THE 2020 PEW STUDY: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE JEWISH IN AMERICA?

(Begin audio)

Joshua Holo: Welcome to the College Commons Podcast. Passionate perspectives from Judaism's leading thinkers. Brought to you by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, America's first Jewish institution of higher learning. My name is Joshua Holo, Dean of HUC's Jack H. Skirball Campus in Los Angeles, and your host.

JH: Welcome to this episode of the College Commons Podcast, where I have the great, great pleasure of talking about the Pew Study, which came out in 2020, together with my friends and colleagues, Professor Sarah Bunin Benor and Bruce Phillips. Sarah Bunin Benor is Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Most recently, she co-authored Hebrew Infusion: Language and Community at American Jewish Summer Camps, which won the National Jewish Book Award in Education and Jewish Identity. She founded and co-edits the Journal of Jewish Languages, and she's the creator of the Jewish Language website. Sarah, welcome to the College Commons Podcast.

Sarah Bunin Benor: Thank you.

JH: Bruce Phillips is Professor of Sociology & Jewish Communal Studies, also at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, where he also serves as a fellow at the Center for Religious and Civic Culture at our partner institution, the University of Southern California. A leading researcher in demography and sociology of American Jewry, he received the 2017 Marshall Sklare Award for his contributions to the field. His research currently focuses on Jewish interfaith marriage in the US and Jewish adults who grew up in interfaith homes in the context of mixed-race research. Bruce, it's a pleasure to have you.

Bruce Phillips: Thank you, Josh. I just wanna make one little correction, the study was done in 2020, but it actually just appeared a couple weeks ago, I think it was released on April 18th, so we're tackling it right out of the gate.

JH: Right out of the gate. And so, let's orient our audience a little bit about what the information out of the gate is trending toward. The Pew Research Center itself publishes the headlines of the lessons learned from this study, which is an outgrowth of the 2013 study, which the Pew Research Center also produced, and the top line lesson, as they understand them, are the following: There are Jews increasingly diverse in population, Jews in America tend to be quite culturally engaged, although we might talk about the relationship between that engagement versus religious engagement, American Jewry tends toward political polarization. In this regard I

think we'd agree reflecting the non-Jewish American landscape in general as well. And topmost in many people's minds, according to the 2020 survey, is anti-semitism in the Jewish community. So that's a backdrop against which we'll be discussing some of the issues. So start with you, Bruce. You have paid a lot of attention over the course of your career and now to the phenomenon of intermarriage, and I wanna ask you if there is a counterintuitive or surprising lesson to be learned from this study about intermarriage in the American Jewish community.

BP: Well, I think what's most important is the figure, the rate of intermarriage among Jews with two Jewish parents, and as I've argued in a couple of publications that we really need to understand now that the American Jewish population, particularly the younger population under 50, is bifurcated between people who have one Jewish parent and people who have two Jewish parents. We've known for a long time, going back to my analysis even of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, that persons with one Jewish parent marry out at a very high rate, 80%-90%. But what struck me is that for Jews with two Jewish parents, the rate continues to be 34%. It's been that way for 20 years now since the NJPS, which is this striking amount of stability in that. From my point of view, looking at in the context of American society, demography in general, the question for me that I'm impressed with is, Why are Jews marrying other Jews at all? We're now looking at younger Jews who were fourth, sometimes even fifth generation Americans. There are not a lot of Jews in the United States. It's only, depending on which figure you take between 2%-3%, even at its highest, it's still pretty low. So even that 10% rate of in-marriage among, let's say 15% rate of in-marriage among people of mixed Jewish ancestry or one Jewish parent, it's still higher than what you would expect at random.

