to take on leadership roles in adulthood, there are barriers in place in synagogue settings. Beliefs about gender and modesty underpin this; for example, the idea that it is not modest for women to enter a men's prayer space, or for men to hear women singing. If women are not permitted to enter the men's section during prayer due to modesty concerns, many synagogues also do not permit them to enter the men's section when prayers have ended. This prevents women from giving speeches or making communal announcements. Girls in some synagogues are prevented from giving a speech to mark their Bat Mitzvah, because they cannot speak from the pulpit as a man could. There are also barriers in place in non-synagogue settings, such as in a volunteer paramedic organization. Modern Orthodox women can attend medical school and work in the medical profession while still being accepted as part of the mainstream Modern Orthodox community. They cannot join a religious paramedic organization due to modesty concerns. This is an example of the contradictory nature of Toronto's Modern Orthodox community. As soon as religion is brought in, women are treated differently.

Plaskow and Ross (2007) speak about women's roles and gender beliefs, in the context of pedagogy. They observed the "unusually high proportion of Orthodox women teaching and studying" at the Israeli university Bar Ilan (Plaskow and Ross, 2007, p. 220). These women were aware of radical feminist theory, had active careers outside of the home, and were engaged with matters of women's equality. Despite this, many of them "cover their hair, wear skirts rather than pants, attend synagogues with separate men's and women's sections, and recite traditional prayers suffused with male-centered God imagery" (Plaskow and Ross, 2007, p. 220). They

wonder if "outward compliance with basic sexual distinctions will afford Jewish women greater liberty to pursue the expansion of roles on the level of gender" (Plaskow and Ross, 2007, p. 220). Another suggestion could be that they have internalized the gender roles taught to them, and they simply do not believe them to be entirely negative.

> Due to the more complex nature of her commitments and loyalties, she will not be inclined to view the traditional conception of gender as a totally negative affair. Many aspects of her womanhood are cherished elements of her self-identity and communal attachments, or serve as signifiers of other values that she has internalized. For her, the sanctification of differences between men and women in Jewish tradition is corroborated by her sense that such differences bear true benefits despite the risks (Plaskow and Ross, 2007, p. 221)

Based on this, it would seem as though appearance plays a large role in the way that women are perceived. As Prentice and Carranza note, "women who are strong and sensible, competent and effective should receive very favorable reactions, so long as they remain caring, modest, and well-groomed" (Prentice and Carranza, 2002, p. 280). This means that the former qualities are viewed as unexpected in women, but women who portray these qualities will be given leeway if the latter qualities are present. In a similar vein, one of my participants was required to change her style of dressing to one that was deemed more modest, in order to continue working as a youth leader in her synagogue. Her contribution and leadership could not be recognized until she looked the way a female "should" in a mainstream Modern Orthodox institution.

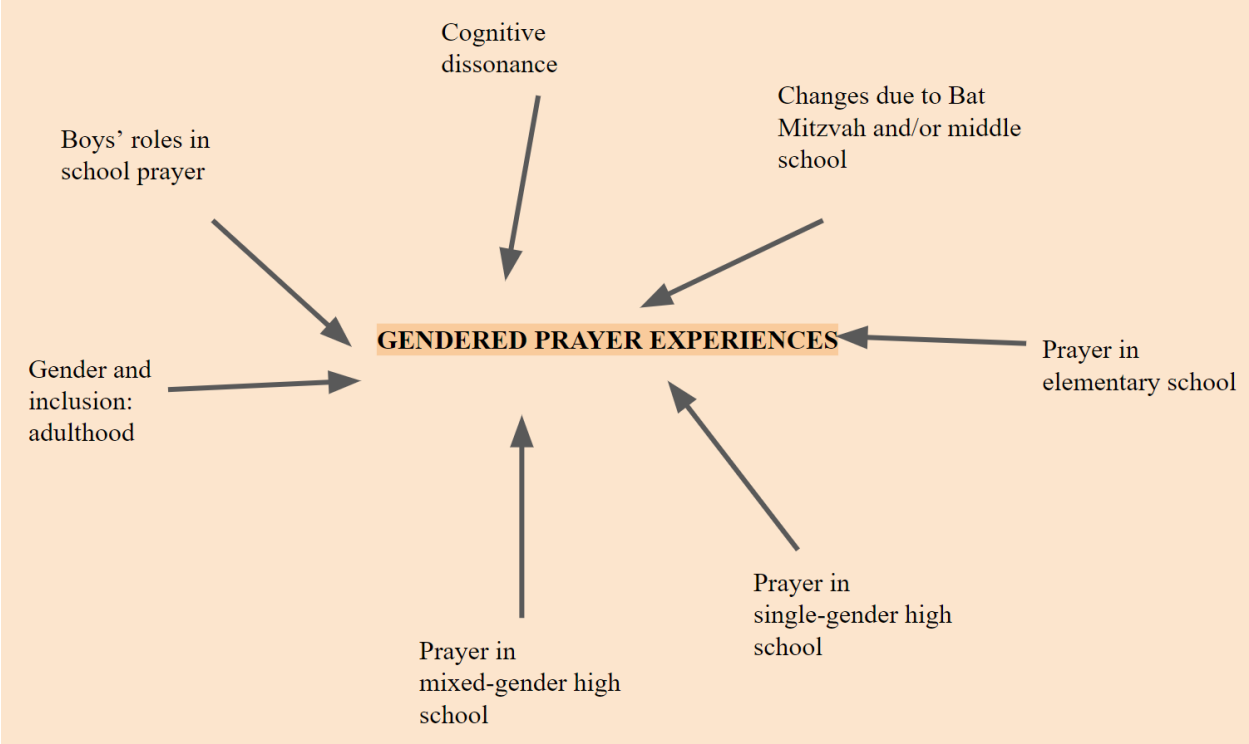
Pomson and Schnoor (2008) discuss the connection between school and synagogue for families who send their children to Jewish day school. They identify three sociological functions

that synagogues have historically performed: acting as a "site for social fellowship", an "educational institution", and a "place of religious worship" (Pomson and Schnoor, 2008, p. 90). They then discuss the ways in which a Jewish day school in Toronto exhibits these three functions for members of its school community. When speaking about social fellowship, for example, one parent said that the school was a place wherein she did not feel judged. This was in sharp contrast to the synagogue that she used to attend, where her lesbian union with her partner had not been recognized (Pomson and Schnoor, 2008). The desirability of school norms becoming synagogue or communal norms serve as an interesting foil to my apprehension in the phenomenon of prayer norms becoming communal norms, to the detriment of women's participation opportunities in other aspects of ritual life. The Greek word "synagogue" means "place of assembly", while the Yiddish word for synagogue - "shul" - actually means "school" (Pomson and Schnoor, 2008). That Jewish communities gather in synagogues and apply what is done during prayer time to other aspects of their lives should, therefore, not be a surprise. Prayer roles relate to gender roles, and the pedagogical practices of Jewish institutions can uphold and strengthen these roles, or complicate them. Pomson and Schnoor's research demonstrates a way in which pedagogy, practice, and prayer can become linked, while my research fits into this landscape and helps to broaden the discussion.

Gendered Prayer Experiences

Figure 7

Code categories associated with "Gendered Prayer Experiences"



Prayer in mainstream Modern Orthodoxy is different for men and women: both it and the experiences are gendered. An important code category that emerged was cognitive dissonance, more so because of the response of the participants. I asked my participants if they experienced cognitive dissonance when going back and forth between school and shul, and the answer was that they did not question it. They recognized that school was "practice" and synagogue was "real life", and that when they would get older, they too would pray the way they do in synagogues all the time. Each time that I asked a participant whether she or her female classmates were upset at not being allowed to lead prayers anymore after elementary school, they responded by saying that they were not upset at the time, or that they had always expected this and known that it was going to happen. In adulthood, however, or in some cases in high school, some participants either became upset by women's lack of roles in prayer, or they simply noted that things could be different, without criticizing or expressing that they would like to pray in a

different way. This is the advantage to the unique type of research that I am doing: the ability to get two different perspectives because of the retrospective nature of my research.

