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Lilith G. Wolinsky
Invisible Jews:
Does Internalized
anti-Semitism Play
a Role in Unaddressed
Jewish Poverty in America?

Abstract

This theoretical study looks at unexamined Jewish poverty in contemporary America through the two lenses of internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self-hate, and internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism with the intention of determining whether or not the constructs represented by these composite lenses have any bearing on the continued existence of Jewish poverty in the United States.

Study results indicate that while the relationship between Jewish poverty and internalized Jewish oppression is not causal, unexamined internalized anti-Semitism may be a factor which prevents Jews from acknowledging and addressing this ill within their midst and as such, which perpetuates Jewish poverty.

Study results also indicate that internalized Jewish oppression and internalized superiority are both aspects of internalized anti-Semitism rather than two distinct constructs. Additionally, it was found that internalized anti-Semitism is an insidious and undermining phenomenon, that it exists in degrees, inhabits most, if not all Jews, and that Jews share the task of “unlearning” and healing Jewish oppression within themselves.

INVISIBLE JEWS: DOES INTERNALIZED ANTI-SEMITISM PLAY A ROLE IN
UNADDRESSED JEWISH POVERTY IN AMERICA?

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

Lilith G. Wolinsky

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

2011

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To the troubled, tremendously hard working and creative line of Wolinskys, Sobols, Brenners and those whose names I do not know: the strength, courage and resourcefulness it took for you to survive, to remain Jews, has not been forgotten. I hope I honor your profound commitment to self-determination and tomorrow.

And to my mother and sisters, who all together bore the burden, seemingly anomalous, of being poor Jews: this is for you. May your paths be strewn with joy and your hearts sated.

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CHAPTER I

JEWISH POVERTY AND TWO LENSES: AN INTRODUCTION

The notion of American Jews living in poverty or low-income households has been studied so infrequently in recent years (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2009) and conjures up an image so contrary to the prevailing stereotype of Jewish wealth and power, that one might think poor or low-income Jewish households simply do not exist (Mendes, 2006; Silberman, 1974). Statistics compiled by the National Jewish Population Survey (2001), however, show that in fact 7% of American Jews live below the Federal Poverty Line, and that number is doubled to 14% if one extends the category to include low-income households (poverty and low income will be defined in Chapter III). A companion survey, National Survey of Religion and Ethnicity (2001) asserts that 20% of American Jews live within poor or low-income households. Though there is almost an expectation that recent immigrants may be impoverished, (at least temporarily) these figures include Jews across a wide spectrum: those who are physically or mentally ill, the elderly, less recent immigrants, single women with children, families, single adults, Jews of Color, those with a high school education or less, and the Orthodox (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2009) since Orthodox Jews often have large families, with husbands engaged in intensive religious study which can preclude economic success. According to the United States Census Bureau for the same year, 11.7% of the overall population of the United States lives in poverty (2001). While Federal Poverty calculations are widely considered to be outdated, (Bernstein, 2003) resulting in an underestimation of poverty overall, there does not appear to be much discrepancy between Jews

living in poverty and non-Jews living in poverty for the same period of time. Why, then, does the perception of Jews as wealthy and powerful persist, not only within larger American culture where these images (and at times negative views) are widespread, but within Jewish communities as well?

Little research has been conducted on the phenomenon of Jewish poverty although its existence has been acknowledged by social service and community resource agencies throughout the 20th Century (Bubis, 2005; Lerner, S., 1985; Silberman, 1974; Wolfe, 1974). Concerted efforts to eradicate this phenomenon are almost non-existent as well, and, since Jews have widely been involved in addressing many of the most intractable social ills during this same period of time, it is reasonable to ask the question: are Jews who have access to monetary resources themselves contributing in some way to the problem of Jewish poverty, either through oversight or some other means?

Overview of Theoretical Frameworks

This theoretical study will look briefly at the ways in which poor Jews might be harmed by the invisibility of their situation but will explore more thoroughly, through two composite lenses, whether or not there is an internal process that prevents the phenomenon of Jewish poverty from being adequately addressed by Jews. Out of necessity, both of the two lenses being used are a composite of ideas from different fields of study, because what has been written within the field of social work alone is not sufficient to be deemed a theory for either lens. Additionally, because this inquiry is cross-disciplinary, the language used to describe the internal states which may contribute to Jewish poverty are called different things in different disciplines.

Internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self-hate. The first composite lens I will be using is called self hatred or self hate within the fields of psychology, and Jewish Studies, and though not mirrored within the fields of social justice, education and anthropology, it is closely related to the construct in those disciplines of internalized anti-Semitism or internalized oppression. Within the field of social work, there is no body of knowledge nor a specific term which addresses the construct which internalized anti-Semitism and self hatred are pointing to, with internalized oppression (as in internalized homophobia, or internalized racism) being the closest correlate. Other terms used to describe this phenomenon are Jewish anti-Semitism, internalized stigma, and internalized Jewish oppression.

Internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism. The second lens I will be using is comprised of various cross-disciplinary ways of understanding how people come to believe that their particular group of people, their ethnicity, or religious group, is superior to other groups of people. In regards to Jews, the field of Jewish Studies or religious studies might look at this as Jewish exceptionalism, or, using biblical language, as being “the Chosen People”. In the field of anthropology, this concept is known as ethnocentrism, and within social justice movements, the phrase internalized superiority may at times be used to designate one way in which oppression impacts identity formation, in this case, thousands of years of persecution on Jewish identity (Kent Katz, 2006).

Of the handful of researchers who have looked at this phenomenon, there is a repeated refrain: Jewish poverty is being ignored by Jews (Bubis, 2005; Mendes, 2006; Silberman as cited in Levine and Hochbaum, 1974). The lenses of internalized anti-Semitism, et al. and internalized superiority have been chosen in an attempt to understand the psychological construct underlying

the Jewish response to Jewish poverty. It must be stated that Jews are an extraordinarily diverse group of people, and that while there is no “one response” to Jewish poverty, there is a community level response, a community level priority, which is not currently prioritizing Jewish poverty in the United States, and that response is being referred to here as the “Jewish response”.

Importance to Clinical Social Workers

Given the emphasis in the field of clinical social work on justice, poverty, oppression, and continued learning, clinical social workers have a responsibility to challenge stereotypes which prevent any segment of the population from receiving the services they might need, or, in fact, from being acknowledged at all. Though poverty itself has been widely studied, almost nothing is known about the daily lives of impoverished American Jews, about the socio-emotional complexity of being a part of a group widely lauded as successful and yet falling into a substratum which is not. Given the high cost of participation in American Jewish communal life, Mendes (2006) found that Jews:

...living below the low-income threshold are consistently less likely to affiliate with Jewish institutions and partake in communal programs. This applies to joining synagogues, purchasing kosher food, visiting Israel, and attendance at fee-paying Jewish day schools. Many cannot afford to live in Jewish frequented areas. As a result poorer Jews often find themselves socially marginalized and excluded from participation. (p. 51)

An additional area of concern is anti-Semitism. If anti-Semitism in America has been mitigated at all by the accumulation of economic resources and some access to power, what then of Jews who do not have these same resources? Has anti-Semitism evaporated for them as well? These and many other questions remain unanswered due to the gaping lack of research on the phenomenon of contemporary American Jewish poverty. The little that is known about poor American Jews indicates isolation from other Jews (Mendes, pp.51) as well as non-Jews (Brown,

1991) in addition to the more generalized burdens of poverty – both of these compel the field of clinical social work towards additional study.

Chapter Two of this research will explore the methodology by which this study will be conducted and will identify the key concepts of each of the two amalgamated lenses being used to analyze the phenomenon. The existence of American Jewish poverty, and the collective and complex Jewish response to this social ill will be examined in Chapter Three. Chapters Four and Five will be devoted to a more in-depth discussion of internalized anti-Semitism, and internalized superiority. The concluding chapter will look at the ways in which the selected theories intersect with the phenomenon hopefully decreasing the denial that exists around Jewish poverty while simultaneously enhancing the compassion that Jews have for themselves in areas where they may have internalized negative or harmful beliefs based on their history of being “othered”. Perhaps with action informed by compassion, the problem of Jewish poverty can be faced and ameliorated, if not resolved.

CHAPTER II

ANTI-SEMITISM AND ITS INTERNALIZED CONSTRUCTS

This chapter seeks to provide a foundation in the two composite lenses, (abbreviated here as internalized anti-Semitism and internalized superiority) through which the phenomenon of American Jewish poverty unaddressed by the Jewish community will be examined. While these two constructs may immediately appear to be contradictory to each other, and unrelated to Jewish poverty, I am hypothesizing that they are actually imbedded and polar aspects of the Jewish psyche (imbedded in much the same way that anti-Semitism is imbedded in the psyches of non-Jews), and that since internalized oppression is often operative when dealing with one's own people (Brown, 1995, p. 46) internalized anti-Semitism is in effect when Jews address, or don't address, Jewish poverty.

The idea that internalized anti-Semitism and internalized superiority might be related is rarely explored within the literature. My thesis seeks to understand the relationship between the two, specifically how, unexamined, they might contribute to, or *allow*, the ongoing existence of unacknowledged and “untreated” Jewish poverty while perpetuating the myth that there are no poor Jews.

What is anti-Semitism?

Before an exploration can be conducted which looks at internalized anti-Semitism and the role it may be playing in unaddressed American Jewish poverty, anti-Semitism itself must be understood in some capacity (though of necessity a limited one, given its ancient existence and

the scope of this project). One could offer the simple definition of anti-Jewish hatred but this does little to explain why it erupts periodically with the vehemence which has cost so many Jewish lives, nor why it has been a phenomenon which has persisted across millennia with representations in art, literature, politics, religion, philosophy, and other fields (Bale, 2006; Cheyette, 1994; Flannery, 1985; Nichols, 1992).

Many books have been written about anti-Semitism, and many theories expounded. One of the truths seems to be that because traditional Jewish religion (and as an extension, Jewish culture) emphasizes an anti-authoritarian worldview which includes a hallowed liberation from slavery, and a refusal to work one day a week (a constraint viewed as particularly onerous in Roman times) Jews consistently found themselves at odds with economic structures which required obedience to the state. Once Christianity assumed state power in the Roman Empire during the 4th Century (Lerner, M., 1992) Jews were persecuted even more harshly. The increased hostility and “irrational violence” which Jews have endured in Christian cultures is also overwhelmingly associated with Jews not having accepted Jesus as the Messiah (Dinnerstein, 1995; Flannery, 1985; Lerner, M., 1992; Nichols, 1993), being blamed for his death by crucifixion and, following this seemingly incomprehensible rejection of their Savior, being seen as evil and satanic. It was not long after Christianity became aligned with the State that the Church took the “... lead in bringing about the deterioration of the position of Jews in the empire.” (Nicols, 1993 p. 203), and this trend, that of the Church flaming the fans of anti-Semitism via sermons, codes, and canons, or, alternatively, looking the other way when Jews were persecuted, has continued in some parts of the world into the 21st Century.

Islamic cultures, while not as virulent in their expression of anti-Semitism as Christian ones, still proposed that Jews were second class citizens – they were taxed disproportionately, and lived lives of precarious appeasement to whomever was in power. In 717 CE in the expanding Moslem world, Jews had to pay fees in exchange for “safeguarding of life and property, and the right to worship unmolested according to their conscience” (Stillman, 1979, p. 25). Stillman (1979) goes on to state that Jews were:

...to conduct themselves with the demeanor and comportment befitting a subject population. They were never to strike a Moslem. They were not to carry arms, ride horses or use normal riding saddles on their mounts. They were not able to build new houses of worship nor repair old ones. They were not to hold public religious processions (including funeral processions) nor pray too loudly. Naturally, they were not to proselytize. They had to wear clothing that distinguished them from the Arabs (p.26-27).

Again, this insistence on social inferiority may be traced, at least in part, to the Jew's rejection of both Jesus as Savior and Mohammed as Prophet, and to fears that Jewish ideas, Jewish “resistance” would contaminate the loyal followers of Jesus and Mohammed.

While these two religions ignited the initial flames of anti-Semitism and spread it throughout their growing empires, ruling classes have fueled the fire when it has been expedient for them. This has worked in two main ways: one, Jews were forbidden in many places from owning land and from working in positions of skilled labor (Lerner, M., 1992; Nichols, 1993; Stillman, 1979). They were, however, allowed to work with money, because money-lending, and money collecting were jobs full of risk and stigma, considered to be lowly and filthy. Jews entered these ventures out of necessity because they were prevented from working in the guilds that were necessary to success in other trades, but their success in the money lending/collecting fields, coupled with the illusion of “power over” poor peasants which these

positions presented, became another reason for the masses to hate them. It was at this time that Jews became the “public face of the oppressor” (Lerner, M., 1992). The positions they occupied:

...tax collectors, foremen, innkeepers, and liquor distributors for the large landowners and feudal elite. To the ordinary serf or peasant, these Jews seemed to have immense power. It was to them that one had to pay the taxes or levies, to them that one paid for the goods that were being brought in from other areas, and to them that one had to appeal when facing arbitrary decisions of the landowners. (Lerner, M., p. 13)

The stigma and hate attached to these positions landed on top of the suspicion and mistrust Jews already carried due to their religious convictions and status as outsiders. It could be argued that anti-Semitism began to have a life of its own during Medieval Europe, capable of being spontaneously awakened simultaneous to social unrest, a deeply and intricately imbedded construct in the (usually) non-Jewish psyche, mostly unconscious as a construct having to do with money, religion and taboo is likely to be.

The second way in which economic structures, governments or the economic elite have kept anti-Semitism alive is due to the way in which Jews have been used as scapegoats during times of economic or social crisis. The above mentioned dynamics created a vilified outsider upon which ruling classes readily heaped the problems they were not able to solve or at least decompress, in fact, Jews were often the decompression valve (Lerner, M.,1992; Nichols, 1993).

These social ills ranged from plagues and famine to economic collapse and were charges levied against Jews without conscience, justifying the most barbaric of treatment. Throughout the centuries Jews have been tortured, raped, had their most sacred possessions destroyed, and have experienced expulsion from the countries in which they made their homes, losing terrain again and again and again. They have been killed in large numbers without regard (or with intention) because they were thought to be satanic, morally bankrupt, greedy, and licentious in

addition to being sponsors of financial ruin. Starting in the 12th Century, it was believed that Jews killed little Christian children, exsanguinated them, and used their blood for making matzoh (Nichols, 1993, p. 237) and this myth, known as a blood libel, whipped villages in the Middle Ages into murderous frenzies; it is also a myth which has persisted into the modern era.

