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# An exploration of middle-aged and older Women's experiences of bat mitzvah within the framework of Erikson's theory of human development

Keren S. Vergon  
*University of South Florida*

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An Exploration of Middle-Aged and Older Women's Experiences of Bat Mitzvah Within  
the Framework of Erikson's Theory of Human Development

by

Keren S. Vergon

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
School of Aging Studies  
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Co-Major Professor: Cathy McEvoy, Ph.D.  
Co-Major Professor: Gregory J. Paveza, Ph.D.  
Kathryn Borman, Ph.D.  
Sara Mandell, Ph.D.  
Lawrence Schonfeld, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

A growing number of Jewish women are participating in adult bat mitzvah ceremonies in many synagogues across the United States. Little is known about the reasons why women choose to participate in a bat mitzvah ritual as an adult. It is also unclear if women of different ages have different reasons for participating in bat mitzvah.

Older women were often not given the opportunity to participate in the bat mitzvah ritual as a young adult, and it is unknown why older women choose to accept the challenge of bat mitzvah. It may be suspected that Jewish women are interested in adult bat mitzvah for a variety of reasons; it could be related to childhood experiences, identity concerns, learning opportunities, or any other number of reasons. Erikson's theory of human development was chosen to explore possible reasons why middle-aged and older women chose to participate in bat mitzvah as an adult because Jewish tradition views the bat mitzvah as a human development issue, and Erikson recognized the importance of ritual and religion in people's lives.

An exploratory case study design used to gather a) interviews with middle-aged and older women who participated in bat mitzvah, b) interviews with their teachers, and c) information from the women's writings about their bat mitzvah experience. This research explored whether these women were using the bat mitzvah ritual to address life stage crises as delineated by Erikson's theory of human development. Analyses of data sources indicated that the majority of women were dealing with issues during their bat mitzvah experience that were consistent with the Erikson stage they were in, as well as revisiting earlier life stages, which is suggested by the concept of epigenesis as part of normal human development. Emergent themes also explored were the use of bat mitzvah as an aging ritual and conversion. Suggestions for further research include expansion of the interview protocol to include questions related to more Erikson stages, and the examination of the role of additional Jewish rituals in human development.



## Literature Review

### Introduction

A growing number of Jewish women are participating in adult bat mitzvah ceremonies in many synagogues across the United States. Singly and in groups, women of all ages are choosing to undergo an intense program of learning, skill acquisition, and self-reflection usually associated with girls who are turning 13 years of age. While Jewish institutions and Jewish professionals have been responsive to the needs of their congregants in providing this experience, little is known about the reasons why women choose to participate in a bat mitzvah ritual (see Appendix A for a definition of this and other words) as an adult. It is also unclear if women of different ages have different reasons for participating in bat mitzvah. In addition, no institution appears to have kept records of the numbers of Jewish females, of any age, who participate in bat mitzvah (Milgram, 2003, Historical).

Older women, who often were not given the opportunity to participate in the bat mitzvah ritual as a young adult and were not provided with the same intensity of Jewish learning experiences as their male peers, are an interesting group to study regarding the bat mitzvah. It is unknown why older women decide to accept the challenge of learning to speak and chant a foreign language, to read and analyze a religious text, and to absorb Jewish customs and traditions and to translate them into personal and synagogue practice.

The centrality of the bat mitzvah ritual for young Jewish girls today as part of their identity as Jews may also affect how adult Jewish women who did not have a bat mitzvah ceremony view themselves. Women who converted to Judaism during adulthood may also view the importance of bat mitzvah as a definer of Jewish identity.

The last several decades have also seen heightened interest in feminism within Judaism and the creation and adaptation of Jewish rituals to meet the needs of women. Women are seeking out opportunities to express themselves, to create meaningful Jewish experiences, and to acknowledge and honor underappreciated aspects of their lives that are important to them.

It may be hypothesized that Jewish women are interested in adult bat mitzvah for a variety of reasons related to childhood experiences, identity concerns, learning opportunities, or any other number of reasons. Because bat mitzvah in Jewish tradition is not only related to identity, but also the transition into Jewish adulthood, it seems natural to examine the role of bat mitzvah in the lives of Jewish women through the lens of human development. Although many theorists have explored human development, one of the best known theories that encompasses adulthood and old age is Erik Erikson's theory of human development. Erikson was aware of the role of ritual in people's lives, and wrote about the role of religion as well. Because of these emphases, Erikson's theory of human development was chosen to explore possible reasons why middle-aged and older women chose to participate in bat mitzvah as an adult.

### Human Developmental Theories

A rich body of literature contributes to scholars' attempts to understand and explain human development. For example, Sigmund Freud wrote prolifically on the first several years of life, but developed no major theory of adult development and wrote much less about later years (Berger, 1988; Freud, 1962; Rice, 1997). Piaget established a clear theory of child development, including explicit stages and expectations of tasks and

events tied to each stage (Piaget, 1983; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). However, once adulthood was reached, the theory was not continued through the life span.

The first real attempt to address human intellectual development throughout the life span can be credited to C. G. Jung, whose chapter “The Stages of Life” in his book Modern Man in Search of a Soul (1933) introduced many concepts that now contribute to our knowledge about aging and adult development, including disengagement theory (Cumming & Henry, 1961) and the mid-life crisis. Jung was not comfortable with Freud’s emphasis on sexuality, and proposed that after achieving adulthood, individuals changed their focus of development from sexual concerns to those that were more related to spiritual concerns (McCrae & Costa, 1990). Generally, Jung felt that after the age of 40 people became more concerned with their concept and understanding of self (Jung, 1933). He introduced the term “individuation” to denote this search for self-understanding and meaning. Since the publication of Jung’s work, many researchers have used his ideas to explore aspects of human development and aging.

Almost 20 years after Jung’s work, Erik Erikson proposed his theory of human development. The author of the only comprehensive theory of human development, Erikson’s work is valuable because it not only describes stages of human development for youth and adolescents, but extends his vision to include adults, even those in old age. The earlier stages of Erikson’s theory were tied to Freud’s work, and then Erikson extended the stages to include the entire life span. In addition, Erikson considered social and community influences upon human development. His theory (1950) encompassed eight stages, in the format of a “crisis” that should be resolved at each stage of the life span. He proposed that the greater number of crises that were resolved successfully, the

more likely the individual was experiencing healthy development. However, if crises were resolved unsuccessfully, life was going to be more difficult and less energy would be available to be spent on personal growth.

Erikson developed his theory of human development in conjunction with his wife, Joan. While earlier books on the human development theory were authored only by Erik Erikson (such as the original 1950 explication of the theory), later works were co-authored or revised by Joan, so that the theory in its fullest development is really a synergy of this couple's work.

Erikson's stages of human development are based on the principle of epigenesis; that all growth and development follow similar patterns in which each stage of Erikson's theory has a specific, orderly time of origin (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). However, epigenesis also suggests more than simple succeeding stages. As human developmental stages unfold, a fundamental relationship exists between all of the stages, including future stages, so that the character of each stage's development influences all of the other stages. Thus, optimal development in Erikson's theory presupposes that proper sequencing and growth at each developmental stage occurs. Failure at one or more stages will influence navigation of subsequent life stages.

In addition to the progressive nature of the stages and their attendant crises, Erikson also suggests that regardless of how successfully each previous crisis stage was handled, the engagement with a new life stage crisis necessitates the revisiting of each previous crisis (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986). The reintegration of these stages must be done in an age-appropriate manner, resulting in previous themes being merged into the attempt to resolve the current crisis stage. Therefore, for example, a middle-aged

person who is currently facing generativity themes will also be reexamining issues such as trust, industry and competence, identity, and intimacy and love as she views herself as a nurturer and guide to a new generation of her family. Past experiences in dealing with trust will resurface, and will need to be reinterpreted within the new life cycle stage as part of the generativity versus stagnation conflict.

Thus, while Erikson's theory of human development may appear straightforward, the interconnectedness of developmental stages indicates that succession to a later stage of the life cycle does not necessarily indicate the retirement of previous stages' influence and presence. In addition to revisiting, it is quite possible that navigation of later stages may also include attempts to resolve or complete prior life cycle events and needs.

### Erikson's Theory of Human Development

Erik Erikson (1982) outlined eight stages of human development to be successfully navigated over the course of the natural human life cycle. Joan Erikson, Erik's wife and research associate, published a revised and updated understanding of her husband's eight stages as well as the outline of a ninth stage in a work published after her husband's death (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

Erikson's eight stages begin with Infancy and continue to Old Age. His theory posits that at each stage of the life cycle, a psychosocial crisis is encountered that needs to be confronted. The outcome of this crisis could be positive, resulting in a strength such as hope, or a more negative outcome could be experienced, leading to antipathies, or negative outcomes, such as withdrawal. These stages, crises, and potential outcomes are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Erikson's Eight Stages of Human Development and Corresponding Psychosocial Crises

Stage	Approximate Age range	Psychosocial Crisis	Strength	Antipathy
I Infancy	Birth to 1 year	Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust	Hope	Withdrawal
II Early Childhood	1 to 2 years	Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt	Will	Compulsion
III Play Age	2 to 6 years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose	Inhibition
IV School Age	6 to 12 years	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence	Inertia
V Adolescence	12 to 18 years	Identity vs. Identity Confusion	Fidelity	Repudiation
VI Young Adulthood	18 to 40 years	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love	Exclusivity
VII Adulthood	40 to 65 years	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care	Rejectivity
VIII Old Age	65 years to death	Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom	Disdain

The third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth stages of Erikson's theory of human development are most salient to this study. The third stage, Play Age, is experienced by children between the ages of two and six. The psychosocial crisis of this stage is Initiative versus Guilt. At this stage, children are seeking to learn about the world around them, trying challenges, and showing curiosity about their environment. This is a time of play, of exploring, developing purpose, and learning responsibility. If navigated successfully, children develop a sense of purpose and courage. Failure to explore, or being blocked, perhaps by restrictive parents or life circumstances, can result in inhibition, with the child being afraid to try new things.

School Age children, those about 6 to 12, usually are dealing with the fourth of Erikson's stages. In this stage, children focus on learning and struggle with being

Industrious instead of feeling Inferior. If successfully resolved, children develop a sense of competence, secure in their knowledge and skills. Failure to develop a sense of competency, even if only in a specific area, can contribute to feelings of inferiority regarding that area.

The fifth stage, Adolescence, occurs from about the age of 12 to 18. This stage is marked by the crisis of Identity versus Identity Confusion. At this stage, adolescents attempt to discover who they are, and what roles in life they find comfortable. If this crisis is confronted successfully, then fidelity emerges as a strength. The adolescent begins to look beyond parents to mentors and leaders for guidance, and begins to apply these guides' values to their search for life roles. However, the crisis could result in role repudiation; the adolescent rejects mentors' and leaders' efforts at modeling values and consciously avoids these examples in searching for comfortable life roles.

Following the identity stage, young adults enter the stage of Intimacy versus Isolation. This stage is associated with the age range of 18 to 40. Relationships with friends, lovers, and partners help young adults develop the capacity for love, both of romantic and platonic types. A lack of these relationship bonds indicates that a young adult has not successfully navigated this stage, and is most likely experiencing feelings of isolation.

The seventh stage, that of the tension between Generativity and Stagnation, is generally addressed in middle adulthood. Erikson felt that adults at this stage are faced with teaching and guiding the next generation; they are involved with procreativity, productivity, and creativity. Generativity, according to Erikson, is the concern for one's self, children, and future generations to lead successful lives. Middle adulthood is also a

time for self-generation in terms of identity development. Adults seek to develop confidence in guiding the next generation, and must draw on all of the previous strengths developed throughout the life cycle lived up to this point. These strengths can then be used not only for personal development issues, but also aid in the task of generativity.

Generativity can also be met by those who do not have children of their own. Teachers, mentors, clergy, and others who guide children are also engaging in tasks related to generativity. However, inability to care or contribute to the welfare of others and future generations can result in feelings of unhappiness, and a sense of stagnation. Adults who are stagnated struggle to find meaning in their lives and feel trapped (Peterson & Klohnen, 1995). Thus, it is important for middle-aged adults to find for themselves roles as mentors, teachers, and guides, specifically those persons to whom adolescents are looking as they are working through their personal psychosocial identity development.

After navigation of middle adulthood, individuals reach Old Age, considered by Erikson to be the final stage of human development. The central tension in this stage of life is achieving Integrity versus encountering Despair. At this point in life, older adults look back over their life and try to make sense of its trajectory. If this life review results in feelings of accomplishment and purpose, the individual develops a sense of integrity and wisdom. However, if unhappy with life choices, and filled with regret, an individual may instead experience despair. The older adult may feel that opportunities in life were not seized, and experience a sense of failure. An inability to rectify this situation contributes to poor mental health, and can lead to depression or even poor physical health. Joan Erikson suggests that individuals in the eighth stage may show a return to



some of the experiences and situations of the child, as curiosity about unknown events returns the person to a state of “not-knowingness” of the child (Erikson, 1988).

In discussing progression through the final stages of the life cycle, Joan Erikson suggests that the previous focus on activities and roles now gradually decreases until disintegration becomes normative (Erikson, 1988). An appropriate gradual disengagement from generative concerns and progressive loss of physical and sensory capacities leads to this disintegration. To compensate for this, adults in the eighth stage seek to integrate past experiences and roles with current realities and potential future experiences. This integration is the development of an existential identity, in which the self is transcended and intergenerational links are prominent. The eighth stage takes the individual beyond individual roles and experiences and shifts focus to larger, broader concerns for humanity in general, a sublimation of the individual into greater humanity.

Joan Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 1997) proposes a final ninth stage to be added to her husband’s original theory. This stage occurs during the later half of the ninth decade of life through the tenth decade and is a time of new demands, reevaluations, and daily challenges. The relentless weakening of the physical body leads to loss of autonomy, and despair, sometimes prevalent in the eighth stage, is frequently found during this last stage. Faith and humility are suggested as counters to despair.

It must be remembered that Erikson’s theory of human development, while presented in a linear fashion, may not always occur in such a clear way in real life (Whitbourne, 1986). Due to life circumstances, such as a later-life marriage or remarriage or becoming a parent at a very young age, Erikson’s stages may be experienced at times that do not coincide with theorized normal human development. For

example, older adults in the eighth stage where the search for wisdom and integrity is normative in Erikson's theory, may revisit the conflict about role identity normally found in adolescence if that earlier role confusion persists (Erikson, 1988). Similarly, even in the absence of life review an older person may experience a renewal of an earlier crisis due to later changes in life (Evans, 1967). A reexamination of life roles may then be resolved outside of the normal life stage, but still to the benefit of the individual. As a result, Erikson's theory provides a general structure with broad application that may be adjusted for individual circumstances.

### Ritualization

Erikson (1977; Erikson & Erikson, 1997) uses the term ritualization to explain how repeated informal and formal interactions between persons in recurring contexts occur. He relates this to a form of play, and the repetition of the interactions and contexts reinforce the play into a ritual. Ritualizations can be useful in understanding how individuals negotiate the life cycle in relation to their communities and society. However, taken too far, ritualization can result in rigidity and a damaging ritualism, in which the stereotyped rituals hold no inherent meaning. For example, adolescents seek to identify personal roles for their lives through the guidance of mentors and leaders. The repeated interaction of adolescents with their guides can lead to a binding ritualization of interaction, in a manner that positively evidences successful role development. However, if taken too far, the adolescent may go beyond ritualization to losing a sense of personal identity in their interaction with guides and developing a totalism view; the guides'

examples become all-important and the adolescent may become inflexible in regards to differing with their guides' viewpoints.

Table 2. Erikson's Eight Stages of Human Development and Corresponding Principles of Social Order

Stage	Approximate Age Range	Principle of Social Order	Binding Ritualizations	Ritualism
I Infancy	Birth to 1 year	Cosmic Order	Numinous	Idolism
II Early Childhood	1 to 2 years	"Law and Order"	Judicious	Legalism
III Play Age	2 to 6 years	Ideal Prototypes	Dramatic	Moralism
IV School Age	6 to 12 years	Technological Order	Formal (Technical)	Formalism
V Adolescence	12 to 18 years	Ideological Worldview	Ideological	Totalism
VI Young Adulthood	18 to 40 years	Patterns of Cooperation and Competition	Affiliative	Elitism
VII Adulthood	40 to 65 years	Currents of Education and Tradition	Generational	Authoritism
VIII Old Age	65 years to death	Wisdom	Philosophical	Dogmatism

This focus on the social aspect of human development, represented through ritualization, provides the context in which the life cycle unfolds. Ritualization may be informal, as interactions between the individual and another person, or may become more formal, as in the case of community participation in larger, more visible demonstrations of interaction between the individual and her environment. For example, participation in ceremonies such as graduation from school or a religious ritual demonstrates ritualization of the interaction of the individual and society. Like the psychosocial crises confronted at each stage of the life cycle, Erikson developed related principles of social order and

associated ritualizations and ritualisms for each stage of the life cycle (see Table 2). Thus, individuals in the seventh stage would be expected to interact with their society in forms of generational behavior, showing contributions to younger members of society and showing concern for their well-being and development. Older adults in the eighth stage would be expected to interact with their surroundings on a more philosophical level as they search for personal integrity, perhaps passing on learned wisdom to others. However, the eighth stage can also be a time for re-ritualizations. If an older person during life review decides that a previous stage was not successfully negotiated, attempts to address this past oversight may include ritualizations appropriate to the unsuccessfully completed stage in attempts to rectify this oversight. The historical development of longer life expectancy provides a greater opportunity than ever before in human history for time and occasions to revisit the earliest ritualizations rooted in play and to frame them within the older adult's world view to assist in seeking contentment with the life lived (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Thus, interactions with society for older individuals may contain elements of many stages simultaneously as older adults attempt to navigate the life course.

As noted previously, religious rituals are formal public interactions of individuals with society. Some religions have established traditional rites to mark life cycle stages and events, and performance of these religious rituals helps individuals show others personal identity and growth. Public ritual performance often leads to status and role change in society, and an individual's willingness to participate in formal religious rituals signifies a desire to demonstrate personal growth and to contribute to her society in

previously unknown ways. Judaism is one religion that has established formal religious rituals to demarcate life cycle events and stages.

### Human Development and Ritual in Judaism

Three different parts of the life cycle have been incorporated into normative ritual observance in Judaism. The first, circumcision and naming, celebrates the birth of a Jewish child and announces the addition of a life to the community. While babies do not actively seek out this ritual, they are the subject of the ritual and participate in it through the agency of their parents. The beginning of adolescence and growth to adulthood is marked at the age of 13 by the ritual of Bar Mitzvah for boys and Bat Mitzvah for girls. In this ritual, Jewish youth demonstrate their knowledge of the Hebrew language, understanding of the communal life of the religion, and publicly assert the decision to participate in the Jewish community and to be responsible for its laws and norms. The final life cycle stage observed in Jewish tradition is that of marriage. Concerns of intimacy are demonstrated with a public declaration of love, the strength Erikson proposes is necessary in young adulthood. However, Jewish tradition contains no ritual concerned with aging or approaching death.

Modern Jews have attempted to remedy this lack of options with the creation of aging rituals that provide them with meaningful interaction with their communities. Meyerhoff reports on a group of older Jews in California who try to seek meaning in their lives while belonging to a local Senior Citizen's Center (Meyerhoff, 1978a, 1978b). This group of Jews uses a learning class and awards luncheon to provide meaning for their lives.

The Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education in San Diego, California (Fine, 1988) has published a book that contains two rituals, one for women who are passing through midlife, and another that celebrates the older "wise woman." The midlife ritual involves a name change and "covenant agreement" with God, a way of rededicating oneself to God or the Jewish community. The Wise Woman celebration, which is sometimes referred to as Celebration of Wisdom, is a group ritual in which the older person is accompanied through a symbolic journey in which losses from earlier periods of life can be removed and a fresh start can be made. The ritual is joyful, often including singing, dancing, or parading around the ritual's location. Savina Teubal has also created a Wise Woman ceremony (Teubal, 1992; Teubal, 1997) that she devised to mark her own 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. Another Jewish scholar developed her own aging ritual utilizing the existing ritual that marks the separation of Shabbat from the coming week (Spiegel, 1997).

To provide Jews turning 50 years old with a way to address generativity concerns, Paul Citrin has developed a ritual that celebrates a person's reaching the "Age of Counsel" (Citrin, 1997). This is an age delineated by the rabbis as when one reaches a point of maturity. In this ritual, the celebrant writes a testament of life's learned lessons and shares it with his or her Jewish community.

The Ritualwell.org ([www.ritualwell.org](http://www.ritualwell.org)) website contains examples of a growing number of articles, poems, and ceremonial frameworks regarding aging issues. In addition to two examples of the Celebration of Wisdom ceremony, there are a variety of adaptations of traditional Jewish rituals as well as creations of new rituals. Havdalah, a ritual that marks the end of Shabbat and the beginning of a new week, and Rosh Chodesh,

the celebration of the new month, are two examples of rituals that have been adapted to meet the needs of Jews who want to incorporate aging concerns into their ritual practice. New rituals have been created to mark milestone birthdays such as turning 40, to deal with issues of life transition, and honoring an important elder female in one's life.

Despite the existence of these rituals, their practice is not yet widespread. In fact, many people may not even know a ritual exists to address midlife or aging.

### Bar Mitzvah

Literally, bar mitzvah means "son of the commandment" and refers to a Jewish boy who has reached his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. Attaining the age of 13 is important from a legal standpoint, as it signaled that the young man was now responsible for following the commandments, and was capable of functioning as an adult for any need of the Jewish community, such as testifying in a legal dispute (Salkin, 1991). Thus, without a ceremony or ritual of any kind, a boy became a Bar Mitzvah upon his thirteenth birthday. Rabbis viewed a girl as being eligible to be considered an adult upon the arrival of her twelfth birthday (Brown, 1998). Again, no ritual marked the event.

It is estimated that bar mitzvah began to include a ritual component about 500 years ago. In its original form, the ritual of bar mitzvah consisted of the youth blessing and then chanting a few verses from the Torah (that had already been chanted by an adult), and then chanting the corresponding haftarah portion (a portion generally from one of the books of the prophets that contains a thematic link to the Torah portion) (Salkin, 1991). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the bar mitzvah ritual became more elaborate until it reached the mix of learning, public performance, and celebration that earmarks it as a

major Jewish ritual today. No longer a quick 10-minute display of Jewish learning, the bar mitzvah today is a major event in family life and provides a way for synagogue communities to share special events and memories.

A corresponding ritual for adolescent girls similar in form and function was not developed until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Goldin, 1997; Sasso, 1993). This ritual, called bat mitzvah, was designed to be a parallel ritual for girls. Bat mitzvah means “daughter of the commandment.” Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan helped his daughter, Judith Kaplan, celebrate the first bat mitzvah in 1922 (Goldin, 1997; Sasso, 1993). Kaplan wanted to provide a strong Jewish education for his daughter, and felt that women needed to be given the opportunity within the Jewish community to be treated as equals.

Even though the first bat mitzvah was held over 80 years ago, most girls were not allowed to celebrate their bat mitzvah. Bat mitzvah rituals were not performed regularly until the late 1950s to early 1960s, and even then only in some liberal Jewish communities (Kahn, 1992). The three major movements of American Judaism--Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox<sup>1</sup>--vary in the degree to which women participate in various aspects of synagogue life, including reading from the Torah scroll, singing or chanting prayers, leading services, and seating arrangements. Greatly simplified, Orthodox Judaism most closely reflects the historical practice of Judaism over the past 1800 to 2000 years, while Conservative and Reform Judaism are viewed as being more liberal in their interpretations of appropriate Jewish beliefs and daily practices and are more

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<sup>1</sup> There is considerable variety in how Jewish denominations or movements are defined. Many people refer to three major movements within Judaism; however, in addition to Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, Hasidic, Reconstructionist, Jewish Renewal, Humanistic, and a variety of other groups have been identified as Jewish movements. In addition, definitions of movements can contain many sub-groups. For example, Orthodox Judaism can encompass Modern Orthodox, Haredi, and Hasidic orientations. The most recent National Jewish Population Survey, conducted in 2000-2001 (United Jewish Communities, 2005), provided the following affiliation choices for respondents: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, just Jewish, or something else.



comfortable with the incursion of modernity in Jewish life and practice. Many reasons have been given for Orthodox Judaism's reluctance related to women's equal participation with men in synagogue activities, including Torah reading and bat mitzvah. Some are based on interpretation of Torah, while others reflect Talmudic and rabbinic writings. Thus, some communities' restrictions on equal participation are a result of both Jewish legal decisions and customs specific to particular Jewish communities from various locations and time periods.<sup>2</sup> As a result, many of today's middle-aged and older women were not given the opportunity to participate in a bat mitzvah ritual, especially if they grew up in a more traditional Jewish community.