Borts (2021) speaks about presence and voice. “A person can *be* there and still be silenced” (Borts, 2021, p. 106). She speaks about the idea of “Kol Isha”. Mentioned by a couple of my participants, this is the idea that it is immodest for a man to hear a woman singing. A rabbi who lived in the late 18th and early 19th century ruled that a Viennese synagogue should not have a mixed-gender choir, so that men would not hear women singing (Borts, 2021). Borts states that

> The main point isn’t the voice - it’s that it is lodged in a female body and thus, for men, a perilous body. The physical female, her spoken word, her singing voice - layer upon layer of danger for men. And therefore, the rabbis have, over the centuries, debated the topic of women and their voice, whether spoken or sung, and have found ways to keep women out of the study and praying centres of Jewish life. (Borts, 2021, p. 108)

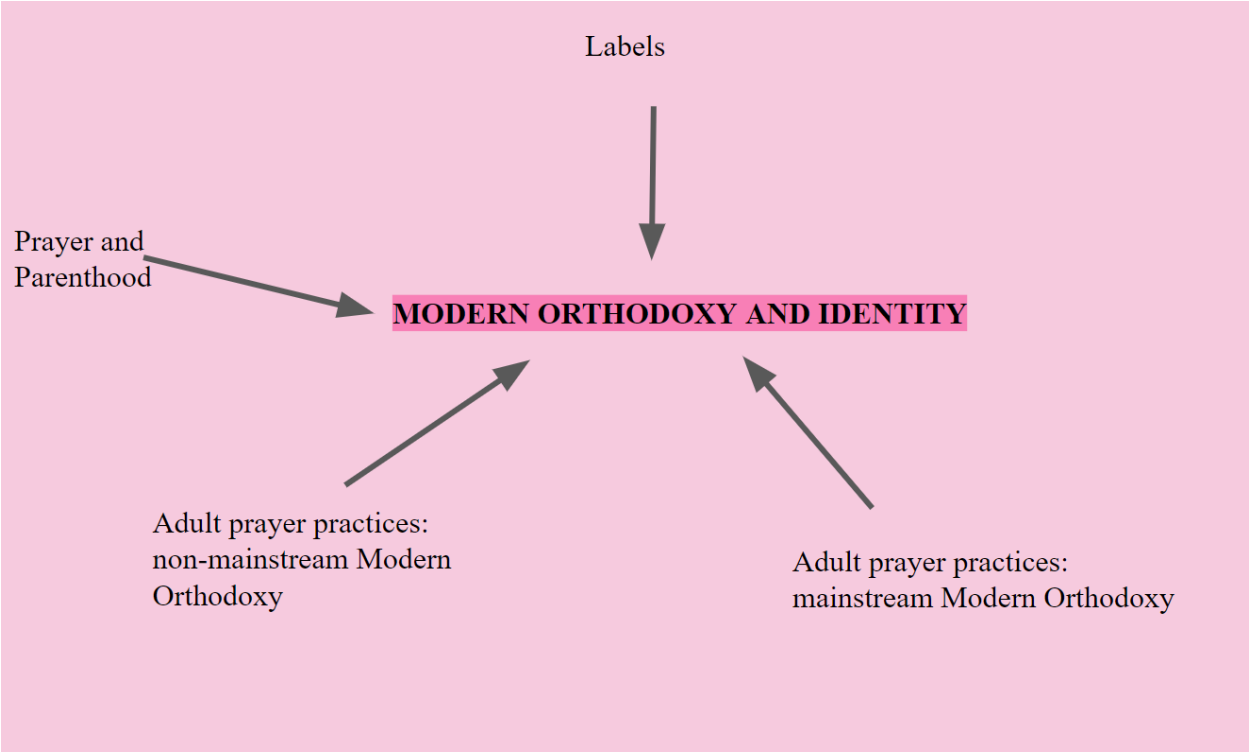
Women’s voices are “begrudged” and “unwelcome” (Borts, 2021, p. 108) in the secular world as well, due to documented biases that people have against individuals with higher-pitched voices (Borts, 2021). Gendered exclusion in adulthood tempers women’s expectations of inclusion in adulthood. It seems as though my participants’ expectations for active engagement were already quite low, based on their lack of cognitive dissonance in childhood. They were well aware of the structure of adult women’s prayer, and were not surprised when they reached the age at which they began to participate. In fact, many participants looked forward to the moment when they would pray in the “women’s section” of a synagogue, because that meant that they were growing up. Their models of Jewish femininity were other Jewish women in their families and communities, and they wanted to emulate them.

Voice and volume also came up quite often in discussions with my participants. Praying out loud as a group in elementary school, and being encouraged to sing loudly or even shout the prayers was a memory that many of my participants shared. Being required to sit quietly in middle school was a stark contrast, and another memory that my participants spoke of. One participant noted specifically that she became quieter in middle school during prayer time, because her classmates were all quieter. As some participants expressed, everyone in a mixed-gender middle school prayer group needed to be quiet so as not to interrupt the services – except for the prayer leader. The difference between the boys' and the girls' experiences, however, was that the girls' turn would never arrive to be the prayer leader. In this way, the code category of "gender and inclusion" is connected to the category of "boys' role in school prayer", "changes due to Bat Mitzvah and/or middle school, and "prayer in elementary school." The structure of the students' high school impacts whether girls can lead the prayers or not; they may do so in single-gender schools, but not in mixed-gender schools. In this way, the categories of "prayer in single-gender high school" and "prayer in mixed-gender high school" are connected to the category of "gender and inclusion." All of these structures are predicated on the idea that the prayer of adult males must be led by an adult male. The interplay between all of these categories come together to form the theme "gendered prayer experiences"; a description that expresses something significant that is occurring in Toronto's mainstream Modern Orthodox community. There are larger implications of girls and women learning to be quiet as these gender role expectations are widespread and pervasive in society, and are not limited to Jewish prayer. In this way voice and gender norms continue to be connected, and both societally and communally reinforced. This illuminates my research question of girlhood experiences with school-based prayer, and the ways in which school experiences differed before and after that age of Bat

Mitzvah. School-based prayer became more like synagogue prayer, in that it was more individualistic for everyone. Some participants who enjoyed the communal aspect of school prayer were able to continue to find feelings of community through praying in a shared space with others. Other participants needed outward expressions of community, such as singing out loud together, in order to feel part of a community; for these participants, the change in school-based prayer format would have been more difficult.

Modern Orthodoxy and Identity

Figure 8. Code categories associated with "Modern Orthodoxy and Identity"



Modern Orthodoxy is difficult to define. It is telling that there are no Jewish day schools in Toronto that refer to themselves as "Modern Orthodox" in their mission statement, even though there are several schools that could conceivably fall under this category. That many of my participants identify as Modern Orthodox for the sake of simplicity, while expressing a different, more preferred label when asked, is emblematic of the complexity of this religious identity.

When discussing Modern Orthodoxy, Fishman (1995), speaks about the contradictions between religious traditions and modern changes. “A traditional religion involves continuity; by its very nature it discourages change. A ‘modern Orthodox’ stream of Judaism, then, suggests an inner tension, if not an outright contradiction, within the social group that embodies this stream, namely, modern Orthodox Jewry.” (Fishman, 1995, p. 89).

Some of my participants choose to pray in ways that would seem to fall in line with mainstream Modern Orthodox modes of prayer, and others choose to pray in ways that are not mainstream Modern Orthodox modes of prayer. The difference lies in the opportunities for women to participate in certain aspects of the prayer services. Women reading from the Torah or leading parts of the prayers is not considered traditional, especially in a mixed-gender group. Both participants who described themselves as Modern Orthodox and participants who qualified this identity with other labels reported attending non-mainstream prayer groups in adulthood. Both participants who described themselves as Modern Orthodox and participants who qualified this identity with other labels *also* reported attending mainstream prayer groups. There were various reasons for this, such as the accessibility and location of the non-mainstream prayer groups. Parenthood was an additional factor that could influence the decision to attend a certain kind of prayer group; depending on the values that the parent wants to instill in the child, the parent may attend a certain kind of prayer group. Prayer in adulthood can also take the form of personal, individual prayer at home. In addition to attending synagogue, some participants also expressed that they pray at home, and that they either pray every day, or feel that they should be praying every day.

This discussion of Modern Orthodoxy is predicated on the premise that streams of Judaism were separate from each other. As can be seen through discussions with my participants

and from a review of the literature, this is not strictly accurate. Streams of Judaism, much like actual streams, flow into each other, and the interaction causes complex ecosystems to develop. There are shades and gradients to identity construction, and the identity of Modern Orthodoxy is no exception. "Labels" and the experience of being labelled emerged in the study. Some participants asserted that they do not want to be labelled, that the label of "Modern Orthodox" does not quite fit them, or that they have a different, preferred label to better express their identity and/or their religious practices. Labels and the process of labelling are significant as they can reinforce rules. At the same time, they allow us to question the nature of what makes a community. Much like conducting research with human subjects, there must be some type of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Related to my research question about my participants' conceptions of their community is the ways in which they choose to interact with the community. The category of "prayer and parenthood" represents women in the community who want their children to experience the community in a different and more inclusive way. It also represents women in the community who cannot attend the type of synagogue that they would prefer, due to barriers such as childcare and child-friendly synagogue spaces. These women are important parts of the community, even in their absence. Whether women use labels to describe themselves, or whether they intentionally eschew labels, can be strongly connected to adult prayer practices. The labels that others use when describing women can also connect to adult prayer practices. This can be the case whether they opt to pray in mainstream or non-mainstream ways. Modern Orthodoxy is an identity within an identity, as it is predicated on the notion of being "Orthodox." This invites reflection. How many, or what type of "non-mainstream" Modern Orthodox practices would a person need to adopt before the title of "Orthodox" was no longer accurate? Who gets to decide? Many would argue that it should be the person themself, but since labels