More current manifestations of anti-Semitism run the gamut from the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues to the bombing of Jewish Community Centers, while swastikas may still be seen on college campuses, and under bridges (Amherst Bulletin, 2011; Halkin, 2002). Less obvious anti-Semitism includes the ideas that Jews control the media (if not the world), that they have more power than others (often with a sinister association), that they are without moral regard, are materialistic, difficult, cannot be trusted, that they are responsible for 9/11, and that Zionism equals racism, a charge justifying broad brush strokes of anti-Jewish sentiment. A narrow focus on the human rights abuses of Israel while excluding the equally, if not more egregious, human rights abuses of its neighbors is also thought to be anti-Semitic and indicative of a double standard that may point the way to anti-Semitism in an era when oppression or hatred of any sort is more likely to be masked than in previous eras (Langman, 1999; Lerner, M., 1992). The older notions of Jews as sex-crazed or frigid, manipulative, pushy and penny-pinching persist.

Many in America, both Jewish and not, proclaim that anti-Semitism has been eradicated here, and Jews are now widely perceived to be White people, with the privileges White people enjoy. The irony is that if Jews are White, with the assumption of power and privilege that White people hold, little to no room is left to examine either historical anti-Semitism or the ways in which anti-Semitism still plays out. This cloak of Whiteness prevents the exploration of Jews as

ethnic minorities with a unique history of oppression, and at the same time, Whiteness precludes Jews' inclusion within a multicultural context where their equally unique and ongoing contributions to the world might be examined: without this examination there is a shroud of ignorance and invisibility around anti-Semitism, and if non-Jews do not understand or recognize this phenomenon, not only is the possibility of it reoccurring great, but Jewish anxiety and vulnerability, latent or manifest, will be perpetuated. (Langman, 1999; Lerner, M., 1992).

Jewish Strategies for Coping with anti-Semitism

A logical response to looking at anti-Semitism is to wonder how Jews have coped, survived, and even thrived in the face of repeated persecution, forced conversions, and centuries of general oppression. Lerner, M., (1992) puts forth that American Jews responded to anti-Semitism in the 20th Century in a number of broad ways and these methods bear relevance to the 21st Century as well.

Assimilating was one common way of dealing with anti-Semitism, with Jews changing their names, altering their noses, modulating their tones, marrying non-Jews, not teaching their children the Jewish languages which they brought with them from the Old World, downplaying the communication styles which were perceived to be too loud and expressive, and at times incorporating Christian traditions into religious services to downplay their Jewishness.

Many other Jews shared the anti-oppression emphasis of the political left, and entered into leftist organizations, but here, too, they assimilated:

...believing they would be better off and less likely to be persecuted *as Jews* if they could show their non-Jewish neighbors that they were really just like them, that they really could behave in ways that were “inoffensive”(not different from the behavioral patterns of their non-Jewish neighbors), and that they really would not insist on specifically *Jewish* concerns within the left. (Lerner, M., p. 23)

Another, and contradictory tack, was to immerse oneself in traditional Jewish religious life, or Orthodoxy. While this was not just a response to anti-Semitism, anti-Semitism did influence the desire to have as little as possible to do with the painful world and ideas of the *goyim* (non-Jews). Orthodox Jews were (and are) usually readily identifiable as Jews by the clothing they wear; they often live in tight-knit communities of other Orthodox Jews, and may view non-Jews (or even non-Orthodox Jews) as debased, and deeply untrustworthy.

The Zionist approach also attracted a number of Jews as resolution to the centuries old yearning for the ancestral land from which Jews had been exiled. Underlying this desire, particularly in the post World War II era, was the notion that creating/maintaining a viable Jewish state was the only real path to safety in a world which had mostly turned a blind eye to the repeated enactment of anti-Semitism.

Other Jews have tossed in their lot with the ruling classes. Though some of this may be ideological kinship, given the “rebellious spirit” (Lerner, M., p. 20) of Judaism, and the inherent oppression built into ruling classes, this alliance may be more expedient than a partnership built solely on compatibility and true desire. It is an old coping mechanism, however, for some Jews to align themselves with power in the hopes that when the fever of anti-Semitism rises, these alliances will protect them.

Whatever strategies Jews use to deal with the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism, both in history as well as current manifestations, it seems clear that anti-Semitism is a legacy which has profoundly shaped Jewish identity, and with which all Jews must grapple in some capacity.

What is Internalized anti-Semitism/Internalized Oppression/Self Hate?

Any oppressed group bears the markings of their oppression. This is true for women, sexual minorities, People of Color, lower socio-economic classes, and though less often acknowledged, it is true for Jews as well. Though it is believed that internalized oppression began to be discussed during the 70's and 80's era of consciousness raising, much about how it works remains unknown in its specifics, particularly when it comes to Jews. Definitions usually include “conscious or unconscious attitudes regarding inferiority or “otherness” by the victims of systematic oppression” (Blumenfeld, date unknown), and the Minority Stress Model used in social psychology asserts that “the internalization of negative societal attitudes (i.e. self stigma) is a major source of stress for minority individuals.” (Herek, Gills, & Cogan, 2009, p. 34) Rosenwasser (2006) defines internalized oppression as:

...an involuntary reaction to oppression which originates outside one's group and which results in group members loathing themselves, disliking others in their group, and blaming themselves for the oppression – rather than realizing that these beliefs are constructed in them by oppressive socio-economic political systems.
(p.2)

Pheterson notes (1986) that internalized oppression “is likely to consist of self-hatred, self-concealment, fear of violence, and feelings of inferiority, resignation, isolation, powerlessness, and gratefulness for being allowed to survive” (p. 148).

According to the Community Tool Box (2010), internalized oppression operates within individuals as well as within groups. The individual manifestation presents when an individual's capacity to live fully is inhibited in some way by “stereotypes and misinformation” that she believes are true about herself. These beliefs may include behaving in self defeating ways, and ways which reinforce the negative stereotypes (What is Internalized Oppression?, para. 6). The

group manifestation of internalized oppression:

...occurs among members of the same cultural group. People in the same cultural group believe (often unconsciously) the misinformation and stereotypes that society communicates about other members of their group. People turn the oppression on one another instead of addressing larger problems in society. The results are that people treat one another in ways that are less than fully respectful. Often people from the same cultural group hurt, undermine, criticize, mistrust, fight with or isolate themselves from one another. (Community Tool Box, para. 7)

Though internalized oppression may share some traits across oppressed groups, such as shame, other aspects appear to be specific to the nature of the oppression itself. For example, an aspect of internalized homophobia may be an inability to take enjoyment in sexual expression, or for women, internalized sexism might be a woman's belief that it is not okay to be physically strong, or competitive or, the belief that if a woman is not conventionally good looking, she is of diminished value. People within lower socio-economic groups might believe that they are of less worth than those with education or wealth, that they are stupid or lazy.

As previously mentioned, research on internalized oppression specifically regarding Jews is sparse. Brown (1995) states:

The need to separate the past from the present is certainly a central theme... But what has not been dealt with fully in the literature are the unique dynamics of the Jewish experience. How do we determine which patterns of behavior are in fact rooted in Jewish internalized oppression and the collective traumas of Jewish history and which behaviors are simply individual life problems for those individual Jews? When I began to lead workshops for Jews dealing with issues of internalized oppression, almost every participant initially was convinced that his or her family struggles were unique psychological problems. Through years of leading workshops and listening to thousands of Jews I have come to identify a common set of behaviors – panic, worry, urgency, hypercriticalness, etc., that emerge in so many family stories. (p. 3)

These traits, while not definitively pointing to internalized anti-Semitism, (nor belonging to Jews alone) may be a subtle, if troublesome, form of its presence, particularly because of the impact these traits have on intimate relationships.

Self disgust, a construct which may be internalized from centuries of being treated as “contagion” and without the right to existence, is another way in which this construct can manifest subtly, in the world of the psyche. Jews may perceive themselves as flawed, and, if they have done their best to “shed their Jewishness” reminders of it may stir up disdain, anxiety and fear (Langman, p. 280)

Of course, internalized anti-Semitism manifests along a continuum, with some aspects hidden to the eye, others visible if being looked for, and still other aspects displayed in rather egregious fashion. Some Jews may wish to be rid of traditional Jewish features such as a strong nose, dark kinky hair, or expressiveness of speech. There are some Jewish men who never date Jewish women which seems to be a clear indication of internalized oppression, but one which may not be recognized as such within the context of Jews. If one talks instead of an African American man who never dates Black women, the internalized aspect of hatred becomes more apparent.

An egregious example of Jewish anti-Semitism is the case of a Jewish student vandalizing Northwestern University a few years ago with a swastika and the words “Die Jews” (Nussbaum Cohen, 2008, p.1) or, via the writings of Austrian Jewish (though converted to Protestant Christianity a year before his death) philosopher Otto Weininger, who in 1903 wrote:

The Jew is amoral, capable of neither great goodness nor great evil. He is much absorbed in sexual matters, especially matchmaking. He is beguiled by soulless doctrines as materialism, Darwinism and Spinozistic determinism. The only way the individual Jew can overcome these traits is to become a Christian, for Christ is

the great exemplar of the Jew who transcended his Jewishness (as cited in Meyer, 1989, p. 37).

Though Weininger ended up taking his own life a year later, at age twenty three, we can clearly see that the negative ideas he held about Jews neatly mirrored the ideas that non-Jewish Europeans had been perpetuating about Jews for centuries: Jews as amoral, consumed with sexuality, and only redeemable (if even then) by becoming Christian.

The final concept of the internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self hate triumvirate is self hatred. Self-hatred is an interesting and complicated term. While other aspects of internalized oppression, whether they be internalized racism, internalized homophobia or any of the other internalized forms of oppression, recognize the influence of external oppression on the internalized construct, self-hatred is, at times, levied against Jews with vehemence, and a pejorative tone as if the self-hatred does not exist in relationship to an often persecuting outside world, but is in fact a deficiency created internally and with volition on the part of individual Jews. Thus, “self-hating Jew” may be flung at Jews for political or ideological disagreement without regard to the pain and intricacy of the construct, without acknowledgment that the term *itself* may be a manifestation of unexamined, internalized hatred on the part of those who dispense with it, for no other group levies this charge against its members with so little compassion, and with so much blame.

Self hate is often used “against” Jews with the intention that the Jew receiving the charge should be disregarded, that they are despicable and have failed, that they should be “disowned” from the collective of Jews. There is often no sense, as there may be when using the term internalized homophobia, for instance, that an individual displaying internalized anti-Semitism is wounded, that they have psychological work to do.

This is not to dispute that some expressions of internalized anti-Semitism are so strong, so offensive, that they seem to fit best into self-hatred terminology over the use of internalized oppression or internalized anti-Semitism, but rather to acknowledge the lack of compassion, the “polemic rather than analytic purposes” (Glenn, 2006, p. 96), with which these words are often delivered. One historian has suggested that the term self-hatred itself is no longer useful, while another argues for “ground rules for its usage” (Glenn, p. 96). Langman (1999) posits that “Jewish self-hatred is an extreme case of internalized anti-Semitism” (p. 14). He goes on to say:

Though internalized anti-Semitism can lead to Jewish self-hatred, the two phenomenon should be differentiated. Whereas I believe internalized anti-Semitism to be common in one form or another, actual self-hatred is probably rare. Most Jews seem to be ambivalent about their Jewishness, rather than really self-hating (p. 14)

It is also likely that the term self-hatred is lobbed at some Jews out of fear, anxiety that an unusual stance or new direction may bring danger, or that criticism of Jews by Jews will bring unwanted and dangerous scrutiny, or, conversely, isolation (Brown, 1995; Lerner, M., 1992).

It seems clear that both the construct “self hatred” as well as the way in which it is often used are manifestations of unexamined internalized oppression. This study, however, could not be conducted without including literature that utilizes the phrase “self-hatred” as it is widely used, particularly in Jewish Studies, and psychology as a synonym for internalized anti-Semitism. Internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self hate and its relationship to the continued existence of unaddressed American Jewish poverty will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four.

What is Internalized Superiority/Jewish Exceptionalism/Ethnocentrism?

If the literature on internalized anti-Semitism is sparse, the literature for my other lens, the entwined construct of internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism, is the desert, with much of what can be found on internalized superiority only marginally applicable to Jews due to its emphasis on power and Whiteness, which until recently, did not pertain to Jews and Jewish identity, because Jews were neither White nor powerful. And, while there is a body of work which researches and defines ethnocentrism, little of it addresses the unique particularities of Jewish ethnocentrism, which, it can be hypothesized, has partly come about as a response to trauma (Hobfoll, Nissim & Johnson, 2006), trauma which was not a part of William Sumner's original conception of ethnocentrism (Bizumic, Duckitt, Popadic, Dru & Krauss, 2009). Given these caveats the following definitions are supplied. Further discussion will occur in Chapter Five.

Ethnocentrism was first defined (though not coined) in 1906 by the above-mentioned William G. Sumner with the recognition that most groups, now and through the ages, presume their group to be the pinnacle of humanity; thus, though ethnocentrism exists as a spectrum, all people are ethnocentric. Ruether (as cited in Langman) confirms this when she states:

Most ancient peoples tended to see their own identity as being the umbilicus of the universe. A certain concept of election, in this sense, is found among any people who have a sense of identity that links them to heaven (1999, p. 207).