SB: I agree with Bruce, I think his contributions in this area are so important, and unfortunately the communal discourse around intermarriage tends to be so oriented toward decline, but what I see in this study is the opposite of decline. I actually see an increased acceptance of intermarriage among American Jews, and there are a few pieces of evidence for that, one is that the vast majority of Jews say that rabbis should perform marriage ceremonies for interfaith couples, and that does not vary by age. What we do see varying by age is the acceptance of intermarriage. The study asked how important it was for people that their grandchildren do certain things, share their political convictions, be Jewish, carry on the family name, and a majority of Jews in all groups say that it's important that their grandchildren do those things. But a minority of Jews in all groups, except the oldest group, say it's important for their grandchildren to marry someone Jewish. So only 34% of those ages 18-29, and 36% of those ages 30-49 say it's important that their grandchildren marry someone Jewish. So this shows the increased acceptance of Jews marrying people who are not Jewish.

SB: Also, we see an increased identification as Jewish among children of intermarriage, and this was something that came out in the 2013 study and also is confirmed here. Among those who have only one Jewish parent, only 21% of those ages 50 and up identify as Jewish compared to 47% of those ages 18-49. That's a huge difference, and I think that has to do with the increasing acceptance of Jews in American society, despite the rise in anti-semitism in certain fringe areas within society. In general, people in America are willing to marry Jews, which I think is a good sign. Also, another piece of evidence that the increase in intermarriage is a good thing for Jews is that about 50% of the children of intermarriage in the younger group are

identifying as Jewish. That means that if that rate goes up a little more, that's the replacement rate, essentially because if you have two Jews and they marry each other, if they have two Jewish children, then they're replacing themselves. If you have one Jew who marries a non-Jew and they have one child who identifies as a Jew, then they're replacing themselves.

SB: How you look at this data, it's really important to think about it from your ideological lens, and I think a lot of people in the Jewish community use an ideological lens of decline or what Tali Zelkowicz called a Humpty Dumpty narrative, the idea that in the old country everything was good and then Humpty Dumpty had a great fall in America, and all the king's horses and men can't put Humpty together again. The Jewish organization can't fix Humpty to make him what he was like in the old country, but I don't think we should be taking the old country as the norm against which we compare our current situation. We have to say, "Wow, it's amazing that so many people still identify as Jews."

BP: I think Sarah's right. It's like what lens are we looking through? There's one table where it's looking like people who are not raised in Judaism, and how do they identify now, and it was an even split roughly between people who just either or have become Christian or don't consider themselves Jewish anymore, I think it was 24% didn't identify anymore but 21% now were Jews by religion. So there's a lot of dynamism here. I think the implications for synagogues and Hebrew schools and Jewish institutions are important, which is that the population is changing. They're much less likely to join the synagogue, or give their children a formal Jewish education, but nonetheless, they're interested in Jewish engagement. So I think we really, we just from a planning point of view, need to understand how the Jewish population is changing, and that they are may well be interested in different things and different modalities of engagement.

JH: The net lesson I'm getting from your overall comments is that the data forces us to reckon with a rather stunning possibility that in the past, we have cared, like Sarah said, about the passing on of tradition. And from a cause and effect perspective, we have treated it as axiomatic that in order to get that effect, I.e., the passing on of Judaism from generation to generation, one way or the other, our desired outcomes depend on in-marriage, that's why we have been so hawkish on in-marriage in the recent generations. I hear you saying that the data indicates that that's really not an accurate axiom, that the goal, I.e., the passing on of certain traditions and Jewish identity does not in fact depend as directly on in-marriage as we have either assumed or as much as has been historical with the case. So that there's a rejiggering regardless of one's ideology that we have to do in terms of just comprehending reality.

SB: Maybe. I would say two things about that. One is certainly if a Jew marries a Jew, they're much more likely to do a lot of Jewish thing than if they marry a non-Jew. But Bruce did a wonderful analysis of the NJPS data, I think it was published in 2010 or '13, it's actually... He did regression analysis. He found that the effect of high school friends, and various activities had a stronger effect than whether they had one or two Jewish parents on whether they do certain Jewish things as adult.

BP: I'm working on a book with Ernie Bucheski and we're doing more of the multiple regression work, and the main factor is what the interfaith couple does with their children. So people who are adults now, the main predictors of whether they join a synagogue, it's not whether they had

a non-Jewish parent but their Jewish background, and this is even throwing more variables into the mix.

