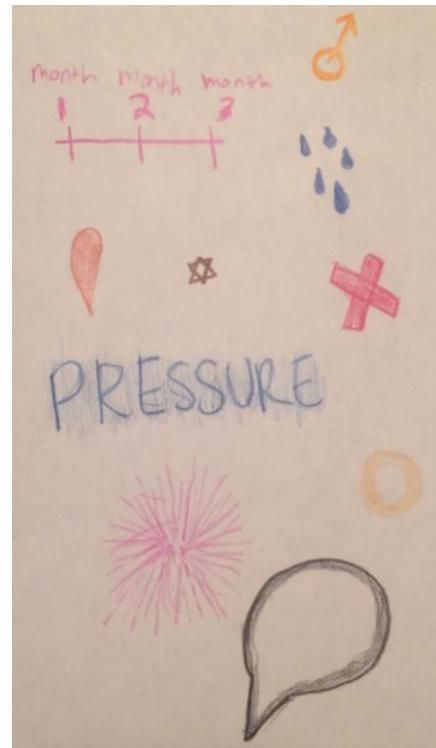


# Reform Jewish Dating Culture: Inflicting Symbolic Violence?

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Qualitative Methods, Spring 2017



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### **Abstract:**

My project looks to explore if Bourdieu's "Symbolic Violence", the internalization of dominant social norms, is present in dating culture among young adults within the Reform Jewish community. In this process, I will be exploring my own relationship to this topic, as well as friends of mine who grew up in the Jewish Reform Movement. These interviews aim to understand the imposed pressures relating to dating and marriage, or a lack of thereof.

This looks to understand a potential conflict between a progressive religious movement and its older instilled values relating to Jewish relationships. These conversations will also discuss the influence of the institutions such as Temples, summer camps, youth groups, NFTY (National Federation of Temple Youth), and Birthright Israel. Five recorded conversations with people, ages 20-23 will be included, as well as an art workshop on the topic of personal dating values. In the conclusion, differentiating symbolic violence is demonstrated to be unattainable and the Union of Reform Judaism community is shown to both inflict and reject symbolic violence towards dating and marriage.

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

It was October, the High Holidays were approaching, and I was aching to be with my family for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. I was living in Strasbourg, France, with a very Catholic family. The High Holidays were always so important to me, evoking strong images and memories of apples dipped in honey and bloody pomegranates leaking all over my hands. Wanting to continue these traditions myself, I decided to seek out a Temple in Strasbourg. I had a lot of trouble being allowed in, as there remains rampant anti-Semitism in France, which is especially a threat during the high holidays. I was eventually allowed to attend Shabbat services after extensive security measures. As I entered the temple, it was clear that this was a much more traditional sect than I was accustomed to. The women in the Temple were separated from the men by a large wall, and all of the women had on long skirts and covered hair. I quietly sat with the women and sang along to the prayers the men were singing on the other side of the barrier.

After the Friday services, I walked outside and a man began to speak to me in French. He approached me because he recognized that I was new, and I explained to him

that I was American. Hearing this, he invited me to his sister's house for Shabbat dinner, and I said nervously said yes. We walked across the park to her house, speaking French and some English.

When we arrived, his sister was surprised to see that he had brought a guest, but warmly welcomed me. She lived in a small house and we ate our Shabbat dinner in the main room, which was both a dining room and a living room. The walls were covered in pictures. Each wall was dedicated to a wedding. They were on display in her socializing room, which showed the importance they held for her as a mother, as well as a desire for others to view them. All three wedding photo collections displayed what I perceived as beautiful, beaming brown-haired women in white dresses with their new husbands. The men were all handsome as well, with dark hair and facial hair. Each set of photos seemed very similar to the mirroring ones across the room, although they depicted three separate couples.

This idealization of straight relationships is a stereotype of Jewish culture, one told in *Fiddler on the Roof*, which revolves around the match-making of daughters. And yet, due to perpetual persecution, in my experience, there is a cultural stress on Jewish marriages and children, with the goal of continuing the Jewish people. Despite my awareness of this stereotype as well as the cultural pressure, I was still extremely drawn to these photos. I viewed these pictured couples as appealing and attractive, and felt a pull towards a Jewish wedding of my own. The people shown looked so lovely and happy, and their mother, who was sitting across from me, seemed so proud to have them displayed.

The mother asked me how old I was (we spoke in French) and smiled when I told her I was twenty. She pointed to a picture of one of the brides, explaining that her youngest daughter had recently gotten married at twenty. I laughed, saying that I wasn't ready, and she exclaimed: "But you never know! It can happen when you don't expect it, you meet the right man and then suddenly you quickly get married!"

I went along with her statement, smiling and humoring her, knowing that this would not be the case for me. Despite my reservations about her statement, I was still attracted to the archaic Jewish family ideal, and the power and perseverance that Jews have had to continue our legacy despite countless obstacles, genocides and persecutions. My understanding of her love for the heterosexual Jewish family, conflicted with questions

about my own goals for my future as well as questions about my own sexuality. Throughout my life, I have heard the trope of “Find a new Jewish boy to marry!” and for a long time, I had wanted this, and sought out men to date who met that model. However, this desire conflicted with my interest in women, feeling that falling in love with a woman would be counterproductive to my search for a Jewish man to start a Jewish family with.

My parents are an intermarried couple, my dad is Jewish and my mom grew up Lutheran which has caused a lot of conflict between their in-laws. I have always strongly identified and practiced as a Jewish person. I grew up in the Reform Jewish Movement, and attended Sunday school, summer camp, youth group, NFTY (National Federation of Temple Youth) events, Birthright and Reform Jewish internship programs. In these programs, I have met many people who have grappled with the complex concept of Jewish dating culture.

As a result of my experiences, and those of other Jewish people, my project looks to explore if Bourdieu’s “Symbolic Violence”, defined as the internalization of dominant social norms, is present in dating culture among young adults within the Reform Jewish community. The driving questions of this ethnography are: Is symbolic violence applicable to Reform Jewish dating culture? Is there external or internal pressure towards heterosexuality? Towards marrying another Jewish person? Towards having Jewish children? These are all questions that I have struggled with, as a queer woman who has idealized heterosexual Jewish marriages and families. Through conversations, interviews, and workshops, and auto- ethnography, this ethnography looks to understand more deeply how young adults ages 20-23 who grew up in the Reform movement understand Reform Jewish dating in relation to family values, intermarriage or interreligious dating, sexuality, family structure and children.

