



ARTICLE

# 'I Hid for Days in the Basement': Moments of 'Jewish' Discovery in Pre-Holocaust Germany and Austria

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What happens when someone ignorant of their Jewish heritage uncovers the truth in dramatic circumstances? This article focuses on and advocates for further analysis of an unstudied discrete phenomenon: 'the moment of discovery' in early twentieth century Germany and Austria. The article's four empirical sections analyse various facets of this moment: the clues which pointed towards the Jewish ancestral secret, missed by many non-Jewish 'Jews'; the reaction of antisemites to becoming the object of their own hatred complex; the deep despair felt during the moment of discovery; the mitigatory actions which could ameliorate the latter; and the minority who reacted positively to the news. Collectively, the piece displays the terror associated with being 'Jewish' at the time, the extent to which non-Jewish 'Jews' were truly separated from the Jewish community and, crucially, the radicalisation of moments of discovery under Nazism, when they became more devastating than ever.

Around 1929, I learned of my [Jewish] descent through my parents and was so horrified that I hid for days in the basement of our apartment. (Rudolf Briske describing his 'moment of discovery')<sup>1</sup>

For many early-mid twentieth century Germans and Austrians, 'Jewishness' was the worst inheritable trait.<sup>2</sup> As such, even once all legal obstacles with which it was associated had been annulled, both societies routinely threw up barriers which hindered the social and career progression of those who possessed Jewish ancestors.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes conversion opened doors, but the advent of racial antisemitism and its precursors meant that, long before the Nazis reordered society around such principles, 'once a Jew, always a Jew' was a slogan with which the unfortunately implicated had to reckon daily.

<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Briske, 'Biographischer Begleittext zu den 17 Tagebüchern von Rudolf Briske,' *Institut für Zeitgeschichte Archiv*, München, ED363-18-2, 1989, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Instead of demarcating the precise years in which this perception rose and fell, one can point to its peak, lasting from the early nineteenth century (in the wake of the beginnings of emancipation and increased fear of 'Jewish infiltration') until its rapid decline in 1945. Of course, antisemitism in Germany and Austria did not simply disappear in 1945, but what did was its potential to be a major career impediment or to consign someone to a death camp. Note, for example, that the 'Jews' who were still in Berlin at the end of the war found themselves struggling to prove their 'Jewishness' to Soviet soldiers, a complete reversal of fortune; see Richard N. Lutjens, *Submerged on the Surface: The Not-So-Hidden Jews of Nazi Berlin, 1941–1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 224.

<sup>3</sup> These barriers have been adumbrated in countless publications, but setting aside political histories, one can get the clearest picture of such barriers in specialist analyses of, for example, German lawyers of Jewish descent: Peter Landau, *Juristen jüdischer Herkunft im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2020). I also recommend Gerhard Botz et al., eds., *Eine Zerstörte Kultur: Jüdisches Leben und Antisemitismus in Wien seit dem 19. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag GmbH, 2002). For classic English language analyses see Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany & Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988, revised edn.) and Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

In this context, this article asks: what was it like to live life without knowledge of one's Jewish ancestry, only then to discover the truth? Seeking to answer this question, I draw on the cases of forty Germans and Austrians who wrote or spoke *autobiographically* about their early-mid twentieth century lives. In the spotlight is a phenomenon I term hereafter as 'the moment of discovery'. The vast majority of these forty individuals were, at one point or another, unaware of their Jewish ancestry despite knowing what a Jew was.<sup>4</sup> Relatedly, this article mainly examines those who were brought up as non-Jewish by a parent (or two parents) of Jewish descent who appears not to have identified as Jewish. This article thus does not give in-depth treatment to moments of discovery where the child was raised non-Jewish but one or both parents identified as Jewish and had remained in the Jewish community. Section two considers these scenarios in brief.

The forty cases are a subset of a larger cohort of fifty-seven individuals who likewise wrote or spoke autobiographically about their lives. The excess seventeen non-Jewish 'Jews' (as I term them)<sup>5</sup> did not include descriptions of moments of discovery in their recollections. I have excluded non-autobiographical accounts because the absence of a moment of discovery in that genre of writing typically says more about a lack of source material than about whether the historical subject would have recalled a moment of discovery had they had the chance. Separately, the absence of a moment of discovery in an autobiographical account does not suggest that one did not take place. Rather, it suggests that the historical subject either could not recall it or did not see it as significant enough to include in their account (see section two, below).<sup>6</sup> The existence of insignificant or unmentioned moments of discovery should not distract from the fact that they *do* feature in seventy per cent of the autobiographical accounts I collected. As such, they certainly warrant analytical attention. Later we will discover that they even yielded something approaching a thematic lexicon or vocabulary.

The idea of a rich linguistic thread, binding together the accounts utilised in this article, prompts an unsatisfactorily brief discussion of postwar testimonies as a source type. While the fading of individual memory and the societal popularisation of normative narratives can certainly detract from a source's historicity, several leading Holocaust scholars have demonstrated that one must set aside assumptions and test for such distortions on a case-by-case and topic-by-topic basis.<sup>7</sup> As it happens, this article could not have been written without memoirs. Diaries, for example, typically omit the very background details where one finds the moment of discovery.<sup>8</sup> Organisational records are obviously far too impersonal. Broadly speaking, postwar autobiographical sources are really all we

<sup>4</sup> The fifty-eight accounts include those found in online oral history repositories (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, British Library, USC Shoah Archive, Fortunoff Archive), in the secondary literature, with the help of various search engines, and in various southern German archives (primarily in Munich).

<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that all non-Jewish 'Jews' mentioned in this piece permanently remained non-Jewish in their own self-perception. Some adopted a Jewish identity immediately, some later on in life.

<sup>6</sup> Or viewed it as embarrassing, for various reasons.

<sup>7</sup> One might note, indeed, Henry Greenspan's contention that later testimonies were not necessarily less accurate, as argued in his lecture 'The Awakening of Memory: Survivor Testimony in the First Years after the Holocaust, and Today' at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in 2000. A PDF is available at <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/bib49303>. See also Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 23–5 and Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2011), introduction.

<sup>8</sup> Many diaries of the Nazi era were begun in 1933 specifically to document the perceptibly momentous historical events (with 1933 being viewed as either disaster or renewal). For more on this theme see especially Janosch Steuer, "'Ein neues Blatt im Buche der Geschichte": Tagebücher und der Beginn der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft 1933/34' (and other chapters) in *Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten: Tagebücher und persönliche Zeugnisse aus der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus und des Holocaust*, eds. Frank Bajohr and Sybille Steinbacher (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), 42–60; Janosch Steuer, *A Third Reich, as I See It: Politics, Society, and Private Life in the Diaries of Nazi Germany, 1933–1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023). However, even diaries with a long history often lack mention of the moment of discovery and other crucial childhood memories. Certainly, some diaries contain moments of discovery but, as far as I can tell, it seems that contemporary accounts are relatively rare and tend to be from a parental perspective. See, for example, Mark Roseman and Jürgen Matthäus, *Jewish Responses to Persecution, Volume 1: 1933–1938* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2010), 35–6.

have. But this last sentence sells their value short, as Professor Marion Kaplan rightly argues in relation to memoirs: ‘In elucidating the personally meaningful episodes in a life and how people perceived their own lives ... [memoirs] are often more eloquent than most other sources.’<sup>9</sup> That memoirs are written to entertain, or perhaps connect with descendants, opens the door to distortion but also encourages expansive accounts that allow historians to uncover new phenomena.<sup>10</sup> So too can the ‘collective memory’ of the Holocaust pollute individual memory but also provoke a desire to set the record straight. The latter was particularly the case for non-Jewish ‘Jews’, linguistically written out of Holocaust memory as they were and still are. This notwithstanding, the statistics presented herein should be viewed only as rough guides. It is difficult to deal systematically with what is missing from a group of sources, let alone a single source. Suffice it to say that there were probably more antisemites in the cohort of forty than this piece would suggest and that some of those who claim to have reacted in a purely positive way to their moment of discovery had presumably been more ambivalent than they were willing to admit from the comfort of their Tel Aviv armchairs. Nonetheless, even if one grants the simplistic claim that post-facto sources are abnormally problematic, there is no escaping the endemic species of historical information which can be found only on their linguistically alluring shores.

Onwards, then. The central aim of this piece is to introduce ‘the moment of discovery’ as a discrete phenomenon. Before examining it in an empirical context, the first two of the following six sections discuss, respectively, (1) the relevant scholarship and (2) the present study’s focuses and limits. After that, the subsequent four empirical sections illuminate various facets of the early twentieth century moment of discovery in Germany and Austria: (3) missed clues which hinted at the ancestral secret; (4) antisemites of Jewish descent; (5) the linguistic and thematic tenor of the moment of discovery (and attempts to soften the blow) and, finally; (6) the minority who reacted positively to their moment of discovery. All in all, the six sections come together to highlight the significance of the moment of discovery, the extent to which non-Jewish ‘Jews’ were truly a part of their non-Jewish environment,<sup>11</sup> and the disruptive and deeply distressing impact that Nazi racial ideology wrought on the lives of young children. Memorable moments of discovery did occur before Nazism but were more common, venomously imparted, and soul-destroying under Nazism. This piece is not intended as the final word on ‘the moment of discovery’ and instead tasks itself with an initial illumination of a neglected phenomenon, consciously at the expense of a full consideration of its implications, the type of which appears in the author’s PhD thesis on non-Jewish ‘Full Jews’.