JH: Before you go on, we have to define what a regression is. Does it mean running the numbers through the lens of different factors like an actuary?

BP: Yeah, so if you just look at a bivariate analysis, which is actually much of the Pew reported, looking at various things by one other thing, you see, yeah, people who had a non-Jewish parents don't belong to synagogues as adults. A lot of the impact... The bivariate relationship has to do with the experiences the non-Jewish, the interfaith couple gave that respondent as a child. So they were much less likely to go to Jewish camp, have a formal Jewish education, and it turns out that it's the socialization experiences that have an impact, it's not whether or not you have a non-Jewish parent. And in fact, from my qualitative research, I'm finding that the non-Jewish parents are usually... They're not particularly Christian and not particularly committed to anything else, they're just religiously neutral, and they're generally happy to go along with what the Jewish spouse does.

BP: Again, I think Sarah's right because of our Humpty Dumpty perspective is that we forget that non-Jewish spouses are part of these relationships, are part of the decision-making process. And we talk about how we're gonna do outreach to the interfaith couple, we're usually thinking about the Jewish spouse when in fact that it's the non-Jewish spouse is equally maybe more important 'cause they're the ones we have to convince to... If we're interested in giving their children a Jewish education, Jewish camp, connecting them to the Jewish community, we have to look at it from their perspective. Why should I spend a lot of my time and money for a religion that's not mine, or a culture that's not mine? Why should I be doing this?

SB: I'm so glad you said that, Bruce. When you asked the question, Josh, you said why we have been so hawkish on the issue of intermarriage and I would ask, who's the we? And I think many people in the organized Jewish community have been hawkish, but many people who are married to non-Jews find that offensive and also feel personally attacked when that discourse is public because they feel that they are being told that they are having a negative impact on Jewish continuity, and especially when they are doing all those things that Bruce said, they are raising their children as Jews and putting in the time, the money, the emotional effort to have Jewish homes. So I think we really have to be careful in how we talk about intermarriage for that reason.

JH: I appreciate that, Sarah. And when I said we, I did mean the public voice that gets heard through the megaphone. If we were to generalize and characterize it, it would be a we in that sense, but I agree that we should be fracturing that we out and we should be asking the questions that you and Bruce have been asking and answering for a long time, so I appreciate the correction. Let's move on to some other topics. I wanna start this question with you, Sarah, because you are a student of Jewish culture and its expressions. Ever since the 2013 study, which highlighted a category called Jews of no religion, we've been using that category as a frame of reference, and as a result, we've been asking if cultural Judaism, that is to say the affirmation of Jewish identity without religious feeling or identification, if that kind of Judaism is sufficient to provide for Jewish continuity or if it's not, and whether or not that's the right

question, I'm sure we'll get into. So I wanna ask you, where is the power in cultural Judaism absence, religious Judaism, if there is such an isolatable thing? And do you think that cultural Judaism has enough power to transmit Jewish identity from generation to generation?

SB: First, I would start by quoting Charles Liebman who talked about how Jewishness has always been both a religious and ethnic, or descent-based, or peoplehood category. But in America, Jews learned to express their Jewishness as a religious identity because people were more likely to accept people who differentiated themselves religiously than people who differentiated themselves ethnically. And so Jews in America created these big synagogues and sometimes on the same suburban road as the local churches, and those synagogues were certainly places of worship, but they were also places of gathering. So when we talk about the category of Jews of no religion in the Pew Study, just to make sure that our listeners understand how that category is created, they start by asking, What is your religion, if any? And if people say Judaism or Jewish, then they're counted as a Jew by religion.