There are many reasons, however, that Jewish women may pursue bat mitzvah as an adult. Some women may choose bat mitzvah because the synagogue they attended did not allow girls to have bat mitzvah ceremonies when they were growing up, while others may have been given the opportunity but chose not to participate. Still others may have converted to Judaism after traditional bat mitzvah age and now desire to participate in this ritual as a way of demonstrating their commitment to their chosen religion. Some women may have participated in bat mitzvah as an adolescent, but did not find the experience meaningful, and are now looking to repeat the experience at a stage in life where the ritual will have personal value. Regardless of the reason, however, increasing

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<sup>2</sup> A variety of reasons have been given for why women should not be allowed to read from a Torah scroll, such as ritual impurity related to menstruation, the community's honor being protected lest the situation of a woman reading Torah be interpreted as meaning that no man present had the skill to perform the reading, or the prohibition of women's voices in the synagogue being heard as distractions by the men present. In response to realities in his Orthodox congregation, Avraham Weiss (2001) explored the halakhic guidelines related to women's handling and usage of Torah scrolls. His informative analysis revealed no halakhic barriers to women touching a Torah, while stating that a "stringency" exists among some women who follow community custom and do not touch a Torah. Cohen (1992) came to a similar conclusion regarding Jewish law on this matter.

numbers of women are pursuing bat mitzvah experiences through synagogues which offer adult bat mitzvah classes.

### Ritual Development

A lack of models has driven older adults wishing to use rituals to observe life events important to them to not only adapt existing rituals generally used for another purpose to their needs, but to also create new aging rituals. Thus, small rituals such as observing the move to a smaller home or an assisted living facility due to losses resulting from aging (Marcoux, 2001) or elder male power religious rituals (Traphagan, 2000) have been developed. Rituals can help older people create new roles for themselves within their religious communities, and the theme of wisdom is often dominant (Myerhoff, 1978). Faith leaders have not only begun to suggest new types of religious rituals to mark previously neglected life events such as the “empty nest” or retirement, but have also developed and implemented them (Robb, 1991; Simmons, 1990).

The long tradition of formal community rituals, often actualized through religious means, provides validation for the important change the individual is undergoing. Lack of rituals to mark life changes, such as retirement or passage into a mentoring role for younger family or community members, make it more difficult for women, their families, and their communities to acknowledge these life changes. Therefore the development of rituals to respond to life changes is crucial to successful negotiation of the life cycle (Davis, 1988). The emergence of a body of rituals related to aging concerns, while a relatively new phenomenon, is not necessarily surprising. The average life expectancy of a child born in the United States in 1900 was only 47 years (Treas, 1995); a female child

born today can expect to enjoy more than 80 years of life (Hoyert, Kung, & Smith, 2005). Thus, until recently, menopause, retirement, aging, and other later-life challenges were often not experienced and the need for a ritual to mark these events was not essential to the average person.

With the advent of women in leadership positions within Jewish life, a considerable amount of attention has been spent studying, understanding, and interpreting the Torah and Judaism from a woman's point of view. New rituals that celebrate aspects of women's lives have been created; existing women's rituals that have been neglected have been renewed. An explosion of interest in feminism and Judaism has led to the creation of Jewish women's studies programs in universities across the United States.

A growing list of books attests to women's interest in interpreting a variety of Jewish texts, including the Hebrew Bible, Midrash, and Talmud (Elper & Handelman, 2000; Goldstein, 1998; Hauptman, 1998). In addition, extensive discourse on women's rituals has also occurred. A two-volume handbook, entitled Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages & Personal Milestones (Orenstein, 1994, 1997), provides scholarship, prayer, poems, and rituals for women who want to observe important events in their lives in an authentic Jewish framework. Several other books have also been published that provide practical, easy-to-perform women-centered rituals for the interested Jew (Adelman, 1990; Levine, 1991; Swartz & Wolfe, 1998; Umansky & Ashton, 1992). Two women's organizations have even collaborated on a website ([www.ritualwell.org](http://www.ritualwell.org)) that provides visitors with readings, poems, prayers, and complete rituals for use.

Why the interest in rituals? There are many reasons why Jewish women are reclaiming old rituals and developing new ones. Ritual in Jewish tradition has often been

used to exclude women from the rest of the community, especially within the synagogue. By actively participating in synagogue rituals and developing new ways of honoring women through ritual, Jewish women are claiming for themselves a piece of their tradition (Rayburn, 1993). This allows women to claim identification with the larger Jewish community and helps provide a Jewish structure for women's lives:

Ritual provides the architecture of life in general, and in our case, of Jewish life in particular. It creates difference. It creates space for us to mark the events of the calendar year, to single out the significant happenings in our lives. It creates space for us to pause, to reflect, to wonder, to appreciate, to rejoice, sometimes to mourn. And it gives us patterns to do all this. Patterns that we can and should adapt to meet our needs. (Goldberg, 1998, p. 223)

In the Judaic tradition, an example of the creation of new aging rituals may be the bat mitzvah. Older Jewish women may be using an existing ritual, bat mitzvah, rather than creating a new ritual to help them navigate the aging process and to create a "wise elder" role for themselves in their family, synagogue, and community. The desire for rituals marking rites of passage through the life cycle results from the individual's need to define herself and her place within the world. Additionally, the community recognizes and formally accepts the individual's changed status, providing visible support for the successful resolution of the challenge the individual faces (Robb, 1991).

### Erikson's View of Religion in Relation to Human Development

Erikson sees religious rituals as clear paths through which individuals can represent societal values to themselves and the next generation. Often enacted by adults, religious rituals draw upon the ritualized play of childhood, providing a connection

between people at all stages of the life cycle. These rituals also legitimize the adult in the role as mentors and examples for the next generation in how to participate in society and how to live a worthy life. Adults are thus using religious rituals in generative efforts, and the successful demonstration of the ritual provides the adult with an authentic legitimacy in the eyes of younger persons. Older persons may demonstrate wisdom through performance of religious rituals.

Older adults may also use religion and its attendant rituals to assist them in the search for integrity in the face of despair. Remembrance of childhood religious activities can provide religious strength in facing the current life stage crisis, as the older person utilizes what may potentially have been a lifelong mechanism for decision-making and actions taken at all life stages (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986). Even simple religious service attendance can be comforting and a source of strength to one facing a life stage crisis. The house of worship provides a concrete example of the support of the community and reflects the generational life cycle through its membership. Because of this, Erikson reports that some older adults may find themselves more involved in religious activities than previously experienced. Those persons limited by physical restrictions may still reach out to religious activities through television or radio, or by engaging in religious activities alone.

A major life change, such as the death of a loved one, may also spark a return to religious activities. Erikson and colleagues (1986) report that even if the person cannot explain why they return to religious participation, they feel an inner need to do so. They suggest that this may be an effort to deal with the present crisis through participation in an activity that helps them transcend the current situation. In this scenario, it is not the

negotiation of a life stage crisis, but an unexpected or unpredictable life event that causes the behavior change.

### Erikson's Theory of Human Development and Adult Bat Mitzvah

It may at first seem curious as to why middle-aged and older adult women would want to participate in a Jewish ritual that was designed for adolescents. However, within the framework of Erikson's human developmental theory, adult bat mitzvah may not seem so unusual.

Erikson's stages are interconnected, and he suggests that individuals further along in the life cycle revisit earlier resolved and unresolved stage crises, either in response to changes in later life, or to attempt to resolve the earlier unresolved crisis. This is especially true for older adults in Erikson's eighth stage of development. Because human development does not occur in a vacuum, ritualization efforts displayed in attempts to address these crises are expected.

Erikson also suggests that adults need to ritualize; these acts provide examples for the next generation and meet generative needs of the adults involved. Within a Jewish framework, choices for life cycle ritualization in adulthood are limited to marriage rituals. Thus, Jewish women who participate in bat mitzvah may be unconsciously stretching Jewish tradition to fulfill generative concerns. Erikson notes that "adults must and do also ritualize being ritualizers; and there is an ancient need and custom to participate in some rituals that ceremonially sanction and reinforce that role" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). For those women who value religion in their lives, seeking a faith-based mechanism for meeting a life stage crisis may be extremely important.

The bar or bat mitzvah functions in Jewish tradition as a declaration of identity, a demonstration of ability and knowledge and a public acceptance of responsibility to and within the Jewish tradition. Traditionally performed at the age of 13, the upsurge in middle-aged and older women who participate in bat mitzvah might signify these women's attempts to address role confusion within their religious lives, and hence the resolution of a previously unresolved adolescent crisis. Other Jewish women may have successfully navigated identity development as an adolescent, but due to life events and changes, feel a need to reexamine their Jewish identity and publicly affirm this identity. Ritualization behavior of this crisis resolution may be achieved through the bat mitzvah.

In addition, it could be suggested that adult bat mitzvah may function differently from its original intent; adult bat mitzvah may be a vehicle for addressing generativity concerns for middle-aged women, or the search for knowledge in the development of wisdom and integrity in the case of older women. An exploration of the reasons why women participate in adult bat mitzvah may help to explain how human developmental stages related to adult and aging concerns are negotiated.

Some clues as to why women participate in bat mitzvah may be found in the Eriksons' writings. They (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986) are very clear in stating that one of the outcomes of life review in older adults is the realization that past decisions and actions cannot be changed. Some way of integrating these regrets must be found for successful development. When looking at earlier hopes and dreams, the older person may find these unrealized, and must struggle with the inability to control the life trajectory. For example, if an older woman was not permitted to participate in bat mitzvah as an adolescent, she must then decide whether to learn to deal with her

adolescent experience as it existed, or to do something in the present to affect how she views these memories. This could be through various religious activities such as increased participation in synagogue life, engaging in learning or teaching, or in participating in a religious ritual that provides at least some of the identity supports found in adolescent bat mitzvah.

Other older women may have had the choice to participate in bat mitzvah as an adolescent, but chose not to. Only as life has progressed can these women see the consequences and outcomes of their choice; while the choice cannot be changed, the women must decide how to deal with their past choices and what action they may currently take. The rejection of bat mitzvah represents a role and identity choice, and revisitation of this identity-formation decision may lead to a different choice at this later life stage.

However, Joan Erikson suggests that past choices which led to one direction may still be remedied, even in old age, by making a decision to embark upon a path that was not previously taken (Erikson, 1988). This suggests that regardless of why women may not have participated in bat mitzvah as an adolescent, through adult bat mitzvah the option still exists to try another direction.

Not much is known about Jewish women who celebrate their bat mitzvah, even though it has become a common component of adult education programs and many Jews know at least one adult bat mitzvah celebrant. Only a small number of researchers have examined the phenomenon of adult bat mitzvah, and most knowledge gained to date is descriptive. Shapiro (2002) examined bat mitzvah as a transformative spiritual experience leading to increased faith or religious practice. Cousens (2002) explored the



meanings women assigned to the bat mitzvah, and Grant (2000) examined changes participants made in their lives as a result of the bat mitzvah. Kahn (1992) explored the bat mitzvah as a tool for ritualized efforts for resolving life transition issues. Schoenfeld's studies detailed the bat mitzvah preparation process, and its role as a rite of passage within the frameworks of feminism and individualism (1987, 1992a, 1992b). None of the studies make age a focus of the research, and it is difficult to understand the experiences of the few older women who were included in these studies separate from those of younger participants.

Even with the contributions of these studies, it is still unclear as to what motivations drive adult Jewish women, of all ages, to undertake a lengthy period of intense study of Hebrew and of Jewish laws and life. It is unclear how the bat mitzvah ritual relates to transitions from one life stage to another for adult women. It is also unclear as to what benefits Jewish women expect to derive from participation in this ritual, and how the preparation for and completion of the ritual affects Jewish women's participation in their synagogue and community.

### Summary

Rituals are important mechanisms for dealing with critical events in the lives of older adults. However, there is a lack of both secular and religious rituals available to assist older women who are seeking meaning in late life and who are trying to deal with developmental issues related to aging. Older Jewish women, especially those involved in their synagogue, may turn to Judaism for guidance in creating rituals that will assist them in navigating later life. One ritual that older Jewish women are participating in with

greater frequency is bat mitzvah. However, it is unknown why older women participate in this ritual.

As women have become more comfortable with the language and form of Jewish rituals, creativity in adaptation and invention has grown. The bar mitzvah, originally a rite of passage marking a boy's transition to a place of adulthood into the Jewish community, has not only been adapted to fulfill the same function for girls (bat mitzvah), but has also been used by adult men and women to demarcate important times or events in their lives (Bletter, 1989; Perlmutter, 1997). Some Jewish women, denied an earlier opportunity to ritually celebrate their entrance to adulthood, choose to study to become a bat mitzvah as an adult. Others may use it as more of a developmental marker, signifying an important progression in personal development from one stage or role in life to another. Still other women may choose to participate in this ritual as a way to prepare themselves for assisting their children who are nearing bar/bat mitzvah age. Older Jewish women may be seeking a deeper connection with their religion and are attempting to gain wisdom about living out the rest of their lives.

Rituals play an important role in people's lives, and rituals are often undertaken to fulfill some type of personal need. Despite the importance of rituals, there are not many rituals, secular or religious, that can be accessed to help older adults meet personal needs they may experience later in life. Due to this lack of rituals, at least one group of older adults, Jewish women, are adapting and adopting established rituals for their use. In addition, they are creating new rituals to specifically address human developmental and aging needs.

Thus, the present study was designed to explore whether Jewish women are using bat mitzvah, traditionally a ritual used to mark a very different stage of life, to help resolve two of Erikson's core crises, that of generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair. The acquisition of knowledge and skills that can be used for personal fulfillment, and for the guiding and care for others that result from intense study and personal growth, is indicative of the bat mitzvah process. This attempt to resolve an earlier stage (generativity versus stagnation) while also engaging in life review and attempting to understand the course of one's life demonstrates effort to rectify earlier failings or missed opportunities in life. In order to develop integrity, older Jewish women are trying to take care of uncompleted tasks and encourage a sense of personal achievement that will contribute to personal growth. If Jewish women are participating in bat mitzvah to address earlier life stage crises, then it may be believed that these women's focus is on personal identity issues, and transcendent existential identity concerns may not be evident in these women's personal development.

It is also possible, at least for the middle aged women involved in this study, that they are dealing with Erikson stages that they have not yet reached based on chronological age. Or women may be choosing to become bat mitzvah for reasons unrelated to human development issues—perhaps issues related to life crises, or currently unidentified reasons that may become apparent through the course of this research.

The lack of research and theory about adult bat mitzvah presents a challenge to the interested researcher. Exploratory case study methodology provides a research framework that allows for the accumulation of varied and rich information about the lives and experiences of women who participate in bat mitzvah as an adult. Through this

approach, interviews with women, their teachers, and analysis of women's writings about their bat mitzvah experience, coupled with the use of a standardized psychological instrument, provide many viewpoints about the reasons why women pursue bat mitzvah. This approach is flexible enough to allow for exploration of questions, experiences, and issues, yet provides a structure to guide the research toward observations and conclusions that can contribute to the development of theories about why women, and older women in particular, participate in bat mitzvah.

## Research Design and Methods

### Research Design

Qualitative research designs are valuable tools for research questions that seek less to quantify an object or event than to explain how or why a given event occurs. Qualitative techniques yield detailed information about events and provide a rich description of the event under study. There are many methods of qualitative research available to the researcher, using different tools to assist in the investigation of the research question. Several time-honored qualitative methodological strategies include archival strategies (such as content analysis and literary criticism), interview strategies (e.g., oral history and investigative journalism), nonparticipant observation strategies (observer study), and ethnography and field study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This research used a case study methodology to examine reasons why middle-aged and older women pursue bat mitzvah.

Case study methodology is a qualitative methodology that uses multiple sources of data to test propositions about complex issues, such as questions that address how or why a given event occurs or exists (Yin, 1989). Rather than being open-ended, case study designs are structured, carefully designed research based upon theoretical formulations. A case study design has five main components: a) research question(s), b) propositions, c) unit(s) of analysis, d) linking of data to propositions, and e) criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 1989). In drafting the study's research questions and propositions, available theory and data should be considered. If little or no theory has yet been formulated, the research must necessarily be more exploratory in nature.

Case study methodology was most appropriate for this research. The types of research questions posed investigated how adult bat mitzvahs are experienced and why Jewish women chose to undertake this course of study. Further, case study was most appropriate because the event in question (adult bat mitzvah) was contemporary, and the researcher was unable to influence the event (Yin, 1989). Case study methodology is appropriate also when the event under study is not readily distinguishable from its context, and the richness of this context contributes to more variables of interest than data points available for study (Yin, 2003).

Case studies can be performed using a single case or multiple cases. In addition, case studies can have single or multiple units of analysis. This study used an embedded (multiple units of analysis), multiple case design. This design allowed for replication of findings by interviewing more than one individual who shared similar traits, and also theoretically replicated the findings by looking at women from two different age groups. This allowed for differences in support or refutation for propositions based upon age. Thus, findings should be more robust (Herriott & Firestone, 1983).

This research used a case study model frequently used in mental health and other research settings. This model used a method in which many sources of information, including written documents and multiple interviews, were used to assess the extent to which evidence existed to support or refute the propositions under examination in the research. Summative questions were placed at the end of the protocol to assist the interviewer in scoring those protocol questions that were related to each proposition. The interviewer assigned a score representing the degree to which the respondents' answers

supported or refuted the proposition under study and recorded any pertinent information relating to the decisions.

This research was multi-modal, using woman and teacher interviews and writing samples as source material. Interview questions either provided demographic information or were tied to one of the propositions under study. The adult bat mitzvah's sermon, speech, or other written narrative prepared as part of the bat mitzvah process was also reviewed. These narratives often expressed motivating factors or themes related to the decision to participate in the ritual. By examining the participants' own writings, the researcher had a unique look at the thought processes of the woman at a crucial time in the experience and performance of the ritual. Following the interviews and document reviews, the interviewer transcribed the interviews and then completed summative questions to discern the degree to which participants' responses supported or refuted the propositions.

In addition to the interviews and narrative writing samples, each woman was asked to complete a short standardized psychosocial assessment instrument. This instrument was another source of information used in attempting to understand what motivates women to participate in bat mitzvah.

### Case Ascertainment

Case study methodology employs no set rule for the number of cases required for a well-designed study, instead suggesting that data are collected and analyzed until it appears that additional cases yield little new information and data saturation is reached (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). For this research, eight women aged 37 to 48 and eight

women aged 64 to 77 at the time of their bat mitzvahs were identified from the West Central Florida area for participation in this study. This number of participants provided a manageable number of interviews for literal and theoretical replication of research propositions.

Women were chosen based upon the following characteristics: 1) having completed their bat mitzvah after January 2000; 2) affiliation with a synagogue belonging to either the Reform or Conservative movements within West Central Florida; and 3) consented to allow their bat mitzvah teacher to be interviewed for the study and the teacher agreed to do the interview. Women who were affiliated with an eligible congregation, but did not complete their bat mitzvah in this congregation, were excluded. Women were not chosen based on marital status, synagogue or community involvement, convert status, or reasons for participating in an adult bat mitzvah ceremony, although some or all of these characteristics may differentiate the women. In addition, congregation size and urban location were considered to identify a mix of bat mitzvah settings and experiences.

A total of six teachers, representing each of the congregations from which the women were recruited, were interviewed. Thus, several teachers taught more than one of the women enrolled in the study. Three of the teachers were the rabbis of their congregations, one was a professional Jewish educator, and the other two were congregant volunteers. Both volunteers were in congregations with established adult bnei mitzvah programs that are offered regularly, and both volunteers were the designated bnei mitzvah program teacher who had taught several classes of students. All of the rabbis were male; the professional educator and the volunteers were female.



All of the women were asked to submit writing samples from the time of their bat mitzvahs. Sermons, speeches, newsletter articles, and program notes were solicited. Six of the women had written something about their bat mitzvah experience at the time of the event and were able to share them for this study. Seven of the women in this study were recruited from the same congregation, where they were not asked to write about their experience. However, as a group, they created the prayer service booklet for their bat mitzvah. This booklet was reviewed, but it did not contain any original writings from the women. The booklet, however, had cover art drawn by one of the women and was a representation of the class, and some of the readings the women chose for the booklet were woman-centered and reflected their feelings about the process and event.

#### Research Question

One of the unique qualities of this study was concurrent examination of two previously unrelated concepts: The need for aging rituals as an aid in dealing with developmental issues related to aging and the Jewish ritual of bat mitzvah. The protocol was designed to explore the following research question: Are middle-aged and older women using this ritual to address life stage crises as delineated by Erikson's theory of human development? This research question was explored by testing a series of propositions. Propositions were theoretically tied to the research question, and the degree to which each proposition was supported by the answers to the interview questions and writing sample findings provided information to help explore the research question.

The propositions were:

1. Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are consistent with the Eriksonian life cycle stage that they are experiencing.
2. Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are representative of earlier life cycle stages in Erikson's theory of human development.
3. Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are representative of future life cycle stages in Erikson's theory of human development.
4. Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah as part of seeking a stronger connection to their religious faith and community in times of personal crisis caused by unexpected life events.
5. Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah for currently unidentified reasons unrelated to human development or life crises.

All stages of Erikson's theory of human development are related to an individual's identity development and maintenance. Support found for proposition one, two or three would indicate that bat mitzvah participation in Jewish women was intertwined with identity concerns.

Erikson has suggested that ritualization is an important part of human development and adults have a strong need to participate in rituals (Erikson, 1977; Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Using a formal religious ritual, Jewish women may be

addressing life stage crises such as generativity and wisdom-seeking (proposition one), or revisiting earlier life stage issues, such as identity formation first experienced in adolescence (proposition two). Or, as indicated by Erikson's concept of epigenesis, Jewish women may be concerning themselves with life stage issues that normally occur in an Erikson stage that is in the future when chronological age is considered (proposition three).

In addition, Erikson and colleagues (1986) have suggested that older adults return to religious participation or increase religious participation in efforts to connect with their community when dealing with traumatic life events, such as the death of a loved one. If proposition four was supported, then adult bat mitzvah may not always be related to identity issues and may not be related to human development for some, or all, women. There may be other unknown reasons unrelated to human development or life crises as to why women participate in adult bat mitzvah. These reasons would be included in proposition five.

## Method

### Woman Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the women in a location of their choosing. Many interviews were conducted in their homes or at their synagogues, but a few were held in public places, such as a bookstore or coffee shop. All interviews were audio recorded, and the researcher performed all transcription. The interview process followed all IRB rules regarding participants' safety, rights, and confidentiality. This

study was reviewed and approved by the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (# 103550).

The interview protocol had a semi-structured format, with set questions that directed the participant, yet allowed respondents opportunity for free response (see Appendix B). A short set of demographic questions about personal and synagogue characteristics provided a general profile of the respondents. The remaining sections asked about the bat mitzvah experience; family issues; synagogue participation and characteristics; community involvement and concerns; personal spirituality and developmental issues; aging issues; and thoughts and feelings about their experiences.

### Teacher Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the teacher each woman identified as having the greatest influence upon her bat mitzvah preparation. In some congregations, the rabbi was the primary teacher; in others, a congregant educator guided their students. A few women reported several teachers leading different aspects of their preparation, including rabbis, cantors or cantorial soloists, and educators. In these situations, the woman was asked to identify the person who they felt had the most impact upon their bat mitzvah experience and that person was interviewed in the teacher role. Written consent was obtained from the women to make sure they were comfortable with their teachers sharing information about them and their experiences, and consent to participate in the research was obtained from the teachers. All teachers were interviewed in a location of their choosing. Many interviews were conducted at their synagogues, but a few were held in their homes. All interviews were audio recorded, and the researcher

performed all transcription. The interview protocol followed the same format as the women's interviews, and the questions were constructed as a parallel version with the woman version.

### Narrative Writing Samples

Writing samples allowed for examination of broader themes within the women's own writings, and reflected ideas and issues important to the women as they were preparing for their bat mitzvahs. Writing samples included sermons on the weekly Torah portion or speeches about their becoming bat mitzvah delivered during their service, and synagogue newsletter and service program narratives composed to explain why the women were doing their bat mitzvahs. At the conclusion of the interview, women were asked to mail a copy of their speech, sermon, or other writing sample, if one was completed, to the researcher. This was done to insure that the participant did not potentially influence recall by reviewing her writing sample before the interview.

### Measures of Psychosocial Development (MPD) Questionnaire

The MPD (Hawley, 1988), is a self-report inventory of 112 items that measures the positive and negative attitudes and status of conflict resolution associated with each of Erikson's eight psychosocial stages of human development. The 112 items comprise a total of 27 scales—a positive, negative, and resolution score for each of Erikson's eight stages, and also a total positive, negative, and resolution score for the instrument. Only the resolution scores for each of Erikson's stages were used in this research. Higher scores on MPD scales indicate better resolution of Erikson-defined stage crises. At the

conclusion of the interview, women were given the MPD and asked to complete it on their own before mailing it to the researcher.