Before continuing, a moment must be spent on those I term non-Jewish ‘Jews’. This moniker reflects these individuals’ self-identification as non-Jewish and their externally decreed classification as ‘Jewish’ by Nazi law. Those with two or fewer grandparents whose names could be found on various official Jewish documents were usually classified as ‘Mischlinge’; correspondingly, those with three or more became ‘Full Jews’.<sup>12</sup> As this article shows, non-Jewish ‘Jews’ typically rejected this imposition

<sup>9</sup> Marion Kaplan, ‘Revealing and Concealing: Using Memoirs to Write German-Jewish History,’ in *Text and Context: Essays in Modern Jewish History and Historiography in Honor of Ismar Schorsch*, eds. Eli Lederhendler and Jack Wertheimer (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 2005), 384–410 (387). My thanks to Prof. Kaplan for sharing a digital copy of this with me. I originally found this chapter in Eric Garcia McKinley, ‘Reclaimed Pasts: Inter-marriage and Remembrances of National Socialist Racial Stigmatization by Jewish and non-Jewish Spouses and Mischling Children,’ *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 61 (2016), 183–98. McKinley implements and augments Kaplan’s theoretical musings impressively.

<sup>10</sup> I would also point to Mark Roseman’s useful discussion of a postwar testimony which provided ‘an astonishingly coherent account’ precisely because of its writer’s access to post-facto information; see Mark Roseman, *ÜberLeben im Dritten Reich: Handlungsspielräume und Perspektiven von Juden und ihren Helfern* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2020), 71.

<sup>11</sup> I wish to be clear that in arguing that there is cause to assert that non-Jewish ‘Jews’ found themselves in a distinct social situation that was far removed from the Jewish community, I am by no means making the hideous argument that this somehow means that they were therefore ‘less deserving’ of persecution than self-identifying Jews. This would imply the converse, that voluntary proximity to ‘Jewishness’ is deserving of persecution.

<sup>12</sup> If a ‘Mischling 1st degree’ was or became a member of the Jewish community (only around 10% were), then they were classified as a ‘full Jew’ (or, in this specific context, a ‘Geltungsjude’).

and did not simply become Jewish overnight. Unlike my PhD thesis and other published work, the present piece examines not just ‘Full Jews’ but also ‘Mischlinge’ (as for why, and the implications, see section two).<sup>13</sup> As with most ‘Full Jews’ in ‘mixed marriages’, ‘Mischlinge’ were not systematically targeted for destruction. It is always worth remembering, though, that those affected by these classifications did not know the future. Individuals in ‘mixed marriages’ were often deported and killed, for a range of dynamic and locally determined reasons.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, though ‘Mischlinge’ mostly remained exempt from deportation, the SS repeatedly pushed for their inclusion in the unfolding genocide.<sup>15</sup>

Non-Jewish ‘Jews’ were, as with the majority of Germans of Jewish descent, predominantly middle class. This classically ‘German-Jewish’ characteristic was further entrenched with non-Jewish ‘Jews’ because conversions were often linked to (though not always motivated by) upward aspirational movement.<sup>16</sup> Both on the left and right of the political spectrum, the vast majority were deeply loyal to Germany (or Austria) and did not speak Yiddish.<sup>17</sup> Many were active Christians, some devout, and a minority were committed atheist communists. Non-Jewish ‘Mischlinge’ considerably outnumbered non-Jewish ‘Full Jews’ in Germany, but only by a little in Austria. In general, statistical calculations about the total number of non-Jewish ‘Jews’ will always be approximate. It was only in the May 1939 census that Germany systematically recorded ‘racial Jews’, a subset of whom were labelled as ‘non-believing Jews’, by virtue of being outside the national Jewish community.<sup>18</sup> Even those figures must be handled carefully because one cannot fully filter out secular Jews who had left the Jewish community and because non-Jewish ‘Jews’ were particularly well placed to lie when filling out census forms.<sup>19</sup>

### Scholarship on the ‘Moment of Discovery’

To my knowledge, there is no scholarship explicitly addressing moments of discovery in the years before and during the Holocaust. Of course, moments of discovery are mentioned incidentally in the literature on *Christen jüdischer Herkunft* (Christians of Jewish origin), ‘Mischlinge’, and even self-identifying Jews, but never as a discrete phenomenon worthy of its own analysis.<sup>20</sup> A close but

<sup>13</sup> The PhD is due for completion in 2026. For my published work see Harry Legg, ‘Non-Jewish “Full-Jews”: The Everyday Life of a Forgotten Group Within Nazi Germany,’ *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 36, no. 4 (2022): 299–326 and Harry Legg, ‘Stuck Inside the *Volksgemeinschaft*: The Social Lives of non-Jewish “Full Jews” in Nazi Germany and Austria,’ *German History* 43, no. 1 (2025, forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> For a full account see Maximilian Strnad, *Privileg Mischehe? Handlungsräume ‘jüdisch versippter’ Familien 1933–1949* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021). See also Michaela Raggam-Blesch, ‘Precarious Reprieve from Deportation: Intermarried Families in Vienna,’ in *Deported: Comparative Perspectives on Paths to Annihilation for Jewish Populations under Nazi German Control*, eds. Michaela Raggam-Blesch, Peter Black and Marianne Windsperger (Vienna: New Academic Press), 257–282.

<sup>15</sup> For the seminal account of the Mischlinge’s top-down treatment see Jeremy Noakes, ‘The Development of Nazi Policy towards the German-Jewish “Mischlinge,” 1933–1945,’ *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 34, no. 1 (1989): 291–354.

<sup>16</sup> For more on this, please wait for the book which will hopefully arise from my PhD thesis.

<sup>17</sup> It should be specified that some Austrian non-Jewish ‘Jews’ were loyal to Germany as part of a wider pan-Germanic project, but many others were loyal to an independent Austria, as represented by the Schuschnigg government.

<sup>18</sup> For the German figures see Bruno Blau, ‘The Jewish Population of Germany 1939–1945,’ *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 2 (1950): 161–72. For Austria: Jonny Moser, *Demographie der jüdischen Bevölkerung Österreichs 1938–1945* (Vienna: Dokumentationsarchiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW), 1999), 18–19. For ‘Full Jews’ per the Nazi definition of three or four grandparents who had been members of the Jewish community, there may have been as many as 40,000 in Germany in 1933 and 35,000 in Austria in 1938. When one includes ‘Mischlinge’ of the first and second degrees, the number rises to several hundreds of thousands. For a detailed account of the stuttering attempts to register the ‘Jewish’ population see Stefan Boberg, ‘Implementing the Reichsbürgergesetz: Registration, Statistics, and the Deportations of German Jews,’ *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 67, no. 1 (2022): 79–99.

<sup>19</sup> For a suggested way to read the 1939 census, see Legg, ‘Non-Jewish,’ Appendix A. It is not personally my view that the 1939 census got the figures much wrong (more on this in my PhD thesis) but other historians disagree; see Strnad, *Privileg*, 41–2.

<sup>20</sup> For a full historiographical summary see Legg, ‘Non-Jewish,’ 300–8. In brief, non-Jewish ‘Jews’ have primarily been studied as ‘Christians of Jewish origin’ and from an organisational perspective, largely because of the difficulty of locating a

not quite cognate area of analysis has examined the practice of ‘passing’.<sup>21</sup> This was the act of concealing one’s Jewish identity or ancestry to survive, particularly in the war years. One prominent manifestation of this practice saw parents stowing their children away in monasteries, convents and other locations. One of Holocaust Studies’ most prominent scholars, Saul Friedländer, was one of these children.<sup>22</sup> Such a turn of events so early in life, when memory is fragile, naturally led to post-war moments of discovery.<sup>23</sup> Scholars working on wartime ‘passing’, as well as on so-called ‘U-boote’ (U-boats, i.e. hidden ‘Jews’), have not really investigated moments of discovery. However, a separate set of writers has begun the task of uncovering what happened when children of Jewish descent emerged from hiding.<sup>24</sup>

For present purposes, the comparative utility of the immediate post-war moments of discovery is in providing a stark contrast. They mainly affected orphaned children whose biological parents had been self-identifying Jews. Conversely, the pre-war phenomenon was dominated by non-orphaned children whose parents did not identify as Jewish and/or had chosen not to raise them as such.<sup>25</sup> Faced with a major challenge to their identities, pre-war discoverers were much more likely to have had the tools with which to cope. This was especially the case when their parents agreed on matters of identity, religion, and parenting. Perhaps most importantly, their parents were alive, offering continuity, while most post-war discoverers learned that they were orphans, this producing a newfound separation from their adopted parents at a time when Jewish organisations across Europe were seeking to shunt parentless children back into Jewish spheres of activity.<sup>26</sup> Of course, many children who experienced early post-war moments of discovery stuck by their non-Jewish identity and non-Jewish adoptive parents. Nonetheless, the double realisation about their heritage *and* their parentage made it difficult to continue unfazed. For example, the result in Poland was, as Marta Ansilewska writes, that ‘numerous children’ considered themselves ‘traitors to their parents and relatives’. For those children of the pre-war era examined in this study (i.e. those with converted, non-Jewish identifying parents), maintaining a non-Jewish identity aligned precisely with their parents’ identity orientation.<sup>27</sup> Where post-war children ‘learned that they were somehow different directly from their guardians’ (and, indeed, from their parents, if the latter were self-identifying Jews), the pre-war children discussed in this article

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nationwide collection of sources pertaining to the lives of a non-defined group who were a small subsection of the much larger cohort of self-identifying Jews.