SB: If they say no religion or atheist or agnostic, and they don't say Jewish, then the next question is, Aside from religion, do you consider yourself Jewish? And if they say yes, then they're considered a Jew of no religion. And so, these categories are a little bit arbitrary because when the survey says these categories, if someone identifies more strongly as atheist than a Jewish, and they check that, but they still are a strongly identified Jew, and maybe they do Jewish religious things, they would still be categorized as a JNR, Jew of no religion. So that's my general statement, but then your question about cultural Judaism, we do find that a lot of Jews by religion and Jews of no religion participate in Jewish cultural practices, but we find that Jews by religion participate in these cultural practices at a much higher rate than Jews not by religion. And so let me see if I can find some examples in the Pew Study. Bruce, do you wanna talk a little while I look for those?

BP: Yes. I wanna say one of the things... Sarah makes a very good point that that category which goes back to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, it's on how you get into the study, and I've showed an article I published almost 10 years ago that a lot of the people who are Jews of no religion, in fact, there's a lot of overlap with people who had a non-Jewish parent, and that's actually the one division that's not in these many different tables. So there's a comparison, Jews by religion, Jews of no religion but you have another row in there, Jews of single Jewish ancestry and Jews of mixed Jewish ancestry. So that JNR category, actually, what's going on there is not people who rejected religion, but it's primarily people who weren't raised in Judaism, they were raised usually as nothing in an interfaith home. And as I mentioned before, 21% of them now identify as a Jew by religion.

BP: The interesting question is, why are Jews of no religion less engaged with Jewish culture? Well, they may have been exposed to less Jewish culture, they also might not be in the networks to find out about it. In other words, I get all these different things for all these amazing webinars. I went to one, and my email gets into somebody else's list and then they send me something that they're doing. So if you never click in to begin with, if you're not part of something that will get you engaged, you might not know about it. The other point I wanted to make, just underscoring Sarah's, as a part of my research on suburbanization a couple of years ago, I went back to read Herbert Gans' amazing ethnographic study of Park Forest, Illinois

done, and I think started in 1946, '48, where he describes exactly what Sarah was talking about, and he says, "The synagogue is not particularly full... There are many more people there for the Saturday night dance than there are for the Friday night services."

JH: Sarah, did you wanna go back to your examples?

SB: Yeah, I do have some numbers up here, and the percentage of Jews of no religion who cook or eat traditional Jewish food is 54% compared to Jews by religion, 78%, but both of those are over half. That's a huge statistic. I think we really should think about that, and having Jewish programs surrounding food, I think is one possible interpretation of this Pew study is that that would be something that would be of interest to people. Also the next statistic, which is share culture or holidays with non-Jews, 70% of Jews by religion and 41% of Jews of no religion. And so the idea of the blurry boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, but also the overlapping social network, the fact that so many Jews do that, I think it's important to look at how high that number is.

SB: Even the next statistic, visit historic Jewish sites when traveling, 66% of Jews by religion and 32% of Jews of no religion, that is another thing that we might look to in Jewish communal life is Jewish travel program. And then some of the other statistics are still pretty high among Jews by religion, but much lower among Jews of no religion, but they're cultural practices, like watching TV with Jewish or Israeli scenes, listening to Jewish or Israeli music, and participating in online conversations about Judaism. These are practices that a lot of Jews do that we might not think of as Jewish in a religious sense, but are very important to Jewish social networks, and I don't just mean online social networks, but also in-person social networks.

SB: You ask, Josh, about continuity. Again, I'm not sure that's quite the right question to ask 'cause it implies this idea that we want to continue the way we have been, and I know it often refers to demographics, like how many Jews are there. I don't think that's actually the question to ask, and I know this is a quantitative study so that's... The main thing it's asking is about numbers, but I think it's just as important, not more important, to ask qualitative questions, not just how many Jews are there and how Jewish are Jews, but also how are Jews Jewish? To quote Bethamie Horowitz. I think it's great that these surveys are asking new questions about cultural practices, and I think we need to do more research on how Jews are being Jewish by interviewing them and doing ethnographic observation and not just looking at how many Jews do each of these things.

