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PERSONAL IDENTITIES AND POLITICAL LIVES: JEWISH IDENTITY AMONG SECOND WAVE FEMINISTS

by

DINA PINSKY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2002

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Abstract

PERSONAL IDENTITIES AND POLITICAL LIVES:
JEWISH IDENTITY AMONG SECOND WAVE FEMINISTS

by

Dina Pinsky

Adviser: Professor Barbara Katz Rothman

This dissertation is an exploration of the relationship between Jewish and feminist identities, based on oral history interviews with twenty-eight Jews who participated in the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Four paradigms for negotiating Jewish and feminist identities are described. The interview accounts analyzed here yield narratives of Jewish-feminist identity conflict as well as Jewish-feminist congruence. Despite a history of gender inequality within Judaism, many Jewish feminists portray Jewish culture and feminism as compatible. This study contributes to theories of intersectionality in gender studies by adding the voices of a group that has been mostly absent from this discussion.

Acknowledgments

There are many special people who helped me through the process of this dissertation. Any omission here is due to error rather than lack of gratitude.

I am very grateful to the Jewish feminists, who, by sharing their life stories with me, made this work possible.

I would like to thank my adviser, Professor Barbara Katz Rothman, for her practical wisdom, soothing advice, and helpful recommendations. I would also like to thank the other members of my dissertation committee, Professors Patricia Clough and Hester Eisenstein, not only for their help with the writing but also for patiently mentoring me through the job-hunting process. There are other professors who have helped with my work at various points, including: Charles Kadushin, Catherine Silver, Bob Alford, and Cynthia Fuchs Epstein. I am also grateful for the valuable job advice given by the following professors: Naomi Kroeger, Phil Kasinitz, Juan Battle, Charles Green, Julia Wrigley, and Robert Carter.

Thank you to the members of my dissertation group, in its various incarnations, for encouragement, useful feedback, and providing me with deadlines: Melissa Ditmore, Jean Halley, Belkis Suazo-Garcia, and Betsy Wissinger.

There are many other friends who offered their guidance with this dissertation. Tania Levey was a wonderful sounding board for my ideas; it was in a phone conversation with her that I first hit upon this topic. Jack Levinson also helped me talk things through, read and commented upon my dissertation proposal, and helped with references. Susan Sapiro patiently helped me with many reference and footnote questions. My cousin, Rabbi

Hillel Norry, always willing to answer my sh'eilot, came to my aid here as well. Jennifer Moore, a very dear long-time buddy, was always interested in reading chapters.

Beyond those who directly helped me with this work are those who have indirectly helped through their all-around love, support, and friendship. I am blessed with many amazing friends, who were very understanding when I was unavailable because I had to work on my dissertation. I also feel extremely blessed to be related to many very special people, including my immediate family: Alice and Terry Shapiro, David Pinsky, and Mark Pinsky. I am grateful for their love, loyalty, and confidence in me. My grandparents, Ruth and Sol Singer, have been the most outspoken advocates of education in my life. Their *menschlichkeit* has inspired many people and I am eternally in awe of them. Their encouragement and support, along with my mother's and stepfather's, has helped me get through all of these years of school.

My most tireless reader has been Mikael Elsila, and I am grateful for his generous supply of enthusiasm and for the energy he has devoted to reading and commenting upon my work. Even more importantly, he is my love, companion, and true partner. The stress of writing this dissertation has been lightened by the joy he brings me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One

Introduction

The Context

The women's movement of the sixties and seventies has been criticized for disregarding the existence of ethnic, racial and cultural differences among women. Early second wave feminist[1] efforts were aimed at mobilizing women as a group and creating an understanding of female subordination within society; in achieving this aim, women were often depicted as a monolith and the complexities of oppression were overshadowed by the feminist definition of gender oppression.

In the 1980s, women of color asserted that the feminist conception of "woman" was not only monolithic but also exclusionary; it failed to acknowledge diversity among women.[2] Moreover, this definition of woman was based on the assumptions of white heterosexual middle class women and thus reflected their own perspectives and omitted the experiences and everyday realities of women of color, lesbians, and non-middle-class women, among others. For at least the past decade, feminist theorists have pondered the implications of exclusion in feminist thought which has led to a heightened awareness of diversity, evident in recent feminist literature, and an exploration into what's often called "intersectionality" – or the relationship between gender and other identities, especially

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[1] The term "second wave" is used to refer to the feminist movement in the 60s and 70s while the first wave refers to the suffrage movement. While this terminology has been criticized for implying that feminism did not exist in the interlying years, I use it for ease of reference to the women's liberation movement of the sixties and seventies.

[2] See Anzaldua (1990), Anzaldua (1987), Collins (1990), hooks (1989), hooks (1981), King (1988), Mohanty (1991), Moraga & Anzaldua (1983), Smith (1983), Spelman (1988).

race and class. Feminist theorists now understand that they cannot theorize gender without also taking into account race and class.[3] Critiques of universalism in feminist thought have also led to an increased awareness of social identity in general; a feminist can no longer write as if she is representing all women; instead she must acknowledge the identities which inform her perspective. This trend within women's studies has taken place within a broader context of multiculturalism throughout the disciplines (Ackelsberg 1996; Biale, Galchinsky, and Heschel 1998; Brettschneider 1996).

A purpose of this dissertation is to ask where do Jews fit into the feminist conversation about intersecting identities? Within women's studies, little attention has been paid to religion as a valid identity, and Jews have been noticeably absent from the debates about difference. American Jews are not usually included in ethnic studies, but rather are seen as part of the white majority. As women of color have demonstrated, their experiences and perspectives as women are shaped by their racial identities. My research contributes to the discussion that they have begun by showing how Jews also have their own unique relationships to gender, influenced by their experiences and perspectives as Jews. It is my goal to participate in the feminist dialogue about cultural difference and intersectionality by exploring the narratives of a group which has been absent from this discussion.

There is evidence in autobiographical writing that American Jewish feminists have recently begun considering the relevance of their Jewishness on their identities, experiences, and perceptions. Many Jewish women who had not previously identified

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[3] Bordo (1990) and Flax (1993) argue that feminists have become dogmatic in accusing each other of not paying heed to race, class, and gender, which Flax, ironically, refers to as the "holy trinity of 'difference'" (p.5).

themselves as Jews among feminists, but merely as white women, have begun to write about their Jewish identity in recent years, asserting its importance to them and noting their absence from feminist discussions of cultural difference (Gubar 1996; Miller 1996; Pogrebin 1991; Zimmerman 1996).[4] Whereas previously they were a largely invisible yet disproportionate part of the women's movement,[5] they now enter the feminist discussion of identity proclaiming their Jewish identities.

Feminist Jews struggle to understand their place as Jews within the feminist debates about difference. Jewish second wave feminists express a sense of dislocation as both feminists and as Jews and ask how being Jewish makes them different from other women. On one hand, the vast majority of American Jews are white[6] and thus occupy a position of privilege within the United States. On the other hand, as Jews, they are members of a group with a long history of oppression. Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust are recurring themes in autobiographical writing by Jewish second-wavers (Gubar 1996; Kimmel 1988; Marks 1996; Miller 1996; Zuckoff 1976/77). Moreover, some of these writers claim that experiencing marginalization as Jews in the women's movement has caused them to question their place within feminist identity politics and to think more

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[4] For other examples of autobiographical writing by second wave feminists, in which the author writes about his or her own Jewish identity, see: Abzug (1976), Brod (1988), Bulkin (1984), Carroll (1999), Epstein (1988), Friedan (2000), Fuentes (1999), Glazer (1996), Hacker (1995), Jay (1999), Kafka (1997: Preface), Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996), Keller (1995), Kimmel (1988), Lerner (1997: Part 1), Marks (1996), Piercy (2002), Prell (1996), Rich (1989), Rubin (1994), Shulman (1999), Tuchman (1995), Wartenberg (1995), Willis (1992), Zimmerman (1996), and Zuckoff (1976,77).

[5] On the prominence of Jewish women in the women's liberation movement, see Antler (1997) p.260-1, Gubar (1996), Glazer (1995), Hartman and Hartman (1996) p.15-16, Sachar (1992) p.833-4, Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996), and Zimmerman (1996).

[6] Jews of European descent in America have not always been considered white. See Brodkin (1998) on the history of racial construction of American Jews.

seriously about their Jewish identities (Antler 1997; Miller 1996; Zuckoff 1976/77).[7] This dissertation will further explore ideas raised in feminist Jews' autobiographical writing through a sociological examination of the relationship between Jewish and feminist identities.

The Central Question

The central question of this study is: How do second wave Jewish feminists connect and negotiate their Jewish and feminist identities? I analyze oral history interview accounts of Jewish women and some men who participated in the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. I examine the ways in which they tell the stories of their Jewish and feminist identities, or their narratives about the relationship between these two identities.

This research sheds light on the construction of the self as a combination of multiple, conflicting, and changing identities. Contemporary social theorists define the self as complex and contradictory, a web of intersecting identities instead of a seamless whole.[8] Identities are not fixed entities, but rather dynamic constructions formed within the discourses of communities and institutions. By examining the creation and negotiation of Jewish and feminist identities, we can learn about the process of maintaining a coherent self despite the challenge of managing competing and contested identities. The meaning of being Jewish, feminist, man, and woman are all contested; they are interpreted

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[7] For accounts of anti-Semitism in feminism, see Beck (1989/82), Daum (1980), Klepfisz (1989/82), Plaskow 1980 and 1991), and Pogrebin (1982).

[8] See, for example, Cushman (1990), Cushman (1995), Elliott (1996), Foucault (1988), Gergen (1991), Giddens (1991), Jenkins (1996), Kavolis (1970), Lifton (1993), Melucci (1996), Taylor (1989), and Waters (1990).

differently among my informants. I will argue that Jewish feminists strategically use variant discourses to negotiate the relationship between their Jewish and feminist identities.

Identities are formed by the integration and reinterpretation of cultural discourses. By cultural discourse, I mean the ideas that a social group holds about itself, which is partly informed by the larger society's ideas about that group. Cultural identities, such as race, ethnicity, and religion, are constructed through the ideas of the members of a group, or the way they talk about themselves and make meaning of their membership in the group and the broader social position of the group. Individuals interpret cultural discourse, positioning themselves in relation to it, and then refashion and reproduce the discourse through their experiences as members of the group. The production of cultural discourses operates at both the micro and macro levels of society, as a dialectic between individuals and groups. For example, Americans associate America with freedom and democracy; this is a commonly held belief about what it means to be American. This belief or cultural discourse then becomes part of the individual American's identity. Individual Americans interpret and reiterate this cultural discourse, refashioning it in their own way. It is through this process that identities, such as Jewish and feminist identities, are constructed.

I found that Jewish feminists use a variety of approaches to creatively construct their identities through cultural discourses of what it means to be Jewish and feminist. These discourses allow the teller to balance the interplay of Jewish and feminist selves. Although Jewishness and feminism are commonly seen as contradictory, many of my informants also claimed to find congruence between their Jewish and feminist identities.

American Jewish Identity

There is ongoing debate about just what Jews are. Are Jews an ethnic group, a religion, both, or some other category? Richard Alba (1990) in his landmark study of American ethnic groups, remarks upon the peculiar nature of Jewishness: "[I]n contrast with other major religious groups in the United States Jews can view themselves as a 'people' and thus satisfy ethnicity's sine qua non" (50). Although for many Jews, it would be difficult to tease out the ethnic from the religious components of Jewishness, others identify as Jews without practicing or believing in the religion of Judaism.[9] Jewishness includes but is not limited to the Jewish religion, encompassing ethnic identity and a history of cultural traits and practices as well as religious beliefs and customs.[10]

Any attempt to define Jewishness is further complicated by race. This paper focuses on American Jews, of whom the vast majority (but by no means all) are classified as white because they are descended from Europeans. In this sense, most Jews currently enjoy white skin privilege in the United States;[11] although in Europe, Jews were, and in some places still are, defined as racial others. In present day American Jewish culture, Ashkenazi (Eastern European Jewish) culture is dominant. Many of the customs and traits that are thought of as "Jewish" are actually particular to the Ashkenazi tradition. Since everyone I interviewed is Ashkenazi and white, this research is not intended to be

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[9] Walker Connor (1996, 72), in writing about the murkiness of the concept of nationality, uses the example of Freud's reflections about his own Jewish identity: "After noting that he was Jewish, Freud made clear that his own sense of Jewishness had nothing to do with either religion or national pride. He went on to note that he was 'irresistibly' bonded to Jews and Jewishness by 'many obscure and emotional forces, which were the more powerful the less they could be expressed in words, as well as by a clear consciousness of inner identity, a deep realization of sharing the same psychic structure.'"

[10] I use the term "Jewishness" instead of "Judaism" because the term "Jewishness" encompasses culture or ethnicity as well, whereas "Judaism" is more limited in connotation to the Jewish religion.

[11] See note #6.

representative of American Jewish identity in all of its complexity. Furthermore the cultural discourse represented in these interviews is specific to the United States; Jews in Israel, for example, would no doubt have a very different understanding of Jewishness in respect to gender and feminism.

Like any ethnic minority, American Jews' ideas about themselves derive from internal and external sources, from both the telling of their own history as well as the perceptions of the larger culture. American Jewish identity is constructed through the individual's negotiation of Jewish cultural discourses as well as the discourses of multicultural America. Most American Jews are descendants of immigrants who came to America between 1880-1920, mainly from Eastern European countries (Glazer 1957; Sachar 1992). These immigrants fled persecution and poverty in Europe in search of freedom and economic opportunity in America. By the second and third generations living in this country, Jews had both ascended into the middle class and shed many of their immigrant ancestors' customs (Glazer 1957; Hyman 1995). In America, Jews have achieved high levels of educational and professional attainment and have lived with relatively limited impact from anti-Semitism compared to the past (Bershtel and Graubard 1992; Hartman and Hartman 1996; Lipset and Raab 1995). In fact, American Jewish women have attained higher levels of education and are more likely to participate in the labor force than other American women (Hartman and Hartman 1996).

Unlike Jews historically and currently living in other parts of the world, American Jews can affiliate with a variety of movements: Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Traditional, various facets of Orthodoxy, and the lesser known Jewish Renewal and Humanistic Judaism. The fragmentation of the American Jewish community, whether

defined by denomination or otherwise, provides American Jews with creative choices in terms of how to be Jewish. Any study of Jewish identity must take into account the variety of American Jewish cultural discourses produced by the complexity of Jewish communities. This study demonstrates how these cultural discourses are interpreted in connection with feminist identities.

Problems with the Social Scientific Study of American Jews

Those who write about American Jewish assimilation contend that the Jewish community has experienced higher rates of secularization and ethnic assimilation than at any other point in Jewish history (Lipset & Raab 1995; Ritterband 1995). They attribute this trend to the receptiveness of multicultural America and the relative paucity of anti-Semitism. These writers claim, both implicitly and explicitly, that the comfort and success of contemporary American Jews is a factor contributing directly to the community's imminent demise. They maintain that Jewish communities have survived under adverse conditions for thousands of years specifically because of external threats and oppression. Anti-Semitism and hardship required strong group cohesion, as well as the perpetuation of traditional religious beliefs and customs, primarily because Jews were segregated from the rest of the population. These "assimilationist"[12] writers conclude that since contemporary American Jews are no longer segregated from other communities and have been welcomed by their neighbors, the ties that have historically held together the Jewish community are breaking.

[12] Authors such as Ritterband (1995) use the term "assimilationist" to refer to those who conclude that American Jews are heading toward total assimilation.

Critics of the assimilationist model point out that this perspective imputes authenticity onto an arbitrary historical point in the long history of Jews, namely the Eastern European *shtetl*[13] era (Eisen 1995; Waxman 1983). The assimilationists propose a linear trend of decreasing Jewishness with each generation in America, while their critics claim that American Jews are creating new ways of being Jewish (Eisen 1995; Mayer 1995; Waxman 1983). I contend that American Judaism is not simply a dilution of a more authentic heritage. Judaism is undergoing a transformation that includes new rituals, a resurgence of personalized religious expression, and feminist-inspired practices and theology.

Scholars of American Jewry have over-emphasized the issue of Jewish assimilation and have not sufficiently investigated Jewish identity along with other important aspects of American Jewish life and culture. Current studies of "Jewish identity" are largely quantitative and focus on outward measures of religious behavior, like synagogue attendance, ritual observance, and donation to Jewish charities. One of the most often touted measures of Jewish assimilation is intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews. Since the authors of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (Kosmin et al. 1991) declared a 52% intermarriage rate among American Jews,[14] the Jewish press and scholars of the American Jewish community have decried the "problem of intermarriage". Decreasing levels of ritual observance are utilized along with the intermarriage statistic to

[13] Eastern European Jewish villages, see Meyerhoff (1978) p.3.

[14] J.J. Goldberg (1997) published an op-ed piece in the New York Times, in which he criticized the methodology of this study and claimed that it inflated the intermarriage rate, which is more accurately around 38%.

cause widespread fear in the Jewish community about Jewish continuity.[15] This conceptualization reduces Jewish identity to a list of observable behaviors and misses the affective aspects.

As of late, a few researchers have utilized more meaning-laden measures of Jewish identity in an attempt to understand Jewishness as a subjective personal identity (Bershtel and Graubard 1992; Cohen and Eisen 2000; Horowitz 1991 and 2000).[16] These qualitative studies claim that sociological theories of ethnicity apply to American Jews since Jewishness, like ethnicity for whites in general, is increasingly symbolic and individualized (Alba 1990; Gans 1979; Waters 1990). They argue that since Jews have dispersed throughout the country and have reached high degrees of assimilation, being Jewish is less dependent upon community cohesiveness. Instead, Jewishness is a matter of individual construction and choice in the same way that other ethnic identities are for descendants of white immigrants. However, Jews differ from other white ethnic groups because they are also a religious group. So, many of the indicators used to measure Jewishness relate to Judaism as a religion.

Although these newer studies of Jewish identity have attempted to gain a deeper understanding of Jewish identity, many of them repeat the mistakes of previous researchers. Many of the new studies utilize closed-ended surveys (Cohen 1998; Cohen and Eisen 2000; Horowitz 2000). Although the surveys measure psychological dimensions of Jewishness excluded by previous studies, identity is multifaceted,

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[15] The term "Jewish continuity" has become a buzzword within Jewish organizations and the Jewish press. Some have tied the concern with continuity to a post-Holocaust mentality in which Jews can imagine the possibility of the Jewish people's extinction.

[16] For early examples of qualitative sociological studies of American Jews, see Sklare (1979 and 1983). Recently, a number of scholars in the fields of cultural studies and philosophy have written books, influenced by postmodern theories of identity, which offer more nuanced and compelling perspectives on Jewish identity (Boyarin 1996; Boyarin and Boyarin 1997; Goldberg and Krausz 1993; Stratton 2000)

ambiguous, and complicated and therefore not easily captured with closed-ended indicators. Jewish identity is a continual process over the life-course, rich with subjective meaning, and thus better understood with qualitative inquiry. Additionally, "social-psychological" studies of Jewish identity define Jewishness as a separate component of the self with its own content. Jewishness is divided from the "larger world" in a false binary. These theorists do not take into account contemporary social theorists' understanding of identities as intersecting. Theories of the self teach us that all of our identities are coexistent and interrelated. Therefore, Jewishness does not occupy a separate segment of the self, distinct from all other identities; it interlocks with other identities in the formation of a multiply constituted self.

Another shortcoming of the literature on Jewish identity is the absence of gender as a category of analysis. The social scientific study of American Jews, until recently, has not sufficiently addressed questions of gender (Davidman & Tenenbaum, 1994). Though their focus is not Jewish identity, a small number of social scientists, have studied particular groups of Jewish women. Sociologists Debra Kaufman (1991) and Lynn Davidman (1991) both authored qualitative studies of newly Orthodox American women. Israeli Anthropologists Tamar El-Or (1994) and Susan Starr Sered (1992) conducted ethnographic studies of religious women in Israel. Riv-Ellen Prell (1999), Susan Kray (1993), and Gladys Rothbell (1986) explore Jewish gender stereotypes and images of Jewish women within popular culture. Moshe Hartman and Harriet Hartman (1996) use quantitative data to compare American Jewish women to non-Jewish white women and to Jewish men on levels of education, labor force participation, and occupational achievement.

While these works are all important contributions to Jewish women's studies, none of them focuses on the association between American Jewish identity and gender -- that is where my study comes in. My study will contribute to the growing body of literature on Jewish women with its investigation of the relationship between Jewish and feminist identities. With this work, I hope to encourage further exploration into the gendered nature of Jewish identity.

Jewish Women's Radical History

In order to understand contemporary Jewish feminist identity, we must place it within a historical context. Jewish participation in the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s follows a long history of Jewish participation in radical movements.[17] These movements afforded Jewish women standing in the public sphere from which they had long been prohibited. Jewish women were prominent participants in revolutionary politics in Europe from the 1870s (Shepherd 1993). Women were leaders and founders of the *Bund*, the Jewish socialist party, in the Pale of Settlement[18] (ibid.). Later, Jewish women immigrants to the United States would become leaders in the labor union movement of the early part of the twentieth century (Glenn 1990; Shepherd 1993). Jewish women were also active in the suffrage movements in the United States and England (Kuzmack 1990).

Following this tradition of political organization, it is not surprising that Jewish women played an important role in the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and

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[17] See Antler (1997), Glazer (1995, 1957), Glenn (1990), Herberg (1960), Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996), Lipset & Raab (1995), Sachar (1992), Shepherd (1993), Waxman (1983), Wertheimer (1993).

[18] The provinces of the Russian empire to which Jews were confined between 1722 and 1917 (Sheperd 1993:7).

1970s.[19] During that same period, Jewish women were also organizing to make change within their own Jewish communities. Although before then, American Judaism had been slowly allowing women greater roles and improved status, the second wave feminist movement inspired faster and more drastic change.

During the early 1970s, Jewish women mobilized within Jewish institutions using similar methods to the women's liberation movement, including consciousness raising and collectively demanding change. In 1972, a group of Conservative Jewish women issued a "call for change" at the annual convention of Conservative rabbis, which eventually led to the decision to ordain women as rabbis and cantors in the Conservative movement (Fishman 1993:7; Heschel 1983). In 1972, the first woman rabbi was ordained by the Reform movement and in 1974 the first Reconstructionist woman rabbi was ordained. Just as the women's liberation movement used conferences and other large gatherings to mobilize women, the Jewish-feminist movement convened two National Conferences on Jewish Women in 1973 and 1974 (Fishman 1993; Heschel 1983; Lerner 1977).

By the time the second wave feminist movement arrived, many sectors of the Jewish community were ready and waiting for change; they just needed a push. For instance, in 1955, rabbis of the Conservative movement ruled in favor of calling women up to the Torah.[20] However, in 1972, only 7% of Conservative synagogues allowed it. Only four years later, in 1976 the percentage of Conservative synagogues that allowed women to be called to the Torah had gone up to 50%.

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[19] See note #5.

[20] Blessing the Torah, or having an "aliyah" in front of the congregation, is an honored role that women were previously banned from taking part in. Rabbis justified this prohibition by citing the "honor of the congregation."

Synagogue life has drastically changed in the past thirty years as a result of Jewish-feminist work. Most synagogues now allow women equal participation in religious services, which is a stark change from the prevention of women from public Jewish life in all of previous Jewish history. The role of women in synagogues varies greatly between movements. Nonetheless, today all Reform synagogues and about eighty-percent of Conservative synagogues (Wertheimer 1996) grant women total equality. No Orthodox synagogues are egalitarian. However even the Orthodox movement has been affected by feminist agitation; at this point, at least two women have received Orthodox rabbinic ordination with more in training (Goodstein 2000) and Orthodox institutions have allowed women to study texts at a level previously unheard of.

These trends, women's occupation of Jewish leadership positions and ritual equality in the synagogue, are tangible improvements in the structure of Jewish institutions that have resulted from the Jewish-feminist movement. The Jewish-feminist movement has also provided the space for women's creative and spiritual innovation, including the development of new rituals and Jewish-feminist cultural production such as art, literature, theater, and music. The availability of Jewish education to women and the ordination of women has added the perspectives of women to Jewish religious culture. On the academic front, Jewish-feminist scholarship has proliferated greatly in recent years.[21]

There is a tradition within Judaism of *makhloket*, arguing within the text. In the rabbinic tradition, the basis for contemporary Judaism, there are varying interpretations for each law and multiple readings of each issue. The Jewish tradition values questioning, even of itself, and the minority opinion is maintained within Jewish legal

[21] For more information, see chapter 3 and page 11 of this chapter.

texts (Gordis 1990). Each generation is given the opportunity to bring social factors into consideration in deciding religious issues.[22] Therefore, paradoxically, while the tradition emphasizes continuity with the past, it also makes room for innovation and has repeatedly done so throughout history, sometimes quite radically (Hauptman 1998). Although the Jewish-feminist enterprise is seen as dissenting from Jewish tradition, I contend that it is actually in line with the tradition: feminist interpretations of Judaism and feminist innovation in Jewish religious practice are within the bounds of the ancient Jewish tradition of innovation, questioning, and debate.

Jewish-Feminists vs. Jews in the Feminist Movement

There is a crucial difference between the Jewish-feminist movement to transform Judaism, that I have just described, and the subject of my dissertation -- Jews who were in the women's liberation movement. In fact, while Jewish-feminists[23] were focusing their activism on the Jewish community in the 1970s, most of the feminists I interviewed were estranged from that community and experiencing their lifetime low point in terms of Jewish identity consciousness. This trend has been noted by, among others, Sylvia Barack Fishman (1993) in *A Breath of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community*:

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[22] A classic example of Jewish legal change in response to social need is the *prozbul* implemented by Rabbi Hillel in which he ruled against the biblical mandate of canceling debts after seven years, because people had stopped lending money and thus poor people were unable to borrow money (See p. 1218 of Marcus Jastrow's (1996) *Sefer Milim: A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Lieterature, vol.1*. New York: Judaica Press.) Another example is the eleventh century rabbinic ban on polygyny because of pressure from the church and governments where Jews resided as well as resistance from Jewish women (Adler 1998: 253n29).

[23] The hyphen indicates that their activism was focused within the Jewish community.

> In the beginning many of the most active contemporary American feminists of Jewish birth devoted little attention to themselves as Jews (except occasionally to deride traditional Judaism as one more egregious example of patriarchal power). (p.2)

There seems to have been very little overlap between the cohort of Jewish-feminists who, for example, called for the ordination of women rabbis or became scholars of Jewish women's studies, and the population of Jewish women in the larger feminist movement of the '60s and '70s. When recruiting research participants, I found that most Jewish-feminists of the same age group, now visible as feminists working within the Jewish community, came to feminism a little later, in the 1980s. Nonetheless, in order to understand the Jewish identities of my sample members, it is necessary to understand the role of women in the Jewish religion and how it has changed in recent years.