### **A. Background Information: Jewish Dating**

The topic of Jewish dating has been discussed by many scholars. The sociological piece: “Jewish on Their Own Terms” explains that Judaism is often very associated with internal personal identity, rather than an external religion. She describes a woman who is Christian, married to a Jewish man and explains: “But she recognized that the Jewish community with which her family was affiliated seemed to assume that Jewishness was

‘what you are’ rather than ‘what you believe.’ The community seemed to have expectations about behavior and belonging but not religious beliefs.” (Thompson 2014: 83). Many of the following interviews will discuss the culture and behaviors of Judaism and how this relates to the individual’s internal identity, rather than the specific religious practices. This internalization of the religious culture allows for socially imposed ideals to directly influence the individual.

The book “Love, Marriage and Jewish Families” by Sylvia Barack Fishman explains how social movements affect trends in Jewish dating culture. She includes a study which shows that over time, less and less young Jewish people are getting married. However, she explains that this “resembles the contemporary non-Jewish community far more than it resembles the American Jewish community” (Fishman 2015 :35). Many of the people interviewed discuss dating trends that relate to both Jewish and non-Jewish influences. This combination of Jewish and greater societal movements shapes the way that dating practices are accepted or rejected.

The ethnography, “Dyke/Girl”, written by Lucy Jones, discusses the practices of a British Lesbian hiker group. The author explains the resistance against a heteronormative social structure present within the queer experience. She states: “Ideology can be defined, as ideas which create structure and order in society” (Jones 2012:11). Jones’s ethnography discusses the way that social identities are constructed. In the following conversations, I aim to understand what the Reform Jewish social structure is, and how it relates to the larger, patriarchal, heteronormative society.

## **B. Conceptual Framework: Bourdieu’s Symbolic Violence**

Bourdieu, in his piece “Gender and Symbolic Violence” defines symbolic violence as the phenomena where “The dominated apply categories constructed from a point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural” (Bourdieu 1977: 339). Post- Marxists theorists such as Bourdieu and Fanon discuss symbolic violence, referring to dominant views embodied in its inferior subjects. This process, Bourdieu explains, comes from lifelong exposure and influence from dominant structures which impacts the individual's' sense of self and worth.

This ethnography looks to explore the internalized dominant ideals from external Jewish culture and greater society. It seeks to understand and differentiate what people “want” in a partner as opposed of what they are told that they should want. In this process, the interviews hope to grapple with symbolic violence and the difficulty of differentiating internal and external pressures. This paper aims to explore and complicate the possible social pressures towards a heterosexual Jewish marriage with children.

Bourdieu explains that this invisible violence takes place in the body and uses the word “embodiment” to describe this experience. He emphasizes that it is internalized violence that occurs unconsciously. “Symbolic force is a form of power that is exerted on bodies, directly and as if by magic, without any physical constraint” (Bourdieu 1977: 340). He also uses the word “habitus”, a similar concept to “habit” to describe the way the dominant power imposes beliefs which become integrated in individuals’ everyday lives and actions. He uses the example that the majority of French women interviewed stated that they desired a man taller and older than them, exhibiting how the dominant patriarchal structures becomes internalized in women.

Bourdieu explains that looking for these influences is not a visible or tangible practice, as symbolic violence is “exerted invisibly and insidiously through insensible familiarization with a symbolically structured world and early, prolonged experience of interactions informed by the structures of domination” (Bourdieu 1977: 341). Following this, he discusses the relation to the dominant structure and how this violence causes complicity with dominant forces: “sometimes in internal conflict and division of self, of experiencing the insidious complicity that a body slipping from the control of consciousness and will maintains with the censures inherent in the social structures” (Bourdieu 1977: 341). This powerful, unconscious violence presents itself in people not through clear, rational thought, but through contradictory actions dictated by an external influence.

Beverly Skeggs explains how this symbolic violence is implemented in a child. She explains how a child then begins to understand and internalize the greater hegemonic structure. “It is through the body that the child learns intimately to experience wider structural features, which are never just an experience of the structure, but always

entwined with the child's physical and sexual presence, with its bodily relation to others." (Skeggs 2004:19).

Bourdieu focuses on how women become "the embodied form of the relation of domination". He explains that the process of symbolic violence "often takes the form of bodily emotions-- shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt-- or passions and sentiments-- love, admiration, respect" (Bourdieu 1977: 341). Throughout various interviews, interviewees will complicate Bourdieu's concept of Symbolic Violence. This will be shown by women and queer people complicating the narrative of feeling inferior. Nonetheless, other facets of the conversations will support Bourdieu's claim, because when someone explains that they want to marry someone Jewish, and they cannot tell if that is because they want that, or from repeated pressure to pursue a Jewish lifestyle.

### **C. Methods:**

In this ethnographic process, I have interviewed my friends. All of these people grew up within the Jewish Reform movement and have attended reform Temple, Camp, Youth Group or NFTY- National Federation of Temple Youth or participated in the Machon Kaplan Internship Program at The Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism (The RAC) in Washington DC. The Union of Reform Judaism (The URJ), also called the Reform Movement, is the largest Jewish movement in North America. Its website, Urj.org, explains its history and mission:

"Since its founding in 19th-century Germany, the Reform Movement has embraced modernity, incorporating innovation into all facets of Jewish tradition, education, and life. Reform Judaism's commitment to social justice for all – women, the disabled, and, indeed, people from all faiths and backgrounds who lack civil and human rights – is a key pillar of the movement, contributing to its popularity among North America's Jews." and "as well as the largest population of Jews affiliated with Progressive Judaism worldwide." (urj.org)

Everyone interviewed is ages 20-23. All of these people gave their consent to be interviewed and I have changed all of their names. Of who is comfortable, I have written their gender and sexual identities, as well as their preferred pronouns. The relationships that I have to each people are explained in the text about them. Nothing is written that I

have not been given consent to write about. I have changed names that were traditionally Jewish or Israeli to remain as such and those who are not to non-Jewish names. For many people, their middle names are being used as their pseudonyms and in this way, the name still carries a part of themselves. In this process, I am also speaking of my own experience as a person who grew up in the Reform Movement and as someone who has experienced Jewish and non-Jewish dating.

Due to the privacy of this subject, I have received consent for all of the following information. All of these people speak from their own, specific experiences as young adults from the Reform community, and although there are many things that tie them together, no statement is representative of all Reform Jews.

## **Chapter 2: Friends from Temple**

**Discussion: Ava, Age 20**

**Date: February 24, 2017**

**Identifies as a woman, uses she/her Pronouns, has only dated men in the past**

I felt this pang of missing my best friend from childhood. We had a very special, creative friendship. We would bring label makers to Sunday school and stick the labels onto our heads and dress up for Purim as Teletubbies or Siamese twins, hobbling around Temple together because we were both inside of one shared skirt and one shared shirt. The two of us had gone to public school together as well as Jewish summer camp, and been on the Regional board of our youth group together. However, we hadn't talked for over a year and I was calling her because someone from our Sunday school class had died. I was missing her and feeling the need to connect to our intimate, special, Jewish community. My friend is petite, with reddish-brown hair and eyes that are the exact same color. I've always called her by her nickname, Ava.