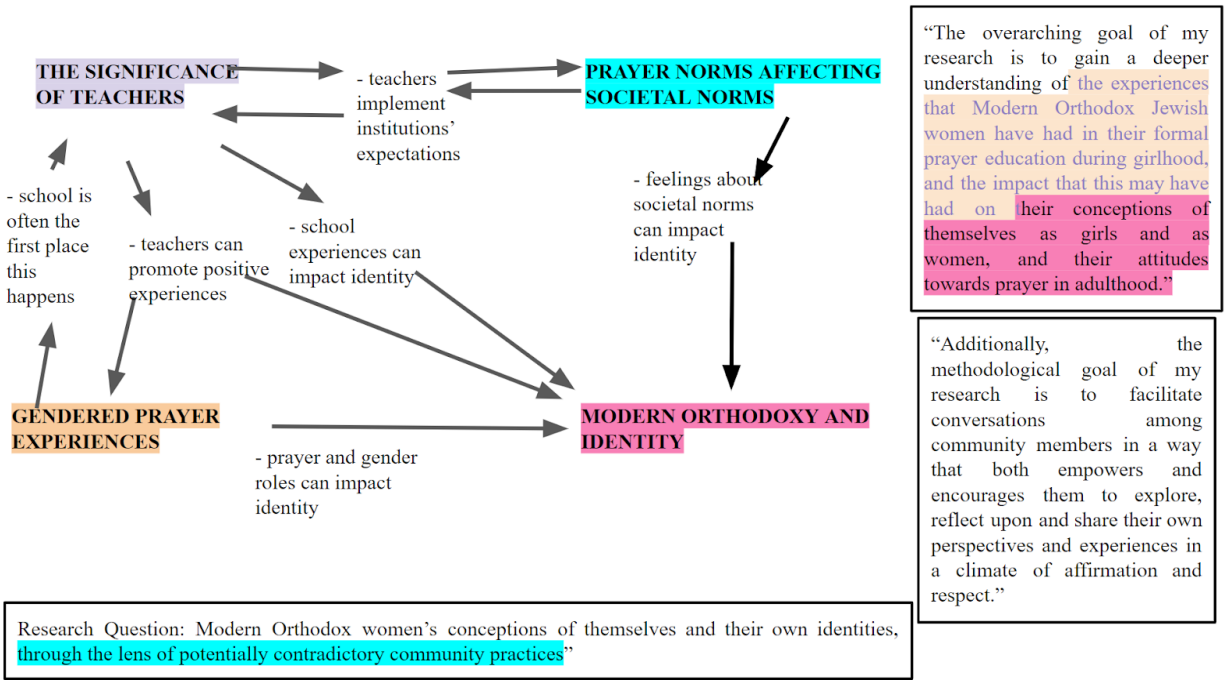
come from one's community and from society the question of whose lens factors most prominently is poignant.

Relationship between Themes, Research Questions, and Research Goals

The following figure demonstrates the relationship between themes, as well as the themes' connection to my research questions and research goals. An explanation follows.

Figure 9.

Relationship between Themes, Research Questions, and Research Goals



For girls in Toronto's mainstream Modern Orthodox community, school is often the first place the gendered prayer experiences occur. In this way, gendered prayer experiences connect to the centrality of teachers. Teachers then promote positive or negative experiences of prayer, which reinforces gender roles. The type of experience that girls have with school prayer can contribute to their self-identification with a Modern Orthodox identity (though this may not always be the case) In this way, childhood experiences contribute to Modern Orthodox identity –

one of the things that I strived to learn more about during this research endeavour. School experiences, prayer, and gender roles can also impact identity when taken all together, aside from one's Modern Orthodox identity. It can influence a girls' opinion of herself, and whether she is someone who is a valued member of her community.

Teachers implement and enforce institutional expectations. As my participants noted, sometimes educators act in different ways when they are representing their institution than they would prefer to act when not representing their institution. Regardless, teacher behaviour can teach girls what is acceptable and unacceptable during prayer time, which can strengthen communal norms. Communal norms, meanwhile, often dictate the practices that teachers must enforce. Girls' feelings about communal norms can impact their identity. This somewhat cyclical process can begin with "the centrality of teachers", "gendered prayer experiences", or "prayer norms affecting communal norms". Either one of these starting points leads to "identity formation", "Modern Orthodoxy and identity" being the apex of this relationship.

Learning about "Modern Orthodoxy and Identity" furthers the goal of learning about women's conceptions of themselves as girls and women, as well as their attitudes towards prayer in adulthood. The theme of "Gendered Prayer Experiences" furthers the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of my participants' prayer experiences, while the theme of "Prayer Norms Affecting Communal Norms" describes the potentially contradictory community practices that may affect my participants' identities and conceptions of themselves. As one of my research goals was to learn about my participants' conceptions of themselves as girls and women. Self-knowledge and self-valuation is such a significant aspect of one's identity.

5.3 Scholarly Reflexive Discussion

In discussing thematic analysis, Byrne (2021) states that "themes should connect in a logical and meaningful manner, building a cogent narrative of the data" (p. 1410) My themes connect to each other in important ways. For example, the norms and standards surrounding prayer are reinforced by teachers in the classroom, and give students the impression that this is something that they can expect in the community. This is confirmed when students do, in fact, see these roles playing out in the community, including in synagogue. The gendered nature of prayer experiences in childhood and adulthood, taken in conjunction with how positive or negative one's childhood prayer experiences were, can affect whether someone will continue to identify as Modern Orthodoxy and claim a space in the mainstream Modern Orthodox community. This provides insight to my research question about how Modern Orthodox women in Toronto conceive of themselves and of their relationship to their community, and to their identity formation.

Sometimes, the things that are taught to girls in the classroom directly impact how they view the world. The following is a real-life example of this, and of the interconnectedness of my themes. I recently found an essay that I had written when I was 13 years old, as the final assignment for my middle school Talmud class. The topic of the assignment was "Should Jewish girls be allowed to learn Torah?" I remembered the annoyance that my classmates and I felt when we were assigned to research this topic. "OBVIOUSLY we're allowed to learn Torah", we complained. "We literally spend half the day learning Torah!"

As girls attending a Jewish day school that we considered Modern Orthodox, we had no exposure to educational environments wherein girls' religious studies were considered lesser than or inferior to boys' religious studies. Yes, our classes were separated by gender in middle

school, but the girls and the boys were required to take the same courses. We had never encountered teachers who taught the boys Talmud, but insisted on teaching the girls something less "academic". The idea that girls should not, or would not be capable of, engaging in religious studies in the same way as boys was ludicrous to us. For myself and many of my classmates, this assignment was our introduction to the fact that religious studies for girls has been fraught with tension throughout Jewish history. I spent time in the school library looking at passages from the Torah, the Talmud, and books of Jewish law. I also interviewed two rabbis who lived in Toronto, and with whom my father learned Talmud on a regular basis. It was my first time encountering the concept that girls lacked the mental capacity to learn religious subjects at the same level as boys. It was also my first time hearing that girls should not learn religious subjects "academically."; some sources that I explored claimed that girls should only learn laws concerning being a Jewish woman and keeping a Jewish home.

The assignment required us to present both sides of the issue, and to cite sources that supported each position. At the end, we had to state which side we agreed with. What resulted from my research was a five-page, handwritten essay, written half in English and half in Hebrew. It vastly oversimplified both the topic and the arguments, and was full of apologetics and internalized misogyny. My decision that women should be allowed to learn Torah was based on an opinion I had read, that "they have to do something to counteract the effects of the outside world" (Markus, personal essay, 2005). I also expressed that "maybe some women don't have adequate minds for Torah, but that is the minority", and "when women learn Torah they gain merit. It may not be as much merit as a man gets but it is merit" (Markus, personal essay, 2005). In trying to equivocate rather than opposing the rabbinic sources that I had been reading, I inadvertently ended up putting down women's intelligence and capabilities. This is also seen in

one of Benor's research findings. The Jewish girls with whom she researched were expected to grow into righteous women, while the boys were expected to become Torah scholars (Benor, 2004). Girls and boys in Toronto's mainstream Modern Orthodox community may receive different types of education, based on their assumed future roles - depending on the schools they attend.

In my focus group, my participants spoke about a school that has different expectations for male and female students. The girls' curriculum is comprised of equal amounts of religious and secular studies, while the boys' curriculum is more focused on religious studies. The underlying cause for this difference is that there is significant value in girls learning Torah, but boys are *required by Jewish law* to do so. To quote myself at age 13, "if men are fulfilled from learning Torah, how much more so would a woman be, learning when they didn't even have to?" (Markus, personal essay, 2005). I put a positive spin on the situation, but I also completely accepted this message. Girls have historically faced barriers to accessing education. This has undoubtedly impacted their ability to engage in religious studies in the same way as boys. Strong justification and apologetics were needed in order for girls' religious education to become mainstream. In Toronto's mainstream Modern Orthodox community, girls may learn any area of religious studies - but the idea that girls are electing to learn, rather than learning out of a sense of requirement, could make a difference in the way that they are taught.

