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How Parents Use Television to Enrich Their Children's Cultural Identity: The Case Study of Shalom Sesame and Jewish Life

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HOW PARENTS USE TELEVISION TO ENRICH THEIR CHILDREN'S CULTURAL
IDENTITY: THE CASE STUDY OF *SHALOM SESAME* AND JEWISH LIFE

by

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B.A., Barat College, 1980

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts, Media Theory and Research.

Department of Mass Communications and Media Arts
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
December, 2012

THESIS APPROVAL

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Master of Arts
in the field of Media Theory and Research

Approved by:

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August 8, 2012

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Elizabeth M. Spezia, for the Master of Arts degree in Media Theory and Research, presented on August 8, 2012, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: HOW PARENTS USE TELEVISION TO ENRICH THEIR CHILDREN'S CULTURAL IDENTITY: THE CASE STUDY OF *SHALOM SESAME* AND JEWISH LIFE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Dafna Lemish

A small-scale ethnographic case study of young children's learning from television in southern Illinois provides understanding about the frameworks used for interpreting media use in family life. The research consisted of in-home interviews about patterns of using the media, observations, and family diaries of children's viewing behavior to examine family engagement with a prosocial television program, *Shalom Sesame*, depicting Jewish culture, Hebrew language, holidays, and the land of Israel. Family responses to the program are identified in terms of appeal, use, and overall fit with Jewish identity and tradition in the homes. Data analysis reveals that quality educational program features of *Shalom Sesame* such as repetition, role models, humor, on screen textual cues, and follow-up activities in the home support learning. The case study concludes that *Shalom Sesame* helps connect families with young children, especially those who are isolated from other members of their minority, to the larger community of diverse Jewish people and culture around the globe.

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“You know, although a mitzvah is not always easy, there is no such thing as a mitzvah impossible.”

-- Grover, in *Shalom Sesame*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Although television is ubiquitous in US homes, family interactions with television are not fully understood. Many studies (Buckingham, 1993; Fisch, 2004; Lull, 1980; Schramm, Lyle & Parker, 1961; Steyer, 2002; others) challenge our assumptions about both the benefits and drawbacks of television in family life, but most researchers agree that the impact of television in family life is significant. Generations have grown up with television. Television is present daily throughout our lives. For many children, whose ways of living are taught first in the home by those who love and educate them, television viewing imparts the influence of another parent (Steyer, 2002). Ernest L. Boyer suggests that “next to parents, television is the child’s most influential teacher” (Boyer, 1991, p. 140). Families spend much time with television, sometimes watching together and sometimes not, but this need not be considered as wasted time (Kirkorian & Anderson, 2008). Among other things, television time can be a source of social interaction and learning. “Children watch television as part of their social existence” (Hodge & Tripp, 1986, p. 8). This makes the study of television and its relationship to children and family life a viable and interesting pursuit with important social dimensions.

Media literacy theory places children at the center, actively constructing their worlds and creating meaning from their television viewing (Lemish, 1997). Experts in the social sciences suggest screen media such as television play the role of a partner in children’s learning (Richert, Robb and Smith, 2011). Children’s responses to television include formation of social concepts. According to Bandura, “Television viewers acquire lasting attitudes, emotional reactions, and behavioral proclivities towards persons,

places, or things that have been associated with modeled emotional experiences” (cited in Baran and Davis, 2006, p. 201). From the first encounter and throughout their lives, the human “response to television is typically a complex cognitive act” (Hodge and Tripp, 1986, p. 3). What children get from their interaction with television, what meaning they construct with it, “refers to the results of immensely complex operations that take place out of view, inside minds, sometimes outside of consciousness” (Hodge and Tripp, 1986, p. 5).

Children’s meaning-making from television is indeed a challenging process for study. Qualitative methods including observations and interviews are valuable in researching the dynamic act of television viewing (Lemish, 2007). Researchers use these techniques, focus groups, and creative methods such as storytelling and drawing in which children participate directly (Greene and Hogan, 2005). Good qualitative study design and analysis acknowledges that children’s viewing habits are integrated with family patterns of media use as well as a child’s personal choice of programs (Lemish, 2007). Study design often considers how television viewing impacts family interaction both directly, through primary exposure, as well as indirectly, when families are not watching it, through ongoing communication (Alexander, 1994). Everyday television viewing patterns are “best analyzed as an interaction not only of individual, contextual, and social characteristics, but also of more general understanding of media as culturally situated” (Lemish, 2007, p. 12). A growing number of researchers have come to support audience studies, considering social and cultural contexts when evaluating and researching media and children. (Hoover and Clark, 2008).

Understanding positive and negative aspects of television and its relationship to children and their development requires insight into the frameworks used for interpreting media use in family life. Although the negative impact of television on children is demonstrated widely, there is much less research on how television influences positive social behaviors “such as cooperation, sharing, empathy, and valuing others” (Fisch and Truglio, 2001, p. 91). The study presented here is an example of how educational television is used by parents to connect children with their Jewish cultural identity.

This thesis presents results of a small-scale ethnographic study of children’s learning from television. This study complements a three-part summative research project conducted for Sesame Workshop by MediaKidz Research and Consulting. The project evaluates the educational impact of a children’s television program series created by Sesame Workshop and known as *Shalom Sesame*. In the US, *Shalom Sesame* is designed to promote familiarity and understanding of Jewish culture among Jewish affiliated families. This ethnographic study yields understanding of the use and context of *Shalom Sesame* in family homes. It consists of interviews with seven Jewish families in southern Illinois about their patterns of using the DVDs, observations in their homes, and family diaries of children’s viewing behavior.

From this case study it is possible to glimpse the role of Jewish culture and identity in family life. The case study identifies responses to *Shalom Sesame* and what value the families assign to the program. It includes an assessment of how viewing *Shalom Sesame* contributes to engaging in Jewish practices and how families perceive the significance of the series to their Jewish lifestyle. The case study contributes to a better understanding of contemporary globalization and multiculturalism by offering

insight into how educational television programs can be applied effectively to help families with young children negotiate their cultural and religious identity.

Jewish words and phrases used in this document are explained here. Bar Mitzvah is a ceremonial rite for boys when they reach the age of 13. Bat Mitzvah is a ceremonial rite for girls when they reach the age of 12. Dreidel is a four sided spinning top, a toy played with during the Jewish holiday of Hanukah. Hamantaschen is a triangular fruit-filled cookie made during Purim. Hanukah is an eight-day festival of lights celebrating the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem after it was defiled. Latke is a potato pancake. Menorah is a nine-branched candelabrum used in the home during Hanukah. Mitzvah is a commandment, a good deed. Purim is a celebration of the rescue of Jews from extermination. Passover Seder is the family home ritual conducted in observance of the Passover holiday, which commemorates the Jewish exodus from Egypt. Rosh Hashana is the new year in the Jewish calendar. Shabbat is Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. Shalom is a Hebrew word meaning hello, peace, goodbye. Shavuot is a festival celebrating the gift of the Torah and the harvest. Tzedakah means charity. Torah refers to Jewish teachings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

What do we know about how young children learn; and in particular, what do they learn from television? Social scientists favor ethnographic approaches to cultural discovery, which support observation of children in their natural setting as they view television (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007). Studies related to children's television content and research on children as an audience provide information about the relationships between children and television. As an audience, children engage in interpreting what they see and hear on television. Children participate in making meaning from television programs. Children imagine, evaluate, and reconstruct meaning in "ongoing dialogue with unfolding situations" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, 966) in their family life, among other contexts. According to Alexander (1994), through human interaction, especially adult mediation, children learn about program content, comprehend and remember educational material on television. Adult mediation contributes to the social context for television viewing. Habit, imagination, and judgment influence families' responses to television. Through social interaction and communication, they organize contexts for learning.

Family Television Viewing

The active theory of television viewing suggests that an understanding of television content comes from using interpretational skills to comprehend its forms and conventions (Baran and Davis, 2006). Much research on television in family life is focused on time actually spent viewing television, but relatively little research addresses the impact of "background" television, where the television is turned on but family

members' attention changes according to what is broadcast (Vandewater, Bickham, Lee, Cummings, Wartella, and Rideout, 2005). Their frame of reference and action is selective, just as their attention to television is selective. Families make use of television as foreground and as background to their lived experiences. Foreground viewing refers to times when children are paying close attention to the screen. Background viewing refers to times when the television is on but children are only exposed incidentally; they are not paying much attention to it as they are engaged in other activities. Often families do other things in addition to watching television.

Studies show that attention to television consists of frequent quick looks and a few lengthy gazes at the screen (Kirkorian and Anderson, 2008). Research points to engaging content as the most important factor in getting and keeping children's attention to television programs (Kirkorian and Anderson, 2008). Television competes for children's attention even beyond actual screen time; for example, they may talk about what they have seen or what they want to watch. Television impacts family interaction even when members are separated from it, because family communication occurs in contexts beyond the television (Alexander, 1994). Because these "extratextual" communications influence family interaction, research approaches sometimes include discussions of media or content outside the act of watching television (Alexander, 1994, p. 55).

How Young Children Understand Television

Several developmental theories have been applied to children's understanding of the world around them. Theorists from around the world have argued for their concepts of children and childhood; including: Ariès' view of childhood as a separate, socially

constructed product of Western thought; Piaget's work in cognitive development; Mead's characterization of the self and the generalized other; Vygotsky's understanding of play; Bronfenbrenner's description of nested ecological systems; Freud's notions of dreams, memories, and the unconscious mind; Kohlberg's insights into moral development, and others.

Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner takes our understanding of child development in another direction (Gardner, 1983). Gardner explains that children can be at different stages in various aspects of their development simultaneously -- a concept known as multiple intelligences. Gardner defines intelligence as the ability to process information in order to solve problems or create products of value in a culture. Intelligence is developed and expressed among humans beyond the obvious capabilities in logic, mathematics, and linguistics. Gardner adds abilities in spatial, musical, kinesthetic, intra- and inter-personal, and naturalistic understanding to the list of human behaviors that constitute intelligence. Further, Gardner has proposed adding existential and moral intelligences to the theory. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences has been applied liberally in early childhood educational settings. The theory is practical and compelling for educators, because recognizing multiple intelligences or learning styles supports many ways of teaching. The idea of multiple intelligences also suggests that diverse learners can succeed through educational approaches that are sensitive to their different cultures. This theory and studies of how children learn from educational programs provide ample rationale for applying skillful and creative use of interactive television conventions, such as sing-alongs or actors

directly talking to the screen. Productions using these kinds of design elements can result in programs that appeal to one or more of youngsters' developing intelligences.

Social theory of television literacy (Buckingham, 1993) complements a framework of multiple intelligences for learning. Starting with an acknowledgement that children use television within the context of their daily lives and in relationship to their families and peers, this theory explains children's television viewing as socially distributed action. That is, children participate in groups that interpret and negotiate social and cultural meanings. Each "interpretive community" may use a different mode of learning about television content, or different "television literacies" (Buckingham, 1993, p. 34), for various social and cultural reasons. A concept of multiple television literacies allows for different opportunities for children to act as individuals and as social creatures. In combination with parental mediation and educational program design, what children learn from television has the potential power for life-changing and life-long consequences.

To address children's learning through multiple intelligences, a quality children's television program must offer such elements as characters that inspire children and help them to negotiate their identity (Mikos, 2009). New research demonstrates that preschool children react to television with "social ideas and expectations" (Richert, Robb, and Smith, 2011, p. 89). Children are likely to pay attention to content and learn from it if they identify with the television character (Richert, Robb, and Smith, 2011). They will distinguish between programs that offer reliable information and models of the world and those that do not. "There is little doubt that television, for some children, offers value-oriented messages and attractive portrayals of role models that are

admired, believed, and potentially imitated by them. Thus, the more a child admires and believes in a role model whose behaviors are rewarded or recognized as important, the more he or she might imitate and identify with the person” (Palmer and Young, 2003, 128).

Parents can reinforce children’s understanding of content by helping them connect between what happens on television and what happens in the world around them. For producers of children’s programming, this translates to relating “children’s development -- their perceptual abilities and the topics which guide their behavior” to the genre of the program and its technical production (Neuss, 2009, 16).

Shalom Fisch introduced a capacity model theory to explain how children learn from narrative and educational content on television (Fisch, 2004). When children watch television, they are processing both narrative content and educational content in working memory. Their ability to learn from this content is affected by the demands of processing content as well as the allocation of processing resources in working memory. Prior knowledge about a subject, inference, formal features of television, and automaticity are factors that support efficient parallel processing of narrative and educational content on television. Fisch also examined how learning is transferred from television to children, citing three conditions for the exchange to occur: initial learning, mental representation, and transfer situation. Children must understand the television content as something that can help solve a problem in real life and they must select the particular content to apply in solving a problem from all of the other knowledge that they have assembled during their young lives.

Television and Social Learning

When considering cross-cultural factors in children's lives around the world, scholars acknowledge that development of television literacy goes beyond a single explanation. Television literacy includes elements of cognitive development, family context, social relations, and macrosystem-level processes (Lemish, 1997).

Based on naturalistic, observational studies of families, James Lull developed a typology of the social uses of television (Bryant, 1990). Lull's typology includes relational uses such as communication facilitation, in which television content is used to create conversation and illustrate experiences. Social learning is another relational use of television in Lull's typology. How children use what they learn from television to solve problems in everyday life, and how their learning processes and impressions are formed, often comes not directly from television but is mediated by the family members. The social uses of television, such as communication facilitation and social learning, are central to interpersonal interaction in the family (Bryant, 1990).