We had so much to catch up on, and so much of it revolved around our Jewish community, as our most of our friendship did. Our parents were at home and planning to go to the memorial service for the person who had died, and we spoke on the phone, sharing memories of him.

As our conversation continued, Ava told me about her boyfriend. They had been together for two years and the last thing she had texted me was a joke that said “When you love your boyfriend but he won’t convert to Judaism for you...” That was really the last time that we talked, so it was an easy lead into a conversation about Jewish dating culture in the Reform Jewish movement.

I asked if she felt any pressure to be with someone Jewish. She said that she has a Jewish friend and whenever someone finds out she’s Jewish they tell her “You should marry Ari! He’s Jewish, you two would have the cutest babies!” She commented on the phrase that we, as Jewish women have heard one phrase many times: “Find a nice Jewish boy!” I asked if this was something she wanted, or something she had thought about from a young age. She said that her mom had always said: “When you marry a boy *or* a girl...” so she didn’t feel a push into heteronormativity. Despite this, she remembers our Rabbi saying that if she wanted a Jewish wedding, she needed to find a Jewish man to marry.

It was not until she felt very close to her Judaism that she wanted to have a Jewish wedding. Her mom converted when she was older, and her Jewish dad was not very religious. As she got more involved in Temple and our youth group (NFTY), around when she was going through puberty, she realized that she wanted a Jewish wedding. She felt that they were beautiful, and she “wanted to do it all”: smash a bottle and sign a *Ketubah* (a Jewish wedding contract).

In the past year, she had gone on Birthright with her older sister. “The whole vibe”, she explained, was to find someone to hook up with, with the larger goal of moving to Israel to start a Jewish family. She said that a couple came on the trip together, and a lot of people hooked up on the trips, with other Americans, or with Israeli soldiers.

I asked if she was interested in dating Jewish people and she said that she is usually just attracted to people she thinks are Jewish. Her current boyfriend, she explained, was at first interesting and attractive to her because she thought he was Jewish; based on his looks and his Jewish- Polish sounding last name. I asked if she ever felt there were things he didn’t understand about her because of their difference in religions. He didn’t grow up religious. She said that they do not really celebrate Jewish holidays together and she didn’t really feel the need to involve him.

However, there were some divides in their relationship that frustrated her. He didn't seem to notice subtle anti-Semitic remarks the way she did. However, she said, he was willing to learn and listen. She explained to him that whenever Trump's press secretary refers to the "Lying Press", it comes from an anti-Semitic, German phrase, that was used because Jews historically ran the press. But, she said, that he was made fun of when he was little because people thought he was Jewish. They called him "The Jew", she said it was interesting that he had also experienced anti-Semitism.

Her boyfriend once asked her if she would want to circumcise a boy if she had one. She has never really wanted to have kids, and she said she did not know the answer to his question because she has two sisters and had never really thought about it. After thinking about it, she decided it would be up to the father to make the decision about circumcision. He was shocked, she said, that she wasn't strongly pro-circumcision, and she was surprised that he had asked.

The rest of our conversation was less focused on her relationship, or her dating preferences, and more on her Jewish identity. She has had some trouble at Evergreen State College in Washington where there are very few Jews. In 2003, an Evergreen student, Rachel Corrie, was killed by a bulldozer in Gaza. There is a lot of controversy surrounding her death but it has led to an anti-Israel, "Free Palestine" legacy at Evergreen. This has been often difficult and isolating for Ava, as there have also been anti-Semitic graffiti at her Temple in Olympia. She has one close Jewish friend, who she will go to services at Temple with very occasionally when one of them is feeling a need for a Jewish community.

Ava, in this conversation, explained that she did not have the pressure from her Jewish parents to only date men, showing the progressive resistance against this hegemony. Our Rabbi, however, against Reform policy, refused to marry gay couples. He was our Rabbi our whole lives and his direct influence is apparent in her, as she still remembers him stating that the only legitimate marriage is a straight marriage. She, like myself, has experienced in various circumstances, a promotion of Jewish relationships and Jewish heterosexuality. As all of my interviewees do, Ava struggles with separating an internal versus an externally imposed desire. She feels herself attracted to Jewish men, but does not know why she feels this. Within her relationship with a non-Jewish man, she has

struggled with differences in their identities and cultures, but also does not wish for this to conflict with her love for him.

**Discussion: Jonathon, Age 22**

**Date: April 8, 2017**

**Identifies as a man, he/him pronouns, identifies as straight**

Jonathon, is a friend from Temple at home, who also attends the same college as me. He and I went to neighboring high schools, both with very few Jewish people, and both of us grew up with people saying anti-Semitic things to us, or making anti-Semitic jokes. Ava was my only Jewish friend at my high school. However, our Temple and youth groups were were important spaces for Jonathan and myself to connect with other young Jewish people.

He began our conversation, explaining that he has always thought of dating as a long term commitment. He said: "I fall for someone in one second. But if I am going to date someone, I have long-term intentions of building a relationship." In the past, he said, his Jewish identity was separate from social identity. He explained that there were few Jewish people in high school, so his Jewish identity at that time, was located in Summer Camps and Youth Groups. He stated that these were hyper-Romanized spaces. He laughed as he said: "you could say I was subject to that." Everyone there, he explained was talking about hooking up, so "you were looking at who you're attracted to in a sexual way."

As he has grown older, he explained that one begins to "look through your life as what your parents did, and having two Jewish parents and since everyone in my family is Jewish, I've see that as a model that is vaguely floating around." He continued: "in college, I don't have the outside Jewish social life. I have a normal life, which is both. Now, meeting someone Jewish is special." He focused on a particular instance from last Spring: "When I was at a party, and you introduced me to people saying 'these are my Jewish friends', I had been single for a long time and was wanting to meet women, so when you said 'Jewish women' that flipped a switch for me." That was when he met his current girlfriend of one year, Rachel. Following, he said something which echoed Ava's earlier sentiments: "I see Jewish women as more beautiful, it is just something that I do, but I don't know why. It isn't necessarily something physical." Here, he questions if this is an externally imposed

pressure to be more inclined to be attracted to Jewish people, or if it is something that is naturally occurring.

Jonathan continued to speak on his Jewish identity, continuing the narrative that Jews heavily consider how Judaism relates to “who they are”. He said: “I have had a stronger connection to my Jewish identity in college, and I have been more aware of hegemonic Christian culture. Having the most intimate relationship in my life, connect to the most intimate part of myself, my Jewishness, is beyond what I can imagine. My current relationship is the first time I have been able to explore that.”