- <sup>21</sup> For an excellent introduction to, and summary of, the vast but not clearly labelled literature on ‘passing’, I recommend Hana Green, ‘Passing on the Periphery: A Call for the Critical Reconsideration of Research on Identity “Passing” as a Jewish Response to Persecution During the Holocaust,’ *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 22, 2–3 (2022): 111–27. For ‘submarines’, some of the more up to date works include Lutjens, *Submerged*; Susanna Schrafstetter, *Flight and Concealment: Surviving the Holocaust Underground in Munich and Beyond* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), tr. Allison Brown and Brigitte Ungar-Klein, *Schattenexistenz: Jüdische U-Boote in Wien 1938–1945* (Vienna: Picus Verlag, 2019).
- <sup>22</sup> One can read his account in Saul Friedländer, *When Memory Comes* (New York: Other Press, 2016), tr. Helen R. Lane.
- <sup>23</sup> Those who had not forgotten about their Jewish ancestry also sometimes experienced moments of rupture akin to moments of discovery, but this was often due to being forced back into a Jewish environment rather than actually discovering that they were of Jewish descent for the first time – two different phenomena.
- <sup>24</sup> Nahum Bogner, *At the Mercy of Strangers: The Rescue of Jewish Children with Assumed Identities in Poland* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009); Erunah Nachmany-Gafny, *Dividing Hearts: The Removal of Jewish Children from Gentile Families in Poland in the Immediate Post-Holocaust Years* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009); Marta Ansilewska, ‘Accepting Jewish Roots for a Pair of Shoes: Identity Dilemmas of Jewish Children in Poland During the Second World War and in the Early Post-War Years,’ *European Review of History* 22, no. 2 (2015): 348–67; André Stein, *Hidden Children: Forgotten Survivors of the Holocaust* (London: Penguin Books, 1994); Feliks Tych, Alfons Kenkmann, Elisabeth Kohlhaas, and Andreas Eberhardt, eds., *Kinder über den Holocaust: Frühe Zeugnisse 1944–1948* (Berlin: Metropole, 2008).
- <sup>25</sup> Note, again, that this piece does not focus on children brought up as non-Jewish whose parent or parents retained a Jewish identity.
- <sup>26</sup> David H. Weinberg, *Recovering a Voice: West European Jewry After the Holocaust* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 49; Daniella Doron, *Jewish Youth and Identity in Postwar France: Rebuilding Family and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 55 & 73.
- <sup>27</sup> For those ‘Mischlinge’ whose ‘Jewish’ parent had retained a Jewish identity, a sense of continuity was less common but not impossible if the two parents had agreed to raise their child as a Christian.



felt a cavernous gulf open up between them and wider society but not between them and their parents.<sup>28</sup> Beyond all that, those pre-war discoverers with a stable parental situation were not faced with the prospect of moving to a new family and home.

A more comparable cohort is comprised of those who experienced moments of discovery after the end of communist rule in Poland. Across communist Europe, but especially in Poland, there were compelling reasons to conceal one's Jewish ancestry: the infamous antisemitic staging of the 1948 'doctors' plot' and the purge in 1968, to give but two examples.<sup>29</sup> As such, 'many Holocaust survivors concealed their Jewishness' and 'many Jewish children were raised as Catholics.' In this sense, Poland had scarcely finished its first wave of post-war 'moments of discovery' before seeing fit to sow the insidious seeds of the second. Crucially, unlike those who experienced moments of discovery in the early post-war period, those who did so after 1989 found themselves in a position akin to that of their parents. The latter were neither dead, nor initially of a different religion, nor adopters and therefore of a different bloodline. The only area of real divergence was the relatively high level of positivity associated with being Jewish in the 1990s, something absent throughout most of the twentieth century.

A small but growing sub-field has begun to research these post-1989 Polish moments of discovery.<sup>30</sup> The latter are misguidedly characterised by some authors as a teleological revelation of 'who the discoverer actually is', as though Jewish heritage necessarily must have contemporary pseudo-racial valence.<sup>31</sup> The inappropriateness of this point is worth emphasising in the context of the present piece because German and Austrian non-Jewish 'Jews' of the early twentieth century typically reacted in the opposite manner. They were *not* Jewish and wished to remain that way. Of the forty individuals studied in this article, only seven reacted positively to their moment of discovery, and only four to the extent that they began identifying as Jewish.<sup>32</sup> This contrasts strongly with the research into post-communist Poland which emphasises positive reactions. In this context, Vera Muller-Paisner's smugly omniscient framing of the moment of discovery seems almost warranted: 'Their parents themselves may have *actually* believed that they were Christians, thus creating two generations in ignorance of their religious identity [emphasis mine].'<sup>33</sup> In other words, the positivity of contemporary responses has prompted some scholars to swallow the notion that something 'real' and almost genetically immutable has been discovered.<sup>34</sup> This article dispenses with that fiction. Indeed, it is the durability

<sup>28</sup> Ansilewska, 'Accepting Jewish Roots,' 361.

<sup>29</sup> Vera Muller-Paisner, 'Poland: Crises in Christian-Jewish Identity,' *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2002): 13–30 (14).

<sup>30</sup> Vera Muller-Paisner, *Broken Chain: Catholics Uncover the Holocaust's Hidden Legacy and Discover Jewish Roots* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2014); Katka Reszke, *Return of the Jew: Identity Narratives of the Third Post-Holocaust Generation of Jews in Poland* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013); also the following newspaper article: Rachel Avraham, 'Young, Hidden Polish Jews Discover Heritage in Israel,' *Jewish Press* (27 August 2013), <https://www.jewishpress.com/blogs/united-with-israel/young-hidden-polish-jews-discover-heritage-in-israel/2013/08/27/>. Analysing a similar epoch, there is also an observable eclectic collection of works looking at the 'moments of discovery' further afield, e.g. as experienced by the descendants of so-called Cryptojews (those who practised Judaism in secret), including those descended from Portuguese and Spanish Jews who were forcibly converted; see Sandra Cumings Malamed, *Return to Judaism: Descendants from the Inquisition Discovering their Jewish Roots* (McKinleyville: Fithian Press, 2010), or as experienced by Africans from Cabo Verde; see Alma Gottlieb, 'Revisiting History, Rethinking Identity: Some Cabo Verdean Profiles in Afro-Jewish Journeys,' *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 10, no. 1 (2019): 47–73; and as experienced globally: Barbara Kessel, *Suddenly Jewish: Jews Raised as Gentiles Discover Their Jewish Roots* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> A major exception is the excellent work of Katka Reszke; see Reszke, *Return of the Jew*.

<sup>32</sup> It must be noted that, if my study had included the children of 'mixed marriages' where the Jewish parent had retained a Jewish identity, it is probable that a higher proportion of the cohort would have reacted positively to their moment of discovery.

<sup>33</sup> Muller-Paisner, 'Poland: Crises,' 14. Pseudo-racial statements can be seen in a multitude of works, e.g. Kessel, *Suddenly Jewish*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> The tendency to write as though descendants of Jews are betraying their 'true' selves can in part be explained by the general societal and scholarly tendency to view Jewishness as inheritable, echoing, as Susan Glenn describes, how 'Throughout all of the de-racializing stages of twentieth-century social thought, Jews have continued to invoke blood logic as a way of defining and maintaining group identity'; see Susan Glenn, 'In the Blood? Consent, Descent, and the

of various (positive) Jewish and (negative) non-Jewish cultural and communal features which gives Jewishness its apparent indelibility. Certainly, the *idea* of race also plays a role.

But why has the relationship of contemporary Polish individuals of Jewish descent to their 'Jewishness' seemingly been so much more positive than that of non-Jewish 'Jews' in the early twentieth century? Firstly, explicit antisemitism, though still quite widespread, is much more taboo in Poland than it once was, even twenty years ago.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the younger generation is especially willing to discuss issues of heritage.<sup>36</sup> Prewar Germany was a different beast altogether. Secondly, any study of the early twentieth century is conducted from a considerable temporal distance. As such, there has been sufficient time for conditions to become favourable for non-Jewish 'Jews' to proffer open accounts about issues that they, at the time, would have been loath to describe. In addition, the popular and scholarly interest in the Holocaust and 'Jewishness' is at an all-time high. In sum, there is presently insufficient historical and personal interest to prompt a wave of more negative Polish accounts of the moment of discovery.

### The Study's Limits and Focuses

What are this study's focuses and omissions? A first relevant consideration is that were a non-Jewish 'Jew' to experience a moment of discovery that they would later recall, it was extremely likely to occur by the time they turned eighteen (thirty-six of the forty). This was because children, particularly under Nazism, were faced with scenarios conducive to producing moments of discovery. 'Aryan' children were common bearers of the bad news.<sup>37</sup> Some were maliciously handed the ammunition by their parents, before deploying it either innocently or savagely in the playground. After 1933, child-aged moments of discovery skyrocketed in the context of having to fill in 'racial' forms required at school, the Hitler Youth, the League of German Girls (BDM), or other official contexts. At least in Germany (but perhaps not Austria), it was rare for a child's parents spontaneously to initiate a moment of discovery (see section five, below).