The MPD manual provides detailed information about the psychometric properties of this instrument (Hawley, 1988). Test-retest reliability was performed to establish reliability for the positive, negative, and resolution scores. Internal consistency scores were also calculated for the positive and negative scores, but not for resolution scores. Reliability was indicated by positive and negative scale coefficients which uniformly approached or exceeded .80, except for one scale (Inferiority, .67). Resolution reliability scores were even higher, with the lowest score being .75 for Intimacy vs. Isolation and the highest score of .91 for Identity vs. Identity Confusion. Internal consistency scores, reported using alpha coefficients, were in the range of .65 to .84 for the positive scales, and .69 to .83 for the negative scales. Two of the scores, Trust (.65) and Guilt (.69), failed to reach alpha coefficients of .70. Nevertheless, overall, acceptable levels of internal consistency were reached. A three phase multi-trait, multi-method analysis was used to determine the construct validity of the MPD. All three phases of the analysis, monomethod, heteromethod, and cross method comparisons, provided support for both convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 3. Case Study Protocol Format

Section	Woman Interview	Teacher Interview	Content
Demographics	Yes	No	Age at bat mitzvah, marital status, children or grandchildren, occupation
Synagogue Demographics	Yes	No	Synagogue, Jewish movement, synagogue of bat mitzvah
Bat Mitzvah Experience	Yes	Yes	Ceremony, events/decisions for bat mitzvah, feeling about bat mitzvah, influence on religious life
Family	Yes	Yes	Family practices, missed opportunities, interactions with family
Synagogue	Yes	Yes	Activity in synagogue, leadership and educational activity, status in synagogue
Community	Yes	Yes	Status in and community involvement
Personal Spirituality & Developmental Issues	Yes	Yes	Conversion, prior bat mitzvah opportunities, personal changes resulting from bat mitzvah, feelings about self, life
Aging & Aging Issues	Yes	Yes	Knowledge of aging rituals and wish to participate, views on aging
Thoughts & Feelings	Yes	Yes	Likert-type ratings of statements related to previous sections

### Case Study Protocol

#### Woman Interview

The interview was divided into nine sections, with each of the first eight providing a specific type of information about the woman, and the last a thoughts and feelings section that asked the woman to rate statements on a Likert-type scale (see Table 3). Women were asked whether the statements were not at all like them; a little like them; somewhat like them; quite a bit like them; or very much like them.

#### Piloting the Interview

Prior to creating the teacher interview, the woman interview was piloted with a woman who had participated in bat mitzvah about five years ago. The pilot interview

indicated places where questions needed to be reworded for clarity, and how certain questions should be phrased. In addition, the researcher was able to experiment with developing impromptu follow-up questions and probing to elicit quality information from the participant. The pilot interview also established an idea of the length of the interview. Once the revisions indicated by the pilot interview were made to the woman interview, the teacher version was created.

### Teacher Interview

The interview was divided into seven sections; the first two sections of the woman interview, Demographics and Synagogue Demographics, were eliminated (see Table 3). Within the remaining seven sections, the woman questions were reworded in such a way that they were able to be answered by the teacher about the student. For example, women were asked, “How did your decision to become bat mitzvah evolve?” The teacher was asked, “Did your student talk about her decision to become bat mitzvah? Did she say how that decision came about?” There were a few woman questions that were not reworded for the teacher interview, as they were deemed too subjective for the teacher to answer about the student’s feelings. One example of this type of question was, “Did your bat mitzvah provide meaning to your life? How?”

### Narrative Writing Sample

The writing sample section, rather than being structured as specific questions to be answered by review of the woman’s speech, contained more general subject areas which guided the researcher in looking for information that may have been helpful in



exploring the study propositions. The choice of general subject areas, such as identity issues, family, synagogue, and community interactions, and reasons for participating in the bat mitzvah ritual, allowed flexibility in data gathering.

As shown in the summative questions section, questions asked of the woman and her teacher in the interview, as well as information gleaned from the writing sample provided by the woman, were used to either support or refute the validity of each proposition for each woman. The only exceptions were demographic questions that were listed on the “General Information” sheet in the protocol to provide an easy place to record these data.

Table 4. Proposition One

Section	Woman	Teacher	Content
Bat Mitzvah Experience	2,3,4	1,2,3	Reasons for undertaking the bat mitzvah ritual
Bat Mitzvah Experience	5,6,7	4,5	Emotions, thoughts, feelings and hopes or dreams that were experienced or met
Bat Mitzvah Experience	10	7	Whether the woman felt she had gained more knowledge through the bat mitzvah
Bat Mitzvah Experience	12		Bat mitzvah was experienced as a source of meaning in her life
Family	6,7	5,6	Childhood or adolescent experiences and interactions with family members
Synagogue	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4	Activity levels with the synagogue
Community	All	All	Issues of status and activity levels with the community
Personal Spirituality and Development Issues	1,2		Conversion, opportunity for bat mitzvah as a girl
Personal Spirituality and Development Issues	3,4,5,6,7,8	1,2	Personal changes and identity issues that may have resulted from bat mitzvah
Personal Spirituality and Development Issues	8		Reflections on how woman views her life and where she places emphasis
Aging and Aging Issues	All	All	Perception of age, knowledge of and participation in aging rituals
Thoughts and Feelings	1,4,5,6,7,9,10,11		Strength of feelings about variety of issues
Document Review			Variety of issues related to bat mitzvah

### Propositions

#### Proposition One

As shown in Table 4, many questions in the interviews and document reviews were designed to provide information relevant to this proposition. Relevant interview sections, identification of appropriate questions in each interview, and relevant portions

of the document review that may have provided information about the woman’s life related to the proposition that women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises consistent with the Eriksonian life cycle stage that they are experiencing are found in this table.

Table 5. Proposition Two

Section	Woman	Teacher	Content
Bat Mitzvah Experience	2,3,4	1,2,3	Reasons for undertaking the bat mitzvah ritual
Bat Mitzvah Experience	5,6,7	4,5	Whether identity issues may be related to the decision to participate in bat mitzvah as an adult
Bat Mitzvah Experience	8		Identity issues after completing the bat mitzvah
Bat Mitzvah Experience	5,6,7,8	4,5	Emotions, thoughts, feelings, and hopes or dreams
Family	1,2,3,4,5,6	1,2,3,4,5	Family history and traditions, beliefs, experiences, and interactions
Personal Spirituality and Developmental Issues	1,2		Conversion, opportunity for bat mitzvah as a girl
Personal Spirituality and Developmental Issues	3,6,7	1,2	Personal changes and identity issues that may have resulted from bat mitzvah.
Thoughts and feelings	1-10	1-10	Strength of feelings about variety of issues
Document Review			Variety of issues related to bat mitzvah

### Proposition Two

This proposition explored experiences that might have indicated women participated in bat mitzvah rituals in attempts to resolve developmental crises representative of earlier life cycle stages. Table 5 shows the relevant sections of the woman and teacher interviews and the document review, and the types of questions asked of the participants.

Table 6. Proposition Three

Section	Woman	Teacher	Content
Bat Mitzvah Experience	2,3,4,5,6,7	1,2,3,4,5	Decision-making processes in undertaking the bat mitzvah ritual and emotions and feelings related to the experience
Bat Mitzvah Experience	9	6	Strength of religious faith
Bat Mitzvah Experience	12		Life meaning
Bat Mitzvah Experience	11	8	Changes in how she views and interacts within the context of the larger world as a result of the bat mitzvah
Family	6	5	Missed opportunities in childhood or young adulthood for middle aged women
Personal Spirituality and Developmental Issues	All	All	Variety of issues related to bat mitzvah
Aging and Aging Issues	All	All	Perception of age, knowledge of and participation in aging rituals
Thoughts and Feelings	4,5,6,7,8,9,11	4,5,6,7,8,9,11	Strength of feelings about variety of issues
Document Review			Variety of issues related to bat mitzvah

### Proposition Three

The third proposition explored experiences that might have indicated women participated in bat mitzvah rituals in attempts to deal with developmental crises representative of future life cycle stages. These are shown in Table 6.

Table 7. Proposition Four

Section	Woman	Teacher	Content
Bat Mitzvah	2,3,4,5	1,2,3,4	Decisions or thought processes that led to the ritual
Bat Mitzvah	12		Ritual provided meaning
Synagogue	1,2,3,4	1,2,3,4	Activity levels with the synagogue
Personal Spirituality and Developmental Issues	1,3,7	1,2	Specific life event that led to the decision of participating in bat mitzvah
Thoughts and Feelings	1,2,4,10	1,2,4,10	Specific life event that led to the decision of participating in bat mitzvah
Document Review			Information about unexpected life events

#### Proposition Four

This proposition looked for information that might have indicated that reasons other than developmental changes and crises led to the bat mitzvah ritual. Unexpected life events, such as a remarriage, or the death of a loved one, may have been the driving force for ritual participation. To explore this possibility, four sections of the interview and some areas of the document review were examined, as shown in Table 7.

#### Proposition Five

This proposition was related to reasons for participating in bat mitzvah unrelated to human development and life crises. Because support for this proposition was likely to be found during almost any part of the interview, all questions potentially provided information for this proposition. However, special attention was given to responses in the Bat Mitzvah Experience, Personal Spirituality and Developmental Issues, and Thoughts and Feelings sections. In addition, previously unidentified or unanticipated issues related to bat mitzvah may have surfaced through review of the writing samples.

The questions within the protocol were designed to be open ended enough so that the woman could respond freely and provide information as to motivations, thoughts, feelings, emotions, activities, and events in her life that were related to the bat mitzvah ritual. Some questions may have provided information that addressed several propositions; others may have only helped with one. The use of the summative questions format allowed the researcher to sort through all of the gathered information and organize it in a way that would help clarify the bat mitzvah experience these women underwent, and provided information about the research question under study.

### Data Analyses

#### Coding Development and Procedures

The dearth of literature about adult bat mitzvah provided little information about possible themes and content anchors for this research study. Thus, the coding was exploratory, although based on the propositions and Erikson's stages. This research used a combination of content analysis and case study analysis, and categorical coding of themes and concepts was completed. The woman and teacher interviews, as well as writing samples, were coded. Content analysis in the context of case study analysis provides the researcher with a systematic, replicable technique of condensing large amounts of text obtained through case studies into content categories through the use of coding rules (Krippendorff, 1980).

To develop the codes, a basic framework was developed based on the propositions and Erikson's stage theory. Each code was assigned to one of the five propositions, and then within the proposition, either an exact word or an idea or theme,

usually based upon an understanding of Erikson's theory, was chosen for the name of the code. Thus, most codes had three parts. For example, a middle aged woman may have talked about wanting to be a role model for her young children who had not yet had a bar or bat mitzvah. This statement would be consistent with her voicing a theme related to Erikson's seventh stage, that of generativity vs. stagnation. Thus, the assigned code to the statement would be "P1 7 role model." This means that the anchor was related to proposition one (consistency with Erikson stage), stage 7 (generativity vs. stagnation), and the exact phrase was "role model." This coding scheme was used for all woman interviews, teacher interviews, and writing samples.

Thus, with an understanding of the case study propositions and Erikson's stages, an outline of the coding was derived. Proposition one codes all began with P1. The second part of the code could only be 7 or 8, since only middle aged and older women were involved in this research. The possibilities for the third part of the P1 code were only limited by the data in the data sources. For proposition two, all codes started with P2. The second part could be any number lower than 7 (for middle aged women) or 8 (for older women). The third part of the code again showed wide variety. For proposition three, which was related to Erikson stages not yet reached based on chronological age, codes were only assigned to middle aged women's and their teachers' materials. These codes were in the format "P3 8 phrase."

The fourth and fifth propositions were a little different. Because these propositions were not tied to Erikson's stage theory, these codes only had two parts. For comments about life crises, the code was something similar to "P4 illness." Reasons for bat mitzvah that did not fit into developmental stage or life crisis issues might look like

“P5 NEW opportunity,” where the opportunity of a bat mitzvah class being offered was a reason for pursuing bat mitzvah.

While this explanation of the coding scheme seems straightforward, the coding development process indicated that a more nuanced coding scheme had to be developed to catch the rich information found in the data sources. Sometimes women made statements that clearly refuted the importance of a concept or theme inherent in one of Erikson’s stages. For example, a woman was asked about identity issues (adolescent age stage five), and she specifically said she “didn’t feel different” as a result of her bat mitzvah, indicating that identity issues were not relevant for her. An explicit rejection of support was coded like this: “P2 5 NEG don’t feel different.” This code shows the stage that was being rejected, that it was related to an earlier Erikson stage for this woman, NEG indicates the rejection, and the last part of the code was the exact phrase. This “NEG”(ative) concept was also used to indicate that the stage was occurring, but the need was being met in a way other than the bat mitzvah. An example of this code would be: “P1 7 NEG OWMN,” where “owmn” means “other way met need”. Appendix C lists all of the codes identified through this research.

Coding development can be highly intersubjective. In this research, a second coder was used to verify the coding decisions made by the researcher. This process consisted of many steps. To begin, the researcher and second coder both read the research proposal and reviewed a summary of Erikson’s theory of human development. Then, discussions about hypothetical situations were held about what type of coding scheme made sense, what kinds of things were expected to be found in the data sources, and how to handle unexpected statements that did not fit the coding scheme. Next, the



researcher and second coder sat down with one interview transcript and read through it, talking about themes contained therein. During this process, the Erikson summary, (<http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/erikson.html>), was consulted. Using the same source for the Erikson summary was an attempt to provide consistency in how the two coders thought about Erikson stages during the coding. Then, using HyperResearch Software, the interview transcript was coded by the researcher and second coder together. Much discussion, reference to materials, and recoding was done during this process. Upon completion of the coding, the researcher and second coder again discussed the process, what was learned, what things might have been overlooked, and the coding scheme was modified. Then, the interview was recoded, incorporating the new understandings. A second interview was coded together, this time an interview of a woman in the age group not represented by the first interview.

After a period of several weeks had passed, the researcher selected a three page excerpt from a woman's interview and a two page excerpt from a teacher interview to be coded independently by the researcher and second coder. Although 80% agreement on coding of a transcript section is required on only one section to demonstrate reliability in coding (Cotner, personal communication, October, 2005), the researcher chose to demonstrate 80% agreement with the second coder on two transcript sections. The percent agreement after the first attempt on the teacher interview was 83%, and for the woman interview it was 73%. The researcher and second coder discussed the identified differences in coding, and then coded another section of a woman's transcript. This time the agreement was 83%. The demonstration of reliability in coding is important in this research because part of the value of this research is the development of content anchors,

or codes, which might be useful in future research on the phenomenon of adult bat mitzvah.

### Case Study Proposition Analysis

The analysis followed a sequential process in which data were coded, sorted, rated, and examined. Data were integrated and ratings were determined for each research question, with higher scores indicating more support for the proposition’s premise based on the woman interview, teacher interview, and document review. All of the interview questions in the protocol were pre-coded at the time the protocol was developed. This allowed for questions to be sorted by interview (woman or teacher) and by proposition. Once all of the required data for the protocol had been collected, the information was integrated in order to rate the summative questions, each relating to a specific proposition. Finally, the researcher supported the final ratings with a brief explanation and direct quotes taken from the interviews.

Each summative question was rated on a scale of “-3” (disagree very much) to “+3” (agree very much). These scores were transformed, as shown in Table 8, on a scale from 1 (disagree very much) to 7 (agree very much), to eliminate the “-“ and “+” signs. Thus, -3 was transformed to 1; -2 to was transformed to 2; -1 was transformed to 3, etc. so that mean scores could be computed.

Table 8. Summative Question Rating Scale

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Disagree very much	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree very much

The results were organized and presented for the five propositions. A rating ranging from 1 to 7 was derived for each of the propositions. Scores from 1 to 3 represent less support (negative) for the proposition, and scores from 5 to 7 represent more support (positive) for the proposition. A score of 4 indicates a neutral rating—support for or against the proposition was not found. Results are presented for all 16 women interviewed for this research, as well as by specific age group (middle aged or older). Two nonparametric tests were used to look for nonrandom associations between age group and the mean scores for the five propositions. The Mann-Whitney U Test compares two unpaired groups by ranking the values from low to high regardless of group, sums the ranks in each group, and then reports the two sums. A large difference between the two sums would yield a small P value, indicating differences between the two groups are less likely to be due to chance (Mann & Whitney, 1947). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used to see if two samples can be determined to have come from the same distribution, without requiring a normal distribution of data for computation (Chakravarti, Laha, & Roy, 1967). It calculates the absolute maximum difference between the observed cumulative distribution functions for both samples, with a large difference indicating the two distributions are different.

In a more qualitative review of the data, within each proposition, the women were clustered by similar scores, themes, or coding anchors. These clusters were described, and illustrative quotes were reported to support the grouping. Exceptional cases falling outside groupings were also examined to determine their unique properties.

### Measures of Psychosocial Development (MPD)

The resolution scores for each of Erikson's eight stages were used in this research in conjunction with the scores from the first three propositions of the case study analysis. Because the MPD was completed by the woman after her interview, it is possible that up to five years' time may have elapsed between the bat mitzvah experience and the completion of the MPD. Therefore, the MPD does not provide a snapshot of the woman's psychosocial development at the time of her bat mitzvah; rather, it should reflect additional developmental growth since the bat mitzvah, as well as psychosocial development achieved through the agency of the bat mitzvah itself. The MPD resolution scores were examined in conjunction with proposition scores to see if the psychosocial stages indicated through the interviews as being salient to the bat mitzvah had high resolution scores. In theory, if the bat mitzvah was used to address a developmental stage crisis, the resolution score for that stage, as reported by the MPD after the bat mitzvah, should be high. Higher proposition scores should be associated with higher resolution scores.

### Identification and Discussion of Themes

There were several themes, identified through the literature review and the researcher's personal experience, that were built into the interviews to be explored in this study. One is the concept of adult bat mitzvah as an aging ritual. Using the codes identified through the analysis, and also responses to relevant questions in the interviews, themes were examined within the context of what is currently known about the idea.

Again, women's responses were clustered within a thematic area, and illustrative quotes were used to explore the theme.

Some of these themes, as stated, were specifically probed by interview questions in a yes/no format. By clustering the women into categories, simple Fisher's Exact tests were performed on some of these themes to see if there were nonrandom associations between clusters of women and their responses to questions. This statistical test was used with the following issues: whether the woman was a convert to Judaism; whether she had the opportunity to have a bat mitzvah as a young adult; whether the woman felt she had missed opportunities in her life; whether the bat mitzvah was viewed as an aging ritual; and whether the woman would like to participate in some form of Jewish aging ritual. Fisher's Exact test is an appropriate test for these data because it is specifically designed to be used with small samples of categorical data. Fisher's Exact Test provides a p-value, but no critical value nor a formal test statistic (Fisher, 1932).

## Results

### Demographic Characteristics

A total of 16 women participated in this research study. Women were recruited from four Reform and two Conservative synagogues in Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Sarasota counties in west central Florida. Twelve of the women had their bat mitzvah in a Reform synagogue; four came from Conservative bat mitzvah programs. All of the women still belong to the synagogue in which they had their bat mitzvah, except for one older woman who now attends a different Reform synagogue in the area because her family moved. They ranged in age from 37 to 77, with a mean age of 57.6 (SD = 14.4). There were 10 converts to Judaism, and only two of the 16 had an opportunity to have a bat mitzvah as a girl. Thirteen of the women were either engaged or married at the time of the interview, and the remaining three women were widowed. Fourteen of the women had children, and five reported having grandchildren. Fisher's Exact Test (Fisher, 1932) did not yield any significant differences between the middle-aged and older women interviewed in this study in terms of conversion status, the opportunity to have a bat mitzvah as a girl, or feeling there were missed opportunities in life.

When the women are stratified into age groups of middle-aged and older women, their characteristics are fairly similar. The middle-aged group of eight women ranged in age from 37 to 48 at the time of their bat mitzvah, with a mean age of 44.4 (SD = 4.2). Five of these women converted before their bat mitzvahs, and only one of the women had the opportunity to have a bat mitzvah as a girl. All of the middle-aged women were

either engaged or married at the time of the interview. Seven of the women had children, but none of them reported having grandchildren.

The eight older women ranged in age from 64 to 77 at the time of their bat mitzvah, with the mean age being 70.8 (SD = 5.5). Five of these women converted to Judaism before their bat mitzvah, and only one had the opportunity of bat mitzvah as a girl. Five of the women were married at the time of the interview. The other three women were widowed; one became a widow during the preparation for her bat mitzvah, and the other two were widowed sometime after the bat mitzvah. All of the older women had children, but not all of their adult children were Jewish. Three of the older women reported having grandchildren (one did not clearly identify whether she had grandchildren), and again not all of the grandchildren were being raised in the Jewish religion.

### Case Study Results

A total of 16 case studies were completed using the protocol found in Appendix B. Each case included the woman interview and the teacher interview. Six of the cases also included a narrative writing sample. As noted previously, cases were chosen to be able to look at differences related to age (middle-aged and older). The results are organized and presented based on the five case study propositions:

1. Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are consistent with the Eriksonian life cycle stage that they are experiencing.

2. Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are representative of earlier life cycle stages in Erikson's theory of human development.
3. Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are representative of future life cycle stages in Erikson's theory of human development.
4. Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah as part of seeking a stronger connection to their religious faith and community in times of personal crisis caused by unexpected life events.
5. Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah for currently unidentified reasons unrelated to human development or life crises.

Findings represent the combined ratings of the summative questions and the coding analysis of the interview transcripts. A rating ranging from one to seven was derived for each of the propositions. Scores from one to three represent less support for the proposition, and scores from five to seven represent more support for the proposition. A score of four indicates a neutral rating—support for or against the proposition was not found. Table 9 illustrates the mean and mode scores for all 16 cases, as well as for the two age sub-groups.



Table 9. Case Study Proposition Mean and Mode Scores

Proposition	All Women		Middle-Aged Women		Older Women	
	X (SD)	Mode	X (SD)	Mode	X (SD)	Mode
Proposition 1	5.63 (1.78)	7	5.13 (2.30)	7	6.13 (0.99)	7
Proposition 2	6.38 (0.81)	7	6.00 (0.93)	5,7	6.75 (0.46)	7
Proposition 3	4.31 (0.70)	4	4.63 (0.92)	4	4.00 (0.00)	4
Proposition 4	4.25 (0.68)	4	4.50 (0.93)	4	4.00 (0.00)	4
Proposition 5	5.06 (0.57)	5	4.75 (0.46)	5	5.38 (0.52)	5

Mean scores for the entire sample of 16 women show that Proposition 2, (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are representative of earlier life cycle stages in Erikson’s theory of human development), had the most support from the interviews and writing samples, followed by Proposition 1 (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are consistent with the Eriksonian life cycle stage that they are experiencing) and Proposition 5 (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah for currently unidentified reasons unrelated to human development or life crises). All three of these proposition scores fell above a score of five, indicating support for the propositions’ premise. The mean scores for Proposition 3 (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are representative of future life cycle stages in Erikson’s theory of human development) and 4 (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah as part of seeking a stronger connection to their religious faith and community in times of

personal crisis caused by unexpected life events) fell in the four, or neutral, range, indicating that the proposition did not have much supporting or refuting evidence.

This indicated that middle-aged women participated in bat mitzvah for reasons consistent with generativity concerns and older women participated in a search for integrity and wisdom, as expected in light of Erikson's theory. The mean score of 5.63 (SD = 1.78) shows slight to moderate agreement for the proposition. However, the large standard deviation indicates that the women's responses were not always consistently supportive. The mode of 7 indicates that a few ratings lowered the mean score into the moderate range.

The mean score for Proposition 2 was higher, 6.38 (SD = 0.81), with a smaller standard deviation. Middle-aged and older women were participating in bat mitzvah for reasons of addressing life stage issues found in previous age stages of Erikson's theory. All of the women's scores for this domain were in the positive range (5 or higher), with a mode of 7.

Proposition 5, which measured reasons for participating in bat mitzvah not related to human developmental theory or life crises, evidenced slight support, with a mean score of 5.06 (SD = 0.57), and a mode of five. In the instances in which interviewees' responses and writings showed support for this proposition, having the time to participate, being encouraged by another person, and the opportunity of the class being offered were all reasons why women were participating in bat mitzvah. The most often endorsed reason for this proposition was the opportunity of the class. While this makes sense in retrospect, it was an unanticipated reason based upon the literature reviewed for this research. Opportunity, unlike a life crisis or a human developmental need, seems

much less like a “reason,” yet nine of the 16 women talked about the opportunity of the class being offered as one of the reasons for deciding to do the bat mitzvah.

### Middle-Aged Women

Mean scores for the eight middle-aged women who participated in the study show that Proposition 2, (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are representative of earlier life cycle stages in Erikson’s theory of human development), had the most support from the interviews and writing samples, followed by Proposition 1 (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are consistent with the Eriksonian life cycle stage that they are experiencing). Mean scores for the other three propositions all fell within the neutral support range.

All of the women’s scores for Proposition 2 were in the positive range. Middle-aged women were addressing developmental issues associated with stages three through six of Erikson’s theory. The mean score of 6.00 (SD = 0.93) shows that the average support for the proposition fell in the moderate range. A mean score of 5.13 (SD = 2.30) for Proposition 1 shows slight support for the idea that middle-aged women were participating in bat mitzvah for reasons consistent with Erikson’s generativity stage, stage seven. Both Proposition 1 and 2 had modes of 7.

Although some women’s cases showed support for Propositions 3, 4, and 5, the means were not high enough to break out of the neutral support range. Three middle-aged women indicated that their bat mitzvah experience was related to issues normally associated with Erikson stages that they had not yet reached based on chronological age.

Two women reported reasons for bat mitzvah that were related to life crisis issues, one being a serious personal illness, and the other a perceived life crisis (the possibility of dying on September 11, 2001). Interestingly, six of the eight middle-aged women's ratings indicated slight support for the opportunity for bat mitzvah as a reason for pursuing the event, but none of the women felt this was a strong influence on their decision.

### Older Women.

Mean scores for the eight older women who participated in the study show that Proposition 2, (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are representative of earlier life cycle stages in Erikson's theory of human development), had the most support from the interviews and writing samples, followed by Proposition 1 (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are consistent with the Eriksonian life cycle stage that they are experiencing) and Proposition 5 (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah for currently unidentified reasons unrelated to human development or life crises) had the most support from the interviews and writing samples. Propositions 3 and 4 fell in the neutral range.