Benor (2004) conducted research on the linguistic differences in the speech patterns of Orthodox girls and boys. Within a controlled conversational environment with students who are either current or former students of a Chabad-run school (what Benor describes as a "branch of Hasidism"), Benor notes the percentage of loan words from Hebrew or Yiddish that are used by girls and boys. 1.9% of the girls' words were loan words. In contrast to this, 4.8% of the boys'

words were loan words (Benor, 2004). This disparity in language usage was affected by communal standards and prescriptive gender roles, as one boy explained to Benor that the difference in boys' and girls' education is that "boys need to learn how to be . . . talmid chachams [masters of Jewish texts]; girls should learn how to be tsedeykeses [righteous women]" (Benor, 2004, p. 147). Benor notes that "both men and women must know and observe the laws, but men must also spend time each day studying the reasoning behind them" (Benor, 2004, p. 147). Prentice and Carranza (2002) conducted research about prescriptive gender stereotypes, and found that the qualities of intelligence and maturity were viewed as less desirable qualities in girls, while the qualities of "happy, helpful, enthusiastic, optimistic, creative, and devoted to a religion" (Prentice and Carranza, 2002, p. 272) were more desirable. These same pervasive prescriptive gender stereotypes find a home in mainstream Modern Orthodox Judaism. This same sentiment arose in my focus group, where participants pointed out the disparities in the amount of Talmud that boys and girls learn in a Jewish high school, and the ways that the differently built schedules account for more emphasis on Judaic studies for boys. This is accepted by the parents who continue to send their children to this school.

One of my research participants informed me that at a certain synagogue in Toronto, women often teach classes on the Tanach [books in the Jewish Bible]. However, they do not teach classes on halacha [Jewish law].

> I don't know if it's an official rule, but I don't think women really give halacha shiur [class]. That's like a thing, that women don't give halacha shiur, women give Tanach shiur…. Yeah, I can't remember a single time a woman gave a halacha shiur. Not to say it's never happened or that it's an official rule, it's just, I don't know if it's ever happened. (Sarit)

When men are the only ones teaching Jewish law, this can lead to the perpetuation of one-sided views. Actions that are non-traditional, but permitted according to Jewish law, will continue to be presented as off-limits to women for the sake of maintaining the status quo. The cycle of justification and apologetics for women's inclusion continues for far longer than it should.

In retrospect, I understand that my middle school Talmud teacher wanted to prepare us for the day when someone would challenge our right to learn religious studies on a high level. We would be familiar with the arguments that they would make, and we would be able to provide counterarguments. In a bittersweet way, it is somewhat beautiful that I did not realize, until that point in my life, that girls and women needed to justify their active involvement in religious life. I simply took it for granted that opportunities were open to me. My own lack of awareness can be reflected in the lack of cognitive dissonance that my participants experienced when discussing the differences between elementary school prayer and synagogue prayer. Many of my participants were not upset when they were no longer allowed to lead the prayers in middle school. Even if they knew that other communities did different things, they also knew that this was the way things were done in their community. As one of my participants stated,

> "when people hear about it when they're young in these communities, and they grew up with traditionally orthodox or modern Orthodox parents, sometimes they think that other ways of doing things are quote, 'wrong ways' - not the way to do it. When it's not necessarily true. It can sometimes take a while for that to process, or be taught, and I think that's unfortunate too." (Judith)

In this way, pedagogical practices influence communal norms; communal norms, in turn, influence pedagogical practices. This is a real-life example of the intersection of my themes, illustrating the interplay between pedagogy, Modern Orthodoxy, gender, and communal norms.

In adulthood, I have been told many times that it is forbidden for me to recite the Havdallah service at the conclusion of Shabbat for myself, and that I must instead find a man to recite it for me. This did not involve me attempting to lead a prayer service in a mixed-gender group; rather, it involved me trying to connect personally to my own religious practices.

Prescriptive Gender Stereotypes and Heteronormativity

While adherence to communal norms and standards factor large in all of my participants' experiences, I would argue that there are wider societal forces impacting active prayer participation for girls and women, such as prescriptive gender stereotypes and heteronormativity. Underlying the aforementioned assumptions about women's participation in religious rituals is the assumption of heteronormativity and "traditional" family structures. This is the assumptive supposition that a woman will go directly from her parents' home to her husband's home. Heteronormativity is a global ideology and is powerfully pervasive. It exists within religion and outside it, and is circulated and reproduced through institutions, families, and structures. Heteronormativity assumes that there are two separate and opposing genders with associated natural roles that match their assigned sex, and "threat reactions to non-heteronormative behaviour reinforces heteronormative beliefs" (van der Toorn et. al, 2020, p. 160). Regarding Jewish girls, it is assumed that they will grow up with a father who conducts certain religious rituals on their behalf, and that they will then get married to men who will conduct these religious rituals on their behalf. Religious practices that some women do not do - for the simple reason that their father or husband is already taking care of it - can come to be seen as things that women are not permitted to do, under any circumstances. Societal and communal expectations of women's participation in Jewish practices do not account for women who live on their own, or women who do not lead heteronormative lifestyles. Judaism is not immune to the

heteronormativity that permeates many aspects of society, which both assumes and expects "that relationships and structures are heterosexual, gender (usually conflated with sex) is binary and complementary, and gender roles fit within narrow bounds including nurturant labor for women" (van Anders et. al, 2022, p. 391). When a man gets called up to say a blessing on the Torah in mainstream Orthodox synagogues, he receives a blessing from the prayer leader in response. He can mention the names of his wife, his children, and even his parents or in-laws in order to include them in the blessing. In this way, women and girls, who are not called up to the Torah themselves, can still receive a blessing. However, this practice simply does not account for family structures wherein both marital partners are sitting on the women's side of the partition.

The connection between feminism and Orthodox Judaism is complicated. Women who wish to remain within their communities must advocate for systemic change in ways that fit into a Halachic framework that already exists. Anything that appears to be too radical runs the risk of seeming un-Orthodox, and might be dismissed out of hand - not only by men, but by women as well. Calling oneself a "feminist" could actually hinder a woman's progress. Harris and Skinazi (2020) portray this tension in their discussion of a documentary about a Hasidic woman in New York who started a female volunteer paramedic organization. Ruchie Freier, a practicing Hasidic Jew and the first Hasidic woman to become a civil court judge in New York, was "the driving force behind the women's emergency medical service" (Harris and Skinazi, 2020, p. 1). Freier explains that the word "feminist" is associated with secularism, and secularism means forsaking Judaism (Harris and Skinazi, 2020). Therefore, the women participating in this organization would not be able to identify as feminists, as that "would be to reject their religion and community" (Harris and Skinazi, 2020, p. 2). This documentary gives insight into Freier's ideas of freedom and agency. She wonders sometimes why G-d made her a woman, when it would

have been so much easier for her to be a man. “If I had been a *Hasidic man* I would have had half the problems I have” (Harris and Skinazi, 2020, p. 15). Freier does not even consider that her life would be easier if she was not Jewish or not Orthodox. She does, however, note that there are advantages to being a man. “Her model of agency is the Hasidic man” (Harris and Skinazi, 2020, p. 15).

I had always learned that men and women had separate roles, but that each was important. When I learned about equity in the first year of my undergraduate classes, it fit right into my worldview. Feminism, however, was something else. After learning more about feminism in my first-year classes, I determined that it was an identity that I wanted to have – but I did not know any Orthodox women who identified in this way. This led me to believe that it was not an acceptable way for an Orthodox woman to identify. It was not until I met other Orthodox women who called themselves feminists that I began to call myself one, as well. The label of “feminist” is so fraught with politics, and I perceived (quite incorrectly) that having that duality of identity might not be possible, no matter how strongly I believed in feminist ideals.

Contributing to, if not reinforcing heteronormativity are prescriptive gender stereotypes - rules and expectations surrounding how males and females behave in the world. The ways that this is seen within mainstream Modern Orthodoxy at once strengthens and complicates this concept. The idea of modesty came up often in my research, and the idea that it would be considered immodest for a woman to lead prayers for men. This would not change if a woman had a deep, stereotypically masculine-sounding voice. Similarly, when boys read from the Torah on the occasion of their Bar Mitzvah, they are 13 years old; many of them sound like girls, as their voices have not yet changed. Men who would avoid hearing a Bat Mitzvah girl give a speech in a synagogue, as discussed by some of my participants, would have no problem

listening to a Bar Mitzvah boy, whose voice may sound completely effeminate. This leads to the conclusion that it is about the child's ascribed potential, rather than their current state. This brings us back to the contradictions of mainstream Modern Orthodoxy. Unlike other sects of Judaism, which promote girls' prayer education that actually does mirror what the girls will encounter in adulthood, mainstream Modern Orthodox educational institutions educate elementary school girls according to what they are able to do at that time, before they become Bat Mitzvah. This also applies to boys, who must refrain from hearing girls' voices leading the prayers after becoming Bar Mitzvah. . This accounts for the drastic change that girls experience at the middle school level with prayers.