Sumner's basic definition was that ethnocentrism “is the belief that one's own ethnic group is better than or superior to others” (as cited in Bizumic et al., 2009, p. 873). There was also often the assumption of negativity towards groups other than one's own though this understanding has been controversial and has changed over time (Bizumic, et al., 2009)

The concept of ethnocentrism is fundamental to the social sciences, but there is now, and has been, ambiguity about its exact nature. Is it preference of one's group (the “ingroup”) alone? Does it include negativity towards other groups (known in anthropology as outgroups), and the willingness to exploit outgroups to preserve one's own group, or is it a combination of these things? The following definition has been offered by Bizumic, et al. (2009):

Ethnocentrism is an attitudinal construct that involves a strong sense of ethnic group self-centeredness and self-importance. This sense has intergroup and intragroup expressions. Intergroup expressions involve the central belief or sentiment that one's own ethnic group is more important than other ethnic groups, whereas intragroup expressions involve the central belief or sentiment that one's own ethnic group is more important than its individual members. Intergroup expressions involve preferring ethnic ingroups over outgroups, a belief in the superiority of one's own ethnic group over outgroups, the wish for ethnic purity within the ethnic group, and acceptance of exploitation of outgroups when this is in ingroup's interests. Intragroup expressions, on the other hand, involve a need for strong group cohesion and a sentiment of strong devotion to one's own ethnic group. These six different expressions of ethnocentrism should be mutually interacting and reinforcing. (p. 874)

One could argue whether each of these elements applies to ethnocentrism within Jews, but this definition serves as a baseline with which to begin to grapple with this construct. What is interesting to note, (though beyond the scope of this project) is that most, if not all groups of people have been identified as ethnocentric (Bizumic, et al, 2009; Reuthner as cited in Langman,1999; Sumner, 1906) though Jews have consistently been singled out and vilified for their insistence on their “special-ness”. That special-ness takes us into the idea of Jewish exceptionalism or being “The Chosen People”.

There is a story: Benjamin Disraeli, when appointed to the British Parliament, was subjected to anti-Semitic harangues. In response, he stated that when his *attackers* were “naked

barbarians roaming the woodlands” *his* ancestors were receiving the Torah on Mt. Sinai (Gertel, 2001, p. 29).

On the one hand, this is an off the cuff witticism in response to an attempt to diminish, to make inferior, and too, it only barely covers a serious dynamic, that is the response of Jews to thousands of years of painful oppression and the way in which discomfort and difference can be turned to superiority (Gertel, 2001; Kent Katz, 2006).

The idea of the Jews as the Chosen People is fraught with controversy and rancor, both amongst and outside of Jewish populations, and has been used to justify brutality for centuries. Some Jews cleave to it, while others disavow what seems to be an almost racist notion in the era of multiculturalism. According to Torah, or the first five books of the Jewish Bible, God entered into a covenant with the Jewish people which says:

Now, therefore, if ye will harken to My voice, indeed, and keep my Covenant, then ye shall be Mine own treasure from among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy people. (Exodus 19:5—6 as cited in Gertel, 2001)

And, there are Jews for whom abandoning “chosen-ness” would be to “discard the *raison d’etre* that ha[s] sustained Jewish identity and Jewish faith through the ages” (Greene, 2006, p.

162). This belief was not only faith-sustaining, but a protective device, a defense mechanism.

For centuries:

What gentiles thought of Jews did not really matter; their views were unable to puncture the firm belief that the Jews continued to be the chosen people, theologically at the very center of world history even as it swirled around them, making them the objects rather than the subjects of historical events. (Meyer, 2002, p. 35)

But what does it mean to be Chosen? Does this imply superiority or some other idea?

Some Jewish religious thinkers have said that chosen-ness is about fulfilling obligations, not

about being better than others (Gertel, 2001; Langman, 1999), and Reconstructionist Judaism, uncomfortable with what chosen *may* imply, has removed all reference to it from their liturgy (Langman, 1999, p. 207).

Scripture, on the other hand, seems to be clear. It states that the Jews were “small and helpless”, and “needed to be healed”, a scrawny bunch of former slaves not yet fit to receive God's Commandments. Jewish religious interpretations known as Midrash assert that the experience on Mt. Sinai was “so overwhelming that the people literally lost their souls and had to be revived” (Gertel, 2001, p. 32). Other religious writings stress that the Jews were meant to be obedient, faithful and trustful, and that *obedience*, not superiority, was how they were meant to keep their side of the covenant (Gertel, 2001, p. 32).

Given this, the notion that the Jews were chosen because they were superior becomes almost farcical, and Berkovits, (as cited by Gertel, 2001) puts forth that “God never chose the Jews; but any people whom God chose was bound to become the Jewish People.” (p. 33).

While this is a complicated and contentious socio-religious issue and this writer is not a religious scholar, what seems important to know for this study is that Jewish exceptionalism did not develop in a vacuum. It arose in response to complex demands: an immediate anti-Jewish hatred and diminishing of the Jewish people which *required* a bolstering, and a perhaps more ephemeral but equally demanding list of spiritual regulations which needed to be adhered to (if one believes the story) and which required exceptional energies.

That moves us into the topic of internalized superiority, which, in the case of Jews, is often, due to anti-Semitism, mixed with inferiority. Gertel (2001) has this to say:

If some Jews in the modern Western experience have vacillated between inferiority complexes and delusions of grandeur, it has not been entirely their fault. Perhaps

the fault is much less theirs than they imagine. Christianity has had much to do with it because of the unhealthy attitude of early Christians, especially Paul, who were Jews and had decided that Jews are *both* inferior and superior to Gentiles. This strange juxtaposition of opposites, this grotesque ambivalence towards Jews [is something] with which Jew have had to live for 2,000 years. (p. 33)

Green (as cited in Kent Katz, 2006) adds:

...whereas for most other racisms, the stigmatized group is alleged to be morally and culturally inferior, anti-Semitism often combines an allegation of moral degeneracy or social inferiority with a paranoid fear of a dangerous superiority, or envy of supposed intellectual or economic attainment. (p. 9)

Internalized superiority may also be called internalized dominance or White privilege, and is usually a construct used within social justice movements. Mostly, it looks at domination of White people over People of Color, though it can be extrapolated to Christian hegemony, heterosexism, ableism, or any of the other ways in which majority groups have developed internal processes that normalize domination or privilege over minority groups.

While I do not believe that because Jews have a history of oppression, they *cannot* be oppressive to others, understanding internalized superiority within Jews requires greater nuance than is sometimes expressed in social justice movements which do not consider the Jewish history of oppression on Jewish identity (Lerner, M., 1992). Certainly, for Jews who are White, their long history as marginalized people differs substantially from that of many other White people, a difference which likely causes superiority to reside within them in a different locale – to manifest differently, to be triggered differently and to be explored and liberated differently. Internalized superiority as it is usually defined is not a perfect match for the phenomenon I am seeking to explore, but it is the most approximate theory available. One definition sees it as a “a multi-generational, dehumanizing, development of entitlement and empowerment for Whites in the United States.” (Houser, 2002, p. 1). Pheterson (1986), who claims to have coined the

expression internalized domination, describes it as:

...the incorporation and acceptance by individuals within a dominant group of prejudices against others. Internalized domination is likely to consist of feelings of superiority, normalcy, and self-righteousness, together with guilt, fear, projection, denial of reality and alienation. (p. 148)

Kent Katz (2006) states that “internalized racial superiority enables white people to see our perspectives and opinions as universal truths” (p. 8). Brown (1995), in the definition most useful for this study, notes that:

Those who have been oppressed often internalize the behaviors of the oppressor and act them out unintentionally against their own people. Thus, the hostility and brutality leveled at Jews, when left unhealed, can be internalized and then Jews may become hostile, hypercritical, or even brutal to one another. This cycle of repeating the initial mistreatment is one of the most insidious results of oppression (p. 46)

Though there are definitions of internalized superiority available, the research on specific manifestations of this construct within Jews is minimal, or, alternately, if it does exist, it may not be defined as internalized superiority but presented instead as merely a facet of Jewish identity. Gertel (2001) states that in some eras, Jews have believed that “anything Gentile is impure and evil, and that Gentiles are, somehow, less moral, less intelligent, and less worthy than Jews.” (p. 31-32). Other identified manifestations of internalized superiority are that Jews are special, smarter, more righteous, more worthy, more scholarly, more successful, more productive (Kent Katz, 2006, p. 9), better doctors, and lawyers, and that they are less likely to be alcoholics, addicts, and men who beat their wives or molest their children. Jews have been known, in the contemporary era, as the “model” minority, a projection which may become internalized as superiority.

Evaluation and Bias

Conducting a theoretical research project on a topic for which little research has been done and using “theories” or lenses which are amalgamated, cross-disciplinary, and not an exact match to the phenomenon being studied presents unique difficulties. This study, the examination of unaddressed Jewish poverty in the contemporary era as viewed through the lenses of internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self-hate and internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism is an example of such a study.

In an attempt to create meaning out of the data gathered, I will be evaluating this research via discussion while attempting to “see” it, and “make sense” of it through each of my chosen lenses. There is no stasis in these lenses – they could be applied differently to different populations, and in their separate forms have only rarely been applied to Jews. The potential for bias is great, as it is when any sole researcher, anyone “wielding” a lens views a phenomenon and attempts to make meaning. I am, as a researcher, no different in this regard. In fact, I may bring extra bias to the table given my history as an American Jew raised in poverty, and a Jew who likely still has remnants of unexamined internalized anti-Semitism and superiority within herself. That being said, it is my intention to bring metacognition to bear on this project, and to the best of my ability, to be willing, at the very least, to examine data from as many sides as possible.

Strengths and Limitations

A research project based on limited research, such as the one I am conducting, is potentially weakened due to the small sample of data, or applicable literature, that can be drawn upon. One of the strengths related to this weakness is that because so little has been conducted

in any one field, a number of disciplines must be drawn on in order to conduct adequate research. And, though no particular field of study has a large body of knowledge related to the manifestations of internalized anti-Semitism and internalized superiority, it is a strength that these concepts have been identified, and studied across a number of disciplines.

The next chapter will discuss the phenomenon of contemporary, unaddressed Jewish poverty in greater detail, providing a foundation for the viewing of this phenomenon through the lenses of both internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self-hate and internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism.

CHAPTER III

POVERTY AND JEWISH POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES

Looking at the phenomenon of Jewish poverty in contemporary America is difficult because few studies address it directly, either in quantitative or qualitative terms. When it is addressed, it tends to be in passing, as a few sentences, or perhaps a paragraph in a study or analysis conducted on some other aspect of Jewish culture or identity. Breaking away from this trend, a number of articles were written in the 1970's by people who had experienced Jewish poverty “2nd hand” – rabbis, social welfare workers, Jewish Federation presidents, and others, and these articles were compiled into the book *Poor Jews: An American Awakening* (Levine & Hochbaum, 1974).

This book explores traditional views on Jewish poverty, asserts that Jewish poverty exists (based on the author's observations), describes the need for services, and looks at some of the reasons why poor Jews were not being adequately served at the time the book was published (Levine & Hochbaum, 1974). Though the book makes a valuable contribution, it does not provide data on what it's like to *be* a Jew experiencing poverty, nor provide facts and figures which bolster the idea that Jewish poverty exists. The ideas present in this book “point their finger” at Jewish poverty, however, and will be cited throughout this chapter.

Quantitative data exploring Jewish poverty is also almost non-existent. One national study has been conducted in recent decades which “counts” Jews living in poor or near poor circumstances. The report, “Economic Vulnerability in the American Jewish Population” was

conducted as a part of the National Jewish Population Survey by the Jewish Federations of North America (2001), and has been used as the quantitative baseline for this thesis. While regional data has been gathered in New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, and other large American cities which substantiates the fact that a significant minority of Jews are living in poverty (Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, 2011; Popper, 2003, 2004; Ruth Rales Jewish Family Services, 2011) the Economic Vulnerability report not only gathered data on a national level but begins to understand Jewish poverty as something other than a regional issue. Since so little hard data exists, much of the research in this thesis has been done via extrapolation. For example, poverty within the general population will be discussed in some detail in an attempt to gain insight into what anyone living in poverty, Jewish or not, is likely to experience, and then how being Jewish might compound certain aspects of poverty will also be discussed.

Being poor and Jewish in the United States is, when considered at all, treated as a non sequitur. Jews are described as being “so good with money” (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996, p.142) that Jewish poverty in the United States is almost incomprehensible, and the phrase “Jewish poor” is thought to be a “contradiction in terms” (Levine & Hochman, 1974, p. 135). Langman says, “The idea of rich Jews has become institutionalized... to the extent that [most] people do not believe that there are poor Jews (1999, p. 5), and Mennis asserts “If the stereotype is that Jews have everything... if you are poor, you are not a Jew” (1986, p. 190). One participant in a New York City poverty program stated, “Jews are always perceived as having money hidden away, and [even] the poorest among them are viewed as having secret sources of income.” (Levine & Hochman, 1974, p. 135)

In addition to contextualizing Jewish poverty in the United States by looking at what poverty is like in general, this chapter will look specifically at who the Jewish poor are, and as stated above, the ways in which Jewish poverty differs from poverty within the population at large. The Jewish Community's response to Jewish poverty will also be looked at as it is being hypothesized that their current response is not incidental to this phenomenon, but rather is an integral factor in the maintenance of Jewish poverty, and thus vitally important to explore.

Definition of Poverty

Poverty is a federally and numerically defined term, and is based on very low economic resources. The measurement used to determine poverty was created by a U.S. government statistician, Molly Orshansky, almost fifty years ago and has changed little since then (Bernstein, 2003). In acknowledgment of how low the official poverty threshold is, eligibility for many social service and community based benefits is calculated using a range of 150%- 200% of the poverty level to include those suffering from inadequate economic resources even though they may not meet the actual poverty level. These people are often described as being low-income or “near-poor”.

The chart on the next page shows the Federal Poverty Thresholds for the year 2000, as well as the Low Income Thresholds used in the study, Economic Vulnerability in the American Jewish Population (National Jewish Population Survey, 2000-2001). While more recent poverty figures are available for the general population, the National Jewish Population Survey's Economic Vulnerability report delineating Jewish poverty has not been conducted since 2000/01; for ease of comparison, Federal Poverty figures from that same year have been included rather than more recent data.