Children's television that promotes positive social learning, often referred to as prosocial television, creates opportunities for positive behavioral changes such as friendliness, cooperation, tolerance and self control (Fisch, 2005). Effects of prosocial television are described in more detail in a later section on *Sesame Street*. One of the objectives of this case study is to determine how a prosocial television program, *Shalom Sesame*, fits into and supports Jewish family culture.

Culture in family life is expressed, among other things, through objects, customs, and values. Families teach culture from birth, even when they help children learn how to relate to one another. Although a variety of approaches are used in teaching culture,

children's awareness of differences depends on their developmental level, their experience, the context in which they are raised, and other elements. Already at a young age preschoolers are able to identify and ask questions about gender differences, physical differences such as skin color and characteristics of hair, and cultural differences such as languages, accents, and celebrations (York, 1991). For example, themes in *Shalom Sesame* such as holidays, Hebrew, Israel, traditions, and Jewish values depict culture in family life. By watching how characters in the program handle these themes, children can connect between on-screen depictions of relationships and the activities of family life in their Jewish homes.

Adult Mediation and Parental Involvement

From an early age, children's media experiences vary in richness and meaning. Media use within the family at home is distinct from the broader media culture. Family members appropriate media in ways that help them to create and maintain their identities, devising unique conventions for using media in their homes. Through their interactions, family members continually participate in negotiations between their distinctive media culture in the home and the mainstream media culture around them. According to Caronia and Caron, "Children are not only competent viewers, they are also cultural viewers" (Caronia and Caron, 2008, p. 383). Talking about media experiences helps children understand television and provides them with cultural frames for their interpretation of programs.

Newer audience studies explore media in family life in terms of social context and interpretation (Hoover and Clark, 2008). Underlying assumptions about media use in the family often relate to children as active participants and to the significance of family

interactions with media (Hoover and Clark, 2008). Media are “part of the ‘cultural currencies of exchange’ through which families develop and maintain relationships, and reinforce shared values” (Hoover and Clark, 2008, p. 108). Lemish identifies “three dimensions of potential parental interventions, i.e., awareness, supervision, and instructive mediation” (Lemish, 2008, p. 163).

Researchers contend that parents’ attitudes about the impact of television are an important contribution to their mediation of children’s viewing (Lemish, 1997; Warren, Gerke and Kelly, 2002). Parental mediation is used to “control, supervise, or interpret content” that children view (Warren, 2001, p. 212). Scholarship about mediation integrates parent strategies to support children’s television use. Strategies include co-viewing, restrictive mediation, and active mediation (Mendoza, 2007).

Co-viewing involves watching television together without talking about what is happening on screen. This strategy is also described as “awareness and co-viewing” (Lemish, 2007, p. 23). While most researchers seem to agree that co-viewing has value, estimates of time spent co-viewing vary greatly (Warren et al., 2002). Explanations of mediation also vary according to demographic factors such as children’s ages or parent’s employment status, media-related variables, and parent-child relationships (Warren et al., 2002). Parental involvement is based on accessibility -- parents’ time with children, and engagement -- activities requiring direct interaction between parents and children (Warren et al., 2002). These researchers suggest that while it is important for parents of young children to watch television with their children, positive results are less likely to be obtained using this strategy since no discussion

about the content occurs, leaving children to draw their own conclusions about the experience.

Restrictive mediation, or supervision, according to Lemish, means parents use rules and limits, such as what type of programs and what amount of time children are allowed to watch television (Mendoza, 2009). Like co-viewing, restrictive mediation offers mixed results in homes with young children. Restrictive mediation can be difficult for parents to implement and children have noted exceptions to television rules. Families have acknowledged that the rules are not always enforced.

Active mediation, or instructive mediation in Lemish's explanation, refers to positive, negative, and neutral discussion between parents and children that focuses on content before, during, or after watching television together. While active mediation is seen by many researchers as the most effective form of parental mediation, others have argued that the best approach is a mix of these strategies (Warren et al., 2002). They found that the most effective mediation combines viewing rules, co-viewing, and discussions among family members.

As stated above, researchers have found that parents' attitudes about how television affects their children is a consistent predictor of mediation (Warren et al., 2002). Taken together, these findings suggest that attitudes about television and parental involvement are the most important determinants of mediation.

More recently, observations of naturalistic co-viewing reveal that parents who watch television with educational enhancements (such as on screen tips) are more likely to speak to their children about events in the program and relate those events to their children's experiences (Fisch, Akerman, Morgenlander, McCann Brown, Fisch, and

Schwartz, et al., 2008). This research suggests that educational value occurs in front of the screen, where participation and learning in young children is facilitated by an involved adult (Fisch, et al., 2008).

Researchers have developed a taxonomy to support use of media with children at various ages and stages of development (Levin, Arafeh, Deniz, and Gottesman, 2004). Along with educators and members of the media literacy community, they continue to investigate the efficacy of various mediation techniques used by parents with their children.

The current case study examines two levels of media engagement in the home: direct experiences of viewing *Shalom Sesame* and social uses of *Shalom Sesame* among family members. Parents' accounts of their children's experience with the program, along with observations of family viewing, are used to craft an informed picture of the family's interaction with this particular media resource. Parents are relied upon as mediators to guide their children's experience with *Shalom Sesame* in the home.

The Sesame Street Phenomenon

Sesame Street is a phenomenon in children's educational television. The program reaches more than six million viewers each week and has influenced 82 million viewers through its 42-season history (Retrieved from <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/>, 05/27/12). *Sesame Street* is the most-watched children's television program in the world, with co-productions in 40 countries and broadcasts in 150 countries. More than 400 celebrities have appeared on *Sesame Street*. It has won the greatest number of Emmy awards (more than 108), of any television program. In 1994 the program received a letter of commendation from President Bill Clinton for its messages of

cooperation and respect in Israel and Palestine (Sesame Workshop, 2009). *Sesame Street's* "muppet diplomacy" (Sesame Workshop, 2009) includes a diverse cast and supports multiculturalism through cultural inclusion (Kraidy, 2002).

Sesame Street was designed originally with four educational objectives: symbolic representation, cognitive processes, physical environment, and social environment (Borgenicht, 1998). In the context of *Sesame Street's* program elements, symbolic representation is learning letters, numbers, and shapes. Cognitive processes refer to reasoning, problem-solving, and understanding of relational concepts. Nature, living things, and how objects made by humans relate to the natural world are examples of *Sesame Street's* physical environment educational objective. Social environment is learning about home, family, neighborhood, and the world at large. *Sesame Street* teaches children about different ways of seeing things, social interactions, and social issues (Borgenicht, 1998).

Cooperation, sharing, empathy, and valuing others are considered prosocial behaviors. In 1974, the first research on *Sesame Street* and prosocial learning was published (Fisch and Truglio, 2001). The study focused on cooperation, using a full season of *Sesame Street* episodes along with the Oregon Preschool Test of Interpersonal Communication, a picture recognition test, and observations from free play. This and other studies about *Sesame Street* demonstrate positive influences on children's social behavior. Nevertheless, the researchers concluded that more study would be needed to achieve the body of evidence for the program's strong cognitive effects (Fisch and Truglio, 2001).

Subsequent research about *Sesame Street's* influence on social and cultural practices has been conducted on international co-productions (Kraidy, 2002). The program's "pedagogy is based on experiential learning through participation" (Kraidy, 2002, p. 21). *Sesame Street* demonstrates that teaching and learning happen during social interaction, with potential for every individual to be an authority. For example, Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking puppets created for an Israeli and Palestinian version of *Sesame Street* help to break down stereotypes and encourage friendship. Organizers of the show received the first Building Bridges to Peace Award for promoting racial tolerance (Kraidy, 2002). In a multidisciplinary summative evaluation of the program, *Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim*, a *Sesame Street* program for children in the Middle East, researchers linked exposure to the program with prosocial attitudes and knowledge about other people (Cole, et al., 2003). Additional studies of international co-productions of *Sesame Street* have revealed the power of the program to reduce negative stereotypes and to help children make friends among different minority groups. (Lemish and Götz, forthcoming).

Besides prosocial teaching, which *Sesame Street* set as a curriculum priority from inception in 1969, the program has evolved to counter gender stereotypes, focus on special needs, and to teach diversity and cultural appreciation (Fisch and Truglio, 2001). *Sesame Street* distributes teaching authority among cast members, both Muppets and human actors from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The program also depicts cultural differences when demonstrating social practices. By doing this, *Sesame Street* "exposes its viewers to a plurality of truths from which they may construct a cultural identity" (Kraidy, 2002, p. 20). Researchers examining *Plaza Sésamo*, the Latin

American version of *Sesame Street*, have argued that the program is inherently cultural and provides cultural scaffolding for children to build an understanding (Kraidy, 2002). *Sesame Street* reaches into a range of “cultural influences with which its young viewers identify and construct an understanding of their sociocultural environment.” (Kraidy, 2002, p.13).

Shalom Sesame

In 2010, Sesame Workshop introduced *Shalom Sesame*, a 12-part children’s video series about Jewish culture and Israeli life. Designed for Jewish families in the US, the programs feature studio segments with the Muppets and live action with children and adults, as well as documentary segments, following the typical magazine format of *Sesame Street*. Content includes Jewish holidays and celebrations, locations in Israel, and Hebrew letters and words (See *Appendix J* for a detailed description of the 12 episodes). A companion website at <http://www.shalomsesame.org> offers an introduction to Jewish life and Israel through videos, games, and resources for parents and educators. The program places a high priority on kindness and compassion in human relationships. The goal of *Shalom Sesame* is to teach children in the United States about Jewish culture and Israel.

The program was evaluated in a summative research project commissioned by Sesame Workshop. Results of the evaluation were published in December, 2011 in series of three reports:

- *Shalom Sesame Experimental Study: Impact on American Children’s Knowledge About Israel and Jewish Culture* by MediaKidz Research and Consulting,

- *Shalom Sesame Family Survey: Use and Value for Jewish Families in the United States* by Media Kidz Research and Consulting, and
- *Shalom Sesame: Summary Report of the Qualitative Case-Study* by Dafna Lemish with Elizabeth Spezia and Shoshana Dayanim.

Jewish Identity

Judaism as a religion and culture in the US has very diverse manifestations. Jewish people first came to this country during the 1600s as an ethnic-immigrant group from Spain and Portugal who established synagogues and practiced orthodox rites (Herberg, 1960). In the mid-1800s, hundreds of thousands of Jewish people immigrated from Germany, dispersing and prospering, but practicing a different form of Judaism based on life in Germany and Poland. Religious, cultural, educational, and philanthropic institutions flourished during this time, yet many intermarried and left the Jewish community. Jewish leaders responded by adapting religious patterns to American living conditions. The largest immigration of Jewish people occurred after 1870, when more than two million Yiddish-speaking people came to the US from Russia and Eastern Europe. For the second generation of Jews, secularism was the means of assimilation as Americans. By the third generation, there was a return to Jewishness and there was intermarriage among the various strains of Judaism (Herberg, 1960).

Jewish people in the US today are organized loosely and autonomously, identifying with religious denominations such as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, or secular (Wertleib and Rosen, 2008). Other distinguishing characteristics of Judaism in the US include location of ancestral origin, and affiliation with Jewish institutions such as synagogues and philanthropic or fundraising groups in

local communities (Wertleib and Rosen, 2008). While the number of Jewish people is disputed and difficult to determine precisely, the current population of Jews in the US is estimated at 6,588,000 (Sheskin and Dashevsky, 2011). However, the percentage of US population represented by Jews has declined from approximately 3.7 percent in the 1930s to just 2 percent today. In identifying reasons for this decline, experts point to less fertility and less immigration among Jews than among the population in general. Another very contested reason for the decline in Jewish population is intermarriages. To help counteract the decline in religious affiliation, Jewish institutions encourage the expansion of education and culture among children as ways to influence Jewish identity among future generations (Wertleib and Rosen, 2008).

Research demonstrates that participation in Jewish education can instill strong Jewish identity in children, facilitate Jewish practices in the family, and serve as a gateway to Jewish life (Vogelstein, 2008). Indeed, experts generally agree that “the Jewish future and the continuity of the Jewish civilization depends extensively on education and enhancing Jewish identity in the generations to come” (The Jewish People Policy Institute, 2012, p.1).

In rural areas such as southern Illinois, Jews are geographically isolated from each other. There are limited opportunities for Jewish friendships. Families tend to be intermarried. Especially where the mother does not identify as Jewish, a family’s Jewish identification can become weaker with each successive generation, “creating a cycle of poor Jewish social capital” (The Jewish People Policy Institute, 2012, p. 5). In southern Illinois, access to early childhood programs that include Jewish education is very limited. Because there is little opportunity for formal education in Jewish ways of

life in this region of the US, media-based learning in the home can supplement parental instruction of young children.

For Jewish families, *Shalom Sesame* is a potentially significant and enduring contribution to the social conditions in which their children's identity is formed. This is especially relevant in light of evidence suggesting that children of intermarried couples receive most of their Jewish knowledge from popular media rather than formal education (Jewish Outreach Institute, 2005).

In conclusion, this case study examines how the television program *Shalom Sesame* fits into family life in the Jewish home. The primary and secondary research questions investigated are:

1. How does educational television viewing among family members contribute to the formation of children's cultural and religious identities?
2. How do parents use the series in their daily lives?
3. How do they perceive their children deriving meaning from *Shalom Sesame*?
4. To what extent does *Shalom Sesame* depict the culture that Jewish families experience in their lives?
5. How does *Shalom Sesame* help families integrate Jewish patterns of life?