I can't count the number of times that I have been told, by both men and women, that women are inherently more spiritual than men - and therefore do not require as many religious strictures to keep us on track as men do. That Orthodox women would accept the idea of "equity, not equality" in the realm of religion is something that I can absolutely believe – and know from personal experience can be true. That Orthodox men can laud women's G-d-given spirituality while denigrating their own religious connection always seemed like somewhat of a false narrative to me. This is reminiscent of a parent who tells their child, "It's spicy, you won't like it", when they don't want to share their ice cream. This is highly relevant to the experience that one of my participants had, when she was engaged in a conversation with a rabbi who expressed that women are so competent, that their participation in a synagogue ritual would intimidate men and cause men to be less involved. This does not end at synagogue participation. It also extends to communal programming, where it was suggested to one participant that it would be useful to have more men speakers than women speakers - because men are less involved. Opting into a religious structure wherein women and men do not engage in all of the same practices is a choice

that many people choose to make. The apologetics, however, are simply poorly-disguised sexism - and can be traced back to a 19th century discourse about religious obligation and spirituality. Seidman notes that the rabbis who compiled and taught the Talmud "did not seem to have worried much about whether their pronouncements [regarding women being less obligated in time-bound commandments] would grate on women's ears" (Seidman, 2019, p. 131). Despite this, "German rabbis who attempted to restate their teachings were raised in a culture in which men were expected to treat women with bourgeoise chivalry" (Seidman, 2019, p. 131). Therefore, instead of focusing on patriarchal structures or family obligations as the reason for differences in religious obligations, Hirsch "recast women's exemption as an acknowledgement of their more refined spirituality" (Seidman, 2019, p. 131).

5.4 Conclusion

I concluded my middle school essay about girls learning Torah by questioning the entire premise of the assignment, asking "how could that be a bad thing?" (Markus, personal essay, 2005). I received a 96%, and a note saying "יישר כחך" - colloquially translated as "good job!" or "well done", but which would more accurately be translated as a statement about moving forward with strength. Interestingly, this was the class that introduced me to the method behind learning Talmud, and the place where I first encountered the significant phrase "Lo Kashya." Literally translated, it means "there is no contradiction." But on a deeper level, it disrupts the entire premise of a contradiction, by demonstrating how two seemingly opposite things can both be true at once, without either side giving in or compromising. Looked at in the context of my research, this phrase represents how identity, practice, and belief can appear to be out of sync with each other, but each one can be authentic. Both can be true. It is the beauty of scholarship also – where we hold things in tension, not falling prey to binaries in thought either. And now,

20 years later, I have had this meaningful opportunity to explore this topic with far more nuance, to intentionally listen to and affirm women's experiences and views, and to close with even more questions.

Chapter 6: Pedagogy, Parity, and Participation: Concluding thoughts

As a conclusion to my thesis, I will speak about the interdisciplinary nature of my work, and my scholarly contribution to my three disciplinary fields. I will close with recommendations and questions, and note limitations to the study.

6.1 Interdisciplinarity and Scholarly Contribution

The interdisciplinary nature of my research was an intentional choice. The multi-faceted nature of pedagogy and Modern Orthodox prayer experience for women in Toronto needed a mode of expression that would be able to contain and celebrate its many variations. Looking at the data through the lenses of religion, education, and gender/feminist studies was central to the research process. Looked at as individual disciplines and in combination, they captured different aspects of my research, and presented it with all of its complications.

After hearing me speak about my research, someone noted that I had represented Toronto's Modern Orthodox community in a positive way. She questioned my positivity, and asked if there were any communal practices that made me say "what the hell?!" I understood her concerns; gender partitions could be construed as concerning or un-feminist. I responded by explaining that my positive depiction came directly from my participants. Despite the concerns that my participants spoke about, most continued to identify with some aspects of Modern Orthodoxy, and all find various avenues to express their religious identity. Their continued presence in their community, and their willingness to have difficult conversations with me and with other participants all work to affect communal change from within. I would argue that, by

participating in this research endeavour as members of Toronto's mainstream Modern Orthodox community, the community has already been changed.

Books, movies, and documentaries about women leaving their communities are somewhat prevalent in popular culture. While the community may change - Jewish, Amish, Mormon, etc. - the narrative is similar, and the story ends with the woman living free of religious restrictions. In the broad landscape of stories about religion and agency, the stories that I am telling have a place as well. The phenomenon of women openly identifying problems within their chosen community is shown by looking at religion through an asset lens rather than a deficit lens. This complicates the ways in which the discipline of religion and the discipline of gender/feminist studies interact with each other. Singh (2015) notes that "religious women's agency highlights the importance of engaging with the positive ethical-political horizons and projects of diverse women" (Singh, 2015, p. 658). Based on this viewpoint, Singh discusses agency and autonomy, and explains that feminism is more than one thing. Quoting, Mahmood (2007), Singh states, "Instead of simply valorizing 'autonomy and the concomitant ideal of freedom,' feminists should recognize this as only one 'rather narrow and parochial way of being human in the world' (Mahmood in Shaikh 2007, 151)" (Singh, 2015, p. 662). Including religion in the discussion of feminist principles actually strengthens the argument for intersectional considerations, and makes the discourse more inclusive.

My research on pedagogy, parity, and participation adds to the current body of work on gendered participation. An example of this is Julé's research about gendered participation in language-learning classrooms (2004), which includes a broader discussion of how teachers' attitudes towards instruction impact girls' participation. Teachers believe that they are educating each student as an individual, but their propensity for "teacher talk" (Julé, 2004, p. 23) means

that they allocate opportunities to speak according to their own inclination, and redirect the conversation if they deem a students' comment to be irrelevant. Boys receive a greater share of the teachers' attention than girls (Julé, 2004). In an ELL classroom, there can be an interplay of gender and ethnicity, and girls' shyness may be viewed as the reason for their lack of language acquisition in comparison to the boys. Julé counters this, and states that "it is the systematic silencing of girls that needs further attention" (Julé, 2004, p. 155). This is illuminated in one of my participants' experiences, who noted that, while the girls and boys both participated in a prayer-book ceremony in grade one, only the boys were chosen to participate in the "Torah service" portion of the ceremony. Looking at research that has been conducted about the intersection of pedagogical practices and gender/feminist studies shows that my research on the gendered ways in which prayer is taught in Toronto's mainstream Modern Orthodox community broadens the discussion of a phenomenon that is already taking place.

6.2 Recommendations and Emerging Questions

Recommendations

Sumiati et. al (2019) conducted research on positive reinforcement in the classroom. They found that a smile, words of encouragement, or a "thumbs up" increased student motivation in a classroom with five to six year olds (Sumiati et. al, 2019). An important finding was that giving positive motivation randomly, instead of each time a student succeeds, was found to be more useful. This way, "students will not expect to be always given the positive reinforcement" (Sumiati et, al, 2019, p. 3). Findings from this study, looked at in conjunction with my participants' experiences of transitioning from elementary school to middle school, lead me to recommend the following out-of-the-box method to prayer teachers. On an occasional basis, ask the students to give themselves positive reinforcement. This can be done by giving each student a

post-it note, and asking them to put a check mark on it whenever they "catch themselves" praying respectfully. This can also take the form of a class discussion, where students are asked to talk about a time they were proud of themselves during prayer time. This changes the narrative of teachers as the arbiter of "good" prayer, and promotes prayer that is more self-motivated. This can be done in different forms in elementary school, middle school, and even high school. I believe that it could mitigate the phenomenon of students becoming dependent on teacher observation and praise, and then feeling unengaged when they become old enough to need less active supervision, which subsequently leads to less praise.

Many Jewish women choose to pray in mainstream Modern Orthodox synagogues in adulthood. They enter these prayer spaces with the knowledge that it will not be an egalitarian experience. While there are some Jewish women who would not make this choice, it is necessary to respect the choice that these women are making. Therefore, my recommendation for members of synagogue leadership teams in mainstream Modern Orthodox synagogues is to ensure that there is always a partition and a designated women's section. Furthermore, it should be the norm that, just as women do not walk into the men's section during prayer time unnecessarily, men should not walk into the women's section during prayer time unnecessarily. The experiences that my participants have had with men disrupting a women's prayer group, when the reverse would never happen, caused them to feel frustrated and upset. It is important for me to acknowledge that this recommendation will only be helpful to women who wish to pray in mainstream Modern Orthodox synagogues. It will not be helpful to women who wish to participate in egalitarian prayer, or to individuals whose gender identity does not fall within a strict gender binary.

My last recommendation is about Halacha [Jewish law]. Individuals who believe that following Halacha is important also have opinions about how Halacha should be followed. Whether in school or in synagogue, I believe that it is highly necessary for girls and women to be actively involved in prayer and leadership roles. Halacha should be used to discover ways in which it is permissible and acceptable for girls and women to be actively involved in prayer and leadership. School and synagogue leaders should be transparent about the reasoning behind their decisions, and should clearly differentiate between practices that are done because of Halacha, and practices that are done because of community norms. It is important for me to acknowledge that this recommendation might be found acceptable by individuals who believe in following Halacha in certain strict ways. This recommendation will likely be found unsatisfactory by individuals who would interpret Halacha in more flexible ways, or individuals who do not find it necessary to structure their lives in accordance with Halacha.

Emerging Questions

When considering the important experiences that my participants shared with me, many questions emerged from the data. I thought about how similar, yet also how unique, each participants' experiences truly were. While I set out to answer several questions, many more aspects emerged as worthy of further thought and possibly research. As someone who attended Jewish day school for elementary school, middle school, and high school, and who then went on to become a Jewish Educator, I will transparently state that I have a personal investment in asking these questions. If we cannot question, we cannot learn, grow, or progress. The following are some of the more salient questions arising from this research:

1. Are there ways to conduct classroom prayer that are both positive and non-hierarchical?

2. What can be done to keep girls actively engaged in prayer throughout their elementary school middle school, and high school years, in ways that are authentic, and relatable to girls' lived experiences outside of school?