People in Household	Poverty Thresholds: US Government 2000	Low Income Thresholds: NJPS Interval Income Data	Percentage Increase of Low Income Threshold over US Federal Poverty Threshold
1	\$8-9,000.00	\$15,000.00	166-188%
2	\$10-11,000.00	\$15,000.00	136-150%
3	\$13,000.00	\$25,000.00	192.00%
4	\$17,000.00	\$25,000.00	147.00%
5	\$21,000.00	\$35,000.00	167.00%
6	\$24,000.00	\$35,000.00	146.00%
7 or more	\$27,000.00	\$35,000.00	130.00%

Poverty in the General Population

It may be unnecessary to say, but living in poverty is stressful, particularly if one lives in a culture where poverty is treated with hatred and derision, as it often is in the United States. Even though literature exists which details the lack of integrity in the idea of the US as a meritocracy, the “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” ideology is still strong, and for those who are unable to comply, whatever the reason/s, there is both a psychological as well as a physical price to pay.

de Botton (2004) in his exploration of status, states that the following three ideas began to gain influence in the mid 18th Century, and that they continue to have impact on our culture today: rich people are useful, and poor people are not; status has moral connotation, and those who are wealthy have greater merit, and, “the poor are sinful and corrupt and owe their poverty to their own stupidity.” (p. 55, 59 and 67). In his 1920 autobiography, Andrew Carnegie wrote this of charity:

Every drunken vagabond or lazy idler supported by alms is a source of moral infection to a neighborhood. It will not do to teach the hard-working, industrious man that there is an easier path by which his wants can be supplied. The less emotion the better. Neither the individual nor the race is improved by alms-giving. Those worthy of assistance, except in rare cases, seldom require assistance. The really valuable men of the race never do. (as cited in de Botton, 2004, pp. 70-71)

Race as a factor in poverty will be briefly explored later in this chapter; an additional comment on meritocracy from 1958, London, however, bears consideration as it furthers our understanding of the views on poverty and poor people that exist in America today:

...all persons, however humble, know they have had every chance....If they have been labeled 'dunce' repeatedly they cannot any longer pretend....Are they not bound to recognise that they have an inferior status, not as in the past because they were denied opportunity, but because they *are* inferior?" (Young, as cited in de Botton, 2004, p. 71)

While the weight of these projections must certainly be described as enormously heavy, and likely to inspire self-loathing and shame in the recipient, poverty is also comprised of many other aspects, some of them quite tangible.

“Food insecurity”, is an academic term for hunger, and is defined as “when the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain” (Mello, et al., 2010, p. 1906). Food insecurity is considerably more likely to occur in poor households, than in those with adequate means, and in 2005, “38% of poverty-level income households were food insecure.” (Mello et al, 2010, p. 1906)

Low income couples are also more likely to have relationship difficulties, and research shows that “economic strain leads to an increase in spousal hostility and a decrease in spousal warmth.” (Freeman, Carlson & Sperry as cited in Daken & Wampler, 2008, p. 300); financial

stress is also associated with decreased marital stability and possibly correlated to higher rates of divorce (Daken & Wampler, p. 2008, pp. 300 and 308).

Research has also shown an association between low-income and mental health and a “strong relationship has been made between hardships [paying bills and having the phone turned off] and depression.” (Heflin & Iceland, 2009, p. 1051), with women living “in or near poverty” having a higher incidence of major depressive disorder (Heflin & Iceland, 2009, p. 1051) than those who are outside of poverty's limits. Additionally, a “higher lifetime and 12-month incidence of depressive, anxiety and substance abuse disorders” has been shown to exist in “low-income individuals.” (Kessler as cited in Heflin & Iceland, 2009, p. 1051) Najman et al. (2010) found that “family poverty predicts higher rates of adolescent and young adult anxiety and depression” and that “repeated experiences of poverty over a child's early life course are associated with increased levels of poor mental health.” (p. 1719)

Children who live in poverty experience “noisier, more crowded, and lower quality housing...than their middle income counterparts... and also experience more psychosocial stressors such as elevated family turmoil, greater child-family separation, and higher levels of violence” (Evans & English, 2002, p. 1243) all of which contribute to a greater level of “psychological distress” than experienced by middle income children (Evans & English, 2002, p. 1245).

Additionally, physical health is often dramatically compromised for those who are poor or near poor, and “poverty is one of the most documented contributors to high infant mortality” (Eudy, 2009, p. 807), and is also “associated with a higher risk of asthma and... mortality.” (Flores, et al., 2009; p. 392) Full time employment of a caregiver was associated with

“significant reduction” in childhood asthma “exacerbations” (Flores, et al., 2009, p.395) while obesity and diabetes have been shown to be “particularly problematic” for the poor (Perdue, 2008, para. 2). “Extreme impoverishment” was also strongly associated with poor outcomes for women with breast cancer in the United States, with “non-localized disease at diagnosis, long waits for initial surgery..., non breast-conserving surgery... and shorter survival.” (Gorey, Luginaah, Hamm, Fung & Holowaty, 2010, p. 160)

Treadwell & Ro (2003) assert that poor men in particular “are invisible” and that their health needs are “neglected” resulting in a tremendous amount of pain and early death (p. 705). Poor men “jeopardize their health” to support their families, and frequently work in hazardous conditions where policies meant to protect them are “grossly inadequate” and where employer health insurance is rarely offered (Treadwell & Ro, 2003, p. 705). Treadwell & Ro go on to state:

Poor men are less likely to have health insurance, less likely to seek needed health services and less likely to receive adequate care when they do. Even among the poor, some men are less than equal. The generally abysmal health status of men of African descent best demonstrates the great peril that poor men have to face. Life expectancy for African American men is 7.1 years shorter than that for all men. Forty percent of African American men die prematurely from cardiovascular disease, compared with 21% of White men. And death rates from HIV/AIDS are nearly 5 times higher for African American men than for White men. (2003, p. 705)

While devastating race-based health disparities have been shown to exist (Trentwell & Ro, 2003; Eudy, 2008) Blacks and Hispanics are often presented as the “face” of the poor in the United States while White poverty is hidden. According to the 1998 Census, Blacks and Hispanics combined made up 32% of people living in poverty at that time with 68% of those living in poverty being White (as cited in Moss, 2003, p. 3) leading Kirby Moss (2003) to call

poor White people “America's truly, truly invisible citizens” (2003, p. 3). While it is beyond the scope of this project to explore the reasons for the misrepresentation of the “color” of poverty, it can be said that while poverty has bitter consequences for all who endure it, racial minorities are likely to be disadvantaged in other ways as well, such as education and career opportunities (Tatum, as cited in Adams et al, 1997, p. 80) and also when involved with the criminal justice system (Glasser, 2000; Mauer, 2007).

Poverty that is “passed down from generation to generation” has been conceptualized as a “culture”, in this case, the “culture of poverty” (Lewis, 1974, p. 10). Some of the traits associated with this phenomenon include a high rate of “abandonment of wives and children”, “competition for limited goods and affection”, “a strong present time orientation with relatively little ability to defer gratification”, “a sense of resignation and fatalism, a widespread belief in male superiority, and a high tolerance for psychological pathology of all sorts” (Lewis, 1974, p. 16). While the idea of a “culture of poverty” is controversial, Lewis asserts that his intention (1974, p. 10) was always to understand this phenomenon in a way that removed the responsibility from the individual, and that he sees the culture of poverty as:

...[an] adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated, capitalistic society. It represents an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair which develop from the realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society. (1974, p. 11)

Not surprisingly, the poorest of America's citizens also experience disparity in educational opportunities, with many schools in poor communities under-performing and perpetuating what is known as the “achievement gap” where poor students have lower test scores and graduate less frequently than their wealthier counterparts. While many factors influence the

achievement gap, it is, in the United States, widely correlated to poverty (Education Northwest, 2009).

Understanding some of what poverty in America may be like in general, we turn next to the Jewish experience of poverty.

Jewish Poverty

Prior to the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, poverty amongst Jews in the United States was fairly commonplace, as many Jews emigrated to the U.S. during that time period, and arrived here near penniless (Bubis, 2005, para 15). Remarkable economic achievements were made by Jews in that same period to the extent that today people both inside and out of the Jewish community are flabbergasted to hear Jewish poverty mentioned (Mendez, 2006; Mennis, 1986; Kotler-Berkowitz, 2009).

Poverty amongst Jews has never gone away entirely, however, and has been acknowledged by social service and Jewish Community agencies, as well as a smattering of researchers, throughout the 20th Century (Bubis, 2005; Gold, 1930; Kotler-Berkowitz, 2009; Lerner, S., 1985; Mendes, 2006; Popper, 2003, 2004; Silberman, 1974; Ukeles and Grossman, 2002; United Jewish Communities, 2000-2001; Wolf, 1972). Not only does Jewish poverty exist, but dependent upon the calculations used and the geographic area being studied, it is reported to exist at a rate similar to the rate of poverty amongst the general population, usually estimated to be 11% (Popper, 2003); this number is sometimes thought to be considerably higher (as is the general poverty rate) again, dependent upon the calculations used (Popper, 2003; Bernstein, 2003).

Kotler-Berkowitz (2004) in his report on Economic Vulnerability in the American Jewish

Population, found:

In 2000-01, 7% of American Jewish Households ha[d] incomes that fell below the federal government's official poverty line, and double that proportion, 14%, have incomes that place them in a category that can also be considered "low income". The persistence of economic vulnerability among a minority of Jewish households stands in stark contrast to the fact that the median income of American Jewish households is significantly higher than the U.S. Median household income. (p. 3)

Berkowitz goes to state that "economic vulnerability...is not distributed evenly across the American Jewish population"(2004, p. 3), and that it is more common amongst the elderly, single women with children, single adults of either sex, those who are physically or mentally ill, immigrants, families, Orthodox Jews, Jews who live in the Western United States, Jews of Color, those who have a high school education or less, and those who identify as "just Jewish" but have no particular religious denomination (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2004). The number of American Jews living in poverty or low income in 2000 was estimated to be approximately 498,000 people. (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2004, p.8)

While these poverty and low income figures have astonished many, they are widely considered to be "misleading as a measure of Jewish poverty" (Popper, 2003, para 8) for a number of reasons. First, poverty calculations do not take into consideration the higher cost of living associated with urban environments, where "most Jews live" (Popper, 2003, para. 9), and secondly:

...the survey posed its questions on income and poverty only to a selected subgroup of "more Jewishly engaged" respondents. Less affluent Jews are less likely to participate in Jewish religious and communal activity, according to the survey's own findings, and so were less likely to receive the full survey questionnaire, almost certainly skewing the survey's income findings upward. (Popper, 2003, para. 7).

The report's author, Kotler-Berkowitz (2004) has this to say in regards to the accuracy of the figures:

In surveys conducted in the United States, a substantial minority of respondents typically does not answer questions on income, either by explicitly refusing or replying “don't know” (often as a less direct refusal)....The assumption is that respondents who did not provide valid data do not, as a whole, differ significantly from those who did provide valid data in terms of their (unknown) income....The implication is that the population estimate of total households and people with low income....is, in all likelihood an underestimate because some of the people who refused to provide their income would fall in the low-income category (p. 7)

Kotler-Berkowitz goes on to state:

If we assume that the low-income distribution is the same in cases where we do not have income data as it is in cases where we do, then....this would bring the total population of [Jews] living in those [low-income] households to 981,000. (2004, p. 8).

Consequences of Jewish Poverty *or*, “Does it Matter?”

Though contemporary Jewish poverty has not been widely studied, it may be possible to extrapolate from the data on poverty, anti-Semitism and Jewish identity in the United States today, that Jewish poverty might have a particularly pointed effect on Jews who experience it, and that some of the detrimental aspects that poverty has on the general population might be exacerbated within the Jewish population. The reasons for this are varied and possibly include the psychological burden of not living up to the cultural expectation of economic success that has come to be inextricably woven into American Jewish identity; the lack of ability to pay the cost associated with participating in Jewish communal life in 21st Century America thus increasing the likelihood of isolation from other Jews; the almost non-existence of programs geared specifically towards assisting non-immigrant American Jews *out* of poverty; a contradiction

between the values of poverty and Jewish values, and the possibility of impoverished Jews being exposed to a greater degree of anti-Semitism than their more wealthy counterparts.

Psychological effects of Jewish Poverty. Little in the literature relates directly to the psychological experience of being a poor American Jew in the late 20th and early 21st Century. Mendes (2006) states that “...Jewish poverty has tended to be either hidden, or a source of considerable personal shame or stigma.” (p. 50). And, given the emphasis in contemporary American Jewish culture on “success (and its public recognition)...prestige, respect, authority, and status (Rosen & Weltman, 1996, p. 617), this shame is likely to go both ways, with Jews who live in poverty experiencing shame at their “shortcomings” and the Jewish Community being ashamed at those amongst them who cannot reach or maintain community standards. Rosen & Weltman (1996) relay the story of “an economically struggling family [who] expressed a preference for a non-Jewish therapist, with whom they believed they would feel less ashamed of their lack of financial success.” (p. 618). This lack of “making the grade” is often subtle or unspoken:

In some Jewish families, almost no one feels he or she can truly meet the high standards of success. For example, families may go to great lengths to deny or hide the fact that their child is unable to excel academically. In addition, expectations are often implicit and unspoken and can therefore never really be met. (Rosen & Weltman, 1996, p. 618)

Mennis (1986) says this of the projection of wealth towards Jews, and the experience of being Jewish and without economic resources:

What happens when one feels self-conscious and small and is seen as large, wealthy, powerful, controlling? At a young age, I knew the anti-Semitic portrait of the wealthy, exploitative Jew. I also knew that I did not feel powerful or controlling. My parents and I felt powerless, fearful, vulnerable. We owned nothing. All my parents saved, after working fifty years, would not equal the cost of one year of college today. What does it mean to have others' definition of one's

reality so vastly different from one's experience of it? The effects are confusion, anger, entrapment. I lost touch with what was real, what my own experiences really were. (p. 189).

Yeskel (1996) states that middle class or above is thought to be “normative” for Jews in America, and that this has led to “alienation, shame and self-blame among many poor and working class Jews.” (p.52).

Kaufman & Raphael, researchers on shame, assert:

Americans are taught to compete for success and to measure self-esteem by external standards of performance. Failure to succeed becomes a potent source of shame....In a culture which esteems popularity and conformity, individuality is neither recognized nor valued. Being different becomes shameful. The awareness of being Jewish inevitably translates into being different and hence, potentially inferior in a culture which prize[s] social conformity. (1987, p. 34).

Being a poor Jew, then, is potentially two strikes in a mainstream culture that values conformity and success, as a poor Jew may not be capable of living up to either, and a third strike if one considers the norm of achievement which Jews are measured against within their own culture. Clark (as cited in Kaufman & Raphael) found:

Whenever human beings are relegated to an inferior status in a larger society – whenever they are rejected, humiliated and persecuted, they begin to doubt themselves and question the value and worth of the group to which they belong. Those individuals develop deep feelings of inferiority and a sense of personal humiliation. (1967, p. 112).