All of the older women's cases showed moderate or strong support for Proposition 2, the idea that the women were participating in bat mitzvah as a way to address developmental issues related to previous Erikson stages based on chronological age. The mean score for this proposition was 6.75 (SD = 0.46), a very high score, corresponding with a mode of 7. This finding coincides well with Erikson's theory that

as people deal with life stage crises, they revisit earlier stage crises, both those resolved well and those not completely resolved. In addition, since Erikson's eighth stage, in which these women fall, is centered around the search for integrity by reviewing one's life and either correcting past life choices or coming to terms with choices that were made and integrating them into one's current identity, the strength of this Proposition score is not too surprising.

The mean score for Proposition 1, 6.13 (SD = 0.99), is also a score in the moderate support range. The Proposition 2 scores confirm the Proposition 1 rating. In addition, older women's responses about missed opportunities in their lives, searching for meaning and resolution for issues, and wanting to correct past choices are supporting material for the salience of Proposition 1 for the older women in the study. Proposition 5 was the other proposition to have a positive score, with a mean of 5.38 (SD = 0.52) and a mode of 5. All of the older women's cases showed support for this proposition, mostly with slightly supportive scores. Again the most important previously unidentified reason was the opportunity for the bat mitzvah class, but a few older women also talked about their decision to pursue bat mitzvah as being related to having the time to take the course of study and in response to someone else's encouragement to take the class.

The mean score for Proposition 3 was 4.00, with all cases rated a 4. This is partly a function of the structure of Erikson's theory. None of the older women's cases provided any support for bat mitzvah being related to a future stage. The older women were in stage eight of Erikson's theory, of which there are only eight stages. After Erik Erikson's death, his wife and research associate, Joan Erikson, reported on the existence of a final ninth stage. This stage occurs during the later half of the ninth decade of life

through the tenth decade and is a time of new demands, reevaluations, and daily challenges. Weakening of the physical body leads to loss of autonomy, and despair, sometimes prevalent in the eighth stage, is frequently found during this last stage. None of the older women in this research was old enough to fall into this ninth stage, and none of them nor their teachers talked about physical frailty, challenges with the activities of daily living, or other indications of despair with life. In fact, several of the older women, including some of the oldest women interviewed in this research, talked about age as a state of mind and reported that they did not consider themselves to be old.

Proposition 4, (Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah as part of seeking a stronger connection to their religious faith and community in times of personal crisis caused by unexpected life events), had a mean score of 4.00, with all cases rated as a 4. None of the older women talked about life crises as reasons to participate in bat mitzvah. Two of them experienced life crises during the bat mitzvah process, but this was after the decision to pursue bat mitzvah was made.

The Mann-Whitney U Test (Mann & Whitney, 1947) and the Two-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (Chakravarti, Laha, & Roy, 1967) were performed on the proposition mean scores to see if there were differences between the two age groups. The Mann-Whitney Test compares two unpaired groups to see if any observed differences in computed ranks are true differences and not a result of chance. The Mann-Whitney U test did not show any true differences between the groups (See Table 10).

Table 10. Mann-Whitney U Test

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Significance	P = .51	P = .13	P = .23	P = .44	P = .08

The Two-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test compares the distributions of two sets of values to see if they have the same continuous distribution and computes the maximum difference between the two distributions. This test also failed to identify significant differences between the middle-aged and older women in terms of proposition mean scores (See Table 11). The modes reported in Table 9 were nearly identical for all women considered together, middle-aged women as a group, and older women as a group. The mode scores along with the Two-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test seem to suggest that the two age groups of women were not different in regards to their proposition ratings.

Table 11. Two-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Significance	P = .63	P = .63	P = .63	P = .96	P = .63

The small number of women in this case study affects the power of both the Mann-Whitney U and Two-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests, so even though no significant differences were found between middle-aged and older women's proposition mean scores, it is not conclusive that differences do not exist. Based on an understanding of Erikson's theory and the proposition statements, however, few differences should exist between the two age groups. Because proposition 5 contained several different reasons for deciding to pursue bat mitzvah (opportunity, time, and other's encouragement), it is possible that middle-aged and older women might see some of these reasons as more important to them than others. For example, having the time to prepare for bat mitzvah was cited as a reason by two older women, but by no middle-aged women. It is possible that due to not having young children in the home or being retired, older women have

more free time in general compared to middle-aged women. Without more information about these women or more cases to examine, it is impossible to know if true differences exist between the two age groups regarding this proposition.

### Proposition 1

Proposition 1 states “adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are consistent with the Eriksonian life cycle stage that they are experiencing.” Many of the women’s responses showed strong support for this proposition. In fact, eight of the women scored the highest possible score, a seven, on the scale. One woman scored a six, and four women scored a five. There was one woman whose case showed no indication of support or refutation for this proposition, hence a neutral score. Finally, one woman’s score showed slight disagreement with the proposition and one woman’s score represented a strong refutation of the proposition.

The strong support cluster of women contained four middle-aged women and four older women. Five were converts to Judaism, and all but one belonged to Reform synagogues. None of them had the opportunity of bat mitzvah as a girl.

Erikson’s Stage Seven. A large number of content phrases were identified through the coding procedure that reinforced that the middle-aged women within the cluster were dealing with concerns related to generativity issues. Some examples found in the coding include “bat mitzvah with child,” “child’s bar/bat mitzvah,” “effective Jewish parent,” “good example,” “look up,” “mentor,” and role model.” Words or phrases related to things the woman wanted to give or provide for her child are “foundation,” “give to child,” “help child,” “and “religious home.” There were also some



words or phrases related to broader efforts at generativity, such as “community involvement,” “mentor,” and “volunteering.”

Many of the middle-aged women spoke about their bat mitzvah in relation to their children. One woman who had several young children said, “I definitely felt like it was—I was kinda stepping up to the plate for my kids.” She was also “supporting a Jewish identity to pass on to (her) children.” This woman’s rabbi explained, “I think that for [name] it was primarily motivated by gaining skills and knowledge that would enable her to be a more effective Jewish parent.” Another woman was also concerned about passing on a Jewish identity to her child, and to explain to him what it means to be Jewish. She said, “I have to learn and teach my son how to be a minority and how to do that with dignity and comfort.”

One woman, who stated that primary reason for her decision to pursue bat mitzvah was to be a good example and role model for her children, said, “I thought about setting a good example for my own children.” She also said, “I try to be a good role model for my children and I don’t want them saying to me when its their turn, ‘Mom, you didn’t do it.’” Another woman, whose son was in his bar mitzvah preparation process, said,

It was just good timing being that my son was going through it ... And I did it too, to connect with my son, to show that he’s gonna go through all this—that’s how the whole thing started with me even just learning Torah because my daughter was going to [be bat mitzvahed] that’s when I learned to read from Torah. So I could read at her Bat Mitzvah. So her bat mitzvah experience was the first thing that encouraged me to become more involved in the service and grow more Jewishly. So it kinda goes back to her bat mitzvah.

Erikson’s Stage Eight. The older women’s cases also provided many examples of words or phrases representative of Erikson’s eighth stage, that of the search for integrity

with wisdom as the hoped for outcome. These codes included “awareness to larger picture,” “correcting past choices,” “dream,” “happy with life choices,” “look back,” “missed experiences,” “no bat mitzvah,” “role in Jewish community,” “searching for meaning,” and “searching for resolution.” One older woman who grew up with a learning problem and had had difficulties with academics her entire life was apprehensive to pursue bat mitzvah because of the great amount of learning and study involved. She viewed completing her bat mitzvah as a resolution of her academic difficulties. When asked if she had fulfilled hopes or dreams that had previously been unmet, she responded,

Oh yeah, definitely because I gave up on myself as far as educating myself because I had such a hard time in school and I mean I finished school I never got a degree, but I did take a lot of college courses but I audited them because I did not want to have to take a test and because I would get so sweaty and so horrified and my throat would close and my eyes would blur and it was awful yeah it was bad so I just I was afraid that would happen but it didn't.

This same woman had converted to Judaism within the last ten years or so, and saw her bat mitzvah as a completion of her conversion. When asked what led to her decision to pursue bat mitzvah, she replied,

Because I was a convert I felt that I had to follow it through. I had to finish my journey, because my journey started many years ago as you'll read in my d'bar torah. And I wanted to convert when I was 18 and my then fiancé who was not Catholic, which is what my parents were, and so there wasn't any problems getting married he converted from being an Episcopalian to being Catholic so we could get married at the altar. I don't know if you know anything about Catholicism, but in those days if you were marrying a non-Catholic you couldn't go beyond the railing and my mother who never went to church was like, 'no this can't be,' so he converted. So what was I going to tell him--that I had already talked to a rabbi about converting? I couldn't do it you know--God he gave up his own religion for me, so I didn't do it obviously.

This woman's conversion was also a hope or dream that she had not met earlier in her life. She had wanted to convert as early as age 18, yet life circumstances prohibited that from occurring. The bat mitzvah, which could only be completed after conversion, was the end of her "journey", from Catholicism to Judaism.

Another older woman, who converted after almost 50 years of marriage, also saw the bat mitzvah as a completion of her conversion. When asked if she had grandchildren and if any of them had had a bar or bat mitzvah, she said, "One of them is 22 years old, when she was at my bat mitzvah, she said, 'Oh, I think I found what I have been looking for.' I said honey, it took me 50 years. (laughs)" In a discussion about family members' religious influences, this woman said, "I was always looking for the truth and finding the truth is so difficult ... In Uruguay at the time I was growing up there was a political change ... They [her aunts] told me horrible things about priests and they were always speaking against the Catholic church. And this was one of the things that I think made me look for the truth, because I knew it wasn't there [Catholicism]." And in her speech delivered at her bat mitzvah ceremony, she ended with, "I am happy to say that I have finally arrived at my destination. I am a Jew!"

There were also older women in this cluster who had grown up Jewish. When asked about her decision to pursue bat mitzvah, one woman said, "At the time I was growing up, Orthodox women did not have a bat mitzvah. And I had always hoped that some day that I could do that." She also talked about how the bat mitzvah fulfilled a dream for her.

I remember the feelings that I had as a youngster and being denied the right to sit with my father, to be an active part of the service. And I could have done it as a Conservative Jew because after I was married I was Conservative, but somehow

or another, the time just wasn't right. It was as though I had fulfilled a dream that I had had all my life.

Another older woman, who grew up in a Classical Reform synagogue that only offered Confirmation, but not bar or bat mitzvah, to its young people, talked about the bat mitzvah as meeting a long-held hope or dream. She said, "I never dreamt I would ever go through that and I felt that was a culmination of something that I should have done years ago and it made me feel good," and "I'm very sorry I didn't do it many years ago, but I never had the opportunity. Nobody ever did it." Her rabbi talked about her bat mitzvah experience in this way: "She would come back a mantra—I never got to do this growing up, I'm glad I could do it. It was sort of like a task. I've been a leader of the synagogue, I've been a leader of [unclear], I've done everything but this." It is clear that many of the older women were searching for some sort of meaning or resolution in their lives, and many felt that they had missed opportunities in their lives that the bat mitzvah would hopefully rectify.

There was also one woman whose case resulted in a neutral score for this proposition. She was middle-aged, just engaged, and had no children nor plans to have children. She briefly mentioned wanting to increase her community involvement, and that she and her fiancé had talked about wanting to mentor youth in their synagogue.

Finally, there were two women, both middle-aged, whose scores for this proposition were in the negative range. One woman had chosen not to have a bat mitzvah as a girl, and by the time she pursued bat mitzvah, both her children had already completed theirs. She said, "I certainly could not assist them in any way. They both, to this day, know more than I do, even though all the classes I took—they still both know

way more than I do.” She also talked about the reasons for pursuing her bat mitzvah as “more personal.” The other woman felt the bat mitzvah was a continuation of the learning that began in her conversion class, and her children “were some of my best tutors.”

Overall, most of the women’s cases provided evidence in support of Proposition 1. The middle-aged women were motivated by generativity concerns, and the older women were searching for resolution and correcting past life choices or circumstances. Few women did not fit into this proposition’s theory, and the reasons why were clear from the transcripts of their and their teachers’ interviews.

### Proposition 2

This proposition states “Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are representative of earlier life cycle stages in Erikson’s theory of human development.” This proposition garnered the highest level of support of all of the propositions under examination in this research. It would be the unusual person, indeed, who did not deal with issues regarding previous human developmental stages over a multi-year course of study, learning, and growth.

In fact, all of Erikson’s stages prior to the seventh and eighth stages, in which the women in this study are found, were identified through the coding analysis except for the first stage that is associated with Infancy. However, the second stage that covers the period up to age three, was only noted once in the coding, when an older woman said that during the bat mitzvah preparation process she “wanted to please” her teacher. Thus, this

analysis focuses on stages three through six for the middle-aged women, and stages three through seven for the older women.

Erikson's Stage Three. The third stage, Play Age, is experienced by children between the ages of two and six. At this stage, children are seeking to learn about the world around them, trying challenges, and showing curiosity about their environment. This is a time of play, of exploring, developing purpose, and learning responsibility. If navigated successfully, children develop a sense of purpose and courage. Seven of the women seemed to be dealing with issues related to this stage through their participation in their bat mitzvahs. Three of the women were middle-aged. Four of the six women who were born Jewish are included in this cluster. Most of the responses in this cluster were related to “wanting to do it,” being “curious,” looking for “direction” or “focus,” and needing “discipline” to take on this “accomplishment.”

One older woman said, “It’s ‘cause I wanted to do it. It wasn’t for any, it’s just I hadn’t done it and I wanted to do it. Like changing your job. That’s what I want to do now (slaps leg). Ok. That was what I wanted to do now.” She also talked about her curiosity, “Because I’m always curious, I love to know what I don’t know.” A middle-aged woman talked about some of her feelings regarding the bat mitzvah, and how she avoided feelings of guilt, the dystonic pole of this stage.

During [the bat mitzvah ceremony] I just—I was glad that it was finally there and doing it and after I felt really good what all I had accomplished but more relieved that I had done it and don’t have to worry about it any more (laughs).

Her comments about being relieved and not having to worry showed that she was successfully dealing with this stage.

Two older women also talked about worrying. When asked how she felt during the ceremony, one woman said,

Wonderful. I was a little bit frightened at first you know but after having spoken before so many people and so many different organizations, national and region wise, and groups that I wasn't afraid of being talking to people but it was something I never did before so openly. And I was a little bit--yes I worried until after I read the torah part, I did.

When talking about whether the bat mitzvah had provided meaning to her life, the woman responded, "It made me feel that I had accomplished what every Jewish person should do. Male or female." The other older woman who talked about worrying said, "something inside me just wanted me to do it and I would have done it earlier but I have ADD and I had such a problem in school." This woman felt held back by her abilities, but her inner drive to seek out this experience was great.

I always wanted to do it you know because I always went to the students' bar mitzvahs and because I loved to see them. We have produced such wonderful Jewish children they are so comfortable where they are they have a wonderful relationship with the rabbi and with Lori and I would kvell [be filled with pride] for them but I also would be oh God I wish I could do that.

This emphasis on wanting to do bat mitzvah, in the face of perceived challenges from her family, synagogue, community, and even herself, is a recurrent theme among the women whose cases showed evidence for the importance of Erikson's third stage in their bat mitzvah experience.

Erikson's Stage Four. School Age children usually are dealing with the fourth of Erikson's stages. In this stage, children focus on learning and struggle with being Industrious instead of feeling Inferior. If successfully resolved, children develop a sense

of competence, secure in their knowledge and skills. More than half of the cases of the women in the study showed strong support for the importance of industry and developing competence through the bat mitzvah experience. Six of the women in this cluster were older; three were middle-aged. Four of the six women who were born Jewish are included in this cluster. Many of the codes related to this stage are related to issues of learning and competence. Examples of common codes are “achieved goal,” “comfort level,” “confidence,” “education” and “educational,” “graduated,” “Hebrew,” “Torah,” “knowledge of Judaism,” “knowledge of rituals,” and feeling “qualified.” In fact, six of the women in this cluster, from both age groups, gave responses related to learning and competence as the primary reason for pursuing bat mitzvah.

One older woman said, “I really needed to establish a dialogue as a student ... I like to study. I’m a perpetual student.” When asked about whether the bat mitzvah had any effect on her feelings about herself as a Jewish woman, she said,

I think the area of wearing a tallis was one that I really had to think about. My husband was raised probably more Orthodox and then became active in the Conservative movement and if there ever was anything that I didn’t want to do it was to upset him. So I asked his opinion and how he felt about it and it was like everything else that happens between us, it leads to discussion and support. And he felt very strongly that I had earned that right. And I knew that I had, but you don’t have to wear a tallis to prove anything. But for me it was sort of closure, a statement, the outward statement that I had made a commitment and had fulfilled that commitment. And I stand now before you as a Jew who has totally dedicated her life to studying her faith, because to me, that’s what bat mitzvah does as an adult. That’s a commitment to perpetual learning. It’s also humbling—how little we know.

A middle-aged woman, when asked how her decision to become bat mitzvah came about, said,



Oh, it was a very long process. I actually started years before the other gals did—I started as my kids were going to Hebrew school, I became a lot more interested in learning more. I realized how little I knew. And I thought, gee, I'd really like to learn and so I started taking Hebrew with [woman in congregation] who then had to leave due to her health. She was a long-standing teacher at the temple, and then I moved into doing only adult ed and so I took Hebrew with her, and this was when [the previous rabbi] was still there, I think. And in fact I'm 99% sure it was when [he] was still there. And then I continued with my Hebrew, and I kept trying to say gee, aren't we gonna have some sort of a class, aren't we gonna have some sort of a class, and then there was a big transition and hiatus, and so when [the current rabbi] came in I was on the Board at that time and I sort of pushed and ... [several women in the congregation pushed]—so he [rabbi] was getting a lot of pressure from people to do a bnei mitzvah class. So he started doing just some classes, and some of those women were just then starting with Hebrew, where I had already done the Hebrew, but I, you know, kept going, and I like, I tried to keep going, but originally I was hoping to be bat mitzvahed with [daughter who is 16] ... And she was very excited at the notion but things weren't moving along and so I read Torah at her bat mitzvah but I did not consider myself to be bat mitzvahed. Although other people said to me that counted. But I hadn't learned what I wanted to learn. It was the mechanics of reading the Torah, and the wonders of reading from the Torah, but that wasn't the whole thing about becoming bat mitzvah. I mean that's just one of the elements of becoming bat mitzvah. So I was happy that I had learned enough to be able to do that at her bat mitzvah—that was very very important to me—but I didn't consider myself bat mitzvah at that point.

Another middle-aged woman felt that the decision to pursue bat mitzvah came out of a desire to continue her adult education classes at the synagogue. She said, "I knew from the curriculum that the rabbi had us—had set up for the program—I would get the information that I was looking for." This woman was a convert and wanted to increase her knowledge about Judaism.

Another middle-aged woman said that she "just wanted something official to show to signify that I had gone through the educational process and the steps taken to be a bat mitzvah." When asked whether she experienced positive emotions at the accomplishment of becoming bat mitzvah, she responded,

In general, yeah. I didn't feel like I learned anything more—to be blunt—in terms of my ritual knowledge, maybe intellectual—the rabbi did present information that made me think about being Jewish and the Conservative movement, but that wasn't my goal. I wanted to be more comfortable on the bimah, I wanted to learn the service, I wanted a Haftarah, I want—basically my goals weren't met.

For this woman who sought out the bat mitzvah specifically for learning, she clearly indicated that the bat mitzvah experience wasn't all she had hoped it would be, and was somewhat disappointed.

Finally, there was one older woman whose case showed many examples of the dystonic pole of this stage. Overall, her case study showed she was most concerned with her current stage, stage eight, and with this fourth stage. Competence seemed to be very important to her, not just during the bat mitzvah experience, but throughout her life. While in preparation for her bat mitzvah, she experienced several unexpected life events that affected her deeply. She talked about learning as one of the reasons for wanting to pursue bat mitzvah.

I've always wanted to learn to read Hebrew. I resented the fact that my kids did it before I did it. Not really, but, um, I just always thought that was what I needed to do. I picked up the Romance languages very easily, and I thought this would be interesting ... but I've never learned Hebrew and I've always wanted to do that. And when I was in Kansas City I started and sometimes the teacher dropped out, sometimes I got transferred, you know, I never ever was able to do that and then somehow or other this came up and I thought that, you know, I'd love to go through all this and learn some of these things ... I've got a wonderful library of Jewish books, on the religion, particularly on women, and those kinds of things. And I've read many of them, have not read all of them, but I enjoy learning and I think that's very important.

And when she was asked whether deciding to pursue bat mitzvah presented her with any difficulties or reservations, she talked about the challenges she faced during her preparation.

Not really, but everything happened during it. We had to move in the middle of all that, and I had to find homecare when I brought him home [husband had a stroke] ... Also, my grandson committed suicide during this time ... It was a terrible..., you know, my personal stuff. But you know, that's life and it's not anything that's not handleable. You just—it's what happens.

This response was followed by a question asking how she felt during the bat mitzvah ceremony. While her immediate answer shows many traits related to unsuccessful navigation of Erikson's fourth stage, she ends her answer with a more positive outlook on her competence during the bat mitzvah.

I: How did you feel during the ceremony and after?

S: (subdued voice) very stupid. Very stupid. I asked rabbi to recite Mourner's Kaddish [for grandson's death] with him, and I couldn't even, I mean I couldn't even read it. I couldn't. And like I say, I've been before audiences all my life and I'm never afraid of an audience. But this was not because of the audience it was just feeling stupid for the first time and I know better. But, that's what happened. But it's really funny. Now in the temple, you know, the things that rabbi taught us, "this is how you handle the scroll" and this is your [unintelligible], you know and you do this, I could never respond the sentence that you say at, when somebody goes up—Now I just know it, I don't have to read any of that stuff, I know all that stuff, and I know when somebody does something WRONG, or somebody doesn't, you know, do the right sequence or something like that and it just makes me feel so good that, hey, I DID learn something, I may not have thought I learned anything, but that (laughs) you did learn it, you did learn it.

The emphasis on learning and competence shown by the examples given above is not surprising given the centrality of learning in Judaism. Many older women were not given

the same opportunities as their male counterparts across a variety of learning situations, and more than half of the women in this study converted to Judaism as adults. Although Judaism stresses the importance of lifelong learning, most formal Jewish education is provided to children and youths. In order to feel comfortable and at home within their families and synagogues, it makes sense that the women who converted to Judaism would want to develop and extend competencies in areas of Jewish learning.

Erikson's Stage Five. The fifth stage, Adolescence, occurs in Erikson's theory from about the age of 12 to 18. This stage is marked by the crisis of Identity versus Identity Confusion. At this stage, adolescents attempt to discover who they are, and what roles in life they find comfortable. If this crisis is confronted successfully, then fidelity emerges as a strength. More than half of the cases of the women in the study showed strong support for dealing with issues of identity through the bat mitzvah experience. All but one of the older women's cases displayed this support. Five of the middle-aged women also seemed to be dealing with identity issues as an important part of the bat mitzvah. Three of the four women who did not seem overly concerned with identity issues were born Jewish, and all four women specifically said things in their interview that explicitly rejected the importance of identity for them. While each also said some things that supported the possibility of identity issues, they were fewer in number than the other women in the study and the addition of explicit rejection of identity make it clear that other factors were more important. Two of these women indicated that learning and competence were their reasons for seeking out the bat mitzvah, and the other two were very concerned about generativity issues.

A variety of words and phrases culled from the interviews and writing samples seemed to indicate identity issues. Examples of these words and phrases include achieving “authenticity” as a Jew, feeling “complete,” being a “convert,” “identity,” “Jewish growth,” being on a “journey,” the appropriateness and worthiness of wearing “kippah” and “tallit,” a sense of “legitimacy,” “finding Judaism “meaningful” and feeling “more Jewish,” having “pride” in being Jewish, and feeling “religious” and “spiritual.” A few of the teachers talked about the bat mitzvah as a “transformational” or “transforming” experience for their congregants.

The three middle-aged women who seemed to be dealing with many issues of identity were all converts. One of them talked about feeling “complete.” When asked how she felt during her ceremony and after, one woman said, “I felt like I was a big part of—a piece of a big puzzle. Just—I would say complete in my Judaism, definitely.” Later in the interview she talked about the effect of the bat mitzvah on her feelings as a Jewish woman, and she responded, “I just didn’t see it as, again, as a woman’s issue. It’s just had an effect on me as a convert being more complete in my Judaism ... I felt more empowered as a Jew.” Another woman’s teacher said, “I think that it rounded out her conversion experience and brought her to another level of authenticity.” This woman also indicated that the bat mitzvah has provided meaning to her life: “I think it’s given me somewhat of an identity to a point. So I mean, it’s very meaningful.” The other middle-aged convert talked about her bat mitzvah in this way,

Well I guess it’s ... kind of a significant rite of passage regardless of what age you are. Kind of it symbolized for me kind of an official membership in some ways ... I think as a Jew ... I think the [bat mitzvah] kind of helped me feel—kinda graduated of sorts.