Methods to investigate these questions include interview guides created by the *Shalom Sesame* collaborative research team. The interview guides are designed to link the findings among the three studies that formed the summative evaluation of the program. In supporting the summative evaluation of *Shalom Sesame*, this case study is

designed to uncover the processes by which educational television viewing in the home contributes to the development of children's Jewish identities.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Because the goal of this research is to discover how *Shalom Sesame* fits into the lives of Jewish families with young children, an interpretive paradigm using ethnographic methods, including observation of the families, was chosen. This approach commits to preserve the experiences and motives of the subjects in the study. In using this approach, the significance of actions, feelings and cultural symbols is considered. Since this thesis is concerned specifically with Jewish culture as depicted in *Shalom Sesame* and as understood by the families studied, it is necessary to operationalize the term culture. The definition of culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Geertz, 1973, p. 89) can be applied to this case study.

This project is an ethnographic case study of children’s media use among Jewish families living in southern Illinois with children ages three through six. The study consists of four types of research activity. The researcher conducted in-depth personal interviews with families in their homes. The researcher conducted participant observations of families viewing *Shalom Sesame* DVDs in their homes. The researcher conducted phone conversations with the families. Families kept viewing diaries. The study was approved by Southern Illinois University Carbondale human subjects committee prior to data collection. Committee approval entailed completion of a research ethics course and submission of a detailed outline of the methodology to be

used in the study. As small-scale, qualitative research performed on a specific and limited population of families, there is no claim to representativeness or generalizability.

Recruitment of Families

The precise number of Jewish families with young children living in southern Illinois is unknown. The Jewish Federation of Southern Illinois, Southeast Missouri, and Western Kentucky published a directory listing 174 member families living within approximately 100 miles of Carbondale, Illinois. The researcher contacted about 30 Jewish Federation officers and families who appeared to have children as listed in the June, 2011 version of the published directory. Of directory contacts by email and by telephone, most families were not qualified because their children were too old for the study. From these directory-led contacts, only one family was recruited to the study. The researcher also posted recruiting messages on Facebook, such as the Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) Hillel page and others. The researcher attempted to recruit families through Congregation Beth Jacob in Carbondale and its Sunday School teachers, as well as through other Jewish temples in Alton, Belleville, Benton, Scott Air Force Base in Illinois and in Paducah, Kentucky. Additional contacts were attempted through early childhood educators and child care organizations in southern Illinois. These attempts were not successful. Other unsuccessful recruiting activities involved contacting a group of African American Jewish converts from Cairo, Illinois and a messianic congregation of Christian Jews. The researcher was more successful in recruiting families through word of mouth with Jewish contacts at SIUC and in the community. The researcher also visited Camp Ben Frankel and spoke with camp counselors to gain awareness and support for recruiting participants to the study.

Contacts lamented the lack of Jewish families with young children in southern Illinois. Most of them agreed that qualified participants for this study are few and far between. After several months of recruiting effort, a total of seven southern Illinois families with young children agreed to participate in the study. While this is a limited number of participants, it is quite common and acceptable in ethnographic studies which prioritize depth and meaning over generalizability of results.

Once qualified candidates were identified, the researcher contacted these potential participants by telephone, by email, and in person, explaining the project in detail and securing verbal consent to participate (see Appendix A). Home visits were scheduled. A letter explaining the project and a sample consent form (see Appendix B) were provided to participants, enabling them to familiarize themselves with the project prior to the introductory interview.

Introductory Interview

Upon arriving at the home for the introductory interview, the researcher first went over the letter, responded to questions, and obtained written consent from adult participants. Verbal and written assent in the form of an "X" or printed first name was obtained from each child who participated in the study. After obtaining consents, the researcher asked questions from the introductory interview guide and recording the conversation using a digital audio recording device. This introductory interview lasted approximately one hour (see Appendix C for introductory interview guide). Prior to leaving the home, the researcher gave the family the first DVD in the *Shalom Sesame* series, a diary, and explained expectations for viewing the DVD, using the diary, and following participant progress. As soon as possible following this opening interview, the

researcher wrote a short summary of the visit. The researcher also created and maintained a Microsoft Excel workbook containing family data, schedule of interviews, and other information to help with project organization.

Viewing Diaries

Families viewed the DVDs and kept track of their activities and impressions over several weeks in a written diary (see Appendix D for diary instructions). Families communicated updates about the contents of their diaries by sending emails and having phone conversations with the researcher.

Progress Calls

The researcher called families between visits to check progress, answer questions, and schedule subsequent interviews.

Observations and Additional Interviews

The researcher scheduled two additional visits to each of the homes. During each additional visit the researcher provided a different DVD to the families. The researcher also took notes and used the audio recorder at each visit. One visit consisted of the researcher observing the families in their natural setting with the children watching a DVD and the researcher conducting a short interview with the child(ren) (see Appendix E for child observation and Appendix F for child interview guide). Prior to conducting the child observation and interview, the researcher obtained child's assent (see Appendix G). Another visit consisted of a summary interview to focus on the viewing experience and what the family thought of the DVDs (see Appendix H for second interview guide). Following each of these interviews, the researcher wrote a short summary of the visit.

Conclusion of Family Involvement

At the conclusion of the data collection period, families were able to keep the DVDs (see Appendix J for list of Shalom Sesame DVDs). In addition, the researcher provided a small educational gift from PBS to the children. The researcher sent thank you notes to each of the participating families, explaining ways in which results of the project will be communicated.

Data Management

Audio recordings of each interview were transcribed for data analysis. Unfamiliar Jewish terms and correct spelling were researched using Internet resources such as the Judaism 101 website at <http://www.jewfaq.org> to assure accuracy. All data collected during interviews, observations, and family diaries were used for the purpose of answering the research questions according to the principles of qualitative inquiry. Because this research procedure demands strict protection of the confidentiality of the participants, record-keeping techniques to ensure confidentiality were used. Pseudonyms and numbers were assigned in lieu of using real family names and names were not used in reports. Data was kept in locked files. Following recruitment, participant contact data was entered into a password-protected spreadsheet and kept separate from study data. Signed consent forms were stored in a secure location. A coding sheet matching a random number assigned to family names was generated. After the study was completed and the thesis was accepted, the coding sheet was destroyed. Only the researcher for this study had full access to the coding sheet and data. A notice about this practice was provided in the cover letter and consent forms for the study. All research design and project documents were secured in both paper and

electronic files. The research procedure also required significant organization, well-designed instruments, compassionate and friendly relationships with participants, and appropriate data entry with quality control.

Data Analysis

The researcher used a mixed approach of inductive and deductive data analysis techniques in this study. Collected data were analyzed in several ways, from noting themes to make sense of the data, to grouping the data for the purpose of seeing connections between them, to counting the data, to making comparisons, to tying evidence to theoretical references (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

First, family data were coded and organized into worksheets. Families' names were substituted with a random number. Parents' and children's given names were substituted with Jewish pseudonyms. All transcriptions and records were kept with numbers and pseudonyms. In addition to names, family data in the worksheets included ages of parents and children, location of the homes, siblings and their ages, type of Jewish or other religious affiliations, and whether the parents intermarried. In terms of Jewish affiliation, the researcher kept track of responses to interview questions about whether families attend synagogue or Sunday school, whether they speak Hebrew, and whether they have been to Israel.

Family background was collected and examined in some detail. Family background included parents' occupations and places of origin. The primary caregiver in each family was identified as well as other caregivers for the children, such as grandparents and nannies. The types of leisure activities the families enjoy were also recorded. Similarities and differences among the families was noted and considered.

Next, additional worksheets were produced. Other types of data collected and analyzed match the structure of the interviews and the questions asked during the interviews. Data from transcripts, notes, and family viewing diaries were used. Each type of data was arrayed in a worksheet as well as noted in the interview transcripts. Five data worksheets were produced, each related to the line of questioning during the interviews: Family Data, Lifestyle, Media Environment, *Shalom Sesame*, and Program Appeal.

Much detailed data were collected on the media environment in each of the homes. Besides the number and location of televisions, amount of television viewed, programs viewed, rules about television, and other media used in the home, the interviews yielded data on attitudes and assumptions about media.

A large portion of the interview questions related to uses of *Shalom Sesame* in the homes. For each family, the researcher recorded how often *Shalom Sesame* was viewed, how many different episodes were viewed, when and with whom the programs were viewed, and secondary activities that occurred during viewing of the program. Parents were questioned directly about the appeal of the program and asked to respond using a rating scale from “great” to “terrible.” Similarly, children were given an opportunity to share their opinion of *Shalom Sesame* by placing an “X” in the preferred slot on a smiley face scale ranging from “great” to “terrible” (See Appendix K). The researcher directly observed and solicited parents’ observations of their children’s viewing behavior during the program. Learning behaviors were directly observed and relayed by parents. Parents were asked about activities they did following the program. Their opinions of Israel were recorded. Both parents and children made other

observations and gave general comments, including suggestions for improving the program. Parents and children linked characters or actions on the program to their own experiences in family life, in school, and in the community.

The researcher identified recurring concepts from handwritten notes kept throughout the process, from interview summaries, transcripts, and diaries, and generated a list of these general themes. The researcher reviewed transcripts to find exemplars as well as statements specific to *Shalom Sesame*. A list of quotes of both adults and children was created to support recurring themes and to illuminate particular aspects of the case study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Although it was difficult to find Jewish families who qualified for this study, all families who agreed to participate approached this process willingly and enthusiastically. Aaron, father of three-year-old Adam, said, “When you mentioned the idea, I thought, that’s kinda cool. *Sesame Street’s* awesome. Little Jewish tinge to it.” Many volunteered feedback through email and viewing diaries or notes, as well as during interviews. “I liked participating in it. I like the fact that you wanted our feedback,” said Elise, mother of six-year-old Naomi and five-year-old Bruce.

Southern Illinois Family Participants

By using the Jewish Federation directory and networking with local contacts, roughly 30 Jewish families with children of any age living within a 100-mile radius of Carbondale were identified as potential candidates for the study. Of these, only seven families in southern Illinois met the criteria and chose to participate in the study. Six families completed the study. One family stopped participating after the second interview because of marital problems and did not complete the study. Data from all seven families are included in the results. Both parents and at least one child in the target age range of three to six participated in the study, for a total of 14 parents and 9 children. There are 10 siblings in these families, all of whom were involved in the study to some extent. Additional children such as siblings and friends often were present during interviews. Sometimes another family member, such as a grandparent or adult friend, was present during interviews. The presence of family members other than the targeted participants sometimes created challenges in terms of the audio recordings

and staying focused during the interviews, but it also reinforced the naturalistic aspect of this study in the home. Most of these families' leisure time focuses on their children. Nearly all stated how much they enjoy being outdoors and traveling.

All of the fathers originated in a location other than southern Illinois, but only two of the mothers grew up outside of southern Illinois. All of the fathers are professionally employed. Four of the mothers work outside of the home and three are stay-at-home mothers. The parents are in their thirties and forties. Their homes are located in the country and in small towns. In all but one family, the mother is the primary caregiver. One family splits child rearing duties equally between the mother and father. Four families mentioned grandparents and nannies as other caregivers who spend a significant amount of time with the children.

Jewish Family Life in Southern Illinois

All of the families primarily have a secular approach to Judaism. Each family self-identified their Jewish affiliation for the purpose of this study; however, at the time of this study none of them were participating in Jewish community life on a regular basis. Parents in this study who were raised in Jewish households described how customs and practices were observed frequently when they were growing up. They contrast their experience in southern Illinois with their parents and relatives, who live in homes where Jewish customs are practiced regularly and a vibrant Jewish community exists. According to Aaron, "It's hard to explain in a way, because you have this institutional religious identity, but it doesn't really entail necessarily believing in God. It's so much about just being part of a minority culture."

In one of the families, both spouses are Jewish and are originally from large Jewish communities on the east and west coasts of the US. All of the other families are intermarried. In one intermarried family, the wife underwent an Orthodox conversion from Catholicism to Judaism prior to marrying her husband. The four children in this family attend a private Catholic school, but they are being raised in a secular Jewish home. The family regularly practices Jewish traditions, such as Shabbat (Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath), in their home and in the home of another Jewish family in a nearby town. The children have attended Sunday School at the synagogue in Carbondale and Ben Frankel summer camp. Another family sometimes sends their children to mass with their father, who is Catholic. In another family, the husband was raised in a secular Jewish household and the wife was raised as a Southern Baptist. They decided to raise their daughters in a secular household. The family occasionally attends a local Methodist church "because they like the music there." In another family, the husband and wife temporarily relocated to their in-laws home outside of the US so the wife could give birth to their child in Israel.

None of the families attend synagogue on a regular basis. All but one of the families attends synagogue in metropolitan locations such as St. Louis on high holy days with their relatives. Only one location, Congregation Beth Jacob in Carbondale, offers regular Jewish services in southern Illinois. Three of the families send their children to the Sunday School at Congregation Beth Jacob when it is in session.

At least one member of each family speaks Hebrew. Several parents stated their knowledge of Hebrew came from their Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah (a celebration of joining the adult congregation, held at the age of 13 for boys and 12 for girls). For these

parents, Hebrew mostly was forgotten, but members of three different families indicated they speak Hebrew fluently. Members in five of the families have traveled to Israel. Two have been to Israel with their children, who were infants or quite small at the time of the visits.