I asked him if he felt external pressure to date a Jewish person, to which he replied: “I don’t know if it was feeling that pressure, but of more wanting the pressure. I was a big participant in it.” After this, he said: “I always had the question: do I want to marry a Jewish person, and I would say no, I just want to meet my soulmate, who I love. But now I do want that pressure. Maybe it is ingrained and me and I have internalized that ‘want’, but I do want it. Since being in a Jewish relationship, instead of pushing back against it, I see that there is a very real value here, beyond just being happy to tell my parents I’m dating a Jewish girl.” He explained the intimate value he was referring to: “There was a night that we stayed up until four in the morning talking about our Jewish identities and she shared her stories about her family. I had never met someone who was the grandchild of a holocaust survivor, and to find out that I was dating someone who was; maybe that triggers something, thinking ‘you’re not supposed to exist.’”

Throughout our conversation, Jonathan had some frustration with the way people perceive Jewish dating. He spoke a lot of the stereotypes that non-Jews have about Jewish dating practices: “I don’t like when people say: ‘Birthright is for Jews to reproduce’ it makes it seem like Jews are savages, like animals. It also makes it seem like a bad thing to want to do.”

In conclusion, Jonathan struggles with differentiating the pressure, or symbolic violence, that has been present in his life to possibly cause him to seek out a woman to marry. He also questions his attraction to Jewish women, wondering where this feeling comes from. As Bourdieu explains, social imposed values are often so deeply rooted in the individual, that one cannot know where a tendency comes from. Jonathan continues to explain that he does not feel the pressure to simply impress his parents by dating a Jewish

women, but that it is more closely tied to the shared Jewish experience bringing a closeness in his relationship. As he describes his Jewishness to be the “most intimate” part of himself, the value in a Jewish relationship ties to his internal wants, which is a rejection of the assumption that he desires this simply as a result of dominating pressures.

### **Chapter 3: A Discussion of Queerness: Raya, Age 22**

**Date: April 11, 2017**

#### **Identifies as a woman, she/her pronouns, identifies as bisexual**

Raya is a friend who I met two years ago at a Jewish internship program in Washington D.C. She is very loud, and very positive, with chemically straightened hair. We would joke that she was always disheveled, with messy hair and work clothes. Her and I were incredibly close the summer that we spent in D.C. together as she is very outgoing and would encourage me to go on various adventures around the city. Raya is very smart and politically involved as someone who reads the news every day and is always aware of what is happening in The Capitol. I have only seen her once since then, and we do not keep in touch very much. I felt the urge to call her because it was Passover, and Jewish holidays always make me miss my Jewish friends who are in different states. She is currently living in California, attending Scripps College, a girl’s school within the Claremont colleges.

Initially, I had wanted to speak with her because we had spent a lot of that summer discussing dating and sexuality as well as navigating our various crushes together. She identifies as bisexual and grew up in the Reform Movement, going to Temple frequently and camp every year. We hadn’t spoken for over a year, but it was easy to catch up, as we still message each other sometimes. We began the conversation laughing; with her telling me that she is “still in love with the same Catholic girl as two years ago-- and it ain’t happening.” She had kissed this girl two years ago, confessed her feelings, and had been rejected. Despite this, they were still best friends and had a plan to “get married at 40 if they have no one else.” Raya said that they had decided that, in this hypothetical marriage, she would have one child and it would be Jewish and her friend, Anna, would have the other and raise it Catholic.

Raya remembers her first crush on a girl in sixth grade. She said that she knew that being gay was okay, but did not know that you could be interested in both men and women, and this confused her. She said that this was heavily influenced by the media, and that if there had been a bisexual or queer character on Disney Channel, she would have understood that bisexuality was a possibility.

I asked how her family felt about her sexuality and she said that they had always been very supportive of gay rights and participated in pro-gay political action. Her dad, she explained, had always thought that she was “gay before she knew” and had always expected her to date a woman. She gave a good comparison: she had told her parents about both Anna, who is Catholic and Eli, a Jewish man from school who had treated her poorly, and her parents told her they would rather her date Anna. This shows the acceptance that her family has towards her queerness, not prioritizing Judaism before her happiness.

We discussed how Reform Jewish culture informs dating culture. She had gone to Jewish summer camp as a child and teen and explained that the culture there was very heteronormative. Raya said that there was a kind of social capital that was gained from hooking up with someone of the opposite gender. She interjected that, however, her first kiss with a girl was at camp in a game of truth or dare. Since then, many of her camp friends have come out as queer, but at the time the camp culture “really idealized heterosexual relationships”.

Beyond the camp sphere, however, she feels that Reform Judaism is extremely welcoming to queer people. Our internship program was through the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, the headquarters of Reform Jewish advocacy, and as a group we marched with other Jewish groups in Gay Pride and collectively ran to the Supreme Court together when gay marriage passed. Raya feels that the Reform movement is super inclusive and celebrates gay people, but that we as a generation need to come of age in order to see more gay families at temple and more queer people in Jewish leadership. She explained: “for being a religion, The Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) is incredibly inclusive as we usually see pro-gay movements in secular spaces. There are some gay churches but the URJ really is the only full religion that embraces gay people”.

Raya is a leader of the Claremont Colleges Hillel, and close friends with the president who is queer and has a girlfriend. Raya's rabbi is also gay. Being surrounded by this, she explains, allows her to feel comfortable in her Jewish community as a bisexual person. She goes to gay clubs with the president of Hillel, her girlfriend and her Jewish gay, male friend. They recently met a Jewish Drag Queen there, named Janxx Monsoon, with whom they took a group picture with. For her, queerness is very visible within the Reform Movement.

I asked her if her sexuality influenced her views of marriage and children. She replied that her rabbi and queer friends at Hillel speak often about having Jewish children, and she feels that there would be no issue in raising a Jewish child in a gay family. This statement challenges a lot of my assumptions based on the symbolic violence that causes compulsive heteronormativity. However, she is in a very specific environment, living in California, coming from a very liberal family and attending a girls school.

Raya and I then discussed our internship program. Over the course of six weeks, between around 25 people, about four, serious heterosexual couples developed. This is something that I have observed in Jewish communities to happen very quickly. Even my ten-day Birthright trip resulted in two serious couples. However, I am not sure if this is indicative of Jewish culture or of the intensity of spending extensive time with one group of young adults. Reform Judaism provides a lot of opportunities for extended group activities and trips.