Five of the older women who appeared to be using the bat mitzvah to address identity issues were also converts to Judaism. One woman said, “Yes, well, you know, being that I had already converted, I decided I wanted it all, wanted to be Jewish 100%. And that was why my decision [to do bat mitzvah].” This woman began and ended her bat mitzvah speech with the following sentence, “I am a Jew!” Another older woman said, “I really deep down did not consider myself a real—not a real—a true Jew ... unless I made my bat mitzvah.” This is a powerful statement of identity regarding the personal need for bat mitzvah in this woman’s life.

Another woman spoke about how she felt during the service in front of the congregation. She said, “There was a comfort zone that I was in and I don’t know how to explain it, but I was right where I wanted to be.” This feeling of comfort and belonging was a recurrent theme for many of the converts in this study. Teacher interviews also revealed the importance of identity in the bat mitzvah experience. One teacher, who talked about an older woman who had not only converted to Judaism and become involved herself in the synagogue, but also got her husband involved, said, “[The bat mitzvah] really was an identity affirmation for her.” This teacher also told a story about how the woman had quietly adopted a personal mitzvah project, a project to help the community. She would take the flowers from the sanctuary at the end of each week, place them in individual vases, and deliver them to the local hospital so that patients there, of any religious background, had the pleasure of a flower. She had not started this project until she was preparing for her bat mitzvah, and the rabbi saw this project as a way that the woman was putting into practice some of the ethical concepts of Judaism

that she had been learning about in classes. The teacher remarked on the personal and Jewish growth this woman had shown through her own involvement, that of her husband, and her efforts to give to the local community. He described her bat mitzvah experience as “probably the most transformative of anybody in the group.”

Several women also talked about the power of tallit (prayer shawl) and kippah (head covering) as identity symbols. A few of the women designed their tallits, and put a lot of thought into their design. In talking about creating her tallit, one woman said,

I really wanted something, a phrase in there that was--reflected more of me and what I'm doing. And it took me a long time. The woman that I worked with asked me, “well, what do you want?” And I said, I've had to do a lot of searching to find something that would be meaningful to me as well as belonged.

Another woman talked about how different she felt as a Jew after she began wearing tallit and kippah. She said, “I can wear the tallit with authority and kippah--and it's the difference between black and white TV and color TV. Now I'm color TV.”

The two older women in this cluster who were born Jewish did not have the opportunity to have bat mitzvah as a girl. One grew up in an Orthodox environment where girls were not allowed to have bat mitzvahs and other learning opportunities boys were expected to pursue. The other woman grew up in a Classical Reform environment in which neither boys nor girls were offered bar or bat mitzvah, instead participating in Confirmation around the age of 15 or 16. The woman from the Orthodox background said, “I think that probably I'm more comfortable with myself. It was like something was always lacking and it wasn't self-confidence, but in a way it was self-confidence.” She described her bat mitzvah as “next to having my children, [it was] the most awe-inspiring

thing I think I have ever done.” Obviously the bat mitzvah was a powerful confirmation of Jewish identity for her. The woman from the Classical Reform background had always felt a connection to Torah, yet saw it as something she was not allowed to embrace. Because she was able to study Torah during her preparation and to read from the scroll during her ceremony, she felt that her religious faith had increased: “It made me feel closer [to Judaism] to be able to go look in the Torah and because I did not know enough of the Torah because I could not read it and I always looked at it as untouchable. And now I felt at home with it.”

There were also some words and phrases that explicitly rejected the importance of identity issues for some of the women who were interviewed. The coding analysis showed that four middle-aged women and one older woman talked rarely about or rejected identity issues. Three of them were born Jewish. Several of them talked about not feeling “spiritual” or “religious”, that they felt that they already “belonged,” and that they “didn’t feel different” because of the bat mitzvah. One woman, when asked if she felt like she belonged more in the synagogue or in her family as a result of the bat mitzvah said, “I don’t think so. We have a very inclusive synagogue and I don’t feel that there’s any difference with my family.” Another woman said, “No, I always felt like I belonged, and you know, everybody was accepting.” In another part of the interview, she said, “I’m not that spiritual.” This woman was very clear that the reason she had pursued bat mitzvah was to be a good role model and example for her children, and not for personal identity reasons. These women’s responses are representative of the rest of the women in this cluster.



Erikson's Stage Six. Following the identity stage is the stage of Intimacy versus Isolation. This stage is associated with the age range of 18 to 40. Relationships with friends, lovers, and partners help young adults develop the capacity for love, both of romantic and platonic types. A lack of these relationship bonds indicates that a young adult has not successfully navigated this stage, and is most likely experiencing feelings of isolation. There was a small cluster of four women for whom relationships and connection with others seemed an important part of the bat mitzvah experience. Another small cluster of five women's cases also seemed to support the importance of this sixth stage, but not as strongly as the first cluster. Finally, there was a group of women for whom this stage did not seem to be an issue at all. Some of the words and phrases that were typical for this stage were "bond," "camaraderie," "closer to rabbi," "connection," "relationships," and "supportive."

Of the cluster whose cases showed strong support for the importance of relationships in their bat mitzvah experience, one older woman's husband died during her preparation, and another older woman battled lung cancer. The woman whose husband died talked several times about the importance of her relationship with her class members, and also wrote about it in her speech. She said, "I probably made six new friends—most of them I had known to say hello, but some of them not. And I really bonded with these six other people and knowing how they think and feel about so many issues. It's a grand thing." The short article she wrote for the congregation newsletter showed even more powerfully the connection she felt with the other women in her class, and how she drew support from them after her husband died.

As excited as I am at the prospect of being a Bat Mitzvah in just three weeks, I feel deep sorrow at the thought that our class of very unique individuals will no longer meet weekly to study Torah and to talk about our experiences in Judaism. Articulating what I had grown to believe as the result of my life experiences, and discovering the aspects of our faith that support and challenge others, have been sources of enlightenment and strength for me over the past fourteen months, especially in the aftermath of the sudden death of my husband. To bond with six wonderful, loving new friends and to achieve a heightened understanding of what it means to be Jewish has been, is, and will be, a special blessing—always.

Instead of bonding so strongly with her class, the woman who battled cancer while doing her bat mitzvah felt a strong connection to her teacher and also her rabbi. She spoke about them often in her interview, and felt that she would have been unable to complete her bat mitzvah without their help and support. She describes a special moment in her service when the rabbi spoke with her class in front of the congregation.

We read Torah and d'bar Torah--the rabbi called us over to him and ... he actually put his arms with the tallit around us and told us things and how he felt about what we did and oh my God, it was like to hear it from this man who is a regular man, a regular guy ... He just said things to us that were so endearing ... I never had anyone speak to me like that and to have it come from not only my rabbi but the rabbi that converted me, it was really special.

The only middle-aged woman to strongly endorse the importance of relationships talked about the special bond she had with her classmates. She said, “The ones that were involved in my class, we kind of have a special, kind of like a member of a club ... You see this group of women that was just not these people that you would typically put together, but it really was a bond for us.” The other woman in this cluster, an older woman who had a long marriage to a Jewish man who had grown up Orthodox, felt that her bat mitzvah improved their relationship and brought them closer together. Her reason for pursuing bat mitzvah was she felt “left out” of her family because she had not had a

bat mitzvah yet. “My husband spoke it [Hebrew] so well, my son, so he went to yeshiva as a child, as a student years ago and he was so involved and being able to speak it, I felt like I was being left out.” After she started the class, she said, “He learned with me ... I brought it home and he worked with me ... I learned some transliteration originally memorizing it but I could follow it and I stopped doing it, my husband made me stop and he said go by the letters.” Her rabbi talked about her experience also.

“I think she felt more of a partnership with her husband religiously. They did everything together but he came from an Orthodox background. And I think she probably deferred to him and I know that during the class she would challenge him on things. I think she got more confident taking him on religiously after that [the bat mitzvah].

These examples show that a bat mitzvah experience can affect relationships with a wide variety of people—partners, family, friends, and authority figures. The cluster of women whose cases showed some support for the importance of this stage does not seem to have any special features. The cluster is evenly split between middle-aged and older women and evenly divided between converts and those born Jewish. There was a small cluster of women who, while showing some support, also made statements that the bat mitzvah did not change or improve relationships with others, stating that the bat mitzvah was a personal experience. A representative example of this feeling is given by a middle-aged woman who said, “It was, yeah, my reason for converting and continuing my education [through the bat mitzvah class] was purely for me. It wasn’t to please my husband, my in-laws.”

Erikson’s Stage Seven. The seventh stage, that of the tension between Generativity and Stagnation, is generally addressed in middle adulthood. Erikson felt

that adults at this stage are faced with teaching and guiding the next generation; they are involved with procreativity, productivity, and creativity. The analysis of this stage in terms of Proposition 2 is necessarily limited to the group of older women, as Stage seven is the stage in which the middle-aged women should be found. Five of the eight older women's cases seemed to indicate generativity concerns. Two of the women talked about helping and having an impact on their grandchildren. One older woman talked about her efforts to gradually add more examples of ritual observance, such as lighting Shabbat candles, to her life. She said she is especially aware of this "whenever my grandchildren are here. They are the bell that is ringing in my mind and has made me more observant, I think." When asked if she thought she was better able to assist her grandchildren with their Jewish education, she responded,

Certainly when they begin to read Hebrew. I can help them with that. I already knew the stories. Because I had the background in Old and New Testament I knew all the stories that you typically teach young children. And my grandchildren are still young. But when they take Hebrew I will certainly be able to do that. And I also found myself talking more about my beliefs than I ever did I think with my kids. I look back on what I did, right and wrong with raising my children in terms of faith, I think I didn't talk about my own faith enough. I lived it, but I didn't talk it.

Her comment shows she is clearly hoping to have an impact in her grandchildren's lives, and that she is also hoping to change how she does that, as compared to how she had raised her own children. The other older woman who talked about helping her grandchildren felt a strong urge to assist them, but felt limited by the fact that her grandchildren lived more than a thousand miles away. She said,

The thing that is difficult is that my grandchildren are in Toronto, my Jewish grandchildren. And so I feel that I'm unable to spend more time with them and I try to do it in other ways so that there is some meaning to their growth and development as far as their faith.

Her grandchildren also had an impact on why she chose to pursue bat mitzvah: "I think one of the driving forces too was that I knew a step-grandson would be pursuing his bar mitzvah and I certainly wanted to be a part of that."

Several of the other older women talked about volunteering and leadership activities as ways to contribute to their synagogues and communities. However, a few of them also talked about the responsibility of being, or opportunity to be, examples to other adult women who had not had a bat mitzvah. Sometimes the encouragement was just to study, but sometimes it extended to the ceremony itself. One woman said her bat mitzvah added meaning to her life.

Yes. It has. And how? I have had numerous women in my synagogue come to me and ask that same question [has the bat mitzvah added meaning to your life]. And they express some of the fears of commitment and doing it correctly and learning it—knowing it takes commitment, that kind of time, but when you ask the word how, it is truly an opportunity to share with another person the experience that you had and give them an opportunity to ask questions—if in fact it is right for them.

Another woman also felt compelled to talk about her experience with others. She is very involved in her synagogue, with a variety of age and interest groups. She said,

I think I find myself talking about the bat mitzvah experience to others and encouraging other Jewish people who have not had the experience to go ahead and have that experience. If I were in a situation, and someone said, oh, I never had one, it would be nice to do it, I say, it's the best thing in the world. You need to try it, there's gonna be a class, or if they said, I've never had any Hebrew,

that's not a problem, we teach Hebrew, we do all of those things, so I guess I proselytize (laughs).

Two older women spoke about seeing themselves in a leadership role model for other people in their synagogues. One woman said,

I think that people look up to me for leadership because I am able—I'm there for people and I do, because of my varied background, I am able to supply answers to their questions, and I'm a friendly person, and I listen. And a lot of people come to me that ask for my help and I gave it to them.

The other older woman talked about being an example to younger women in her synagogue who were thinking about bat mitzvah. She said, "I'm working hard at it, and encouraging others to do it. 'Cause I feel like they can get the same result that I did."

This woman's teacher reinforced this woman's position in the synagogue. The woman had been a former president of the synagogue, helped build it, and had been a leader in a variety of Jewish organizations for a number of years. When asked if people in the synagogue looked up to her because of her bat mitzvah, he answered, "I think it probably helped solidify her image as an elder role model to a younger generation of adult leaders."

Thus, we see that generativity can take many forms. Sometimes it is experienced through guiding one's children or grandchildren. Other times women reached out into their synagogues and communities through volunteer and leadership efforts. These women also saw themselves as role models for younger women and their peers, both in terms of pursuing a bat mitzvah, and in other leadership activities.

It is clear that most of Erikson's stages were well represented in the bat mitzvah experiences of this group of 16 women. The fourth stage concerned with the search for competence and the fifth stage of identity formation were the most strongly present, but interesting experiences and influences were also reported for the third and sixth stages, as well as the seventh stage for older women.

### Proposition 3

This proposition states "Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah to address human developmental crises that are representative of future life cycle stages in Erikson's theory of human development." Theoretically both the middle-aged women and older women could have provided evidence for this proposition. Middle-aged women could talk about aspects of human development related to the search for integrity and wisdom, and a few did. The older women could have talked about some of the aspects of the ninth stage that Joan Erikson postulated, but none of the older women in this study did. The ninth stage is seen as a time of increasing physical difficulties and struggles with daily living in the face of despair. None of the older women in this study were facing major health issues related to aging, and none seemed to be in despair about their lives. All of them seemed to be successfully interacting in the world around them.

Three of the middle-aged women seemed to be dealing with developmental issues that are associated with a stage that they had not yet reached based on chronological age, and each seemed to be in this situation for different reasons. One woman, who was born Jewish but grew up in an unaffiliated family and had few religious experiences or influences as a child, spoke about the bat mitzvah as a "missed opportunity" that she was

correcting by doing her bat mitzvah as an adult. When asked if she felt she had hopes or dreams that had been unmet prior to the bat mitzvah but were resolved after the ceremony, she said, “I absolutely do ... definitely was intrinsically motivated also. I had nobody who pushed me to do this.” She described her life during her adolescence as a time of missed opportunity in terms of her experience of Judaism.

I guess Jewishly, I felt—I had friends in high school, I went to high school and the Jewish population was five out of a thousand kids and they all had made their bat mitzvahs and I didn’t and I might not have, I think that I took it into my—it was something that I absorbed, but because I didn’t feel there was the opportunity to do that I never dwelled on it. And when I got older and my kids were—we afforded them the opportunity to do that, I suppose that I felt that, hey, you know, now it’s my turn. I want to be able to do it too.

The bat mitzvah, for her, was an important opportunity to look at her past, to change what she could about it, and to take steps to address and resolve those issues that were in her power to do so. She saw the bat mitzvah as something she wished she had done as she looked back at her childhood, and decided that she now had the opportunity to pursue bat mitzvah. She had helped her kids have their ceremonies, and now she wanted her own.

Another woman, who had experienced a serious illness prior to deciding to pursue bat mitzvah, said that the bat mitzvah preparation was a “reflective” process, and that “I think I totally understood that it [bat mitzvah] was a culmination of something I had wanted to do for a very long time.” She also spoke of having wished she had gone to religious school as a child. She said that the bat mitzvah experience had also caused her to think more about her life and her place in terms of her religion.



It just made me want to pause and be a little more reflective about things, you know, on a—I can't say a daily basis, but on an intermittent basis to just pause and be a little bit more reflective about things than I was before. From the framework of religion, does that make sense?

She also seemed to be able to put into perspective parts of her relationship with her father. She spoke about him, what she had learned as she was preparing for her bat mitzvah, and how she was integrating what she had learned about Judaism and its role in both her and her father's lives.

I already told you a little bit about my dad, he was rather brilliant, and very, very learned, a very erudite man, and he was very vehemently opposed to organized religion. And one of the things that I came to understand—because I understand a lot about what his philosophies were in life, I got what he didn't like about it. I'm not necessarily say[ing] I agree, but there were some nights I'd come up and I'd say NOW I get what my dad used to be so mad about. Because really, the early development of Judaism was really about developing a societal structure for a nomadic people. And when you take something that's done in a framework that makes sense in this context and you wanna carry it through in the future, when that same context doesn't exist, you're now imposing certain kinds of rigor that doesn't make sense for that society. But it made sense for this society. I guess in a nutshell I really got what he resented about organized religion and organized Judaism. And the rabbi really helped us understand that it was really, you know, a bunch of white guy rabbis making a lot of decisions about what we were all gonna pay attention to a thousand years later as our religion. They got to pick and choose to what we were gonna pay attention to. So the rabbi didn't shield us from the truth about the development of our religion. And I found that to be quite fascinating. I found that at times to be challenging to merge with the spirituality. Because I do believe there is a spiritual element associated with religion, whether it's really spiritual or it's physics we don't get yet, I mean time will tell in the future, but the fact that the basis on which our religion was developed (laughs) had NOTHING to do with spirituality, it had to do with how to control society and how to control people. And that's really pretty interesting.

The third woman who seemed to be dealing with aspects of stage eight indicated that her personal experience of September 11, 2001 heavily influenced her decision to

convert to Judaism and to pursue bat mitzvah. She talked about how she felt God's presence that day, and that, if she was to die while stranded at an airport in another state, she knew it would be okay because she was not alone. A year later, she talked about the importance of September 11 and how it has caused her to think about her life and its trajectory. The opening sentence of her bat mitzvah speech talked about September 11, and as she continued her speech, other issues related to Erikson's eighth stage emerged.

Tuesday, September 11th, 2001, is clearly ensconced in our collective memory as a day that forever changed our world. My small world was also radically altered that day in a way I can never forget.

As I was standing in the Baltimore airport, traveling alone, terrified, I became starkly aware of my aloneness, fully cognizant of the fact that there existed not a single person on earth to turn to for advice. Then it was as if a thunderbolt from the heavens struck me as I suddenly realized that if I were to perish that very instant, that I would not die alone, that God would be with me. Though I have heretofore sensed God's presence, the magnitude of this moment was undeniable.

Remembering September 11<sup>th</sup> brings us respite from our spiritual solitude. We recall in ourselves the desperate human need to find solace in the company of others and in the presence of something larger than the self.

Yes, my study of Judaism had commenced some years before that, having taken introductory courses ... It has been a progressive, slow and deliberate journey which began when I sought to increase my knowledge and awareness of [fiancé's] religion and culminated in my conversion last April.

The vision of the yellow brick road from the Wizard of Oz comes to mind in that although [fiancé] was the one who pointed me on my way, that it was only through my own heart and spirit that the true secret would be revealed to me: I had to learn it myself or it would be meaningless.

This B'nei Mitzvah class has been a richly rewarding experience, confirming in my mind that the decision I made was the correct one. I think I speak for the whole class in expressing the sense of connectedness we have experienced. The class has prompted a great deal of introspection.

The experiences of these three women show that while unexpected life events can cause people to deal with human developmental issues earlier than they might according to theory, sometimes the strength of missed opportunities can do the same. In accordance with Erikson's theory, unresolved life stage crises do resurface throughout life, and because the final stage of the theory includes aspects of all of the previous stages and is a time of seeking integration of these past stages and events within them, women who reflect and assess their life choices and trajectories can find themselves anticipating a life stage they have not yet reached based on chronological age.

The first woman highlighted in this section seemed to be going through some of the reflection about previous life experiences and missed opportunities often experienced by people in Erikson's eighth stage. She helped her children celebrate their bat mitzvahs, thought about how she was the only Jewish child in her high school who had not had a bat mitzvah as a young adult, and wanted to pursue bat mitzvah now in her life. She had always felt Jewish, but had not been exposed to many of the ritual and synagogue experiences that her peers had experienced.

The second woman struggled with life priorities and choices, and reexamined her relationship to her family and her religion after a serious illness. She came to understand her father's view of religion in general and Judaism in particular, and decided to learn more about her religion and make a public statement about its importance in her life through the bat mitzvah. The examination of life choices and priorities, and trying to make sense out of her feelings about herself and her family, are indicative of life review experiences that people in Erikson's eighth stage experience.

The third woman was propelled towards serious consideration of her religious life and choices by the perceived threat of imminent death. She took stock of her life, and decided to embark on a religious learning and experiential path. She made the decision to convert to Judaism, and moved directly from her conversion class into her bat mitzvah preparation. It is unclear whether she would have made the decision to convert and ultimately pursue bat mitzvah if she had not felt God's presence on September 11. However, this historic day seems to have been very influential in her pursuit of Judaism and its rituals and experiences.

#### Proposition 4

This proposition states "Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah as part of seeking a stronger connection to their religious faith and community in times of personal crisis caused by unexpected life events." Erikson talked about unexpected life events sometimes provoking increased religious participation and activity, independent of developmental issues and concerns. There were only two women whose lives seemed to fit this concept, both of whose stories were just reviewed in the discussion of Proposition 3. The middle-aged woman who was seriously ill only briefly mentioned her illness, but it was an important reason for participating in bat mitzvah in her teacher's opinion. When asked why the woman had pursued bat mitzvah, the teacher answered,

S: [name] had been very ill just before I came to the community.

I: And you came in 2001?

S: 2001. Like, you know, one of these they don't really know what was wrong with her and she almost died kind of situations? And when she got better she

definitely—it definitely caused her to reassess and rethink all sorts of things about her life—priorities, career, and I think that the decision to want to do an adult bat mitzvah was part of that aftermath.

From some of the woman's answers given in the discussion of Proposition 3, it can be seen that this woman reevaluated many aspects of her life, including her decision to become more connected to her synagogue and her bnot mitzvah classmates by pursuing bat mitzvah.

The other woman, who had a strong reaction to the events of September 11 and made some changes in her life, did so not because of an actual health crisis or the death of a close family member or friend, but because of her perception that she was in imminent danger. This perception led to her conversion to Judaism, membership in her synagogue, study of Judaism with her fiancé, and eventual bat mitzvah.

There were two other women, both older, who did not seek out bat mitzvah because of an unexpected life event, but who did experience them during their bat mitzvah preparation. One woman was very clear that events in her personal life were disruptive to her bat mitzvah preparation, but she ultimately decided to continue and completed her bat mitzvah. She spoke about these difficulties candidly.

Everything happened during it. We had to move in the middle of all that, and I had to find homecare when I brought him home [husband had a stroke] ... Also, my grandson committed suicide during this time ... It was a terrible..., you know, my personal stuff. But you know, that's life and it's not anything that's not handleable. You just—it's what happens.

This woman also talked about her classmates being supportive of her. She said, "The good thing was the women were so supportive of me and that was wonderful

because they're from all ages and all walks of life.” The other older woman's husband died during her preparation, but she also finished the class and completed her ceremony. She seemed to draw upon her synagogue and especially her classmates as she continued.

Articulating what I had grown to believe as the result of my life experiences, and discovering the aspects of our faith that support and challenge others, have been sources of enlightenment and strength for me over the past fourteen months, especially in the aftermath of the sudden death of my husband. To bond with six wonderful, loving new friends and to achieve a heightened understanding of what it means to be Jewish has been, is, and will be, a special blessing—always.

Both of these women turned to their religious community for comfort and support in times of crisis, and ultimately were able to complete the bat mitzvah process in challenging times of great sorrow.

#### Proposition 5

This proposition states “Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah for currently unidentified reasons unrelated to human development or life crises.” This proposition was exploratory in nature, so that ideas not discovered through review of relevant literature and the personal experience of the researcher might be identified to inform further research efforts regarding adult bat mitzvah.

There were three themes that emerged from the interviews and writing samples as an important reason for middle-aged and older women pursuing adult bat mitzvah. One of the most surprising, yet simple, reasons was the opportunity of the class being offered. Ten of the women remarked on opportunity as a reason for bat mitzvah at some time during their interviews, and seven of these women stated opportunity was at least part of

their reason when asked directly what caused them to pursue bat mitzvah. These women were almost evenly split by age group; all but one of the women born Jewish endorsed opportunity as a reason for bat mitzvah.

A representative response about opportunity was given by one woman who said, “Probably the event [that led to decision to become bat mitzvah] was [rabbi] was offering the classes.” Another woman said, “I read the newsletter at the synagogue that they were gonna be starting and I decided then that I wanted to do it.” One reason why opportunity may be an important deciding factor is that not all synagogues offer adult bat mitzvah regularly. At one synagogue from which women were recruited for this study, the class had only been offered once, the time about which two women in the study were interviewed. In addition, although class length varies by synagogue, classes usually last two years, so that there are large gaps in time between class offerings. Out of all of the synagogues represented in the sample, only two had established, regular adult bat mitzvah classes whose schedules were predictable.

Another reason given for the decision to pursue bat mitzvah was having the time. One older woman had been an educator and school principal, and decided after she retired and had the time to do things, bat mitzvah was one of the things she would like to do. “I felt when I retired, I’d like to do that. And so, when I retired, and got a few other things out of the way, then I did it.” The other older woman who talked about having the time indicated it coincided with opportunity.

The rabbi was starting a new class it was something new and the women had started that I work with on the board were going for it and they--I said to them, you know, I’ve always never taken the time to do it. I have the time now. You

think I'm too old? And they all agreed that it's never too late. And that's what made me do it. Trying to see if I couldn't possibly follow and do it right.

This woman's teacher echoed her need for time. "Why she waited 'til now, that I don't know. [Name] has been in congregations her whole life, maybe she was just too busy—I don't know." Both of these women were retired, and had been very involved in their careers. The educator did not wait long after her retirement to pursue bat mitzvah. The other woman, who was in her seventies when she had her bat mitzvah, was in her congregation's first adult bat mitzvah class. Thus, it seems that time coupled with opportunity were important influences on her decision.