Media Use in Southern Illinois Homes

The media environment in these homes is complex. The presence of television varies from none at all in one of the homes to four televisions in another of the homes. Among families with at least one television, the set is located in a living room or family room. In most homes there is a second television set in the parents' bedrooms. There is a television in the child's bedroom in one household. The amount of children's television viewing ranges from none at all in the home without a television, to four hours per day in some of the homes. In the US, an average of almost two hours of daily television viewing among young children is a norm. Families described their struggle to understand available choices and to guide program selection for their children. "Having to negotiate children's media choices is a burden," said one mother. "I find I spend a lot of time researching media for my children, because there's only so much time they have allotted to it, and there's just so much garbage out there that it can be wasted. Part of my job as a mother is to spend my time evaluating," said Elizabeth, parent of five boys.

Rules for television viewing reported by parents in this study include: limit viewing to certain times of the day, limit viewing to certain days of the week, limit viewing location, and avoiding mature content. These strategies are quite similar to what has been found in previous studies on parental mediation of television viewing (e.g., Chakroff, and Nathanson, 2011; Nathanson, 2001; Valkenburg, 2004; Warren,

2001; Warren, Gerke, and Kelly, 2002). One family spoke about recording programs. Three families explained they did not have rules for television, because their children are young enough that television viewing is not yet a problem in their household. Children watch television mostly on their own, although adults typically turn on the television and choose the programs. Sometimes parents mediate television viewing because their children are too young to manipulate the controls. In other cases, parents expressed concern about children's use of the television. "It seems like they just know their channels. They don't go just pushing buttons, but Daniel, he knows the remote....I've noticed in the last few weeks, we got a new remote, and Daniel will sit in his rocking chair and hold it. If he goes in the other room he takes it with him. It's like he's becoming one with the remote, and that's starting to make me nervous," Lisa confided, in reference to her five-year-old son.

Parents co-view with their children on a casual or intermittent basis. Family co-viewing occurs when favorite programs are broadcast, when holiday specials are scheduled, or when children's movies or DVDs are chosen. *American Idol* and *Dancing With the Stars* were mentioned by several families as programs they enjoy viewing together. PBS KIDS programs were mentioned often as the child's favorites. Disney channels and programs, and in a few families, Nickelodeon channels and programs were mentioned as the child's favorites. One mother described their interest in Animé and Israeli children's shows, leading to an extended conversation between mother and father about the type and availability of children's programs they want their boys to see. In the one home without a television, the child's favorite media included classical music, public radio programs, and Disney websites.

There is a great deal of media other than television in the homes. All of the families have computers. Most have mobile devices such as cell phones and tablets and game players. Some of the children also use tablet computers in school. Music videos, movies from Netflix, and even the online game *Angry Birds* are popular with these children.

When asked about other media in the home besides television, books were the first media mentioned by the family without a television. Books were mentioned by other families also; but not first, and for the most part books were mentioned only after their lists of other electronic media was nearly exhausted. From the description of media availability and use above, it is clear that families in this study are very much like others studied in the US in terms of amount of time spent with media, the variety of media available to children, and the preferred content (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003).

Several families indicated that Jewish media resources for children are limited mostly to books. In the conversation transcribed below, Deborah and her husband Aaron discuss the use of *Shalom Sesame* with sons Adam, age three and Noah, age eight, in their home.

D I think this is like the only overtly Jewish media we've ever shown them. I mean, I don't...

A We've had *Rugrats* on a couple of times.

D Oh right. Like there's a *Rugrats Chanukah* but, like, they're not old enough for any of the, well, I guess Woody Allen. Noah's seen Woody Allen movies, which he really likes, but, like we haven't shown *Fiddler on the Roof*. I

mean they're not old enough yet to really engage with other...like we have Jewish children's books. We have books about the Jewish holidays and stuff. I guess we do have some Jewish media. Books. But this is one of the few visual media we have that's been explicitly Jewish and I think it's been really nice. Like he, he knows he's Jewish...do you think Adam knows he's...?

A Yeah, yeah, yeah. He doesn't know what it means.

D He's becoming...he's gradually becoming aware. I think the show's helped.

Rugrats videos were mentioned by more than one family. Many of the families indicated that their children are too young for feature-length movies with Jewish themes and characters. Some of the parents described the use of Jewish songs and videos on YouTube or at the synagogue, but were unable to specify titles or content of these media. Some families stated that they own tapes and CDs of Jewish music. One family uses *Uncle Moishy* music and videos with their children. One family uses a holiday *Sesame Street* video that depicts Chanukah and Kwanzaa. One family uses DVDs of well-known children's stories such as the Ugly Duckling, Peter Pan, and Snow White in Hebrew, which the father brought from Israel. Their three-year-old son Ben loves a Hebrew-language children's series from an Israeli producer of classic tapes, Clasikalatet. His favorite program is known in the English language as King of the Dinosaurs.

Deborah compared the *Shalom Sesame* DVDs to the family's existing media, "I think because it's similar to *Sesame Street* it's a great vehicle for teaching them about Jewish stuff. Like, we have a book about the Passover story, and a book about

Hanukah, but actually there isn't any kind of connection between them." This lack of connection and continuity is cited by experts in Jewish education and Jewish identity as a particular challenge for families who are isolated geographically from other Jews and Jewish community programs (Jewish People Policy Institute, 2012). For these families, including those who are intermarried, "weak Jewish identification often gets worse with each generation...creating a cycle of poor Jewish social capital" (Jewish People Policy Institute, 2012, p. 5). Having access to appealing media depictions of their culture is an indicator of family identification with Jewish community and Jewish life. Family education, such as *Shalom Sesame* DVDs, that teaches skills for special occasions and celebrations as well as skills in applying Jewish values to real-world problems faced by growing children is most effective (Berkson, 1996).

Use of Shalom Sesame

Shalom Sesame consists of 12 program episodes on DVD with companion website and Facebook pages. During the study the families used *Shalom Sesame* according to their own media preferences and lifestyle choices. In order to identify families' general knowledge of the program format and viewing experience, the researcher inquired about *Sesame Street*.

Sesame Street Viewing in Jewish Homes

Two of the families watch *Sesame Street* regularly. All of the other families have watched *Sesame Street* in the past. Parents in these families indicated they feel their children may have outgrown *Sesame Street*. Both parents and children are familiar with *Sesame Street* program elements and easily described favorite characters, memories of episodes, celebrity appearances, and so on. Josh, father of five-year-old David and

three-year-old Judith, said, “*Sesame Street* is known over the years, been around forever, since I was a kid, and you know, kids love it.”

Shalom Sesame Viewing in Jewish Homes

Exposure

With *Shalom Sesame*, parents were asked how often the family viewed the program DVDs. Families indicated their children watched all of the program episodes on the first DVD, with repeat viewing of some episodes. Many families reported their children watching all episodes on all of the DVDs. *Hanukah* was mentioned as the favorite episode by most families, although one family mentioned their son watched *Passover* six times. Other frequently mentioned favorite episodes included: *Passover*, *Rosh Hashana*, *Mitzvah on the Street*, *Shabbat*, *Purim*, and *Welcome to Israel*. Viewing typically occurred at various times of the day such as in the mornings and afternoons. Some families viewed the DVDs in the car during trips. Some families took *Shalom Sesame* DVDs with them when they visited grandparents. In several families, older siblings watched *Shalom Sesame* with their younger brothers and sisters. Sometimes parents watched the programs with their children. For families in this study, having access to the DVDs and communicating with the researcher seemed to influence their choice to put *Shalom Sesame* in the foreground of television viewing in their homes. There is no evidence to suggest that *Shalom Sesame* was used as background in these homes.

Some parents felt challenged by how and when to suggest to their children to view the program. Television viewing is already problematic for these families. “We struggle around screen time issues,” said Deborah. According to Lisa, mother of two

young children, “If the television is on in the morning, it kind of sets a tone for the day. So when I’m home on weekends I try to start the day without it being on....I feel like once they start watching it, they would watch it all day if you let them....Or, at the same time, it could be cuddle time in front of the television with my kids because I’m not here in the mornings.” In this family, a problem arose when the girl wanted to watch *Shalom Sesame* but the boy did not. The mother explained, “The first time we watched it, they were being kind of rowdy....I turn it on and immediately, it caught their focus....and they watched very attentively for the first -- I think we got through about one and a half -- of the episodes. And Judith was still involved but...at some point Daniel just didn’t want to watch anymore....I think I may have pushed it a little too much, at that point. I’m like, no, you’re gonna stay here and watch this, when normally I wouldn’t ever say, no, you’re gonna sit here and you’re gonna watch *iCarly*. I would never say that, you know. So I think that’s where I learned my lesson that day, that it’s not something I want to push upon them.” Another mother said, “I felt like I was kind of nagging them to watch it, and I don’t like that.”

Viewing choices and length of time viewing were discussed by many of the families. Decisions such as who gets to choose what episode to watch and how much of the program to watch were negotiated frequently within the families. Even a three-year-old boy has personal viewing preferences and expresses them, as in this conversation between Adam (A1) and the interviewer (I):

I So, was there anything that you didn’t like about that show?

A1 Yeah.

I What was it?

A1 Uh, I didn't like watching all of it.

In this instance, the young boy's attention to the screen wavered after about 20 minutes of the program. His report seems to confirm the researcher's observations of children viewing *Shalom Sesame* and parent comments that children were becoming inattentive during the last part of the program. This behavior is consistent with studies of children's television viewing such as those conducted by Fisch (2004), Lemish (2007), and in evaluation of *Shalom Sesame* by MediaKidz Consulting, in which comprehension of the content, parental intervention, and to a lesser extent, age, determine attention to television.

Comprehension

Younger children's ability to process and comprehend the material presented is a determinant of how long they stay with a program (Lemish, 2007). At only three years of age, this boy's cumulative experience with the format of *Shalom Sesame* was very limited. It is possible in his case that such little viewing experience of the segments within the program made it difficult for the child to understand, and thus to continue paying attention to the full episode.

Another mother felt the sounds, spoken Hebrew, and customs shown in the program were not clear and were unfamiliar to her three-year-old, making *Shalom Sesame* a little too advanced for him. Several parents noted that the program is good for their older children. "I really like the concept of the program, and I think it would be beneficial, even for older kids," said Elizabeth, who added, "I feel the format is for my younger son's age, but the material and content is more for my older son's age." As noted earlier, Neuman (2008) suggests engaging content is the most important factor in

keeping children's attention to the screen. These findings can be interpreted in view of different levels of comprehension between these two siblings. Because the older son had a greater amount of prior exposure to Hebrew language and Jewish customs, it is possible that *Shalom Sesame* was more understandable and appealing to him.

Through observations of the families and in discussions with them afterward, it is clear that viewing was the children's focus and primary activity during *Shalom Sesame* programs. In some instances children performed secondary activities, such as playing with toys or eating a snack during the show, but for the most part, children were attentive to the program and stayed still or quiet while viewing. Through analysis of notes and statements made by parents, it is clear that the children in these families interacted with *Shalom Sesame* during viewings. Interactions most frequently stated by parents include: laughing, calling a family member's attention to a certain part of the show, imitating action on the screen, singing along, and repeating Hebrew words. As documented by many researchers through observations, these are typical behaviors that preschool-age children demonstrate while viewing television (e.g., Buckingham, 1993; Hodge and Tripp, 1986; Lemish, 2008; Richert, Robb and Smith, 2011).

Learning

Below is an example of notes from an observation in the home of Sydney and Carol and their daughter Sara. In the television room on Saturday morning are six-year-old Sara, her non-Jewish friend Jenny, and the family dog. Sara has long blond hair. She is wearing a dress with a metallic giraffe, pink watch, and green striped socks. The television room is filled with toys such as Legos, a tiny piano and xylophone, an

alphabet caterpillar, music and song books, CDs, VHS tapes, record albums, and photos.

“Oh yeah, I watched *Sesame Street*,” says Jenny. Both girls are seated on the couch with their dolls and a pink teddy bear nearby. Sydney, Sara’s father comes into the room and asks Sara to choose which episode of *Shalom Sesame* she would like to watch. Sara chooses *Welcome to Israel*. Dad starts the program and then he leaves the room. When falafels are discussed, Sara opens her glasses case and cleans her glasses with a cloth. Jenny’s eyes are wide and her mouth is open during this part of the show. Sara smiles when the falafel spills. Dad comes back into the room as the characters are arriving in Israel. Mom is upstairs teaching music lessons; faint sounds of the piano can be heard. Both girls give the program their complete attention during the model airplane making. Both girls watch attentively during preparations for the welcoming party. About seven minutes into the show -- when Ernie enters with fruit on his head, bounces up and down, and chants rutabaga, rutabaga, rutabaga -- both girls smile, then laugh out loud, and continue laughing throughout the segment. When Ernie puts a fish on his head, tap dances, and says hippity-hoppity, Jenny laughs. There is not as much response from Sara and her father. They say they have seen this episode before. During the next segment about boys at school, Jenny sucks her thumb. Both girls lay back on the couch. Sara is shifting position and holding her doll. When the boys go to bed and the moon lullaby song

plays on the show, Jenny lays her head on a pillow and strokes her doll's head. She is in the fetal position cuddling her doll. Sara looks bored during this section of the program. When the Hebrew letter *Yod* is presented, neither of the girls respond. When Shoshanna appears, Sara looks mildly interested, but doesn't interact with the action on screen. Sara doesn't make a response during the number of the day segment. It seems she doesn't recognize the Hebrew words. During the segment with Big Bird, Jenny gets up and puts her doll in a stroller, takes the teddy bear, hugs it, and gets back on the couch. About 20 minutes into the program, Grover visits Jerusalem. During this part of the show, both girls watch intently. When Grover and his friend Talia arrive in the Old City, Sara kisses her doll's head. When trays of breads and pastries, including challah, are displayed in the market, Sara says, "I've had challah before." At this point both girls start talking about Jerusalem. Sara seems to be more attentive to the program than Jenny. Sara states the meaning of the word *shalom* along with Annaliese on the program, saying "*peace, goodbye, and hello.*" While Jenny plays with a fairy castle in the room, Sara (S1) and the researcher (I) talk.