Correspondingly, there is some quantitative evidence that being an adult by the time the Nazis seized power meant that one was less likely to recall a moment of discovery (i.e. experience a memorable moment of discovery).<sup>38</sup> Presumably, every person who later displays knowledge of their ancestry must have, at one point or another, experienced a moment of discovery in its most literal sense. Of the seventeen such individuals who did not *recount* a moment of discovery, eight were adults by the onset of Nazi rule. Of the forty individuals who did recount a moment of discovery, six were adults by the onset of Nazi rule. Though only a trend produced with a small sample size, the implication is that being a child under Nazism was more likely to supply someone with a memorable or recall-worthy moment of discovery. This hypothesis will be born out qualitatively throughout the article.

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Ironies of Jewish Identity,' *Jewish Social Studies* 8, nos. 2–3 (2002): 139–52 (140). For another critique of this phenomenon, see Sarah Imhoff, 'Racial Standing: How American Jews Imagine Community, and Why That Matters,' in *Judaism, Race, and Ethics: Conversations and Questions*, ed. Jonathan K. Crane (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020), 268–90 (268). See also Deborah Viëtor-Engländer's comprehensive overview of how scholarly biographers ascribe a Jewish identity to those who explicitly repudiated it, including to those who were several generations removed from the last familial self-identifying Jew, in Viëtor-Engländer, 'What's in a Name? What is Jewishness? New Definitions for Two Generations: Elsa Bernstein, Anna Gmeyner, Ruth Rewald and Others,' in *Integration und Ausgrenzung: Studien zur deutsch-jüdischen Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart. Festschrift für Hans Otto Horch zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Mark H. Gelber et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 467–81.

<sup>35</sup> Acknowledged in Reszke, *Return of the Jew*, 88.

<sup>36</sup> As noted in *ibid.*, 89.

<sup>37</sup> The ubiquity of this experience may partially relate to whichever youthful characteristic also made children more susceptible to Nazi propaganda; see Richard Evans, *The Third Reich in History and Memory* (Boston: Little Brown Book Group, 2015), 109.

<sup>38</sup> Twenty-eight of the forty strong cohort experienced moments of discovery under Nazism, but this in itself is probably statistically insignificant because a similar number were still children upon the start of the Nazi era.

Alongside its heavy focus on children, the study limits its analysis almost exclusively to individuals brought up as non-Jewish.<sup>39</sup> As just mentioned, theoretically speaking, every person who knows of their Jewish descent necessarily must have had a ‘moment of discovery’. And yet, it being remembered or chosen for recollection was not a foregone conclusion. During their post-facto recollections of childhood, individuals brought up unambiguously as Jewish tend to assign a wide variety of youthful activities to the category ‘Jewish’. This is even despite these activities having occurred before the child could possibly have developed an understanding of what the word ‘Jewish’ meant. There are some similarities here between this phenomenon and how Lawrence Langer distinguishes between what he calls ‘common memory’ and ‘deep memory’.<sup>40</sup> In this instance, the ‘common memory’ shared with wider society is the knowledge – not gained in the historical moment – that a certain action was ‘Jewish’. The ‘deep memory’ here would be the individualised recollection of having partaken in said action. The blending of deep and common memory in accounts by people who have ‘always’ self-identified as Jewish is such that, instead of recalling a ‘moment of discovery’, their childhood memories blur into one long Jewish continuum. Their ‘Jewishness’ was never a question in their living memory. For most Jews, the unmemorable ‘moment of discovery’ was a moment when the word ‘Jewish’ was applied to something with which they were already familiar. The result, to take the example of Helmut Krüger, is an ancestral knowledge with an almost pre-requisite quality: ‘Of course I knew my mother was Jewish’.<sup>41</sup> It took a lot for children in self-identifying Jewish families to experience memorable (or recall-worthy) moments of discovery. Berit Gehrig, for example, ignored a multitude of signs, including her brother’s circumcision, only to find out the truth in the most dramatic of circumstances during *Kristallnacht*.<sup>42</sup> All of this was despite her being fully aware that Jews existed.<sup>43</sup> If a significant number of children from self-identifying Jewish families are ever shown to have experienced memorable moments of discovery, I would expect them to have been just old enough to know about race or religion, to have been the children of irreligious parents, and to have lived in areas with tiny Jewish populations. In general, we should not conflate assimilated Jewish children being introduced to Jewish religiosity at school with ‘moments of discovery’.

Aside from children raised as Jewish, also excluded from the present study are those non-Jewish ‘Jews’ who did not *recall* moments of discovery. Of the fifty-seven autobiographical accounts I possess<sup>44</sup> by non-Jewish ‘Jews’, seventeen do not mention a moment of discovery. Some of the seventeen probably recalled a moment of discovery but saw it as irrelevant to their life story. Others, much like the average self-identifying Jew, no longer retained the memory because of its insignificance. For example, having Jewish ancestry was a simple fact of little poignance to the non-Jewish ‘Jew’ Leonore Lyndsey.<sup>45</sup> Ignoring the interviewer’s multiple attempts to yield a response, she rattles off an account of her Catholic upbringing. Then, finally, Lyndsey indulges the interviewer after the latter switches tack and asks: ‘So you didn’t really feel Jewish?’. Lyndsey’s response is revealing: ‘No ... it’s not that I made a mystery of being from a Jewish mother, but I was brought up Christian’.

<sup>39</sup> For separate reasons, I have also excluded families where the Jewish partner, despite converting, retains a Jewish identity. This identity could impact quite significantly upon the moment of discovery and needs its own dedicated research.

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 5–6. For an introduction to specific issues relating to various key oral history archives and the Holocaust see Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>41</sup> Helmut Krüger, *Der Halbe Stern: Leben als Deutsch-jüdischer ‘Mischling’ im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Metropol, 1993), 9–12.

<sup>42</sup> Berit Gehrig, ‘Bist ‘ne Jüdische? Haste den Stern?: Erzählt im Gespräch mit Bruno Schöning (Kreuzberg: Dirk Nishen Verlag, 1985), 4.

<sup>43</sup> What is particularly fascinating about Gehrig’s case is how her ignorance of her Jewish heritage – even despite her family’s seeming adherence to various Jewish customs – meant that her post-moment of discovery experience aligned more heavily with that of those non-Jewish ‘Jews’ who came from distinctly non-Jewish families. After being forced to attend a Jewish school she described it as ‘terrible because you always had the feeling: Are you actually a real Jew? Do you actually belong to the Jews?’, Gehrig, *ibid.*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> At the time of writing in mid-2023.

<sup>45</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, Interview of Leonore Lyndsey by Elisabeth Pozzi-Thanner (1997), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/27195>.



Interestingly, the purveyor of the ‘mystery’ here is Lyndsey. Contrastingly, most non-Jewish ‘Jews’ conceive of their ‘Jewishness’ from the opposite angle, centred on a moment of discovery over whose narrative they have little control (see section five, below).

Several factors made it more likely for a non-Jewish ‘Jew’ to be aware of their Jewish ancestry but not recall a moment of discovery. The more recent the transition away from Jewishness, the more likely a family was to possess openly Jewish family members. Even (or especially) when intra-familial hostility was present, infrequent mutual visits could impart information about Jewish ancestry to particularly alert children. As George Cranby described it: ‘yes, we had a lot of relatives and they were all Jewish except one brother of my mother who also changed faith. ... But, it was just a matter of fact one didn’t think about. ... I knew that there were different faiths.’<sup>46</sup> The ideological outlook of the parents was also important. Children brought up to respect people of all kinds could learn about their Jewish ancestry without perceiving it as life changing. The parents of Henry Leichter, for example, reared him in a spirit of socialist humanism, teaching him to ‘respect the belief of other people’.<sup>47</sup> Leichter’s ancestry was portrayed as unimportant and thus it is unsurprising that he does not recall a moment of discovery.

As mentioned earlier, from September 1935 the Nazis differentiated ‘Mischlinge’ from ‘Full Jews’. ‘Mischlinge’ were heavily persecuted but nonetheless retained the greater social and legal freedom of the two. Of course, the two groups were differentiated not only by their legal persecutory status but also by the potential for the parents of ‘Mischlinge’ to have diverging identities, family histories, and persecutory statuses. We will return to this shortly. Of the forty individuals examined in the present study, twenty-nine were ‘Mischlinge’, the other eleven ‘Full Jews’. I have chosen not to emphasise this legal distinction for two reasons, one historical and one relating to the limitations of this piece. The historical reason is that, when applicable (after 1935), the legal classifications instituted by the Nuremberg Laws barely registered during the moment of discovery. Though the event itself frequently involved *mention* of the fact that the child in question had been labelled as a ‘Mischling’ or ‘Full Jew’, this distinction appears to have been irrelevant in the moment. It is worth remembering that these children had, necessarily, been at least somewhat sheltered from reality. They were hardly likely to have read Wilhelm Stuckart and Hans Globke’s tedious explanation of the Nuremberg Laws.<sup>48</sup> Children suddenly saddled with the ‘Mischling’ label did not gleefully celebrate their slightly superior status. That ‘Full Jews’ would be deported and murdered several years later was obviously not a consideration. Of course, when one follows ‘Mischlinge’ and ‘Full Jews’ beyond the moment of discovery and into their daily lives under oppression, the legal-classificatory difference soon becomes important. Sometimes, this only took a matter of days. The implications of the legal differences between ‘Mischlinge’ and ‘Full Jews’ explain why my own PhD thesis (a work in progress) focuses only on non-Jewish ‘Full Jews’.