Many of my informants explicitly discuss the influence of Jewish-feminism on their Jewish identities. No matter how secular or unaffiliated, the people I interviewed are aware of the difference between Judaism today and when they were growing up because of Jewish-feminism. Even for those who are detached from organized Judaism, these changes must affect their understandings of the relationship between Jewishness and feminism. An important finding from my interviews is that despite the conflicts between Judaism and feminism, feminism and Jewishness are also seen as compatible. I doubt that this sentiment would have been so widespread if I had done my research twenty years ago, before the upsurge of Jewish-feminism. The existence of new feminist approaches to Judaism has paved the way for the kind of creative interweaving of identities that I found in my interviews.

Structure of the Dissertation

Throughout this dissertation, I present narratives from interview accounts which illustrate ways of approaching the relationship between Jewish and feminist identities. Chapter 2 is a description of the method of research for this study. There are four general approaches by which my interviewees negotiate their Jewish and feminist identities. Each approach is described in chapters three through six. At the beginning of these chapters, I review literature relevant to their themes. Chapter 7 contains a summary of the findings and conclusions.

The first approach to Jewish and feminist identities, detailed in chapter 3, "Negotiating Conflict between Judaism and Feminism through Religious Practice," is the integration of Jewish and feminist identities in the practice of religion. Jewish and feminist identities get played out in Jewish religious contexts, through religious accommodations to feminism or struggles to make the Jewish religion more amenable to feminists. For this group, Jewish religious practice is the location for their feminist activism. They navigate their lives as Jewish feminists through participating in feminist rewriting of Jewish liturgy, becoming leaders in their synagogues, or studying Jewish texts from a feminist perspective. Their observance is a mechanism for reconciling the dissonance between Judaism and feminism

A second approach to negotiating Jewish and feminist identities, discussed in chapter 4, "Claiming Compatibility between Jewishness and Feminism," is adopted by secular Jews who envision their Jewish and feminist identities as complementary. In their interviews, these women claimed that Jewishness and feminism are compatible rather than contradictory. This perspective, which I term the discourse of Jewish-feminist

congruence, makes connections between Jewishness and feminism. If the dominant belief is that Jewishness and feminism are conflicting, the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence offers a way of refashioning Jewishness so that it is rendered compatible with feminist perspectives. This discourse was briefly touched upon by other tellers placed in other chapters; however, it was overshadowed by discussions of conflicts between Jewishness and feminism. For the women in this group, on the other hand, the only framework for understanding the relationship between Jewishness and feminism was the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence.

A third paradigm of Jewish-feminist narratives, illustrated in chapter 5, "Connecting Jewish and Feminist Life Stories Retrospectively," is locating the intersection of Jewish and feminist identities in one's lived experience or life history. The women who typified this approach wove their feminist and Jewish autobiographies together; they saw them as one and the same. They were not able to distinguish between their Jewish upbringings and their feminist life histories. They work out the relationship between their Jewish and feminist identities through weaving them together, retrospectively relating them in their autobiographical memories. Some themes that arose were negative experiences with male rabbis and feeling marginalized as Jews within the women's movement.

A fourth approach, taken by Jewish feminist men, is illustrated in chapter 6 "Constructing Jewish Male Feminist Identities". They see their Jewish and feminist identities as connected because both place them in a position of being outside mainstream society. The feminist men I interviewed voiced what I call the Discourse of Alternative Jewish masculinity. They claim that Jewish norms of masculinity are in line with

feminist critiques of masculinity and thus offer another paradigm for Jewish-feminist congruence.

The main concern of this study is not so much the relationship between Jewish and feminist identities as narratives about that relationship. I have captured the ways in which people understand or talk about their Jewish and feminist identities and the intersections between them. I am interested in how they make meaning of being Jewish and feminist and how they understand what the two have to do with each other. My framework for understanding these identities is not as individual psychological processes, but as products of the integration of cultural strands. Individuals are faced with the challenge of integrating multiple identities; this study provides a context for examining the negotiation of this challenge.

Chapter Two

Methodology

This dissertation is a qualitative study of the identities of Jews who participated in the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. I conducted in-depth, oral history interviews with twenty-eight Jewish second wave feminists, five men and twenty-three women, over a ten month period, between August 1999 and June 2000. I chose to conduct oral histories, in which I asked about earlier life experiences, Jewish upbringing and women's movement experiences, because of the nature of my topic of study – identity. The focus of my analysis is the ways in which people connect the Jewish and feminist aspects of themselves.

Recruitment of Informants

The process of recruiting research participants was made simple by e-mail. I tracked down my interviewees through a combination of techniques: the snowball technique (each person I spoke to gave me the names of other potential informants), contacting those who identified themselves as part of my target population in writing, and e-mailing a query to various listservs. I sent e-mails to a Judaic-studies list, a Jewish feminist discussion list, and a women's studies list. The email stated that I was looking for men and women who identified as Jewish and participated in the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

In response to my query, I received between 75 and 100 e-mail messages. The volume of responses surprised me since I had been taught that it is difficult to persuade

people to participate in social research. Instead, I found people to be extremely enthusiastic and interested in the topic of my study. Their responses helped convince me that there is a need for research on Jewish second wave feminists. My initial query was forwarded by e-mail to the extent that many of the people who contacted me did not know how they initially found out about my study. Also, of the people with whom I made initial contact, who had either been recommended to me or identified themselves as Jewish second wave feminists in their writing, only a handful refused to be interviewed.

After initial contact, I screened the correspondents to ensure that they did actually participate in the feminist movement during the '60s and/or '70s. I also tried to elicit details about both their Jewish and feminist backgrounds in an attempt to gather a well-rounded group of informants. So, for instance, towards the end of my data collection phase, I only interviewed people who claimed to be practicing Jews in our initial correspondence, because I felt that I had already interviewed too many secular Jews and I needed to hear the perspectives of more observant Jewish feminists.

The interviews were confidential; I have excluded all identifying information about each interviewee within this work. I use pseudonyms and omit details that may give away the teller's identity. In order to ensure confidentiality, I have also refrained from telling people who I interviewed. However, this was complicated by the fact that the group was partly a snowball sample and thus some people found out through their own social networks that I was interviewing their friends; though this was the exception rather than the rule. Some of the informants do not socialize within Jewish feminist circles and probably knew none of the other interviewees. Most of the people I interviewed did not know who else I was interviewing, even if they did happen to know of them. This led to

a stray reference, here and there, to another person who I just happened to have interviewed. Sometimes this meant I was able to glean information about an interviewee which was not provided during the interview.

Characteristics of the Group

I interviewed twenty-eight people, five men and twenty-three women, who identify as Jews. Both parents of all of the informants were Jewish and all but four are second and third generation Americans. The extent of their involvements in Jewish life varies. The distinctions between common categories used to define Jewish identities and practices are murky and thus I am hesitant to use any of the typical labels to describe my group's Jewishness in this chapter. Short-hand descriptors of Jewish identity are not useful and can be misleading; instead the reader can learn more about the Jewish identities of the informants in the following chapters. None of the sample members are Orthodox but all engage in at least some Jewish observances throughout the year. The informants described in chapter three all practice Judaism while those discussed in chapter four identify as secular Jews. The remaining informants, discussed in chapters five and six offer a range of Jewish religious identities and practices.

I felt it was important to interview people with a variety of Jewish backgrounds and religiosity, yet it was much easier to find secular than religious Jewish feminists. After having gone through the Left in the 1960s and 1970s, it was common for people to discard their religious affiliations. I tried very hard to find an Orthodox respondent, but to no avail; this is probably due to the common experiences of this cohort and the radicalizing experience of the women's liberation movement. Incidentally, a few

informants even expressed concern that they would "skew" my findings with their lack of religious identification, since Jewishness is only a cultural and not a religious identity for them. They did not realize how typical they are among their Jewish second wave feminist peers.

In addition to Jewish identity, the other requirements for inclusion in the study are possession of a feminist identity and a history of active participation in the feminist movement of the '60s and/or '70s. People who identified as second wave feminists but had not actually participated in any feminist action were not included in the study. I did interview a few people like this, because I did not realize prior to the interview that although they identified as second wave feminists, they had not really been involved in the feminist movement; their affiliation with feminism was only by identification. I knew after those particular interviews were finished and they had described their lives in the '60s and '70s without any overt social movement participation that I could not include their interviews in the study. I also interviewed a couple of people who, though they had participated in feminist activities, did not identify themselves as feminists but rather as social activists of other kinds. I also did not include them in my analysis because I wanted to narrow the sample down to people with feminist identities who had participated in second wave feminism.

The participants in this study were involved in virtually all segments of the feminist movement of the sixties and seventies. The men belonged to feminist men's groups, protested violence against women, and supported reproductive rights and the Equal Rights Amendment. The women's feminist histories were more diverse. It was common for them to have had a range of affiliations in the women's liberation movement, either

concurrently or over time. Many participated in the radical feminist movement. Some had been lesbian feminist separatists for a short period of time. Others participated in the less radical, liberal camps of feminism, and were active in their local chapters of the National Organization of Women. Still others were producers and performers of feminist theater and the women's music movement. Many informants were not so active in any particular group but took part in an eclectic mix of feminist activities, such as consciousness raising groups, newspaper collectives, battered women's shelters, marches and demonstrations. Virtually all of the people I interviewed also participated in other protest movements besides feminism, especially the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements.

As was quite common for second wave feminists, many of my informants became academics. In fact, at the time of the interviews, twelve were academics. All of the academics who I interviewed have engaged in feminist scholarship and have made gender a primary area of their work. Most of the others work in the non-profit sector. Moreover, almost all of the interviewees were writers in some capacity; if not academics or writers by profession, they wrote articles, poems, or essays for pleasure. They are a remarkably well-educated group; all but three have graduate degrees and seventeen of those hold doctorates. Their intelligence, eloquence, and thoughtfulness comes through in the interview accounts.

The class background of the interviewees is mixed. Those whose parents were immigrants tend to have grown up poor or working class. The others were more likely to have come of age in a middle class environment. As is evident from their educational background, they are all middle class today.

The age of respondents ranges between 47 and 75 years old and the average age among the group is 59 years old. Some were in college when first participating in the feminist movement and others are old enough to be these respondents' parents. I did not ask about sexual orientation during the course of the interviews, so I can not be sure of the sexual orientations of all of my respondents. However, a number of people did volunteer this information. Five identified themselves as lesbians and two as bisexual. A number of others told me that they had identified as lesbians earlier in their lives but were married to men at the time of the interviews. Seventeen lived with heterosexual partners when the interviews occurred and all but six informants have children.

Since where one lives inevitably affects one's Jewish identity, I interviewed people who live in various regions of the country. To conduct interviews, I traveled to the West coast, Midwest, Southwest, and also conducted interviews in the Northeast. Although I live in New York City, I wanted to interview people who live outside of this area because since the largest concentration of American Jews lives in the New York City metropolitan area, Jewish identity may be different among New Yorkers (Horowitz 1992). In the end, I found that many of the people I interviewed either grew up in the New York metropolitan area or lived there at one point in their lives. Twelve of the informants lived in the New York City metropolitan area at the time of the interview, but sixteen grew up in the New York City area and another three had lived there at some point in their youths. I did find that the environment one lives in and the concentration of its Jewish population is an influence on one's Jewish identity.

Interview Process

The purpose of my research was to explore the relationship between Jewish and feminist identities. I engaged in informal life history interviews so that I could observe the discursive construction of personal identities (Angrosino 1989; Atkinson 1998; Lieblich et al. 1998; Riessman 1993; Yow 1994). I asked informants to tell their Jewish and feminist autobiographies because identities are constructed as a process throughout the life course and they change over time. I am interested in the meanings given to cultural discourses and thus I asked very broad, open-ended questions, allowing the teller to define the response categories (Bernard 1995; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Taylor 1998). Each interview lasted approximately two hours. Twenty-five interviews were conducted in person, mostly at the informants' homes. Three interviews were conducted over the phone because it was not possible to meet with the interviewees in person.

I have included the interview guide as an appendix; I used it as a general guide rather than as a verbatim script. I did not ask all of the informants the exact same questions. The interviews were divided into three main sections: feminist autobiography, Jewish autobiography, and the relationship between feminism and Jewishness. I began with the feminist autobiography because I felt that people would have an easier time discussing this aspect of their lives. This part of the interview was a recounting of the teller's feminist activist history. As a result, I learned much about the women's liberation movement; however, many of those details are not reproduced in this dissertation. I asked for this information for two reasons: to warm the teller up in the beginning of the interview and to ascertain the nature of feminist involvement in order to ensure a well-rounded sample in this regard. The Jewish autobiography section was also

straightforward; it contained details about the informant's Jewish family background, practice, Jewish education, and feelings about being Jewish.

The last section of the interview was on the relationship between Jewishness and feminism, Jewish and feminist identities, and Jewish and feminist life histories. This section elicited narratives at varying levels of abstraction. Some people illustrated the relationship between their Jewish and feminist identities with vignettes and others with more abstract ideas, through a theoretical discussion of the nature of Jewishness and feminism. Also, many informants linked their Jewish and feminist autobiographies earlier in the interviews and thus, for them, it was not as difficult to tease out their understandings of the relationship between feminism and Jewishness at the end of the interview. All material in the interview accounts pertaining to both feminism and Jewishness became the focus of my analysis.

Interpersonal Component

The apparent differences or similarities between researcher and study participants is always a factor in determining the outcome of research (Hunt 1989; Riessman 1987). Like the participants in my study, I am both Jewish and feminist, and the interviewees seemed to take both for granted. There were clues that my informants saw me as an insider, part of their cultural group. For instance, they often used Hebrew or Yiddish phrases or referred to Jewish practices or facts that would probably be outside of the frame of reference of a non-Jewish interviewer. I attended Jewish schools for most of elementary and high school, yet the informants did not know this. Somehow, they

expected me to have the background to understand Hebrew, Yiddish, and religious references. They expected us to speak a shared language.

Although being a Jewish feminist means that I have much in common with my interviewees, my age is a considerable difference. I was twenty-seven and twenty-eight years old when I conducted the interviews and thus young enough to be the daughter or even granddaughter of the people I interviewed. The age difference did not usually feel like a factor in our interaction. However, a few of the women apologized for acting like a "Jewish mother" with me. They would say things like, "I'm sorry to be such a Jewish mother but"... "be careful in the snow," or "eat more," or "wear your seatbelt."

When I was ill with the flu, I visited the home of one woman who epitomized this sort of interaction. Upon hearing my hoarse voice she exclaimed that I sounded awful. She admonished me to drink more water, saying very grimly, "Do you know how low the humidity is here? It's less than 10%. You have to drink at least a gallon a day." She sounded like she was scolding me for not taking care of myself. We went in the house and she offered me all kinds of food from her kitchen. After offering me a particular choice of food, she changed her mind, saying: "Oh no you can't have that. It's dairy." When I replied that I do in-fact eat dairy, she insisted, "You can't! It will make you produce more mucous."

This sort of interaction is more typical of participant-observation than interview studies in which the interviewer sometimes meets strangers for only a couple of hours for the interview session. Instead, I often had more extensive interactions with interviewees. Although participant-observation was not officially part of my research design, any extended socializing beyond the bounded interview became a form of participation-

observation. I ate at restaurants with informants before or after interviews and many of the people I contacted who live outside of New York invited me to stay at their homes when visiting their area. In these circumstances, I had the opportunity to observe people's lives and they had the opportunity to become more comfortable with me.

Two of the women with whom I stayed, took the time to "test me out" before being interviewed One woman scheduled our interview for the end of my visit, after having taken me out to dinner the preceding night and spending hours talking to me with her husband at her house. Before I left town, she explained that she had planned my visit this way because she had to make sure she trusted me before the interview, since she knew she would be talking to me about painful parts of her life experience. Another informant, who also hosted me for a night in her home, had suffered from mental illness, and tried to gauge my attitudes toward mental illness prior to the interview. She took me out to dinner with her husband before the interview and asked me what I thought about a recent film, "Girl, Interrupted" which was about adolescent girls in a mental institution. All of these experiences, outside of the interview sessions, became part of the fabric of my investigation and undoubtedly influenced my understandings of the people I studied.

Data Analysis

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. I then coded the transcripts for key themes, using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software program. The main category of analysis for this study is the intersections between Jewishness and feminism. I selected all material pertaining to both gender/feminism and Judaism/Jewish

identity/Jewish experiences; my analysis of the resulting narratives were the basis for the organization of the data.

In examining the ways in which my informants negotiate their Jewish and feminist identities, I came up with four categories. For each category, I chose individuals for whom the dominant approach to fitting together Jewish and feminist identities is similar. Each represents its own orientation to balancing Jewishness and feminism. For instance, chapter three describes women who reconcile the conflicts of their Jewish and feminist identities through Jewish-feminist religious practice. Some of these women touched upon the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence, explained in chapter four, during the course of their interviews; however it was not central to their narratives. Thus, these women are not discussed again in chapter four; instead chapter four is about only those women for whom the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence is the main way in which they approach the relationship between Jewishness and feminism.

Since I organized my chapters according to types of people, each respondent is only described in one chapter. This method allows me to also present life history data about each informant when I explore his or her narratives about Jewishness and feminism. I chose to present my analysis in this way in order to preserve the richness of the data that I gathered. The individual's identity is part of the larger context of her/his previous life experiences, and thus the autobiographical layer is necessary for understanding constructions of Jewish and feminist identities.

I began this research with the assumption that a Jewish feminist must feel at least some conflict between his or her Jewish and feminist identities. The tension between Jewishness and feminism was simply a given for me and thus I did not even consider

asking people if they felt it themselves; I took for granted that they would. This is probably based on my own past experiences of conflict between my Jewish and feminist identities. Also, everything I had heard and read pertaining to both Jews and feminism was based on a tacit assumption of incongruity. After all, the literature on Jewish feminists and Jewish feminism largely deals with religious issues and the conflicts that arise when feminists confront Judaism.

I recognized my omission when interviewing Sam, one of the men in my sample. I realized that it had not previously occurred to me to actually ask people if they feel any tension between their Jewish and feminist identities. Unconsciously, it seemed so obvious that it did not even need to be asked directly. As soon as I became aware of this, I asked Sam if he had ever experienced a conflict between Jewishness and feminism. I was surprised to hear him reply that he had not with an elaborate explanation. After that interview, I explicitly asked everyone who did not raise the issue themselves whether they felt cognitive dissonance and I received a wide range of replies. My own personal biases caused me to overlook an important area of inquiry. Luckily, I realized this blunder at an early stage of the interview process and was able to ask all subsequent interviewees if they felt a sense of cognitive dissonance between their Jewish and feminist identities. This proved to be a significant aspect of my investigation.

It is important to keep in mind that putting the interview narratives in writing creates a false sense of fixity, belying the changeability and ambivalence inherent to social identities. Although the interviews were autobiographical, their retrospective nature is not intended to create a historical account. Instead, I am interested in the telling of life

histories as windows into the informants' identities. Memories are by nature transient; we tell our histories from different vantage points at different times in our lives.

The scope of this study does not allow me to generalize about all Jewish second wave feminists. In fact, it would be impossible to collect a representative sample of this group, because there is no comprehensive list of all Jews who participated in the women's liberation movement. It is not my intent to make general claims about this population, but rather to examine multiple discourses of Jewishness as they intersect with discourses of feminism. My larger aim is to think critically about the construction of cultural discourses and the integration of diverse identities.

Chapter Three

Negotiating Conflict between Judaism and Feminism through Religious Practice

This chapter explores the negotiation of Jewish and feminist identities within religious practice. The eight women described here actively work, through their religious observance and Jewish communal leadership, to bring together Jewishness and feminism. They are Jewish-feminists; their Jewish religious practice is a site of their feminist activism. They are part of the development within Judaism of feminist-inspired and gender-egalitarian[1] religious observance. Not only are they keenly aware of occupying positions and roles within their Jewish communities that were previously barred for women, but they also see this newly permitted participation as a feminist act. They use the evolving developments of Jewish-feminism, such as feminist text study or liturgy change, to reconcile the conflicts of their identities. The extent of conflict between Judaism and feminism varies among the informants in this chapter; some have been more successful than others at managing this conflict.

Whereas many religious Jews who went through the life-changing experience of the women's liberation movement concluded that Judaism is not for them and feminists can not be practicing Jews, the eight women discussed in this chapter are different. The women in this chapter actually became more religious and more involved in Judaism after participating in the women's liberation movement. These women all have a deep

[1] The term egalitarian is commonly used by Jewish communities to refer to prayer communities that allow full participation to women

love for the Jewish religion; being Jewish is more than a cultural identity for them. Since they are religious, to varying degrees, they do experience tension between their Jewish and feminist identities. This is inevitable for people whose Jewish identities draw on an ancient religious system that does not easily translate into a new ideology such as feminism. However, the narratives of the women in this chapter are not just about conflict, but also about actively working to join Jewishness and feminism. Although they begin from a point of dissonance, they bridge it through their creativity and spirituality and by their participation in Jewish-feminist rituals, Jewish education, and synagogue leadership.

The Impact of the Jewish-Feminist Movement

Although Judaism is historically rooted in patriarchy and its laws and traditions exclude women from full participation in Jewish life (Adler 1998; Plaskow 1979), during the course of this past century American Jewish communities have radically changed the way they practice Judaism so that women now have opportunities that did not exist during the past five thousand years (Fishman 1993; Grossman and Haut 1992). Although traditionally women were relegated to the role of passive observer in the synagogue, most synagogues outside of the Orthodox community are now gender egalitarian (Wertheimer 1996).[2] Women now count in a *minyan* (prayer quorum), are permitted to lead services, and are even ordained as rabbis and cantors. While women have long been prohibited from public Jewish life, they now serve in every capacity as leaders of Jewish

[2] The Conservative movement is the only denomination other than Orthodox which still has some non-egalitarian synagogues. According to Wertheimer's 1996 study, 80% of Conservative synagogues were egalitarian; surely in the past six years, more have become egalitarian.

communities. Furthermore, while traditionally women were permitted only cursory educations in Jewish texts, now even in Orthodox communities women have access more than ever before to serious text study (El-Or 1994).

Another transformation in American Judaism is the result of the impact of feminism on Jewish thought (Davidman and Tenenbaum 1994). Jewish-feminist scholarship has flourished in many areas in the past twenty years, including such developments as: feminist interpretations of Jewish texts (Hauptman 1998; Hyman 1997; Pardes 1992), Jewish feminist theology (Adler 1998; Plaskow 1979), gender-inclusive liturgy (Falk 1996), and the creation of feminist rituals (Adelman 1990; Berrin 1996; Broner 1999; Orenstein 1994). In many ways, Judaism is not the same religion as it was in the 1930s – 1950s, when the participants in my study were growing up.

The Jewish-feminist movement made it possible for the women discussed in this chapter to practice Judaism as feminists. Whereas as children, their participation in Jewish life was restricted, they can now study Jewish texts from a feminist perspective, participate in liturgy change, and become leaders in their synagogues. Indeed these women, as adults, have taken on stricter personal practice of Jewish customs and have enjoyed the privileges of synagogue leadership, participation in public ritual roles, and Jewish education. Because, as women, their religious lives had long been prohibited by Jewish tradition, they see their Jewish practice as feminist achievements. Being Jewish has required much work from these women. They are all active learners and keep up with Jewish-feminist and other modern Jewish scholarship that helps them practice Judaism as critical thinkers, progressives, and feminists.

All of the feminists in this chapter are practicing Jews on at least a semi-weekly basis. Unlike the typical Jew who only attends synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the women in this chapter attend *Shabbat* (Sabbath) services as well. They are all leaders in their synagogues, and their participation in the organized Jewish community is an important part of their lives. Although these women are religious Jews, none are Orthodox and all are adamant about participating in egalitarian services. The Orthodox movement of Judaism is the most traditional denomination and still does not allow women to lead services or participate in any public ritual or leadership role in the synagogue. The search for a feminist-friendly congregation and/or rabbi is a theme in the narratives of this group; many of them straddle different denominations, belonging to both Conservative and Reconstructionist or Reform congregations.[3] By being religious, they are in keeping with the family tradition: none of these women were raised in secular families and most had Orthodox grandparents.

Jewish Education

A major theme in this chapter is the impact of Jewish education. The narratives of this group of eight women demonstrate that the quest for Jewish learning is central to their Jewish identities. In Jewish tradition, Jewish education is obligatory and crucial to religious practice; Torah study is a central *mitzvah* (commandment). In her study of the

[3] According to the model that Reform is the most liberal denomination and Orthodox the most traditional, Reconstructionist and Conservative would be in the middle. The continuum would look like this, going from most liberal on the left to most traditional on the right: Reform – Reconstructionist – Conservative – Orthodox. Although, of course there are variations within each movement, with Orthodox being the most diverse.

religious lives of elderly Jewish women in Jerusalem, Susan Starr Sered (1992) remarks on the salience of Jewish education:

> According to Jewish belief there are certain deeds for which one is rewarded both in this world and in the next. These deeds are enumerated in the *Mishna* ("Peah" 1,1) and recited daily during the weekday morning prayer service: honoring one's father and mother, the practice of loving kindness, the making of peace between a man [sic] and his neighbor, "but the study of Torah surpasses them all." (p.66)

Although Jewish education has been so vital to Judaism, women were historically excluded from it. While Jewish fathers are commanded to teach their sons Torah, the rabbis debated about the requirement or even permissibility of teaching daughters Torah (Fishman 1993:182-3). For much of Jewish history, only "exceptional" women were permitted to engage in the rigorous Jewish scholarship that was required of their brothers (Ibid.:184-5). However, during the twentieth century this exclusion of women from Jewish education ended and by now, even in the most Orthodox sects, women are adept at Jewish textual study (Ibid.:190-199).

The women in this chapter have acquired considerable skills in Hebrew, text study, and prayer leadership. Much of this Jewish education has taken place during their adult years. Their attendance of Hebrew school[4] as children varies according to their age. Edith, Rebecca, and Naomi were all close to seventy years old at the time of the interview. The other women discussed in this chapter, Sarah, Janet, Rachel, Natalie, and Gail are almost a generation younger; they were all close to fifty years old at the time of the interview. Because of their generation, the older women in this group did not have any formal Jewish education as children, yet the younger women did. The younger women were in the first generation of females to be bat-mitzvahed; they all attended

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[4] Supplementary Jewish education, usually provided by synagogues on weekday afternoons or on Sundays.

Hebrew school and, except for Natalie, all had bat-mitzvahs. The older women, Edith, Rebecca, and Naomi, grew up before it was a widespread custom to provide girls with formal Jewish educations; their brothers attended Hebrew school but they did not.