I What happened on that show?

S1 It's about Annaliese going to Israel.

I What else happens on this show?

S1 She likes falafels.

- I You told me you've never had that, right? Do you think you might want to try the falafel sometime? It tastes pretty good. (long pause) Was there a problem on the show? (long pause) Did they have some kind of problem that they worked on? What was it?
- S1 Annaliese couldn't get a falafel because Grover kept on dropping it.
- I Okay, how did they solve that problem?
- S1 Annaliese took a piece of pita bread and then she caught it.

Fisch's capacity model theory (Fisch, 2004), which is based on existing knowledge about the transfer of learning, can be applied in order to understand what happened in this observation. Fisch's theory describes four conditions in which children's learning from television can occur: understanding of the program content, creation of an abstract mental representation of the content, remembering the content, and applying the remembered content to a new problem. Fisch recommends repetition as an aid to learning transfer. It seems as though Sara was unable to comprehend the Hebrew numbers because she had no prior knowledge of the subject and there was no repetition or reinforcement of the words on screen. When provided with Annaliese, an inspiring character, however, Sara identified with the content and was able to demonstrate understanding by retelling the narrative and using new vocabulary words in various ways. According to Lemish (2007), Richert, Robb, and Smith (2011), and others, children pay attention to on-screen characters if they see them as socially relevant role models who provide useful information about the real world.

Many of the parents in this study pointed out features of the program that helped or hindered their family's comprehension and enjoyment of *Shalom Sesame*. Parents prompted their children to use Hebrew words, especially those already familiar to the parent. This type of mediation behavior has been described by researchers (Fedner, Richert, Robb and Wartella, 2010). Some parents relied on *Shalom Sesame* for Hebrew language instruction. John, father of six-year-old Ruth, put it this way. "We just watched it a half hour ago, and it's hard for me to remember the counting. Maybe if they had it spelled out phonetically in English, that would help to get the words in your head."

As Lemish and Rice reported in their work on television and language acquisition (1986), parental mediation in the form of co-viewing and talking about program content is another aid in children's transfer of learning from television. In this example, Rachel, mother of three-year-old Ben, describes what happens when she and her son watch *Shalom Sesame* together. "He did repeat. Especially when they go really slow. He'll participate. Like when they stop, and wait for them to interact. He definitely likes the words and letters....During the show I will ask and he'll be, 'Oh! Oh!' I'll say, what letter is that? And he'll repeat it."

Active television viewing and learning among children is characterized by behaviors such as singing, repeating words, laughing, and describing what happens on screen. These viewing behaviors were displayed by families during home visits as well as described by parents in reference to other viewings of *Shalom Sesame*. Deborah and Aaron were very excited by the response from their son, Adam to the episode

involving the Passover Seder (the family home ritual conducted in observance of the Passover holiday, which commemorates the Jewish exodus from Egypt.) “He was watching it right around the time that we had the Passover Seder and he definitely understood that what we were doing here was connected to what he saw on the show. He even said something about the show. We’re like, ‘We’re gonna get ready for our Passover Seder’ and he said something: ‘You mean like *Shalom Sesame*?’” Adam’s (A1) understanding is revealed again in this conversation with the interviewer (I) and his mother (D), which occurred immediately after he viewed the Hanukah episode:

I Do you know what this program was about?

A1 Yes.

I What was it about? What happened in this program?

A1 He got the candle.

I What was the problem they had?

A1 He couldn’t find the candle.

I Do you remember what the candleholder is called?

A1 The menorah.

D The menorah! Very good.

I How did they solve their problem?

A1 They tried to find it.

During interviews and in their notes, parents described the many Hebrew words their children learned from *Shalom Sesame*. Some parents used and discussed the meaning of Hebrew words such as Shabbat (Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath), mitzvah (commandment, good deed), dreidel (a four-sided spinning top, toy played with during

the Jewish holiday of Hanukah), latke (potato pancake), hamantaschen (triangular, fruit filled cookies made during Purim, a celebration of the rescue of Jews from extermination), Shavuot (festival celebrating the gift of the Torah, or teachings, and the harvest) and the like while viewing the program. In one interview, John read program episode titles to his daughter Ruth and their conversation grew from the Hebrew words:

J Hanukah, Shavuot, Shabbat, and Mitzvah on the Street.

R Mitzvah?

J Mitzvah. What language are those in?

R Hebrew.

J Do you know what Mitzvah is? We talked about what shalom is.

I Hey Ruth, what does shalom mean?

R Hello.

I Uh-huh.

R Good.

I Uh-huh.

R Peace.

I Very good!

J We said that around the house a little bit, haven't we? Like, when mama called me on the phone I said shalom.

Appeal of Shalom Sesame

Parents were asked to identify the appeal of *Shalom Sesame* for their family on two occasions during the study, once during the second interview and again during the third interview. The question was posed as follows: "How would you rate the value of

Shalom Sesame for your family: great, good, okay, not so good, or terrible? Why?”

This rating scale mirrors the smiley faces that were used to assess program appeal for children. All parents stated *Shalom Sesame* has great or good value for their family.

“We all liked it!” said Sydney. “The more exposure to her Jewish heritage, for both Sara and her sister, the better, because we are not really observant. We don’t regularly go to synagogue, and we’re in a non-Jewish area. So, great exposure to culture and Israel.” Elizabeth rated the overall value of the program as great for her family because they aren’t living in a Jewish home and they aren’t receiving a Jewish education.

According to Elizabeth, “I think it is great. I think it is something that we will come back to and it definitely provides them with information that they just don’t have access to anywhere.”

Children were asked to respond to two questions about the appeal of *Shalom Sesame* while the researcher showed them a smiley face scale: 1) “What did you think about the *Shalom Sesame* video you saw today? Did you think it was great, good, okay, not so good, or terrible? Why?” and 2) “What did you think about the other *Shalom Sesame* programs that you saw? Were those programs great, good, okay, not so good, or terrible? Why? Children’s responses varied; in some cases, help from parents was needed to make a valid interpretation. Responses to the first question about today’s program were somewhat more positive than responses to the second question about other programs children viewed. Children selected smiley faces corresponding to ‘great’ or ‘good’ in response to question one, and ‘great,’ ‘good,’ or ‘okay’ in response to question two. One possible explanation for the difference in responses is that children chose the particular episode of *Shalom Sesame* that they wished to view during the

researcher's visit. In several instances, children chose the episodes that they enjoyed the most. It is also possible that children's recall about earlier episodes they saw was not as strong as their recall for the episode they just watched because of limited cognitive development.

Upon the researcher's arrival in the home for the second and third interviews, some children immediately described parts of the show that they liked. Children seemed to enjoy the smiley face rating scale and teased the researcher by laughing and changing their choices. One three-year-old boy gave no answer, but his mother said he watched the program and interacted with it while viewing.

Daniel, a five-year-old boy who felt *Sesame Street* was for younger kids like his little sister, gave *Shalom Sesame* several different ratings at different times during the interviews. The literature (Fisch, and Truglio, 2001; Valkenburg, 2004; others) suggests that gender is one of the determinants of program preference. In general, boys tend to lose interest in *Sesame Street* at a younger age than girls. Daniel finally settled on the rating 'not so good,' but his mother indicated that he asked to watch it, and after watching it he asked to go to temple. Here his mother's comments helped place the child's response into a relevant context. Later in the course of the study, Daniel's mother explained that both children were asking to see the program and talking about what they watched. The family had engaged in conversations about Sunday School as well as tzedakah (charity), which was depicted on the program. When *Shalom Sesame* was the focus of conversation among his father, mother, sister, grandmother, and researcher, Daniel seemed to decide that the program was worthwhile; something he could join in viewing. Although complex and characterized by many facets, Daniel's

relationship to *Shalom Sesame* was defined in part by the way it allowed him to join in and be a part of the latest thing in the household (Griffiths and Machin, 2003).

Especially with his father's encouragement, this little boy chose to be a part of the Jewish group at home, connecting his viewing experience of *Shalom Sesame* to the synagogue and other cultural practices. Daniel's father described a situation in which his son was singled out as being different while at school. Outside of his home and the temple, Daniel was reluctant to communicate his thoughts about *Shalom Sesame* and about being Jewish because his peer culture in kindergarten was not accepting and welcoming of differences.

For the most part, children liked *Shalom Sesame* a great deal. Without exception, when asked if the DVDs should be taken away, children wanted to keep them. They also expressed a desire to have more DVDs.

Parents found the diversity in *Shalom Sesame* to be appealing. "On the one hand, having a recurring character who's an Ethiopian Jew. On one level, it's really similar to other variants of *Sesame Street*. Like the one in New York. We watched *Sesamestrasse* in Germany, and it seems like there is this commitment in the show, in whatever the incarnation, to celebrate diversity. Which is great," said Deborah. Her husband, Aaron, feels the program has appeal for any family. "There's so many non-Jewish families I know....that are interested in Jewish themes, for both religious reasons or curiosity. I bet there would be a million families who'd wanna watch these."

Children recalled and described the stories presented on *Shalom Sesame* as well as identified favorite episodes and what they liked or did not like about the program. "I kinda liked the girl, the puppet girl with pink, 'cause she's pretty," said six-year-old

Naomi, referring to the Muppet character Avigail. When asked what she liked about the program immediately after viewing the Purim episode, Naomi said, “I like the music...I liked the parade.” Her five-year-old brother Bruce said, “I like the Muppets.” When asked what happened during the Purim episode, Naomi correctly explained, “When they’re doing the show, the guy, um, the grouchy one in the garbage can. He was in the show and she didn’t know that, and then he became nice.” The children’s mother, Elise, confirmed what Naomi and Bruce said. “They really liked that Oscar the Grouch character. Moishe. They really liked him.”

Rachel, mother of three-year-old Ben, shared her childhood memories of *Sesame Street*. She gave her perspective as a young mother on using *Shalom Sesame* to teach Jewish culture. She said, “I don’t think there are any other shows that even do anything like this, of teaching of a different culture....*Sesame Street*, at least the one that I grew up with, it teaches numbers and letters and you know, feelings and emotions and things. But I don’t ever remember it teaching about the culture of a specific region or country, you know? Which, I like that.”

Mike, father of four children, spent time in an Orthodox Jewish community and studied in Israel. He favored reinforcement of Hebrew letters of the alphabet and Jewish concepts through repetition in songs and through on screen text. He emphasized the importance of basic Jewish concepts, including foods and customs. “You have to learn about the great grandfathers of religion. Catholics do it. The Baptists do it. They all learn about the same people. But if you don’t give them some basics, the kids have nothing to grab onto,” said Mike.

Values Parents Ascribe to Shalom Sesame and Jewish Life

Parents were asked how viewing the program influences their ideas about Judaism. Generally, parents feel that *Shalom Sesame* provides a balanced perspective on Judaism. For some families, *Shalom Sesame* generated a renewed interest in family history and cultural practices. During an after school interview on Rosh Hashana, Sara's family shared apples and honey together, something they saw on the program. When asked about hopes for her children, Sara's mother Carol said, "I want them both to know their background—Jewish or Christian, whatever—to be respectful to other cultures. Appreciation for where they came from, be open minded." Sara's father, Sydney, also shared a written history of their family, including a letter from his grandmother translated from Yiddish. Sydney wrote the history specifically for his daughters, so they would understand the diversity of their ancestors.

Elizabeth also connected depictions of life in the program to ways of living among earlier generations in her family. "I think it's great. I do. And I think for our family, because they aren't living in a Jewish home or receiving Jewish religious education, it's nice for them to do those holidays and understand when they hear me talking about them or hear their relatives talk about it. It really gives them a frame of reference, or exposure to how I grew up, when their grandparents grew up," said Elizabeth.

When asked about the importance of maintaining a Jewish identity in the family, Rachel, wife of Joseph and mother of two very young boys, Ben and Ron, responded, "Oh I think it's extremely important. I don't want them to lose that heritage. I mean, Ben was born there (Israel) and Ron will soon go home – move back there, actually towards the end of this year – so I'm thinking it's always going to be close in our hearts, whether

we're here or there. I think it's important for them even to start speaking Hebrew now. Joseph is always speaking Hebrew to them in the house. I think that's important. And I want them to be able to keep Shabbat. I think that's important, too. Keeping their father's cultural traditions and his religion. And some aspects from mine, too."

Josh expressed his gratitude for the program and participation in the study, saying, "It was important for me for the kids to grow up not only being Jewish or learning about it, but being proud of it, not being ashamed of it."

Aaron was eager to discuss this aspect of the program. "I like that it just sort of reinforces their Jewish identity. That's a good thing." In a later interview, he commented again, "It reinforces Jewish identity. I think that he's just seeing a Jewish world on the screen that I think will make it just that much less foreign to him, especially here in southern Illinois. I always feel like this is particularly good because when I grew up in L.A., I took it for granted that there were Jewish families everywhere." When asked what he thought was valuable about the program, Aaron said, "Blending the familiarity of the *Sesame Street* brand to this educational project is what can entice kids. I mean, it's not just like, 'Hey, we have a Jewish show. It's a Jewish *Sesame Street!*'" Aaron's wife, Deborah, agreed. "This is one of the few visual media we have that's been explicitly Jewish and I think it's been really nice. Like he, he knows he's Jewish."