Poverty in and of itself has been correlated to increased anxiety, depression and substance abuse (Kessler as cited in Heflin & Iceland, 2009, p. 1051) and related to overall increased levels of poor mental health (Najman et al., 2010, p. 1719). Jewish poverty likely has these same components, and, when it has been addressed in the literature, it has additionally been associated with shame, alienation, a sense of not measuring up, fear, vulnerability, confusion, anger and powerlessness (Mendes, 2006; Mennis, 1986; Rosen & Weltman, 1996; Yeskel, 1996). Given

the dearth of qualitative research on Jewish poverty, it is not possible to know whether anyone living in poverty experiences these feelings or whether these feelings are exacerbated for Jews living in poverty. It seems likely however, that the shame inducing consequences of poverty might be compounded if one's poverty is looked down upon and unaddressed not only by the “culture-at-large” but is ignored by one's own ethnic group as well.

Bubis (2005) points to this when he questions whether or not board members of large Jewish Community agencies tasked with addressing poverty and low income in Jewish communities have had life experiences which would “engender empathy”(p.7) and notes that board members no longer represent the demographics of the community in the way they once did. His research shows:

...only 17% of board members [of Jewish organizational boards] earned less than \$100,000 a year, while 66% earned \$150,000 or more. Some 52% reported over \$200,000 in annual income (Bubis & Cohen, 1998, as cited in Bubis, 2005, p. 7).

Bubis goes on to assert that studies that revealed the Jewish existence of poverty have “challenged the myths cherished by Jews about their self-sufficiency and success in contrast to the desperate poverty of the past” (2005, p. 10), and that contemporary Jews have preferred to focus on the ways they have moved away from poverty rather than addressing poverty that still exists within their community. Lerner, S. (1985) puts forth:

For too long we have lived with the myths that (a) there are no Jewish poor; (b) if they do exist, their numbers are so small as to be insignificant and not important enough to be considered as a serious problem; (c) the poor or near-poor are concentrated almost exclusively among the aged; (d) the Jews 'take care of their own' and therefore, have solved this problem to the satisfaction of the givers and receivers of assistance. Unfortunately, none of these guilt-relieving myths is true.(p.49)

Rabbi David Polish (as cited in Wolfe, 1974) states:

It is not merely neglect that the American Jewish poor have suffered. They have been the victims of prejudice and discrimination as well, and they have suffered from these attitudes at the hands of fellow Jews. (p. 27)

Rabbi Polish continues, "...we have swept the Jewish poor out of sight and acted as though they didn't exist." (as cited in Wolfe, 1974, p. 27). The lack of attention to the problem of Jewish poverty, is, Bubis states, "the dark underside of a successful community." (2005, p. 10)

Next, we will look to see whether or not anti-Semitism, sometimes rumored to be gone from America, is experienced by Jews living in poverty.

Poor Jews and anti-Semitism. Cohen (2010) states, "In the early 21st Century, overwhelming percentages of American Jews perceived anti-Semitism in the United States to be either a somewhat or [a] serious problem." (p. 85). Cohen goes on to question why "a group as successful as American Jews" (p. 85) would perceive such high levels of anti-Semitism. His premise seems to be that anti-Semitism in America is an issue of perception and context rather than actual anti-Semitism and his article is an exploration of who amongst Jews perceives anti-Semitism, and under what circumstances. Cohen (2010) puts forth the following in regards to marginalized individuals:

Marginalized individuals, whether their marginality stems from social, economic, political, or other factors, are more likely to hold racist attitudes and look upon members of other groups with hostility, suspicion, and other negative attitudes. (p. 90)

He goes on:

Despite the high level of educational and economic attainment among many Jews, not all are highly educated, wealthy or otherwise successful; many live on the economic margins....socially marginalized Jews may see anti-Semitism as a greater threat than less marginal, socially secure Jews. Marginalized individuals possess fewer resources to protect themselves from social and economic disturbances, like

downturns in the economy and upswings in crime, as well as perceived or actual threats, such as anti-Semitic incidents and threats. Similarly, marginalized individuals lack the resources to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves and/or to improve their social and economic circumstances. (p.91)

Cohen seems to be expressing that socially marginalized Jews might both perceive and experience “actual” anti-Semitism at a greater rate than Jews with more abundant economic resources, as well as have fewer resources with which to address anti-Semitism when they experience it. He continues, however, by stating:

Intergroup competition has often been seen as a source of prejudice and dislike of other groups. This effect may be heightened among socially marginalized individuals, who may be more likely to blame others for their social circumstances, especially outgroups, who may be seen as competitors, as receiving societal preferences or special advantages, or otherwise as the source of their plight. Marginalized individuals, thus, live in a world that they perceive as filled with hostility and ingroup versus outgroup conflict. (Cohen, 2010, p. 91)

This paragraph seems to put forth that “marginalized Jews” are not actually “experiencing” anti-Semitism, but that their own bias, hostility and competitiveness can be held accountable for their “perception” of anti-Semitism. Cohen elucidates here:

This leads to the hypothesis that socially marginalized Jews are more likely to perceive anti-Semitism as a threat than less marginal Jews. For instance, marginal Jews may think that affirmative action privileges Blacks, while disadvantaging Jews. They may also associate affirmative action with quotas used to exclude or restrict Jewish entry in major social and economic establishments earlier in the twentieth century (on this history see Dinnerstein, 1994). Affirmative action, the argument goes, keeps marginal Jews down, hurting their chances for advancement. There are many to whom marginal Jews may point to blame for their social difficulties (Glaser, 1997). Marginal Jews may thus see anti-Semitism as a greater problem than nonmarginalized Jews. (2010, p. 91)

What Cohen does not address is whether or not “marginalized” Jews actually *do* experience greater anti-Semitism than their more wealthy counterparts or whether they only *perceive* anti-Semitism where none exists. Surely, if marginalized Jews are more likely to be

“racist”, “hostile” and “competitive” than non-marginalized Jews, than other economically marginalized peoples are equally likely to carry these same “negative” traits of racism, hostility and competitiveness. And surely, too, this “hostility and suspicion” could have individuals from within these groups behaving in anti-Semitic ways towards the marginalized Jews in their midst. According to Cohen's hypothesis, it almost ensures that they would. It seems odd and clearly an oversight that this possibility is not also a part of Cohen's thinking and it begs the question as to whether or not Cohen has some internalized anti-Semitism of his own to contend with. If he is Jewish, this could be a textbook example, based on the research in this study, of a Jewish person seeing what is negative and attributing it to Jews when others manifesting similar traits are not seen in a negative light at all.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has a somewhat different perspective on anti-Semitism than does Cohen. In 2007 they commissioned a report that looked at American attitudes towards Jews, and discovered that “Education remains a strong predictor of anti-Semitic propensities, with the most well-educated Americans being remarkably free of prejudicial views while less educated Americans are more likely to hold anti-Semitic views.” (p.3).

This data would lead us to believe that marginalized Jews would be *more* likely than non-marginalized Jews to experience anti-Semitism, as they themselves are more likely to be poorly educated, and are also likely to live in poor communities where education levels are lower than in more affluent communities.

The ADL report also found the strongest anti-Semitic propensities within these demographics:

- Americans with incomes under \$50,000 per year at 19% of respondents
- African-Americans without a college degree – 37% of respondents

- African-Americans with college degrees – 19%
- Foreign-born Hispanics – 29%
- People over the age of 65 – 18%
- People without internet access – 21% (2007, pp. 22-23).

This data lead us to believe that poor, poorly educated and aging communities as well as poorly educated Communities of Color are *exactly* the places where anti-Semitism *would* be expected to flourish.

Isolation from Other Jews. Participation in Jewish communal life in America costs money. Synagogue dues, day school tuition, Jewish summer camp fees, and visits to Israel are just some of the costs associated with active engagement in Jewish life. Of course, if one can not pay the rent, or is worried about getting food on the table, these fees are relegated to the distant back burner, which can leave poor Jews isolated from the Jewish Community and without a sense of Jewish identity that is strong and positive in a Christian dominated society (Bubis, 2005). While poor Jews who live in New York City are likely to live in proximity to other Jews, in other parts of the country, “Many cannot afford to live in Jewish frequented areas.” (Mendes, 2006, p. 51)

Kotler-Berkowitz (2004) states:

Having low income also has important Jewish communal consequences, reducing rates of institutional affiliation and communal participation....Those with low income are less likely than others to be members of synagogues, Jewish community centers and other Jewish organizations. They are also less likely to volunteer for Jewish organizations, to participate in adult Jewish education, and to make contributions to federations and other Jewish causes....People with low income more frequently report that financial costs have prevented them joining synagogues, and JCCs, traveling to Israel and keeping Kosher...and are consistent with other findings that show low income presents obstacles to Jewish communal participation (p. 19)

Bubis (2005) estimates that “...today's Jewish families require \$25-\$35,000 of discretionary income for intensive Jewish experiences – a sum often beyond the reach even of upper-middle class Jewish homes.” (as cited by Bayme, 2005, p. 2) but certainly well beyond the reach of those living in poverty or near-poor circumstances.

Mendes (2006) asserts “...people living below the low-income threshold are consistently less-likely to affiliate with Jewish institutions and partake in communal programs....As a result poorer Jews often find themselves socially marginalized, and excluded from participation.” (p. 51). He states that poor Jews “...face the additional challenge of engaging with a Jewish community which is overwhelmingly based on middle or even upper middle class norms” and that “there remain serious educational and social barriers to *integration* [emphasis added]”(2006, p. 51). Further, Mendes notes that “Class snobbery has been identified as a significant problem” amongst Jews in Australia. (2006, p. 51).

Yeskel (1996) also notes class differences when she states, “When we distance and dissociate from other Jews, because of our fear of being identified with them, it is hard to maintain a sense of connection and community.” (p.53). She goes on, “...often, but not always” this distancing is based on those who are “farther down on the class spectrum, poor and working-class Jews”. (p.53)

It is clear that poor Jews face obstacles in participating in Jewish communal life both in terms of class differences which, it seems plausible, could make interaction difficult, as well as cost, which might preclude the class confrontation from ever happening – perhaps that partially explains why lower class participation in Jewish community life has not been prioritized by Jewish Community agencies and federations.

A clash in values. No qualitative studies of poor Jews in the United States have been conducted, so almost nothing is known of the culture of American Jews living in poverty. And while it is extremely difficult to generalize given the many different “sub-cultures” that exist within the stratum of poor or near poor, it can be extrapolated from sources on poverty as well as Jewish culture, that some long held Jewish values might clash with values which are commonly found in impoverished communities in America today.

For example, Jews traditionally value education, verbal expression, questioning, a strong emphasis on reason, and the centrality of “marriage, home and family” (Rosen & Weltman, 1996, p. 621; Smith, 2005), but it is known that poverty and poor education are also often correlated, and a “strong predisposition towards authoritarianism” (Lewis, 1974, p. 16) exists within some poor communities. What is the experience like, then, for Jews who may hold the value of education (whether officially “educated” or not) and individual expression but live in communities which are authoritarian in nature? Do poor Jews give their values up? Do they find themselves being the oddballs, the ones who can't ever quite fit in? Are they the recipients of violence or other recriminations when expressing themselves, or is there some other configuration that manifests?

Another traditional value of Jews is that of tzedekah, charity or social justice which comes with the imperative that “responding to poverty is not optional” (Dorff, as cited in Mendes, 2006, p. 52). This concept is related to the concept of tikkun olam, which means to “heal the world”. Further study might reveal how Jews without adequate financial means manifest these values, values which seem to be, for many Jews, deeply ingrained and arguably beyond consciousness, and might clarify as well, what outcomes occur if an appropriate outlet

cannot be found, and whether or not there are psychological by-products to not adhering to these “commandments”.

A value which may not be traditional, but which is common to American Jews is the value of success, authority, prestige and achievement (Rosen & Weltman, 1996, p. 617). We have already seen how the image of the wealthy Jew so prominent in American culture presents challenges to poor Jews, and the disbelief they may experience in regards to their economic circumstances. Kaye/Kantrowitz (1992) states, “Often non-Jewish women who are poor, working class or of color, automatically define Jews as privileged, and can only imagine Jewish power being used against them” (p.190). Again, further study might explore the dynamics of being a member of an ethno-religious group known for its success yet being poor and living in the midst of those who as a group have neither achieved success in America, nor had that expectation thrust upon them. It seems clear that it is one thing to have everyone expect you to succeed, quite another to have no one believe in the possibility of your success.

Programs to help Jews out of poverty. It is estimated that almost a million American Jews live in poor or near poor circumstances (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2004, p. 8) and yet, because this demographic is poorly understood, and stereotypes persist which portray Jews as monied, few if any programs exist to help them rise out of their circumstances (Lerner, S., 1985; Mendes, 2006; Silberman, 1974; Wolfe, 1972). Poor Jews do not fill positions on boards that are meant to insure the health of their communities (Bubis, 2005; Silberman, 1974, p. 122) and thus their perspective and their needs are not represented when community funds are allotted. Silberman (1974) states:

The basic problem in delivering adequate services to the Jewish poor is that so many people are either unaware, or unwilling to accept the harsh reality of Jewish

poverty. Until we teach our own people that there are persons of widely different socioeconomic statuses within what is generally considered to be an upper-middle-class ethnic group, and help them understand what being a poor Jew is all about, we will be unable to provide the variety of services needed to help the elderly Jewish poor live out their lives in greater comfort and the younger generation to escape from the cycle of poverty. (p. 118)

Comar (1976) puts forth the idea that American Jews have been more comfortable helping poor Jews abroad than “poverty-stricken Jews” in America, and asks, “...can we continue to justify, to ourselves and others, the sending of increased sums of money raised in our cities to aid the overseas “poor Jews” without, at the same time, meeting our obligation to aide our own American Jewish poor?” and “...is there not a way to meet all of our responsibilities?” (pp. 106-107).

Statistics are kept on the African American poor, Hispanic poor, and White poor, but Jewish poverty has not been parsed out, has not been tracked, and thus the particular needs of Jewish poverty are not being addressed (Levine & Hochbaum, 1974; Silberman, 1974; Wolfe, 1974). Christian faith based agencies, which have proliferated in recent years, may prioritize serving people within their own communities, and/or, may proselytize to those receiving services, which could be uncomfortable, if not painful, for many Jewish people.