The other unanticipated reason women gave for pursuing bat mitzvah was because of other's encouragement. One middle-aged woman was encouraged by her son, who was beginning preparation for his bar mitzvah. Three other women, two of them older, were encouraged by their teachers or rabbis. One older woman said,

I studied Hebrew with [teacher] and I was really surprised that I did one semester with her and the next semester she put me in the bnei mitzvah class. "How come, you know? Neither one of the others has done it!" Why me? And she said, because I think that you are ready.

Another older woman needed strong encouragement from her teacher because of insecurities about her ability to learn.

Oh, I had to do it, something inside me just wanted me to do it and I would have done it earlier but I have ADD and I had such a problem in school. Although, when I worked, and I worked in a very technical area, I never had a problem with it, but take me out of that situation and oh God, I would get terrified if I had to have a test or whatever. Then [I] sat down with [teacher] and we just talked about



it and she is so remarkable. It was that she convinced me that I could do it. I always wanted to do it you know because I always went to the students' bar mitzvahs and because I loved to see them ... I was scared but I said to [teacher] or [teacher] said it to me actually, that if you can't make it you can't make it, it is no big deal. Which made me, I wanted to please her and show her that her faith in me is right and that I could do it and that's really what carried me on, plus her encouragement because I met with her every other week in the beginning and as it got closer and closer and closer we met every week.

These examples show that others' encouragement could be a strong motivator, and was sometimes needed even when a woman's own desire to pursue bat mitzvah was strong.

Thus, opportunity, time, and the influence of others' encouragement were important reasons for deciding to do bat mitzvah for many of the women. Almost all of the 16 women indicated that one of these three reasons had some influence on their decision.

#### MPD Resolution Scores

The resolution scores of the MPD were examined to see if higher resolution scores were reported on Erikson stages that were identified through the interviews and writing samples as being most prominent in the women's bat mitzvah experiences. If this was found, it might indicate that the bat mitzvah was being used to address stage crises important to the women at that time in their lives as identified through their case studies. The MPD was administered after completion of the bat mitzvah, in some cases as long as 5 years later. Thus, it can be theorized that Erikson stages that were most salient in the case study should show higher MPD resolution scores. To test this theory, the most prominent stages identified through the case studies were compared with the

corresponding MPD resolution score to see if the resolution score was high when compared to the other stage resolution scores for that woman.

The MPD analysis grouped into four clusters: those whose most prominent stages were also their highest MPD scores, those who had mixed congruence with some high and some middle MPD scores, those who had mixed congruence with some high and some low MPD scores, and those whose MPD scores were the lowest.

There were three women whose most prominent stage was also their highest resolution score. One woman had a single prominent stage, and the other two women had two prominent stages. Of those two women, one had the highest score, and the other prominent stage had a middle resolution score. The other woman had two prominent stages, which coincided with her two highest resolution scores. These three women were joined in this cluster by one woman who had congruence on her most prominent stage and high congruence on another. This cluster contained three middle-aged women and one older woman, and represents women who appeared to have been dealing with developmental issues during the time of the bat mitzvah that appear to be resolved in the few years after the bat mitzvah.

The first mixed cluster contained six women, who had some stages with high resolution scores and some in the middle. Four middle-aged and two older women formed this cluster. The second mixed cluster was formed by three older women and one middle-aged woman. All of the women in these two clusters seemed to be successful in resolving some of the developmental issues prominent for them at the time of the bat mitzvah, but other issues were not completely resolved.

The final cluster was a small group of two older women whose MPD resolutions scores were only in the middle to low range for them when compared to the life stages that were prominent for them at the time of the bat mitzvah. These women appear to still be working on the stage crises they were dealing with at the time of the bat mitzvah. One woman completed the MPD about a year and a half after her bat mitzvah, while there was a four year time gap between bat mitzvah and completion of the MPD for the other woman.

Overall, it appears that the middle-aged women seemed to use the bat mitzvah more successfully than the older women to address developmental issues.

### Emergent Themes

#### Bat mitzvah as an aging ritual

One of the main interests of this research was to see if middle-aged and older women viewed the bat mitzvah as an aging ritual. Jewish women are adapting traditional practices and rituals in ways that help them meet their needs, and it is possible that bat mitzvah is an example of this adaptation. However, in the 16 cases collected for this study, only one middle-aged woman thought the bat mitzvah could be considered an aging ritual. However, she did not talk about it as such for herself, but rather for her classmates. When asked to rate on a one to five scale, with five being the highest, how strongly she saw the bat mitzvah as an aging ritual, she said,

I'll say four, yeah, I'd even give that maybe a four-plus, even a five. Because I see that—it was kind of a freeing experience for a lot of the women, I mean not as much personally, but listening to these women talk about the hurdles they had to overcome or couldn't overcome, I guess, as a younger person, and whatever their

age was at the time—be it 35, 40, be it 88, what—there was this sense of great kind of freedom and accomplishment for them to do this.

All other women interviewed gave this question a score of one. However, there was some support for bat mitzvah as an aging ritual from the teacher's interviews. One teacher gave the rating a three for his student, while the older woman gave it a rating of one. Another teacher felt that his student could have viewed the bat mitzvah as an aging ritual if the ritual was considered from a cross-cultural anthropological viewpoint, but not for her personally. This rabbi shared a college interest in anthropology with this middle-aged woman, and he felt that she probably viewed a lot of her religion through an anthropological lens. He said,

Three, I would say. Mostly because—not an aging ritual in a sense as an affirmation of celebration of the elder stages of aging. But more from that whole—cross-cultural anthropological bit. So a part of her own personal maturity and journey and the collective journey of these women. So I don't really know that's a one because it's not about aging, or it's a three because it's this other stuff. Not about celebrating golden age.

Thus, he did not think she saw the bat mitzvah as a celebration or observance of her personal aging. This woman, however, did not talk about the bat mitzvah as an aging ritual in any form.

There is one last example of the bat mitzvah being seen as an aging ritual. The older woman did not endorse this idea, but her rabbi definitely did for her. When asked if his student “viewed the bat mitzvah as an aging ritual,” he said, “I would say five, but if you include the words viewed, I would say two. I knew it was part of a great process to

help put her life in perspective but I don't know she viewed it that way. As an aging ritual. I'll put two and four on that, ok?"

Thus, there are hints that the teachers and rabbis saw how the bat mitzvah could be seen as an aging ritual, at least for some of their students, while the same women almost uniformly rejected the idea. The women seem to view the bat mitzvah as a way to address missed opportunities, identity issues, generativity concerns, or other issues related to concepts in Erikson's theory. It is possible that the teachers and rabbis are observing something that the women are unaware of, but it is also possible that they did not understand their students as well as they thought they did.

Although aging is often viewed as a stage of life associated with retirement, decreased physical abilities, and increasing losses, aging can also be viewed as something that begins at birth and continues until death. Thus, aging can be said to be occurring during all of Erikson's stages of development. It is possible that bat mitzvah can be used as an aging ritual, or rite of passage, from one stage of life to another, depending on how the person involved defines these life stages. Two middle-aged women did speak of the bat mitzvah as a rite of passage for them, although they did not explain the stages of life they felt the bat mitzvah helped them to navigate. One said, "I just thought it was a rite of passage for me, just me personally." Later, when asked if the bat mitzvah could be considered an aging ritual, she seemed to indicate that the bat mitzvah fulfilled a rite of passage role similar to the transition towards more involvement in Jewish life that young adults experience, but she did not consider it an aging ritual. She said, "I would say yes! Even though I was an adult doing it, it wasn't aging, but a rite of passage." Finally, there was one middle-aged woman, who had experienced a serious illness prior to her bat

mitzvah, who rejected the idea of bat mitzvah as a rite of passage for her. “But when you’re doing it as an adult, it was more that—at least for me—it was more the whole religious, spiritual, educational aspect versus a maturity, rites of passage aspect.” This woman did not relate to a transition to adulthood and increased involvement similar to what Jewish youth go through; rather, she seemed to draw on personal religious and educational needs that were fulfilled through her bat mitzvah experience.

Fisher’s Exact Test was performed on the data to see if there were differences in how women viewed the bat mitzvah in terms of its utility as an aging ritual. When the women were divided into age groups (middle-aged and older), no differences between the groups were found. No significant differences were found between the age groups when asked about interest in a Jewish aging ritual, of any type. Breaking the women into two groups based on whether they were born Jewish or had converted did not yield any significant findings related to bat mitzvah as an aging ritual or interest in any type of Jewish aging ritual either.

### Conversion

Ten of the women had converted to Judaism as adults. This represents more than half of the study sample, and was somewhat surprising. It was expected that a majority of the women would be those who had not had the opportunity to have a bat mitzvah as a girl. It is true that those women who converted to Judaism as adults also did not have that opportunity, but the opportunity would have been irrelevant to them at the time. In talking with the women who were born Jewish, several of them indicated that whether they had been given the opportunity to have a bat mitzvah as a youth or not, that they

probably would not have done it because the social atmosphere at the time did not place importance on the ritual for girls.

One of the most interesting findings was that many women viewed the bat mitzvah as the completion of their conversion. Jewish law does not require, nor even recommend, the bat mitzvah in relation to conversion. Three middle-aged and two older women viewed the bat mitzvah as part of their conversion. One older woman said, “Yes, well, you know, being that I had already converted, I decided I wanted it all, wanted to be Jewish 100%.” One middle-aged woman said, “I would say it [decision to pursue bat mitzvah] started back with the con—deciding to convert. It just seemed like a completion. Of the process.” Another middle-aged woman said, “I converted and I’m like, I’m going to stay with this thing because all my good friends were in it. And so it was really just a continuation.” In fact, several of the women said they transitioned directly from their conversion classes into preparation for their bat mitzvahs.

Some of the other women converted for reasons related to their children. One older woman had converted about 30 years prior to her bat mitzvah, when she got married. She chose to do it at that time “because I wanted my children to have one faith growing up. I wanted them to know who they were.” A middle-aged woman talked about her lack of religious involvement in her family growing up, and deciding that she wanted her children to have a clear religious identity. Because her husband was more involved in his religion, she chose to convert to Judaism. She said, “I knew that I wanted to raise my family with some type of stability and raising them in a religious household, be it Christian or Jewish, was important to me.”

There were also two older women who chose to convert to Judaism because of the religion's intellectual appeal. One first became interested in Judaism because her husband was Jewish. But then she continued her interest for personal reasons.

And then I realized once I got into it, how marvelously laid out—I know I just simplified it, I don't mean to simplify it, but there are different levels that you can choose what you study and I noticed there's a certain maturity of study that comes with the more you do. And you look at things and you think, how is this related to what I just read, or there's something there that I need to remember this for. I became more alert ... I'm an academic-oriented person. So this is why Judaism appeals to me. It's because I feel the need to continue to enlarge it and let it ripen and come to fruition, or whatever you want to say, but it needs to go on and there'll never be an end to it.

The other older woman talked about reading as the beginning of her interest in Judaism, eventually leading to her marriage to a Jewish man.

It was evolutionary. The interest started probably long before I met my husband. Having read Michner's book out of curiosity. Then started to read a little bit more about the history of the Jews. You know how you start little by little. And I was invited to a seder, I was the token Gentile, and my husband had been dead about 10-11 months, and I had gone to work and did my grocery shopping, and gone to work and I didn't do anything. And I got this invitation and I didn't know if I really wanted to go. And so I went to this seder, and who is sitting across the table from me but this incredible, incredible man who was—I was just taken by his spirituality and the way he approached this incredible experience. And I was mesmerized.

There were also a few women who felt they had been searching most of their lives for a religious home, and finally found it in Judaism. The older woman who wanted to convert at 18 but did not because she was asking her husband to convert to her current Catholic religion to please her mother is one example. Another example came from a



woman who knew she needed to find her religious identity as early as elementary school. When asked what religious tradition she had been raised, she said,

Methodist. But it always felt, yeah, being Methodist I felt like it was more of a social part and it didn't have that spiritual connection. I didn't buy into it. I mean, in fourth grade I didn't fit. Fourth grade, when I got an award, a little pin for having perfect attendance, I thought, okay, my mom made me come every Monday, or I mean every Wednesday and every Sunday morning, I mean, I was nice, I was appropriate, but I didn't—I just didn't buy the Jesus bit. Something—I didn't, it didn't connect. And I couldn't tell you why, but I just felt like I'm a fraud, I'm sitting in here, they're giving me this award for being a good person.

It is unknown how many women who convert to Judaism continue on to bat mitzvah. But one of the reasons why may be the opportunity for serious Jewish study that can be accessed through preparation for bat mitzvah. For women who come to Judaism without a firm Jewish foundation normally given to children raised in the religion, the intense study of a multi-year program is a good vehicle to fill gaps in knowledge and to learn how to expand one's learning. As several women reported, the bat mitzvah experience showed them how much they did not know, and what they still needed to learn.

Fisher's Exact Test did show a significant difference between women who had converted as compared to those born Jewish when asked whether they had felt they had missed opportunities as a young adult ( $p = .001$ ). Five of six of the women born Jewish felt they had missed opportunities, whereas none of the converts did. There were no differences found between the two groups as related to the bat mitzvah as an aging ritual or interest in a Jewish aging ritual.

## Discussion

### Findings as Interpreted Within Erikson's Theory of Human Development

Erikson's theory of human development is a life-course theory, in which aging occurs through biologic, psychologic, and sociologic processes (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). In order to describe his concept of the life course, Erikson borrowed the idea of epigenesis from embryology. Epigenesis describes the step-wise growth of the fetus, with the understanding that development of body structures occurs in a predictable, ordered sequence. If some influence affects that development, fetal organs or other structures might be permanently affected and unable to achieve maximal form and function. The impediment does not have to result in the death of the fetus, but impeded development affects all further development and the organism will have to invent compensations. Additionally, factors can emerge to cause growth to occur earlier than expected, and this development will also affect sequential growth. This same concept of orderly growth, but from the view of a child rather than a fetus, was an underlying principle of Erikson's theory of human development (Erikson, 1950). Erikson divided development into stages with attendant crises that have to be resolved in order for maximal functioning; failures to completely resolve stage crises influence all subsequent development. In addition, even if crises are successfully resolved, the character of the resolution affects further development. Thus, life stages not only unfold in a specified order, but all stages influence the others.

A person's ability to deal with these biologic, psychologic, and sociologic processes as they occur throughout the life cycle from birth to death greatly influences

how successfully she is able to age. Aging, in various forms, occurs daily, and overlaps with life stage crises that characterize Erikson's theory. Erikson incorporated psychologic and sociologic processes into his theory, and his acknowledgement of the importance of social context in people's lives was one of his most important extensions of Freud's theory of psychosexual development (Erikson, 1977).

The results from this study indicate strong support for the notion that adult Jewish women use the bat mitzvah as a tool for navigating the life stages and accompanying crises of Erikson's theory of human development. The concept of epigenesis, in which human development unfolds in similar patterns for all people with each life stage having a specific, orderly time of origin and the degree of success at each stage influencing all of the others, was very prevalent in these women's bat mitzvah experiences. Epigenesis suggests that unsuccessfully resolved life stage crises become especially important in stages further along in the life span, and that these unsuccessfully resolved issues, along with successfully resolved ones to a lesser extent, resurface within the context of the life stage crisis the woman is currently experiencing. Thus, women who did not have the opportunity for bat mitzvah as a girl sometimes reported feeling that their Jewish identity was not clearly felt, and often reported that identity issues were at least partially resolved through the bat mitzvah experience. The opportunity to develop knowledge and ritual skills increased feelings of competence, and women felt more capable to guide their children or students and to view themselves as sources of knowledge and inspiration to younger people within a Jewish context.

While epigenesis theory suggests that all previous life stages experienced are revisited throughout the developmental course, not all of Erikson's stages were identified

in the conduct of this research as being related to the bat mitzvah experience. The first stage was not present, and only one woman reported one instance of issues related to the second stage arising. However, stages three through six for the middle-aged women and stages three through seven for the older women were often prominent in the writing samples and interviews with the women and their teachers about the women's bat mitzvah experience.

Many of the women talked about being curious about Judaism in general, aspects of and content areas in Jewish knowledge, and about the bat mitzvah experience. They often reported that they felt a strong desire to pursue bat mitzvah, and sought out and embraced whatever opportunities and challenges the bat mitzvah brought them. These are clear examples of stage three influences in the bat mitzvah experience. The sixth stage, that associated with intimacy and relationships with others, was important for several of the women in their bat mitzvah experiences. Some of these women talked about the special bonds they felt with their classmates as they shared an intense learning experience in an atmosphere of open questioning, seeking, and answering that is commonly associated with Jewish learning. These repeated learning interactions reinforced feelings for classmates that were often characterized by the description of a unique bond that this small group of women shared with each other. Some of these women sought out these bonds more than others, as in the cases of women who were experiencing life crises during the bat mitzvah process. These women felt a strong sense of support from their classmates and an acceptance of them and their situations as they went through their bat mitzvah preparation. Other women talked about initial friendships with classmates that contributed to the decision to pursue bat mitzvah and resulted in

even stronger friendship ties. Many women talked about how the bat mitzvah provided them with opportunities to share learning experiences with their children, grandchildren, husbands, and significant others that they had previously not experienced. Several women felt closer to their families and their synagogue communities and became more involved in synagogue activities.

Identity issues, associated with Erikson's fifth stage, seemed to be prominent for many of the women, especially those women who converted to Judaism. The bat mitzvah was sometimes seen as a necessary completion of the conversion process for women to feel truly, completely Jewish. Women who were born Jewish, yet felt deficits in their status as compared to men within a Jewish context, talked about feeling not only more competent as Jews, but also a sense of confidence about who they were. The development of self-confidence sometimes translated into perceptions of authenticity as a Jewish role model as the women engaged in generative tasks.

Perhaps the most prominent epigenetic stage uncovered in this study is the fourth stage, that related to the achievement of competence. Learning, familiarity with Hebrew and the Torah, and the completion of the tasks related to bat mitzvah were recurrent themes in the women's interviews. The emphasis on learning in Judaism, coupled with lack of opportunities and downplaying of the importance of learning for females throughout most of Jewish history (Bletter, 1989; Borts, 1993; Orenstein, 1995; Weiss, 2001), seem to suggest that the prominence of Erikson's fourth stage is not unexpected.

In addition to experiences of previous stages, the women in this study also were dealing with issues consistent with their Erikson stage. The middle-aged women in this study were experiencing Erikson's seventh stage based on age. This stage is highlighted

by the tension between Generativity and Stagnation. Adults at this stage are faced with teaching and guiding the next generation; they are involved with procreativity, productivity, and creativity. Middle adulthood is also a time for self-generation in terms of identity development. Adults seek to develop confidence in guiding the next generation, and must draw on all of the previous strengths developed throughout the life cycle lived up to this point. These strengths can then be used not only for personal development issues, but also aid in the task of generativity. Generativity can also be met by those who do not have children of their own. Many of the middle-aged women spoke about wanting to be leaders, good examples, or good role models for their children, or perhaps for children they taught in religious school. Many teachers also observed this need to demonstrate generativity when interviewed about their middle-aged students. Women who see at least part of their reason for pursuing bat mitzvah as related to generativity made statements about feeling the need to show their kids that they could do it, and that their children were expected to do it too. These women expressed a desire to show their children that they understood the time, effort, and dedication required for a child to prepare for their bar or bat mitzvah. And they wanted to possess the knowledge and skills that would help them teach and learn with their children, and to participate in their child's bar or bat mitzvah ceremony as a full, knowledgeable participant.

Older women who pursued bat mitzvah also seemed to have made the decision for reasons consistent with Erikson's eighth stage, in their search for wisdom and integrity in the face of possible despair. The bat mitzvah provided opportunities to review their lives, to think about life choices, and to decide to either accept them or to try to address these unacceptable life choices (Erikson, 1988). Bat mitzvah became a way to participate in a

ceremony that they were unable to complete as a girl. It also allowed them to correct choices about learning, religious participation, and personal identity issues that they might not be happy with as older adults. Several older women said that their participation in the bat mitzvah preparation and ceremony gave them a greater awareness of the world around them.

While the focus of this research was on the bat mitzvah as a way to deal with developmental issues, there were instances identified where the women were dealing with developmental issues using opportunities other than the bat mitzvah. One middle-aged woman was developing her leadership skills, which can be useful tools for generativity activities, through participation in a Jewish community leadership program. Another woman, who feared public speaking, addressed that issue by participating in Toastmaster's.

In addition, Erikson's theory has some inherent difficulties that may detract from its usefulness in this research. Erikson's original research that formed the basis for his theory of human development was based on his observations of a small group of White boys (Jordan, 1997). Erikson did not report research on different groups of people, including women, as further testing or refinement of his theory. In addition, feminists have taken issue with Erikson's view of women's capabilities and needs, both in terms of their relationships with men and in their own identity (Walter & Peterson, 2002). While Erikson's attitudes were based upon his understanding of the general roles and places of women in society, as these roles have changed over time and women have developed different understandings of themselves and their position in relationship to men, some of the foundation upon which Erikson's theory was based has been questioned. While

Erikson did work in conjunction with his wife, she was unable or unwilling to refine the theory to address these concerns. Finally, Walter and Peterson (2002) also highlight some postmodern concerns about Erikson's theory. Postmodernism rejects the linearity implied in the stage model, and suggests that the life stage crisis polarities are hierarchical in structure. However, in this discussion, no attempt was made to reconcile Erikson's use of the concept of epigenesis with the concern about the linear nature of the theory. Because epigenesis, in Erikson's construction, implies that each stage of the life cycle informs and is affected by all the others throughout the life cycle, to a certain degree the concerns with strict linearity are deflected.

However, it is interesting to note how well the bat mitzvah did work as a developmental vehicle for many women in this study. It is doubtful that the women began the bat mitzvah process aware of the variety of developmental issues they were navigating during the time period from the decision to pursue through the ceremony, but the bat mitzvah seemed to work well in helping these women resolve the stage crises they were experiencing.

#### Interpreting the Findings Within Theories of Aging

Erikson's theory of human development has played an important part in understanding the aging process through biological, psychological, and sociological indicators. A substantial body of literature has addressed theories of aging using all three of these processes. While biological theories of aging do not seem to strongly contribute to an understanding of how middle-aged and older women use bat mitzvah to navigate



their lives, several aging theories that focus on social and psychological aspects of aging provide additional frameworks within which adult bat mitzvah can be examined.

One of the first formal aging theories that attempted to explain the process of growing older is disengagement theory. This theory posits that as people age, their relationships with other people change and are sometimes curtailed or ended, while those relationships that remain are altered in quality (Cumming & Henry, 1961). The reasons why an aging person experiences this distancing from other members of society can be due to her own choice, or caused by society. As this distancing occurs, those relationships that remain are renegotiated. One of the criticisms of this theory is that many older persons do not seem to experience disengagement as they grow older (Brown, 1974; Tallman & Kutner, 1970), and disengagement theory has been largely rejected as an important theory of aging in its original construction.

The middle-aged and older women who participated in this study did not report that their involvement in synagogue activities, leadership roles, educational activities, or Jewish communal activities decreased. In fact, several of the women, from both age groups, reported increased activity in these areas. These activities included both formal, structured activities, as well as more informal interactions with their families, friends, synagogues, and broader communities. Several of the women in this study were president-elects in their synagogues, and a few of them began to teach in local religious schools. In at least two synagogues included in this study, women who completed their bat mitzvahs as part of a class continued to meet with at least some of their classmates. Some of them participated in Jewish women's study groups. Others joined book clubs, and some joined Torah discussion groups. Several women began attending synagogue

prayer services more often, reporting that they felt more comfortable with the structure and content of the service, and that they felt a personal spiritual need to go to services. Other women talked about increased religious participation through home-based activities like hosting Shabbat evening dinners for their family, lighting Shabbat candles, and making time for regular personal Torah study.

These reported behaviors suggest that a companion theory to disengagement theory, that of activity theory, provides a framework to explain these women's experiences. Activity theory emphasizes the importance of continued social involvement (Havighurst, Neugarten, & Tobin, 1968). A woman's concept of self is related to social roles, and continued or added activity in some roles counterbalance the loss of other roles. For example, a woman who retires experiences loss of the worker role, but can at the same time feel like she is making societal contributions through volunteerism or participation in social recreational activities. Activity theory maintains that the substitution of new roles for lost roles is critical to a positive self concept (Tobin & Neugarten, 1961). One of the women in this study clearly substituted a new role for an old one. A dedicated teacher, school principal, and county administrator, she chose to pursue bat mitzvah after she had retired and had the time to engage in the bat mitzvah class. At the same time, she was nominated to be the next president of the congregation. Thus, she was substituting one leadership role, in the area of public education, for that of synagogue leadership.