The novelty of a Jewish *Sesame Street* was remarked by a number of parents. Mike, a Jewish father of four children expressed the following views and suggestions about the program.

M If you're doing multicultural, it wouldn't hurt to do multi-Jewish.

I Oh! That's a good--that's a great idea too! I've not really heard that expressed.

M Rabbi ----, may he rest in peace, saw this beyond belief. He'd say, Jews just argue all the time. They wanna get their points across. They could sit there and just go on forever....There are modern, conservative, reform, and orthodox at various levels....And since you're really doing a multicultural thing, Judaism is so multicultural on its own, it's unbelievable.

Mike's observation leads to an interesting potentiality for *Shalom Sesame* and programs like it. Children's interpretive frames are operating in combination with parental mediation to construct program value from secular humanist, orthodox, and other belief orientations. While parents are the bearers of traditional values, programs like *Shalom Sesame* offer the basics of cultural information.

Speculation about the Muppet Elmo's identity arose spontaneously during a conversation in Mike's family among brother Bruce (B), sister Naomi (N), and mother Elise (E).

E Elmo needs to visit Israel.

N He's not Jewish.

B Elmo is Jewish.

E You think Elmo's Jewish?

N Elmo's not.

Families in the study were able to use the program to get conversations about Jewish identity started. Parents who are non-Jewish learned about Jewish life, culture, words, and Israel from the program. Jewish parents were able to use the program as a

refresher course and as a connector between the way they were raised and the way they hope for their children to learn Jewish customs and traditions. Aaron (A) and Deborah (D) described how their family is constructing an understanding of their Jewish identity from *Shalom Sesame* in this way.

D Adam's too little, but I think Noah (older brother, age eight) is really interested in this, actually. Like, that he's Jewish and what it means.

A He's curious to know....he's started to figure out that he's a minority, especially down here.

D He's different. He knows that he's different. Which is painful but it's what we want for him.

According to parents interviewed in this study, through the lens of *Shalom Sesame*, children can see what is taking place in the larger Jewish community and they can use that understanding to interpret Jewish actions in their homes. By talking about various elements of the show, children began to understand their identity as Jewish – both as individuals and as a people.

Values Parents Ascribe to Shalom Sesame and Israel

Parents were asked how viewing the program influences their ideas about Israel. At least one parent in five of the seven families has been to Israel before. Children in the study learned from *Postcards From Grover*, the segment toward the end of each episode that depicts special places and life in Israel. In a conversation with John (J) about what his daughter Ruth learned from the program, the subject of Israel came up naturally.

J I think she's getting something out of it. Yeah.

I How so?

J I don't think we ever really talked about Israel before.

So we talked about Israel. I tried to explain to her where it was.

We were gonna look on a globe.

"I thought it was all good, balanced and nice," said her father Sydney. "I think it makes us more inclined to take a trip to Israel."

Lisa, a non-Jewish parent, agreed about the importance of Israel for her in-laws and her family. "They (in-laws) love Israel....They talk very highly of Israel, and the country itself, and the pride that they have in it and what has been capable of, what the country itself has withstood, is capable of, and still is. So I know it's very important to them. And they do still keep up with current events, because they know the importance of it in today's—you know everything that's going on today. It's very important." When asked if she and her family would like to go there, Lisa responded, "You know, I don't know if we've ever talked about it." Her husband Josh later stated, "You know, eventually I'd like to go to Israel. My parents have been there. I was Bar Mitzvah'd. But I grew up on the east coast, in Connecticut, an hour outside of New York City. And there are plenty of Jews there. And they have very large, very nice temples with full time cantors and rabbis it wasn't where--only on the weekend. It's a weekend temple, you know. That is typical around here."

Some of the families expressed hesitancy about visiting Israel, as in this conversation with Elise, whose husband Mike lived and studied in Israel during the 1990s. In this discussion, Elise speaks to a different kind of connection.

I Nobody else in your family has ever been to Israel, right?

E No.

I Does anybody want to go there?

E Oh, my husband would go in a heartbeat. I myself am a little leary, you know, because of all the unrest, and being a military state. I definitely wouldn't take the kids at the age they are now, no way. Maybe when they are older, yeah. I mean, some Jewish people feel that connection. I don't really feel connected to a country. I think my connection is more like a state of being.

I That's interesting.

E Not so much a place....It's supposed to be really beautiful in places.

Aaron and Deborah were quite animated in their response to representations of Israel in *Shalom Sesame*. Adam said, "Whatever portrayal of Israel there is, there's nothing political about it in and of itself. The entire Jewish identity the world over has been tied to Israel, whether the nation or the imagination of the nation for like, centuries. So there's nothing strange or surprising that there's an Israel segment. I mean, everything about Judaism since, certainly since the foundation of Israel, is about the centrality of Israel. Now, but not everyone agrees with that." His wife Deborah, connected depictions of diversity shown in the program with current day conflict in Israel. "I guess what I'm saying is in the context of Israeli politics it takes on a charged meaning, because everything takes on an added layer of complexity."

Overall Value of Shalom Sesame

Results of this case study demonstrate that *Shalom Sesame* fits into family life in Jewish homes in southern Illinois by supporting parents as they introduce their children to Jewish culture and traditions. The results provide answers to the interrelated research questions that were posed in this case study.

1. How does educational television viewing among family members contribute to the formation of children's cultural and religious identities?
2. How do parents use the series in their daily lives?
3. How do they perceive their children deriving meaning from *Shalom Sesame*?
4. To what extent does *Shalom Sesame* depict the culture that Jewish families experience in their lives?
5. How does *Shalom Sesame* help families integrate Jewish patterns of life?

Educational television viewing contributes to the formation of children's cultural and religious beliefs by helping children connect what they see on the screen to their lived experience at home and in the community. They begin to understand that they are Jewish. On the screen they see depictions of other children who are Jewish, including those who live in Israel. Children learn basic letters and words in Hebrew in connection with problem-solving experiences and celebrations.

Jewish parents relate scenes from the program to their own childhood experiences. Non-Jewish parents learn about Jewish practices and Israel along with their children. All parents relate scenes from the program to experiences and stories shared with Jewish relatives. Parents refer to segments of *Shalom Sesame* as a way to

explain Jewish customs to their children. They practice speaking the Hebrew letters and words with their children.

Parents explain that their children seem to identify with Muppets and human characters on *Shalom Sesame*. Parents report that as they view the programs, children seem to gain an awareness of their Jewish ancestry and of their individuality as Jews. The program not only helps their children learn Hebrew and Jewish culture, it celebrates their experience as young Jewish people.

Many scenes in *Shalom Sesame* provide examples of culture as it is practiced in the homes of families in this case study. Lighting the candles of the menorah, reciting special Hebrew words, and cooking special foods were activities mentioned by the families as they discussed their connection to the program. Parents appreciated scenes of Israel in *Shalom Sesame*. Many expressed their heartfelt longings for the well-being of Israel. These families want to experience Israel free of conflict and danger.

Shalom Sesame helps families integrate Jewish patterns of life by offering stories for each part of the Jewish calendar and showing how holidays are celebrated. *Shalom Sesame* integrates with family life because the DVDs can be used at convenient times. Jewish and non-Jewish relatives and different generations in these families can watch the program together, and can follow-up by discussing, questioning, and relating their personal stories.

Results of this study reveal that *Shalom Sesame* has the potential to interest a wider range of children, in terms of their ages and their cultural and religious affiliations. For children living in southern Illinois who have very little experience with Jewish community, Hebrew letters and words are quite challenging. On screen tips or off-

screen activities that extend the program could be used to support comprehension and learning. For parents and families that are not located near an active Jewish community, *Shalom Sesame* is a way to refresh the knowledge of Hebrew language and customs that were learned during childhood. This study helps confirm results of summative evaluations about *Shalom Sesame*'s educational value and provides additional evidence of learning. This study demonstrates that families with young children living in southern Illinois assign value to the program in helping them to create a sense of Jewish community in the home and connect them to Jewish customs and traditions around the world.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATION

This case study demonstrates how a small group of parents in southern Illinois use *Shalom Sesame* videos to teach their young children—as well as inform themselves and their families—about Jewish life. During the study, parents introduced *Shalom Sesame* to their children and applied program topics in everyday conversations with their family members. Some families extended program topics to educational and cultural practices in their homes, such as baking Jewish pastries or eating symbolic foods, lighting candles at the dinner table, writing Hebrew letters and numbers, singing songs. A few of the families used a variety of *Shalom Sesame* media, watching the videos on computer instead of television or visiting the *Shalom Sesame* website and *Shalom Sesame* Facebook page.

One of the families had no television in the home and the daughter spent much time outdoors without using media of any kind. This family compensated for not having television by using *Shalom Sesame* with other media in their home more so than the other families. Even though most of the homes in this study are filled with media of all kinds, there is very little Jewish media for children other than books. Because of this positive introduction to *Shalom Sesame*, parents expressed their intention to use the videos repeatedly with their children in the future. Parents and children also expressed desire for more Jewish media. *Shalom Sesame* is used by these families to illustrate and enrich understanding of holidays and cultural practices. For the most part, it fits easily into family media routines as an educational program that entertains and they can watch the videos whenever they want. For Orthodox Jewish families, *Shalom Sesame*

can be watched at times other than Shabbat and religious holidays. The general public in southern Illinois and around the United States have opportunities to watch holiday-specific episodes that are broadcast on their local public television stations, such as WSIU-TV. For families who do not use television, *Shalom Sesame* can be watched on DVDs, online on the website and through social network sites. The on-demand access to *Shalom Sesame* DVDs makes the program much easier to use whenever and wherever families choose.

Shalom Sesame offers sufficient appeal to capture and sustain the interest of families with young children in this study. Parents in this study suggest that the appeal is even broader: *Shalom Sesame* is useful for teaching non-Jewish families about culture and Israel. The program offers good to great value for these families, including other siblings. *Shalom Sesame* is a refresher course for Jewish parents and a primer for non-Jewish parents. *Shalom Sesame* helps them make connections between the way they were raised and their hopes for their children in establishing Jewish identity and learning Jewish customs. Parents believe the program offers a balanced perspective on Jewish life and Israel. The programs have a place among the seemingly unlimited choices of children's media in these homes, especially with active mediation from parents. Parents perceive both immediate and long term value in having access to the videos. In summary, *Shalom Sesame* meets intended goals and family expectations of the program: it measures up to the high quality level that families have come to assign to *Sesame Street* over the years, it fits very well within the context of rural life, it honors parents as the bearers of traditions and values, and it offers quality entertainment and learning opportunities.

For the young children in this study, much of the appeal of *Shalom Sesame* relates to them identifying with humorous stories involving both human and Muppet characters. The program helps them to negotiate their identity as Jews by providing on-screen examples of diverse families, rituals, songs, and places that reinforce Jewish culture. As Kraidy (2002) explained, the program's design uses all of the characters in teaching capacities, so that most interactions during the show result in teaching and learning cultural knowledge from diverse perspectives. Families watching the program can see similarities and differences in the way Jewish culture is expressed. They can interpret meaning for their family through a blend of face-to-face interactions at home in the United States and interactions among characters on the screen in the land of Israel.

Programs such as *Shalom Sesame* offer an important opportunity for parents to help their children begin to attain television literacy, even at an early age. Through intentional *Shalom Sesame* viewing experiences, families can develop frameworks for interpreting larger media depictions of Jewish life. *Shalom Sesame* helps families understand Jewish activities in their home and connects them to a larger world, helping them form a global picture of Jewish culture.

Based on the researcher's experience with this case study, *Shalom Sesame* does a good job of presenting content to build children's levels of skill and knowledge. Parents reported ample evidence of learning in the form of vocabulary words, asking questions about on-screen content, tying on-screen depictions to cultural practices in the home, and connecting the television stories to their own books and life experiences. It is clear that *Shalom Sesame* helps children with Jewish identify formation and helps families understand themselves as Jewish people. Since all of the families are living in

secular households in a predominantly Christian region where great emphasis and expectations are placed on Christmas celebrations, they especially expressed appreciation for the way in which holidays, particularly Hanukah, are presented in *Shalom Sesame*.

Some parents expressed concern that the program is too fast-paced when their children are unfamiliar with the material, such as the Hebrew language. It may be useful to compare the pace of *Shalom Sesame* to *Sesame Street* in determining an explanation for parents' concerns. Studies of *Sesame Street* point to differing conclusions about the program's impact on preschoolers' attention spans and social interaction (Anderson, Levin and Lorch, 1977; Tower, Singer, D. G., Singer, J. L. and Biggs, 1979). It is possible that learning among children in this age group could be strengthened by modifying certain program features for television; for example, adding more on-screen text or adding audio and text-based on-screen tips. Some of these features are available to a greater extent in other media formats, such as the *Shalom Sesame* website. Learning may also be improved through family engagement with educational materials and activities that complement the program, such as books, games, puzzles, and the like. For example, the program and website can offer suggestions to parents to write Hebrew letters and numbers with their children during or after the show, or, the program could demonstrate how families can make tzedakah boxes to keep and use in their homes.