Within our internship group, there was a lot of openness in the internship group towards queerness. Raya was interested in our friend Elizabeth, and all of our friends were very supportive of her. Raya and Elizabeth had kissed once at a "Queer Harvard Party" in D.C. and Elizabeth had said: "I feel like this was bound to happen." However, Elizabeth had a boyfriend at the time, but has since dated women. Everyone in the group was open and accepting of this kind of sexual fluidity. There was also another woman in the group who was openly lesbian. Notwithstanding, the nature of the internship can also account for the openness of our group. Everyone was working at different organizations for progressive political causes including pro-choice, anti-death penalty, pro- LGBTQ+ organizations and many more. Those who were drawn to the program were already dedicated to these issues.

Raya's discussion of queerness in the Reform Movement complicates and challenges some of the previously discussed dominant pressures. She supports the claim of symbolic violence by explaining her experience of it within the Jewish summer camp culture. In contrast with this, her Reform community has, in many ways, worked against the hegemony of heterosexuality. Her Jewish parents, like Ava's, are very supportive of queerness. In addition to this, she is surrounded by queer people in positions of power in her Jewish community. In opposition to the heterosexual Jewish family model, Raya has seen many queer people reject this prevalent family structure and feels there would be no issue raising a Jewish child in a gay family.

#### **Chapter 4: Art Workshop with Sisters, Yael: Age 21, and Avital: Age 23**

**Date: March 10, 2017**

**Yael: Identifies as a woman, she/her pronouns, identifies as bisexual**

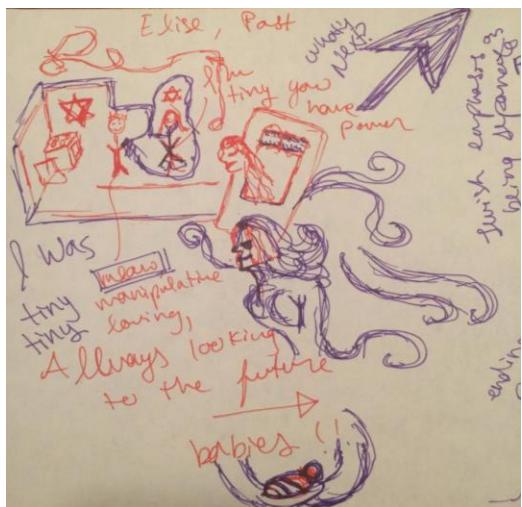
**Avital: Identifies as genderqueer, she/her pronouns**

I sat in my living room with my best friend from home, Yael, who was visiting from Boston on her spring break, her older sister, Avital, and my roommate, Maddie. Yael, Avital and I met at Jewish summer camp when I was thirteen. Yael and I have been extremely close since then, and although we never went to the same schools, we have always talked on the phone every few days and continue to do so through college. We have seen each other go through many transformations and followed each other's love interests and dating experiences. Maddie, my roommate, was in the living room when I began the project with Yael and Avital, and I asked if she wanted to join. She was interested, so she participated with us. Although I did not include her words in this paper, it is important to note her presence. Yael and Avital both grew up going to a Reform Temple, going to URJ Camp Kalsman and being involved in NFTY, similarly to me. As a family, they were very involved in Temple, because their mom is the Sunday school director. Their dad, who they call "Abba" is Israeli, and their mom, "Eema", is Jewish and was raised in Massachusetts. They go to Israel as a family every few years as their dad's whole family still lives there.

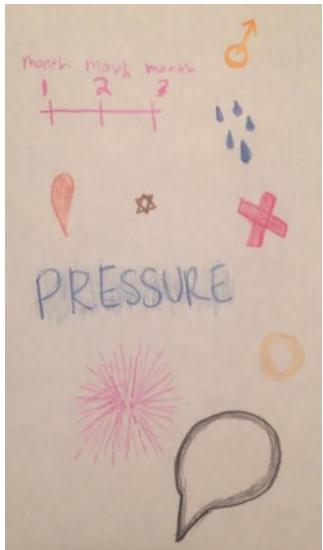
This workshop is split into drawings and discussions relating to the participants' dating pasts, presents and futures. I began the workshop by handing out small pieces of white paper and colored pencils and pens. I gave instructions: I asked everyone to draw and depict through art or words their "dating past" and how it relates to their families, societal pressures, and the Jewish religion and culture. I played Cat Stevens on the speakers as we all sat and drew for the length of a few songs. In order to allow enough time, I waited for everyone to tell me when they were done and then turned off the music. To begin the discussion, I asked if anyone wanted to speak about their drawing, and when no one was eager to, I started off the conversation to make everyone feel more comfortable.

### The Past

To discuss my drawings, I explained that in my past, my relationship to dating and specifically Jewish dating was very based in my future goals. I was focused on the idea of my Jewish identity being closely tied to a want to have Jewish children, with a Jewish man. I had an idea of domesticity in the future but had also had many bad relationships and experiences with men, Jewish or non-Jewish. On my paper, I wrote the words "mean", "manipulative" and "loving" to describe the patterns of people that I would get into in past relationships. In many of these relationships, I felt "tiny" and powerless. Also, I depicted my



want for babies and always planning the future: "what's next?" is written. I said to the group: "I had this imaginary life in my head of this perfect Jewish guy... but it wasn't just Jewish guys... but when I was dating someone non-Jewish I would always think: in my future I would find a Jewish guy to settle down with. I don't know why I wanted to settle down so much because I didn't really want to, but I never felt like veering from that, because it was always something I wanted so badly. But that really dramatically shifted after a bad relationship last year when I realized that I'm sick of feeling like a tiny person."



Yael followed me, agreeing with many of my expressed sentiments. "I felt a lot of pressure to date a certain way, but it wasn't really from my parents or society, it was from both, but was mostly pressure I put on myself and my parents would be like: don't think about marriage why are you thinking about that?" She spoke about her sister: "Avital always had really long relationships and it felt like everyone was looking at me and everyone thought that I was gay. Part of it was that I had a lot of questions about my sexuality and I felt like I had to have all of these boyfriends to prove that I'm normal." She explained: "I drew a little Jewish star

because it was important to me to date a Jewish person. It wasn't like I only wanted to date Jews but a lot of people I've dated are Jewish because I have a lot in common with them because I am very Jewish. I just don't have anything in common with white guys. I drew half a heart because all of my relationships have felt very one-sided from either side, and I also drew a timeline because I have never dated someone for three months." She finished saying: "There is a wedding ring because I always wanted a really traditional life. I did want that but I prioritized it too much and it wasn't realistic." Here, Yael cites a lot of pressure, both internal and external towards a straight Jewish marriage. She also discusses the important role that she plays in that, explaining that it was something she really wanted. She also echoes the statements of Jonathan, stating that a Jewish relationship seems to develop naturally due to commonalities between the two people.