The other reason I underplay the ‘Mischling’ versus ‘Full Jew’ distinction owes to a methodological limitation. That is, of the forty individuals studied in this article, only twelve experienced post-Nuremberg Laws moments of discovery. One reason for this disparity was mentioned earlier: for German non-Jewish ‘Jews’, it was quite rare to make it to 1935 without being confronted with the truth. However, the lack of post-1935 cases also stems from the fact that Austrians are underrepresented (only six of the forty) in this piece, thereby augmenting the naturally produced German disparity since Nazism came to Austria *after* the Nuremberg Laws. That is, far more Austrians remained unaware of their heritage until the legal distinction between ‘Mischling’ and ‘Full Jew’ had been instituted. Though I maintain that the insignificance of the Nuremberg Laws is a feature of both the Austrian and German moment of discovery, I wish to give due warning to the reader

<sup>46</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview of George Cranby* by Reuben Zylberszpic (1997), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/35083>.

<sup>47</sup> As quoted directly from Henry’s personal account in Herbert Steiner, *Käthe Leichter: Leben, Werk und Sterben einer österreichischen Sozialdemokratin* (Vienna: Ibero und Molden, 1997), 33. See also his interview: USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview with Henry Leichter* by Sheila Ainbinder (1997), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/28522>.

<sup>48</sup> Wilhelm Stuckart and Hans Globke, *Kommentare zur deutschen Rassengesetzgebung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1936).

of this article's underrepresentation of Austrians. Indeed, it does not consider the comparative intensity of post-Anschluss events or the fact that the Austrian population had been able to observe similar events as they unfolded in early 1930s Germany. In this light, Austrians probably paid, on average, more attention to the 'Mischling' vs 'Full Jew' distinction during their moments of discovery than did Germans.

Earlier, I mentioned the potential impact on *future* 'Mischlinge' (and their experience of the 'moment of discovery') of the fact that their parents were necessarily of two different 'racial' and religious heritages, something already true before the Nuremberg Laws. On the one hand, it was obviously standard for parents of both 'races' to try and comfort their distressed children. On the other hand, 'mixed' parents were more likely to have divorced, with 'Mischlinge' in such cases (but also more generally) given the chance, or forced, to pick a side. If the 'Jewish' parent was female, they were particularly vulnerable to losing contact with their child, as the case of Dieter Bergmann shows (see section four). Stemming from this, scholars of 'Mischlinge' have rightly emphasised the latter's particular susceptibility to internal identity conflicts, noting how the split parental status combined with the statistically youthful character of the cohort to produce more instances of destabilisation than was typical for other persecuted categories.<sup>49</sup> Several immediate conflicts are noted throughout the piece (e.g. instant rejections of antisemitism, and decisions to embrace Jewishness). Indeed, the anguished and stunned reactions which characterise the moment of discovery certainly chime with the type of emotions which could spark internal identity conflicts. Certainly, the moment of discovery was an affront and challenge especially to one's non-Jewish identity, particularly for believers in race science. But it was a challenge often instinctively rebutted. 'Mischlinge' were not a homogenous group comprised of individuals universally prone to destabilisation. It is often wrongly assumed that their parents' 'mixed marriage' status corresponded to a real mixed reality. However, roughly half of the 'Jewish' partners in mixed marriages had left the Jewish community, and it is the children of these marriages that are the focus of this article. A good chunk of 'intermarried' converts had done so out of religious or cultural conviction long before the marriage; others had converted with 'pragmatic' motives in mind but had only been willing to do so in the first place because of their loose connection to a personal and/or communal sense of Jewishness. Subsequently, over time, they became non-Jewish in self-perception and attempted to reflect this in their social lives. On the one hand, therefore, some 'Mischlinge' could rely on parents who had long since been united in religious outlook. For these individuals, the moment of discovery was often more about questioning their place in the hostile world than about questioning their sense of self, though the former could, in time, lead to the latter. On the other hand, though, we must not lose sight of the very real split between families and parents that characterised many *actually* mixed marriages, i.e. the type deliberately underrepresented in this piece because of their historiographical overrepresentation.

### Missed Clues

Almost as interesting as the 'moment of discovery' itself are the missed clues that delayed it. One way to miss a clue was to register that an antecedent relative was Jewish but fail to apply that information inwardly. A relevant consideration here is that children did not automatically understand 'Jewishness' in racial terms, no matter wider society's proclivities. Elsewhere I have documented a remarkable array of evidence which suggests that young Nazi era non-Jewish 'Jews' may sometimes temporarily have maintained an abnormally expansive social sphere because their 'Aryan' friends refused

<sup>49</sup> See Beate Meyer, *Jüdische Mischlinge: Rassenpolitik und Verfolgungserfahrung 1933–1945* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz Verlag, 1999), 318; Sonja Grabowsky, *Meine Identität ist die Zerrissenheit: Halbjüdinnen und Halbjuden im Nationalsozialismus* (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2013), 240; Franklin A. Oberlaender, *Wir aber sind nicht Fisch und nicht Fleisch: Christliche 'Nichtarier' und ihre Kinder in Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2013), 329. Oberlaender and Meyer draw attention to the susceptibility of children to identity conflict, with Oberlaender emphasising that, otherwise, 'the identity of Christian Germans of Jewish origin acquired before National Socialism was largely preserved'.

to abandon them.<sup>50</sup> A potential reason for this is that young children, before becoming old enough to discriminate on racial grounds or be susceptible to coercion to that end, distinguished between their peers primarily along religious lines. In simple terms, this was due to the segregation of religious lessons at school. In relation to the moment of discovery, it is likely that when clues emerged in the form of *religiously* Jewish relatives, some non-Jewish ‘Jews’ saw no reason to link it to themselves. Others were too young to know the very meaning of the noun ‘Jew’. Still others were aware that ‘hereditary Jewishness’ was a thing but may have been unaware that certain ritual events, performed by relatives, were associated with being Jewish.

Racial ignorance also lay behind a failure to notice another key type of clue. Implicit assertions of their Jewishness, using slightly obscure terminology, were frequently hurled at ignorant young non-Jewish ‘Jews’ in public. Inge Hoberg, for example, recalls a ‘Mischling’ classmate approaching her in search of solidarity. The classmate then announced that Hoberg was likewise a ‘Mischling’. Hoberg’s response is revealing: ‘For me, a half-breed was a mulatto or something like that, and I was white like everyone else! You’re crazy [she replied]! What a nonsense! That was the end of the case for me’.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, when Inge Deponte was outed at school as being a ‘non-Aryan’, she recalls how, ‘On the day of the announcement, of course, none of my classmates knew what that meant, “not-pure Aryan”’, and subsequently went home to their parents to find out.<sup>52</sup> Seemingly, to young Germans, such words could be ambiguous or mean nothing at all.

For Cordelia Edvardson and a number of others, however, even the word ‘Jew’ itself was a complete mystery. On one occasion, her family had sent her away on holiday for a stay with a family whose son was her playmate. Writing of herself in the third person as ‘the girl’, Edvardson describes playing a sexual, ‘forbidden game’: ‘The girl had just come in with a son of the family, they have been playing outside. Uncle M. has gripped her arm, is beating her and shouting, beside himself with rage.’<sup>53</sup> Edvardson then continues the description, recalling the uncle’s angry words and accusation of ‘racial shame’ (*Rassenschande*): ‘That’s what happens when you bring a filthy Jewish brat into your house’.<sup>54</sup> These words, however, meant nothing to Edvardson, ‘a filthy Jewish brat – what is that anyway? Does it mean wetting your pants and playing forbidden games?’ In another example, Hellgart Flitney was similarly non-plussed when, shortly after 1933, a close friend of hers approached, stood deliberately *outside* her front garden gate, and informed her that any more interactions between the pair were forbidden because Flitney was ‘Jewish’.<sup>55</sup> Flitney, however, didn’t even know what she meant. Even despite losing a friend, Flitney did not consider asking her parents about the incident. Something similar happened to Erika Rybeck. Upon being placed in a Christian school, Rybeck remembers being ‘so innocent about my own background and the hate campaigns of the time that I was completely puzzled when someone called me a “dirty Jew” or something like that. It meant nothing to me.’<sup>56</sup>

With the example of Francis Lenard, the antisemitic hostility was not couched in an explicit denunciation for ‘being Jewish’.<sup>57</sup> Lenard theorises that it was because the children ‘probably had some sixth sense about me’ that they were ‘sometimes hostile and I didn’t know what hit me’. In reality, the other children’s parents had probably been more informative than Lenard’s on the matter of her Jewish descent. As this account implies, school was a common trigger of ‘moments of discovery’. Correspondingly, it also elicited moments of failed discovery where a little bit of prodding would

<sup>50</sup> See final part of section three in Harry Legg, ‘Stuck in the *Volksgemeinschaft*,’ *German History* (forthcoming, 2025).

<sup>51</sup> Inge Hoberg, *Der Dom so nah und doch so fern: Das Leben eines Mädchens im Versteck und auf der Flucht* (Cologne: Hermann Josef Emons Verlag, 1998), 14.