3. How can educators reconcile the tension between teaching students what to expect from society, versus teaching students how society could be – within the structure of a religion that is wary of change?

4. Who benefits when women and girls feel relegated?

5. Why didn't my participants note a stronger connection between childhood prayer experiences and adult prayer practices?

6. In what ways does the definition of mainstream Modern Orthodoxy change, depending on who is defining it?

6.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Due to the specific and focused nature of my research, I have not had the opportunity to speak with women who have had alternate experiences - such as women who learned to pray at home (e.g., homeschooling), in supplementary school, or at Jewish summer camp. I also did not get to hear from women who grew up in Toronto, but who currently reside elsewhere. The brief nature of an Interdisciplinary Studies Master's degree at York University meant that much of my two years was spent taking courses, applying for ethics clearance, transcribing interviews and focus groups, and writing my thesis. The amount of time that I was able to allot to interact with my participants was comparatively short. Had I been able to meet with my participants for longer, or more often, I may have gained an even greater understanding of their experiences. However, this was also dependent on my participants, all of whom lead busy lives and who kindly made time to speak with me. It would not have been fair for me to schedule a longer

interview time, or to repeatedly make requests to meet with them, as respect for my participants' time was paramount.

Had this been a longitudinal study, I could have learned about the ways in which my participants' attitudes towards prayer changed over time, and then followed up in five years to discuss new developments in their relationships to prayer. Had circumstances been otherwise, I could have recruited a second group of 5-8 individuals, and noted commonalities and differences between different groups. I could have varied the inclusion criteria slightly each time, so as to compare experiences of women who attended single-gender schools and women who attended co-educational schools, or women who currently identify as Modern Orthodox and women who no longer identify that way. Emphasizing one aspect of the Modern Orthodox experience (prayer) means that there are still other aspects of Modern Orthodoxy that have yet to be explored. While the experiences of a very small sample of Modern Orthodox Jewish women cannot be viewed as representative of all Modern Orthodox Jewish women, and also cannot be representative of the experiences of Jewish women of other religious denominations, or of women who follow other religions, it does begin to fill a substantive gap.

Another limitation of my study is the insufficiency of language to encapsulate the many categories and sub-categories of streams of Judaism. Different people use the term Modern Orthodox to mean different things, which complicated the intended cohesive nature of my study. My inclusion/exclusion criteria was created to attract participants who were part of mainstream Modern Orthodox society (e.g., celebrating a Bat Mitzvah at 12 years old, but not reading from the Torah). This showcases my own bias about what mainstream Modern Orthodoxy is. It certainly impacted who signed up to participate, and subsequently, the results of my study. Bat Mitzvah celebrations have not always been popular or accepted in Orthodox communities until

quite recently. Therefore, using Bat Mitzvah celebrations as an inclusion criteria will exclude women who would have had a Bat Mitzvah celebration when they were younger, had it been acceptable in their community to do so. Upon reflection, I see that my own experiences as a Jewish-educated girl, young woman and educator may have influenced the study itself. Arguably, where were many of my initial perspectives on prayer formed, if not in a Jewish day school, under the umbrella of gender roles? So I, too, may have inadvertently brought forward aspects prescriptive gender roles into this entire endeavor. This is why we understand that research is never bias free and when we ourselves serve as the research tool, being as transparent as possible is our best rigor-intended intervention. For future research, I would suggest repeating this study without the inclusion criteria of having a Bat Mitzvah celebration at age 12, as there could be many reasons that are completely unrelated to one's religious ideology regarding why one may not have had this celebration. Another suggestion for future research is to continue to pursue the connection between school prayer experiences and women's attitudes towards prayer in adulthood, without focusing on mainstream Modern Orthodoxy. This would give a broader perspective on Toronto's Jewish community. I would also suggest revisiting the idea of connection between childhood and adulthood. It would be interesting to discover whether other women in similar circumstances would connect childhood prayer experiences to adult prayer practices in ways that are similar to or different from my research participants.

Finally, when discussing limitations, I would be remiss not to mention the impact of antisemitism. Antisemitism was the highest-reported hate crime in Toronto in 2021, according to the Toronto Police Service's *Annual Hate Crime Statistical Report* (Toronto, 2022). Though I did attend to rigour and accurately report my participants' views, I was cognizant about the risk of inadvertently contributing to antisemitism through the dissemination of my research, by speaking

about issues in Toronto's Jewish community and adding to a larger negative discourse about Jews and Judaism.

6.4 Conclusion

Did I achieve my goal of gaining a "deeper understanding of the experiences that Modern Orthodox Jewish women have had in their formal prayer education during girlhood, the impact that this may have had on their conceptions of themselves as girls and as women, and their attitudes towards prayer in adulthood"? Yes, but there is always more to learn. Did I achieve my methodological goal of "facilitat[ing] conversations among community members in a way that both empowers and encourages them to explore, reflect upon and share their own perspectives and experiences in a climate of affirmation and respect"? Yes, but I do not believe that it is enough; these conversations and expressions of empowerment need to continue. Answering my research questions led to even more questions. This makes sense and is congruent for Judaic scholarship, because questioning is an integral part of research, and a central aspect of Judaism.

The retrospective nature of my research allowed women in Toronto to relate both positive and negative girlhood experiences with school prayer, as well as a diverse range of adulthood experiences. If they so choose, they could easily attend one of Toronto's many synagogues wherein individuals of any gender can perform any role, with no gender partition in sight. Instead, they are making a choice that many will not understand. They choose to stay within their community, to an extent that is different for each participant. For some, this means struggling with the contradictions of mainstream Modern Orthodoxy on a regular basis. This struggle may take the shape of attending a synagogue while privately feeling unhappy with certain practices therein, or trying to reconcile one's feminist identity with one's religious identity. Hartman Halbertal (2003) speaks about an experience she had sitting in the women's section of an

Orthodox synagogue. Her daughter asked, “Mommy, how can you stand behind this mechitza [partition] and teach feminism?” (Hartman Halbertal, 2003, p. 1). This made her question whether it was possible for her to be consistent in her feminist teachings if she stayed within her community (Hartman Halbertal, 2003). In a chapter of her book, Hartman Halbertal recounts asking her synagogue’s rabbi to reconfigure the sanctuary so that the women would be more centrally located (Hartman Halbertal, 2003). She also speaks about a woman who asked her rabbi to let women carry the Torah during a festival celebration, telling him “I have lived in this community from its onset—I have proven my loyalty. Now [the rabbi] must answer my question.” In participating in this research endeavor, I, too, am asking community members and communal leaders to contend with my questions.

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Appendices

Appendix A: *Advertisement in "Community Link", Vol. #12 Issue #392,* https://issuu.com/shloim/docs/issue392

Orthodox Jewish Women in Toronto:

Reflections of Girlhood, Prayer, and Participation Experiences

Are you a Modern Orthodox Jewish Woman, who might be interested in sharing your girlhood experiences with Tefillah? My research as a York University graduate student seeks to listen to women's reflections and experiences!

I currently live in Toronto	YES NO
I went to a Jewish elementary/middle school AND a Jewish high school	YES NO
I became Bat Mitzvah at 12 years old	YES NO
I read from the Torah at my Bat Mitzvah	YES NO
I want to share my experiences and opinions about prayer and women's roles in (Modern) Orthodox Judaism	YES NO

- Do these answers describe YOUR personal experiences?
- If they do, please reach out! I'd be thrilled to tell you about my research study, about the prayer experiences of Orthodox Jewish women - in girlhood and adulthood.
- Your contributions will be kept confidential and will contribute to what we understand about girls and women's experiences with prayer. I hope you'll reach out!