All of these factors: the psychological components of being an impoverished American Jew; the what-seem-to-be increased chances of experiencing anti-Semitism; the clash of values that Jews may experience when living in poor communities, and the lack of programs to address Jewish poverty, point not only to the difficulty in being a poor Jew, but compel the field of social work towards further research in which to ground attempts to meet this demographic's needs. The next chapter explores in detail the concept of internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self-hate.

CHAPTER IV

**THE IMPACT OF INTERNALIZED ANTI-SEMITISM/INTERNALIZED
OPPRESSION/SELF HATE ON JEWS**

Chapter Two provided an introduction to the construct of internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self hate, and this chapter seeks to further illuminate this cluster of ideas and the impact they have on Jews. While each element of this “cluster” is somewhat different in tone, or implication, there is overlap between the three. Additionally, since these are psychological constructs, the ways in which these ideas manifest is complex – sometimes contradictory, layered in defense, and difficult to pinpoint.

Definition Recap

Internalized anti-Semitism is the situation in which “Jews involuntarily absorb external negative messages resulting in internalizing destructive feelings [and beliefs] about themselves and other Jews.” (Rosenwasser, 2005, p. 182). It could be added that internalized anti-Semitism involves a quality of dislike or shame, whereas with internalized oppression, the emotional component may be fear, sorrow, anxiety, or any number of other emotions manifesting as a result of current or historical anti-Semitism. Internalized oppression may also include behavioral patterns in reaction to anti-Semitism, patterns which are often passed down from generation to generation (Rosenwasser, 2005, p. 182), and which may include unexplained family rules. Self-hatred amongst Jews is thought to be the most extreme example of internalized anti-Semitism

(Langman, 2004, p. 14); all three of these constructs are intimately connected to the millennia-old Jewish experience of oppression, of being “othered”.

Though “...internalized anti-Semitism has received almost no attention in the realm of psychological research” (Murphy, 2009, p.65), the theory about this phenomenon which does exist, has correlated it to shame; depression; grief; fear; poor body image; self-loathing; eating disorders; difficulty with intimacy; distancing oneself from Jewishness or other Jews; fear of visibility; mistrust of others; a sense of victimization; anxiety, and many other forms of psychological distress (Beck, Goldberg & Knefelkamp, 2004; Breitman, 1995; Brown, 1991; Clark, 1995; Hammer, 1995; Klein, 1980; Langman, 2004; Lax & Richards, 1981, Marx; Murphy, 2009; Rosenwasser, 2005; Schlosser, 2006; Schnur, 2001; Schwartz, 1995).

Schlosser (2006) suggests that “...every American Jew goes through the process of learning (and hopefully unlearning) internalized antisemitism [sic] by being raised and /or living in an antisemitic society like the United States.” (p. 428)

Affective impact of anti-Semitism on Jews. Today, it is almost common knowledge that Jews have a history of trauma, but how this trauma has affected Jews has not been well studied, and is not well known (Hammer, 1995, p. 205). The Holocaust occurred over sixty years ago, and many Jews in the United States report their lives to be free of virulent anti-Semitism or the hindering effects of anti-Semitic views. Why then, are Jews still traumatized and manifesting symptoms of being an oppressed group? Schwartz (1995) clarifies the ways in which the history of genocide and diaspora live on:

Jews have a history of trauma, whether seen and experienced directly, passed down through family stories or inherited through pathological family interaction. Much like the survivor of trauma, we too are terrified of what we have seen and heard, frightened that it may happen again, and vigilant about protecting ourselves from

that possibility. Like the survivors of trauma, we are horrified, and grief-stricken by the loss of loved ones whom we have actually known or perhaps only heard about through family stories. (p. 135)

While the focus in the United States has been on assimilation (which may in itself be a facet of internalized oppression), achievement, and leaving the past behind: forgetting Yiddish, fleeing synagogues (known to many Jews from Eastern Europe and Russia as *shul*, which is Yiddish for the same word), becoming Buddhist, and marrying outside of the “clan”, the residue of trauma, most recently and dramatically the Holocaust, runs like a deep, painful, mostly unconscious and unexamined river through the bloodlines of Jews everywhere. Beck (as cited in Schwartz, 1995) asserts:

In varying degrees and in different ways, the Holocaust has marked the psyche of every Jew the world over. I believe that most Jews, even the most assimilated, walk around with a subliminal fear of anti-semitism the way that most women walk around with a subliminal fear of rape. (p. 140)

This burden, this emotional weight which may be a “given” for Jews, something which lives within them unquestioned, seems to be more an example of internalized Jewish oppression, which can include *any* of the myriad internalized responses to anti-Semitism, than an example of internalized anti-Semitism which might be construed as actively involving dislike or bias against. Subliminal fear *of* anti-Semitism is not *dislike* of Jews, in thought, feeling or behavior, but is rather an emotional or psychological response *to* anti-Semitism. While these distinctions may be important in some contexts, the terms internalized anti-Semitism, internalized Jewish oppression, the psychological effects of anti-Semitism, and self-hate are used almost interchangeably in the literature to point to the same phenomenon, and have been used interchangeably, with the exception of self-hate, within this thesis.

Unexplained feelings of dread, despair, anxiety, grief, and depression, as well as profound distrust, can also be aspects of internalized Jewish oppression, and, after conducting research on Jewish identity, one of the conclusions Lax and Richards (1981) reached was that being Jewish has a “slightly torturous quality” (as cited in Langman, 2004, p. 278), while Karl Marx (as cited in Rosenwasser, 2005) stated that “persecution of Jews has produced an intensity of self-hatred that is *searing* [emphasis added]” (p. 212). Ackerman and Jahoda (as cited by Murphy, 2009) conceptualized internalized anti-Semitism as “a deep-seated self-rejection” (p. 2). Brown (1991) asserts:

I have yet to meet a Jewish person (even those who live actively Jewish lives) who does not carry somewhere inside an internal recording of self-disgust, deriving from hundreds of years in which the world has said to us: “There's something so wrong with you that you don't deserve to exist” (p. 27)

Schwartz (1995), a practicing psychotherapist and professor, states that the major issues Jewish women bring into therapy are grief, loss, chronic terror and pressure to conform to dominant Christian culture, and goes on to say this about intergenerational grief:

The grief which many of us carry can be very complex. At its most concrete, some of us carry the unshed tears of our grandparents and parents, who did not know of, or have the safety, to embrace their sadness. “...given the pain...with which being Jewish has usually bathed our families, our Jewishness is often buried under oceans of tears.” (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1991, p.11). At its most complex, some of us may carry the grief of generations of oppression. We have come to carry it in the form of depression, muscular aches, and chronic, deep despair. (p. 141)

Clark, (1995) another psychotherapist, observes “...that many Jews are mildly depressed much of the time.” (p. 193), and in a cooperative inquiry exploring internalized Jewish oppression with nine women, Rosenwasser (2005) discovered strong incidence rates of the following emotions: self-loathing, intense feelings of isolation and humiliation, fear, panic, worry, urgency, hyper-criticalness, feelings of victimization, hyper-vigilance, anxiety, mistrust

and shame (p.202-3). Brown (1991) has added self-disgust to the list (p.27), Langman (2004) vulnerability, and Breitman (as cited in Breitman, 1995), taking her lead from Cornel West and his discussion of race and sexuality argues:

It is my impression that many American Jews of European ancestry have been deeply impacted, particularly in the area of sexuality, by self-hatred that does not seem to go away even though the Jewish body is now under less direct assault than it was in Europe. The wounds that racism inflicts on the sense of self, particularly the sense of self as gendered, sexual and embodied, seem to be deep, long-lasting, and tenacious (p. 160)

Breitman continues, asserting that Jews may partner with non-Jews in order to “...experience the needed sexual validation and affirmation of self they have been unable to find within themselves or get from other Jews.” (1995, p. 160) The reason for the high incidence of Jews partnering with non-Jews, while certainly complex, is also ironic in that Jews, once isolated from, and persecuted by non-Jews, now find respite from their own people in non-Jewish arms. Brown (1991) elaborates on this aspect of internalized Jewish oppression:

It's difficult for many Jews to relax enough to allow deep closeness to develop. Jews have historically been kept separate from the world, and have become used to feeling isolated from others. Even though the initial experience of isolation may have been with non-Jews, this isolation also gets internalized and will keep us from building close, trusting bonds with each other....This sense of isolation often affects family relationships, and our ability to have genuine closeness. We love each other, but we don't trust each other. A fear of being abandoned always keeps even the closest relationships from having a deep sense of trust. (p. 27)

Brown also states:

It seems to be too painful to stay close to each other *when we see the scars of oppression etched in each other's behaviors* [emphasis added]. We can be highly critical of one another, holding each other to the same perfectionist standard that the world holds us to (1991, p. 27)

Fear as an emotional residue of anti-Semitism deserves special mention since many of the other emotions associated with internalized Jewish oppression – anxiety, panic, hyper-vigilance,

urgency, worry and self-loathing – are likely, at least in part, to be rooted in fear and are a part of the “legacy of...danger” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 138) which Jews have inherited.

Fear manifests in many different ways. Schnur (2001) identifies fear as being underneath “Jewish women's pattern of worrying” putting forth that some Jewish women “fairly vibrate with anxiety” and going on to assert that “worrying has become hardwired into our Jewish genes (souls) after generations of its being an adaptive survival skill. Something. Bad. Can. Always. Happen.” (para 3)

Brown (1991) states that Jewish survival strategy differs from that “which others adopt when facing internalized oppression and fear” (p.26) and describes how Jews are more likely to “act as though they aren't scared” (p. 26) while, in fact, the terror still exists within them, “...showing up in asthma, overeating, a failure to take good care of ourselves, constant activity” (p.26) and a driven quality. Further, Jews are likely to become active when afraid, “...running out and starting five new organizations” (p. 26).

Vasquez and Femi (as cited in Rosenwasser, 2005) suggest that Jews may be afraid to identify as Jewish, and that it is fear that creates a desire for control; these fears result from the sense that safety can be destroyed at any moment. (p.205)

Fear may also manifest as “feeling unsafe with non Jews”; searching for security through material means, i.e. wealth and upward mobility; a sense of not belonging; and acting superior to others in an attempt to cover up vulnerability (Rosenwasser, 2005, p. 205). Brown (1991) states that Jewish fears about security are “enormous” but that “Jews who show their fears tend to generate...disgust or withdrawal from other Jews” (p. 27). She also notes that Jews may attack other Jews who try something new, or courageous, out of fear that they may be endangering “all

of us” (Brown, 1992, p. 27). An additional fear-based strategy has been the occasional attempt by Jews to limit the number of Jews in positions of power and visibility.

An example of this took place in the 1930's when there was one Jew, Louis Brandeis, on the United States Supreme Court when Justice Benjamin Cardozo died. President Franklin Roosevelt wanted to nominate Felix Frankfurter, who was also Jewish, to the vacant position, and encountered opposition from a number of well-connected Jews, including the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, and the Editor of the New York Times, Arthur Hays Sulzberger. Roosevelt was urged *by Jews* not to make this appointment with the belief that “putting a second Jew on the Court would play into the hands of anti-Semites at home and abroad.” (Dinnerstein, 1994, p.125) Roosevelt chose to ignore their pleas, and Frankfurter was appointed to the Court, where he served for almost twenty-three years.

Fear of visibility is another insidious internalized component of anti-Semitism. Beck, Goldberg and Knefelkamp (2003) in a discussion on academia, state that “...the myth of a Jewish “takeover” creates a shift from invisibility to “overvisibility” (p. 23), and that “many [in academia] like Jews in the larger society, feel that their position is a precarious one and that acceptance by colleagues and the institution require that they downplay their Jewish identity” (Brody as cited in Beck et al, 2003, p. 239). This complicated fear of visibility “...may not be rational, but it is powerful. Even when Jews can tell themselves that no one is going to kill them if they speak up, there is still great reluctance to even call attention to themselves as Jews, let alone take a stand.” (Langman, 2004, p. 13) Rosenwasser (2005) asserts, “Assimilation warns us to silence our Jewish voices so that we will not be targeted.” (p. 327)

Many Jews live with some degree of fear of visibility (Langman, 2004, p. 12), and it may be part of what motivates the behavior of the numerous Jewish activists who do not identify as Jews in the work that they do (Brown, 1991; Langman, 2004; Rosenwasser, 2005). Brown (1992) notes the tendency on the part of Jewish activists to put everyone and everything's needs before their own (pp.26-27) and Mamet (as cited in Langman, 2004) puts forth, "In our support of the moral, social, and emotional rights of the oppressed, we put ourselves, the Jews, behind not only every other racial group, we put ourselves behind the seals and the *whales*. (p. 12) While fear of visibility is likely a component of this behavior, collective low-self esteem, an internalized sense of not being valued enough by the world to stand up for, likely also contributes to this phenomenon. The following is another illustration of apathy most likely attributable to internalized oppression:

Most of the Jews I have encountered since I began writing and working in publishing are what I consider to be "closet" Jews – Jews with little or no background in Judaism and with a bemused, fiercely secularist attitude toward many of the rituals that are the foundation of their religion [and their culture]. The extent of these Jews' evident disinterest in their own heritage puzzled me initially, just because they seemed so tolerant – so curious – about everything else, from Buddhism to deconstructionism. Only the arcana of Jewish life struck them as humdrum....their disregard for an almost-six-thousand-year-old tradition was nothing short of dazzling. (Merkin as cited in Langman, 2004, p. 14)

An enduring sense of victimization is another trait thought to be a part of the construct of internalized Jewish oppression and is defined as "confusing past victimization with current reality" (Rosenwasser, 2005, p. 211). Brown argues that this is "distorted thinking based on suffering and fear" (as cited in Rosenwasser, 2005, p. 212) and Rosenwasser (2005) puts forth that internalized victimization allows one to blame and attack, and still maintain a position of moral high ground and justification of any behavior. Being attached to the "victim" role may

prevent Jews from addressing issues such as domestic violence, incest, the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis, or poverty in their midst, the thesis of this study, thinking that they cannot, somehow, be perpetrators. Some of this denial seems to be related to not wanting to provide fodder for non-Jews “... to drive us out or kill us yet again” (Rosenwasser, 2005, pp. 474-475). Internalized victimization, when not addressed, creates a sense of powerlessness, can contribute to Jews not believing that their “pain matters” and is worth addressing, and, in one of its most detrimental manifestations, can allow the abused to become the abuser (Rosenwasser, 2005, p. 284).