<sup>52</sup> Inge Deponte, ‘Erlebnisse eines “Mischlings I. Grades” während des 3. Reiches,’ *Institut für Zeitgeschichte Archiv, München*, ZS-2309-3, 1979, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Cordelia Edvardson, *Burned Child Seeks the Fire: A Memoir* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 18, tr. Joel Agee from original Swedish book, *Bränt barn söker sig till elden* (Stockholm: Brombergs Bokförlag, 1984).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview of Hellgart Flitney* by Reuben Zylberszpic (1998), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/44650>.

<sup>56</sup> Erika Schulhof Rybeck, *On My Own: Decoding the Conspiracy of Silence* (independently published, 2019), 35.

<sup>57</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview of Francis Lenard* by Neilan Stern, (1996), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/21606>.

have brought the whole house crashing down. Evelyn Fielden recalls being obviously happy at her Christian school and not even questioning her exclusion from religion lessons.<sup>58</sup> This was despite her being a baptised Christian. According to Fielden: 'I lived a very self-centred existence, I saw my friends, I didn't care about what happened around me, what I tell you now is what I pieced together.' It was not until later that she noticed the Jewishness of her relatives. For Friedrich Reuss, it was exposure to a number of antisemitic incidents (not directed at him) which provided a missed clue about his Jewish ancestry. In this context, Reuss recalls his father insisting repeatedly that antisemitism was forbidden because it was 'nonsense' and because 'all the agitation against the Jews was a disgrace'.<sup>59</sup> Of course, it was possible for such an attitude to be held by someone of non-Jewish descent. And yet, Reuss's father was a staunch right winger. It is thus a little surprising that, barraged by antisemitism at school and his father's defence of Jews at home, Reuss never considered investigating further. Reuss was one of the few members of the cohort whose eventual moment of discovery occurred during adulthood.

### An Antisemite's Nightmare

Although it may surprise some readers, in the pre-1933 years a common trigger for the 'moment of discovery' was antisemitic behaviour on the part of the 'Jew' affected (six of the thirteen examined herein). The potential for people of Jewish descent to be antisemitic emphasises the extent to which non-Jews of Jewish descent lived lives completely severed from 'Jewishness'. Though a sizeable minority of non-Jewish 'Jews' were antisemites, it is important not to assume that this combination led to 'self-hatred'.<sup>60</sup> Self-hating antisemitic non-Jewish 'Jews' were vanishingly rare. Most racist antisemites of Jewish descent shied away from any ideologically consistent self-flagellation. Instead, they simply adjusted their world view. Erwin Goldmann, for example, asserted that a mistake must have been made in the genealogical records since his behaviour was indisputably 'Aryan'. His basis for this theory was the dubious opinion of Dr Karl Ludwig Lechler, a *Gauamtsleiter* of the *Rassenpolitischen Amtes der NSDAP* (regional leader of the Racial-Political Office of the Nazi party): 'He then said to me that my attitude in recent years had been such that he, as a racial researcher, had to draw the conclusion that it was impossible for me to be a Full Jew.'<sup>61</sup> Similar mental contortions were also the last resort for other antisemitic non-Jewish 'Jews', like Rudolf Briske, a 'Mischling'. Briske enlisted the services of a geneticist friend of his (a 'Herbert W') who wrote the following letter, entitled 'Hereditary character assessment of Hans Rudolf Briske':

I have always been interested in the character picture of the Briske family, especially from the point of view of heredity. It is well known that within each ethnic group (population) there

<sup>58</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview of Evelyn Fielden* by [unlisted interviewer] (1990), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/53110>.

<sup>59</sup> Friedrich Gustav Adolf Reuß, *'Dunkel war ueber Deutschland. Im Westen war ein letzter Widerschein im Licht': Autobiographische Erinnerungen von Friedrich Gustav Adolf Reuß mit einem Nachwort von Frederick Joseph Reuß* (Oldenburg: Bibliotheks- und Informationssystem der Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, 2001), Ursula Blömer et al., eds., 37–8.

<sup>60</sup> Sander Gilman's original exposition of this theme, though helpful in elucidating the process by which an individual may come to despise themselves, relies on numerous examples in which the only evidence of self-hatred is antisemitism on the part of an individual of Jewish descent. Though such hatred is indeed sometimes directed inwardly, Gilman gives little attention to the potential for this hatred to be directed purely externally, seemingly endorsing a view of immutable 'Jewishness' which is inescapable. I concur with Shulamit Volkov's critique: 'Only rarely does one find in their writings a hatred that is truly directed inward, and even then it is miraculously transformed into a source of inspiration: a starting point for creativity on the individual level and world-reforming on the public one'; see Shulamit Volkov, 'Excursus on Self-Hatred and Self-Criticism,' in *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites*, 33–46 (40). For Gilman's perspective see Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

<sup>61</sup> From a 6 June 1945 statement to Stuttgart police by Erwin Goldmann, as quoted in Wolfgang Benz, *Patriot und Paria: das Leben des Erwin Goldmann zwischen Judentum und Nationalsozialismus: eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Metropol, 1997), 73.

are genetic variations of the mental-characteristic dispositions of a wide range. As a result of this, in each people there are a certain number of borderline types which are not typical for the general character of this ethnic group, but should rather be systematically assigned to another ethnic group. In the present case I am convinced that the father of Dr. Briske represents a distinct genetic borderline case within the Jewish people, which is underpinned with great certainty by the positive character traits of his Jewish blood relatives as well as by the early voluntary choice of his own spiritual *völkisch* standpoint.<sup>62</sup>

Upon the moment of discovery, Briske had evidently been unaware of this genetic caveat. Having become an antisemite 'at an early age', the disturbing truth was revealed to him in 1929: 'I learned of my descent through my parents and was so horrified that I hid for days in the basement of our apartment.'<sup>63</sup>

Briske remained rigidly antisemitic after the moment of discovery, avoiding self-hatred with some legally futile racial wrangling.<sup>64</sup> Most antisemitic non-Jewish 'Jews', however, simply changed their minds about 'the Jews'. It was not always easy to make the switch. Dieter Bergmann compared the moment of discovery to being diagnosed with a terminal illness. It took him a while to come round: 'It was difficult for my brother Ulrich and I to reconsider all the propaganda we were exposed to. Suddenly the finger with which we had pointed innocently, but also thoughtlessly and pitilessly, pointed at us and at the people we loved.'<sup>65</sup> It is worth noting that Bergmann was a 'Mischling' whose parents had divorced long before 1933. As a symbol of her isolation, his 'Fully Jewish' mother was given sole charge of explaining Bergmann's new racial status. Though Bergmann remained commendably loyal, it would have been easy for 'my father's nationalistic views and our politically irreproachable stepmother's fear that any contact with Jews could be terribly dangerous' to prompt him to abandon his mother.<sup>66</sup> This was a problem peculiar to the children of 'mixed marriages', albeit one regularly offset by religiously and maritally unified parents. Marianne Forchheimer faced a similar moment of discovery, though it seems likely that the unity of her parents helped her to stay loyal. After learning of her father's 'Jewishness' she momentarily contemplated the unthinkable: 'the propaganda in school, especially biology classes ... they taught us about the Jewish people ... and I was brainwashed by it so when my mother told me the facts about my father I was devastated and then I thought my father is a criminal.'<sup>67</sup> Forchheimer, after having thrown herself on her bed, 'cried my heart out'. She soon came round to accepting that her 'loving father' who had 'never abused me, he treated me well, he was a sweet man', was in fact still the same person. Inge Samson, in an almost identical scenario, recalls a 'terrible shock at school' upon it being announced that she was forbidden to collect for the winter relief fund because her father was a 'Jew'.<sup>68</sup> She then struggled with having 'been indoctrinated that Jews are the lower form of life'. Like Bergmann and Forchheimer, Samson came round relatively

<sup>62</sup> Rudolf Briske, 'Biographischer Begleittext zu den 17 Tagebüchern von Rudolf Briske,' *Institut für Zeitgeschichte Archiv*, München, ED363-18-2, 1989, 38.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. For another comparable example, see the case of the antisemite Theodor Duesterberg, a leading figure in the Steel-Helmet (*Stahlhelm*) party, whose Jewish ancestry was unknown to him until publicly exposed in 1932, forcing him to resign amidst 'nearly' suffering a breakdown. For the full story see Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), tr. Deborah Lucas Schneider, 63–6. Thanks to Stephan Malinowski for pointing out this case.

<sup>64</sup> There were exceptions; see Volker Koop, "Wer Jude ist, bestimme ich": "Ehrenarier" im Nationalsozialismus (Cologne: Böhlau, 2014). 'Honorary Aryans' (*Ehrenarier*) were declared as such in a largely arbitrary process which should not be confused with that run by offices like the *Reichsstelle für Sippenforschung* (National Office for Kinship Research, renamed in 1940 to *Reichssippenamt*), which adhered to the law.

<sup>65</sup> Dieter Bergman (author) and Suzanne Plüss-Steffen, ed., *Zwischen Stuhl und Bank: Nicht zur Ausrottung Bestimmt* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2019), 47.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>67</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview of Marianne Forchheimer* by Miriam Karp (1996), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/10759>.