As confirmed by the researcher during the course of this case study, *Shalom Sesame* approaches children as fully human, with concern for helping their moral development. With its emphasis on stories of kindness and compassion, *Shalom*

Sesame presents morally upright ways of being in relationships with others. *Shalom Sesame* represents the potential for viewers to honor parent-child relationships. The program provides parents with a tool to construct Jewish identity together with their children. This is especially important in families where transmitting Jewish identity to the next generation is of paramount concern. For parents and grandparents, *Shalom Sesame* is a way to connect to their Jewish home in Israel, and to share that with their children. In its assessment of Jewish learning and identity, the Jewish People Policy Institute (2012) notes that Elliott Malamet's benchmark for Jewish identity is purpose, not continuity. In addition, *Shalom Sesame* seems to present Jewish values and traditions without trampling on or promulgating modern Western ideals such as "individualism, secularism, freedom of speech, and equality" (Livingstone and Drotner, 2011, p. 414). Indeed, because children increasingly are participants in global media culture, perhaps their understanding of themselves as having moral purpose as Jewish people will play a vital role in connecting generations, cultures, and media in the future.

One of the difficulties in teaching young children about historic contexts of Judaism is the subject of the Holocaust. While *Shalom Sesame* does not offer depictions of this terrible tragedy that nearly obliterated the Jewish people during World War II, the subject did come up in multiple interviews. Acknowledging that discussion of the Holocaust is probably not age-appropriate for their children, parents nonetheless engaged in deep conversations with the researcher about their Jewish identity in connection with this subject. They expressed angst about how to teach their children about this history and concern that they not perpetuate a Jewish identity based solely on being a victim in society.

Another interesting aspect of Jewish identity was raised by parents in this study. Aaron and Deborah questioned the fact that so many Jewish leaders and decision-makers are working in the media and financial industries in the United States. In this couple's view, it is reasonable to critique the narrowness of Jewish media choices and representations of Jewish people. Families also noted a lack of Jewish media other than books for children. Because little such media exists in US family homes, the implications of engagement with Jewish media over time have not been traced.

This work is an example of audience reception studies, occurring within social and cultural contexts in family life. Parents remarked that the ethnographic methods used in this study were comfortable and effective for their families. The interviews, at approximately one hour each, were neither too long nor too short. A few of the families mentioned that the final interview could have been conducted by telephone. However, because the last interview was conducted on a face-to-face basis, the researcher was able to meet other family members and gain a stronger sense of each family's overall evaluation of the program. The final interview also gave the researcher an opportunity to give reminders about using *Shalom Sesame* in the future and to seal new relationships--in some cases, friendships--with the family. Most families needed several weeks over the course of the summer to use the three DVDs in a natural, unhurried way. This timeline worked well for the case study.

Creating immediate summaries of the interviews using a thick description technique proved to be very helpful during data analysis. The summaries were used as an aid to recollection and as an encapsulation of key aspects of each experience with the families. The design of interview questions enabled the researcher to link effectively

to program elements in *Shalom Sesame* and to quantitative data in the larger realm of research activity, including the work of MediaKidz Consulting, North American Jewish Data Bank, Jewish Federations of North America, and Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry, because data collected in the case study is the same or similar to other variables and indicators measured by these organizations. A frame-by-frame analysis of each *Shalom Sesame* episode created by MediaKidz Consulting was very useful in pinpointing details from the program referenced in conversations with the families.

A few problems were encountered with the ethnographic method. Recruiting enough participants to achieve the desired goal of 10 Jewish families with children ages three to six was time consuming and only partially successful. If there are only a handful of families with young children who identify as Jewish in southern Illinois, it is possible there are many other families with such poor Jewish social capital that they lack any active cultural and community connections. It is likely that these people were missed in the recruiting process because there is no way to know if they are Jewish. Transcribing the interviews was very difficult and time consuming because of a general lack of software in the industry for translation of spoken word to text. Since each interview took approximately six hours to transcribe, additional graduate student support was provided for transcribing the interviews. While it is best for the researcher to do transcription personally because the process generates greater intimacy and knowledge of the interviews, it is recommended that future studies be designed with multiple transcribers, especially if the number of interviews is larger and if the analysis and results are needed quickly.

The smiley scale used in this case study was not an entirely reliable measure of children's preferences, as evidenced by the way some of them changed their choices. In these families, the children approached the rating playfully and seemed to want to make a game out of it with the researcher. Nonetheless, the smiley scale is acknowledged as the best qualitative evaluation of children's attitudes. Given these case study findings, meta-analysis of smiley scale uses in children's media studies could be an interesting topic of future research. Since only seven families were involved in the case study, the desired result was only to provide a general idea about how children enjoy the program and whether they wish to keep watching it.

One of the limitations of this case study is its small scale. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, no claims are made for representativeness and generalizability. Still, this case study is an independent element of a larger summative research project conducted on *Shalom Sesame*. This qualitative ethnographic case study can be tested against results obtained in the larger project to provide a sense of validity in the interpretation. Results of the summative research project were published in December, 2011 in three reports; namely: *Shalom Sesame Experimental Study: Impact on American Children's Knowledge About Israel and Jewish Culture* by MediaKidz Research and Consulting, *Shalom Sesame Family Survey: Use and Value for Jewish Families in the United States* by Media Kidz Research and Consulting, and *Shalom Sesame: Summary Report of the Qualitative Case-Study* by Dafna Lemish with Elizabeth Spezia and Shoshana Dayanim. Results of the entire project are used to further academic understanding as well as to inform business decisions about *Shalom Sesame* and Jewish education. *Shalom Sesame* distribution in the United States

includes DVD sales and outreach through the Jewish Community Centers of North America.

One of the challenges in interpreting the data collected through this research was the sheer volume of potentially significant meanings that could be assigned to qualitative interviews and observations with families. The ethnographic data is descriptive and socially constructed through naturalistic observations and interviews with family members. During data collection, it is important for the researcher to be non-judgmental, using an inductive approach which focuses on the family. The researcher must allow the family to make their own choices about viewing or not viewing the program. Interpretive techniques related to family television viewing of *Shalom Sesame* must take into account “those distinct and detailed events which social actors create in their own terms and on their own grounds in order to make the substance of their ordinary routines meaningful” (Lull, 1980, p. 198). Another challenge of interpretation relates to the researcher’s theoretical assumptions. Understanding of will, beliefs about truth, and the ordering of value all come into play when interpreting qualitative data. In this case study, even the non-Jewish affiliation of the researcher influenced the interpretive results. Having no personal experience of membership in the Jewish community limited the basis of comparison for the researcher. Because the researcher has never visited a Jewish Sunday School or other educational setting for Jewish children, normative types of instructional practices are unfamiliar. Hebrew letters of the alphabet, Jewish terms, and assumptions about Jewish traditions all are unfamiliar, requiring extra time for the researcher to learn and consider, primarily with the aid of the thesis advisor and the families themselves. This learning experience

created new social capital and helped the researcher build greater understanding of Jewish culture among families living in southern Illinois.

This case study concludes by acknowledging the value of *Shalom Sesame* on two levels. From an educational perspective, the *Shalom Sesame* case study examines how families use the program to activate Jewish identity in their homes. The program helped Jewish families participating in this study to identify with important aspects of their culture and traditions. Parents who were raised in Jewish households remembered the Hebrew letters and words depicted on the program and acknowledged the significance of Israel in their lives. Non-Jewish spouses learned Jewish customs alongside their little ones. In southern Illinois homes, *Shalom Sesame* programs were a catalyst for parents to renew conversations about their hopes for their children's futures as Jewish people. Children asked to watch the program and were able to connect things they watched with practices in their homes. *Shalom Sesame* programs created a focus on Jewish ways of living in conversations among older brothers and sisters as well as parents and grandparents.

From a children's television perspective, the *Shalom Sesame* case study serves as a role model for research studies that explore how families use programs to learn about cultures and enrich their understanding of themselves and other people. This case study shows that the educational content of *Shalom Sesame* has value for older children. The *Sesame Street* format could be modified to create programs with similar content and greater appeal for older children. For example, live action scenes of Jewish children from *Shalom Sesame* can be offered online and on demand for parents and educators to share with older children.

Sesame Street has always opened a window to diverse cultures. Based on the positive reception of *Shalom Sesame*, the creators may consider adapting *Sesame Street* for use among immigrants and other minorities in the US. By adapting the program to aid understanding of the significant population diversity in this country, such as Spanish-speaking immigrants in the US, Sesame Workshop would fill a gap in young children's programming. Such a program could be helpful in teaching English as well as preserving and sharing aspects of Hispanic culture among Mexican and Central American populations living in the US. Similar children's programs that explore the many indigenous Native American population groups in the US could be educational and entertaining to families. This type of program could also provide a foundation for understanding differences, supporting continuity between generations, and resolving conflicts among children of different backgrounds. The *Shalom Sesame* model could be adapted for families in other minority groups such as Muslims living in the United States. As suggested by several families who participated in this case study, these programs are of interest to general populations in mainstream cultures. As this case study demonstrates, *Shalom Sesame* offers a unique introduction for families to learn about themselves and others who are different. The program has enduring value for Jewish families in southern Illinois by helping them to connect with the Jewish community in the world around them.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PHONE/ FACE TO FACE RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello, my name is Beth Spezia. I am a graduate student at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. I am working on a family media research project. My study involves a new DVD series from Sesame Workshop known as *Shalom Sesame*. We want to know how young children learn about Jewish culture from *Shalom Sesame*. Dr. Dafna Lemish, professor and chair of the Department of Radio-Television at SIUC and former Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication at Tel Aviv University, is supervising this study, and it has been approved by Southern Illinois University.

We are seeking Jewish families with children between the ages of three and six to participate in the study. Participation is voluntary, and will take approximately 12 hours over a period of three months.

Would you like to hear more about this study?

Here is how the study works. Participants will receive *Shalom Sesame* DVDs and a notebook to keep track of viewing activities at home. I will visit your home at a time that is convenient to learn about your family life and your media environment. During the visit I will use a digital audio recorder, and later our discussion will be transcribed from the recording. I will leave the DVDs and a notebook with you. Over the next few weeks, you will keep track of your family's viewing of *Shalom Sesame* by writing in the diary. We will have two more interviews in your home. During one of the visits I would like to observe your child(ren) watching *Shalom Sesame* during a time when this behavior would naturally occur. In between the home visits, I will call you and

you can share parts of your diary with me through email. The last visit will focus on your experience and what you thought of *Shalom Sesame*.

If you participate in this study we will take all reasonable steps to maintain your family's confidentiality. The data we collect will be kept secure and the reports we create will not reveal your names and your family's identity. Before we begin the study, I will share a consent form with you and a letter that explains the study in detail. We have determined that this study presents minimal risk to your family, because you will choose viewing activities and you will choose what to share with me. You will be able to withdraw from the study at any point with no penalty.

Do you have any questions about this study?

Do you wish to participate?

If no: Thank you for your time. If you know of other Jewish families in southern Illinois who might be willing to help with this study, please ask them to contact me.

Provide contact information.

If maybe: I understand your need to think about it and consult with other family members. Let me know if there is any other information I can supply you to help with your decision making. Would you like me to mail you the letter describing the study so you can learn more about it? When would be a good time for me to contact you again?

If yes: Thank you so much! Your willingness to participate will help shape the direction of children's media in the future. May I have your preferred method of contact so that I can share more information with you? Can we schedule a time for our first visit now?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM FOR SHALOM SESAME STUDY

Project Title:

Shalom Sesame Ethnographic Study

Researchers:

Principle Investigator: Dr. Dafna Lemish, Professor and Chair, Department of Radio-Television, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale and former Professor and Chair, Department of Communication, Tel Aviv University

Researcher: Beth Spezia, graduate student in the College of Mass Communication & Media Arts at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale

Why is this research being done?

This is a family media research project that involves a new program series from Sesame Workshop (producers of the award winning educational program *Sesame Street*). We are working with MediaKidz Research & Consulting agency to conduct a small study with Jewish (or partially Jewish) families in southern Illinois. This study will help us evaluate the educational impact of a series of children's television programs known as *Shalom Sesame*. This study will help us understand how families might be using these programs and how children learn about Jewish culture from *Shalom Sesame*. We are inviting you to participate in this study because your family has a child between the age of three and six.

What will I be asked to do?

If you choose to participate in the study, your family will watch *Shalom Sesame* DVDs and contribute your ideas about *Shalom Sesame* through personal interviews, phone calls, and written records. The study will take approximately 12 hours of your time over three months. Here is how the study works. You will complete a consent form to participate. Beth will visit your home at a time that is convenient to learn about your family life and your media environment. During the visit Beth will use a digital audio recorder, and later the discussion will be transcribed from the recording. Beth will leave the DVDs with the program episodes and a dairy-notebook, with you. Over the next few weeks, you will keep track of your family's viewing of *Shalom Sesame* by writing in the diary. We will have two more interviews in your home. During one of the visits Beth would like to observe your child(ren) watching *Shalom Sesame at a time when this activity happens naturally*. In between the home visits, Beth will call you and you can share parts of your diary through email. The last visit interview will focus on your experience and what you thought of *Shalom Sesame*.

What about confidentiality?

If you participate in this study we will take all reasonable steps to maintain your family's confidentiality. We will assign a code number to each family in the study and remove names from interview transcripts. The data we collect will be kept secure and the reports, articles, or presentations we create will not reveal your names or family's identity. Only the two researchers directly involved with the project will have access to

the data. Before we begin the study, Beth will share a consent form with you and your child(ren).

What are the risks of this research?

We have determined that this study presents minimal risk to your family, because you will choose viewing activities and you will choose what to share with us. You will have an opportunity to preview the television episodes before screening them to your child(ren). You and your child(ren) may choose not to participate at any time during the study. You may choose not to be audio recorded at any time during the study. There is no penalty for withdrawing or not participating in the study.