Contact Information:
Ariella Markus
(416)797-4452
markus25@yorku.ca

Appendix B: *JBI Checklist for Qualitative Research*

https://jbi.global/sites/default/files/2021-10/Checklist_for_Qualitative_Research.docx

		Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1.	Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.	Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.	Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.	Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.	Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.	Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.	Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice- versa, addressed?	☐	☐	☐	☐
8.	Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	☐	☐	☐	☐
9.	Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.	Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	☐	☐	☐	☐

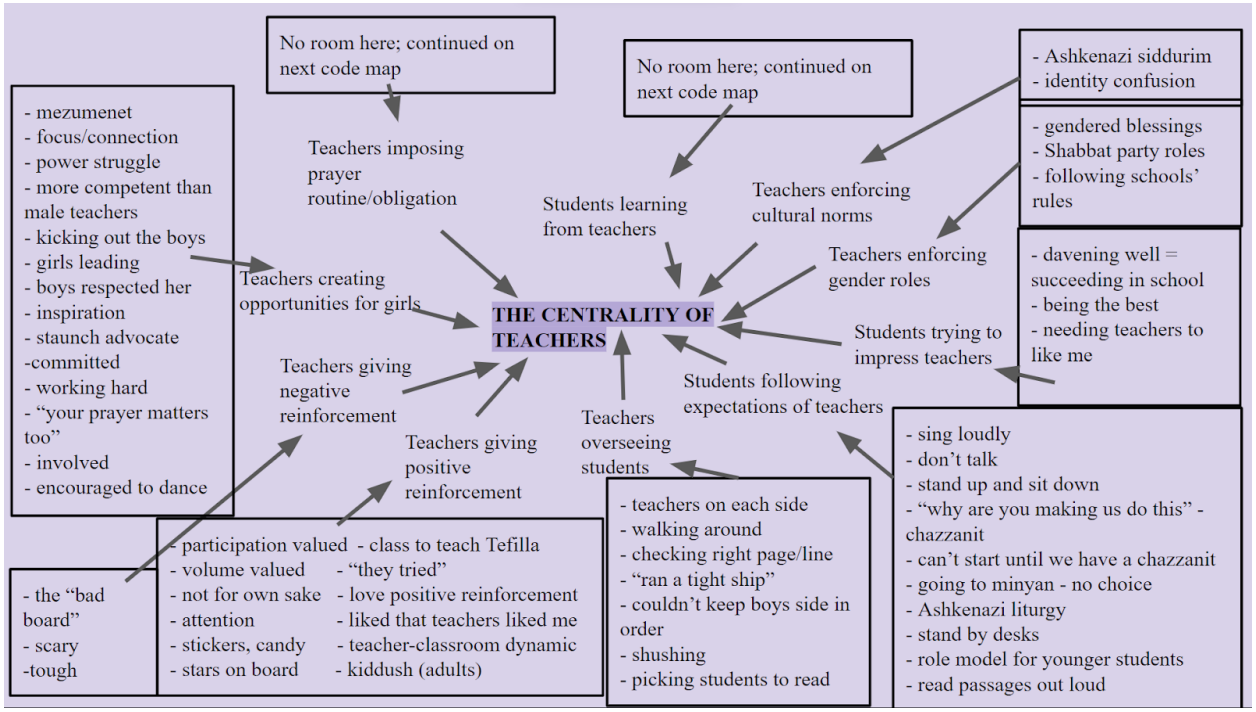
Overall appraisal: Include ☐ Exclude ☐ Seek further info ☐

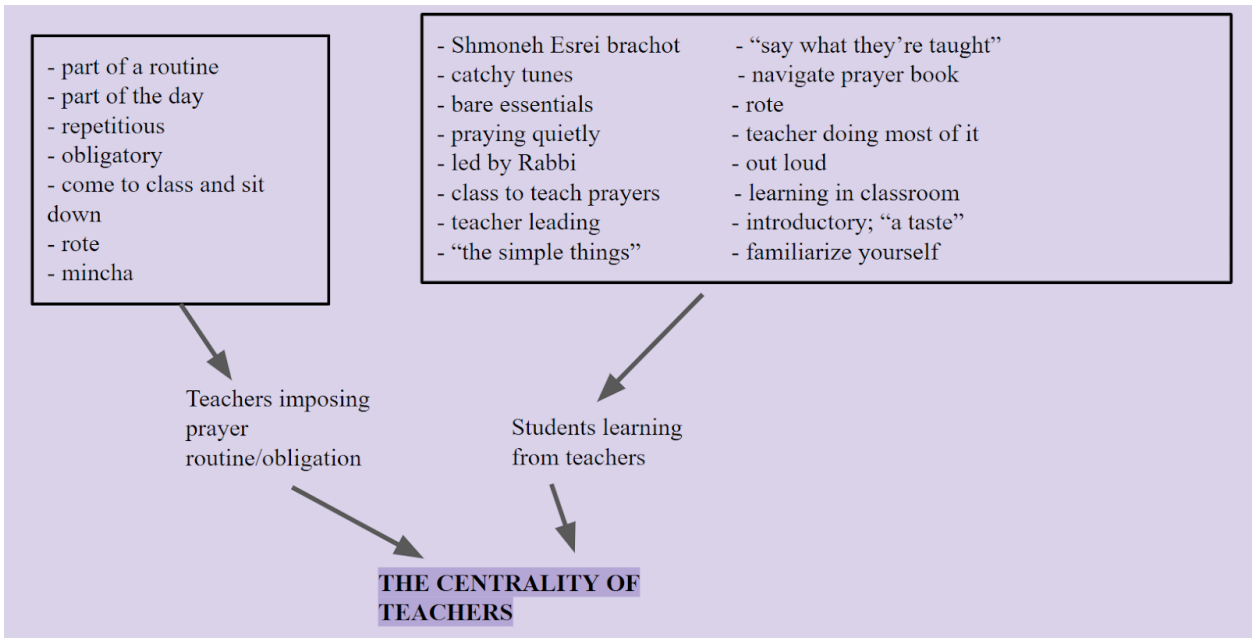
Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

Appendix C: *Code Maps*

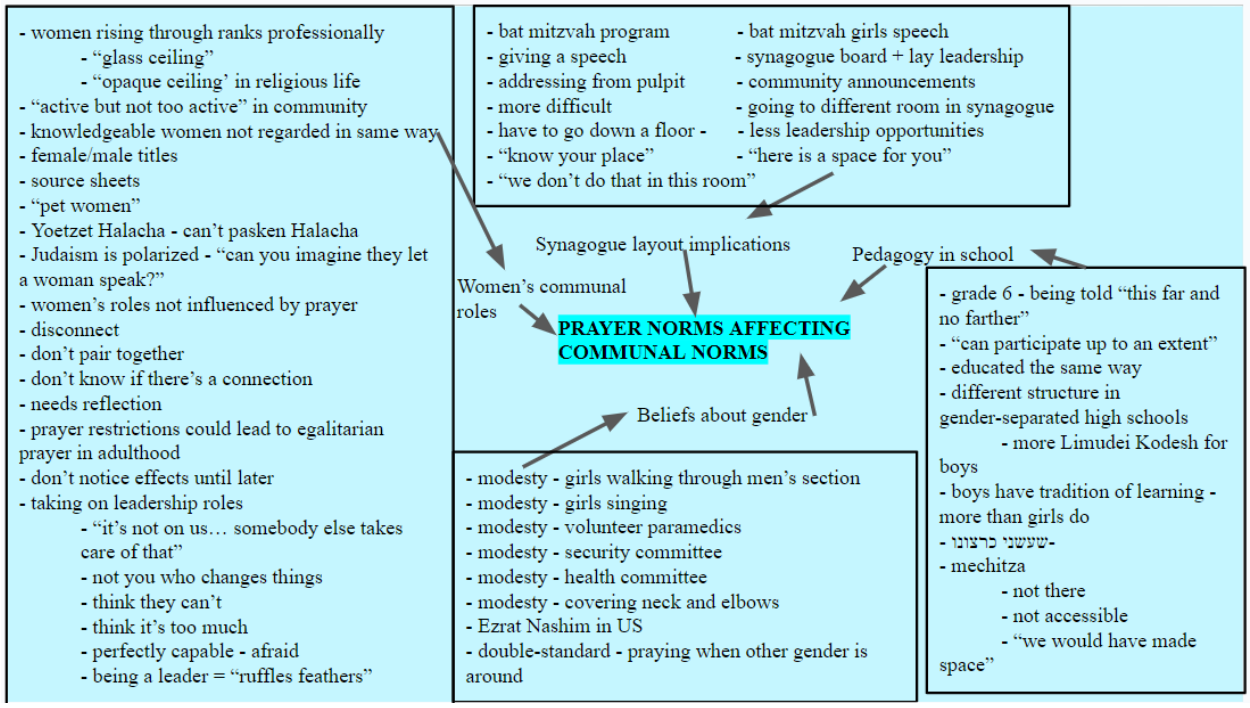
These maps show how the individual codes led to code categories, which in turn led to themes.