<sup>68</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview of Inge Samson* by Martin Gilbert (2009), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/58066>.



quickly. And yet the feelings of guilt stuck with her up until the point of her interview, during which she reflected that she was ‘as bad as the rest of the class’.

Other children of Jewish descent experienced moments of discovery not so much as committed antisemites but as children naively participating in behaviour adjacent to antisemitism. For example, Dietmar Brücher recalls himself and his siblings painting swastikas on walls in Berlin in 1932, ‘as children do’.<sup>69</sup> Some family acquaintances happened to witness this and reported it to Brücher’s mother, who then informed her children on the spot that ‘You don’t do that anyway, and *you* certainly don’t, because you have Jewish grandparents and the Nazis are against the Jews. So a swastika is something really awful that you shouldn’t paint!’ This was the first Brücher had heard of his Jewish ancestry. Interestingly, in relation to the section on clues (above), Brücher seemingly did not fully take this in. He later claims that it was in fact in 1933, after he had wanted to join an equivalent of the Hitler Youth, that he became ‘fully aware of my Jewish ancestry’ through his Uncle Ernst’s explanation. In another example, Hanns Born, a similarly unaware child, also experienced a moment of discovery whilst partaking in pro-Nazi activities. The year was 1928 and many Germans would do anything to make some quick cash. Fatefully, for Hanns and his friend Heinz, the 1 RM per hour task was ‘to place a poster, an advertisement for the Nazis [saying] “Vote Adolf Hitler”’.<sup>70</sup> His father, an official at the election polling station, apparently in situ at that precise moment, pulled his son aside and instructed him to take down the posters and return the money. Then came the bombshell line, ‘Don’t you know that Mutti is Jewish?’

### A Vocabulary of Discovery?

Katka Reszke’s study of modern-day Poland concluded that ‘none of our participants recall the moment when they found out about their Jewish ancestry as a negative experience.’<sup>71</sup> For the non-Jewish ‘Jews’ of the early twentieth century, the complete opposite was the case. And one did not have to be an antisemite to feel despair after a moment of discovery. A certain linguistic similarity pervades the following accounts. Inge Hoberg ‘was thunderstruck ... I crept back home ... and had a good cry’; Berit Gehrig ‘was horrified’; Annemarie Roeper ‘was stunned’; for Elsa Bernstein ‘the ground was pulled out from under our feet’; Ilse Aschner’s mother ‘cried really terribly and out of sheer emotion I cried with her’; Dieter Bergmann remembered ‘feeling thunderstruck, as if the doctor had told me I had been diagnosed with a terminal illness’; Leonie Hilton remembers the moment as ‘terrible, terrible, terribly upsetting’; for Inge Samson it was a ‘terrible shock’; Evelyn Fielden’s ‘whole world came down on me’; Francis Lenard was ‘very unhappy’; and Marianne Forchheimer threw herself on her bed and ‘cried my heart out’.<sup>72</sup> In many such accounts, a key theme is ‘collapse’, as though the foundations of life had been shattered by a tremendous force. Words like ‘thunderstruck’ and ‘terrible’, as well as themes of irreversible structural breakdown, pervade accounts of the moment of discovery. But ‘collapse’ is perhaps less appropriate an analogy than ‘collision’; it was precisely the strength and uncollapsibility of the non-Jewish ‘Jew’ identity that produced the sensation of collapse.

Functioning as both metaphor of terror and historical event, many moment of discovery accounts describe the newly classified ‘Jew’ fleeing homeward to question their parents. Part of this was a return to a familiar and comfortable space. Sometimes, the confrontation between parent and child was

<sup>69</sup> Dietmar Brücher, ‘Um nicht zu vergessen: Erinnerungen an meine Familie und an vergangene Zeiten,’ *Institut für Zeitgeschichte Archiv, München*, MS2086-1, 1992–2006, 109.

<sup>70</sup> Hanns Born, ‘Der Mampe,’ *Institut für Zeitgeschichte Archiv, München*, MS761-1, 1998, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Reszke, *Return of the Jew*, 85.

<sup>72</sup> Note: Gehrig was raised in a Jewish family. Hoberg, *Der Dom so nah*, 17; Gehrig, *Bist ‘ne Jüdische*, 4; USHMM, *Oral history interview with Annemarie Roeper* by Sylvia Prazan and Jake Birnberg, (1992) <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn507746>; Elsa Bernstein, *Das Leben als Drama: Erinnerungen an Theresienstadt* (Hamburg: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005), 96; USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview of Ilse Aschner* by Anna Kodura Ofner (1998), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/41935>; Bergman, *Zwischen Stuhl und Bank*, 43; USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview of Leonie Hilton* by Jacqueline Richmond-Wade (1996), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/9193>; USC Shoah, *Interview of Samson*; USC Shoah, *Interview of Fielden*; USC Shoah, *Interview of Lenard*; USC Shoah, *Interview of Forchheimer*.

delayed by a trip to the bedroom for a lengthy cry. Elsa Bernstein describes standing up in front of her father and managing only 'a pitiful stammering that I had something to say'.<sup>73</sup> Eventually, 'I only managed to say: that you, that we are not Christians by birth. And then the tears came'.<sup>74</sup> Though Bernstein remained a committed Christian throughout her life, the shock of the moment of discovery had nonetheless posed previously unthinkable questions about her identity. In such moments, parent and child often embraced, with the former offering an explanation accompanied by an assertion that the family was, whatever the Nazis said, still Christian. The emotional importance here of having parents present who were in the same boat – which post-war discoverers in the late 1940s lacked – cannot be understated. As mentioned in the introduction, Christian 'Jews' with self-identifying Jewish parents might also have struggled in these circumstances.

In some cases, despair at the moment of discovery was prompted not so much by the revelation of Jewish descent as by being 'dropped' by friends. This word recurs frequently in testimony as a descriptor for the night and day change in life situation. With the word 'dropped', the theme of collapse reappears, more appropriately this time, reflecting both a fall into social despair and the abruptness of the moment of discovery. Where the word 'Jew' meant nothing to the child in question, losing a best friend was enough to bring home its dark significance. In other cases, the word meant little more, as Ulrich Rabe put it, than those who 'nailed Christ to the cross ... drink the blood of little children, cheat the Germans'.<sup>75</sup> This, understandably, made the accused child deeply upset.

The location of the revelation was crucial. Typically, children who received initial explanations from their parents reacted less dramatically. Unfortunately, as just noted, such explanations often came too late, after the child had already been publicly humiliated. Where the opportunity for pre-emption arose was when a school required a child to fill in a form about their racial descent, a circumstance usually constrained to the Nazi period. Friedrich Reuss was one of the individuals who discovered their Jewish descent *before* 1933 and as an adult. Despite this, his experience echoes that of many children after 1933. As a young adult he had wanted to join a group called the Makaria Corps and was required to fill in a form which included questions about racial descent. Upon returning home, Reuss describes how 'My father asked me for the sheet, went with it to his studio and asked me to come in with a strangely serious face'.<sup>76</sup> Reuss's father first attempted to dissuade Reuss from joining the Corps via rhetorical appeals which elided reality. He soon realised, however, that the only option was to impart the truth. Until his hand was forced in that moment, the father had hoped to 'spare' his son the discomfort. What followed was a 'terrible revelation' for Reuss.<sup>77</sup> For the next few days his parents refused to let him out of their sight, fearing suicide. Bemused, Reuss reassured them that 'I had been knocked on the head, but ... I would not commit suicide because of it'.<sup>78</sup> Younger children in similar scenarios prompted by Nazi-required form filling struggled to cope. This was despite their parents being given the chance to direct the narrative. In one such instance, the 'Aryan' stepfather of Cordelia Edvardson took on 'the delicate task of explanation', saying that: 'If you are a Jew ... then I am a Jew as well, we are all descendants of father Abraham, we all have our roots in the Covenant. In this sense, we Christians are all Jews'.<sup>79</sup> For Edvardson, however, this explanation was of little comfort. Writing in the third person she recalls: 'But at that point the girl already knows that this is not true, that it is not her truth'.<sup>80</sup> No matter what well-wishing parents said, many children, especially older ones, had experienced enough of antisemitic Germany to know that their lives would never be the same again. Parental support, though significant in buttressing a child's internal identity, could do nothing to change how others viewed them.

<sup>73</sup> Bernstein, *Das Leben als Drama*, 96–7.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Ulrich Rabe, *Ein 'Halbjude'?* (Schwerin: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2006), 6–7.

<sup>76</sup> Reuß, 'Dunkel war ueber Deutschland,' 43–4.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Edvardson, *Burned Child Seeks the Fire*, 39.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

One reason to delay the moment of discovery was the widely held parental view that shielding their children from the truth was a viable strategy of protection. Certainly, in rare scenarios, such as that of Paul Oestereicher, ignorance was bliss. Born in 1931, Oestereicher made it to his emigration in 1938 without learning the truth: ‘all that suffering my parents were subject to, they managed to make my life as a child a happy life’.<sup>81</sup> And yet, Oestereicher was simply extremely lucky. Far more common was for the charade to come crashing down in deeply upsetting circumstances, as we have seen. Being informed by parents was the kindest strategy. But there was rarely an easy way to inform a child that their previous reality was at an end.