Avital started speaking right after her, also saying that her drawing was similar to the previous ones. She explained: "So this house represents my ideas I had when I was younger that was very influenced by my family, that was where you marry a Jewish person and that's it. It's in a bubble because that's what I wanted and I felt like I wanted that. I felt like in Judaism there is a lot of emphasis on being separate from other people and that's something that I've always grown up around and as I got older I realized that that doesn't feel right. It didn't agree with my emerging spirituality to abide by that expectation because the separation made me feel like we thought we were better than other people. And that didn't sit well with me. That's why I have the stairs, leading up to the Jewish household

because Jews... well not all Jews... have that connotation of being separate and better." I interjected: "the Chosen People" and we all laughed. She continued, "I got into my own

spirituality and kind of wanted to leave that behind.



Everything around the bubble is all of the possibilities and all of the people you might meet. I have 'CULTURE IS NOT YOUR FRIEND' written, which are words by Terence McKenna who is a psychedelic researcher. What he means by that is that culture is made up and that there is nothing that says that social codes are good, true or real in any sort of way. That ties into Judaism, and that's saying that it isn't bad to be Jewish or identify with that, but knowing that it's not the end all, be all. Underneath this is the flower of life, which represents my current spirituality. Growing up in the bubble, but then

realizing that there was more outside of it and other better relationships. I never felt like I couldn't date someone because they aren't Jewish but it's kind of like Elise said, where you expect to end up in a certain place (me and Yael agreed). The last person I dated wasn't a practicing Jewish person but was Israeli and had a Jewish parent. It wasn't necessarily a good relationship but one of the reasons I wanted to hold onto it for longer than I should have was because of that expectation. And after that ended, I realized it doesn't really matter. I want someone who is interested and respectful of my culture. My current partner comes to Hanukkah and stuff, but neither of us are religious, but we connect on a spiritual level that isn't cultural at all. Like going beneath and beyond all of that." In this exercise, Avital expresses frustration with the continual focus on Jewish partnerships, feeling that her family always expected her to be with a Jewish person. She reflects on this time, and the structures of her youth, that she wishes to rebel against.

In our following discussion, Avital went on to explain that she hates that we talk to little kids about dating, and often ask them the question "do you have a boyfriend". She said that if she has kids, she does not want to mention dating to them. She explained that it is another cultural thing that she believes to not hold as much importance as we give it. "People just don't think about how heteronormative practices in elementary school can

affect people". The group discussed that they would have fake weddings when they were little.

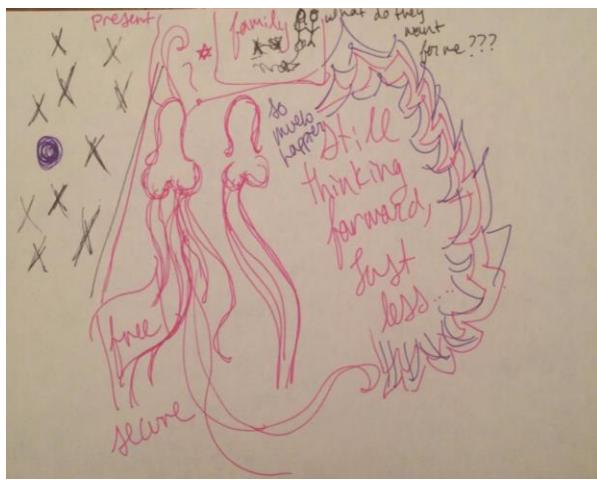
Yael, in response to her sister, said: "I totally get not caring if someone is Jewish or not but when I dated Mack, I felt like something was missing. If I mentioned Passover, or something, and they say 'Oh! Tell me the Passover story' I would just get so annoyed. I want someone who just gets it. For me, it is a cultural thing where I want to date someone that feels like family." Avital interjected here, saying: "I get that, but I have lost so many of the connections to Judaism that I don't really want that as much." Yael then responded: "If I do marry someone and have this traditional life, I don't think that I could marry just like a white guy. But I could marry another minority. I want someone who has traditions and culture and gets being a minority." Her sister replied, "but you never know..." To which Yael replied, repeating what she had said earlier: "I know, but I just want to be with someone who feels like my family, and I could end up with someone not Jewish but for me, I don't feel like I have things in common with guys that aren't Jewish."

Yael continued, speaking about politics and social class, stating that she does not want to be with someone who comes from a Republican family, and that someone she was interested in had a very "white trash" family, explaining that she was uncomfortable around them and did not want to speak with them or be around them. She explained this feeling: "I don't want to get trapped and fall in love with him again and then have to interact with his weird family and that makes me feel really shallow." Her sister, once again, interjected, using the same phrase of "white trash" to discuss her current partner's family. She said that he was the "black sheep" of the family and has completely different views from his family. I then entered the conversation, stating that I thought it would be hard for me to date someone whose family had voted for Trump, because I feel that there is a lot of anti-Semitism that is deeply rooted in the right wing. Avital replied to this, saying: "If you love the person and they share their views, then what their family thinks doesn't really matter." Yael, brought up her ex-boyfriend Mack again, explain that when she met his dad, he said a joke about something Jewish and in her head she thought "Oh shit, I can't do this. I don't ever want to be in a situation where I have to defend Judaism to someone."

Here, the importance of a partner who has lived a shared experience, as well as the rejection of that need, are displayed.

### The Present

Next, we took time to draw our present views of dating. I started the conversation again, with the goal of making it a comfortable space to speak about the intimate topic of



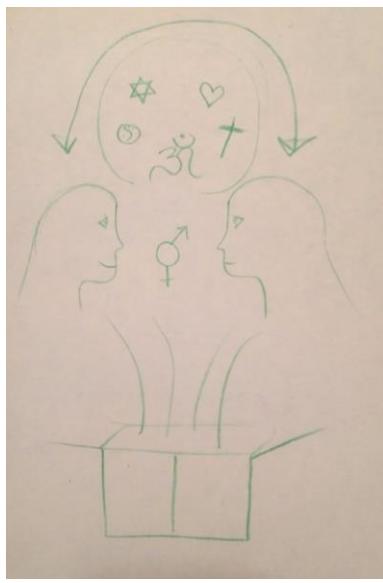
dating and relationships. "I was thinking about my present and how it relates to my past." I began, "I see my past as this jumbled pain and of weird people who I have dated that have been really negative. Now I feel like I'm embracing this sense of openness and dating a girl and not confining to this future that I want for myself. And yet I still have this overbearing feeling of what my family expects

from me and a lot of fear and sadness about how restricted I feel by that. It is interesting that the girl I am dating, Hannah, is Jewish, and how it is fun that she is Jewish but I don't think about it that much. But, if she were a guy and we got along this well, I would be really excited about it and that is really based on this idea of having Jewish kids. I still am thinking forward, but this relationship doesn't feel like: 'I'm going to date her so that we can have this life together.' I feel like I am doing something because it feels good right now. That is very freeing. I am not constantly trying to plan ahead, in the past, I used to keep doing that and felt unhappy. I am also a lot more secure in who I am now. I drew "x's" because, in my past, there was only one good relationship that I feel like was happy and good, but for the most part it was just negative. I feel like I am no longer doing something to get validation, but it is a lot more difficult and takes a lot more effort and more confidence than before when I was just dating shitty dudes." I finished: "I am in this stage where I am not planning for anything, and am just floating around."