As adults, benefiting from the scholarship and teaching of Jewish women, all eight of these respondents have become extremely well educated Jews. Many of them have stories of being inspired by women rabbis in their paths to reconnect with Judaism. This learning process has taken considerable energy for them, yet it is an important way in which they relate to Judaism. They are all intellectually curious and have remained consistently interested in Jewish studies.

Their Stories: Integrating Jewish Religious Lives with Feminist Worldviews

Sarah is an observant Conservative Jew and has been throughout her entire life. She has always observed the Sabbath[5] and kept kosher (Jewish dietary laws). She feels that her current Jewish observance is very similar to the way her parents raised her, although she is now somewhat more stringent. She is very active in an egalitarian *minyan* (prayer group) where she attends services weekly and often leads prayers. This *minyan* is an important reference point for Sarah. Many of her impressions about the feminist evolution of Judaism have come from experiencing the effects of feminism on her *minyan*.

Judaism is integral to all aspects of Sarah's life. Sarah describes her Jewish identity as an essential aspect of herself:

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[5] Usually a Jew who "observes the Sabbath" refrains from engaging in certain activities from Friday at sunset to Saturday an hour after sunset, including: traveling, spending money, cooking, and working.

> I think that Judaism is an enormously influential part of who I am. It is much clearer to me in fact, to make what might sound like an outrageous statement here, it is much clearer to me that I am a Jew than that I am a woman. My gender identity is much more ambiguous. Judaism is part of everything I do. It's part of the kinds of jobs I'm interested in and the worldview that I have and the way I raised my kid and the way I vote. It's something that's part of me like my organs or like breathing.

Sarah's distinction between Jewish identity and gender identity reverses the paradigm of gender as an essential embodied trait and religion as a social trait. Instead, Judaism is likened to biology (like her "organs or like breathing") while being a woman is uncertain.

Sarah's Jewish observance has been informed by feminism since before her bat-mitzvah. She claims that growing up in the Conservative movement made her feel that "Judaism was an evolving and changing thing." As a teenager, Sarah remembers feeling that "there were no inconsistencies between [being] a good feminist and being a good Jew. It was just a question of working for greater enfranchisement of women within the Jewish community." But over time, she has come to feel that Judaism is essentially irreparable because of the patriarchal roots of the rabbinic legal structure. It seems that the more she has learned about Judaism, the more critical she has become and the more dissonance she has experienced. This mindset makes her different from others who describe feeling more settled with Judaism over the years, especially as they have become more educated in feminist interpretations of Judaism. Although Sarah works hard to integrate feminism into her Jewish practice, she still feels deeply dissatisfied. She describes feeling increasingly so for the past few years. Previous attempts to take a feminist approach to her Jewish life satisfied Sarah for a while but did not permanently solve her conflicts with Judaism.

It was difficult to pin down the extent of Sarah's critique of Judaism, because she vacillated between describing Judaism as a hopelessly flawed system and expressing that perhaps a feminist reconstruction of Judaism is possible. She is torn between her commitments to both the old and the new, that is traditional Jewish customs and feminist ideologies. Sarah expressed the view that for Judaism to truly become feminist it would have to lose its authenticity:

> And I also sometimes think...that honestly trying to turn Judaism into a feminist enterprise is an attempt to do something completely inauthentic to it that won't make it recognizable in terms of continuity as Judaism...And then I have this very painful choice of deciding if I'm ready to part with it. And I'm probably not. But I think that Judaism can change, but I really think that there's some stuff that's so patriarchal down to its core that we've all been afraid to look at lest we be put up against this issue of can we really stay here? Is there anything left to work with? We're talking about an authority structure that's alien to feminism as I see it.

In the previous passage, Sarah contemplates the possibility of "parting with" Jewish tradition. Elsewhere in the interview she said, "I'm always wondering whether I'm going to have to get a divorce from this tradition that I love very much, whether it's not self-destructive to me to stay in it."

If Sarah's Jewish identity is so essential and basic to her self concept, as is demonstrated above, how can she even contemplate leaving Judaism? By pondering this choice in the interview she illustrates the intensity of the conflict she feels. In other words, the patriarchal foundations of Judaism must create a strong conflict for Sarah if it is enough to cause her to consider "parting with" Jewish tradition. The emotional impact of this issue is clear in the language and metaphors Sarah employs: "I'm worried about all the stuff that we're unconsciously transmitting, including some of the sexist messages

that at times I feel have all but destroyed me...it's as if I'm living in an environmental disaster zone. You know, I'm living in Love Canal."

One of the themes in Sarah's feminist critique of Judaism is the dominance of Jewish men. Her theory is that Jewish "men feel threatened by not feeling masculine enough and react to that by confining women." Sarah referred to Judaism as a "sheltered workshop for men." She feels that this phenomena goes back to the rabbinic period of Jewish history yet is still "alive and well and it's pervasive in our Jewish culture whether people are secular or religious." She feels that contemporary Jewish men's behavior still comes from this masculine insecurity. About this, like the other fundamental problems of Judaism, Sarah says "I think that's deeply embedded and would be difficult to remove." Yet on the other hand, she personally feels a profound connection to much of traditional Judaism, even that which is a result of male-dominance: "Some of the stuff that I most love is stuff that depends on male dominance. And I don't want to bring male dominance back." Sarah noticed that when the women became more active in her minyan, the men started to "disappear into the wallpaper." She said that she missed their "male energy;" she liked "to have men in the room with great *kavanah* [intention or focus], singing and mumbling and all of that. And swaying and charging up the room...It was a very male-dominated service, but it was so lively."

Sarah is ambivalent about the possibility of "fixing" Judaism. She is pessimistic about the transformative possibilities of feminist creativity within Judaism such as liturgical reform, and calls it "tinkering," even though she has taken part in it herself. She argues that Jewish-feminists have only made superficial adjustments and "haven't

done enough with the paradigms that are operating underneath." Heterosexism within Judaism is central to Sarah's critique:

> Until the Jewish community is willing to look at alternatives to heterosexual dyads, and I mean both things -- heterosexual and dyads, Jewish-feminism hasn't got a lot to offer me. I feel like all that's really happened is the doors that used to be closed to women are now open to them, but it's still a patriarchally conceived world of artificial dichotomies. And that Jewish feminists haven't really, for the most part, haven't fundamentally challenged that...I mean, I think some interesting stuff has the potential to happen now. But for the most part, it's been about getting women into the rabbinate, getting women into the cantorate, and liturgical reform. And that just don't cut it baby {said in an exaggerated, emphatic whispered tone, then laughing}.

Sarah is saying that giving women equality within Judaism is not enough as long as the underlying structure is patriarchal.

Sarah claims that she is out in the vanguard in terms of how far she is willing to go to question Judaism; yet she also is deeply attached to tradition. Although she is willing to talk about a complete restructuring of Judaism she does not actually want to do away with the tradition:

> I think it's partly that I really do want to keep the old. I think, a lot of the old. I think a lot of people who are into new rituals, new liturgy, blah blah blah ... do not love the Hebrew language and the traditional prayers, all of those things, as much as I do. Don't have that imagery sort of engraved on their hearts the way I do. I wouldn't be comfortable bailing out for something completely new. It wouldn't feel like it had a Jewish character, to me anyway... I am worried that the place that I belong constantly invalidates me as a human being. Wipes me out as a human being. I belong there and I have that comfort of home but it's like getting comfortable with your oppressor.

Sarah's attempt to reconcile her Jewish and feminist selves is clearly painful for her. She is in the difficult position of being stuck between her radical critique and her love of Judaism. She does not want to be too innovative in her Jewish observance because she is wedded to traditional customs. She is still searching for something "authentically Jewish and thoroughgoingly feminist" since she does not feel that most existent Jewish feminist

scholarship lives up to that goal. Sarah fantasizes about going back to school to immerse herself in Jewish studies in order to work on this problem. She has not yet found a comfortable home that can completely accommodate both her Jewish and feminist identities because her Jewish beliefs consist of mutually opposing views.

Like Sarah, Janet also spoke with sadness about her struggle to find a balance between Jewish tradition and feminist innovation. Janet is very involved in both a Conservative synagogue and a Jewish Renewal *chavurah*.[6] Janet claimed that she "keeps one foot in both" communities because she has "multiple identities and they get satisfied in different ways." For Janet, the Conservative synagogue sometimes feels too traditional and the Jewish Renewal *chavurah* sometimes feels too "out there." She struggles with deciding where she feels closer. Janet has gotten more involved in Judaism since the 1980s and in the past ten years has become even more religious. She attends synagogue weekly and often leads services. She also takes Jewish adult education classes which are often on feminist topics.

Janet describes her parents as "not active Jews" who were learning about Judaism when she was a child, although they did have Sabbath dinners and frequently attended synagogue as a family. Janet traces the roots of her activism to a radical Jewish camp that she attended as a child. Her parents sent her to the camp because it was Jewish without realizing its political nature. She feels that it was at this camp that she began to part ways, politically, from her parents.

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[6] Chavurah is Hebrew for "fellowship." It is a collectively organized prayer and study community. The chavurah movement emerged out of the New Left to create an alternative organization to the synagogue (Prell 1989).

Janet's telling of her Jewish upbringing focuses on her Jewish education. In fact, learning is still primary to her Jewish identity. She absolutely loved Hebrew school and her synagogue. She attended services by herself on Saturday mornings, beginning at the age of eight. During high school, she became president of her Jewish youth group and took Hebrew classes and Israeli folk dancing. She has very fond memories of these experiences.

Janet was the first girl to have a bat-mitzvah in her Conservative synagogue which she describes as "very meaningful" and "exciting and wonderful." She was chosen to set a precedent, as the first girl, because she was skilled at Hebrew. At the time, she felt that this was a great honor and it later became an important milestone in her life. However, Janet recalls that she did not understand her bat-mitzvah as a feminist event until later.

Janet says that being a "Jewish-feminist" has been a major part of her identity for many years. When I asked Janet when her feminist autobiography began, she referred to the time during her adolescence when she realized that, although she was very active in her synagogue, her power within that framework was limited by her gender: "There was a point at which I had this thought that there was no place that I, as a female, could go in the synagogue except to be a rabbi's wife." Consequently, she experienced her first feminist "click" moment[7] in a Jewish context.

Janet was a non-practicing Jew during her young adult life, including her activist days in the seventies: "I had gone through a phase of not being involved with my Judaism and then finding, but yet realizing that a lot of what I learned as a Jew guided what I was doing." In the early 1980s, Janet joined and became active in a progressive secular

Jewish organization. She began to reconnect with Judaism "on a spiritual level" because of her participation in this organization. She describes this period of her life as a "spiritual reawakening" in which she strove to regain the Judaism she had given up. Janet recalled a trip to Israel with this organization which was an influence on her return to Judaism. Janet also used emotional language to describe how, through this organization, she was introduced to the Jewish-feminist movement:

> I was starting to see again other models of what women were doing. And it struck chords with me partially because it was something I had left behind...You know, it was creatively interpretive and doing stuff that had to do with Judaism, and that had meaning behind it, and that included prayer, and that included arguing in terms of text, and that was interpretive. I mean, I loved studying Torah...And I battled for using feminist language and it was that kind of thing...I started really feeling it inside. And that's when for me it became, you know, I'm a Jewish-feminist. I felt comfortable with it. I'm not a feminist who's Jewish; I'm a Jewish feminist. I feel deep in my gut Jewish and I feel deep in my gut feminist because of what I believe.

Janet was able to take advantage of the creativity of the Jewish-feminist movement as she was exploring Judaism. Thus her reconnection with Judaism meshed well with her feminist identity.

Janet claims that bringing Judaism and feminism together has strengthened both identities. She has kept up with Jewish-feminist scholarship and has used Jewish-feminist tools for writing poetry and creating art: "My feminism and my Judaism, it's kind of like this creativity going on in there. There's always something challenging my creativity in a way that I'm looking towards wanting to work with. So you know, it touches on a lot of different things for me." However, Janet also feels that there have continually been conflicts between her Jewish and feminist identities. Janet spoke a lot

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[7] The expression "click moment" is used by feminists to refer to an event or experience in the teller's life that raised her or his consciousness about feminism, either when it happened or in retrospect.

about grappling with Jewish text, which seems central to her Jewish practice; however, her pursuit of Jewish education has been characterized by an approach-avoidance conflict. She gravitates toward certain subjects and then loses interest if she feels uncomfortable as a feminist. Janet laments that there are not enough people in her congregation who "want to study text from a feminist perspective."

Janet's ambivalence also relates to prayer. Sometimes when she looks at the words in the prayerbook, she questions their relevance and asks herself why she goes to synagogue every week. On the other hand she feels she has to "compartmentalize" and remember at these moments of questioning that she attends synagogue because it is a "respite" that gives her strength for handling the rest of her life. Compartmentalization is a strategy used by others as well to negotiate the tension between Jewish and feminist identities. These conflictual feelings are at the heart of Janet's struggle to balance her Jewish and feminist identities:

> It's something that I think I'm in the middle of struggling with again right now in a way, because something inside of me is sort of saying: Wait a minute, I ran away from it once before, I'm not gonna run away from it now. This is what I have to deal with...But somehow, to truly deal with all of this out of the strength of being a feminist, means challenging it all the time. And you can't live by challenging it all the time...You have to just deal with it the way it is and just take the pieces. 'Cuz it's the way it is.

In the previous passage, Janet expresses a fear that the dissonance between her Jewish and feminist identities will inspire her to run away from Judaism, as she did when she was younger. This fear dictates how she handles the issues she has with Judaism. She tries to put aside her ambivalence and focus on what she gains from observing Judaism. She copes with the dissonance by focusing on the positive aspects of Judaism rather than continually challenging it.

Although Janet's feminism sometimes makes her feel alienated during "more traditional" Jewish services, she prays in a traditional synagogue because the setting reminds her of her childhood and is thus a source of comfort. She chooses when to challenge the androcentrism of Judaism and when to compartmentalize her feminist discontent:

> The tension is, when I go to a more traditional service and...pray in...more traditional melodies or just use the words that are in the Conservative *siddur* [prayerbook]. I'm always still changing "*melech*" [king] to "*ruakh*" [spirit] and using the more Jewish Renewal words. So there are places where I'll say "*Brucha Hee*" [Blessed is She] instead of "*Baruch Hu*" [Blessed is He]. I'll do that because it's important to me to do that. And I hear the dissonance from everyone around me, as they're saying one thing and I'm saying another...There are other times where I want to desperately just be there with everybody and I don't want to be different...God, why did you make me different? {laughing}

Janet wants to feel like an insider, yet her feminism sometimes causes her to feel like an outsider. She struggles to balance her traditional Jewish outlook with feminism. Her strategy is to compromise, compartmentalize, and focus on the rituals and Jewish tenets that benefit her. She left Judaism for years and she doesn't want to leave again, so she lives with the cognitive dissonance that results from being a practicing Jew and feminist causes. Although both Sarah and Janet demonstrated the emotional difficulties of reconciling traditional Judaism with feminism, their approaches are different. While Sarah presented her religiosity as essential, its conflicts with feminism inspire a desire to break away from Jewish tradition. In comparison, Janet, who came back to Judaism later in life, is fearful of losing the joy and meaningfulness that it brings her and thus focuses on these positive aspects instead of the contradictions of her Jewish-feminist identity.

Unlike Sarah and Janet, Rachel did not convey difficulty in balancing Judaism with feminism. Whereas her Jewish practice is also traditional, she comfortably integrates it

with her feminist identity. Rachel was cooking for the Sabbath when I arrived at her house for the interview on a Friday morning. There was a Hebrew/English bible, published by an Orthodox press, out on the table which she was using to prepare a *drash* [sermon] which she would deliver in synagogue the next week. Rachel's narrative was infused with spiritual language. She talked about God perhaps more than any other teller. She also became choked up with emotion at various points during the interview.

Like perhaps all of the women in this section, Rachel's Jewish identity is primary, a master status of sorts. Before she does anything political, she asks herself if it makes sense from a Jewish point of view:

> So how does being Jewish affect the way that I'm a feminist? If there's any political thing I'm going to do, even if it's only sending an e-mail that probably nobody will ever read anything except the subject line of, I'm going to like run it through a filter of -- is this a position that makes sense in Jewish terms? Is this going to help create the kind of world that, as a Jew, I want to leave after me?

Rachel's religious life has helped her heal from many of the troubles of her past. She had a turbulent adolescence and early twenties when she was frequently arrested and was in and out of psychiatric hospitals. However, she has been off of medication for twenty years and seems to be living a stable life. The Jewish community plays a key role; she finally feels like she belongs somewhere after feeling like a social misfit for all of her life. She describes herself as having been "socially inept" and "socially miserable." She claims that, even during the '70s, when she was part of lesbian feminist collectives and radical groups of other kinds, that she "didn't fit in anywhere." She turned toward Judaism after she "felt ripped off enough and disappointed enough by the revolution" and eventually became more religious through her involvement in a queer Jewish

congregation.[8] Now Rachel is an active member of three synagogues and feels valued by her Jewish community: "I'm finally part of a community where I feel like I'm valued because I can do something and because it's who I am, where I can value the other people. I'm no longer the most negative person anybody knows." She serves on committees, leads services, chants Torah, writes for synagogue newsletters, and gives *drashes* [sermons].

Rachel's involvement and sense of belonging in Jewish life was not always as easy and joyous as it is for her today. During Rachel's lesbian-feminist days, she was living in a southern city and was the first Jew that many of her feminist sisters had ever met. She felt different as the only "damn Yankee Jew" in her circle, yet she also was unable to find a comfortable Jewish community. She went from synagogue to synagogue looking for a place that was right for her. She felt rejected by the Reform temple in town when the rabbi told her that she could not be both a religious Jew and a lesbian. She felt rejected by the Conservative synagogue in town because she "got shit" for wearing pants instead of skirts.

Rachel's Jewish upbringing was varied because of a diversity of approaches within her family. She grew up attending a Conservative synagogue. Her parents were atheists, but they kept kosher because they lived near her more traditional grandparents. Her maternal grandparents were "believers" and her great-grandfather was a very prominent Orthodox rabbi. Rachel's paternal grandparents were "atheists but they believed in tradition." So Jewish ritual was very important to Rachel's upbringing. Rachel forged

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[8] There are many gay and lesbian synagogues around the country. Rachel referred to her synagogue as a "queer synagogue" because inclusiveness of transgender people is also part of their mission. For an ethnographic study of New York City's gay and lesbian synagogue, see Shokeid (1995).

her own religious path from an early age. While in elementary school, she "insisted on going to children's services" at her synagogue every Shabbat. Rachel recalled an early influence on her feminism: "When I was growing up I was so frustrated because girls couldn't do anything on the *bimah*[9]. That was an early Jewish feminist thing. So I'd go to kids' services and just sing real loud and tonelessly, because that's what I could do to make myself visible and audible. To make it so I was publicly there." Rachel recalled that Hebrew school was "boring as hell"; yet at age eleven, she told her parents that she wanted to have a bat-mitzvah. This was her idea and Rachel thinks, in retrospect, that it was because she "wanted a public ritual presence."

Rachel is more appreciative of Jewish-feminist scholarship than Sarah. She feels that she owes her participation within institutional Judaism as a lesbian feminist to the hard work of other women. She copes with the tensions between Judaism, feminism, and lesbianism by emphasizing interpretations that work for her and by stressing the personally meaningful aspects of Judaism. "That's one very useful twelve-step slogan, 'Look for the Good'. And this may also be a lesbian thing...That may be something that I'm bringing from feminism into my perspective on Judaism." Rachel translates Judaism so that it is consistent with her other identities; she is not bothered by the ambiguities of her beliefs. She is quite comfortable with contradiction: "I've always been very good at believing incompatible things -- ten preferably before breakfast. Because what else are you going to do? Like, sociologically, we're all marginal, right? There's nobody who's grounded in a single culture anymore. Why should I be?" For instance, when recalling her beliefs when she was part of the women's liberation movement, she referred to

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[9] *Bimah* is Hebrew for the platform in a synagogue, which is like a stage, where services are traditionally

herself as a "part-time atheist" even though she also believed that "all women are incarnations of the Goddess."

Rachel's strategy for coping with tensions between Jewishness and feminism is to tell herself: "I'm just gonna ignore the cognitive dissonance. I'm gonna try to have both on separate hands because both are me." Rachel's adulthood has been a quest to integrate the various aspects of herself. She remembers the period before she was out as a lesbian as a time when the pieces of her life were not integrated: "I crashed and burned with my attempts to be normal. I could not be Jewish again until I could be lesbian and I couldn't be authentically anything until I could be lesbian. When you try to base your life on a total lie, you end up beating and being beaten...How can you have any kind of spiritual life when your whole life is a lie?"

Being "all of her" and living the pieces together was very important to Rachel's narrative of maturation and self-actualization. She began to become more religious once she found the queer synagogue that she now attends. She also has become a very learned Jew and is educated in the works of Jewish-feminists: "I'd been reading enough that I was getting some context for how to do this in a way that recognized...all of who I am." Now, instead of focusing her activism on the social movements of the seventies, she focuses on an ancient spiritual tradition - Judaism: "That I can be a lesbian feminist Jew and this way, as opposed to all those revolutions that went down the tubes, I'm contributing to something that has lasted for thousands of years."

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led.

Rachel's approach to Judaism is to focus on its plurality and the history of multiplicity within Jewish thought. This approach allows her to bridge her Jewish and feminist identities. She sees it as her mission to practice inclusive Judaism:

> Well, being feminist affects everything about the way I'm Jewish, because...nothing about me without me. I'm not going to become a true believer in what somebody tells me is, well this is the way to be Jewish. Number one: I know enough history to know there is no one way to be Jewish. And number two: I know that my God-given task is to push this in a way of including and recognizing and supporting women and prayers of various kinds, including lesbians' reality and experience and wisdom and spirituality...I see that as my role, like in the column about the *chagim* (holidays) that I write for the [queer synagogue's] newsletter is for all these mostly, well I can't say mostly, but frequently Reform or secular or not very Jewishly educated Jews. To give them exposure to some of the wisdom that can be extracted from some traditional and Orthodox Judaism, and reformulate it in ways that leave out whatever really offensive elements can make it sometimes hard to get to in the first place. I see myself very much as a translator.

Translating Judaism is feminist activism for Rachel. She is positive about the flexibility of Judaism: "Every *mitzvah* that I learn about there's some way to apply...You have to figure out how, and part of my work is figuring out how lesbian feminist American Jews of our generation can do it."

Rachel is able to negotiate the relationship between her Jewish and feminist identities by crafting her own interpretation of Judaism. Rachel's attempt to integrate Jewishness and feminism seem largely successful and angst-free not only because of the kinds of communities that she is in but also because of her comfort with ambiguity and conflict. Thus, her narrative lacks the anger at Judaism that is present in some of the other interviews that I will discuss in this chapter.

Like Rachel, Natalie did not convey anger towards Judaism, but instead is pleased with her recent Jewish experiences. Natalie's Jewish upbringing was a mixed experience.

Her parents helped found a Reform synagogue, but both of them were from more religious backgrounds. They were very active in this synagogue and attended services weekly. Both parents also taught Hebrew or Sunday school. Natalie celebrated Jewish holidays with her extended family and thus "grew up exposed to Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform services and ideas and practices." At the same time, Natalie lived in a suburb without many Jews and frequently felt discriminated against. Natalie, like a few of the other respondents, wanted to be a rabbi when she was younger, partly because it was a profession that was not available to women. She claims that she was "not able to make that leap of imagination" so she chose law, another male-dominated profession.

Natalie has been married once and divorced. Her husband was Jewish but "expressed a lot of anti-organized religion ideas." When she got married, Judaism was not as important to her. But after having children, Natalie "really wanted them to have exposure to religious services and religious education and stuff." This caused conflicts with her husband. She divorced her husband, for many reasons, and moved out to an Indian reservation which had an influence on her Jewish identity. At that point, she was "pretty much unaffiliated":

> And what I saw was, here's a group of people who, while they were very acculturated into mainstream American life in almost every way, they were still quite willing to lead their own lives with their own culture and their own observances. And it made me realize that I could do the same thing. And it's really interesting that it kind of took getting out of the life that I'd had and getting into a different subculture to recognize the value of my own. And so that was a factor for me also in deciding to be more involved in Jewish activities.

Now Natalie is very active as a board member and volunteer for her participatory[10] synagogue and in other Jewish activities. She has become more observant over the years partly as a result of participating in her synagogue. She says about her increasing participation in Jewish life: "So that's like a whole part of my life that's been really, really fulfilling for me." Natalie, like the others in this chapter, also talked about her love of Jewish texts and liturgy.

When I asked Natalie to tell me her feminist autobiography, she began with a vignette from her childhood, another instance of a feminist click moment occurring in a Jewish milieu. As a small child, she attended an Orthodox synagogue daily with her great-grandfather and sat in the men's section. She describes the experience in superlative terms: "And it was just incredible. I just thought this was the most wonderful thing I'd ever seen -- even as a very, very young child." Then, when she was twelve years old, she was moved to the women's section, as is the Orthodox custom for girls entering puberty. She described this experience as being "kicked out" of the men's section. This was traumatic for Natalie who never again attended an Orthodox synagogue. Nonetheless, this experience did not permanently embitter her towards Judaism.

Natalie does not take for granted the achievements of the Jewish-feminist movement. She sees her participation in public Jewish life as a feminist act, because she plays roles that were not possible for women in the past:

> So for me one of the really important things has been to spend time developing skills that were restricted in the past that I didn't have the opportunity to learn to do. And I'm doing things now like *haftarah*[11] chanting. I sort of feel like I'm

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[10] This phrase is part of Jewish communal parlance to refer to a congregation in which the congregants, rather than a cantor, lead services and chant Torah.

[11] Selections, usually from the book of Prophets, read in synagogue on Sabbaths and Holidays.

> doing things that in the past were not available to women and it's really important for me, as a woman, to do that; as well as it's just very personally satisfying.

Natalie shared that she gets very emotional each time she is called up to the Torah in synagogue because she realizes that women were not allowed to do so for thousands of years. Instead of cognitive dissonance, Natalie expressed joy at her current Jewish life; it seems to fulfill her spiritually and intellectually. Like Rachel, Natalie's strategy is to stress the positive aspects of Judaism and her Jewish experiences. By comparing the openness of contemporary Jewish communities to women's participation to the restrictions of the past, she remains comfortable integrating her Jewish and feminist selves. Simply participating is enough for Natalie; thus she does not experience the conflicts that Sarah and Janet do.