Public exposure was the cruelest mode of discovery. Only in very rare cases was it kindly imparted. This unlikely reprieve was afforded to Peter Brode: ‘I joined the Hitler Youth and was very astonished, surprised and uninformed when my superiors explained the facts to me and then graciously acknowledged me and left me unmolested.’<sup>82</sup> More common was the experience of Ulrich Rabe, one which illustrates the Nazi-inspired normalisation of previously grave insults. One day, a teacher instructed any ‘Jews’ in the class to reveal themselves. As Rabe recounts:

Then a classmate stood up and pointed his finger at me: ‘Uli there, he’s a Jew.’ I looked around in disbelief. Then the teacher stopped in front of me, pointed upward with his outstretched thumb and ordered: ‘Stand up! Sit down on the last bench. That’s where you’ll always sit from today on, and alone.’<sup>83</sup>

Such moments of unbelievable callousness, though more common during the Nazi era, were not confined to it. Elsa Bernstein remembers attending a concert, in the late nineteenth century, escorted by adult friends of her parents because the latter were away. Bernstein does not describe the encounter with much clarity. The moment of discovery seemingly occurred during a speech which mentioned the Jewish descent of Hermann Levi, a onetime conductor of the Munich court orchestra. Bernstein implies that she and her siblings’ ‘Jewishness’ was somehow hinted at, perhaps by nudges and sideways looks by audience members. As a result, ‘the naive unity of the youthful world view was torn apart, the ground was pulled out from under our feet’.<sup>84</sup> Leonie Hilton’s Nazi-era experience was rather different but had the same result. In what amounted to a double moment of discovery she first learned from her parents about her Jewish descent but then, shortly after, had the new reality confirmed to her in a second incident. After turning up at her best friend’s house, the latter’s mother ‘opened the door and she said, “I heard you are a bloody pig, a Jewish pig. Don’t come here again.” And she closed the door in my face.’<sup>85</sup> Hilton was rooted to the spot. ‘I stood there like an ox’, she later described, these words reflecting how many children subjected to public moments of discovery ‘froze’ before fleeing to safety.<sup>86</sup>

### Embracing the ‘Truth’

In recent times, in a number of countries, moments of discovery have become something to celebrate. Although this indicates welcome societal change, also on distasteful display has been a resentful indignation. Some individuals show ‘tears and even anger at having been deprived of their rightful ownership of Judaism’.<sup>87</sup> Such positivity, bordering on entitlement, apparently also made rare appearances in the early twentieth century. In the following examples, however, it should be remembered that recalled positivity may have been a figment of postwar wishful thinking or a result of the interviewee’s

<sup>81</sup> *Interview of Paul Oestereicher* by Harry Legg (2023, private video).

<sup>82</sup> Peter E. Brode, ‘Mehr als gedacht: Erinnerungen und Reflexionen: Bruchstücke einer Biographie,’ *Institut für Zeitgeschichte Archiv, München*, MS2132, 1999, 52–53.

<sup>83</sup> Rabe, *Ein ‘Halbjude’?*, 7.

<sup>84</sup> Bernstein, *Das Leben als Drama*, 96.

<sup>85</sup> USC Shoah, Interview of Hilton.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> For the quote see Malamed’s study of ‘Cryptojews’: *The Return to Judaism*, 145. See also Gottlieb’s study of Cabo Verdean moments of discovery: ‘Revisiting History,’ 57.

perception of the interviewer's expectations. In the first example, Annemarie Roeper, a German, says that she reacted counter-culturally: 'Once I found out I was Jewish, I thought I should be Jewish. I thought that it was – you know, I felt this dishonesty that my parents were – mostly my father. My mother just went along with it, but ... it was a disappointment for me'.<sup>88</sup> Anja Lundholm's reaction was of the same grain, her discovery coming 'much too late' for her liking. Despite noticing that her mother had 'anxiously' hidden it from her, Lundholm recalls how 'even then I was still beaming'.<sup>89</sup> Her follow-up question to her mother was proof that the 'moment of discovery' could happen in name only: 'And why are you sad about it?' Lundholm's mother then added ambiguous but ominous meat to the otherwise trinket-esque bones of the moment of discovery: 'A lot of things can happen to you. You don't really understand yet.' Ignorance, though, was not the only reason to react positively to a moment of discovery. Francis Lenard, fully aware of what it meant to be of Jewish descent, describes how her 'parents finally told me [in the context of Nazism], but it should never have been a secret'.<sup>90</sup> Whether this was her contemporary or post-facto reaction is unclear. Regardless, positive reactions were probably more likely in the pre-Nazi years, when racial divisions were not legally defined. Back then, Wolfgang Schweitzer had been unaware of the very existence of antisemitism. Thus, when informed of his Jewish descent by his parents in the years preceding 1933, he was 'proud that they, the men like the prophets or something, maybe they were my ancestors'.<sup>91</sup> Still, to this day, Schweitzer apparently wonders whether Jeremiah may have been one of his ancestors. It is difficult to imagine this attitude taking root after a post-1933 moment of discovery when the unavoidable backing track was the goosestepping march of state-backed antisemitism.

## Conclusion

Moments of discovery were far from involuntary Bar Mitzvahs. German and Austrian non-Jewish 'Jews', particularly those with religiously aligned parents, only rarely became Jews overnight. Although the identities of the affected were now laden with a potentially destabilising weight, support systems unavailable to post-Second World War discoverers kicked in and smoothed things over. In general, more prominent than any identity crisis in accounts of the moment of discovery was 'bewilderment' in the face of the first-time experience of a legal and social assault on liberties.<sup>92</sup> This assault had been bubbling along since the mid-nineteenth century because legal emancipation in both Germany and Austria had never successfully quashed the unofficial and implicit inhibitions placed on individuals of Jewish descent. As such, even before the assault metastasised under Nazism, moments of discovery frequently induced despair. And yet, under Nazism they took on an even greater significance. In the short term, affected children understood that it was the duty of those around them to treat them as pariahs. In the long term, depending on their 'racial status', becoming a 'Jew' could mean complete disenfranchisement, the demolition of aspiration, and ultimately expulsion. At best, the affected had to forge new lives abroad; at worst, they were murdered in Nazi death camps.

The very existence of a phenomenon like 'the moment of discovery' testifies to the need for a separate history of the people who were labelled as 'Jewish' by Nazi law but did not identify as such. Few vantage points compare to that provided by 'the moment of discovery' in terms of displaying the extent to which non-Jewish 'Jews' were truly disconnected from all things Jewish. Inasmuch as they had their supportive parents, this was frequently the extent of their interaction with those who shared in their persecution. The affected could find themselves moved from the 'in group' to the 'out group'

<sup>88</sup> USHMM, *Interview of Roeper*.

<sup>89</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview of Anja Lundholm* by William Collins Donahue (1996), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/17363>.

<sup>90</sup> USC Shoah, *Interview of Lenard*.

<sup>91</sup> USC Shoah Foundation, *Interview of Wolfgang Schweitzer* by Marilyn Schapiro (1997), <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/29227>.

<sup>92</sup> Here I borrow Peter Monteath's apt adjective choice from Monteath, 'The "Mischling" Experience in Oral History,' *The Oral History Review* 35, no. 2 (2008): 139–58 (147).

in a matter of seconds. After all, the moment of discovery was often not just a revelation to the non-Jewish 'Jew' but also to their friends. Even if social expulsion were not immediate, those affected knew that things were bound to deteriorate.

As such, in a society pervaded by antisemitism, moments of discovery were preceded by clues which hinted at what was to come. Being unaware of the meaning of certain nouns sometimes delayed the inevitable. Some children recall being so wrapped up in their own worlds, often by the explicit design of their parents, that various antisemitic incidents washed over their oblivious heads. And yet, ignorance was not always bliss. A complicated balancing act was afoot which weighed up whether years of happy ignorance could counterbalance a sudden moment of discovery which left a child scarred for life. The best of a bad bunch of outcomes was when parents pre-empted the inevitable, providing their child with the tools to cope, however imperfectly.

Relatedly, *where* the moment of discovery occurred was of great significance. Public moments of discovery inflicted the most pain. During the Nazi period, these were more common. This is perhaps one reason that people who were adults by the rise of Nazism were more likely to be found amongst those who do not recall moments of discovery. In other words, because moments of discovery were generally more likely amongst children, fewer non-Jewish 'Jews' made it to adulthood without experiencing a memorable, more traumatic, moment of discovery if they had been children during the Nazi period.

Finally, those non-Jewish 'Jews' who experienced moments of discovery as a positive event, or as the result of their own antisemitism, were outliers to the wider experience. Delusion, meant non-pejoratively, was a commonality between these two poles of experience. One form of delusion was to conjure up a new world view where you were the only 'Jew' who had a place in the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Another form of delusion was born out of ignorance of the severe consequences that being a 'Jew' promised in Nazi Germany. None of this is to say that adopting a Jewish identity was a 'wrong' response to a moment of discovery in early twentieth century Germany; indeed, if there was willingness on both sides, one could join a community which offered social and physical support. However, only ignorance could make a moment of discovery a moment of undiluted happiness. Unthinkable back then was the controversy which surrounded Fabian Wolff in the summer of 2023. Wolff's declaration that he had been mistaken about having Jewish ancestry was not seen as cause for celebration. Quite the opposite, he mourned his loss sorrowfully in public and was then accused of deception by critics. Whatever the truth of his case, mercifully gone are the days of *Der Stürmer* gleefully outing public servants of Jewish descent.

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