Yael continued off of what I had said with the phrase "same-ish." She began: "I drew first, a girl, because I am exploring dating girls, but then I drew a guy because I am also doing that. I then drew water, because it is also fluid. And I drew grass and a sunflower because for the first time, I am letting things grow naturally. There is a clock, because I am going slow with things and I am really trying not to rush into relationships anymore. The word 'Freedom' because I am not thinking about the future as much. 'Sensuality and sexuality' which I am exploring more and not just being like: 'this is what you do, so you can get this in the future as an investment' I am doing what feels good and is healthy for me." In this stage of "present", Yael is challenging her previous pressures by focusing more on her more immediate, personal feelings rather than focusing on her future. She is embracing her bisexual identity rather than conforming and hiding within the heterosexual societal structure.

Avital spoke next, explaining that she drew her and her current partner. "This is us



exchanging our ideas and our backgrounds but coming out of our box and not taking any of that with us. We are a male and female, but we are both queer in the sense of gender, we are not as much in sexuality, but we are both gender fluid. So, we are coming together as just souls without baggage. We have both been through a lot of rough relationships and we are leaving that behind and letting it happen organically and naturally. This is the first time where I don't feel like I have any hang-ups about pressure from family, because I know that they will accept me no matter what and I have come to terms with how they will never fully understand me. No other

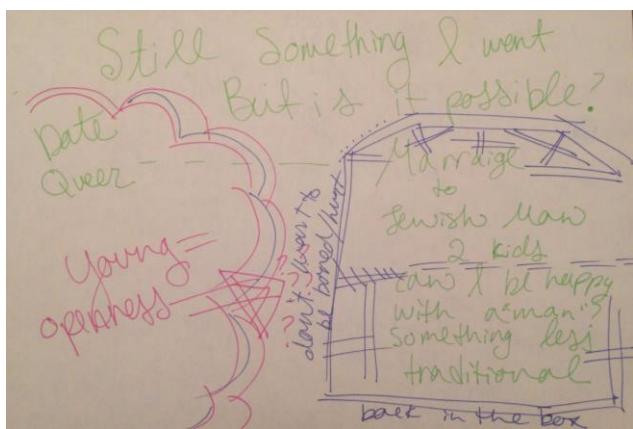
human is going to completely understand your internal experience and I am okay with that. My partner doesn't care what his family thinks. I care, to an extent, but I am not going to let

that affect the way that I live my life anymore." Avital, like Yael and myself, is focusing more on herself rather than fitting into what is expected of her.

We discussed, after this conversation about the present, that everyone was speaking of the present much more positively than the past. I explained that I felt like if I had done this a year ago, I wouldn't have been able to say "I'm really happy, I feel really free and secure". Everyone laughed at this, and agreed. Despite all of us living in different places, and being different people at different stages in our lives, we were all feeling a kind of freedom from the previously imposed Symbolic Violence. This freedom was present in our willingness to reject social structures of fixed sexuality, gender and religion.

### The Future

Once again, I began the discussion on the "future" section. I explained that this

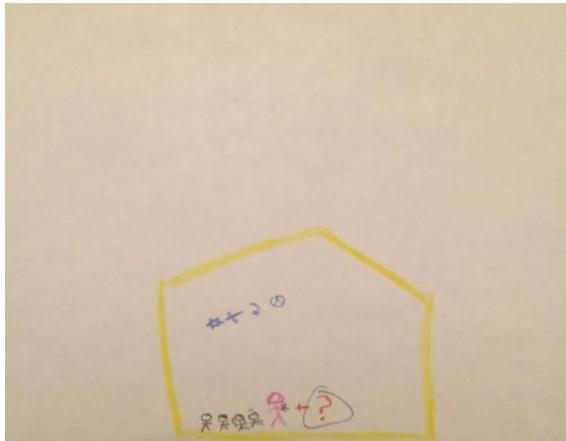


project was inspired by the many questions that I have about my future and the uncertainties I have relating to who I am and what I want. In relation to this, I discussed how I both find it liberating to come to terms with my queer identity as well as confusing. Despite my sense of self, I still have many ingrained desires of a

Jewish family with a Jewish man and I am exploring where this pressure is coming from: internally or externally? Then, I explained that my most successful relationships with men are people who are more gender fluid. Although I have struggled with dating men I also have experienced how difficult being in a non-heterosexual relationship is. Finally, I discussed how having a Jewish family is something that is really important to me. My parents were not very religious and I wish that I had had that from an earlier age. I explained how I would love to have a child to send to Jewish summer camp, but also give them the freedom to reject that religion as well. My picture shows the structure of a house, where I see this concept of a future, but I don't know what that really looks like. I ended,

saying that “Maybe I will be with something that appears traditional but doesn’t feel traditional.”

Yael described her drawing next. “I drew a house, and a lot of kids, because I feel like



my life calling is to have foster kids and maybe adopt, and maybe have my own kids. I would like to have a partner but I don’t know if they would be a man or a woman. Statistically I know that most bisexual people end up with the opposite sex because there are fewer sexual minorities. I see that happening, but I am open to falling in love with whoever. I don’t know if

they would be Jewish, I just don’t want to decide what my future is. I drew a Jewish star and other symbols. I consider myself Omni-Religious and I want to have all kinds of religious customs in my family.” Yael is very concentrated on having children, but does not know who she wishes her future partner will be. In her desires of being with a man or a woman and having an Omni-Religious household, she is choosing not to chase after what she had longed for earlier: a Jewish husband, with Jewish children.