JH: Sarah, I think that there's a challenge that if we're at a minimum emotionally, but also intellectually honest, we have to confront, which is this: Even if we accept the point of departure, being the reframing of the question as Bethamie Horowitz proposes, it still is a primary preoccupation, I think, of many Jews, the Jewish community, whatever that big we is, how is worthwhile, but I also wanna know if. Whatever the complex of attitudes, actions, associations, and beliefs is that we feel is Jewish enough or Jewish or whatever we're aiming for, if that thing is going to continue. And that's the anxiety in the room, and the flipping of the question in and of itself doesn't address that anxiety.

SB: Well, no, I guess I disagree with the question. I don't think it should be a question of, "Are they doing things that we consider Jewish?" I think instead, we should be asking, "What are they doing that they consider Jewish?"

JH: Yeah, the question is, whatever it is that's emerging in any given generation, is it enough to inspire the next generation to do their version of something that at the end of the day we call Jewish?

BP: If you look at the historical lens, I would turn it upside down. Now the majority of young Jews are in the fourth, and some of them fifth generation. If you go back to the Sephardic Jews who came in the 1600s, they all disappeared by the fourth generation. If you look at the German Jews who came in the mid 1800s, they pretty much disappeared. By the way, comparable research on people of Hispanic ancestry also suggested by the fourth and fifth generation, they really no longer identify as Hispanic at all. So to me, the question is, "Wow, what is going on that this particular wave of immigration that came between 1880 and 1924 when anti-semitism cut it off, that Jewish identification has persisted, that people are somehow finding ways to identify?" I think for sure if I'm on the Board of Trustees of my synagogue, I would say, "Don't add a new wing to the religious school." Matter of fact, my synagogue decides to tear down our religious school and sell the building, because the numbers were so small and we needed the money, and I think we'll be seeing that happening more and more. At the same time, as a social scientist, in looking at this in the larger historical perspective, I think a really equally challenging question, intellectually, is, "What's going on that this is still important to these people?"

JH: This goes back to your inversion of the intermarriage question, which is not, "Are we panicked about continuity, but we should be celebrating remarkable continuity that we have... "

BP: Yeah, exactly.

JH: Sarah, I pushed back to you and I spoke last, it was your question, so you get the last word on this before I move on.

SB: Well, I'll just say that I agree with everything Bruce said.

JH: Me too.

BP: I think there're things to interrogate more, what is it being like sharing what we do as Jews with non-Jews? That speaks to... It's so different than the 1950s, and certainly in Germany, a citizen on the street and a Jew at home. But it means you're proud of what you do, it means you have non-Jewish friends who are interested. I think that those non-Jewish friends who are interested reinforce your sense that your being Jewish actually is positive and valuable.

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JH: There's been a dust up in the Jewish community about the demographic make-up of the American-Jewish population in relation to race and ethnicity. So I wanna ask you, what do we learn from this study about the racial and ethnic make-up of American Jews?

BP: Jews of color are part of a larger phenomenon, which is the large number of Jews who have a non-Jewish parent. In the case of Jews of color, they have a non-Jewish parent who is of color and therefore more visible in terms of American society. But one of the things they share with other Jews is that, "How do I balance these two heritages? How do I deal with the two different parts of our family?" And this is not just a Jewish issue, this is a major change in American society where people are now of more than one race, and those numbers are increasing. And I think actually it makes it easier to be Jewish and something else because so many other young people are African-American and something else, or Asian and something else through their parentage. The other thing that's actually pretty disturbing to me is there's a whole other kind of invisible category, invisible in the sense that they're not included in the Pew reports, but they are discussed in chapter 12.

BP: And these are people who had a Jewish parent, who do not qualify as Jewish, either because they said they don't consider themselves Jewish, that's the small minority. The majority of them say, "I am Christian by religion, or I am Jewish and Christian." They actually come across pretty Jewish when you look at, do they have Jewish friends? They are no less Jewish than Jews of no religion. So there's actually this much larger population out there of Jews who don't get counted as Jews. What does this have to do with Jews of color? Jews of color are much more likely to be in that position. And particularly from my analysis of NJPS, African-Americans are more likely to say they're Christian. And I'm just wondering if that's because they grew up in black communities, they feel more welcome in churches than they do in synagogues. There's some things going on there that's alienating them from the Jewish community, even to be not counted as Jews.