Jews have been blamed for centuries for “...both their perceived positive and negative characteristics.” (Langman, 2004, p. 136) They are both too much and not enough: wicked, and party to a covenant with God, greedy and Communist, victims going to the slaughter, and power-mongers ruling (or attempting to rule) the world. While it might reasonably be expected that this projection could create psychological contortions in the mind of the recipient, how this polarized view impacts Jews has not only not been well studied, it has almost not been studied at all. This theme arose in Rosenwasser's study (2005) however, where she found, not surprisingly, both the internalization and the personalization of two messages in her inquiry participants “I'm too much and I'm not enough” (p. 286). Additionally, this polarity has been integrated into Jewish identity to the extent that it is considered “Jewish” to struggle with, or perhaps enact, these converse notions. When discussing this theme, (Rosenwasser, 2005) one participant stated “[that's]...pretty Jewish” while another asserts, “And that nicely sums up my entire life!” (p. 286)

Hyper-criticality and perfectionism are two other traits which may be associated with Jewish identity today (Brown, 1995; Rosenwasser, 2005) and which likely result from both

internalized hatred of the self, and the attention to every detail, which may, theoretically, stave off imminent destruction. These traits, though understandable within the context of Jewish history, may also make it difficult for Jews to be in close to proximity to other Jews.

It seems likely that the mix of difficult emotions inherent to being a Jew today has contributed to the large number of Jews who have moved away from “being” Jewish in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries. Hammer (1995) states:

...the loss of so many Jews through choice arises, in part, from the fact that Jews have not fully recovered from the psychological trauma of anti-Semitism. The resulting hidden, unresolved traumatic reactions have caused many Jews to go to great lengths to avoid the traumatic stimulus: Judaism and/or Jewish identity. (p. 201)

It may be that external anti-Semitism is no longer the primary challenge facing Jews in the world today, but rather that the psychological *effect* of anti-Semitism is wreaking the greatest havoc on individual Jews as well as the fabric of Jewish communities. The phenomenon of unaddressed Jewish poverty, the subject which will be viewed through the lenses of internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self-hate and internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism in Chapter VI, is just one example of a divide within the Jewish community. As this research progresses, this divide is beginning to make sense within the context of internalized Jewish oppression, and though the awareness of the *impact* and *pervasiveness* of internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self-hate on Jews could be quite painful, this awareness may also bring hope that Jews can, with the security that America has given them, face these internalized structures and begin to heal. Mamet (as cited in Langman, 2004) asserts:

We could not, as American Jews, feel that Jewish is Beautiful, that the sexy, vital, essential assertion of a just demand was written within our power, *just* as it was

and is within the power of the American Indians, or the Eskimos, or the American blacks. And *never* have we American Jews thought, let alone asserted, “Yes, *I* am beautiful. I come from a beautiful race.” (p.12)

But perhaps Jews can take beauty back for themselves. It is with this wish, and this understanding of the impact of anti-Semitism on Jews that we turn to the other construct being explored for this study, internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism.

CHAPTER V
UNDERSTANDING INTERNALIZED SUPERIORITY/JEWISH
EXCEPTIONALISM/ETHNOCENTRISM

Chapter Two introduced and defined the construct of internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism, and this chapter seeks to build on that foundation with a discussion of this construct's applicability. One of the ideas put forth in that preliminary study is that superiority within Jews is one of many (often unconscious) responses Jews may have *to* anti-Semitism: that Jewish arrogance, and a sense of chosen-ness, or special-ness are neither singularly character defects nor vestiges of entitlement that arise in a racist culture which privileges some at others' expense, but that these emotions likely reside alongside other internalized constructs such as shame, pain, and fear arising out of oppression and marginalization. Internalized Jewish superiority, while neither more nor less laudable than any other aspect of internalized oppression, makes sense given the polarized anti-Semitic views of Jews as both degraded, yet also tinged with moral superiority. And, because Jews may be hesitant to talk about the “darker” aspects of Jewish culture and identity, Jewish notions of superiority are rarely referenced in the literature, likely because there is fear that to reveal and explore this construct may exacerbate, either literally or psychologically, the vulnerability of a population already plagued by a sense of insecurity, both physical and psychological.

What also became apparent through the literature review conducted in Chapter Two is that no single prong of the tripartite construct internalized superiority/Jewish

exceptionalism/ethnocentrism encapsulates internalized Jewish superiority in the way that it is being conceptualized here.

Internalized superiority or the assumption of “entitlement and empowerment” (Hauser, 2002) that White people internalize in a racist society is not the concept being explored in this thesis; this is not superiority in the sense of White superiority over People of Color – the type of internalized domination that our culture has encouraged in White people for centuries (though Jews are not necessarily exempt from this, and of course, all Jews are not White). Rather, this concept is the internalized idea of superiority of Jews over *all* other people, over *Gentiles*, or non-Jews, and is the type of superiority that arises not because dominant culture says it is one's due, but rather as a *response* to a culture that says one is vile.

Gertel (2001) states that the belief some Jews carry that Jews are better than others is the natural “flipside” of self hatred (p. 31), while Brown (1991) asserts that anti-Semitism, and its internalized component involves “...two forces. Most people understand one or the other, but rarely both. These two forces are very real vulnerability...followed by an effort to overcome vulnerability” (Brown, 1991, p. 28). Internalized superiority can be seen as that effort.

Additionally, one of the dangers of overcoming vulnerability and claiming a position of power can be a *negation* of vulnerability, the inability to *tolerate* vulnerability. Brown hypothesizes that it is the overcoming of vulnerability by “accommodating to oppressive forces”, those same forces which have set Jews up over the course of history to be the “face of oppression” that allows Jews to become oppressors (1991, p. 28). Green (as cited in Kent Katz, 2006) suggests that when Jews buy into Jewish ideas of superiority that “...Jews are innately more worthy, more righteous, smarter, more scholarly, more successful, more productive, better

candidates for jobs, better mothers and more adept at assimilation, [that] they are playing into anti-Semitism rather than denouncing it.”(p. 9)

Internalized superiority may manifest, in part, as a standard, and an expectation that prevents Jews from acknowledging other Jews' vulnerability. This thesis posits that it may be the standard of superiority, in addition to other aspects of internalized Jewish oppression which prevents Jews from addressing poverty amongst other Jews. And, acknowledging that Jews may have internalized superiority in ways that are not conducive to the well-being of the Jewish community as a whole, or to some aspects of Jewish relations with other cultures, is not to downplay the astonishing contributions that Jews have made to the world, also perhaps out of a sense of superiority, though certainly Jewish accomplishments cannot be reduced to this.

Jewish exceptionalism is a thorny and controversial issue. Rooted in the biblical era, it can reasonably be argued that the notion of being the recipients of God's Commandments and privy to a sacred agreement with Him has indelibly shaped Jews since that time, as well as their relationship with non-Jews. Though Jews have grappled fiercely with the notion of specialness, and many contemporary Jews consciously shy away from even an ephemeral idea of being “special” or “chosen” (while, of course, the question arises, “chosen for *what?*”), the imprint of divinely bestowed specialness, whatever the manifestation, and however great the ambivalence, seems likely to last. Collectively, Jews are proud of the disproportionate number of Jewish Nobel Prize winners, and equally ashamed of the Bernie Madoff's in their midst, as though, somehow, they are supposed to disproportionately strive and achieve while at the same time completely avoiding the mishaps that might befall any people (Newhouse, 2009). If Jews have a standard for themselves, not just that they *were* chosen, but that they now must *be* extraordinary,

it may be that it is difficult for them as a community to understand and tolerate those amongst them who are not able, for whatever reasons, to excel in the same ways.

The anthropological concept of ethnocentrism widely presumes that people locate their own ethnic group, religion, nation, etc., as being in a position of superiority to others, with ancient myths reiterating the notion of “umbilicus of the universe” (Ruether, as cited in Langman, 2004, p. 207). Bizumic, et al. (2009) found, “Ethnocentrism is quite prominent in the world, in which many groups and cultures assume superiority and tend to reject and exploit those belonging to other groups and cultures.” (p. 871)

While ethnocentrism is both “widely used” and a “fundamental social science concept” (Bizumic, et al., 2009, p. 872) the term itself has been subject to debate. In addition to the notion of superiority, ethnocentrism often, though not always, includes the components of purity, exploitativeness, group cohesion, and devotion. In general, “ ethnic group self-centeredness” is accepted as being a central part of this construct, while the other components are less widely agreed upon. (Bizumic, et al., 2009, p. 872)

Understanding that ethnocentrism is a common phenomenon amongst peoples puts the concept of Jewish exceptionalism into a different light. One could reasonably ask, “What's the big deal? Why do Jews go to great lengths to proclaim this trait does not exist within them, and why have others, through the centuries, been so outraged at manifestations of Jewish ethnocentrism, or Jewish pride, when so many, if not most groups, manifest this trait?” And, based on the literature reviewed for this thesis, a reasonable response could be that the expectation that Jews neither *have* nor proclaim Jewish pride is a manifestation of anti-Semitism, which exists both outside of Jews and as an internalized construct. And, as with so much of anti-

Semitism, there is a contortionist aspect to this idea – Jews have developed superiority, in part, as a way to combat the negative messages of anti-Semitism, and at the same time, the fear of fanning the flames of anti-Semitism has Jews minimizing even what might be appropriate expressions of Jewish pride.

The next chapter will discuss the phenomenon of unaddressed Jewish poverty in America through the lenses of internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self-hate as well as internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This thesis seeks to understand how it is that Jewish poverty can exist in the contemporary United States at a rate similar to that of poverty within the general population, and yet remain unrecognized and unaddressed within the larger Jewish community. This thesis notes that the lack of Jewish involvement in redressing Jewish poverty is in stark contrast to the concentrated efforts Jews are making towards alleviating many other social ills, including poverty, both in the United States and beyond, and it proposes that the phenomenon of unameliorated Jewish poverty can be examined, and perhaps understood, through the lenses of internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self hate, and internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism.

Both of these lenses are an amalgamation of related ideas: internalized anti-Semitism/internalized oppression/self hate is the clustered concept relating to the ways in which anti-Semitism becomes internalized, and what was once external hatred and derision directed at Jews is now a concept one carries *within* oneself, as a part of one's psyche, expressing in myriad ways and across generations. Internalized superiority/Jewish exceptionalism/ethnocentrism, on the other hand, is a concept which may initially appear unrelated to anti-Semitism, but which this research has shown, is a compensatory strategy, at least in part, which Jews have employed as a response *to* anti-Semitism. As this thesis reaches its culmination, it has become increasingly apparent to the researcher that what was initially framed as two separate lenses is in fact one

wide range of responses to anti-Semitism, with self-hatred at one end of the continuum, and internalized superiority at the other. Internalized superiority is an *aspect* of internalized anti-Semitism.

Analysis

That Jews have experienced anti-Semitism for millennia is not news, and much interdisciplinary work has explored this subject. Though it was not borne of Christianity (Lerner, M., 1992; Nichols, 1993) it gathered strength there, and these two things combined, Christianity and anti-Semitism, spread across much of the globe like a dessicated dandelion. That anti-Semitism has affected Jewish identity across the ages, in the way that a bag of tea first clouds and then colors a cup of hot water, has been less readily acknowledged. This is not to say that many strong and beautiful aspects of Jewish religion and culture have not survived, because they have, remarkably, nor to deny that Jews have resisted anti-Semitism, because they have done this, too, continuously, but rather to acknowledge that the strengths of Jewish culture and identity live within Jews *alongside* internalized anti-Semitism, and internalized superiority, (again, conceptualized here as polar responses to anti-Semitism) and it is the internalized response *to* anti-Semitism which has overwhelmingly been ignored within academia as well as the Jewish community.

For those who are aware of and have written about internalized anti-Semitism, there is agreement that it has many deeply detrimental manifestations (Beck, Goldberg & Knepelkamp, 2004; Breitman, 1995; Brown, 1991; Clark, 1995; Hammer, 1995; Kent Katz, 2006; Klein, 1980; Langman, 2004; Lax & Richards, 1981, Marx, date unknown; Murphy, 2009; Nichols, 1993; Rosenwasser, 2005; Schlosser, 2006; Schnur, 2001; Schwartz, 1995). These range from

addiction, depression, anxiety, fear and a deep seated inability to feel safe, difficulties with intimacy, a lack of self care, self-distrust, shame, alienation, grief, poor body image, insecurity, constant worry, a relentless quest for perfection, mistrust of others, a sense of victimization, humiliation, panic, despair and terror, to self-disgust, distancing oneself from other Jews, and a complete rebuttal and virulent hatred of all that is Jewish.

Scholars on racial identity development assert that marginalized and oppressed peoples “...must resolve any negative stereotyping and prejudice towards members of their particular group that threaten their self-concept” (Phinney, as cited in MacDonald-Dennis, 2006, p. 269), and there is a widespread understanding that one of the shared developmental tasks for People of Color in the United States is to overcome “...the many manifestations of internalized racism.” (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006, p. 269)

In regards to Jews, no research has been conducted to determine either how they “...develop awareness and understanding of belonging to a subordinated ethnoreligious group” (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006, p. 270) nor how they navigate this awareness once it's been obtained, though “...literature suggests that all groups targeted by oppression undergo similar developmental processes” (MacDonald-Dennis, 2006, p. 270). Schlosser (2006) believes that all Jews in an anti-Semitic culture (identifying the United States as such) internalize anti-Semitism, hopefully to unlearn it at a later date (p. 428). Based on these theories, Jews, as a historically marginalized and oppressed group, and current members of an ethnic/religious minority, have oppression internalized within them and as such, they share the developmental task of “undoing” or “unlearning” the impact that thousands of years of oppression has bestowed upon them.