Avital spoke next. “It is really hard for me to think about my future. I enjoy thinking about my future but I also really don’t. I have a heart with a little Jewish star, because it is always going to be a part of me, and how I was raised. It is going up, and the rest is divine love and being open to whatever path love will take me on.” As time progressed, shown through the three separate drawings, Yael and Avital hinted at the dismissal of previous structures and a focus on themselves and their happiness.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion/ Interpretations

Present in this ethnography, are the interviews of Ava, Jonathan, Raya, Yael and Avital. All of these people individually grappled with their understandings of their Jewish

identities, their desires and the pressures that they have been exposed to. As Bourdieu explains, symbolic violence is “Exerted invisibly and insidiously through insensible familiarization with a symbolically structured world and early, prolonged experience of interactions informed by the structures of domination” (341). All of the people discussed previous interactions that determined their current views towards dating, sexuality and Judaism. All of those interviewed dealt with the intersections of Judaism and dating, showing the clear importance of these forces in their lives, as well as their relation to each other. Consequently, these conversations all point to the question: Can we ever differentiate symbolic violence? This violence, as Bourdieu explains, is so deeply rooted that the individual cannot tell where the pressure comes from, this way, we can never really know where our influences come from and how they affect us. As these interviewees spoke, it became clear that one can never truly identify the role that symbolic violence plays rather than a solely personal desire. Symbolic violence cannot be extricated and understood and neither the individual nor the reader of their words can identify where each interviewee’s interests take root.

I expected to find that those who felt more connected to Judaism, felt a more distinct connection to who they wished to date. However, Raya and Ava, who both strongly identify as Jewish, did not place as much of an importance on the religion of who they were with. Avital represents someone who does not feel as connected to her Jewish identity so the person who she is with closely mirrors her shifting spiritual identity. Both Jonathan and Yael, explain that they find it difficult to date non-Jews, due to their difficulty to closely connect with someone of a different religion or background. To them, their Judaism was a specific, intimate as well as cultural experience that they wished to share with their partner.

Most participants discussed the presence of anti-Semitism in their lives and the way that that defined who they wished to be with. This discussion of closeness based on shared experience refutes the claims of Symbolic Violence as the conceptual framework. Although these people have been told many times to be with a Jewish person, there are also many other important factors that lead these young Jewish people to be interested in other Jews.

Jonathan mentioned that there is an importance to being able to tell his parents that he is dating a Jewish girl, but that the importance to him goes beyond fulfilling that social model.

There were many other identifiable trends within the various conversations. Within most conversations, the topic of Jewish children was addressed, showing the importance of Jewish children as a continuation of the Jewish culture and religion. When speaking of sexuality, there seems to be an openness towards queerness, but the remaining understanding that heterosexuality is the norm. As these everyone got older, there seemed to be a trend of veering away from set heteronormative or inner-religious structures. Other sentiments that were expressed were that other Jews felt like family, and that they are seen as more attractive. Also, each participant heavily weighed Judaism in their relationships, because for no one this was a “non-factor”.

To conclude, it can be drawn from the preceding quotes and interactions that The Union of Reform Judaism both inflicts and rejects symbolic violence relating to dating and marriage. As a progressive institution, participants, including myself, noted the sect’s openness towards queer people as well as its liberal social stances. In contrast, everyone also cited instances of dating pressure sourcing from their parents, rabbis, summer camps or other Reform Jewish institutions. This pressure was often made visible in jokes, statements or vague messages, hinting that the “right” kind of relationship was Jewish and heterosexual.

### **Annotated Bibliography:**

1. Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Gender and Symbolic Violence*. Social Theory, Spring 2017.
  - a. I am looking into how the dominant force can influence a community’s ideology. Bourdieu explains: “The dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural” (339). As women, we are conditioned our whole lives to be inferior to men and feel uncomfortable in “male spaces” and “This can lead to a kind of systematic self-depreciation, even self-denigration” (339). Over time, this misogyny is internalized by all people and it becomes an unconscious part of our lives that puts men and women in clear hierarchical terms. Bourdieu explains that French women reported that they wished to have men taller and older than them. This reminds me of the internal “need” to find a “nice Jewish boy.” This wish is not natural, but a

result of all the input that has told women to want a man that can validate them. Bourdieu argues that this happens “at the deepest level of the body” (340). It is not a conscious decision to take a position of dominance or inferiority, but it is something that takes place deep in the body.

2. Fishman, Sylvia. 2015. *Love, Marriage and Jewish Families. Paradoxes of a Social Revolution*. Sylvia Barack Fishman Editor. Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press.

. This explores the paradox and questions that Jews encounter in relationship to traditions and social revolutions. It is edited by Fishman and has very many chapters that are extremely relevant to my project such as “What’s love got to do with it? Marriage and non-Marriage among younger American Jews”, “Gender, Dating and Singlehood among Religious Zionist Jews” and “Same-Sex Couple Families and the American Jewish Family”. This is a sociological book and therefore does not give the personal details I need but also provides a lot of interesting statistics and insight into Israeli and Orthodox life that I have less access to.

3. Glaser, Elise. 2017. *Bourdieu’s Symbolic Violence*. Social Theory: Lewis and Clark College.

. My writing on symbolic violence was taken from writing that I had done for a Key Words assignment and a presentation on symbolic violence. This informed my conceptual framework for my ethnography.

4. Jones, Lucy. 2012. *Dyke/Girl*. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

. This ethnography is about the British lesbian community. It will be helpful as it will discuss personal identity, queer identity and community dynamics. It will also be a similar style to my ethnography, as it will consist of personal interviews in trusting environments.

5. Thompson, Jennifer. 2014. *Jewish on Their Own Terms. How Intermarried Couples are Changing American Judaism*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

. This book gives me alternate information than the other book but also addresses the question of Jewish identity in relation to social movements. This discusses changes that have happened in the Jewish community surrounding changes that have happened socially. As I am writing about myself and pressures to date other Jews, and social acceptance towards dating non-Jews, this sociological book will be very useful. “What you are” and “What’s in your heart” interests me as I am interested in the intersection of love and want and Jewish identity and how that manifests in dating norms and culture.

6. Skeggs, Beverly. 2004. *Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of class, gender and sexuality: Introducing Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of class, gender and sexuality*.

[http://www.academia.edu/4720545/Context\\_and\\_Background\\_Pierre\\_Bourdieu%27s\\_analysis\\_of\\_class\\_gender\\_and\\_sexuality\\_Introducing\\_Pierre\\_Bourdieu%27s\\_analysis\\_of\\_class\\_gender\\_and\\_sexuality](http://www.academia.edu/4720545/Context_and_Background_Pierre_Bourdieu%27s_analysis_of_class_gender_and_sexuality_Introducing_Pierre_Bourdieu%27s_analysis_of_class_gender_and_sexuality)

. As I am looking into the concept of Symbolic Violence, I will do more research into Bourdieu’s studies on gender, sexuality and symbolic violence.

7. Urj.org. 2017. *Who we are*. <http://www.urj.org/who-we-are/reform-movement>