What are the benefits of this research?

Your family may enjoy watching the educational programs and learning about Jewish culture and traditions. Though the effect of the program is not yet tested, your child's knowledge and comprehension may improve from participating in the project, but benefits are not guaranteed. We hope that, in the future, other people may benefit from this study through improved knowledge about how to share cultural awareness and understanding through children's media. The DVDs will remain yours to keep.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Dr. Dafna Lemish and Beth Spezia of Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. If you have any questions about the research

study itself, now or later, please contact us at dafnaemish@siu.edu, 618-453-6992 or beth.spezia@wsiu.org, 618-453-5595.

Human Subjects Committee approval

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to: Human Subjects Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, Woody Hall C214, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709, siuhsc@siu.edu, 618-453-4533.

APPENDIX C

INTRODUCTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE

(topics for discussion, not necessarily in set order as customary in in-depth interviews)

General History of the Family

Who are the members of this family? Names, ages

What languages does this family speak?

What are the occupations of the family members?

What are favorite leisure activities of this family?

Who is the primary caregiver (mother, father, other)?

How long has the family lived in southern Illinois? Where are they originally from?

Media Environment

What screen media is used in this home? (Television, DVD, computer, other)

How many television sets, computers are in the home and where are they located? (What media are used in the parents' and children's bedrooms? In common areas?)

How is screen media used in this home? (Who, when, and how is media used; What is your daily media-use routine? Are there programs that you watch regularly? Are there programs that you watch regularly together as a family? Are there programs that you watch together with your child(ren) regularly?)

The Child

What is the child's daily routine?

Who does the child spend time with during a regular week?

What are some of the child's interests?

What are some of the child's personality traits?

Which media does the child use? (television, DVD, videogames, computer, other)

What programs does the child watch regularly?

Does your family have rules about the child(ren)'s use of media? (e.g., constraints regarding amount of viewing/playing, content of viewing/playing, scheduling of viewing/playing, location of viewing/playing; is the child allowed to operate technology alone – e.g., remote control device or turn computer on/off?)

Jewish Culture in the Family

What is your family's Jewish background?

How important is it for you to maintain your Jewish identity?

How important is it for you to raise your children as Jewish?

Do you practice any of the Jewish traditions? (e.g., Shabbat, holidays, keeping kosher, having Bar/Bat Mitzvahs?)

Do you attend synagogue on a regular basis or occasionally?

Do your children attend (or are you planning for them to attend) a Jewish Sunday School?

Are you involved in the Jewish community in your area? Do you socialize with other Jewish families?

Do you speak/read Hebrew?

Do you have a special interest in Israel? (e.g., Do you follow it more closely on the news? Have you ever visited Israel?)

Expectations

As you are aware, this study is about a new television series called *Shalom Sesame* produced by Sesame Workshop that deals with Jewish culture.

Do you have any thoughts about your child(ren)'s viewing such programs? (e.g., concerns?

Hopes?)

How do you feel at this point about your family's participation in this project? (e.g., excited,

worried, indifferent; what is the motivation for participation?)

Close

Thank you for sharing information about your family with me today.

Now I am going to give you some DVDs from Sesame Workshop. These DVDs are part of a new program called *Shalom Sesame*. I ask that you watch the DVDs with your family whenever you would like but at least one program once a week. Then please write your impressions of the experience. If you have email, you can send your thoughts to me online at beth.spezia@wsiu.org (give email contact information). If you prefer, you may keep a written diary (give notebook). I will call you in a few days and check to see how you are doing. If you have any questions at any time, feel free to get in touch with me (give phone number). Is there anything you would like to ask me at this time?

APPENDIX D

INSTRUCTIONS TO PARENTS FOR COMPLETION OF THE DIARY

Dear _____ (name of the family member who will complete the diary):

Thank you once again for your collaboration and assistance in this exciting research project about *Shalom Sesame* and Jewish affinity. Your contribution helps us understand the role educational television can have in raising young children in a multi-cultural world.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to: Human Subjects Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, Woody Hall C214, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709, siuhsc@siu.edu, 618-453-4533.

For this part of the study, we will be most grateful to you if you will be willing to keep a diary of _____ (child's) program related behavior. You are the person who knows your child best, and are around him/her during and after viewing the program, thus you are the expert informant who can help us understand the role the program might have in _____ (child's name) life. You can be as detailed or brief as you wish, although of course, we will benefit more from detailed descriptions. Note things like: child's requests for viewing the program, expressions of emotions, learning and behaviors related to the program. Tell us also about the way you choose (if at all) to relate to the program. We are interested in learning the mundane details of the role this program might have in your everyday life. You can write it down in the diary, type out on a computer, and email to me periodically. If you have any questions on how to report in the diary, please contact me, Beth, at 618-453-5595 or beth.spezia@wsiu.org.

Remember, everything related to your family's viewing of *Shalom Sesame* is of interest to us! We thank you once again for your commitment and assistance.
Shalom,



Beth Spezia

APPENDIX E

CHILD OBSERVATION

Researcher will sit in the same viewing area with the child, but preferably out of the child's direct view so observation and note taking is less obtrusive. Researcher will take notes, as customary in ethnographic observations regarding all behavior during viewing session.

Pre-viewing: What was the child's behavior regarding the upcoming viewing; including settling down by the television behavior and related conversation?

During viewing: Was the child attentive to the program? Did the child express enjoyment/boredom/or any other emotions while viewing the program? Did the child lose patience at particular points in the viewing situation? Did the child relate to the program during viewing time – talk back to the television and make sounds (e.g., laugh, repeat words, answer questions, sing along, point to the television and name something on it); **react behaviorally** (e.g., clap hands, move, dance); **ask questions or make comments to researcher and/or any others present in the room?** Did any other family member initiate any conversation during viewing time? Did s/he join the viewing? What were they engaged in during the viewing?

Immediately post-viewing: Was the child unhappy when the program ended? Did the child request to continue viewing? Did the child comment about the viewing when it was over?

APPENDIX F

CHILD INTERVIEW GUIDE

(topics for discussion, not necessarily in set order as customary in in-depth interviews, to be completed based on child's attention span and cooperation)

General attitude

Did you like this program?

If Yes: What did you like about it? Was there anything you did not like about it?

If No: What didn't you like about it? Was there anything that you did like about it?

What about the other programs that you saw before of Shalom Sesame, did you like (or dislike) them too? (e.g., prompts – why, what about them)

Would you like me to leave these DVDs for you so you can watch more of these programs or do you think I can take them back now because you don't want to watch them anymore?

Specific program

What was this program about?

Was it interesting?

Have you seen something like this before? Where/when? (adjust to child's response)

Would you like to learn more about it?

I noticed that you were _____ (describe child's behavior – e.g., laughing, singing, imitating, getting up and leaving the room, etc) when they showed _____ (describe specific program element). Would you like to tell me about it? (solicit specific feedback)

Repeat as necessary and as appropriate to child's attention span.

Thank you so much, you are such a smart kid and I enjoyed so much talking to you.

You really helped me a lot by allowing me to view *Shalom Sesame* with you and to talk to you about it. Do you want to tell me anything else?

I will now go to the other room to continue to talk to your Mom/Dad/other and let you go play/watch/other (adjust to the situation). Thanks!

APPENDIX G

CHILD'S ASSENT

To be obtained on the second home visit before research-related observation and/or research-related conversation with child(ren). Child(ren) will provide positive verbal and/or favorable head nod as assent.

Researcher's Script:

I would like to know how you like the *Shalom Sesame* programs that you watched.

Would it be okay if I ask you a few questions?

Yes _____

No _____

Would it be okay if I use this little recorder to record what you say to me, so I will be able to listen to it again later and write it down exactly as you said it?

Yes _____

No _____

Would it be okay if I sit here while you watch *Shalom Sesame*?

Yes _____

No _____

APPENDIX H

SECOND INTERVIEW GUIDE

(topics for discussion, not necessarily in set order as customary in in-depth interviews)

Exposure

How often did your child watch the programs? How many different episodes in all did your child view?

Viewing circumstances

What were the circumstances in which the child typically viewed: what time of the day? Where? Was there anyone else present? Was s/he doing secondary activities (e.g., eating, playing, falling asleep, looking at books, manipulating the remote control, etc.)

Viewing interest

What is your impression regarding the degree to which s/he enjoyed the programs, was attentive to them, wanted to view repeatedly?

Were there parts of the programs s/he liked more than others or less than others?

Viewing behavior

Did the child relate to the program during viewing time – talk back to the television and make sounds (e.g., laugh, repeat words, answer questions, sing along, point to the television and name something on it); react behaviorally (e.g., clap hands, move, dance); ask you questions or make comments to you or to someone else in the room?

Did you or any other family member initiate any conversation during viewing time?

After-viewing behavior

Did your child initiate any communication about the program outside of the viewing situation? (e.g., ask question, recall something s/he saw in the episode, relate it to everyday experiences)

Did you or any other family member initiate any communication about the program outside of the viewing situation? (e.g., ask question, recall something s/he saw in the episode, relate it to everyday experiences)

Overall evaluation

What is your evaluation of the programs – do you find them to be of value for your child?

Would you like your child to continue viewing them?

Do you think your child has benefited from them? Do you think your family has benefited from them?

Do you think it fits with your approach to your Jewish affiliation?

What is your overall evaluation of your family's participation in this project? Any feedback you would like to offer us about the program and or about the research surrounding it?

Close

Thank you for sharing information about your family again with me today.

Please continue to watch the DVDs with your family whenever you would like and continue to write your impressions of the experience. I will call you again to see how you are doing. If you have any questions at any time, feel free to get in touch with me (remind contact information).

APPENDIX I

THIRD INTERVIEW GUIDE

(topics for discussion, not necessarily in set order as customary in in-depth interviews)

Exposure

How often did your child watch the programs? How many different episodes in all did your child view?

Viewing circumstances

What were the circumstances in which the child typically viewed: what time of the day? Where? Was there anyone else present? Was s/he doing secondary activities (e.g., eating, playing, falling asleep, looking at books, manipulating the remote control, etc.)

When your child watched Shalom Sesame, who usually suggested watching it – you, your child, or someone else?

Viewing interest

How would you rate the appeal of Shalom Sesame for your child: Great, Good, OK, Not So Good, or Terrible? Why?

Were there parts of the programs s/he liked more than others or less than others?

Viewing behavior

Did the child relate to the program during viewing time – talk back to the television and make sounds (e.g., laugh, repeat words, answer questions, sing along, point to the television and name something on it); react behaviorally (e.g., clap hands, move, dance); ask you questions or make comments to you or to someone else in the room?

Did you or any other family member initiate any conversation while your child was viewing?

After-viewing behavior

Did your child initiate any discussion about the program after watching Shalom Sesame? (e.g., ask question, recall something s/he saw in the episode, relate it to everyday experiences) (IF YES: What did your child talk about?)

Did you or any other family member initiate any discussion about the program after watching Shalom Sesame? (e.g., ask question, recall something s/he saw in the episode, relate it to everyday experiences) (IF YES: What did you and your child talk about?)

Did your child engage in any follow-up activities after watching Shalom Sesame? (IF YES: What did he/she do? Who initiated the activities – you, your child, or someone else?)

Overall evaluation

How would you rate the value of Shalom Sesame for your family: Great, Good, OK, Not So Good, or Terrible? Why?

Would you like your child to continue viewing them? Why/why not?

Do you think your child has benefited from them? (IF YES: How? Anything else?) Do you think your family has benefited from them? (IF YES: How? Anything else?)

How well do you think it fits with your family's approach to Judaism?

Has your experience with Shalom Sesame influenced anything that your family does (or plans to do) regarding Israel or Judaism? (IF YES: What?)

How does it compare with other media programs/products aimed at teaching about Jewish culture?

What is your overall evaluation of your family's participation in this project? Any feedback you would like to offer us about the program and or about the research surrounding it?

Close

Thank you for sharing information about your family again with me today. May I have your notes about the project to take with me? After all the data is collected and analyzed, I will share what we learned in the study.

Here is the third DVD. You may keep all of the DVDs and watch them whenever you would like.

In addition, here is a small gift for your family.

If you have any questions about at any time, feel free to get in touch with me

(remind contact information).

APPENDIX J

LIST OF SHALOM SESAME DVDS

DVD #1 Episodes:

1. Welcome to Israel
2. Grover Learns Hebrew
3. Purim
4. Passover/Pesach

DVD #2 Episodes:

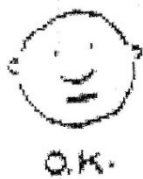
1. Hanukah
2. Shavuot
3. Shabbat
4. Mitzvah on the Street

DVD #3 Episodes:

1. Rosh Hashanah
2. Sukkot
3. Tu Bishvat
4. Adventures in Israel

APPENDIX K

SMILEY FACE SCALE



VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Elizabeth M. Spezia

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Barat College, Lake Forest Illinois
Bachelor of Arts, Theatre and Dance, May 1980

Special Honors and Awards:

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Thesis Title:

How parents use television to enrich their children's cultural identity: The case study of *Shalom Sesame* and Jewish Life

Major Professor: Dafna Lemish

Publications:

Lemish, D., Spezia, E., & Dayanim, S. (2011). *Shalom Sesame Summary Report of the Qualitative Case-Study*. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University.

Spezia, E., DuBois, L., Delaney, M., & Pianfetti, E. (2012). *Illinois PBS LearningMedia Pilot Evaluation Report*. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University.