Internalized anti-Semitism and Unaddressed Jewish Poverty While nothing in the literature directly connects internalized anti-Semitism and internalized superiority to the phenomenon of unaddressed Jewish poverty, some links are easily made. The notion of superiority itself, the idea of being higher or better in rank than others, may preclude some Jews from being able to acknowledge Jewish poverty, as accepting poverty within one's own esteemed community requires acknowledging one's full and "just average" humanity. Accepting poverty requires a degree of humility, and humility, one could argue, is opposite in nature to superiority.

Hypercritical-ness, related to superiority, and identified as another aspect of internalized Jewish oppression, may make it particularly difficult to assist those living in poverty if one has internalized the expectation that Jews should be living up to a higher standard. It is likely that this high standard does not include being poor and downtrodden, requiring assistance, presenting a less than shiny face to the goyim: being a "shandeh" or a shame to the non-Jews.

Brown (1991) puts forth that Jews expect perfection from other Jews when she states that we "...hold each other to the same perfectionist standard that the world holds us to." (p. 27) Perhaps, then, those aspects of the Jewish Community which are less than "perfect" are not fit to be seen, by Jews or by the rest of the world. While Jews do not believe, generally speaking and stemming from their religious traditions, in the "poor as morally inferior" (Rosen & Weltman, 1996, p. 619) it seems likely that Jewish poverty is a painful reminder of centuries of Jewish struggle, vulnerability, powerlessness, and shame which may deter Jews, particularly those with unexamined internalized anti-Semitism, from looking at it.

Superiority, hyper-criticalness and perfection directly tie into the notions of success with which Jews have become so strongly associated in late 20th and early 21st Century America, and,

as manifestations of internalized oppression, are rooted in what has often been a desperate push for survival. Rosen & Weltman (1996) assert that the Jewish family system “demands....success and achievement” (p.619) and, as noted previously, that parents may go to “great lengths to deny or hide the fact [if] their child is unable to excel academically” (Rosen & Weltman, p. 618).

One can easily extrapolate that if Jewish parents are able to deny or *hide* that their children, whom they know and love, are not successful in prescribed ways, then denying that some strange Jew, somewhere, lives in poverty and needs their assistance, might be an easy jump to make.

A persistent sense of victimization, coupled with shame over their inability to save themselves, may be another aspect of Jewish identity which compels Jews away from reminders of their not-too distant disempowerment (Kent Katz, 2006, p. 4) Anne Roiphe (as cited in Langman, 2004), states, “ I did not want to be Jewish, because Jewish and victim became confused in my mind.” (p. 285) Jews who have been unable to overcome their circumstances, such as Jews in poverty, likely trigger this sense of victimization in more successful Jews, who, consciously or not, may wish to leave these painful situations and the feelings they stir far behind.

Deep rooted, easily triggered, and unexamined shame is another aspect of internalized Jewish oppression which likely contributes to Jewish poverty being a mostly unknown and unaddressed issue within the contemporary American Jewish Community. Tomkins states (as cited by Kaufman & Raphael, 1987) “Shame is the affect of inferiority, of indignity, defeat, transgression and alienation.” (p. 32). And Kaufman & Raphael, researchers on shame, (1987) found that “Deeply imbedded in Western culture are images of the Jew which are profoundly

shameful: “Christ-killer”, “Devil”, “Judas”, “Shylock” – the eternal outsider....not fit to belong.” (p. 35)

Shame is dangerous because in its unconscious forms, it propels the one who feels it far from the stimulus which has spurred it on. Kaufman & Raphael (1987) state “The inability to tolerate the affect of shame itself *and* overcome its sources leads to the development of maladaptive strategies of avoidance and escape.” (p. 38) Given Jews' collective history of being outsiders, different, and maligned, they are likely especially prone to shame as an enduring legacy of anti-Semitism, and Jewish poverty is likely a stimulus which triggers it, with all of its unbearable weight.

Synthesis

It is hopeful to understand unaddressed Jewish poverty in America as an aspect of internalized anti-Semitism rather than as a massive characterological shortcoming afflicting many socially and economically well-positioned Jews. For though internalized Jewish oppression is not widely recognized as a problem, and therefore is not being widely addressed, it could be, and one of the “side-effects” of confronting internalized Jewish oppression might well be the willingness and the ability to address Jewish poverty.

Therapist Cherie Brown notes (1995), that while many of the thousands of Jews she has counseled over her twenty years of practice show shared symptoms of internalized Jewish oppression, the tendency on the part of these individuals is to think that their symptoms are theirs alone, unique and dysfunctional, without realizing that there is a larger cultural context, a context of oppression and marginalization, in which their symptoms make sense. Brown puts forth that by addressing the larger context, the “internalized recordings of terror” can be healed, and

neither passed down to future generations (p. 44), nor enacted within their current homes and communities.

Internalized anti-Semitism continues to exist in the same way anti-Semitism does: because there has never been a conscious, wide-scale, education based effort to eradicate either. And, while in the year 2000, “...most American Jews [saw] anti-Semitism as a problem, and a significant percentage [saw] anti-Semitism as a very serious problem” (Cohen, 2010, p. 85) *internalized* anti-Semitism has yet to receive this wide-scale acknowledgment. This researcher would argue that even though anti-Semitism remains a frightening and pernicious problem, one which leaves Jews vulnerable due to its never having been resolved, and its tendency to lay in wait in the psyche, that in its internalized form it is far more insidious and dangerous in that it slowly erodes the continuity and strength of Jewish identity, a quiet unknown poison, seeping. Unaddressed Jewish poverty is just one potential symptom, but the psychological distress which has been attributed to unexamined internalized oppression in this study, ranging from mild to debilitating, undoubtedly impacts personal well being, relational capacity, family life, creative fulfillment and, as does unremedied Jewish poverty, the strength and cohesiveness of Jewish Community. Minimizing the imprint anti-Semitism has left within Jews seems like a battle worth staking. The question, given the lack of Jewish awareness (or perhaps willingness) on this topic, is how. One can only hope that researchers across disciplines will continue to explore this topic, and disseminate what they have learned and that with that, a critical mass will accumulate which will bring these ideas into the fore to be examined and metabolized.

A number of clinicians and academics have put forth ideas for healing internalized anti-Semitism. Diller (as cited in Langman, 2004) a therapist whose work focuses on “...Jewish

identity rejection and awakening” (p. 290) has devised a “four-stage model” to foster a sense of positive Jewish identity, noting that the stages may be simultaneous or occur in any order, and that people approach the material in vastly different ways. He also notes that the phenomenon of Jews rejecting some aspect of their Jewish identity may not involve complete negativity, but rather ambivalence and a state of conflict. His stages (as paraphrased by Langman, 2004) are:

First, Jews must become aware of feelings related to being Jewish, especially anger and embarrassment. These must be made conscious and understood. Second, Jews must accept the fact of their Jewishness and the psychological impossibility of escaping it. Jews must be exposed to a satisfying view of Jewishness and develop a more accurate and positive vision of Jewish heritage. Fourth, Jews must find personal meaning in Jewishness, and integrate their Jewishness into their lives. (p. 290)

Siegel (1995) another therapist, has a streamlined version of the above, which was developed out of her work with Jewish women, but which likely has applicability, with minor modification, to men as well. Her steps are:

1. Identify the sources of Jewish pain, anger and conflict about Jewish identity, including specific incidents and situations.
2. Identify the sources of Jewish joy and healing, including role models of Jewish women.
3. Identify positive experiences of individual and communal Jewish celebration and introduce Jewish self-affirmation. (p. 52)

Brown (1995) suggests “...ongoing support groups” (p. 47) similar to the consciousness raising groups which occurred in the women's movement, providing an opportunity for Jews to “...release all the internalized grief and terror associated with being Jewish....to be able to acknowledge openly....the fear and pain from the past”, and to be able to see the connections between current life struggles and collective Jewish history (p. 47). Weingart (as cited in Rosenwasser, 2005) asserts, “There's a lot of crying and screaming to do.” (p. 225), while Hagan

(as cited in Rosenwasser, 2005) puts forth that “...we must crack the code of our conditioning.” (p. 227)

According to Kaye/Kantrowitz, Klepfisz and Mennis (1989), Jews must begin consciousness raising by becoming aware of the “strategies of anti-Semitism” (p. 334) which they categorize in three broad groups : fostering silence, looking at what prevents Jewish solidarity, and understanding how Jews get isolated from other people (pp. 334-335). Specific strategies within these categories include scapegoating, stereotypes, double standards, assimilation, the myths of “Jewish paranoia” and “Jewish power”, polarization and self-hate (pp. 334-338).

Their “strategies for resistance (Kaye/Kantrowitz, et al., 1989, p. 339) are also clustered into a group of three, and include: “breaking silence....building Jewish identity, pride and community,....and creating coalitions” (pp. 339-344). Specific strategies within these groups include (but are not limited to) “gathering with other Jews....developing visibility....and studying Jewish culture and Jewish life” (pp. 339-343) in addition to addressing the issue of “solidarity and critical thinking” (p. 343), or, in other words, learning to both disagree with other Jews and still feel okay about being connected to them. Kaye/Kantrowitz, et al. (1989) assert the following about resistance:

That Jews, as a people, still exist is proof that we have always resisted anti-Semitism. We have resisted directly, in a variety of legal, illegal, physical, intellectual ways; and we have resisted by our adherence to a sense of ourselves as a people with cultures (religious and/or secular) we cherish. Sometimes we have had to resist utterly on our own; sometimes others have joined with us or welcomed us – or been willing for us – to join with them. (p. 339)

Kaye/Kantrowitz (1992) also suggests reclaiming some of the negative words that have been used to describe Jews including: “pushy/loud/politico/cheap/dominant/garish/sexy

emotional/always screaming/bossy/scary temper/difficult style and...Jewish mother and Jewish princess” (p. 84).

Schwartz (1995) notices that many Jews have a “vague” sense of family members who have been lost in the past, that they may feel as though their families started a few generations ago, and that they may have little sense of their roots (p. 135). Langman (2004) encourages genealogy as a way for Jews to gain insight into “...the forces that shaped their families lives.” (p. 291), to begin to piece together who “those” people were, their secrets, challenges, strengths and losses.

Lewin (1948) puts forth that:

...the more the individual learns to see the Jewish Question as a social problem rather than as an individual problem of good conduct, thus placing a double burden on his shoulders, the more he will be able to act normally and freely. Such a normalizing of the tension level is probably the most important condition for the elimination of Jewish-self-hatred. (p. 200)

Addressing internalized oppression can also be done in mixed groups where both Jews and non-Jews are present, in social justice settings, or perhaps in classrooms. Knefelkamp (Beck, Goldberg & Knefelkamp, 2003) has devised an exercise revolving around the concepts of “marginalization and mattering” (p. 247) where students write about two group experiences they've had: one where they felt they mattered and one where they felt marginalized, including their feelings and behaviors in response to each, in order that they hone in on the pain associated with being marginalized, and the joy at being mattered. With awareness, hopefully, comes a sensitivity which decreases the imposition of marginalization and increases the inclusion of mattering.

Strength, Weaknesses, Implications

One of the strengths of this study is that it is cross disciplinary and the phenomenon of internalized Jewish oppression, though called different things in different disciplines, is recognized in each. An additional strength is that it adds to the body of research on both the phenomenon of unaddressed Jewish poverty as well as internalized anti-Semitism. This thesis also provides an entirely new way of understanding unameliorated Jewish poverty in contemporary America.

There are also, however, a number of weaknesses in this study. The fact that no qualitative research exists on contemporary American Jewish poverty means that one can only extrapolate as to what that existence is really like. And, no prior study has been conducted linking unaddressed Jewish poverty to internalized anti-Semitism, which is, in its own right, an under-studied phenomenon. This lack of research makes any conclusions tenuous.

An additional weakness, one created out of academic necessity, is the eight month period of time during which a thesis at the Smith College School for Social Work must be completed. While the material which directly relates to the phenomenon and lenses being used in this study was limited, the knowledge base *surrounding* what was being studied is fairly vast, so, for example, a greater understanding of anti-Semitism could have come with more time, and with that, a greater understanding of its internalized manifestations, around which, once again, little has been written. The same could be said of other forms of internalized oppression, specifically internalized racism and internalized homophobia, both of which have been researched and theorized to a greater degree than internalized Jewish oppression and which could have been studied, and perhaps extended to this thesis, given greater time.

Research and theories which seek to understand Jewish identity formation are also sorely lacking, though ancillary bodies of knowledge could, with more time, have been explored to a greater degree and perhaps provided additional insight into Jewish identity constructs.

That said, this research is, in the eyes of this researcher, valuable for some of the same reasons that it bears weakness. We are not, neither in America nor in the field of social work, accustomed to thinking of Jews as poor, nor at looking at the ways in which Jews are still vulnerable. Jewish identity issues are not widely taught – not under the rubric of Whiteness nor, generally, as issues of interest within multi-cultural studies. Even at an institution which emphasizes socio-cultural factors in the provision of competent clinical care, little to no mention is made of Jews – either the many Jews who are practitioners of clinical social work, nor the many Jews who are consumers of psycho-therapeutic treatment. In addition to meaning that the therapeutic relationship, when any Jew is present, is likely impacted by unaddressed internalized anti-Semitism, this lack of attention also makes any research, even an eight month master's level thesis, an important exploration.

Conclusion

To whatever degree and in whatever ways anti-Semitism has been mitigated in the world today, its internalized form, based on the handful of researchers, therapists and academics who have studied it, is, unfortunately, alive and well – its relationship to unalleviated Jewish poverty, while newly explicated, and based on limited research, appears to be supported.

Though this project was initiated out of a desire to understand the factors that contribute to the invisibility of Jewish poverty in the United States, and the role of the Jewish community in that invisibility, at conclusion, internalized Jewish oppression seems to be the greater ill. For

although neither problem is widely acknowledged nor addressed with concentration, internalized Jewish oppression is the older, more deeply buried and twisted construct. Nichols (1993) puts forth that Jewish “self-hatred is dangerous” (p. 411) because it weakens Jews who are otherwise strong, and goes on to say “The most important task for Jews...is to bring to light and fully relinquish, all forms of internalized anti-Semitism.” (p. 411) If the conclusion this thesis has reached is true, that internalized anti-Semitism allows Jewish poverty to exist unseen by Jews, it is an important element of what must be faced and rooted out in some capacity before Jewish poverty can be seriously tackled. It is with hope that Jews will be willing and able to chip away at this inner scourge that this project is completed.

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