Continuity theory is another aging theory. This theory suggests that as people age they attempt to maintain both their personal and societal contexts through the use of strategies they have developed over their lives (Atchley, 1982, 1989). Erikson's

explanation of epigenesis suggests that people revisit the same topics and issues as they age. However, unlike continuity theory, which focuses on maintaining contexts, Erikson suggests that past events and experiences are integrated into new experiences, so that the content and quality of personal and social contexts change over time. Erikson's concept of ritualization and re-ritualizations, in which patterns of play-like behavior are repeated over the life span, seems to be similar to aspects of continuity theory. Often, people will use familiar strategies to deal with issues in specific areas of their lives repetitively. For example, a woman who finds comfort in synagogue participation, its accompanying support system, and the familiarity of its religious structure, may turn to her synagogue when dealing with health issues related to aging, just as she might have earlier in her life when dealing with a previous surgery, miscarriage, or other health crisis. However, the nature of that interaction with a familiar source of support may not extend to all aspects of the supportive environment. The bat mitzvah ritual, while a familiar Jewish ritual that evokes the support and love of family, friends, and community, generally occurs only once in a lifetime. Thus, it might be that rituals or participation avenues which occur more frequently, such as lighting candles to mark the death of a loved one, or reciting a prayer for healing as part of a synagogue service, may have a greater supportive impact on an older woman. None of the women in this study talked about the bat mitzvah experience as a continuation of her religious participation. Instead, a few women and several of the teachers talked about the bat mitzvah as a transformative process. However, one woman, whose profession was related to anthropology, did talk about her participation in bat mitzvah as a link in the chain of tradition of the Jewish people. She acknowledged that bar and bat mitzvah rituals have a rich history in Jewish synagogue

and family life, and that her decision to participate in bat mitzvah connected her to generations of Jews who had engaged in this ritual over hundreds of years. For her, continuity theory was not a personal aging framework, but rather explained how she viewed her place within the Jewish people.

One useful aging theory framework in examining why middle-aged and older women pursue bat mitzvah is role theory. The role in which a woman operates throughout her life changes as she ages, and the addition, modification, or subtraction of roles all affect how women move from one stage of life to another (Rosow, 1976). One of the difficulties for older persons, and women in particular, has been the lack of acceptable, positive roles. As women age, they may lose roles related to work, motherhood, marriage, or friendship, for a variety of reasons, including aging, societal influences, and death. This concept of lost roles is one of the major challenges to disengagement theory, because role theory does not support the concept of a natural withdrawal from society with aging. Instead, the loss of functional roles caused societal withdrawal, and the development of new roles could combat disengagement (Brown, 1996).

Moen (1996) views aging within the life-course perspective as a determinant of people's social roles independent of their abilities and choices, and gender affects the trajectories of the transitions through various roles throughout life. She discusses the assignment of roles based on gender, and how society's support for gendered assignment can be a hindrance to women's ability to occupy roles outside societal norms. She also points out that volunteer and other unpaid roles may be ignored by society, and research

has not brought clarity to how these roles are viewed by those who occupy them and the communities in which they live.

### The Role of Women in Jewish Rituals

The rise of liberal feminism in the 1960's, led by Betty Friedan and the National Organization for Women, has led to changes in role genderization. Women have experienced increasing variety, content, and number of roles opened to them. In addition, increasing educational and workforce opportunities have also expanded available roles (Hulbert, 1993; Muller, 1990). Feminists have advocated for equal rights and opportunities for men and women, and believe that political involvement is a critical way to contribute to social, political, and economic spheres. Significant progress has been made in the last fifty years in America, and equality for women in religious spheres is also being achieved.

Jewish women in the United States have experienced tremendous expansion of opportunities. Women are now rabbis and cantors in all 3 main streams of liberal Judaism (Nadell, 1998; Ruether & McLaughlin, 1979; Swartz & Wolfe 1998; Wessinger, 1996) and a few women are exploring the possibility of rabbinic ordination within Orthodoxy (Ner-David, 2000). In fact, women now make up half of all rabbinic students at the Reform movement's Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (S. Bergman, personal communication, July, 2002) and are now celebrating thirty years of women in the rabbinate. Women sit with men in services (De Lange, 1975), lead worship services and prayer, serve in leadership positions within the synagogue and community,

and are finding their place as Jewish scholars and innovators (Adler, 1998). These are all activities that would have been unavailable to most women only a few generations ago.

However, Jewish women's role opportunities and equality experiences vary between various movements within Judaism. Orthodox women, whose lives are lived within a traditional Jewish context, find themselves with opportunities and roles similar to those experienced by Jewish women who lived hundreds of years ago. Orthodox women's main sphere of influence is the family, and their participation in many aspects of synagogue life is limited. However, some Orthodox women, are comfortable with their traditional roles, and feel no need for participating in traditionally male activities, including rituals (Mandell, personal communication, May, 2006).

Learning and knowledge are central values in Judaism, and Jewish knowledge often carries more importance in social standing than profession or wealth (Stehr, 2001). Historically this strong emphasis on learning has been directed mainly to males. Explanations have been offered for learning as a male domain, many centered around the fact that study of Torah can be interpreted as a time-bound *mitzvah*. That is, it is a commandment that must be performed at certain times of the day in order to be accurate. Traditional Jewish views toward education contain the tenet that education is provided in order for the commandments to be performed appropriately (Brayer, 1986). Women, whose traditional role dictated that they ran the household, cared for the children, and served their husbands, were not required to be responsible for time-bound commandments. The rabbis ruled this way because they did not want women to decide between simultaneous commandments to fulfill, such as reciting a certain prayer and needing to attend to a sick child. Thus, women were generally exempt from time-bound

commandments. However, exemption does not equal prohibition (Wolowelsky, 2001). Therefore, women could choose, if society allowed, to study Torah or to perform other commandments. However, generally women were only provided enough education to allow them to perform the commandments for which they were obligated, such as those pertaining to the laws of family purity or observing the Sabbath (Cohen, 1988).

This exemption from time-bound commandments has had far-reaching consequences. Prayer, especially communal prayer in a worship service, is a time-bound commandment from which women were exempt. Women were not allowed to lead prayers or services, were discouraged from attending services (Weiss, 2001), and, because of concerns about men's inability to control their sexual urges, women were not even allowed to sit in the same part of the synagogue as men (Bletter, 1989; Borts, 1993). Women were also disallowed from counting as part a quorum of ten adult Jewish men required for a complete prayer service to be recited, even if not enough men were present to form the minyan (Orenstein, 1994). Thus, women were marginalized from an activity that men participated in three times each day. If women felt moved to prayer they generally offered private prayers, and they were in fact obligated to pray in private (Weiss, 2001).

There have been women, however, who have been educated to a high level and are even cited in the Talmud as offering a valid ruling on legal issues (Brayer, 1986). Some women, often those in high social positions or who had a rabbi as a relative, received more education than their less well-connected peers. These examples from history have been used by modern women and some men to call for an increase in the Jewish education of women (Wolowelsky, 2001) even within traditional communities,

where gender roles are fairly consistent with those of more than a thousand years ago. In fact, some traditional Israeli communities have now encouraged Orthodox women to learn (Simon 2000), and opportunities for older Jews who were unable to receive a quality Jewish education as a youngster are being offered through older adult confirmation classes (Friedman, 1997). These classes are patterned after the confirmation classes offered to teenagers after becoming Bar or Bat Mitzvah. In a confirmation class, Jewish teens learn more about their Jewish heritage and Jewish knowledge and then ritually affirm their commitment to Judaism in a public worship service. The goals of the confirmation class are consistent with the educational needs of some older Jews.

Older adult confirmation classes fit well into the Jewish emphasis on lifelong learning (Goldman, 1975). Although Jewish tradition emphasizes learning at all ages (Kushner, 1993), Judaism has not institutionalized formal learning experiences for Jews beyond school age. Traditional Jews are immersed in daily study through high school age, and they possess the Hebrew skills and other knowledge required to continue personal study or in informal groups. However, assimilation and emphasis on secular knowledge has led adult Jews to the position that they lack the knowledge to study in a self-directed manner. Without a basic Jewish education, many traditional Jewish texts and sources of knowledge are inaccessible. Thus, in need of formal learning experiences, some traditional Jewish institutions have attempted to meet the needs of these older learners by offering formal study opportunities. The adult confirmation class, both a mechanism for formal study and a public display of effort and achievement, fills adult Jews' learning needs.



The encouragement of women's learning and attempts to make Jewish learning experiences more accessible to all Jews among traditional Jewish institutions and communities, however, has been forcefully in practice for decades by Jews outside of traditional communities. Those Jews who consider themselves Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, or other more liberal streams of Judaism experience much more gender equality than in traditional communities.

While this is the history of Jewish women, modern women who do not consider themselves part of a traditional community consider it only history. Women within more liberal streams of Judaism, where the legal ruling of the rabbis (*halakhah*) are not binding, enjoy more equal participation. This equality can only be understood as allowable if one understands the role of *halakhah* in Jewish life and its observance today.

The term "traditional Judaism" is used today to refer to a wide variety of Jewish groups who believe that *halakhah* is binding. These Jews follow laws, which some Jews say do not apply in a modern setting, solely because it is a legal rule that has been accorded acceptance by the Jewish community over a period of time. Additionally, there are no term limits for the observation of *halakhah*. Thus, much of the daily life of traditional Jews is based on legal rulings from rabbis who lived 1800 to 2000 years ago, and modern women can be expected to occupy the same roles her female ancestors did hundreds of years ago.

For example, *halakhah* holds that a child born to a Jewish mother, but a non-Jewish father, is considered a Jew (Talmud Yevamot 45b). However, a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother renders the child a non-Jew. Thus, the mother's status decides the child's. While this may have made sense when the rabbis made this ruling during a

period of history when the mother of a child could definitely be identified but the father was more difficult to be certain about, today we have tools to help determine parentage with greater certainty. The advent of DNA technology has allowed parentage to be accurately determined. Thus, if for the rabbis of old a child who had only one parent (the mother) who was Jewish was considered a full Jew, current DNA technology should be sufficient for identifying a child as Jewish if one parent, of either gender, is Jewish. The original *halakhah* was content with one Jewish parent; since the mother could be proved, she was required to be Jewish. Today, since either parent's parentage can be proved, either parent being Jewish should suffice. However, traditional Jews still require a child's mother to be Jewish for the child to be a Jew. The Reform movement, in recognition of advances in technology, has ruled that patrilineal descent is also acceptable for determining the Jewish status of a child.

The Reform and Reconstructionist Jewish movements do not hold that *halakhah* is binding (Stein, 1998; Telushkin, 1991); their adherents are instructed to use informed choice when deciding how to live as a Jew (Goldstein & Knobel, 1999). The Conservative movement is somewhere in the middle; *halakhah* is not absolutely binding, and can be modified to help the modern Jew live in a non-Jewish world. However, Conservative Jewish women may still experience separation from men, and may find equal participation more difficult (Carmody, 1984). The removal of *halakhah* from the center of Jewish life and laws has created a space for Jewish women to actively participate in public Jewish life.

The Role of Women in Judaism, Aging Rituals, and Conversion Issues Discussed by the  
Participants

The interviews with the women and their teachers who participated in this study reflect liberal Judaism's efforts towards inclusion, equal opportunity, and leadership, educational, and other roles within the synagogue and Jewish community. Several of the women interviewed were either past presidents or president-elects in their synagogue, and many were very involved in their synagogue's religious schools, sisterhoods, mitzvah committees, ritual committees, and other activities. One older woman ran the synagogue's library, and was the official advisor to bar and bat mitzvah students who were planning and completing their mitzvah projects as part of their bar and bat mitzvah preparation. Three of the teachers interviewed were female, and two of them were older women. Although none of the rabbis interviewed in this study was female, there are female rabbis and cantors in the West Central Florida area.

Because of the literature about gender inequality in Judaism and the relatively recent expansion of educational and participation opportunities for women, the women in this study were asked if one of their motivating factors for pursuing bat mitzvah was to attain equality with men in Judaism. None of the women, in either age group, endorsed this concept. In fact, most of the women specifically shared experiences refuting this idea, stating that they had never felt "less" than men, that they could do whatever they wanted in their synagogue, and that they were often more involved in their synagogue than their husbands were. Only one older woman talked about gender inequality, and that was in the context of her youth. She grew up in an Orthodox family, and talked about feeling resentful that she had to sit in a separate section of the synagogue when she

accompanied her father to services, and that she was unable to receive much formal education even though she desired it. She talked about sitting outside the Jewish school where her grandfather taught, listening through the door to the boys' lessons, and learning what she could by rote in that way. This lack of opportunity to learn, especially within the context of a bat mitzvah ceremony, was the main reason this woman pursued bat mitzvah as an adult.

Even though this woman did receive more learning than her female counterparts during her childhood, it was all informal. Inequality is related to power and status, and public demonstrations of learning and knowledge can be very powerful. Erikson's emphasis on the importance of ritualization reinforces this concept, and the lack of opportunity for bat mitzvah as a young adult, for whatever reason, denied the women in this study the opportunity for a public declaration of the skills they did have.

Ritualizations emphasize the social aspects of human development, and occur within the community in which a woman lives her life (Erikson, 1977; Erikson & Erikson, 1997). They are often public demonstrations of how women view their place and status within their communities, and may signal a desire to demonstrate personal growth and to contribute to her society in previously inaccessible ways. The public aspect of the women's bat mitzvah experiences suggests that ritualization played a role in how these women tried to make sense of an often very personal and meaningful experience that simultaneously affected their families, friends, and communities. Middle-aged women saw the bat mitzvah as a public demonstration of their ability to lead the next generation, and older women felt comfortable showing their ability to be a

source of advice and knowledge to others in need. The women's writings often expressed these themes.

One of the themes explored in this study was whether middle-aged or older women used the bat mitzvah as an aging ritual, beyond a tool for developmental issues. Direct questioning about bat mitzvah as an aging ritual revealed almost no support for this proposition. Women certainly did not see the bat mitzvah as a personal aging ritual, and only one middle-aged woman suggested the bat mitzvah could be viewed that way for women older than her. However the teachers and rabbis interviewed were not so consistent in their dismissal of bat mitzvah as an aging ritual. While they were reluctant to state that their students viewed bat mitzvah this way, a few of them did say they could see the bat mitzvah functioning as an aging ritual for their students. The fairly high degree of interest in a Jewish aging ritual voiced by many of the women seems to suggest that middle-aged and older women are looking to Judaism to help them make sense of their experiences of aging.

When asked if they had ever participated in an aging ritual, only a few women had an answer, and then the answer was more of a question. One older woman asked, in a playful way, if the researcher meant taking out her bridge and contact lenses. One middle-aged woman did comment that she had a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party for herself, but wasn't sure if that should be considered an aging ritual. It is possible that the women interviewed in this study had not participated in aging rituals because they were unaware of what aging rituals, and specifically Jewish ones, were available to them. The [ritualwell.org](http://ritualwell.org) website contains a growing list of ceremonies, poems, and other resources to help Jewish women celebrate aspects of aging at many different times in their life.

One poem shares a woman's thoughts about turning 33 and buying a bathing suit while out with her mother and her mother's friends. She wrote of being anxious about her own body at the same time her mother and her friends seemed comfortable in their aging bodies. A ceremony for banishing self-criticisms as one turned 40 and considered the advent of middle-age can also be found among the website's resources. There are also ceremonies for turning 50, 60, and 90, and a poem about turning 80. In addition to these milestone birthdays, there are resources about menopause, grandparenting, retirement, having to move out of one's home, and dealing with physical frailty and health issues.

Although biological aging was not a focus of this study, a few of the women talked about physical aging, and the deaths of loved ones. The rituals available for menopause and sickness through [ritualwell.org](http://ritualwell.org) could help women mark the passage into older adulthood and facing the personal and social losses older people face. Retirement ceremonies can help deal with role loss (Brown, 1996), and hopefully help older women identify substitute roles to assist them in continuing to contribute to their communities in personally meaningful ways. Generativity concerns that are a hallmark of Erikson's seventh stage can be explored and celebrated through grandparenting rituals and ceremonies.

Even those women who did not feel a need for aging rituals in their lives at present suggested that they might when they got older, or felt very comfortable expressing support for an older friend who might want to participate in an aging ritual. This suggests that this group of Jewish women did not perceive the bat mitzvah as a ritual candidate for adaptation or expansion to address aging concerns. The women's openness to Jewish aging rituals in general, coupled with a few of the teachers' views that the bat

mitzvah was functioning as an aging ritual, suggests that the bat mitzvah might be functionally used as an aging ritual, but not perceived that way by participants. Further exploration of interest in, uses of, and reasons for Jewish aging rituals may help clear up this issue. For example, surveys can be constructed to measure the perceived need for and knowledge about Jewish rituals to be used to navigate middle age and old age for Jewish women. Jewish professionals, including rabbis and cantors, can be queried about their knowledge of aging rituals, their use with their congregants, and their openness to adapting existing Jewish rituals and creating new ones to meet the needs of their female congregants who are concerned with aging issues. Participant observations of aging rituals within Jewish communities can provide a detailed picture of women who participate in aging rituals, the environment in which these women live, and how their families and communities respond to these women's needs and experiences.

Conversion was another important theme in this study. Conversion status was not considered when selecting women for the study, but was tracked to see if it might affect women's experiences of bat mitzvah. It appears that regardless of age, women who converted to Judaism were much more likely to see bat mitzvah as a way to address identity issues, which indicate a revisitation of an earlier Erikson stage. In fact, many of the women felt that their conversion was not complete until they had completed their bat mitzvahs. Bat mitzvah is not a requirement of the conversion process, but it evidently addresses identity and competence needs that many converts feel (Diamant, 1997). Anita Diamant says "becoming a Jew is an act of definition and redefinition" (p. 16). It can also be suggested that bar and bat mitzvah is a definition of identity as a Jew in one's

community. Thus, the link between conversion and bat mitzvah, while not formally acknowledged by the Jewish community, may be salient.

The place of bat mitzvah in a convert's Jewish journey seemed to differ for the women in this study. Some women talked of it as a beginning, others as a transition, and many as a completion for them. For example, several of the older women who converted to Judaism saw the bat mitzvah as a beginning. It was a way for them to increase their Jewish knowledge and skills, and it expanded their awareness to the vast amount of Jewish knowledge that was available to them, yet currently untapped (Hendler, 1998). This might indicate that the women were addressing competence issues important in Erikson's fourth stage. While these women may have felt extremely competent in the rest of their lives, the assumption of a new religious identity presented them with the situation of feeling like a novice in their new religion. They may have felt like they knew less about Judaism than many of their peers, and sometimes even less than children and teenagers in their congregations.

Erikson's eighth stage is a search for integrity with the hopeful outcome of wisdom, and knowledge can be seen as a form of wisdom (Telushkin, 1994). Several of the older women talked about feeling a responsibility to other women in terms of assistance, advice, and encouragement in their religious lives; pursuing more Jewish knowledge, using the skills attained through the bat mitzvah preparation process, can be seen as an effort to continue a learning process that began in the bat mitzvah experience. In a similar vein, the bat mitzvah could also be viewed as a continuation of the Jewish learning process that began with studying for conversion (Diamant, 1997). While conversion requires a certain amount of knowledge, specific skills such as reading



Hebrew, performing certain rituals, being able to lead a prayer service, and reading from the Torah are more advanced skills often acquired through preparation for bat mitzvah that are not required for conversion (Epstein, 1994). These more advanced skills often need to be developed before additional areas of Jewish knowledge can be explored.

The development of these advanced skills can signal a woman's readiness to take on new roles and status within their families and communities (Hendler, 1998). Thus, the bat mitzvah becomes a transition for them to new roles (Diamant, 1997). Women who were completing their bat mitzvahs were becoming presidents of their synagogues, becoming religious school teachers, and fulfilling the role of Torah reader for their clergy and congregations. Several women, in both age groups, said that without the skills they learned through preparation for their bat mitzvahs, they would not have felt comfortable taking on these new roles and would have not felt competent leading or teaching others. These generative activities, examples of Erikson's seventh stage concerns, may have been closed to them without the bat mitzvah experience.

Finally, some of the converts viewed the bat mitzvah as a completion of their conversion. Several of the middle-aged and older women described their participation in bat mitzvah as a natural extension of their conversion, and to a certain extent felt it was required for them to be a "true Jew." The bat mitzvah helped them complete their identity transformation from a non-Jew to Jew, which resonates with Erikson's fifth stage. Several of the women were Catholic before their conversions. The importance Catholicism places on rituals may have had an influence on these women's desires to use the bat mitzvah ritual to more firmly identify with Judaism for themselves and their families. They also talked about a feeling of belonging in their synagogue and new

religion that did not exist before the bat mitzvah, even though they had converted. In addition, they talked about connectedness to Judaism and the Jewish people, feelings that the bat mitzvah intensified. These feelings of connectedness can be associated with identity, as well as relationships with others, which resonates with Erikson's sixth stage.

### Methodological Issues

This study was exploratory in nature, and many methodological issues arose throughout the course of the research. This research was retrospective in nature, and relied heavily on interviews about events that may have occurred up to five years earlier in the lives of these women and teachers. Thus, historical recall may have affected the quality and quantity of information gathered. The women's interviews seemed to be rich sources of information, with many examples of specific incidents in their lives. The integrity of the information gathered through these interviews was viewed to be fairly high. However, the writing samples, which were composed very near to the time of the bat mitzvah ceremony, sometimes emphasized different ideas, experiences, and issues than those offered through the interviews. In addition, the women completed the Measures of Psychosocial Development (MPD) questionnaire, providing another source of information. However, it was completed after the interviews, and because it provides a current snapshot of psychosocial development, it can not be considered a reliable source of information about prominent Erikson stages women were experiencing during the bat mitzvah process. However, the MPD resolution scores seemed overall to be fairly consistent with findings from the interviews and writing samples. The women's sources of information provide windows into their experiences at very different times in their

lives, and so some sources seem to provide more accurate information about the time of bat mitzvah in these women's lives than others.

The teacher interviews were conducted to provide another source of information about the women's bat mitzvah experiences, but overall these interviews' contributions to knowledge about the women's bat mitzvah experiences were limited. The teachers' strength as an information source might have been hampered by several factors. Many, if not all, of these teachers had taught multiple classes of adult bat mitzvahs, and some had taught classes in between the bat mitzvah experiences of the women in the study and the date of the interview. Remembering specific, detailed information about the women in their classes seemed to be difficult for some of the teachers, and there were many questions where they either said they did not know, could not remember, or gave very short, general answers without specific detail. Some of the teacher interviews were more detailed, and this could be due to the nature of the teacher's relationship with the woman. If the teacher knew the woman before the bat mitzvah class, and/or maintained a relationship with her after the completion of the bat mitzvah, it seems more likely that the quality of information the teacher could provide would be greater. Similarly, if the teacher was involved in the conversion process of the woman, the teacher may feel more of a personal investment in the woman's Jewish journey and be a better information source. It is also possible that unique issues that arose during the bat mitzvah preparation, such as a serious illness or a life crisis, may have caused the teacher to remember more specific details about that woman's experience and increase the quality of the information gathered through the interview. Thus, a myriad of influences probably

affected the quality of the teacher interviews, making some more valuable than others in this research.

Coding of important words and phrases was an important part of the analysis process. The coding scheme was developed out of knowledge of Erikson's theory of human development and knowledge of Judaism. Because Judaism has its own lexicon, knowledge of Judaism was important to code development. In addition, the researcher's own experience of conversion, participation in adult bat mitzvah, having taught an adult bat mitzvah class, and tutoring of adolescents for their bar and bat mitzvahs contributed to an understanding of not only Judaism, but also the context within which adult bat mitzvah occurs. When the second coder was involved in the process, it was apparent that the researcher's understanding of the personal and social context within which bat mitzvah occurs affected how words and phrases were not only chosen, but to what category they were assigned. For example, the phrase "comfort level" was identified in a number of interviews. Depending on the context of the interview environment, this phrase could be related to Erikson's fourth, fifth, sixth, or seventh stages of development. Women could have been talking about a comfort with their knowledge levels or ritual understanding that would be demonstrative of Erikson's fourth stage, or they might be talking about feeling a sense of belonging and comfort in the context of their Jewish identity, a stage five issue. Some women talked about a comfort level with other congregants and in family relationships with Jewish family members, which is related to Erikson's sixth stage. And some women talked about feeling comfort in their role as an example to their children as a Jewish woman capable of teaching the next generation. These nuances were at times difficult for the second coder to distinguish. Thus, the

coding process was not a straightforward exercise, and required good communication between the two coders. However, the use of a “naïve” second coder was a deliberate choice to assist in clarification and objective coding practices.

Despite the limitations of this study, attempts to safeguard the integrity of coding and data analysis, using convergence of different data sources and a second coder, provided the researcher with confidence in the reported findings of this research.

### Future Directions

This study was an exploratory case study of the experiences of middle-aged and older women who pursued bat mitzvah. Erikson’s theory contributed to an understanding of the ways in which middle-aged and older women use bat mitzvah in their lives. However, this understanding is not complete, and can be greatly expanded. A variety of methodological and conceptual suggestions for future research directions in understanding human developmental issues and women's experiences of bat mitzvah can be identified.

Because bar and bat mitzvah are rites of passage related to Jewish identity, identity issues were expected to be important in this study. In addition, because the women who were being interviewed were middle-aged and older, generativity issues and the search for wisdom and integrity suggested by Erikson to be important for women in these stages, were also expected to be found in this research. Thus, when the interview protocol was developed, emphasis was given to these three Erikson stages. However, as interviews were completed, it became apparent that the information being gathered was richer in terms of data about human developmental issues. Future research that uses an

interview tool similar to the one in this study should be expanded to include questions targeted to all Eriksonian stages. In addition, there were developmental issues and concepts found in other theories that can be used to examine adult bat mitzvah outside the scope of Erikson's theory. Research involving Kohlberg's moral development theory (1984) and Fowler's stage of faith (1981) are two interesting frameworks for further exploration of adult bat mitzvah.