Like Natalie, Gail also wanted to be a rabbi when she was a child. All of Gail's grandparents were Orthodox immigrants. Gail told me that both her Jewish and feminist autobiographies began with the same person, her grandmother:

> She had a tremendously strong sense of self. And personal dignity. And she'd be in the kitchen, usually she'd be cleaning more than cooking, at least when I was seeing her. But I remember her saying to me... "You have to have your own money and you have to always kind of have a sense of yourself and be in charge of yourself and don't let other people lead you around"...She was an Orthodox Jewish woman...I found her very compelling as a kid. And she and I had a good relationship throughout most of her life. So she gave me both a strong sense of Jewish identity and a strong sense of women's identity. Both as sources of strength.

Gail's grandmother was not the only model for integrating Judaism and feminism in her early life; she feels that the origin of both her Jewish and feminist identities was her childhood synagogue.

Gail's story is unique because she grew up practicing Judaism in an egalitarian setting. Her family attended a synagogue that was very progressive for its time; women and girls were allowed full participation. She is of the same generation as the women already discussed, yet while the other women did attend Hebrew school and, except for Natalie, have bat-mitzvahs, this was a new thing for girls and their ritual leadership was limited in comparison to the boys' bar-mitzvahs. They were aware of the proscriptions and the gender inequality inherent in this milestone in their lives. Gail, on the other hand, was not limited in her participation in Judaism at all because of her gender; her synagogue was early in adopting the egalitarian model that would later become mainstream.

This synagogue experience was very influential for Gail who was raised in a town with very few Jews. She loved Hebrew school and also attended Jewish camps. Gail was completely unaware that Judaism was not historically egalitarian and that her synagogue was unusual. She told me that she was "so naïve" but is grateful for this naivety because of the positive and proto-feminist orientation to Judaism it gave her.

Gail finally discovered that her childhood experience was not representative when she moved away from home and began attending synagogues in other cities. She was shocked and disturbed to find that women were not granted participation in services and felt that women were not respected in these synagogues. She refused then and still does refuse to go to non-egalitarian synagogues, because she "knows it doesn't have to be that way." Gail explained that she "has no patience" for non-egalitarian Judaism.

Although Gail feels angry about the traditional proscriptions against women in Judaism, it does not cause her cognitive dissonance. Instead, Gail refers back to the

Jewish environment in which she was raised as correct Judaism, and writes off the non-egalitarian option as wrong. Like many of the others in this chapter, she copes with the possible tensions between Judaism and feminism by emphasizing Jewish-feminist accomplishments.

Like the other informants in this chapter, Edith is extremely active in her synagogue. However, it is a battleground for her, where she fights for feminism. In her synagogue, she is a tireless advocate for the prominence of feminist rituals and programs. Activism has been a constant in Edith's life. Edith, like many of my other respondents, sees her activism as coming out of her Jewish upbringing: "As I look back on it...the fact that I was Jewish, the fact that there was a strong social action component in the Reform movement in the forties and the fifties, is part of my consciousness now. It is part of what informs my activism now."

Edith grew up in an "upwardly mobile family" in a suburb of New York that she describes as anti-Semitic. Her family belonged to a Reform synagogue and was what Edith refers to as "revolving door Jews" because they were in synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and then out after Yom Kippur. They celebrated Chanukah but also sang Christmas carols at the village green. She was, however, very conscious of being part of the Jewish minority because of the anti-Semitism she witnessed. Edith explains that being "Jewish was [just] what we were." Edith attributes the attitude she was raised with in the 1930s and 1940s to Jewish gender roles: "I was brought up that nice Jewish girls weren't supposed to be too smart and weren't supposed to be athletic. I was both of those things. And I felt that it was unfair that I couldn't be those things."

Edith's Jewish practice remained fairly consistent until middle age. She divorced her husband and "came out" as a lesbian which was a process that took many years. During this period of time, she found a feminist rabbi who allowed her to see that she "could bring together Judaism and feminism." Her participation in Judaism has grown since then. Like many of the other women in this chapter, she was able to increase her involvement in Judaism in feminist contexts. She has devoted considerable energy to Jewish text study and participation in a gay and lesbian synagogue, including serving on the board, leading services, giving *drashes*, and organizing Jewish-feminist events. She now attends synagogue weekly. It is important to Edith that her lesbian identity is affirmed in her Jewish communities. She says about her ability to practice and learn about Judaism in feminist and queer-friendly communities: "And I can be all those things and I can celebrate them. I can talk about them and I can see where they are in the Torah...And I can deal with them."

Like the other women in this chapter, Edith is very interested in Jewish textual study. She feels that it is important to highlight the politically (feminist and otherwise) problematic areas in Jewish texts and struggle with them communally, not to push them under the rug:

> There's a woman rabbi...who has had one of the greatest effects on how I look at Judaism and how I look at text. She says you look at text and you see what it has done. Damage it has done to women or damage it has allowed to do to women. And it's gotta be opened up and made public. And then you've gotta look at what it has done and then you have to look at repairing it. And then make sure it doesn't happen again. And that is very, very, very much my approach to text. And my approach to what goes on in Judaism. And you can't keep glossing over it...And I've been part of this whole debate about whether you take some of this stuff out of Torah, or whether you leave it in and then talk about it and make it visible. And I've done some drashes for [my synagogue] and I feel that part of my job is to make it visible and show what's there and talk about it.

Like Rachel, who sees herself as a translator of Judaism to make it more accessible to feminists and non-heterosexual people, Edith also feels a responsibility to raise these issues in her community. Both of them frequently give *drashes* and it seems as if they have turned this task into a kind of activism. Edith is comfortable struggling with the tradition, it is central to her idea of what being a Jew is about.[12]

Although Edith is very involved in her synagogue, she is critical of her synagogue for being too traditional. She sees herself as an inside agitator in her synagogue:

> The Rabbi and I have had some fantastic fights about my feminism in Judaism and so forth. And that's because [the synagogue] is somewhat more traditional then I am...And of course now I've got choices and voices and all those kinds of things. So life has been good now.

Edith told me that feminism is about choice and voice. Thus, implicit in the previous quote is that Edith welcomes the role of fighter; it is her way of negotiating the relationship between her Jewish and feminist identities.

Edith does not appear to feel bound to tradition to the extent of those mentioned above; perhaps this is because her background was less religious. Instead, she would like to create a new feminist Judaism and often battles with those who still rely upon patriarchal traditions and texts. Her strategy is to question Judaism and to argue with the tradition. She is not afraid to confront traditional Judaism but, on the contrary, uses confrontation as a way of negotiating the intersection of her Jewish and feminist identities. In this way, Edith's orientation is quite different from that of Sarah and Janet,

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[12] Edith remarked that her struggle with the tradition is what progressive rabbi Arthur Waskow calls "God-wrestling." His book (1978), bearing that title, claims that questioning is central to Jewish tradition. The book title is a poetic translation of the word, "Yisrael" (Hebrew for Israel) which is an ancient name for the Jewish people.

the first two cases discussed in this chapter, for whom the divergence between traditional Judaism and feminism appears to be personally threatening to their identities.

Rebecca is close to Edith in age, and thus about twenty years older than the previously discussed interviewees. Rebecca's parents were immigrants who were raised Orthodox. When she was a child, her family belonged to a Conservative synagogue but conveyed mixed messages to her about Judaism. Rebecca describes her mother as a "rebel" who fed her uncle pickled herring on Yom Kippur while saying, "Pull the shades so the neighbors won't see." They only went to synagogue on the high holidays. They kept kosher in the house while eating non-kosher food out of the house until she was a teenager. Rebecca describes her family's Jewish practice as for appearances more than spiritual meaning. She says, "Nobody was particularly religious. We were Jewish, that's what we were." This is similar to how Edith described her upbringing. Rebecca was not given a Jewish education because she was female, but her brothers were bar-mitzvahed. She mentioned her Orthodox grandfather at various points in the interview, whom she considered the only "committed" Jew in the family: "Judaism for him was spiritual. And for everybody else it was an identity and a kind of secular practice and the high holy days." His religiosity was an influence on some of the decisions she made during her life; for instance she had an Orthodox wedding so that her grandfather would attend.

Rebecca was not affiliated with Judaism for many years, including her women's liberation movement days. When her son was a young child, she decided to join a Reform synagogue so that he could attend Hebrew school and be bar-mitzvahed. Rebecca made this decision after a conversation with her son in which he seemed unclear

as to whether he was Jewish. She began to study Judaism on her own by reading the books her son brought home from Hebrew school. She eventually became involved in the synagogue and began learning more about Judaism; she taught herself Hebrew and to read the prayers. Rebecca explains that this transformation took place in coherence with her feminism:

> I got interested almost as an intellectual pursuit. And then Jewish-feminism started surfacing and then I got interested in that as well... And so I started going to different services and really educated myself in Judaism. And then, at the same time, in feminist issues that were coming up - liturgy changes. And so, it was kind of everything was all together, being a mother and being a feminist and being Jewish.

Rebecca continued her synagogue affiliation and leadership after her son moved out of her home. She has changed synagogues a few times but has remained active and has even served on a synagogue board.

Rebecca's adult reconnection with Judaism began at a time when the Jewish-feminist movement was flourishing, which provided her with a way "in" that was congruent with her identity: "I think that if I couldn't have been feminist and Jewish, then I wouldn't have been Jewish." I doubt that any of the other women discussed in this chapter would say this as strongly; Rebecca seems different from them because she appears somewhat defensive or apologetic about her religious involvement. Rebecca insists that she would never belong to a congregation that is not either Reform or Reconstructionist. Joining a synagogue with a feminist woman rabbi was instrumental to her religious path: "Would I have become as active in Judaism? I suspect that I would have dropped out of Judaism except maybe even entirely if I hadn't discovered Rabbi _____ and joined the temple I'm in now." Rebecca has been a consumer of Jewish-feminist literature. She is "interested in feminist interpretations of Torah." She implemented gender-sensitive

curricula as the president of a synagogue school. She has also brought a feminist perspective to her other leadership positions within synagogues over the years.

When I asked Rebecca if she feels cognitive dissonance between being Jewish and feminist, she initially replied that she does not and actually did not understand the question. Later, at the end of the interview, Rebecca returned to the topic on her own, admitting that she does experience a sense of dissonance:

> One of the things that one of my friends raises, she feels that you're never going to clean up the patriarchy in Judaism. She doesn't care how much you clean up the language. It's a patriarchal religion period. And there are times when I feel, what am I doing here?... You know, I'm an atheist {uneasy laugh} in the sense that I don't go to synagogue to pray; I like the liturgy. I like ritual and I like the liturgy and I like the knowledge and I like being part of the community. But there is a, when you say cognitive dissonance, there is this kind of, you know, bracketing off of -- yes it is a patriarchal religion... there *is* a cognitive dissonance.

It is telling that Rebecca did not express the inner conflicts that others did in reconciling Judaism and feminism until the end of the interview. Note that in the previous passage, she speaks in the first person when describing what she likes about Judaism, but she minimizes the personal impact of her cognitive dissonance by referring to it in third person and invoking her friend. She sees herself as someone who is unwilling to compromise her feminism for Judaism and participates in Judaism as a feminist. So cognitive dissonance does not permeate her experiences with Judaism

Rebecca justifies her observance of a patriarchal religion by placing it within a social and historical perspective:

> The major religions are gendered. And because they are gendered, they legitimize the gender division and the gender hierarchy. So that religions, all the major religions, are very much part of a legitimation of the patriarchal underpinnings of our society...I could never become a Wiccan {laughing} or anything like that; I would like to become part of a Jewish-feminist congregation...That's what I would really like.

With the statement that all major religions are patriarchal, Rebecca places the problems of Judaism in perspective; not only is Judaism no more patriarchal than other major religions, but it is changing because of the feminist movement. This negation of Judaism's uniqueness is one strategy for balancing one's Jewish and feminist identities. Rebecca also downplays the tensions of these identities by being firm about what she considers a feminist enough Jewish environment. In this way, she is similar to Edith; their battles to integrate Judaism and feminism takes place within the synagogue rather than within their own selves.

Naomi's interview was filled with dramatically told vignettes. Naomi is like Edith and Rebecca in that her orientation to coping with the tensions between traditional Judaism and feminism is to fight from within Jewish institutional structures. These last three cases are also a cohort in terms of their age and perhaps their generation is related to their common approach. Unlike the first five women discussed, Edith, Rebecca, and Naomi grew up with no access to Jewish education and ritual leadership. Perhaps their early experiences instilled in them the need or desire to become agitators within Jewish institutions, on behalf of women, that has been characteristic of their adult lives.

Naomi has always been a Conservative Jew. Both of her parents were immigrants and her father was a Sunday school teacher. However, she didn't learn Hebrew until she was an adult, since girls of her generation were not yet given Jewish educations. She describes her Jewish upbringing as "sweet" and about "loving holidays, family, and close reading." She was keenly aware of anti-Semitism as a child because she grew up in a city and in a time when it was pervasive.

Naomi has written about and for Jewish women. She thinks of herself as a pioneer of the Jewish-feminist movement. Naomi used the words "battle" and "fight" repeatedly to describe her struggles with Judaism and the Jewish community. Like all the other women in this chapter, Naomi belongs to a progressive synagogue which is sensitive to feminist issues. However, she is bitter about many of the rabbis who she has encountered in her lifetime because either they did not speak out for the progressive issues of the time or they were not feminists. Nonetheless, she says, "I never disassociated myself from being Jewish." Even during the sixties and seventies, when so many of her cohort became unaffiliated Jews, Naomi tried to find a place for herself: "I'm a *shul* [Yiddish for synagogue] goer...I would go from shul to shul. I never heard a rabbi who didn't demean women. I walked out...So I would try so hard to be a nice Jewish girl and they wouldn't let me."

When I asked her if she feels tension between being Jewish and feminist, Naomi talked about the hostility to feminism that she has encountered among Jewish male leaders. During a class, she fought with a rabbi who wanted to teach *Pirkei Avot* [Ethics of the Fathers], a text she called "insulting" to women. Naomi spoke with anger about being in "constant battle with terrible text." She also confronted a group of prominent rabbis in a hallway as they were leaving a conference before hearing her, the token feminist, speak. She said to them, "'What is it guys? You [don't] want to know what I have to say? You know it already?'...So this was the hottest, the most feminist...and they would throw away women in a minute." The antagonism Naomi feels towards Jewish men is clear:

> It's still our fight. We don't have anybody to help us... And it's very painful to have to fight that battle. Twenty years I've been fighting that battle. When

> people say something and make a remark, I think: Do I have to educate you? My breasts dried up long ago; I don't want to nurse you anymore. So I find much more sympathy for feminism among non-Jews, among men who are not Jewish than among Jewish men. They are not our allies in this movement...When I...helped bring the Torah to the [Western Wall in Jerusalem] and I saw who rose and cursed us and what they said to us, I thought, son of a gun, my own are my enemies. That's an interesting fact to find out.

In the previous passage, "we" refers to Jewish women. Naomi feels that she and other Jewish women have to struggle for feminism alone without the help of Jewish men. The incident at the Western Wall refers to ultra-Orthodox men cursing at women who transgress the norms of their community by holding their own service at this holy sight in Jerusalem.[13]

Naomi stresses the necessity of constant questioning and challenging of one's own community and identities. As in Edith's narrative, this is feminist activism to her:

> So even if you're Jewish, you can't sit back. You challenge and you stretch and you become insider and outsider. You don't just walk around being Jewish. You have to walk around outside of Jewish and you have to say, What is that? What's happening over there? Who are those people? Are some of those people my enemies? Actually they are.

Although Naomi's narrative is colored with bitterness, she is nonetheless optimistic about the future of Jewish-feminism. She is very proud of the burgeoning field of Jewish-feminist scholarship, and stated that she has "helped birth all of that." Naomi's story is about her personal efforts and successes in affecting change. She sees transformative possibilities in the efforts of Jewish-feminism. When I asked her why she has remained involved in Judaism, she answered:

> You choose your fights, right? I fought civil rights, I fought the war. I fought for feminism, I think. To make Judaism something else. And it will be, it will be something else, it's changing. It's gonna be something else. It's just there have

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[13] Women of the Wall is an organization which has been fighting for the right of women to lead their own services at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. See http://www.womenofthewall.org/

> to be more women rabbis. And they are changing things. So that's very nice. Wouldn't it be nice if that were the last thing I fight?

Conclusion

Edith, Gail, Janet, Naomi, Natalie, Rachel, Rebecca, and Sarah locate their Jewish-feminist narratives in their religious practice. Negotiating Jewish and feminist identities is a process which, for some, has been fraught with conflict, anger, and sadness, and for others has been easier and mainly joyous. Since they identify with Judaism as a religion, these informants must grapple with the dissonance between Judaism and feminism. They have found ways to balance their Jewish and feminist identities, even from within their religious orientations. They use a combination of techniques to overcome the conflicts between these two identities: reinterpreting Judaism, fighting for change within the system, focusing on the positive, compromise, and compartmentalization.

This group takes a proactive approach to negotiating their Jewish feminist selves. This process happens through study and creativity. All of these women have become more observant, religious, or involved in Judaism as adults. Their adult Jewish observance is dependent upon the Jewish-feminist movement and their relationship to Jewishness is from this perspective. It is probable that many of them would not have been as religious as adults if Jewish-feminism had not come about.

Jewishness and feminism intersect in these respondents' day-to-day lives through their observance of Judaism. These eight women strive to live fulfilling and integrated lives as Jewish women. While their strategy for negotiating their Jewish and feminist identities is based in their religious lives, in the forthcoming chapters I will discuss other approaches. The informants in this chapter wove together their Jewish and feminist

autobiographies as inseparable aspects of their life stories from the beginning of their interviews. In the next chapter, I will present a group of women who required prodding to discuss the intersections of their Jewish and feminist identities, but once they did they focused on the compatibility of these two identities. In contrast to the women in this chapter, their narratives are free of conflicts between Jewishness and feminism.

Chapter Four

Claiming Compatibility between Jewishness and Feminism

This chapter presents a second paradigm for understanding the navigation of Jewish feminist identities. While the women discussed in the previous chapter told narratives of Jewish-feminist identity negotiation that were rooted in the tensions between traditional Judaism and feminism, this chapter tells the story of those who do not find being Jewish feminists personally conflictual.

The nine women discussed in this chapter see their Jewish and feminist identities as complementary. In their interviews, they articulated an ideology of cultural Jewishness that is congruent with feminism, which I call the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence. This discourse draws parallels between Jewishness and feminism. It was sometimes raised by other informants placed in other chapters; however, it was eclipsed by narratives about the friction between Jewishness and feminism. The women in this chapter, on the other hand, only present Jewishness and feminism as congruent and deny feeling any cognitive dissonance. Another unique aspect of the informants in this chapter is that their negotiation of their Jewish and feminist identities was not rooted in their life experiences, but was discussed in more abstract terms through retelling cultural discourses of what it means to be Jewish and feminist. All of the interviewees explored in this chapter are secular Jews for whom being Jewish is a somewhat peripheral identity.

Secular Jewish Identity

In contrast to the religious women discussed in the previous chapter, the nine women presented in this chapter do not identify with the Jewish religion. They maintain that their Jewish identities are strictly ethnic or cultural rather than religious. Being a secular Jew to them is a viable alternative to the Jewish religion. Besides referring to themselves as secular Jews, they also call themselves: "cultural Jews," "politically Jewish," or as one woman called herself, a "culinary Jew". To be a secular Jew is to identify with the Jewish people, culture, ethics, and history (Rosenfeld 2001; Silver 1998). Saul Goodman (1976) in the introduction to his collection of writings by historic secular Jews writes, "Jewish secularism suggests a philosophy which perceives all that is good and valuable in non-Jewish cultures, but as seen through the prism of Jewish history, which shaped both the Jewish collectivity and the individual Jew" (p.37).

Contemporary American discourses of secular Jewishness can be traced back to the Haskalah movement, often called the Jewish enlightenment. The Haskalah, beginning in the 18th century in Western Europe and the 19th century in Eastern Europe, emerged from the European Enlightenment (Goodman 1976). In European cities during the Enlightenment many of the restrictions against Jews were relaxed and, in some cases, they were granted citizenship and allowed into high schools and universities (Feiner 1996). The Maskilim (members of the Haskalah movement) advocated the acculturation of Jews into mainstream societies. For the first time in Jewish history, peoplehood and religion could be separated for Jews (Cohen and Eisen 2000:31). The Haskalah resulted in two ways of conceptualizing cultural membership for Jews (Feiner 1996; Goodman 1976; Kulick 1993). Especially in Western Europe, many Jews saw themselves as

citizens of their country who happened to be Jewish by religion. Their national identities were allied with the country, while Jewishness was relegated to faith. The other strand, more prevalent in Eastern Europe, saw themselves as Jewish culturally, profoundly tied to the Jewish people, but without the Jewish religion. This group had Jewish national identities that linked them to Jews throughout the world and advocated Yiddish language, literature, theatre, and culture. This second ideology is the predecessor of secular Jewish culture in America today.

At the turn of the century in the United States, many secular and progressive Jewish groups flourished, such as: labor Bundists, Yiddishists, and secular Zionists (Kulick 1993). Those groups, formed by Eastern European immigrants, influenced the founding of contemporary organizations of secular Jews (Jewish Currents 2001, Rosenfeld 2001, and Silver 1998). In this country, there are still secular Jewish institutions which have been in existence for a century, including shulas, or afternoon schools teaching Yiddish language and secular Jewish culture, and socialist Jewish camps. They emphasize the transmission of Jewish culture through social justice work, language, food, and cultural expressions such as folk music and dance, plays, and literature.

There are two national secular Jewish organizations, The Society for Humanistic Judaism and the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations. The Society for Humanistic Judaism was founded in the 1960s by a rabbi; members celebrate Jewish holidays and lifecycle events with "freedom from supernatural authority" (www.shj.org). Part of the organization's mission reads as follows:

> Secular Humanistic Judaism offers a non-theistic approach to Jewish identity and Jewish culture. It also promotes certain important values in Jewish life that the traditional establishments have resisted. These values are rationality, personal autonomy, feminism, the celebration of human strength and power, and the

> development of a pluralistic world with mutual understanding and cooperation among all religions and philosophies of life. (www.shj.org)

It is possible to be affiliated with Humanistic Judaism as an alternative to the normative Jewish denominations, such as Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox; however many Jews who identify themselves as secular use the term to mean that they are not affiliated with any Jewish organizations, secular or otherwise. In fact, the women whose stories appear in this chapter did not even seem aware of the existence of Humanistic Judaism, with the exception of Jill who had been attending some meetings of her local chapter. For these women, being secular is an individual identity and connotes lack of involvement in any organized Jewish life; they are completely unaffiliated.

Since Judaism requires action rather than belief and ritual observance is prioritized over belief in God, it is possible to be a religious Jewish atheist. In contrast to Christianity which mandates that to be Christian one must hold a specific set of beliefs, there is no essential doctrine dictating what Jews are supposed to believe (Gillman 1990:xx). The secular-identified women in my sample are atheists and construct their Jewish identities in opposition to the religion. Incidentally, even a few of the religious respondents also claimed to have atheist tendencies. There is a sense that to contest the faith is especially Jewish; challenging Judaism does not make one less Jewish. Feminist scholar Elaine Marks (1996), in an autobiographical essay, expresses the view that non-belief is Jewish: "I am Jewish precisely because I am not a believer, because I associate from early childhood the courage not to believe with being Jewish; I am Jewish because of familial ties and loyalties; I am Jewish because of the memory, transmitted to me by members of my family, of suffering and pain" (p.346). Likewise, Nancy Miller (1996), a feminist literary critic, writes in the same volume: "In my oscillation between wanting to

have Jewish difference matter and yet feeling that I don't coincide with its dominant representations, I am perhaps at my most Jewish. I resist taking on 'Jewish' as a fashionably nouveau identity, and yet don't I run the risk of doing that, even as I write this chapter about my resistance?" (p.167).

When the respondents in this chapter told me that they were secular, it was usually through statements such as, "I connect to the culture rather than the religion" or "Being Jewish is a major part of who I am, but it's an ethnic identity" or "I'm an atheist; I don't like religion." For instance, Lisa said, "I'm not a religious Jew; I don't go to temple and my contact with Judaism is cultural." Jill said, "The religion aspect isn't for me." Evelyn said, "I am totally a secular Jew and have no interest in the religious aspect."

The root of secularism is in the meaning and motivation applied to one's own Jewish observance. Although many of the people I interviewed claimed to be disconnected from the Jewish religion, virtually everyone engaged in at least some Jewish customs. A secular Jew may observe a few holidays and lifecycle rituals yet she interprets her observance as non-religious and motivated by cultural ties. Eleanor's description of her family's Jewish observance illustrates this framework:

> We've never been involved with any synagogues or anything. We've always celebrated Passover kind of as a Jewish Thanksgiving. And we've always made our own hagaddah[1] which has been kind of, you know, progressive and changes year to year and things like that. Celebrated Chanukah, not much more than that...I always take off from work on the Jewish holidays, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And that's more a way of saying that I'm different from other people. It's a cultural diversity issue more than anything else.

Being secular is not as much about practice as belief. Eleanor's family may celebrate Passover, but it is akin to Thanksgiving, a non-religious holiday, for her. And although

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[1] The text of the traditional Passover service at home, called a *seder*.

she does not work on some Jewish holidays, she states that this is to show her cultural difference rather than out of a feeling of religious obligation.

Like Eleanor, the other women discussed in this chapter also do not belong to synagogues. In addition to saying that they do not connect to the Jewish religion, some even described themselves as "anti-religious." Their antipathy is not towards Judaism in particular as much as the idea of organized religion, in general. Terry expressed her anger towards religion vividly:

> Religions are man's attempt to control spirituality. And no matter who it is, all fundamentalism is the same, whether it's Jewish fundamentalism, whatever. They're all the same. They're all boys. They're all control. They're all anti-spirit. They're all anti-children. They're all anti-women. They're all anti-life. They're all anti-wholeness. That's what feminism is to me, it's a movement towards wholeness and away from fragmentation; it's to bring the parts together. That's my spirituality. That's my feminism. That's my Jewishness.

Here Terry frames the mission of her spirituality, feminism, and even her Jewishness as to move towards wholeness. Her use of the phrase, "my Jewishness" implies that she has given it her own meaning, or has turned Jewishness into something that she can call her own. So although religions are male-dominated, including Judaism, Terry recreates her own Jewishness as a remedy to this.

Being Jewish is a non-religious, non-God centered identity for these women; yet it is unquestionably one of their identities. Jewish identity for these women is about being part of the Jewish people. It is family and home oriented without the structure of rules and institutions. Many of them affirm their own Jewish identities by virtue of their interest in Jewish topics. They describe paying attention as a Jewish behavior: following Jewish topics in the newspaper, reading about the Holocaust, going to Jewish films, and reading Jewish literature. In this vein, The philosopher Gary M. Brodsky (1993) wrote

about his own secular Jewish identity: "...the differences between me and my non-Jewish colleagues and friends traceable to my Jewishness amount to little more than that I pay more attention to American-Jewish culture and to the Holocaust than they do" (p.247).