SB: Yeah. I think, Bruce, you're pointing to two different things. One is the analytic frame that the study does not consider people to be Jewish if they check Jewish and Christian, and if they write their religion as Christian, but they're Jewish, then they're not considered to be Jewish. But then you're also pointing to Jewish organizations and social networks not being as welcoming as they could be to Jews of color.

JH: I wanna follow up on that with a qualitative question. It is my impression that many, many, many Jews view the phenomenon of Jews of color very favorably, and they relish the idea of a more diverse Jewish population, and it's something they wanna celebrate. And my impression is, co-exist with another impression, which is that Jews of color themselves don't feel that Jews not of color, in fact celebrate them, they're not feeling the welcome, they're not feeling celebrated. And so, it is one problem to observe that Jews of color might experience not being welcome. That is a problem in and of itself, a very serious one. It is a distinct but related

problem that Jews who are not of color should perceive themselves to be celebratory and welcoming, when in fact it's not working. Do you agree that this is a problem built on top of a problem, and that both of these things are in fact as I described them, or do you perceive it differently?

SB: Well, I think there's a generational shift. I think that younger White Jews are more likely than older White Jews to be welcoming to Jews of color, and so I guess we're talking about both individual interactions and organizational culture more broadly, or organizational efforts to reach out to Jews of color. I think also it's not an either/or, are you welcoming or are you not? It's a continuum, and I think as welcoming as organizations might be, there's always room for improvement and for reaching out to Jews, not just Jews of color, but LGBTQ Jews and Jews who are not in traditional family configurations, and Jews who are not Ashkenazi, and various other dimensions that are seen as minoritized in our Jewish community.

JH: So, let's keep going in this direction of diversity, at least insofar as we're talking about minorities, but it's the counter-intuitive minority, I guess, which is Orthodoxy. I wanna go to you, Sarah, you wrote a book called Becoming Frum, which investigates the social codes and the processes of becoming Orthodox, as opposed to those who were born and raised Orthodox. That phenomenon of a certain number of non-Orthodox Jews who become Orthodox, together with the much better known and widely advertised fact of higher birth rates in Orthodox families, contributed over the years, I think it's fair to say to a broad sense that Orthodoxy would increase its proportion of the Jewish population. In fact, however, if I'm reading the Pew 2020 report correctly, the numbers, proportionately of the Orthodox population have declined from 10% to 9%, or perhaps we could consider that flat. Does the data from 2020, therefore, indicate that we should consider studying the cultural pathways of attrition from Orthodoxy?

SB: Definitely not. In fact, there's very little in a study that indicates Jews leaving Orthodoxy in large numbers, those are small numbers. The reason that the percentage of the population, of the Jewish population that is Orthodox is relatively flat is because there's such a high number of Jews of no religion who do not consider themselves any particular denomination. What we're talking about with denomination is clearly a historical trajectory of increases in the Orthodox population, and as you said that this is mostly due to high birth rates, also to high retention rates. And if you look at the statistics about people leaving Orthodoxy, although there are many high profile cases, some of which get their own Netflix shows, these are not high numbers. And it's much higher numbers of people leaving the conservative movement, mostly for the reform movement.

SB: My book was about people who become Orthodox who grew up conservative, reform, reconstructionist, no denomination, or not Jewish, and become Orthodox. And so and that was the tail end of a major movement in American Judaism of people becoming Orthodox. Certainly you still have that today, there are still new Baal teshuva today. But I think most of the growth in Orthodoxy is really due to that high birth rate, and if you look at the percentage of Jewish children who are Orthodox, that continues to grow. And so I think when we think about the future of the American-Jewish community, Orthodoxy I think will continue to rise as a percentage of the overall Jewish population. And if you're limiting it to people who are engaged with Jewish organizations, that number is much, much higher. The percentage of Jews engaged with Jewish

organizations who are Orthodox is very high and will continue to be higher, and when we think about Jewish schools and synagogues and other organizations, a higher percentage of those moving forward are gonna be Orthodox.