With an expanded instrument, other Erikson stages may arise as having an important part in adult bat mitzvah. Without questions specifically designed for Erikson's fourth stage, a large body of information was gathered that indicated this stage is important in understanding adult bat mitzvah as a human developmental tool. This finding suggests that expansion of the interview could be valuable in future research. In addition, to contribute to the concept of ritualization and the social environment in which adult bat mitzvah occurs, the addition of questions about the content and dynamics of the preparation classes may be important. An understanding of life crises that occurred during the bat mitzvah process was difficult to achieve. Future research interviews might include a module of questions specifically designed to be asked when a life crisis experience is shared. This would allow for more exploration of how religion can be used during times of crisis, and might help discern whether religious experiences during this time are related to the crisis or are part of the developmental processes that are also occurring. One of the findings of this research was that the opportunity of a bat mitzvah class being offered was often one of the reasons for pursuing adult bat mitzvah. This finding was not suggested by current literature nor by personal experience of the researcher, and should be further examined to understand the role of opportunity in rituals

and human development. It is also hoped that the coding scheme developed in this study can be used in future research, modified, and clarified further, to eventually provide content anchors that can assist in more homogenous coding of adult bat mitzvah within the context of human development.

In addition to these concrete examples of future research efforts, more fundamental changes to methodology might be helpful in understanding adult bat mitzvah within the context of human development. One of the methodological issues in this research was the retrospective nature of the information gathered. Research efforts that followed bat mitzvah participants from the beginning of their preparation through the process to the completion of their ceremonies would probably provide a richer data set of immediate experiences and feelings for women who participate in this process. If this method was employed, teacher or rabbi interviews at different points in the process might be more valuable sources of information than those gathered in this study. Women who were followed through their experience could be encouraged to write down their thoughts and experiences, and these diaries or journals would be a rich source of information as well. The MPD could also be administered in a more immediate way than was done in the present study, and possibly a number of times to establish psychosocial developmental patterns and to monitor change over the course of the bat mitzvah process.

More broadly, there are many conceptual suggestions for future research. This study asked about the reasons for bat mitzvah from women who completed their bat mitzvahs. Women who did not complete the process were not interviewed. It is possible that bat mitzvah completers look different as a group when compared to women who discontinued the process. Interviews with non-completers may also contribute to an

understanding of adult bat mitzvah within the context of human development. The research could also be expanded to women of all ages, representing more of Erikson's stages, and could also include men who do bar mitzvah as an adult to look for possible gender differences.

In addition, the lack of clarity surrounding the interaction of adult bat mitzvah and Jewish aging rituals should be examined. A growing body of Jewish aging rituals provide ample opportunity to examine the role of religious aging rituals in human development. An understanding of how existing rituals are adapted and how new rituals are developed to address aging issues may help clarify whether adult bat mitzvah is an aging ritual, at least for some people. While the current research does suggest that adult bat mitzvah is involved in human development, and plays a role in ritualization efforts within a community or society, it is unclear how that ritual role is related to aging.



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## Appendices

## Appendix A

### Glossary

B'nei Mitzvah: Literally, “sons of the mitzvah.” Often used to refer to more than one bar/bat mitzvah celebrant.

Bar Mitzvah: “Son of the commandment,” refers to a Jewish boy who has reached his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. The phrase originally referred to a person responsible for performing the divine commandments of Judaism; it now refers to the occasion when a boy reaches the age of religious majority and responsibility.

Bat Mitzvah: “Daughter of the commandment,” refers to a Jewish girl who has reached her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday. The phrase originally referred to a person responsible for performing the divine commandments of Judaism; it now refers to the occasion when a girl reaches the age of religious majority and responsibility.

Bimah: Location in a synagogue from which worship is led.

B'not Mitzvah: Literally, “daughters of the mitzvah.” Often used to refer to more than one bat mitzvah celebrant.

Cantorial Soloist: A reciter and chanter/singer of liturgical materials in the synagogue.

Cantor: A reciter and chanter/singer of liturgical materials in the synagogue who has received ordination, or formal educational recognition of his or her skills.

Classic Reform: A stream of Reform Judaism that maintains the traditions of the earliest Jewish Reformers. Emphasis is on ethics, and religious symbols like tallit and kippah are not used. Services are styled after Protestant Christian services, with music and decorous behavior.

Confirmation: Ceremony marking completion of religious school courses, often celebrated around one's 16th or 18th birthday.

Conservative: A modern movement in Judaism, reacting to and developing from early Jewish Reform movements in an attempt to retain clearer links to classical Jewish law while at the same time adapting it to modern situations.

D'var Torah: Pronounced “d(e)var Torah”. Literally, “word of Torah.” Speech on enlightening biblical passage or any aspect of religious thought.

Gentile: In pre-Christian times, used to refer to non-Jewish peoples; thereafter, for non-Jewish and non-Christian (roughly synonymous with “pagan”).

## Appendix A (Continued)

Haftarah: Occurs after Torah reading; a reading from Prophets or “historical” books, usually related in content or theme to Torah portion just read.

Halakhah: The legal ruling of the rabbis.

Hasidic: A movement within the Haredi, sometimes referred to as Ultra-Orthodox Judaism, is the most theologically conservative form of Orthodox Judaism.

Havdalah: Ritual that marks the end of Shabbat and the beginning of a new week. Literally, “separation.”

Hebrew Bible: Refers to the Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

Hebrew School: After-school Hebrew classes.

Intersubjective: Communication between two or more subjects.

Kippah: Head covering.

Kvell: Be filled with pride.

Midrash: Any of a group of Jewish commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures compiled between 400CE and 1200CE and based on exegesis, parable, and haggadic legend.

Minyan: A quorum of ten adult Jewish persons required for a complete prayer service to be recited. In all forms of Orthodox Judaism, all members of the quorum must be male.

Mitzvah: Religious commandment.

Mitzvah Project: A project to help the community, often required of bar/bat mitzvah students to teach them to practice ethical principles.

Mourner’s Kaddish: Jewish prayer (in Aramaic) with eschatological focus extolling God's majesty and kingdom recited by mourners during the first eleven months of bereavement and on the anniversary of the death of next-of-kin or others who are being mourned.

Naming: Ceremony that occurs eight days after birth when a baby receives its Hebrew name.

Orthodox: The branch of Judaism that is governed by adherence to the Torah as interpreted and applied in the Mishnah-Talmud and other early Rabbinic writings, later codified in the Shulchan Aruch (“Code of Jewish Law”).

## Appendix A (Continued)

Rabbi: Literally, "teacher," or "Great One." An authorized teacher of the classical Jewish tradition after the fall of the second Temple in 70 CE. The role of the rabbi has changed considerably throughout the centuries. Traditionally, rabbis serve as the legal and spiritual guides of their congregations and communities. The title is conferred after considerable study of traditional Jewish sources. This conferral and its responsibilities is central to the chain of tradition in Judaism.

Rabbinic Ordination: The formal educational conferring of the status of rabbi.

Reconstructionist: Founded by Mordecai M. Kaplan (1881-1982), this movement is a recent development in American Judaism, and attempts to focus on Judaism as a civilization and culture constantly adapting to insure survival in a natural social process.

Reform: Modern movement originating in 18th century Europe that attempts to see Judaism as a rational religion adaptable to modern needs and sensitivities. The ancient traditions and laws are historical relics that need have no binding power over modern Jews.

Rosh Chodesh: The celebration of the new month.

Scroll: Any roll of parchment that contains writings. The Torah is one such scroll.

Seder: Passover ceremonial meal. Literally, "order," refers to program of prayers and rituals for the home celebration of the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt.

Shabbat: The seventh day of the week, recalling the completion of the creation and the Exodus from Egypt. It is a day symbolic of new beginnings and one dedicated to God, a day of rest.

Shabbat Candles: Candles lit to mark the beginning of the Shabbat holiday. This is a mitzvah traditionally performed by Jewish women.

Synagogue: The central institution of Jewish communal worship and study since the late Second Temple Era of antiquity, and by extension, a term used for the place of gathering. The structure of such buildings has changed, though in all cases the ark containing the Torah scrolls faces the ancient Temple site in Jerusalem.

Tallis / Tallit: Prayer shawl. A large, four-cornered shawl with fringes and special knots at the extremities, worn during Jewish morning prayers. The fringes remind the worshiper of God's commandments.

Talmud: Literally, "study" or "learning." Rabbinic Judaism produced two Talmuds: the one known as "Babylonian" is the most famous in the western world, and was completed around the fifth century CE; the other, known as the "Palestinian" or "Jerusalem" Talmud,

## Appendix A (Continued)

was edited perhaps in the early fourth century CE. Both have as their common core the Mishnah collection of the first important group of rabbis in Jewish tradition, to which are added commentary and discussion by later rabbis. They are referred to as Mishnah-Talmud.

Time-bound Mitzvah: A commandment that must be performed at certain times of the day in order to be accurate.

Torah: The written Jewish law. In general, Torah refers to study of the whole gamut of Jewish tradition or to some aspect thereof. In its special sense, "the Torah" refers to the "five books of Moses" in the Hebrew scriptures.

Torah Portion: Refers to the weekly amount of Torah read in the synagogue. The Torah is divided up into portions so that the entire Torah can be read yearly.

Yeshivah: Talmudic school, in which Orthodox Jews study. It can be a day school for children or a seminary for adults. Some Jewish men spend their entire lives attending a yeshivah.

The Experience of Bat Mitzvah  
within the Framework of  
Erikson's Theory of Human  
Development

PROTOCOL

# Woman Interview

## Demographics

Read aloud: *Let's begin with some basic information about yourself.*

D1. What was your age when you became Bat Mitzvah?

D4. What kind of work do you do?

D2. Are you married, or do you have a partner?

D3. Any children? How many? How about grandchildren?

**Demographics Page 1**



## Synagogue Demographics

Read aloud: *Let' now talk about your synagogue.*

SD1. Which synagogue do you attend?

SD4. If not, in which synagogue did you have your bat mitzvah?

SD2. With what movement is this synagogue affiliated?

SD5. If not, with what movement is this synagogue affiliated?

SD3. Is this the same synagogue in which you had your adult bat mitzvah? (if yes, skip to next section)

## **Bat Mitzvah Experience**

Read aloud: *Let's talk about your bat mitzvah.*

BM1. When did you have your bat mitzvah?

BM4. Did your decision to become Bat Mitzvah present for you any difficulties or reservations?

BM2. How did your decision to become Bat Mitzvah evolve?

BM5. How did you feel during the ceremony and after?

BM3. Was there a specific event that may have led to your decision?

BM6. Did the Bat Mitzvah experience renew memories of previous Jewish events or experiences?

**Bat Mitzvah Experience Page 3**

## **Bat Mitzvah Experience**

BM7. Do you feel you have, as a result of your Bat Mitzvah, fulfilled hopes or dreams that were previously unmet?

BM8. Do you feel like you “belong” more in your synagogue? Your family?

BM9. Do you think your religious faith has increased as a result of your Bat Mitzvah?

BM10. Do you feel you have acquired more Jewish knowledge through the Bat Mitzvah experience?

BM11. Has how you relate to the larger world around you changed as a result of your Bat Mitzvah?

BM12. Did your Bat Mitzvah provide meaning to your life? How?

# Family

Read aloud: *Now let's talk about family issues.*

F1. In what movement of Judaism were you raised?

F2. Please describe your parents' religious beliefs.

F3. Please describe your parents' religious practices.

F4. Please describe other important family member's religious beliefs.

F5. Please describe other important family member's religious practices.

F6. Do you feel you had missed opportunities or experiences in childhood or young adulthood? Jewishly?

## **Family**

F7. Do you feel you are better able to assist in your child(ren)'s or grandchild(ren)'s Jewish education as a result of your becoming Bat Mitzvah?

**Family Page 6**

## Synagogue

Read aloud: *Let's talk about synagogue issues*

S1. Have you become more or less active in your synagogue and the Jewish community as a result of your Bat Mitzvah?

S2. Has your level of synagogue leadership activities changed since becoming Bat Mitzvah?

S3. Has your synagogue service attendance or ritual participation changed since your bat mitzvah?

S4. Has your level of synagogue educational activities changed since becoming Bat Mitzvah?

# Community

Read aloud: *Now let's talk about the larger Jewish community.*

C1. Has your level of Jewish community involvement changed since becoming Bat Mitzvah?

C2. Do you think young people in your family or synagogue community look up to you as an example to follow?

**Personal Spirituality & Developmental Issues**

Read aloud: *Let's talk about your personal experience.*

PS1. Did you convert to Judaism? Why?

PS2. Were you given the opportunity to participate in a Bat Mitzvah ritual as an adolescent? Tell me about that time in your life.

PS3. Do you think the bat mitzvah process brought about any changes in yourself in any way? How?

PS4. Do you feel your bat mitzvah helped bring focus or direction to your religious life?

PS5. Did your bat mitzvah have any effect upon your feelings about your knowledge as a Jew?

PS6. Did your bat mitzvah have any effect on your feelings about yourself as a Jewish woman?



**Personal Spirituality & Developmental Issues**

Read aloud: *Let's talk about your personal experience.*

PS7. Were there any other changes brought about by your bat mitzvah that I haven't asked about?

PS8. In general, do you focus on the present, or do you find yourself looking back at previous times in your life?

## **Aging & Aging Issues**

Read aloud: *Finally, let's talk about some issues related to aging.*

A1. Does your age affect the way family, friends, or the synagogue community view you?

A2. Have you ever participated in any type of aging ritual?

A3. Have you heard about the ritual of Simkhat Khokhmah (Celebration of Wisdom)? Would you participate in this ritual if it was made available for you?

**Aging & Aging Issues Page 11**

# Answers for the Thoughts & Feelings Section

- 1—Not at all
- 2—A little
- 3—Somewhat
- 4—Quite a Bit
- 5—Very much

## Thoughts & Feelings

Read aloud: *On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much you agree with the statement*

TF1. I have turned to a ceremony or ritual at a time of life transition, or when I might have been dealing with a sense of loss or change. Explain.

TF4. I experienced positive emotions at the accomplishment of becoming bat mitzvah.

TF2. I have turned to a ceremony or ritual when I have some concerns or dissatisfaction with my identity—with how I live my life and who I am to myself—and I may use a ritual to effect change in my sense of who I am.

TF5. My relationships with family members and friends changed as a result of becoming bat mitzvah.

TF3. I chose to become bat mitzvah as a result of wanting equal participation with men within Judaism.

TF6. Becoming bat mitzvah brought about some changes in my place or status within my synagogue.

**Thoughts & Feelings** Read aloud: *On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much you agree with the statement*

TF7. Becoming bat mitzvah brought about some changes in my place or status within the Jewish community.

TF10. I experienced gratification at making a commitment to keeping Judaism alive for future generations as a result of becoming bat mitzvah.

TF8. I experienced positive emotions about feeling a connectedness to Jewish traditions and the Jewish people as a result of becoming bat mitzvah.

TF11. I view the bat mitzvah as an aging ritual, marking the passage into “elder” status in the synagogue.

TF9. I have grown personally/psychologically as a result of becoming bat mitzvah.

**Thoughts & Feelings Page 13**

# Teacher Interview

## **Bat Mitzvah Experience**

Read aloud: *Let's talk about your bat mitzvah.*

BM1. Did your student talk about her decision to become bat mitzvah? Did she say how that decision came about?

BM2. Did your student say there was a specific event that may have led to her decision?

BM3. Do you know of any difficulties or reservations your student faced because of her decision to become bat mitzvah?

BM4. Did your student talk about how she felt either during the ceremony or afterwards?

BM5. Did your student talk about her bat mitzvah experience bringing up memories of previous Jewish events or experiences?

BM6. Do you think your student's religious faith has increased as a result of her bat mitzvah?

**Bat Mitzvah Experience Page 14**

## **Bat Mitzvah Experience**

BM7. Do you think your student has acquired more Jewish knowledge through the bat mitzvah experience?

BM8. Do you think that your student has changed as to how she relates to the larger world around her as a result of her bat mitzvah?

**Bat Mitzvah Experience Page 15**



## **Family**

Read aloud: *Now let's talk about family issues.*

F1. Did your student talk about her parents' religious beliefs?

F4. Did your student talk about other important family members' religious practices?

F2. Did your student talk about her parents' religious practices?

F5. Did your student indicate whether she felt she had missed opportunities or experiences in childhood or young adulthood? How about missed Jewish opportunities or experiences?

F3. Did your student talk about other important family members' religious beliefs?

F6. Do you think your student is better able to assist her child(ren)'s or grandchild(ren)'s Jewish education as a result of her becoming bat mitzvah?

**Family Page 16**

## Synagogue

Read aloud: *Let's talk about synagogue issues*

S1. Has your student become more or less active in the synagogue and the Jewish community as a result of her bat mitzvah?

S4. Has your student's level of synagogue educational activities changed since becoming bat mitzvah?

S2. Has your student's level of synagogue leadership activities changed since becoming bat mitzvah?

S3. Has your student's synagogue service attendance or ritual participation changed since her bat mitzvah?

**Synagogue Page 17**

## **Community**

Read aloud: *Now let's talk about the larger Jewish community.*

C1. Has your student's level of Jewish community involvement changed since her Bat Mitzvah?

C2. Do you think young people in her family or synagogue community look up to her as an example to follow?

**Personal Spirituality & Developmental Issues**

Read aloud: *Let's talk about your personal experience.*

PS1. Do you think the bat mitzvah process brought about any changes in your student in any way? How?

PS2. Were there any other changes brought about by your bat mitzvah that I haven't asked about?

## **Aging & Aging Issues**

Read aloud: *Finally, let's talk about some issues related to aging.*

A1. Does her age affect the way family, friends, or the synagogue community view your student?

A2. Have you heard about the ritual of Simkhat Khokhmah (Celebration of Wisdom)? Do you think your student would participate in this ritual if it was made available to her?

**Thoughts & Feelings** Read aloud: *On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much you agree with the statement*

TF1. My student turned to a ceremony or ritual at a time of life transition, or when she might have been dealing with a sense of loss or change. Explain.

TF4. My student experienced positive emotions at the accomplishment of becoming bat mitzvah.

TF2. My student turned to a ceremony or ritual when she have some concerns or dissatisfaction with her identity—with how she lives her life and who she is to herself—and she may use a ritual to effect change in her sense of who she is.

TF5. My student's relationships with family members and friends changed as a result of becoming bat mitzvah.

TF3. My student chose to become bat mitzvah as a result of wanting equal participation with men within Judaism.

TF6. Becoming bat mitzvah brought about some changes in my student's place or status within the synagogue.

**Thoughts & Feelings Page 21**

## Thoughts & Feelings

Read aloud: *On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much you agree with the statement*

TF7. Becoming bat mitzvah brought about some changes in my student's place or status within the Jewish community.

TF8. My student experienced positive emotions about feeling a connectedness to Jewish traditions and the Jewish people as a result of becoming bat mitzvah.

TF9. My student has grown personally/psychologically as a result of becoming bat mitzvah.

TF10. My student experienced gratification at making a commitment to keeping Judaism alive for future generations as a result of becoming bat mitzvah.

TF11. My student viewed the bat mitzvah as an aging ritual, marking the passage into "elder" status in the synagogue.

**Thoughts & Feelings Page 22**

# Document Review



# Document Review

Number of Documents: \_\_\_\_\_

Types of Documents: \_\_\_\_\_

DR1. Information about decisions for becoming Bat Mitzvah.

DR4. Interactions with synagogue.

DR2. Issues of identity.

DR5. Interactions with Jewish community.

DR3. Interactions with family.

DR6. Information about performance of rituals or religious practices.

# Document Review

DR7. Evidence of education or teaching activities.

DR8. Evidence of synagogue leadership.

# General Information from Woman Interview

# General Information

- Age (D1) \_\_\_\_\_
- Marital Status (D2) \_\_\_\_\_
- Children (D3) \_\_\_\_\_
- Occupation (D5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Affiliated Synagogue (SD1) \_\_\_\_\_
- Synagogue Movement (SD2) \_\_\_\_\_
- Bat Mitzvah Synagogue (SD3-5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Bat Mitzvah Date (BM1) \_\_\_\_\_
- Conversion to Judaism (PS1) \_\_\_\_\_
- Opportunity for Bat Mitzvah (PS2) \_\_\_\_\_

# Summative Questions







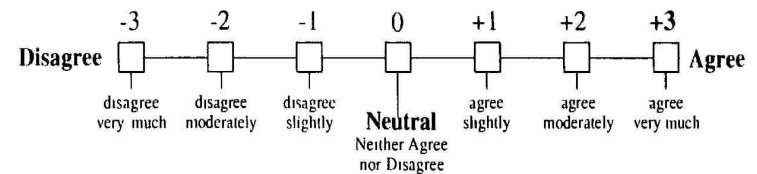




## Summative Questions

**Proposition 5:** Adult Jewish women participate in bat mitzvah for currently unidentified reasons unrelated to human development or life crises.

Check Most Appropriate on Scale Below



### Protocol Index

All questions in the woman interview, teacher interview, and document review

**Explain Rating Below:**

Appendix C

List of Codes

**P1 7**

bat mitzvah with child  
child encouraged  
childs BM  
childs education  
community involvement  
didnt happen  
effective Jewish parent  
encourage others  
expectation  
foundation  
getting child connected  
give to child  
good example  
help child  
hypocrite  
inspired others  
knowledge  
leader  
look up  
mentor  
not assist  
religious home  
respect  
role model  
share experience  
skills  
stepping up to the plate  
talk the language  
teach  
understand  
volunteering

**P1 7 NEG**

didnt happen  
not assist  
not role model for people  
OWMN  
personal

Appendix C (Continued)

**P1 8**

able to do things  
awareness to larger picture  
BM as aging ritual  
correcting past choices  
done it  
dont take it anymore  
dream  
feeling to Israel  
happy with life choices  
living life Jewishly  
look back  
losses  
missed experiences  
no bat mitzvah  
perspective  
proud to be jewish  
regret  
role in Jewish community  
searching for meaning  
searching for resolution  
wish employed

**P1 9**

**P2 1**

**P2 2**

wanted to please

**P2 3**

**P2 3 NEG**

accomplishment  
curious  
did it  
direction  
discipline  
dragged myself  
focus  
frightened  
glad accomplished  
great experience  
passed a test

focused before

Appendix C (Continued)

pleased happy  
proud  
relieved  
reward to self  
satisfaction  
seal of approval  
surprised  
wanted to do it  
worry  
passed a test  
pleased happy  
proud  
relieved  
reward to self  
satisfaction  
seal of approval  
surprised  
wanted to do it  
worry

**P2 4**

achieved goal  
affirmation of learning  
classes  
comfort level  
confidence  
disappointment  
educational  
graduated  
Hebrew  
inadequacy  
knowledge of Judaism  
knowledge of rituals  
learning  
power  
public speaking  
qualified  
reading  
something official  
stupid  
Torah  
understanding

**P2 4 NEG**

goals not met  
knowledge of rituals  
NEG OWMN

Appendix C (Continued)

**P2 5**

Authenticity  
being at home  
belonging  
close to Torah  
comfort  
commitment  
complete  
connection to God  
connection to Israel  
connection to Judaism  
convert  
customs  
family ties  
Gods presence  
identity  
identity as woman  
introspection  
Jewish growth  
journey  
kippah  
legitimacy  
meaningful  
membership  
more Jewish  
religious  
right  
rite of passage  
ritual  
searching  
spiritual  
tallit  
touched her  
traditions  
transformational experience  
ownership  
pride  
relationship with God

**P2 5 NEG**

belonged  
dont feel different  
not connected  
not Gods presence  
not heart and soul  
not religious  
not rite of passage  
not spiritual

**P2 6**

bond  
camaraderie

**P2 6 NEG**

husband better  
no chatting

Appendix C (Continued)

closer to rabbi  
comfort level comfortable  
commitment  
connection  
distanced from others  
family  
felt left out  
feminist  
got husband involved  
husband learned with  
involved  
Jewish friends  
member of a club  
relationships  
respect  
share with other Jews  
social  
sought community  
spending time with group  
supportive

not improve relationship  
personal

**P2 7**

**P2 7 NEG**

encourage others to study  
example  
grandchilds BM  
help  
help grandchildren  
inspired  
look for leadership  
look up  
outreach  
role model  
understanding  
volunteering

already involved  
didnt happen  
not teach  
OWMN

**P2 8**

**P3 8**

**P3 8 NEG**

awareness to larger picture  
culmination  
introspection  
living life Jewishly

OWMN

Appendix C (Continued)

missed opportunities  
reassess  
reflective

**P3 9**

**P3 9 NEG**

**P4**

OWMN

ill  
life crisis

**P5 NEW**

had the time now  
opportunity  
teacher said ready



## About the Author

Keren S. Vergon received a Bachelor's Degree in Gerontology with a minor in Music from the University of South Florida in 1996. Upon graduation, she began the Ph.D. in Aging Studies at the University of South Florida, working at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute on a variety of research projects in aging and children's mental health.

While in the Ph.D. program at the University of South Florida, Ms. Vergon became very involved in a local synagogue, performing teaching and mentoring roles for youth and adults. She has also coauthored a book, *Aging with HIV: Psychological, Social, and Health Issues*, two book chapters, several journal articles, and made several paper presentations at a variety of aging and children's mental health conferences.