These women's secular Jewish identities are not major shifts from the way they were raised; none of them had religious Jewish upbringings. A few occasionally attended temple with their families or Reform Sunday school, but only very rarely and this was the extent of their synagogue involvement. They noted that their parents were not religious and, in some cases, they were the only secular families in their neighborhoods. Ann remembers that her father listened to a Jewish radio program every weekend, they sometimes lit Sabbath candles as a family, and sometimes had Passover seders. But those practices were infrequent, and "all on the level of culture, certainly not religion." In describing her Jewish upbringing, Ann recalls "that was the extent to which anything Jewish would happen...But you know you're a Jew and you know who else is Jewish." Many of the women also recalled that they did not understand what being Jewish meant, that it was "confusing." Randi said, "I always knew I was a Jew but I didn't know exactly what a Jew was." A number of them described their parents as very assimilated, and a few (Kathie, Randi, Eleanor) received Christmas presents.

Being secular is not the only unifying feature that defines this group and they are not the only secular Jews in my sample. Some of the Jewish feminists discussed in the next two chapters are also secular. What makes the nine women described in this chapter unique is that being Jewish is not at all central to their identities and they claim to be free of conflictual feelings about being both Jewish and feminist but instead see the two identities as cohesive; the remainder of this chapter discusses these characteristics.

Peripheral Jewish Identities

Unlike the other respondents, with these nine cases it was sometimes difficult to elicit much discussion pertaining to the intersections between Jewishness and feminism. After coding the interviews, their transcripts contained far less narrative than the others about the relationship between their Jewish and feminist identities. Perhaps the relative paucity of narratives related to the intersection of Jewishness and feminism is because Jewishness is somewhat peripheral to their identities and thus their engagement with Jewishness, as feminists, leaves them with less to say than the other people I interviewed.

The centrality or strength of a particular identity fluctuates according to context, social interaction, and life-stage. Participating in an interview about Jewish identity obviously shines the spotlight on that aspect of the self. Thus I recognize that it is impossible for me to measure exactly how important being Jewish is to these women. What I am describing in my study is narratives of identity, rather than actual identities.

This group's narratives were filled with hints to the submerged nature of their Jewish identities, as Randi said,

> My ethnic identity, such as it is, is very definitely Jewish...But I don't have that feeling of being Jewish. When I'm alone on my island, I don't much think of myself as Jewish unless the outside impinges... But so it's something I have to remember to embrace as an identity. It isn't something that I just automatically come up with.

Statements such as these attest to the nonessential nature of their Jewish identities. For instance Lisa said, "I still don't think of myself primarily as a Jew." Another typical response was, "I don't think about it that much." Ann repeatedly said that she was "at a loss" or "drawing blanks" when asked to talk about what being Jewish means to her. Ann said, "My Jewish education, my Jewish experience is minimal if not zilch." When

recounting her identities, Ann mentioned feminist, socialist, radical, and leftist. Then she added Jewish to the list and said, "but it's never been very important." When describing her childhood, Ann claims, "I didn't have much of a Jewish identity." The apparent marginality of Jewish identity manifested in these interviews is not because these women are secular. There were many other secular Jews in my sample, who are discussed in the next two chapters, for whom Jewishness is more essential and central to their lives.

The less relevant nature of these nine cases' Jewish identities is in contrast to the pervasive nature of the Jewish identities of the women in the previous chapter. Whereas the women in the previous chapter described Jewishness as an essential part of themselves, the informants discussed in this chapter referred to themselves as not very Jewish. For instance, Randi called herself "un-Jewish" and compared herself to Jennifer, who will be discussed in chapter 5 as someone for whom "Jewish culture was much more dominant and out-front."[2] Randi also said that Jennifer is "very Jewish, in her conception of herself" even though Jennifer is also a secular Jew. Additionally, Ann said about her sister-in-law "She is much more Jewish than I am." The tellers often called someone else "more Jewish" in order to illustrate their own identities, by contrast. They use the designation "more Jewish" not to refer to people who are more religious, but to other secular Jews for whom Jewishness is a more central identity.

Identities fluctuate throughout lives in terms of meaning and importance. Almost everyone in my sample recalled the sixties and seventies as a period in which their Jewish identities were more submerged. They describe being less "conscious" of Jewishness during those years, not that they stopped identifying as Jews but that it did not feel as

relevant to their lives. This has been attributed to both the political nature of those years and the negative feelings about religion among the Left. For instance, Kathie recalled that during her radical activist years in the sixties and seventies, she would never march for a Jewish cause:

> But I would march for every issue except the Jewish issue. I mean if that would have came up, I would have felt disgust and disdain like why would you ever march for that. And here I was out there on the street, for not everything, but a broad array of social issues... I think on the Left there was this unconscious you know -- and a lot of leaders were Jews but it wasn't talked about and there was not a value about valuing it and I bought right into that... That's a big thing, the discounting of Jewish oppression.

Kathie attributes this refusal to take up Jewish issues to her own history of internalized anti-Semitism. She also feels that other Jewish activists' experiences were characterized by internalized anti-Semitism and that anti-Semitism was present in the Left more generally.[3]

The informants in this chapter continued to experience submerged Jewishness in later adulthood, but some recall times at which Jewishness has been more important. It is an oscillating identity, as Terry said, "It's kind of gone in and out and in and out of my life, this Jewish identity." Randi stated, "Jewish is something that I assert out of ideology rather than out of my internal sense. Though sometimes I have a stronger sense of being Jewish than other times"

One of the causes of the ebb and flow of Jewish identity is one's awareness of marginality to mainstream American culture. Some of the women mentioned that they were impelled to explore Jewishness in response to an event which made them aware of

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[2] Although the interviews were confidential, some of the interviewees unknowingly referred to other participants in the study (See chapter 2, "Methodology").

[3] See Michael Lerner (1992) for a discussion of anti-Semitism in the New Left.

Jewish difference. Randi claimed that the rare times at which her Jewishness emerges is in response to this outsider's awareness: "It's just that usually it's just down in there, way, way underneath. And then, every so often it comes out. And it's always when I'm confronted by somebody who isn't Jewish." Terry found herself asserting her Jewish identity when she moved with her Jewish lover to an area where no Jews live. Lisa recalled that after experiencing anti-Semitism at a women's studies conference, she "got involved a lot in Jewish issues there; that was really [her] first time." Randi became acutely aware of her own Jewishness when she got together with her non-Jewish partner:

> I can work up in myself some ethnic solidarity of sorts, but it doesn't come naturally to me...I feel almost inauthentic, however, when I'm acting out of Jewish pride. Almost as if it's something I don't deserve to claim because I don't feel that connected. I don't feel that that's my identity particularly. With [my partner], I can act as if I'm a Jew and isn't that great. But, my heart isn't in it, to tell you the truth. If there's some anti-Jewish feeling, then I can get it. But otherwise, in absence of that, of opposition, I don't remember.

Ann makes a conscious choice to claim her Jewish identity because of a history of anti-Semitism: "Had Jews not been persecuted, I don't think I'd really care that much whether I was Jewish or not." Instead of becoming more religious, like the women in the previous chapter, the women in this chapter used terms like, when they "acknowledged" or "embraced" or "became interested" in their Jewishness. Often it has been through reading about Jewish history and culture, particularly the Holocaust. The focus of study is on a negative, like the Holocaust, and an external identification of Jewishness rather than positive feelings from within or anything to do with Jewish religion.

"Cognitive dissonance? Me? No; that's for religious people."

Whereas the narratives in the previous chapter addressed the tensions between Jewishness and feminism, the women discussed in this chapter do not personally relate to the idea of Jewish-feminist dissonance. They see no inconsistency between being Jewish, in their way, and being feminists. Their view of the relationship between Jewishness and feminism is that they are congruent. They maintain that their Jewish and feminist identities fit well together and that being both Jewish and feminist does not cause personal conflicts.

Feminism operates in tension with Jewishness through constructions of Jewishness that are alien to the way secular Jews define their Jewish identities, such as androcentric religious texts, a patriarchal legal system, male dominated religious institutions, and exclusion of women from prayer leadership. For people without personal connections to the Jewish religion, these issues are not impediments to their Jewish identities. So when I asked the nine women in this chapter, who are all secular, whether they felt tensions between their Jewish and feminist identities, I was met with a resounding, "No." This unambiguous denial of identity conflict surprised me since I had presumed that the ideological differences between feminism and Jewishness would result in feelings of cognitive dissonance among my interviewees.

The idea of Jewish-feminist dissonance was almost incomprehensible to Evelyn. When I asked her if she ever feels dissonance between her Jewish and feminist identities, she initially did not understand the question. So I explained to her that some Jewish feminists feel cognitive dissonance since Judaism is patriarchal, at which point she became exasperated:

> What religion isn't patriarchal? And what woman identifies with the patriarchal aspects of--? I mean religious women, I suppose do. Religious Jews, I suppose do. Why are they feminists? I mean I don't get that.
> *So you haven't felt any cognitive dissonance?*
> No.
> *It's something that comes up in autobiographies, even by people who have been secular feminists. They see the two as being somewhat in tension with each other. They have ambivalence about their Jewish identities because they are feminists.*
> I really don't know what they're talking about. Spell it out for me, because I feel stupid on this one. I don't know what they're talking about.
> *Probably because Judaism is so inherently sexist.*
> {In an impatient tone of voice:} Well, wait a minute! So what religion isn't inherently sexist? I don't get it. So what? So yes, Judaism is inherently sexist. Now what?

Evelyn's bafflement underscores the situated nature of Jewish identity; as a secular Jew who describes herself as anti-religious, she cannot even grasp the tension that another feminist may feel just from sitting in synagogue and reading a prayerbook with male god-language or hearing the absence of women in the weekly Torah portion. She is so removed from a religious conception of Jewish identity that the meaning of my question is not even apparent to her. She downplays the problematic nature of sexism within Judaism by putting it in the context of other religions.

By attaching the label "religion" to what's sexist in Judaism, the secular Jewish feminist can maintain congruity between her feminist viewpoint and her conception of herself as a Jew. As a result, she is able to escape the conflicts that religious Jewish feminists feel. She relegates the problematic content of Jewishness to religion and thereby diminishes its personal impact. Thus, when I asked Ann if there has ever been tension for her between her Jewish and feminist identities, she responded: "No. Because the Jewish identity is so minimal and so much based on just what I choose. If I had to observe the rules and customs, then yes." Since her way of being Jewish does not entail

proscribed behavior, it does not pose an obstacle to her feminism. She also implies that since being Jewish is a matter of personal choice and is of minimal importance to her, it does not adversely affect her emotions. Likewise, when I asked Randi if she was aware of Judaism being patriarchal when she was younger, she replied no and explained: "I don't have a connection with the Bible or with those institutions of Judaism. And when I do, through reading, it doesn't mean very much to me."

When I asked Kathie if she ever experiences cognitive dissonance between her Jewish and feminist identities, she also explained that she does not with reiterations of the non-religious nature of her Jewish identity:

> Oh no, no. And, again I'm not -- I'm interested in Judaism as a religion but much more culturally so I don't -- it's not a big trigger for me, all this stuff about the paternal, the patriarchal stuff, nature of Judaism. That just isn't where I get triggered...for a lot of reasons. I think it's interesting. It just hasn't affected my life in that way, you know.

As in Randi's statement above, here the Jewish religion is an intellectual interest rather than a personally meaningful identity. By locating the patriarchal aspects of Jewishness neatly within the category of religion, they become irrelevant to her own identity.

Lisa responded to the question of cognitive dissonance similarly: "Oh no, because my Judaism isn't directed by the religion. It's directed by the accident of birth and my parents being very consciously Jewish, culturally Jewish. And I think a lot of it is the outsider status, and being a woman is being an outsider." Here Lisa calls on elements of Jewish culture that she feels are compatible with feminism to explain that her Jewish identity does not have to be in conflict with her feminism. Since the women in this group construct their Jewish identities as separate from the Jewish religion, they are able to balance their Jewish and feminist identities without much of the ambivalence apparent in

others' interview accounts. When I asked Terry if she experiences cognitive dissonance between her Jewish and feminist identities, she replied by substituting lesbian for feminist: "Au contraire...being a lesbian and being Jewish are very similar...To me it's seamless, all of it ...*Right, so the patriarchal religion is not a trigger for you?* [pause] Fuck it. No. It's *guys*. It's *boys*, who needs it? Who cares? You know really, 'get out of my face.'" Here Terry rejects the Jewish religion by equating it with masculinity and through this rejection claims to be free of personal conflict with Judaism.

The Discourse of Jewish-Feminist Congruence

These nine informants do not simply claim to not feel Jewish and feminist dissonance, they also describe ways in which the two identities are complementary. They enunciate a discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence which links feminism and Jewishness. The articulation of parallels between Jewishness and feminism was also found in other interview accounts, not just the nine cases described in this chapter. However, for other sample members, the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence is not the main way in which they associate Jewishness with feminism in their life stories, but is incidental to their narratives and overshadowed by other paradigms of Jewish-feminist identity negotiation. The accounts of these nine interviewees are used to illustrate the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence since it is the dominant way in which they weave together their Jewish and feminist identities.

The discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence contains three common themes. The first is social justice: connecting one's activism and feminism, more specifically, to the value of repairing the world (*tikkun olam* in Hebrew) in Judaism and/or a history of

progressive activism among American and European Jews. The second theme is that Jewish "otherness" prepares one to intuitively grasp woman's alterity. The third theme, closely related to the second, is that Jews have traditionally held a critical perspective on society because of a history of marginalization, Talmudic debate, and questioning authority.[4] I am interested in these ideas as narratives of identity construction and am not making any claims about their factuality. What is important for my analysis is not whether it is true that Jews might be more likely to be feminists because of a history of marginality but that Jewish feminists use this idea to construct their relationship to their ethnic group.

These intersections of Jewishness and feminism -- social justice, otherness, and questioning -- are presented as ways in which the two identities can peacefully coexist. They are often used as causal explanations for why being a Jew led the teller to being a feminist. Through this discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence, even those who feel alienated from the Jewish religion can connect to elements of Jewish culture or universalist values in Judaism. This discourse is a valuation of Jewishness that allows the teller to feel positive about being Jewish. With these links between Jewish and feminist sensibilities, the respondents are able to claim that the two identities are complementary.

Barbara feels proud to be Jewish because she feels that Judaism values education and intellectualism, yet she is angry at Jewish men because she feels they do not support feminism. Barbara voiced the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence with the outsiders' perspective theme:

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[4] This is similar to feminist standpoint theory which claims that women have a vision of social relations that is unavailable to men since they benefit from sexism. This theory claims that material life structures knowledge so that the standpoint of the oppressed group exposes the reality of social relations, since it's an

> I got this insight from a former student of mine who's not Jewish, from Winnetka Illinois. She believes that Jewish people are more creative in this country, because from the beginning we stand outside the dominant stream. And so we learn to be somewhat critical. We have an outsider eye.

Barbara uses this "insight" which was given to her from someone else, a non-Jew, to explain why being Jewish and feminist are compatible perspectives. They are both viewpoints from the outside.

Kathie who claims that she was not proud to be Jewish when growing up because of internalized anti-Semitism has been exploring her Jewishness in recent years. This process of exploration is different from the women in the previous chapter, many of whom became more religious or traditionally observant. Instead, Kathie has been learning more about Judaism and working on feeling good about being Jewish. She was "thrilled" to discover the theme of social justice (*tikkun olam* or "repair of the world" in Hebrew) when studying Kabbalah:

> So to repair the world, that feels like the core of my identity as a human being. That's my mission, to make a difference to social justice. And so to find that that's part of Jewishness, that's a core piece of Jewishness, and to me that's a core piece of feminism, so there's a natural connection there.

Kathie has been a social activist for her entire adulthood. By retroactively connecting her own value of social justice to Judaism, she is forging a coherent Jewish feminist identity as an adult. She has come in contact with the idea of social justice in Judaism in recent years and thus it provides her with a new discourse through which to forge her Jewish identity. It is through reproducing the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence that Kathie has overcome the negativity associated with her Jewish identity in her youth.

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inversion of the ruling group's presumptions. See Hartsock (1987) and Collins (1990). My informants are claiming a Jewish feminist standpoint theory.

Jill also has been exploring her Jewish identity in recent years: "I'm glad I'm Jewish...because I think that being Jewish for me stands for being an activist and being an aware person in the world and having a certain sensibility and understanding oppression and wanting to help the world be better."

Eleanor grew up in a middle class Jewish neighborhood, in a family that presented mixed-messages about the value of Judaism. She spoke with some bitterness about the Jewish community in which she was raised. Eleanor's interview illustrates the power of cultural discourse on an individual's identity. She began by recalling a conversation with her daughter in which she told her daughter about her upcoming interview with me. Eleanor remembers saying to her daughter, "I don't know, I don't see my feminism so related to my Judaism." Eleanor recalls that her daughter said, "Oh that's ridiculous, of course it's related to your Judaism." And then her daughter raised the typical themes of questioning and resisting authority. Interestingly, she refers to her daughter as "much more Jewish identified" than her, implying that because her Jewish identity is stronger in some way that she is better able to ponder the relationship between Jewishness and feminism.

Although Eleanor reported telling her daughter that she was not sure how Jewishness and feminism intersected, her interview contained narratives about the commonalities between Jewishness and feminism. In other words, whereas she had been struggling to find material before her conversation with her daughter, she reiterated the discourse of Jewish feminist congruence during our meeting. So her conversation with her daughter seems to have had an impact on her thinking; the cultural discourse that interprets Jewishness as congruent with feminism was transmitted through Eleanor's interview even

though it seems alien to her own experience of Judaism. She explains that although she feels there is a concern for social justice in Judaism, she was not exposed to that when she was growing up. Another hint to the disconnect between the discourse she voiced in the interview and her own experience can be found in the divergence between Eleanor's description of Jewish women and her memories of Jewish women in her childhood. She describes Jewish women as loud and assertive, but then recognizes that this is different from the Jewish women she knew when she was growing up: "When I was growing up, they would say a lady should speak in a quiet well-modulated tone of voice." By voicing ideals that differ from her lived experience, Eleanor makes evident the constructed and contextual nature of identities.

Eleanor's Jewish identity seemed largely defined by cultural difference; she emphasized the idea that Jews possess "outsider status." After telling me about her conversation with her daughter, Eleanor continued to elaborate parallels between Jewishness and feminism:

> I think that what resonated for me in Judaism was resistance to authority or resistance to unjust authority that is in the Passover story. It's in the Chanukah story. It's probably in...Esther, you know, and Mordekai and Haman. I think those are the things that stuck with me. Those are the myths or the relevant pictures that I think then resonated with antiwar stuff, feminist stuff.

Although Eleanor defines her Jewishness as cultural rather than religious, she refers to religious texts in relating her Jewish and feminist identities. In this passage, she mentions names of characters from the stories of holidays who subverted the governments of their days to save their people.

Eleanor then expanded the common theme of questioning beyond a history of questioning authority to include the tradition within texts of authors (rabbis) debating

ideas, the layering of multiple interpretations that comprise the Talmud. She contrasts an image of Jewish thought to Catholicism:

> I think that's another thing about Judaism, you know, which you certainly hear in, like, the *hagaddah*, the questioning of authority. Not just the questioning of authority like the Pharaoh questioning of authority, but the questioning of points, the Talmudic debate about things. As opposed to the Catholic religion that I saw when I was growing up with my friends, where there was the catechism. There was a question and an answer and that was it. There was a way to do things. Whereas for Jews, there is debate. So I think that played into a lot of the political stuff.

Here, Eleanor is constructing her relationship to Judaism, through relating her own political activist history to a Jewish value of questioning. When I asked her if the previous discussion relates to gender for her, she answered:

> I think it relates to gender in the sense that -- okay now we're getting to it, okay {laugh}-- I think it relates to gender in the sense that the way women were socialized, primarily, when I was growing up was not to question but to be obedient and to do what you were supposed to do. And play into the stereotype. And that perhaps for Jews that was different because of this questioning that came as part of the religion, there was also more of a tendency to question gender roles and the rules, and things like that.

I suspect that Eleanor's discourse is not rooted in her own experience but is drawn directly from cultural ideologies of Jewishness. On the one hand, she divulged the gap between her feminist ideals and her experiences of Jewish women, while on the other hand, she presented a seamless intersection between Jewish and feminist values. Even though her experience could lead her to doubt the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence, her interview presents no hint that she feels such doubt. She acts as a vehicle of transmission of a particular interpretation of Jewishness that allows the Jewish feminist to feel in harmony.

Randi is different from Eleanor in that she is aware that the discourse of Jewish feminist congruence may be just that, a discourse. Like Eleanor, she evokes the outsider

status theme yet she is conscious that it does not resonate with her own feelings and experiences:

> *Do you feel a link between being Jewish and being feminist?*
> {pause} Well both others. I mean I could spin something for you, but are you asking about my feelings or my experience? Not really, except that they're both outside and, um {pause}, but I've always much more strongly felt the gender oppression than the anti-Semitism, much more strongly. I guess because I never felt that Jewish, coming from an American environment. I don't know.

This passage, with its pauses, points to the confusion of her Jewish identity. This kind of ambivalence is probably felt by all the cases in this group, but Randi is exceptional in that she reflectively remarks on her own confusion throughout the interview. "Spinning" a response, as Randi puts it, seems precisely what the others did when they described the relationship between Jewishness and feminism. Spinning seems an appropriate metaphor for the process in which individuals reinterpret and reiterate cultural discourses from their own perspectives.

Randi grew up in what she considers a very assimilated middle class Jewish family. "I mean I wasn't so much of a Jew," Randi said. She was unaware of Jewish cultural differences in her childhood, which she illustrates by telling me that she didn't even taste a bagel until she moved to New York City as an adult. There are some contradictions in her claim that she "had no Jewish culture" since her grandparents were immigrants from Eastern Europe and she spent time with them including all of the holidays. Also, all of her friends were Jewish, but she says: "It was just that my social life was Jewish and otherwise I didn't know I was Jewish."

The conflicts of Randi's Jewish identity are seen in her attempts to ponder Jewish-feminism. She has been invited to participate in Jewish-feminist events which has always left her feeling uncomfortable both because of her "dislike of religion" and because of her

insecurities about "not being Jewish enough" to represent Jewish feminists. Although in the previous excerpt Randi "spins" a connection between Jewishness and feminism, here she demonstrates her belief that the two actually don't go together:

> Nothing would ever make me renounce Judaism because I am a member of that tribe that started back there that Moses led out of Egypt...I mean I'm very interested in Judaism, but it doesn't have anything to do with women. I don't get a thrill from Rachel {laughing} whoever she is...And Jewish-feminism, I don't know what that is. It makes me suspicious...Because what is Jewish-feminism?...I know feminism and I know Jewish. I cannot imagine what they do together except that it's Jewish women who are being feminists...I don't *like* the association of Judaism and feminism. That's maybe it. I don't want them to be associated. It seems like a provincializing of feminism. It seems like a restricting of feminism. You're making me think about things I haven't thought about.

The discomfort in this passage is indicative of Randi's feeling that being Jewish is a limitation and thus associating it with feminism restricts, in her words, feminism. The subtext is that Judaism can somehow contaminate feminism. Her feminist identity is absolute and without ambivalence, but her Jewish identity continues to be a source of conflict.

Evelyn, like Randi, is ambivalent about her Jewishness. She depicts an interpretation of Jewishness that is aligned with feminism and yet she ends the interview with the following statement: "I'm Jewish and I am a feminist but I don't think the two have much to do with each other." Evelyn grew up poor in the Bronx, raised by her immigrant mother. Being Jewish symbolized deprivation for her and the anti-Semitism she faced as a kid scarred her. Evelyn's participation in the Left dates back to the thirties.

Evelyn also draws from the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence. Here she describes the common theme of otherness, connecting Jewish participation in protest movements to Jews' own experiences of oppression:

> I think the reason you find so many Jews in the Communist party, so many Jews in the civil rights movement, so many Jews in feminism...was because we already came to the world with a sense, a knowledge, even if we didn't experience it, that anti-Semitism exists. And a sense of the injustice of that and especially in the post-Hitler era.

Evelyn also evokes the theme of social justice, although she calls it "doing mitzvahs" which connotes "good deeds" in Hebrew and Yiddish and literally means commandments:

> I mean, you see, if you say to me a Jewish person, I think of some of the things we've talked about. People who, for example, will put something at risk for a principle...Jewishness for some significant numbers of us means doing mitzvahs, doing good...I think it leads to being in the Left perhaps but it doesn't have any particular connection to feminism.

Here she draws on the liberal Jewish idea that social justice is central to Judaism. Evelyn downplays the connections with feminism that others highlight, claiming that the Jewish values of social justice and otherness are compatible with the Left rather than feminism in particular. Likewise, Lisa, who grew up in a secular Jewish communist community, says: "Well being Jewish and being a radical is the relationship and being a radical and a woman makes you a feminist." Lisa also enumerated the theme of social justice, while at the same time critiquing it and showing that it is merely an ideology:

> I always felt like Bella [Abzug][5] did in saying that Jews believed in justice. I knew that there were rich Jews and there were poor Jews, and there were strikes against the Jewish garment workers. But basically I thought that Jews were on the side of justice. Sort of a utopian people. It was just what I got out of my childhood. That to be a Jew, you had to be moral. And it was so unbelievably unanalytical, because clearly there were some Jews in government and industry, and all of that, who were the so-called class enemies. But I still believed that Jews were good people.

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[5] Bella Abzug was a prominent feminist in the seventies, a New York congresswoman, and leader of the House antiwar movement (*The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition, 2001). See Abzug (1976) for her own discussion of the roots of her activism in her Jewishness.

Like Lisa, Ann's father was also a Communist and Ann considers her "red diaper" upbringing central to the formation of her feminist consciousness. According to Ann, "Neither of [her] parents identified strongly as Jewish" and her father "was very anti-religious" although her father grew up in an Orthodox family. Like many of the other tellers, Ann remembers growing up with the idea that social justice is important to Judaism:

> And I did learn from, I guess, my family that there was a connection between the social activism, the concern about justice, that was part of Judaism...I don't remember being taught that explicitly, but I grew up in it...As a Jew you had the obligation to make the world better.

She also refers to a history of persecution as a call to action for Jews: "You were exterminated, got through all of this terrible hatred throughout the generations. So you've got to fight against that." She relates being Jewish to being feminist with her view that "being Jewish puts a burden on you to act and being a feminist puts a burden on you to act."