BP: Josh, just to underscore Sarah, I did that, an age analysis for the 2013 data, and older people who were raised Orthodox had become reformed and conservative. Younger people raised Orthodox, were staying Orthodox. Add retention to higher birth rate, and you have increasing absolute numbers, but as a percentage, we have this larger peripheral population Jews of no religion, people who had non-Jewish parents, who are hanging on as Jewish.

JH: So in closing, Sarah and Bruce, we've talked about some of the surprises in the data, we've talked about some of the contentious issues in the data. What I'd like each of you to do now is to share with our audience overlooked data, questions raised by the Pew report that we should be paying attention to that maybe we would otherwise overlook.

BP: So people with one Jewish parent are much less likely to have graduated college. In addition to all the other differences, I think we're seeing a really important socio-economic barrier emerging as well, and it just raises all kinds of questions, "What's going on there? Why is that?" It's not one of the things we talk about, it's not one of the things we pay attention to, but as social scientists we know education is very important, and I think that's just something else to think about and pay attention to that it doesn't make the headlines in the Pew report.

SB: Yeah, there's so much in this report, 200-something pages. Here are some statistics that stood out to me, one is about how connected Jews feel to other groups, or how much they feel they have in common with other groups. And more Jews feel they have a lot in common or some in common with Muslims than with evangelical Christians. In fact, 38% of US Jews feel they have a lot, or some in common with Muslims. And I think that is something that a group like NewGround can take and say, "Wow, that's a pretty large percentage of American Jews, we should have more dialogue and interaction between Jews and Muslims." Another statistic that I think I'm gonna use in my forthcoming book on the Jewish names of pets is a statistic about pets. In fact, here's a quote from the report, "Twice as many Jewish-Americans say they derive a great deal of meaning and fulfillment from spending time with pets, as say the same about their religion." Twice as many, that's a lot.

SB: Actually, the percentage of Jews that say that is similar to the percentage in the broader US population, 43%, but only 9% of Orthodox Jews report that compared to 37%-49% of Jews with other or no denominational affiliation. We haven't really talked that much about the polarization between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews politically, religiously, socially, morally, ethically, but that is one example of that, that Orthodox Jews are much less likely to have pets and to report that spending time with them provides them with a great deal of meaning. And finally, the statistic about Shabbat. It's pretty amazing how Shabbat is still a very important part of American-Jewish life. In fact, the question of, "Do you mark Shabbat in a way that is meaningful to you?" 39% of Jews say they mark Shabbat in a way that's personally meaningful to them.

BP: Younger Jews say it as well.

SB: Yeah, exactly. And even looking at the little sections at the end that are really of interest to Bruce, people of Jewish background and Jewish affinity, also 21% and 20% of those categories say they mark Shabbat in a way that's personally meaningful to them. I think that's really interesting, and in higher than the Jews of no religion. There's so much in this study, and I hope that people will really read it carefully and not just look at the headlines, but people who work at Jewish organizations can use this data to apply for grant saying, "Oh, look, this percentage of the population says this, and this is exactly what we're doing, so we're doing exactly the right thing, and you should give us money."

JH: So as we close, I wanna summarize what I think is the headline of this interview, which is the following: Read the Pew report for opportunity, because there's a lot in it, which both of you have echoed from your various perspectives. There's a lot to be gleaned here that could lead us to really wonderful change, and growth, and opportunity in many directions.

BP: This is really the tip of the iceberg in terms of additional analysis, but also asking other questions. One of the functions of people like Sarah and the question she's asking is to move us out of our just sort of conventional narratives, or conventional ways of thinking about things, which is to ask new questions and see the world in a different way.

SB: Yeah, and I think it's great that HUC makes these kinds of conversations a priority and really allows us to bring our academic research to real-world problems.

JH: Well, thank you both. And here's to the next conversation, when we go into those deeper questions following up on the Pew study. Take care.

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