The Centrality of Teachers

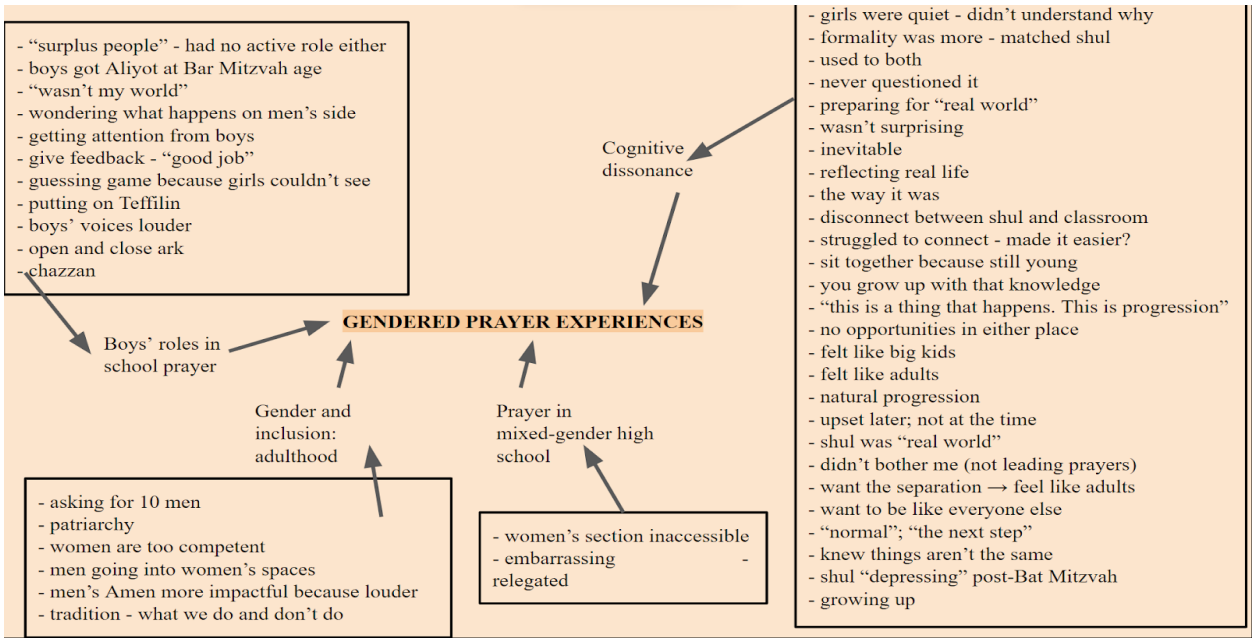


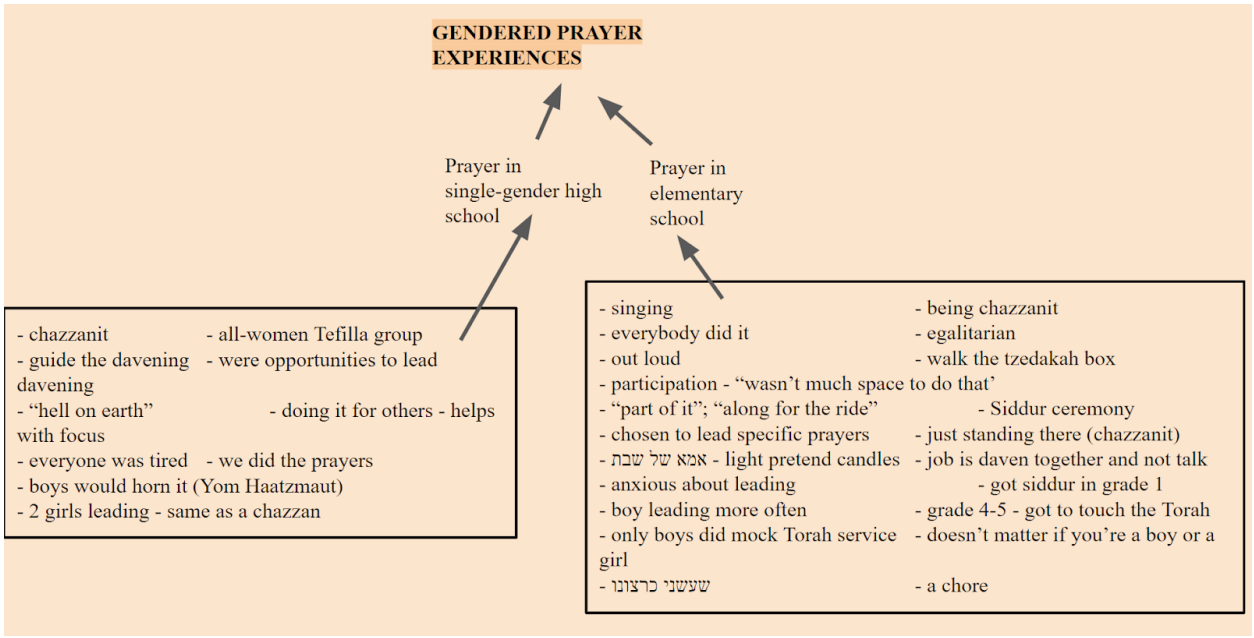


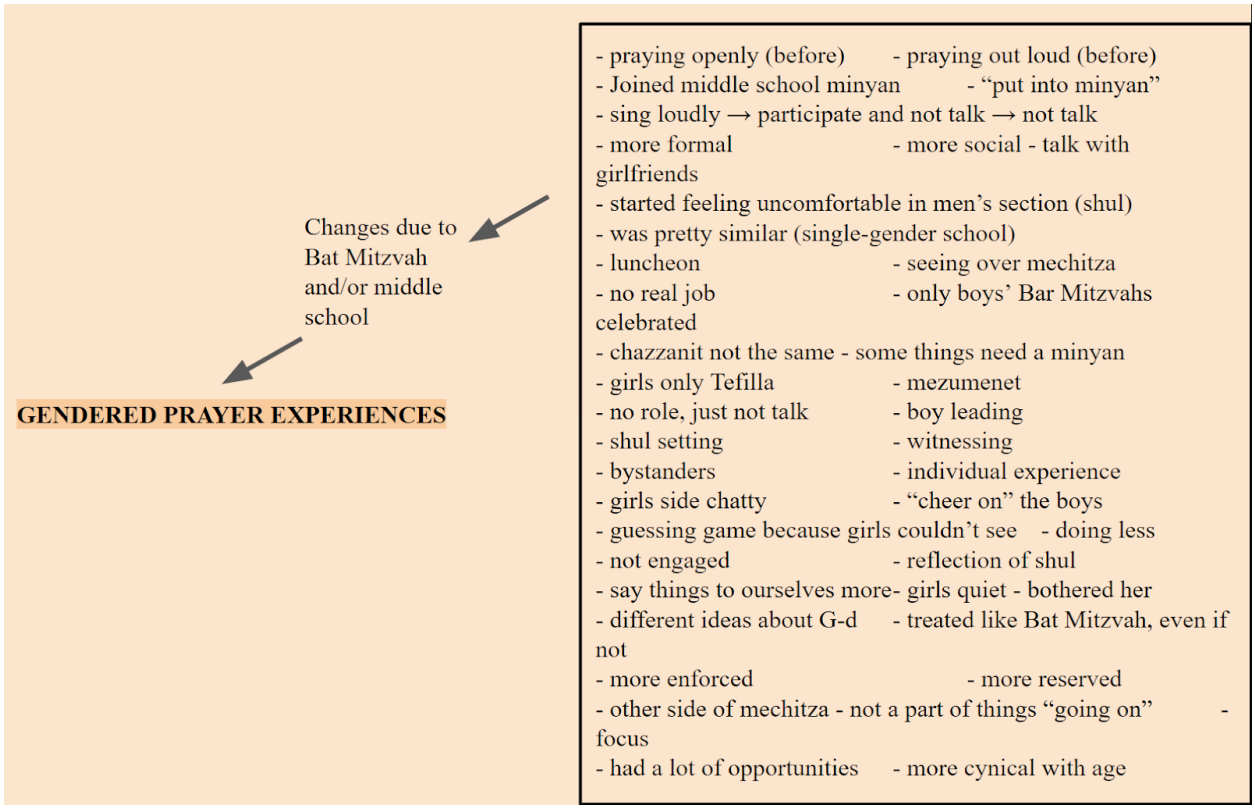
Prayer Norms Affecting Societal Norms



Gendered Prayer Experiences




GENDERED PRAYER EXPERIENCES
Prayer in single-gender high school
Prayer in elementary school
- chazzanit - all-women Tefilla group
- guide the davening - were opportunities to lead davening
- "hell on earth" - doing it for others - helps with focus
- everyone was tired - we did the prayers
- boys would horn it (Yom Haatzmaut)
- 2 girls leading - same as a chazzan
- singing - being chazzanit
- everybody did it - egalitarian
- out loud - walk the tzedakah box
- participation - "wasn't much space to do that'
- "part of it"; "along for the ride" - Siddur ceremony
- chosen to lead specific prayers - just standing there (chazzanit)
- אמא של שבת - light pretend candles - job is daven together and not talk
- anxious about leading - got siddur in grade 1
- boy leading more often - grade 4-5 - got to touch the Torah
- only boys did mock Torah service - doesn't matter if you're a boy or a girl
- שעשני כרצונו - a chore


Changes due to Bat Mitzvah and/or middle school
GENDERED PRAYER EXPERIENCES
- praying openly (before) - praying out loud (before)
- Joined middle school minyan - "put into minyan"
- sing loudly → participate and not talk → not talk
- more formal - more social - talk with girlfriends
- started feeling uncomfortable in men's section (shul)
- was pretty similar (single-gender school)
- luncheon - seeing over mechitza
- no real job - only boys' Bar Mitzvahs celebrated
- chazzanit not the same - some things need a minyan
- girls only Tefilla - mezumenet
- no role, just not talk - boy leading
- shul setting - witnessing
- bystanders - individual experience
- girls side chatty - "cheer on" the boys
- guessing game because girls couldn't see - doing less
- not engaged - reflection of shul
- say things to ourselves more- girls quiet - bothered her
- different ideas about G-d - treated like Bat Mitzvah, even if not
- more enforced - more reserved
- other side of mechitza - not a part of things "going on" - focus
- had a lot of opportunities - more cynical with age

Modern Orthodoxy and Identity