Like Lisa and Ann, Terry was also a red diaper baby. Both of her parents were Communists and she joined the Communist party in high school. "I was raised in a very progressive communist household, I was a red diaper baby. So I always had a consciousness, not only about social and economic justice, racial justice, I was raised with all of the movements as part of my life." Terry maintains that her family was not religious because their religion was Communism. Instead she was raised "very much as a cultural Jew." Yiddish culture was a big part of her upbringing; her parents sent her to a Yiddish Communist summer camp where she "learned a lot of social history and the unions organizing and social justice and the struggle against Jim Crow and the

sweatshops and all that." This "Jewish militant tradition, the non-religion, the secular Jewish" tradition is still an important part of her identity.

Terry made links throughout her narrative between lesbian and Jewish identities, including the quote excerpted in an earlier section of this chapter. She answered many of my questions about the relationship between Jewish and feminist identities by substituting the word lesbian for feminist.

> We're not meant to survive. We're outsiders. We're targets. This is one thing that Jews and lesbians have in common. We have an outsider's perspective which is a great value because mainstream culture is nothing without stealing from all these outsider cultures, the ethnic cultures. And so we have that advantage of that perspective from the outside.

Here she raises the typical notion of Jewish outsiders' perspective, but instead of linking it to feminism, she connects Jewishness to lesbianism. Throughout the interview when discussing her identities, she interchanged the words "lesbian" and "feminist" as if they are synonymous.

Terry feels that coming out as a lesbian allowed her to claim her Jewish identity because it "gave [her] permission to claim all the different parts of [herself], including being Jewish, which [she] had not really thought of that much." Terry also recalled that she asserted her Jewish identity by wearing Jewish symbols and thinking more about what it meant to her when she lived in a rural environment with very few Jews. This is similar to the stories of some other women in this group, such as Alice and Randi, who recalled feeling most Jewish when living in environments with very few Jews. Terry associates being Jewish with being a "target" and has often felt vulnerable due to her Jewishness.

Conclusion

As a group, Ann, Barbara, Eleanor, Evelyn, Jill, Kathie, Lisa, Randi, and Terry articulate the common discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence and distance themselves from the idea of Jewish-feminist dissonance. It is not my task to evaluate the veracity of the claims they make about the relationship between Jewishness and feminism. I am interested in their narratives as instances of a cultural ideology.

Jewish culture can be more easily meshed with feminism than the Jewish religion; thus these nine secular Jews are able to manage their Jewish identities as feminists. By constructing a Jewish identity in opposition to a religious framework the teller releases herself from the dissonance that other Jewish feminists feel.

The description of Jewish-feminist compatibility is based on cultural discourses of Jewishness among liberal American Jews. Jewish feminists reinterpret images of Jewishness from this cultural discourse to conform to their values. The themes of this discourse are not particular to Jews; they are universal experiences and values. Nonetheless, the tellers reconstruct the themes to imagine a symbiotic relationship between Jewish and feminist identities. The women in this chapter have refashioned Jewishness to fit with their values and in doing so, they offer a counter-discourse to feminist critiques of Judaism.

It is important to note that the reported lack of tension between Jewish and feminist identities articulated by the nine cases in this paper was not found among other secular Jewish feminists in the sample, as you will read in the next chapter. Also, in contrast to the cases discussed in this chapter, all of the other tellers related Jewishness and feminism in ways that were more apparently derived from their own life experiences.

The extraneous appearance of their Jewish identities in the context of the life histories also makes this group unique among my larger sample.

Chapter Five

Connecting Jewish and Feminist Life Stories Retrospectively

This chapter explores the process of connecting Jewishness and feminism in life stories. The six women discussed here locate the intersections of their Jewish and feminist identities in experiences from their pasts. During the course of the interviews, they used vignettes from their own lives, in which Jewishness and feminism are merged, to illustrate the relationship between the two. Many of these vignettes deal with conflicts between Jewish culture and feminism.

The central theme in the Jewish/feminist life stories of these women is the challenge of feeling at home as females among Jews and as Jews among feminists. Many of the stories relate to difference -- feeling ostracized because of one's feminism or Jewishness. The complex dance with multicultural environments, as both Jews and feminists, has been influential to their identities. Many of the informants in this chapter have felt marginalized or experienced anti-Semitism among feminists. They have also struggled to find a place for themselves in their Jewish communities. Their childhood Jewish institutions played enormously important roles in the telling of their Jewish autobiographies and their interpretations of the factors influencing their Jewish identities; experiences with rabbis and in synagogues are both recurring themes. Another common thread in the accounts of the women in this chapter is negative, and even violent, interactions with Jewish men.

Whereas all of the informants in each of chapters three and four were religiously similar, religious practice is not a unifying element among the six women presented in

this chapter. Instead they are varied in terms of current Jewish practice and identity. Although four of the women in this chapter are secular, they are different from the secular Jews presented in chapter four who claim to be "not very Jewish" or to "not think about it that much." Jennifer and Rhonda, for instance, claim to be "very Jewish." Furthermore, Olivia and Alice explained that Jewishness has become more important to them in recent years. Rosalyn and Miriam are the two informants in this chapter who did not identify themselves as secular. Rosalyn is married to a Reform rabbi and Miriam has tried out various synagogues in recent years and also celebrates Jewish rituals in her home. Whereas none of the women in the previous chapter had religious Jewish upbringings, Jewish practice was the norm in these respondents' families-of-origin. The Jewish backgrounds of three of the women in this group contain an interesting commonality: Jennifer, Olivia, and Rhonda were all raised in religious households, but became atheists because of the Holocaust.

Anti-Semitism in Feminism

A key theme in the interviews explored in this chapter is the role of Jews in the women's movement. In telling me their Jewish and feminist autobiographies, many of the women here shared memories of feeling alienated within the women's movement because of their Jewishness or experiencing anti-Semitism among feminists. They have felt the importance of their Jewish identities when confronted with their difference within their feminist communities.

Evelyn Torton Beck (1989), in the introductory essay to *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*, claims that "anti-Semitism has been supported by the lesbian-feminist

movement (even if out of ignorance and insensitivity)..." (p.xxi). Beck explains that anti-Semitism often occurs through the discounting of Jewish oppression and she details how some lesbian-feminist authors, critics, and speakers have not accounted for their own and others anti-Semitism. Irena Klepfisz (1989), writing in the same anthology, also discusses this denial of anti-Semitism:

> The anti-Semitism with which I am immediately concerned, and which I find most threatening, does not take the form of the overt, undeniably inexcusable painted swastika on a Jewish gravestone or on a synagogue wall. Instead, it is elusive and difficult to pinpoint, for it is the anti-Semitism either of omission or one which trivializes the Jewish experience and Jewish oppression...Even when confronted with these attitudes, the lesbian/feminist response is most likely to be an evasion, a refusal to acknowledge their implications. (p.52)

Klepfisz claims that many Jewish feminists have responded by being silent about their Jewishness and that, when in the spotlight, they are afraid to draw attention to their Jewishness: "For these women, the number of Jews active in the movement is not a source of pride, but rather a source of embarrassment, something to be played down, something to be minimized" (p.53). Klepfisz attributes this self-silencing of Jewish feminists to internalized anti-Semitism.

Nancy Miller (1996) realizes that she is one of the Jewish feminists that Klepfisz is writing about who had been silent about her Jewishness. She writes about the process of realizing her own silencing of her Jewish identity:

> To my surprise, the Jewish question came back into my life in the next decade...At a feminist conference in 1985, Evelyn Torton Beck, speaking as a Jew and as a feminist, dramatically challenged the feminists in the audience who were Jewish to "take back their noses and their names." When were we going to assume our identity and our responsibility to it? In women's studies curricula every minority or ethnic literature was taught except Jewish. Why, she wanted to know, no courses on women's Jewish-American or Yiddish literature? Beck's challenge was never answered on its own terms because it was immediately displaced into a violent exchange with another panelist, who argued that Jewish women could not consider themselves oppressed, since they could choose to pass,

> whereas black women did not have this luxury. Jewish women's writing did not belong to the alternative history, the history of the oppressed. I was profoundly disturbed by this debate, not only because it was ugly and classically divisive, but because it forced me to consider why I, a great partisan of "identity," had never thought to assert a Jewish or a Jewish feminist one. (p. 161)

For Miller, both experiences, hearing Beck's challenge and seeing the conflicts within the women's movement around anti-Semitism, served as catalysts. Miller writes that, after this conference experience, she began adding Jewish women's writing to her introduction to women's studies courses.

Although Klepfisz claims that Jewish feminists often keep silent about their Jewishness because they have internalized anti-Semitism, Nancy Miller's vignette is indicative of the claim, made by other authors, that Jewish feminists have been impelled to identify more strongly and visibly as Jews after experiencing anti-Semitism within the feminist movement (Antler 1997:260, 276; Cantor 1976; Glazer 1996). As is evident in the life-stories of many of my respondents, especially those in the previous chapter, Jewishness was not salient to many Jewish second-wave feminists during their early activist years. It has become more important to them in recent years, partly in response to observing anti-Semitism in the feminist movement, as Miriyam Glazer (1996) writes, "For after the shock of coming face to face with anti-Semitism within the international women's movement, feminists who had been only incidentally Jews were driven to look again at their Jewishness..." (p.442-3).

Jennifer's story is an example of this trend. She told me about her negative experiences as a Jew within the women's movement. She recounted situations at feminist conferences in which Jewish women were verbally attacked. She also told me about the pain she experienced when she was unknowingly ousted from a consciousness raising

group. Jennifer interprets this rejection by her peers as due to her Jewishness: "all [these] Protestant very WASPy women had gotten together and decided that my personal style was offensive to them. I was too passionate. I was too articulate. I was too analytical. I was too Jewish." She later found out, when meeting with a group of Jewish feminists, that many other Jewish women had experienced similar things. After this meeting, Jennifer decided that anti-Semitism was pervasive in the women's movement and this knowledge affected her Jewish identity: "And it was at that point that my {pause and sigh} feelings that I had to become more consciously assertive about my Jewish identity began to take fire."

Another interviewee, Rhonda, spoke about the delegitimizing of Jewish oppression within the feminist movement: "The anti-Semitism I have confronted are the assumptions that Jews are all middle-class, that Jews are all wealthy; I have encountered that among feminists who aren't Jewish: 'Why do you worry about anti-Semitism after all?' I haven't liked it." Rhonda has recently been conducting research in the area of Jewish studies and her dissertation was about Jews as well:

> Even going into anti-Semitism more came from doing this research...I realized how much I had suppressed. And I think that partly growing up...and living in a kind of leftist milieu in the late 60s did not encourage looking at anything about Jewishness. And in fact when I decided to do the dissertation that I did, I didn't get a lot of encouragement from my leftist friends, because they didn't see Jews as an oppressed group or an interesting group in any kind of way. And I think the fact that I taught about ethnic groups and racial inequality for so many years, without dealing with anti-Semitism, speaks volumes.

Rhonda adds to the discussion of Jewish invisibility within feminism by claiming that it is a phenomenon within the Left more generally. Just as Klepfisz contends that many Jewish women have downplayed their Jewishness in the face of this invisibility, Rhonda feels that she herself has done so in the past.

The recently increased salience of Jewish identities among Jewish second wave feminists can also be attributed to the rise of multiculturalism and the heightened awareness of cultural difference among feminists since the 1980s. Jewish feminists find themselves in a complicated position because Jews are not usually included in the agenda of multiculturalism. Also, they are (mostly) seen as white and part of the white women's movement that is often critiqued by women of color, yet they feel separate and sometimes marginalized by white gentile feminists. Jewish difference and identifying as other than white was a key theme in my interview accounts. In this vein, Jennifer said, "I have always been profoundly committed to differentiating myself from the dominant Christian culture...I find myself in contrast with much of feminism because of my particular kind of ethnic Judaism."

Olivia is another teller who experienced a shift in her Jewish identity after feeling marginalized as a Jew. Olivia is an academic and has been affiliated with ethnic studies fields as well as women's studies. She spoke of having an "Afro-centric identity" that served as a substitute in some ways for her Jewish identity. This identification changed when anti-Semitic speakers were invited to her campus by the African American studies department and black students' organization which became milestones in her Jewish identity development. The shock and hurt she felt caused her to withdraw from the ethnic studies department at her school and from some of her scholarly community. Olivia began to consider the importance of her own Jewishness more seriously and to assert her Jewish identity more. Anti-Semitism is a theme that runs through Olivia's interview. She discussed this when I asked her how Jews fit into multicultural feminism. Olivia feels that an anti-Semitic thread appeared in ethnic literature in later years. She also feels

angry that Jews are lumped in with whites; she does not identify as white and feels that this categorization of Jews shows ignorance of Jewish history.

Miriam also feels that Jewish women should be considered a visible cultural group separate from the appellation, "white." She discussed the work of 1970s Jewish feminists as, perhaps unconsciously, emerging from their experiences as Jews in a Christian culture:

> The women who were writing in the 70s, for example, Alix Kates Shulman...her book[1] was about coming of age in America, as a woman, but she was really Jewish...If you look at what she wrote about, she wrote about the experience of a Jewish woman in WASP society. If you look at many, I can't say all of us, but many, many of the women who were writing and thinking and creating feminism in the 70s, we thought we were writing as women. But we were really writing from the position of Jewish women whose sexuality and sense of self and sense of exploration and sense of being in the world was stifled in WASP culture.

Here Miriam is contending that many Jewish second wave feminists in the 1970s thought their Jewish identities were not of relevance, yet they were mistaken. She claims that although they may not have realized it, these women were outside of the mainstream, different from gentile women. Their experiences and their perceptions were shaped by being Jewish, just as the writing of women of color comes from their racial identities. Miriam is aware that this point of view goes against the typical exclusion of Jews from multicultural curricula.

Like Jennifer, Miriam also feels that people discriminate against her because they find her "too Jewish." Anti-Semitism seems to be an integral issue to Miriam's Jewish self-definition. She also recalled incidents when she encountered anti-Semitism in the women's movement and when teaching women's studies. Just as Miriam frequently proclaimed during the interview that she had been ignorant of Judaism, she also said that,

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[1] See *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*. 1973. New York: Bantam Books.

in the past, she "did not understand" anti-Semitism. She has often felt in limbo because while she experienced marginalization in women's communities she has also felt not Jewish enough among Jewish feminists.

Struggling to Find a Home: Other Jewish/Feminist Life Stories

Just as Jewish feminists have often struggled with their place in feminist communities, they have also struggled with their place in Jewish communities. These women were raised when gender roles were extremely limiting for girls. At times, they experienced the discord between their own self-concepts and others' gendered expectations as coming from within Jewish culture. They also experienced sexism and violence at the hands of Jewish men. These experiences were not about the dissonance between Jewish religion and feminism, but nonetheless can be understood as pointing to clashes between Jewish experiences and feminist perspectives.

Jennifer's Jewish identity is complex, coming out of both positive and negative experiences in her Jewish upbringing. She grew up in a heavily Jewish urban community and was very involved in her synagogue, winning religious school awards and graduating as salutatorian of her synagogue's school. However, a number of negative experiences in her life, involving Jewish men, rabbis, and spiritual questions, pushed her away from the organized Jewish community. As an adult, Jennifer has had periodic forays into participating in Jewish organizations, but has always left disappointed. She expressed bitterness about the current American Jewish community around issues of racism and ableism. She does not belong to a synagogue or participate in formal Jewish activities or institutions.

Despite Jennifer's antipathy toward institutional Judaism, her Jewish identity is still very strong. In fact, Randi, who knows Jennifer and was discussed in the previous chapter, mentioned Jennifer to contrast her own submerged Jewish identity with Jennifer's "out-front" and "dominant" Jewish identity. In the beginning of the interview, when I asked Jennifer what names she applies to herself, she replied: "You know how Cynthia Ozick says, 'Everywhere in the world, I'm a Jew except in *shul* [synagogue], and there I'm a woman.'? So, yeah, Jew and woman are the twin identities. And which one is dominant depends on the context." Jennifer views Jewishness as an essential cultural identity and maintains that her Jewish identity is foremost in her self-concept.

Jennifer's early feminist autobiography relates to realizing the confinement of her role as a Jewish female. When I asked Jennifer where her feminist autobiography began, she told a story from when she was five years old. She walked into the room to find her uncle consoling her father. She worriedly asked her father what was wrong and her uncle replied, "'I was just consoling your daddy because he'll never have somebody to say *Kaddish* [the memorial prayer said in honor of deceased relatives] for him.'"[2] When she asked her uncle what he meant, he told Jennifer that her mother was not going to have any more children. Still not understanding, Jennifer asked her uncle why her father would not have anyone to say *Kaddish* for him, to which her uncle replied, "because only a boy can say *Kaddish*." Jennifer told the remainder of this early childhood story from her adult perspective: "And I said, 'Do you mean to tell me that your son...can do something I can't do?' And my uncle said, 'Yeah, he's a boy; he can say *Kaddish*. You

[2] The *Kaddish* seems to have been pivotal in creating Jewish-feminists. This prayer, which is said in memory of immediate relatives after their death, has deep symbolic and emotional significance. Many women have reported that a galvanizing moment for them was when they were barred from saying *Kaddish* for a parent because of their gender. See Broner (1994), Fishman (1993:138-141), and Reguer (1993).

can't say *Kaddish.*' And so I was made inarticulate with rage by that. I kicked him very hard in the shins!" As a grown woman, Jennifer remembers this experience with pride because it shows that, even as a young child, she fought against sexism.

When I remarked to Jennifer that it is interesting that her feminist autobiography began with this Jewish moment, she said, "Oh, absolutely! And so here's another one, okay" and proceeded to tell me another story which merges her Jewish and feminist experience. Jennifer was friends with a neighborhood boy who was the son of a rabbi. The rabbi took an interest in her and they would take walks around the neighborhood together. As an intellectually precocious child, Jennifer was flattered by the rabbi's attention and assumed that he was interested in her keen mind, so she took the opportunity to ask him creative and challenging questions about Judaism. She recounted a few of them to me which included protests of the problematic portrayals of biblical women.

Although it is unclear when Jennifer came to this conclusion, she now interprets her interaction with the rabbi quite differently than she did as a child. Jennifer wanted to grow up to be a rabbi but it seems that the rabbi was interested in her as a candidate to marry his rabbi-to-be son. While she wanted to be a rabbi, he wanted her to be a *rebbetzin* (Yiddish for rabbi's wife), two very different plans. Jennifer recalls that when he could no longer find answers to her challenging questions, "he'd reach over and he'd stroke [her] hair and he'd say, 'Oy [Jenneleh], you're such a *sheina maydel.* You'll grow up and you'll be a good rebbetzin.'" In other words, since she was so pretty (*sheina maydel* means pretty girl), she would grow up to be wonderful as a rabbi's wife. Jennifer remembers this story in detail; it is very important to the development of both her Jewish

and feminist identities. Her interactions with this rabbi taught her a lesson about the limited abilities she had within Judaism and stifled her Judaic intellectual aspirations.

Later in her life, as a young woman, Jennifer had another negative experience with a rabbi. When Jennifer became engaged to be married to a gentile man, her mother urged her to go see a rabbi, insisting that she probably would not be happy in her marriage because she had always been so actively Jewish. So Jennifer agreed to go speak to her childhood rabbi. Although she had been one of the top students in the synagogue, the rabbi did not remember her name. Jennifer angrily recounted the episode: "You'd think the guy would know me. He had handed me any number of prizes and awards in front of the congregation." Instead, the rabbi immediately asked her about her male friend from Hebrew school to whom she was always given second place:

> And then I understood the whole history -- why he was valedictorian when I was salutatorian, why he got first prize and I got second prize. I was pissed beyond belief! This is another of my Jewish feminist moments...I abandoned institutional Judaism after that last meeting with Rabbi _____, when he asked me how [the boy] was. And I've only very, very sporadically, for very short periods of time, been involved with institutional Judaism of any sort since then.

This story is emblematic as yet another interaction with a rabbi, a Jewish leader, who represents Jewish authority and has the potential to make an impact, either positive or negative, in an individual's lasting Jewish identity. Once again, Jennifer was left feeling that her importance was diminished because of her gender; neither rabbi recognized this young girl's intellectual potential. The fact that she abandoned institutional Judaism after this meeting shows how influential a rabbi's behavior can be.

Jennifer's Jewish-feminist autobiography contained a string of vignettes about harmful interactions with Jewish men. In addition to the sexist messages that her congregational rabbi and neighborhood rabbi conveyed to her, she also felt betrayed by

her Jewish male peers. Jennifer shared with me that she was the victim of sexual assault many times in her life. She feels that this too was influential on her Jewish path because the attackers were Jewish boys and men. She also recalled with anger that when the Italian boys molested her in school, the Jewish boys did not help protect her.

> My Jewish autobiography and my feminist autobiography go hand in hand. I've been raped four times -- four different Jewish men. I was sexually molested from the time I was thirteen. All were by Jews. Why? Because that's who you live with, you know. Almost all rape is within the community...I don't marry Jewish men, they're rapists. On the other hand, if I were a Southern Baptist, I'd say, "I don't marry Southern Baptists, they're rapists." But Jewish men scare me. But I brought my son up to be a Jewish man. He doesn't scare me.

This passage demonstrates the powerful impact that interactions with other Jews can have on one's Jewish identity. Although Jennifer realizes that her fear of Jewish men is irrational, she acknowledges that the traumas of her childhood have determined her choice of life partners.

Despite Jennifer's animosity towards Jewish community members, she still highly values Judaism. This attitude is exemplified in her insistence that Judaism is not wrong but rather certain representatives of Jewish institutions fail to live up to its positive values. She said, "So it wasn't that I abandoned Judaism. It's that I became arrogant and decided that I was a better Jew than any Jew I knew and I wasn't going to be in community with Jews." Jennifer explained why she remains a Jew by calling upon the elements of her Jewish heritage that she values:

> I'm a Jew because if I were to reject my own heritage, is someone else gonna give me theirs? I'm a Jew because I find the ethics absolutely in concert with what I value, that is the ethics I like, not the ethics I don't...But to do justice, to love mercy, that's not...There's also a thing that says if you're walking down the street and there's a crippled, a lame person ahead of you, it's not nice to pass that person up. You should walk with that person...I believe in *Tikkun Olam* [repair of the world]. I believe that the *mitzvot* [commandments] are worth performing,

> that they're well defined. Because in Jewish humor, I find the most succinct summaries of all that I know and value.

The previous quote has to do with reinterpreting Jewish values, taking the good and valuing it even if there is a flipside to the values that she detests. This is how multiple and often contradictory discourses of Jewishness are constructed. People like Jennifer freely choose to identify with some Jewish tenets or ideologies and critique and distance themselves from other.

Like Jennifer, Miriam is a wonderful story teller. She also did not answer any of my questions in abstract theoretical terms, but instead took off speaking in a series of stories to illustrate her Jewish and feminist identities. Her unsuccessful search for belonging was a key theme in the interview.

Miriam's Jewish identity is a source of conflict and confusion for her. She grew up in a town with very few Jews. She refers to her upbringing as "assimilationist" despite the fact that she did go to synagogue, attend Jewish youth groups and camp, and visit Israel as a teenager. Nonetheless, she stresses that her parents told her that she was an American like everyone else and they did not talk to her about anti-Semitism. She feels that they did not pass down Judaism in a meaningful way, particularly because they did not explain the significance of any of the Jewish practices that they observed. Consequently, Miriam feels cheated by her Jewish upbringing. She repeatedly used the phrase "I didn't understand" when describing her Jewish upbringing. Although she calls her family assimilationist, from the details she gave of their observance, they come across as a moderately affiliated, practicing Jewish family. Later in life, Miriam strove to connect to the richness of Jewish culture that she felt was lacking in her childhood.

Miriam has been a searcher throughout her life. Although she has belonged to many groups, both spiritual and political, and has even lived in communes, she has eventually left each group after developing a feeling of alienation. Throughout all of this, the possession of a Jewish identity has been a constant, although its intensity has ebbed and flowed. Miriam's Jewishness seems to have given her comfort; it has provided an oasis in the middle of all of her upheaval and motion. However, the centrality of her Jewish identity has oscillated greatly through various periods of her life.

Miriam traces this oscillation of Jewish identity importance to periods and events in her memory, some of which are also meaningful in shaping her feminist life history. She became interested in Judaism in her late teens as a result of her involvement in a Jewish youth group and a visit to Israel. After those positive Jewish experiences, like Jennifer, Miriam's Jewish path was marred by sexual abuse; while working at a Jewish camp, she was raped by a rabbi. When I asked if it was salient to her that the rapist was a rabbi, Miriam responded: "Well yeah, I completely cut off all connections to Judaism and anything to do with it...I just suppressed any connection with anything to do with [being] Jewish for several years." This lasted through the sixties and seventies, so that her radical days, like so many others in her cohort, were experienced while being barely conscious of her Jewishness.

This period of alienation in Miriam's Jewish autobiography ended when her grandfather fell ill and she became a caretaker for him. She describes her time with her grandfather, when she was a young woman in her twenties, as joyous and very influential on her Jewish identity. She spent the weekends with him, going to synagogue, eating in Jewish delis, and seeing plays: "And I would go back and forth between the two worlds

and it interested me...I really felt, was just gripped by it...It was like I had a date on the weekend with my grandfather. And it was a date in history and roots and family."

Miriam expressed absolutely no anger at Judaism, which was especially striking in contrast to her clear expression of anger about other things. In fact, her view of Judaism seems romanticized. Even when discussing the separation of women in the Orthodox synagogues she attended with her grandfather, Miriam put a positive spin on it. I asked Miriam what she had thought of gender roles in the Orthodox synagogue at that time, and her answer was surprising for its lack of criticism of the patriarchal customs:

> I was fascinated by it. I just, you know, it was such a different construction of womanhood. And I felt like I felt a loss, that I had been cheated. You know there was a lot of strength to it too...You know, it was like a women's culture, a women's world, which you know we feminists sought to create in the seventies. But, you know, there is something to be said for the fact that these traditional cultures have women's spaces created already and maintained. So that within those there can be a lot of feminist solidarity, or women's solidarity. I began to be friendly with Orthodox Jews too.

In Orthodox synagogues, women sit separated off from men and from the service leaders by partitions or balconies. This seating arrangement serves to keep women away from the action and as passive observers during services. The traditional rationale given for this custom is that women are sexually distracting to men and thus a barrier to their prayer. The obviously sexist implications of this argument and the long-term effects of keeping women literally on the margins of religious life has made gender segregation in Orthodox synagogues a subject of feminist criticism. In fact, the separation of men and women was discontinued in non-Orthodox synagogues many years ago. Nonetheless, Jennifer speaks about her experiences in an Orthodox synagogue longingly and interprets the custom as creating potential for feminist solidarity.

