natural boundaries. Attention is focused inward on the center of the category and on its prototypical members, not outward on its boundaries or on the total membership. As a result, categories do not develop and are not learned through the delineation of the boundaries, but through experiences with the prototypical members of a category.[35] For instance, you can almost certainly distinguish furniture from non-furniture, but can you define "furniture"?[36] Can you list the widely accepted necessary and sufficient features? We understand a category because we have experience with items identified as members of it, not because we memorize lists of features that delineate the category.[37] Boundaries tend to arise rather arbitrarily as a need arises for them, meaning those boundaries are often fuzzy, arbitrary, and/or debatable, and are often the products of attempts to structure values and power.[38] Rather than learning and using categories based on necessary and sufficient features, prototype theory suggests that categories are learned and used based on the perception of some manner of similarity to a prototype. These prototypes are not usually individual members of a category, but cognitive exemplars or idealized conceptualizations that arise from experiences with the category.[39] While this theory will inform my engagement with all the conceptual categories discussed throughout this book (and is why I do not define any terms), it will be a particular focus of my discussion in chapter 3 regarding the conceptualization of deity in the Hebrew Bible. Among other things, prototype

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[35] The "is a hotdog a sandwich" debate shows how prioritizing necessary and sufficient features can result in (mostly) humorous distortions of the ways categories are used.

[36] Cf. Wittgenstein 1958, §1.68: "How is the concept of a game bounded? What still counts as a game and what no longer does? Can you give the boundary? No. You can draw one; for none has so far been drawn. (But that never troubled you before when you used the word 'game.')."

[37] Ask someone on the street in San Antonio to describe a "boot" in as much detail as possible and they'll almost certainly describe a cowboy boot. Ask someone on the street in Liverpool, UK, and they'll almost certainly describe an army boot, if not the trunk of a car. The different experiences with the category "boot" between these two societies will produce different conceptualizations.

[38] For example, there is a lot at stake in debates about what does or does not constitute a deity, a religion, or even a woman, which is one of several reasons the definitions are so contested. For an example of sociological research on what's at stake in how the concept of "racism" is defined, see Unzueta and Lowery 2008.

[39] Describing developments in the field of prototype theory, Patrizia Violi (2000, 107) states, "It became clear that it was not possible, at least for semantic applications, to think of the prototype as the concrete instance of the most prototypical member of any given category, and consequently as a real individual. Instead, it was necessary to turn it into a mental construal: an abstract entity made up of prototypical properties. In this way the prototype, being the result of a mental construction, frees itself from any concrete evidence, and as such may well never be actualized in reality as any real instance."