Alice feels that her Jewish identity has "developed more" as she has gotten older. Nonetheless, she maintains that she is "Jewish culturally and not religiously" and "would almost consider [herself] anti-religious." Alice said that she has a "love/hate relationship" with Judaism: "I've never been ashamed of being Jewish; I'm proud of being Jewish. I just can't deal with the religion."

Alice's Jewish/feminist autobiography begins with her gender socialization: she feels that she was raised to be a good Jewish girl, which meant getting married, having children, letting her husband take care of her, and keeping peace in the household. Those were her mother's plans for her: "That's what a Jewish girl/woman was supposed to be. You're supposed to let your husband take care of you. And no matter what, whatever it is, you make it alright. So that was the idea I grew up with as a Jewish female -- Jewish womanhood." Her mother was very worried when Alice did not get married until her mid-twenties. Later, when Alice divorced her husband, her mother tried to talk her out of it because she worried that Alice would have no one to take care of her. Alice sees the gender dynamics within her childhood household as typical Jewish gender dynamics, even though others might attribute them to the time period: "I have an older brother who was the crown prince in the house and everything was lavished on him. And that was basically my Jewish sense. And my male/female sense. As a female, I was the lesser. [My brother] got everything; [he] got the praise, got opportunities, got the attention. And I got what was left."

Unlike Miriam, Alice is very offended by the treatment of and attitudes toward women in Orthodox Judaism, which seems to be her only exposure to religious practice: "Even though there wasn't Orthodoxy in my home, I was aware of it growing up in the

community and I was always very confused by this idea of why couldn't men and women sit together in the temple. And why did women have to be covered all the time? And all of these things which I find incredibly, incredibly offensive." Alice's brother became Orthodox as an adult, and she has had much friction with him and his family about their different relationships to Judaism: "There was some family occasion where we had to go to Temple. And they were very Orthodox. And my sister-in-law was sweating, she was so worried that [I] was going to cause a scene, cuz [I] had to sit behind the curtain. And I was a good little girl. I did what I had to do, hating myself for it afterwards."

Alice's experiences with Orthodox Judaism and the traditional gender roles within her family have left her unable to see any congruence between Jewishness and feminism. When I asked her how Jewishness and feminism relate, she said:

> I knew there was a group of women called Jewish-feminists. And to me that was an oxymoron. I couldn't understand how the two could coexist. To be Jewish meant that, to me, that you could not be a feminist...My view of Jewishness was Orthodoxy. And Orthodox women could not be feminists, are not feminists. No matter how much they say they run the household and that's their realm. It's a division, it's not equal, it's not shared. It's not -- I mean, the idea of, why are they covered up? Why do they have to wear wigs or head coverings? The reason is so that they're not seductive to men. *Now if this isn't sexist, I don't know what is!* You know? And I don't care what kind of reasoning you cloak it in, what kind of explanation you give it, that's the basis for it. They're saying women have this incredible power to seduce men. Men are total idiots who can't control themselves. I mean that's such *garbage*, it's such *nonsense*. So for those reasons, I could never reconcile feminism and Judaism or feminism and any extremist, fundamentalist religion, cuz they're all the same.

Alice has seen gender inequality in her Jewish experiences since she was a child. Whereas other respondents have been able to reconcile this through positive feminist Jewish experiences later in life, Alice has not had this opportunity since her only exposure to the Jewish religion is through her Orthodox brother and his family.

Consequently, her Jewish identity is informed by the anger that these experiences have provoked in her.

Like Jennifer, Miriam, and Alice, Rosalyn's feminism has roots in her Jewish upbringing. However, while their journeys to feminism were partly paved by negative experiences in their Jewish upbringings, Rosalyn's Jewish/feminist experiences were more mixed. For instance, the exclusion of girls at her Orthodox synagogue was a negative influence and her Reform youth group experience was a positive influence. Rosalyn was raised in an observant family and is now married to a Reform rabbi. So unlike Jennifer, Miriam, and Alice, Rosalyn has continuously remained affiliated and involved with Judaism.

Rosalyn began her feminist autobiography in the Orthodox synagogue of her youth: "We were separated out...I would go to junior congregation and the only thing I could do was prayer for the country...I mean that's what the girls did. And I was the top student in Sunday school... I was the valedictorian. I just didn't like the attitude towards women there." Although Rosalyn was unhappy with her subordinate status in the Orthodox synagogue, she had the opportunity to experience a Reform synagogue setting as well. Her family belonged to the Orthodox synagogue and attended services there because her father was Orthodox, yet she joined a youth group at a Reform synagogue as a teenager. At this synagogue, she learned about the value of social justice in Judaism: they studied Vorspan's (1956) *Justice and Judaism: the Work of Social Action* which "raised [her] social consciousness." Rosalyn mentioned this book at various points throughout the

interview. She feels that her training in social justice at this synagogue was the root of her subsequent feminist activism.

Rosalyn remembers that the restrictions on girls' religious training at her Orthodox synagogue displeased her greatly: "I guess I could have had a bar mitzvah, a bat mitzvah or something...But I didn't want to have a bar mitzvah, a bat mitzvah and not be able to read from the Torah. I'd rather not do it rather than do it half-way. I mean, that bothered me a lot." While gender inequality in her childhood Orthodox synagogue was an issue for Rosalyn, she is appreciative of the equality in her current temple:

> I mean, when we have *Simchas Torah*,[3] it's a thrill to carry the Torah around...To think that I can do that when I could never do it before. I don't think that everything listed in the Torah is so hotsy totsy, I even have questions about things like that...Still it's the Torah and to carry it around is such an honor. And when we were left out of that, I hated that. And now all the women here, they all wanna carry it, if they can. So that's good.

Especially after having experienced gender inequality in traditional Judaism during her childhood, Rosalyn is appreciative of the advances that have been made in the American Jewish community: "In terms of equality of opportunity and synagogue life, well look -- we've seen how that's changed. How many presidents of temples are women...My God!; you think about from 1970 to now, the past 30 years, all the women cantors and rabbis and all that stuff!"

During her participation in the women's liberation movement, Rosalyn's Jewish and feminist stories again intertwined. She was a leader of the women's movement in a small town. In fact, she pointed out that the wives of rabbis in neighboring towns were also leaders of their local feminist organizations. Rosalyn was very outspoken about abortion

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[3] Literally "Celebration of the Torah". Holiday in which the yearly cycle of reading the Torah ends and begins again. Congregants sing, dance, and carry the Torah scrolls around. Traditionally, women did not carry the Torahs and dance with them.

rights and the Equal Rights Amendment; she "came under fire" from many groups because of this. The Catholic archdiocese in her town wrote "diatribes" against her in its newspaper, referring to her as "the rabbi's wife" and calling her a "witch like Bella Abzug[4] and that ilk." She felt that their treatment of her carried anti-Semitic overtones (Bella Abzug was a known-Jew). They also accused her of defaming Catholics and called on her to "cease and desist." A prominent Catholic businessman put pressure on a bank board member, who was Jewish, to silence Rosalyn. In response, members of Rosalyn's temple called on her husband, their rabbi, for a meeting about her activism. However, she and her husband refused to submit to the pressure and insisted that her feminist activism was part of Reform Jewish values. Her husband supported her wholeheartedly, even though, as Rosalyn pointed out, this meeting was a week before his contract negotiations.

Rosalyn's Jewish/feminist path has been a mixture of congruence and dissonance. She told me that she hated the sexist language of the prayerbook but has become more at ease with it over time. She claims not to feel cognitive dissonance between Jewishness and feminism anymore. Rosalyn now sees feminism in concert with Judaism, and particularly the tenets of Reform Judaism:

> The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods supported pro-choice, pro ERA. The Central Conference of American Rabbis, the UAHC[5] all supported what I was saying. I was just getting out there. Like Al Vorspan had said, you gotta go out there and do it. That was from when I was fourteen years old!

Rosalyn's response to the question of how being Jewish and being feminist come together was to say, "To me, it's all combined."

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[4] See footnote #5 in chapter 4 for a description of Bella Abzug.
[5] UAHC = Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the governing body of the Reform movement. The Central Conference of American Rabbis is the organization of Reform rabbis.

Rhonda, like Jennifer and Alice, is a secular Jew, yet she claims that Jewishness is extremely prominent and central to her identity. She was raised by working class immigrants. Her mother was Orthodox and her father was a secular communist and she felt torn between the two of them. She feels that she has spent her life trying to put the two approaches together. Rhonda had a mixed Jewish upbringing outside of the family as well; she went to a secular socialist/Yiddishist shula [afternoon school] but personally practiced Orthodox Judaism. Rhonda gradually starting breaking away from Orthodoxy over the years; by graduate school, she had dropped Orthodox Judaism completely.

Rhonda became disenchanted with God and Judaism because of the Holocaust. She is avowedly secular now; in fact, she describes herself as "allergic to religion." Despite this "allergy", Rhonda strongly identifies as a Jew; she stated, "I'm antireligious, but I'm very Jewish...I am very strongly Jewish. Every word out of my mouth is Jewish, practically." This self-identification is the opposite of how the respondents discussed in the previous chapter described themselves, with the phrase "not very Jewish." The distinction between someone who is more and less Jewish is not something that I can measure. Rather the respondent, by designating *herself* as more or less Jewish, is conveying important information about her own perception of herself as a Jew. It has nothing to do with religiosity but is an indication of the perceived intensity of one's Jewish identity, or the importance of being Jewish relative to others.

Rhonda told me on the phone before we met that she had been obsessing over her Jewish identity her entire life. When I asked her during the interview what is it about being Jewish that inspires her to obsess about it, she answered:

> It's my life! It's who I am...It's not a choice. If you take away the Jewishness, I don't know what would be left {laugh}. What is valuable to me is social justice.

> It's the whole history of social justice. I think being Jewish, this is too instrumental, but it gives me a lens on the world. It frames the way I understand race relations. It gives me my commitment to fighting against the horrible racism in this society. It is very much combined with the working class consciousness that I talked about before which helps me to see, to understand my world, and understand the hypocrisy and the evil in the world. I don't know, it's a framework. It's like feminism, it's like class. It's a framework on the world. It's a mythology.

This response is typical because she brings up the positive value of social justice after criticizing Judaism earlier in the interview, reiterating the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence. Like others, Rhonda also talks about Jewish identity as if it is essential; despite her ambivalence, being Jewish is not a choice to her.

Rhonda does not belong to a synagogue today and still has some ambivalence about religious rituals. She loves the melodies of the service yet gets turned off by the text. She claims to "miss the music," although "she can't relate to it." Although she adamantly rejects Jewish religion, and religion in general, there were hints that it still has some hold on her. She has, over the years, participated in some progressive forms of Jewish practice, but not without struggle. She also expressed regrets about raising her daughter without any institutional Jewish influence, because now her daughter does not identify as Jewish.

In terms of how her Jewish and feminist autobiographies interconnect, Rhonda began her feminist autobiography by telling me that sitting in the women's section in synagogue as a child "bothered" her. Her story is similar to Rosalyn's; when they attended services as a family, it was at an Orthodox synagogue and she was repelled by the gender segregation there. Perhaps the most important intersection of Rhonda's Jewishness and feminism is her work, which relates to Jewish women.

Rhonda voiced some of the typical discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence. She talked about how her Jewish upbringing was about "not putting up with oppression." So when she participated in the student movement in college, at first she had moments of asking herself, "What's a nice Jewish girl like me doing sitting in a building?" However, this activism became personally transformative, and she ultimately came to see it as coming out of her Jewish upbringing.

When I asked Rhonda if she could relate any specific moments in which being Jewish influenced her feminism, she was not able to:

> It's hard for me to separate it out. It seems so organic to me...It's always been problematic, as I said. It's always, I'm always constructing how am I going to relate to the holidays. How am I going to relate to the religion, that's the problematic aspect of it. And I think it's always been problematic. But it's always been a central part of me in this kind of inchoate way I'm not able to really be very articulate about it because it doesn't seem very separate.

Rhonda is unable to separate out her Jewishness because she sees it in essentialist terms, and thus she would not theorize about how it relates to her feminism. Nonetheless, she is clear that the religious aspects of Jewishness cause tension for her. Although Rhonda has been ambivalent about Judaism for so long, she still says that being Jewish and feminist "are more coming together for [her] now than before...How I have defined being Jewish changes over time. But being Jewish is who I am and it suffuses everything else."

Conclusion

Alice, Jennifer, Miriam, Olivia, Rhonda, and Rosalyn are story tellers who see their feminist autobiographies as inseparable from their Jewish journeys in life. Whereas the women in the first two chapters explored the congruence or dissonance between Jewishness and feminism, these women did not emphasize the discourse of Jewish-

feminist congruence, or any discourse for that matter. However their stories do illustrate both tension and compatibility between Jewish and feminist identities, and the attempt to find a comfortable place as Jewish women.

Their Jewish and feminist autobiographies were merged throughout their interview accounts. In chapter four, the discussion of the relationship between Jewishness and feminism was sparse and left till the end of the interview when I asked for it. By contrast, the women in this chapter told their life stories from the beginning of the interviews with vignettes that connect Jewishness and gender or feminism. Their Jewish and feminist identities appear integrated into their experiences.

Many of these Jewish/feminist experiences were unhappy. They were about gender inequality within synagogues, sexism in Jewish families and institutions, and harmful interactions with Jewish men. Except for Rosalyn, and perhaps Miriam, the tensions between Jewishness and feminism that took place in their childhoods were not resolved by positive experiences with the Jewish religion or Jewish institutions. Instead, most of the women in this chapter became unaffiliated with Jewish institutions as adults. This is different from the women in chapter three, who, despite experiencing the gender inequality of Judaism in their childhoods, grew up to become practicing Jewish-feminists whose Jewish experiences are aimed at successfully integrating the Jewish religion with feminism. In the next chapter, we will see the fourth approach to narrating Jewish and feminist identities: Jewish male feminists who articulate a discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity in which Jewish values of manhood become compatible with feminist critiques of American masculinity.

Chapter Six

Constructing Jewish Male Feminist Identities

In this chapter, I discuss the relationship between men's Jewish and feminist identities. I will explore the interview accounts of five Jewish profeminist[1] men and their narratives of Jewish-feminist identity construction. These men all relate in some way to the idea that Jewish masculinity is distinct from American or mainstream masculinity; I call this idea "the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity." This discourse, like the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence, claims that there are commonalities between being Jewish and being feminist, but specifically for men. Jewish men are seen as non-violent, gentle, intellectual, and sensitive, and thus different from the types of men that feminists critique. Not only is this discourse present in the narratives of the men I interviewed but, as I will show, it is also supported in literature about Jewish men. Among the informants in this chapter, there are varying degrees of belief and disbelief in the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity; each respondent relates to it in his own way.

The men who I interviewed were feminist activists alongside women in the sixties and seventies. In the next section, I give background on the profeminist men's movement, which has been an important part of all of their lives. They are keenly aware of the unique position of being male feminists and issues of masculinity were prevalent in

[1] The term "profeminist" is used to distinguish men from women feminists, in acknowledgement of their different social positions. See Kimmel & Mosmiller (1992).

their narratives. In discussing their Jewish and feminist identities, all explore the symbolic meaning of Jewish masculinity whether it is internalized or contradicted.

The Profeminist Men's Movement

In the early 1970s, as the women's liberation movement was burgeoning, men banded together to engage in feminist politics (Kimmel and Mosmiller 1992; Messner 1997 and 1998a). Members of the early men's movement allied with women feminists to protest male violence, sexual harassment, and workplace inequality, and to support the ERA and abortion rights. Their methods were similar to the women's liberation movement; they formed consciousness raising groups and grassroots organizations, and published newsletters, magazines, and books pertaining to gender inequality (Messner 1998a). The men I interviewed were involved in various aspects of this loosely formed men's movement: anti-violence against women movement, abortion rights, battered-women's shelter movement, and pro-Equal Rights Amendment.

In the late 1970s, the men's movement split off into various factions, including the anti-feminist men's rights movement and the mythopoetic men's movement (Connell 1998; Messner 1998b). Nevertheless, the anti-sexist/profeminist men's movement remained and is still going strong. In fact, the men in this chapter still belong to profeminist organizations.

Just as the women's liberation movement led to the development of women's studies, the profeminist men's movement led to the burgeoning field of men's studies (Brod 1987), which focuses on the construction of multiple forms of masculinities. Two notable sociological explorations of the social construction of masculinity are R.W.

Connell's (1995) qualitative study of Australian men's masculinity and Michael Kimmel's (1996) cultural history of American masculinity. While women's studies has become increasingly aware of cultural difference and the intersections between gender and other identities, male feminist scholars also have been exploring the intersection of gender with other identities. The profeminist men's movement has displayed a concern with interlocking systems of oppression through the addition of gay affirmative and anti-racist to the profeminist agenda of it's largest organization, the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (See www.nomas.org).

Jewish Men's Studies

As Robert Rosenberg (1988) writes, Jewish men are portrayed in complex ways:

> We are often viewed as weak, not sexual; in fact, emasculated. Jewish women are often seen as strong, powerful, and in some mysterious way 'outside of sexism." On the other hand, Jewish men are trained to be argumentative, rational thinkers, something which is in some sense very male. Yet we are often considered the most sensitive and least sexist of men. Some people might think Jewish men need feminism least of all, while others might think we need it the most. The truth, of course, lies somewhere in between. (p.157)

A number of scholars have written about the construction of American Jewish men's masculinity. In her book, *Fighting to Become Americans: Gender, Jews, and the Anxiety of Assimilation*, Riv-Ellen Prell (1999) details the history of stereotypes of Jewish women and attributes these stereotypes to Jewish men, who she claims projected their anxieties about their ethnic difference onto Jewish women. Paula Hyman (1995) writes that the modern militaristic Israeli male mentality is a result of years of emasculating Jewish oppression in Europe. Harry Brod (1988) and Michael Kimmel (1988) are profeminist

Jewish men who write about Jewish masculinity and the roots of their feminism in their Jewish experience.

Daniel Boyarin (1997) presents a view of Jewish men that is similar to the interview accounts that I will present later in the chapter. He argues that the early modern Ashkenazi paradigm of masculinity, coming out of Talmudic ideals of masculinity, "has something compelling to offer us in our current moment of search for a feminist reconstruction of male subjectivity" (p.2). According to Boyarin, the ideal Jewish man was "feminized" in the sense that he was a countertype to the European model of "activity, domination, and aggressiveness as 'manly' and gentleness and passivity as emasculate or effeminate" (p.2). Boyarin explains that the rabbis of the Talmud did not view physical aggression as constitutive of manliness, and studiousness and sensitivity as unmanly, and that this inversion of hegemonic gender roles continued into European Jewish culture.

Anti-Semitic stereotypes in Europe associated Jewish men with women; in fact "in early modern Europe, the little finger was referred to by gentiles in certain places as "the Jew" (p.4). Jewish men were seen as either non-sexual, queer, or sexually predatory. Boyarin asserts, however, that despite this gendered anti-Semitic construction of Jewish men as other than men, within Jewish culture, masculine ideals were asserted in opposition to gentile Jewish masculinity:

> Premodern Jewish culture, I will argue, frequently represented ideal Jewish men as femminized through various discursive means. This is not, moreover, a representation that carries with it any hint of internalized contempt or self-hatred. Quite the opposite; it was through this mode of conscious alternative gendering that Jewish culture frequently asserted its identity over-against its surroundings. (p.5)

The Jewish "soft man", as Boyarin calls it, was a "positive oppositional identity" created in reaction to hegemonic norms of masculinity. Although this identity was "unmanning" it was not desexualizing. Boyarin also asserts that the surrounding cultures' association of the body with women, and the mind with men did not carry into Jewish gender culture; but instead, "maleness is every bit as corporeal as femaleness in this patriarchal culture" (p.10).

Boyarin asserts that "rabbinic culture might yet prove a resource in the radical reconstruction of male subjectivities that feminism calls for." Yet he also acknowledges that this very culture has been oppressive to women as well. According to Boyarin, it is the alternative paradigm of gender that bears the subversive potential to undermine western gender relations of power.

The cultural position of Jewish masculinity in Boyarin's study is related to R.W. Connell's (1987:183-8) concept of hegemonic masculinity. "'Hegemonic masculinity' is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women. The interplay between different forms of masculinity is an important part of how a patriarchal social order works" (p.183). The men with the most power in society achieve ascendancy over other groups of men through the creation of ideals of masculinity, embodied in fantasy figures such as Humphrey Bogart, John Wayne, and Sylvester Stallone. "Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities. These other masculinities need not be as clearly defined – indeed, achieving hegemony may consist precisely in preventing alternatives gaining cultural definition and recognition as alternatives, confining them to ghettos, to privacy, to unconsciousness" (p.186). According to this framework, the discourse of alternative

Jewish masculinity, of which Boyarin is a proponent and which was voiced as well as critiqued by the men I interviewed, places Jewish masculinity as an alternative to hegemonic masculinity; it is a subordinated form of masculinity.

Jewish Profeminist Men Tell Their Stories

When I asked Jewish profeminist men to talk about the relationship between their Jewish and feminist identities, they focused on what it means to be a Jewish man. Some agreed with Boyarin's notion that paradigms of masculinity within Jewish culture are compatible with more feminist ideals of masculinity. However, at the same time, they deconstruct their own narratives of Jewish-feminist congruence and express conflicts between their Jewish and feminist identities. These men positioned themselves variously in relation to the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity; their narratives include uncritical assertions, self-critical claims, and total disavowals of this discourse.

Daniel was raised in a suburban Conservative Jewish community. As a dutiful son, he attended Hebrew school up until his graduation, even though he hated it and it "meant nothing" to him. Daniel claims that his Jewish identity has always "waxed and waned." Although his Jewish upbringing was quite active religiously, Daniel paradoxically reported: "So the structure of my Jewish upbringing was, it made no dent. I never really felt Jewish. Partly I believe that's because I lived in a town that was virtually all Jewish." Daniel says about his early adulthood, "I lived an utterly secular, utterly non-Jewish, utterly unthoughtful life, religiously. I still consider myself a very spiritually shallow person and live a very secular humanist life." Growing up, he felt a sense of shame that

the Jews "allowed themselves to be killed" during the Holocaust, and was extremely pleased to learn, as an adult, about the Jewish resistance fighters during the Holocaust. He connects this shame to his gender; he feels that, as a boy, it was particularly shameful to learn that Jews did not defend themselves physically.

Daniel describes ways in which Jewishness is compatible with feminism. He alleges that even within a patriarchal context, Jewish communities have historically supported women. Daniel theorizes that Jewish women of his generation were raised with support for professional and educational aspirations. He surmises that these ambitions were stifled by sexist American society, thereby making feminism a useful outcome:

> I think there were ways in which Judaism was a natural for feminism...Jewish women were much more encouraged, despite the patriarchy of the religion, much more encouraged to go to college...much more encouraged to be smart, to not hide it, to be careerist, and suddenly it's choked off by patriarchy. So there's ways in which there's thwarted ambition.

The themes of intellectualism and career are a unique addition to the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence, which the respondents voiced in making connections between Jewish experience and feminist viewpoints.

Daniel emphasizes an intellectual orientation in his description of Jewish men, distinguishing them from "mainstream" and "hegemonic" men. He also draws on a discourse of post-Holocaust social justice which he feels impels Jews to participate in progressive politics:

> I think being a Jewish man means not being a mainstream man...not falling under the category of hegemonic definition...I think the sort of bookishness, the learning stuff is one part. I thought the political ethical imperative of "never again" was another part. And there's the kind of, we don't subscribe to the traditional anti-intellectualism, and we don't subscribe to the traditional me-first-ism. So those are components of a Jewish masculinity as an alternative to hegemonic masculinity... I think Judaism provides a foundation for an alternative vision of masculinity, a masculinity that can be ethical.

In the previous excerpt, Daniel mixes the past and the present in portraying Jewish masculinity, beginning some sentences with "I think" and others with "I thought." This simultaneous avowal of and distancing from the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity reveals an underlying uncertainty in his own statements.

The discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity is overshadowed by the reality of patriarchal Judaism. Daniel refers to the ritual of circumcision and a traditional verse from the prayer book as reminders of the patriarchal history of Judaism. He distinguishes between Jewish men and "hegemonic men" but acknowledges that Jewish men possess power over women, specifically Jewish women:

> [B]eing a Jewish man, vis-à-vis Jewish women, [is] still quite a patriarchal relationship...So on the one hand, Jewish masculinity does have some possible foundations on which to build an alternative masculinity to the hegemonic version. Not to say it's always taken, but it's possible. On the other hand, there are components within Judaism, of course, that like the circumcision, like the reproduction of patriarchy, that are about male domination and about women's inequality and subordination. And I don't have to remind people about the certain "Thank God I'm not a woman"[2] stuff.

While earlier Daniel articulated the typical notion of coherence between Jewish masculinity and feminism, here he is also critically assessing this notion in light of the reality of sexism within Judaism.

Daniel contrasts the interplay between gender relations and gender equality in Jewish culture and American culture:

> So it's funny because what I was saying before is that American culture has given women part A of feminism - equal opportunity - but not B, the transformation of gender relations that would include the transformation of masculinity. Judaism offers B without A, which is to say it gives men the basis on which to construct the new definition of masculinity, but it doesn't give women the equal

[2] Daniel is referring to a verse in daily morning prayers. "Blessed are you, God, for not having made me a woman" which has been removed from Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist prayer books.

> opportunity {laughing}...So certainly, it's true that Jewish men can be real men vis-à-vis women. And be just as oppressive, just as patriarchal, and just as stubborn and impervious about it as hegemonic men. No question about that. An alternative sense of masculinity in the abstract doesn't necessarily play out as an alternative in gender relations.

In other words, although the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity provides a non-normative masculine ideal, its subversive potential is weakened by the real-life subordination of Jewish women.

Mark also refers to a culture of Jewish masculinity that differs from mainstream American masculinity. Like Daniel, he invokes this discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity in linking his feminism to his Jewish cultural background. Both of Mark's parents are the children of Orthodox immigrants, and they raised him with conflicting views about Judaism. He attended synagogue on Sabbaths without his parents and was recruited for weekly Torah chanting in the synagogue for about a year after his bar-mitzvah. He then got bored with services and decided to play sports instead. He oscillated between attending schools with mostly Jewish student populations and schools with very few Jews. Mark was confused about what to make of Judaism throughout all of this, and his Jewish identity has fluctuated throughout his adulthood as well. He now belongs to a Jewish Renewal congregation where he feels very comfortable because "there's a bunch of radicals there who are no more religious than [he is]."

Mark traces respect for women back to early Jewish history, interpreting a protofeminist paradigm in ancient rabbinic culture. He credits the authors of the Jewish rabbinic canon with being inclined to listen to women:

> I actually think there's strong roots of feminism in Judaism...There are many stories about this, like the rabbi's daughter, I think, he wrote her into the canon,

> into his rabbinic writings[3]. And now it's been discovered that she was actually a famous rabbinical person...If a woman got up and argued with a rabbi, and the argument made sense, in my idealization, that rabbi would say, "Oh, that makes sense." There's something in the Jewish tradition about that...But there's a respect for the woman who says something. Well, that's part of feminism...Women spoke up and men listened. Jewish men, I think, were more likely to listen just like the rabbi was more likely to listen to his daughter or somebody.

Mark then returns to contemporary times to claim a Jewish foundation to being a profeminist man:

> Men who are supporting gender equity are speaking up against domination but not from a position of being oppressed. So what men are saying is, "This is right. We will listen to what the oppressed group is saying and then we will think about the way that we're dominating because we're basically opposed to domination. If they're telling us that we're dominating in this way, then we need to listen and do something about that." Now, that's a Jewish, there are Jewish roots to that attitude, that kind of openness.

Mark makes a connection between Jewishness and progressive politics by linking, more explicitly than Daniel, norms for Jewish men with feminist and radical ideologies. In the following excerpt, Mark enunciates an anti-violent dimension of the Jewish masculinity discourse. Notice, however, that he distinguishes between his perception of Jewish men and the reality that some Jewish men are physically abusive:

> Whatever it is that Jewish men are supposed to do has some parallels with feminism. So I would find it extremely weird that a Jewish man were beating his wife... Now I know that Jewish men beat their wives, but it's still not my sense of what goes into being a Jewish man. So I think that just like there's a set of overlapping things with radical politics, I think there's a set of things with feminism that makes a lot of sense in the Jewish tradition.

In the previous excerpt, Mark juxtaposes "I think" Jewishness overlaps with feminism with, but "I know" it's not always true. While he submits that Jewish men don't beat their wives, he also problematizes that claim.

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[3] It is unclear which rabbi he is referring to. It is likely that he means Beruria, who was the daughter of Hananya Ben Teradion, a teacher in 2nd century Galilee, and the wife of Rabbi Meir, one of the main rabbis of the Mishna (Abrams 1995:2).

Mark asserts that there are feminist elements to Jewish cultural norms for men, emphasizing the Jewish man's role in the family as a non-violent father and husband. But as soon as he discloses his views on what a Jewish man should be, he qualifies them by calling them idealizations:

> A lot of this is idealization. Because if you look at Jewish families across the country, I don't think you'd get a pure left-leaning feminist happy family. There are a lot of Jewish homeless youth out there who come from families where they were beaten. So I think a lot of it is idealization on my part.

Implicit in this passage is Mark's indirect admission of his own middle-class perspective. Mark deconstructed the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity that he had just enunciated by revealing the class bias of many of its assumptions.

To further illustrate the unrealistic nature of his ideas about Jewish men, Mark told me the story of a Holocaust survivor who is the father of an acquaintance.

> [He is] a patriarch like I cannot believe! Total control and domination of women. And abusive towards his children...all the stuff that I tell you has to do with a very small world that I've grown up in. And so my assumptions can be challenged rather easily by another group of people...He's been dominated and now he dominates. I think there's some people like that and so everything I say about Judaism has to be amended a little.

The Holocaust survivor's story is inconsistent with Mark's image of Jewish men and thus reminds him of his self-perceived tendency to view Judaism through rose-colored glasses. So Mark diminishes the accuracy of the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity by naming it a fantasy. Furthermore, Mark told me that he feels he has created an idealized history of Judaism "out of his dreams" which focuses on liberation; this contradicts his portrayal of Judaism as integrally linked to feminism and radicalism. Mark gave me the impression that he came to realize his ambivalence during the course of our conversation.

Mark and Daniel confined their discussion to Jewish men in general. It is not clear that they see themselves, personally, as different from non-Jewish men. Their depictions of Jewish men remain at the theoretical level and do not appear to be internalized into their own gender identities. However, although their narratives are not self-directed, they are nonetheless discursive expressions of their identities as members of the social group they describe.

In contrast to Daniel and Mark, Sam's narratives about Jewish masculinity are more personalized and related to his own life experiences. Sam is the son of immigrant parents who survived the Holocaust. Being the child of Holocaust survivors is his "core identity" and he feels that it is inseparable from his Jewish identity. His family belonged to a Conservative synagogue and they celebrated all of the holidays. Yet Sam reports that "there really wasn't anything...with any religious content to my Jewish identity." His mother's and father's religious background and outlook were very different; one was from an assimilated German family and the other from a Polish Orthodox *shtetl*[4] background. In recalling his Jewish upbringing, Sam said, "My Jewish identity is very much cultural, historical, Holocaust survivor." Like many other respondents, Sam explained that when he moved to a place in which there were fewer Jews, his "Jewish identity became more important" because he "had to positively seek out...and go out of [his] way to have a Jewish identity." Sam now belongs to a synagogue and has been providing his children with Jewish educations.

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[4] See note #13 in chapter 1.

Sam also evokes the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity, but, unlike Daniel and Mark, his reference point is his own experience of alienation from American gender norms. Sam recalls growing up feeling like an outsider which he partially attributes to being Jewish. Because he felt he was different from other males, the feminist critique of masculinity compelled him. He relates that becoming a feminist seemed like a natural progression, more like "coming home" than making a change in his life.

> I mean, there were a lot of men being disturbed, scared, however you want to put it, by women's liberation. But some of us thought there might be something more positive. And a lot of that had to do with my Jewish identity, because the feminist critique of mainstream models of masculinity was something I was happy to join in critiquing. Because it sure wasn't me. It was an image of masculinity that also was a very WASP model and oppressive to Jews as well...So the mainstream model of masculinity was clear was one I could never aspire to. It just wasn't me at all. So then finding other men and women who were criticizing that, more receptive to the kind of person I was, it was finding a home more than anything else.

Feminism allowed him to feel secure in his own difference from mainstream masculinity. Furthermore, the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity provides him with a framework for recalling the development of his own individual gender identity and making sense of it within a cultural or social framework.

The discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity creates a distinct boundary between Jewish and non-Jewish men, thereby imagining a Jewish masculinity which is marginal to American culture. Boyarin (1997), tracing this counter-identification of the Jewish man in relation to the non-Jewish man through Jewish history, writes: "Jewish society needed an image against which to define itself and produced the 'goy' – hypermale – as its countertype, as a reverse of its social norm" (p.4). Sam sees the Jewish man as living in tension with American culture. The subject of anti-Semitism forms the subtext of his musings about Jewish masculinity:

> From the perspective of non-Jewish culture, a Jewish male identity is a feminized identity. It's the scholar, the weakling, the intellectual...The Jewish man struggles under the sort of mainstream culture's stigma of effeminacy, always that inferiority. He's not a real man under mainstream culture's terms...But it's a catch-twenty-two, double-bind situation. 'Cause the Jewish man is the scholar, the intellectual and all that, and that's not the mainstream culture's image of masculinity. So if you're making it on your culture's terms, you're not making it on the mainstream culture's terms.

While Daniel and Mark both appear to be disembodied observers of Jewish men, Sam's narrative suggests an embodied subject in conflict with non-Jewish culture. Although Sam says that the Jewish man is feminized by the outside culture, he himself discursively constructs the Jewish man in opposition to that culture.

Sam delineates how his thinking about Jewish masculinity has developed over time and become more critical. Although he reports that he once thought that Jewish men were more aligned with a feminist model of masculinity, he has come to question that idea. He places himself outside of the alternative Jewish masculinity discourse, viewing it with a critical lens:

> So it took me a long, long time to finally get that some of the critique [of mainstream masculinity] also applied to me and to the Jewish community. The specific lyrics might be different but there were real commonalities, too, in terms of patriarchal culture...So yeah, it became clear to me that we Jewish men weren't rowdy and physically competitive and boisterous and physically violent but I later learned that there is violence in the Jewish community as well. But we certainly engaged in sort of intellectual and can-you-top-this in terms of telling the best joke or the best story rather than shooting hoops in front of them. So that gradually penetrated into my consciousness... It took me a while to realize the trap of that easy identification, 'cause I wasn't dealing with specifically Jewish aspects of patriarchal consciousness and behavior, which are all too present.

Sam feels that his earlier beliefs about Jewish men kept him from seeing the patriarchal aspects of Jewish culture. The flipside to the purported intellectual orientation of Jewish men is intellectual domination. Jewish men are still "real men" as Daniel says, not immune to the privileges of male power. Sam realizes that the supposition that Jewish

men do not value physical virility to the same extent as others obscures the fact that some Jewish men are actually violent. Although he critiques some aspects of the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity, he does not reject it completely.

When I asked Sam if he ever feels cognitive dissonance between being Jewish and feminist, he replied that he does not and took a moment to ask himself why not. In managing the contradictions between feminist and Jewish discourses, Sam compares Judaism to other religions thereby placing its patriarchy in perspective:

> Why do I not experience [cognitive dissonance]? I know Judaism is as patriarchal as any other religion. And I think it's important to resist saying that it's more so...Judaism is not the paramountly patriarchal religion... I think it has to do with being acutely aware of anti-Semitism and the tendency to blame everything on the Jews. So that when I became feminist, it was clear to me that it couldn't be right that Judaism is particularly patriarchal. It was clear to me that Christianity, as the other religion I knew something about, is equally patriarchal. And I knew that there was certainly Christian feminism and there was Jewish feminism. So it never occurred to me to view Judaism as particularly problematic. It was equally problematic as any other patriarchal institution.

Sam told me that he was influenced by reports of anti-Semitic discourse in the scholarship of Christian feminist theologians.[5] In the previous excerpt, he expresses a sense that problematizing Judaism is tied to anti-Semitism. This concern about anti-Semitism causes him to minimize tension between his Jewish and feminist identities.

In describing his Jewish background, Steven said, "I'm definitely more explicitly Jewish than my parents. And I think more spiritually based in my Judaism." Like all of the men in this chapter, Steven grew up in a highly Jewish environment, in terms of his social networks and neighborhood. He describes his childhood relationship to Jewishness

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[5] See Daum (1980), Dijk-Hemmes (1991), Long (1991), Plaskow (1980), Plaskow (1991), Siegele-Wenschkewitz (1991), and Wacker (1991).

with complexity: "Although there was kind of a strong bent toward assimilation, it was also within a very Jewish context...So it wasn't strongly religious, but culturally it was very strongly Jewish." His family belonged to a Reform synagogue and celebrated Chanukah and Passover. Now Steven belongs to a Jewish Renewal congregation.

While the three tellers discussed so far, Daniel, Mark, and Sam, are ambivalent about the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity, their identification with this discourse is unquestionable. Steven, on the other hand, completely removes himself from it, deconstructing the discourse without claiming any of it as based in truth. He refutes what the others say about Jewish men, maintaining that the characteristics they cite are not particular to Jewish men but to the middle-class. During the interview, when I commented to Steven that he was unlike the other tellers because he did not convey that he sees Jewish men as possessing difference, he responded:

> And I think that's partly because I see the core of masculinity being control. And some men are told that they should do it physically, and some men are told they should do it verbally, and others are told they should do it financially or intellectually. But understanding the dynamics of violence, of violence in relationships especially, that it doesn't really make much difference to the person being controlled, what tools you're using. And so I'm not about to make a big difference between verbally and emotionally and intellectually abusing somebody and physically abusing them. And I think Jewish men are taught to be in control. Just as every, all the other men in this society are.

Steven continued to explain that the alternative Jewish masculinity discourse is a "stereotype" which allows the Jewish community to remain in denial about domestic violence. If Jewish men are not physically aggressive, how can there be domestic violence in the Jewish community, he asks. In contrast to Sam, he recalls that he fit in to the dominant models of masculinity "too well" when he was growing up and that he has worked hard to unlearn that as a profeminist adult.

Steven applies his feminist lens to Judaism in a much more critical way than the others. Although virtually everyone I spoke with, including the women, felt that there are at least some commonalities between Jewishness and feminism, Steven downplayed the compatibility between the two:

> The Judaism that I bring to feminism is more general in terms of social justice and things like that, whereas the feminism I bring to Judaism is much more specific and detailed...I think as a Jewish community over the last 30 years, we've had to modify Judaism in the light of our feminist understanding. But we haven't had to modify feminism very much in light of our Jewish understanding. Because Judaism doesn't have a history of equality, of gender justice.

In the previous excerpt, Steven denies a history of equality in Judaism whereas in the next excerpt he presents a bleak view of the impact of feminism on the Jewish community today. He also claims, in contrast to the other men, that Judaism has not influenced his feminist identity:

> Everything I learned growing up about Judaism had men in control, and men naturally at the top of the hierarchy. So I didn't have any roots in Judaism that would lead me to feminism. And I've yet to meet anybody who has...There doesn't seem to be a core of feminism deep within Judaism any place that I can see...I mean obviously there's lots of Jews who are feminists but they're not influencing the institutional structures of the community. Or not in any significant way.

Steven goes further than the other men in asserting the incompatibility of Jewishness and feminism. His interview was lacking the explanations of Jewish-feminist congruence that the other men voiced. He presented an unambiguously critical view of Judaism and seemed frustrated at what he perceives as resistance in the Jewish community to examine issues of gender.

Steven explained that he is able to live with the tension between Jewishness and feminism because he finds a "spiritual connection to Judaism and to the world that is deeper than the patriarchal traditions" and that he is part of communities that strive to

mold Judaism to their feminist understandings. Nonetheless, he asserted that any Jewish feminist who does not feel cognitive dissonance does not have a deep understanding of feminism:

> For many people, I think still, they don't see much dissonance because it's a fairly superficial level of understanding what feminism means. And if you understand it as deeply as I think we need to, then there's just nothing that's not affected by it. There's no place in which you're not aware of the contradiction between what is and what could be.

Unlike Daniel, Mark, and Sam, Steven does not communicate ambivalently. He speaks in stark terms about his Jewish and feminist identities; he clearly sees them as contradictory. He is also unique in his total rejection of the concept of alternative Jewish masculinity.

Gerald grew up in a working-class Jewish neighborhood, the son of poor immigrant parents. Gerald says that his parents were "assimilationists" who "never stepped foot inside a synagogue except for [his] bar-mitzvah day." He enrolled himself in Hebrew school to prepare for his bar-mitzvah despite his parents' protests that they could not afford it. He exhibited negative feelings toward Jews, stemming from his unhappy childhood: "The problem was poverty was a greater influence on me than Judaism." He was a young child during the Holocaust and remembers hearing about relatives being "put in ovens" and other horrible reports of friends and family in Europe, while the adults simultaneously reprimanded each other for talking about the Holocaust in front of the children. The terror of the Holocaust has left a strong mark on Gerald: "I had an existential angst about being Jewish. I thought that I could be killed at any time. My

dreams at night, the Nazis were on the fire escape talking about how to get in the apartment to get me and my family."

The Holocaust also impelled Gerald to become an activist. He links his feminism to Jewishness through the common thread of otherness:

> There but for the grace of God said I, would have gone I, were I living in Nazi Germany, Poland, any of Eastern Europe, etcetera. So I'm committed to stopping crazy lethal hatred of people. When I read feminist literature, I saw that women suffered a form of discrimination and exclusion from opportunities the likes of which I had earlier easily identified as oppressing people of color. And Jews.

Because of his membership in an oppressed group, he feels committed to stopping other forms of oppression, including sexism. The connection that he draws here is part of the discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence discussed in chapter four.

Gerald stands out from the other men in that he presents a negative image of Jewish masculinity. It was unclear whether he was describing formerly held views or if he still believed his depiction of Jewish men because he switched between past and present tenses. While Daniel, Mark, and Sam depict Jewish men in a positive light, and Steven insists that Jewish men are no different from non-Jewish men, Gerald has nothing positive to say. He seems to have internalized negative stereotypes:

> Like most men, I'm very protective of my mother. Very protective of my wife. If I had a daughter, my daughter. Women in general. Male role is to protect women. So there was a male role as opposed to Jewishness. Jewish men I don't think, as a matter of fact, I didn't like Jewish men's behavior towards women. I thought it was pathetic and not very sexy. I thought Jewish men lost out...They weren't sexy, they weren't powerful...Who were the Jewish men who attracted women? John Garfield, in boxing. All the men who were attractive were gangsters and tough men.

Gerald concurs with the discourse of Jewish masculinity by characterizing Jewish men as non-aggressive. He too sees Jewish men as somehow less masculine than other men, outside of typical masculine norms. But for him, this is a source of shame, they are

"pathetic and not very sexy" since they supposedly do not conform to the traditional gender roles that Gerald defines in the previous passage.

In the next passage, Gerald steps back somewhat from his description of Jewish men, speaking in the past tense, and claiming to feel embarrassed. Nonetheless, he does not indicate that his views have changed:

> I saw Jewish men as {long pause} god, it's embarrassing, but I'll do it the best I can. I saw them as acquisitive, I saw them as often without moral boundaries...I also tried very hard to get rid of my Brooklyn. Brooklyn I thought was a limitation. No one would respect you if you sounded, acted like you came from Brooklyn. Because Brooklyn was seen as lower class. And I wanted to be powerful. I wanted to be seen as powerful because I was desirable, attractive, intellectually attractive, morally attractive, physically attractive, athletically attractive. All of the ways in which I didn't see Jewish men.

The subtext of the previous passage is Gerald's class shame which is interwoven with the profound conflicts of his Jewish identity. Elsewhere in the interview, Gerald illustrated that Brooklyn represents Jewishness to him. In this passage, Brooklyn also represents the confines of poverty that he has struggled to escape. Paradoxically, although he relates Brooklyn to Jewishness and poverty, he also criticizes Jewish men for being acquisitive.

Gerald does not come across as critically in his views of gender as the other four men. In addition to his negative portrayal of Jewish men, he presented an antagonistic attitude toward Jewish women. He also expressed residual bitterness towards feminists and likened Jewish women to feminists in his experience: "The feminist women acted like Jewish women: confrontational, insistent, competitive, and lacking a style of allowing the other person to come around to a point of view as opposed to standing there and slugging it out with them, emotionally or otherwise."

Conclusion

The discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity is a kind of discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence, which is discussed in chapter four, because it claims that feminism and Jewish masculine culture are complementary. This discourse is obviously a site of complex feelings for the informants in this chapter; as a narrative of identity, it is indicative of the contradictions and complexities of the self. It is not important for my analysis to evaluate whether there is actually a basis for feminist tendencies in Jewish masculine culture. Instead, examining the discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity as an idea that the men approach from various positions elucidates the construction of Jewish male feminist identities.

Jewish feminist men hold a unique position in relation to both feminism and Jewishness. They are simultaneously in power and disempowered. As Jews, they occupy a subordinated form of masculinity. Yet they also acknowledge their power in relation to Jewish women. Their approach to understanding the intersections of Jewish and feminist identities is different from the approaches of women explored in previous chapters, because they emphasize the meanings of their gender identities. Like the women, the men expressed conflict as well as compatibility between their Jewish and feminist selves.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

The central aim of this dissertation is to examine how American Jewish feminists portray the intersection of their Jewish and feminist identities. Among the twenty-eight participants in this study, I discovered a variety of representations of the relationship between Jewishness and feminism. Some informants demonstrated an ongoing struggle to reconcile the conflicts between Judaism and feminism. Others claimed not to see any tension between Jewishness and feminism and instead maintained that they are congruent. Still others acknowledged the conflicts between their Jewish and feminist identities, yet demonstrated their success at overcoming them. Moreover, many informants depicted a Jewish feminist history that contained all of these perspectives.

Chapters three through six explore four different approaches to negotiating the relationship between Jewish and feminist identities. The first approach, discussed in chapter three, is to promote feminism within the Jewish religion. Some practicing Jews are able to overcome the discord between Judaism and feminism by participating in the feminist reconstruction of Judaism and Jewish institutions, while others repeatedly fight to uphold their feminist ideals in Jewish settings. This strategy is made possible by participation in synagogue leadership, feminist Jewish rituals, and text study.

The informants portrayed in chapter four enunciate a theory on the parallels between Jewishness and feminism, a discourse of Jewish-feminist congruence. They maintain that Jewish culture can be seen as compatible with feminism because both value social justice and questioning the status quo. They also link Jewish otherness and anti-Semitism to

women's otherness and sexism. In contrast to the informants discussed in chapter three, the women in chapter four do not feel any strain between their Jewish and feminist identities. Some even claim that their feminism is rooted in their Jewishness.

The informants described in chapter five narrate the relationship between their Jewish and feminist identities with stories from their pasts. They retroactively depict Jewishness and feminism as connected in their life experiences. Many of the vignettes they tell illustrate conflicts between Jewishness and feminism going back to their childhood experiences. They discuss anti-Semitism in the feminist movement, negative experiences with Jewish men, and feeling limited by Jewish cultural expectations for Jewish women.

Whereas chapters three through five explore the narratives of Jewish feminist women, chapter six explores the construction of male Jewish feminist identities. Jewish male feminists describe their perspectives on Jewish masculinity and its relationship to feminism. They both articulate and critique a discourse of alternative Jewish masculinity which claims that Jewish constructions of manhood are in line with feminist models of manhood.

The life history interview method yielded accounts of the changeable nature of identities. Each informant described pasts with shifting Jewish and feminist identities. However, their Jewish identities have fluctuated more than their feminist identities throughout their lives. They recalled waxing and waning religiosity and connections to Jewishness. Jewish identity must be understood within the context of the total self, as one aspect of a multifaceted, changing, and complex self. Their Jewish identities have formed partially in response to shifting cultural representations of Jewish difference in America. The changes within American Judaism that have taken place throughout the

informants' lifetimes have also affected their Jewish identities. Since my sample of informants spans a wide age range, these changes have affected them differently.

The construction of identities is an ongoing navigation of multiple cultural discourses. The process of reinterpreting and integrating various discourses of identities results in complex perspectives on the relationship between Jewishness and feminism. Although I set out to examine whether Jewish feminists find these two facets of themselves to be in discord or harmony, the picture turned out to be much more complicated. I found that the same individual might claim that Jewishness and feminism are both congruent and dissonant, or that they have changed their position on this at various points in their lives. The divergence of approaches and understandings of this relationship among my respondents points to the multiple meanings and configurations of interlocking identities.

What I have captured in this work is not so much the informants' actual identities, but rather snapshots of the presentations of their identities. My analysis is based on spoken narratives and thus is restricted to the medium of language as an expression of identity; I am unable to read the informants' minds. As such, this study is actually about narratives of identity and thus the relationship between Jewish and feminist identities emerged through the vocalization of shared cultural discourses. Although I presented these discourses in the context of the informants' individual life stories, I do not mean to equate individuals with discourses. Individuals can and do voice multiple discourses.

The findings of this study can not be separated from the historical moment in which it occurred and the events that have shaped the informants' lives. The era has passed in which the liberation of women is seen as antithetical to Jewish concerns. The feminist

transformation of Judaism, taking place for at least the past thirty years, has been an influence on the Jewish identities of all of the informants, regardless of their Jewish affiliations. The rise of the discourse of multiculturalism and increased awareness of ethnic identities has also been an influence on their understandings of themselves as American Jews.

Little research exists on either Jewish feminist identities or the relationship between gender and Jewish identity. This study demonstrates that, despite a history of gender inequality within Judaism, Jewish feminists can find coherence in these identities. As we have seen, Jewishness means different things to different people and can be integrated with other identities, including variously defined feminist identities. The life histories examined in this work attest to the impact of experiences with Jewish institutions on one's Jewish identity. Negative and positive interactions with rabbis and other Jewish leaders have the effect of drawing people closer or pushing them away from Judaism and the Jewish institutional world. Gender matters; the way girls and women were treated and portrayed in the Jewish world made its mark on their conceptions of Jewishness.

Jews have been left out of the conversation about intersectionality in women's studies. This conversation has emphasized the interaction between gender, class, and race, yet has lacked an examination of the role of religious identities. Although the women I interviewed are white and middle class, they are not Christian; their Jewishness places them outside of the mainstream American unmarked category and makes them a minority. They have complex relationships to hegemonic American definitions of race, religion, and ethnicity. Their confusions about how to place themselves among these categories of identity comes through in the interview accounts.

By participating in interviews about gender, feminism, and Jewishness, the participants in this study contribute to the discussion among feminists about the relationship between gender and other identities. They have demonstrated how their experiences as Jews influence their experiences as women and men. Just as gender matters for understanding Jewish identity, Jewishness matters for understanding gender. Their narratives show that being Jewish provides a particular cultural background and lens on being female and male.

In conclusion, the creative interweaving of identities applies to how Jewish feminists relate Jewishness to feminism. They must make sense of contested identities and disparate affiliations. As we have seen, they use a variety of strategies to negotiate this challenge. In so doing, they participate in the continued formation of cultural discourses of identity.

Appendix

Interview Guide

- Before I ask you to talk about your life history, tell me a little about your life currently.
- Main elements of your identity.
- List the major milestones in your life.

1. **Feminist Autobiography**
   - When did you first become a feminist? Click moments.
   - Involvement in the 60s and 70s "second wave".
   - Transformations
   - Since then

2. **Feminist Identity**
   - How do you define feminism?
   - What kind of feminist are you not? Where do you locate yourself? Has that changed?

3. **Jewish Autobiography**
   - Generation in America. Family. Jewish upbringing.
   - Can you remember a time when being Jewish was most salient, important? Least salient?
   - Points of change, i.e. during the 1960s and 1970s. Transformations.

4. **Current Jewish Identity**
   - Salience. Social networks. Identification with specific communities
   - What is important about being Jewish to you? What do you connect to? Feel good about?
   - Can you give me a moment in which you felt like an outsider because you were Jewish? Anti-Semitism?

5. **Jewish identity and gender?**
   - Have you ever thought about how Jewishness relates to gender, is gendered, how your own Jewish identity relates to gender?
   - time/situation in which you felt most like a Jewish wo/man? Felt least like...
   - A Jewish woman is... A Jewish man is...
   - Free associate: What does it mean to be a Jewish wo/man? How are you different than a Jewish man?
   - Any thoughts on Judaism and gender?

6. **Jewish and Feminist Together**
   - When you became a feminist, did it have an impact on your Jewish identity?
   - Social networks back then. Did you identify as a Jew within feminist communities?
   - Do you experience any cognitive dissonance between being Jewish and feminist?
   - Give me a moment in which being Jewish influenced your feminism? vice versa
   - Critiques of feminism by women of color: How do Jews fit into these debates?
   - Do you think things have changed for Jewish women in your life time? If so, how?

   - Is there anything you want to add? Any questions I didn't ask that I should have?
   - Do you have any questions for me?

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