

THE OUTSIDER WITHIN: SENSE OF SELF IN  
JEWISH FEMINIST WOMEN

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I wonder if this "doubleness" is the lot of any woman who leads a hyphenated life, a life defined and determined by two major aspects of her identity---femaleness and something else. In my case, the hyphen links a Jew and a feminist in one human being with the gift and the burden of double vision and the belief that anti-semitism and sexism are equivalent evils. While I often feel like a double agent for two sacred causes, Judaism and feminism, neither of which necessarily believes the other deserves a place in heaven, at the same time, I've discovered that seeing double can be a useful survival mechanism. (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991)

Overview of the Study

A wide range of practices and beliefs is an aspect shared by both Judaism and feminism. Both are often misunderstood and misrepresented in the popular media and in the classroom. The outcome of these misrepresentations can vary from social slights to more dangerous anti-semitic and sexist behavior. Rather than make assumptions, based only on the researcher's experience, in this study I explored the development, meaning and incorporation of these two domains in women's lives. In particular, I examined how residing in an area with a small Jewish and feminist population might

affect either or both of these identities.

In this study I explored the development of a Jewish and feminist self and in particular how women negotiate Judaism's and the larger community's patriarchal hierarchy. Of specific interest is how Judaism and feminism intersect, clash, and coexist. I also examined the intersection of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age, among other social constructs, with Judaism and feminism.

Judaism is often shrouded in mystique to the majority population. To non-Jews, its tenets and practices are often completely unknown or misinterpreted. When speaking of the Jewish people, little allowance is made for heterogeneity. It is often presumed that all Jews are rich, well educated, cheap, and materialistic. But just as one cannot speak of women, men, African Americans, or Asians as monolithic entities, Jews are not a homogenous population. Within the Jewish community there is even current debate on who is a Jew (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). Whereas the Orthodox sect acknowledges that anyone born of a Jewish mother is a Jew, they do not recognize the Conservative and Reform movements as practicing the Jewish religion (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991). Orthodox Jews believe that only converts who were instructed by an ordained Orthodox Rabbi can

consider themselves Jews (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991). This belief leaves the vast majority of American Jews in a quandary. Although they are considered to be Jews they are not deemed to be practitioners or adherents to the Jewish faith. This becomes even more problematic for feminist Jews. For many the strict, literal tenets of Orthodoxy leave little room for feminism (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Lavender, 1986; Umansky, 1988;). Although there are feminists within Orthodoxy there is certainly debate on how they can maintain both identities which seem to be such polar opposites (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaufman, 1992; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996).

This polarity exists within Conservative and Reform Judaism as well. The first ordination of women as Rabbis and Cantors was as recent as 1972 (Lavender, 1986). In many congregations women still take a back seat to male members or are told to take pride in their defined role within Judaism - that of caretaker of the family (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaufman, 1992; Lavender, 1986; Umansky, 1988). For many women it is a struggle to maintain the practices of both Judaism and feminism. Some feminist Jews, as do many Jews in general, have a greater cultural, ethnic, or racial identity than a spiritual connection with Judaism (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). Others have worked

at accommodating the Jewish religion to their feminist sensibilities. Prayer books have been rewritten to delete gendered language and rituals have been rediscovered, transformed, or newly developed to incorporate and celebrate Jewish women and their lives (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1997; Umansky & Ashton, 1992).

In contrast, feminism has been touted as the liberator of women and condemned as the destroyer of not only "traditional family values" but "the family." Both proponents and detractors of feminism have examined its influence on society. Typically, early feminist research was conducted from an essentialist perspective (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Reid Troutman & Kelly, 1994; Spelman, 1988; Young, 1994), which categorized women only by gender without the inclusion and acknowledgement of equally important characteristics such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation on their life experiences (Baber & Allen, 1992; Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; hooks, 1989; Lavender, 1986; Spelman, 1988).

Using feminist standpoint theory, women who have been at the margins of research are brought to the center (Collins, 1988, 1990, 1991; Harding, 1986). These are women who are often outsiders within the general community, feminist community, and in this study, the Jewish community

(Collins, 1991; Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). They share the usual concerns of patriarchy with other feminists but they also must contend with the patriarchy within Judaism and anti-semitism within the feminist and larger communities (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). Although this study focuses specifically on middle-class Jewish feminists, the methods and concepts can be extrapolated to other peoples of color, cultures, classes, and ethnicities.

Included in this focus is racial and ethnic identity. Women and men who are Jewish may find it difficult to find their place in the identity schema (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Langman, 1995). Racial identity is not always just Black, White or Brown. Jews may identify themselves as White for lack of any other acknowledged classification (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Langman, 1995). But to many non-Jews, Jews are not White and this is may be especially true for those Jews who are semitic looking and who do not fit a nordic or western European profile (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Lavender 1986).

For many in the general population, and especially those who reside in areas with small Jewish and feminist populations, both communities become steeped in mystery. Respondents in this study commented about the odd and often

intrusive questions they have been asked. These range from the bizarre to those that are blatantly anti-semitic and sexist. One participant was asked to explain why all Jewish women wear bathing caps in the ocean and another was asked when was the last time she had sacrificed an animal. Another respondent was asked how it felt to have crucified Jesus and a child inquired of another participant if she had "seen the light" now that she had been to his church? Whereas some of these inquiries might be amusing or attributed to ignorance, they contain an underlying, if not blatant anti-semitic tone. Inquiries about feminism tended to be in the form of challenges especially in the classroom and the work place. Some participants were questioned by other feminists on how they can be Jewish and feminist because of the overt patriarchal structure of the former. Although Judaism is patriarchal, this question completely ignores the patriarchy within Christianity, Islam, and other religions. Students in classes with acknowledged feminist instructors voiced concern that they would be graded unfairly. Other respondents had students challenge their claims to feminism on the basis of their appearance, clothing, or heterosexual orientation. Women who were in male dominated professions had to contend with isolation and the lack of support or a sense of community.

Just as Jews are not a homogenous group, neither are feminists. As this study shows, feminists can have varying definitions of and ways of incorporating feminism into their lives. It is therefore important to examine the lives of women who are both Jewish and feminist in detail, in order to dispel the misinformation that surrounds them.

My purpose for conducting this study was to explore the identity of other women who call themselves Jewish feminists, including myself. In wanting to know how my own Jewish, ethnic, and class affiliation intersects with my feminist principles and actions, I am also curious to find out how other women conceive and live a Jewish feminist life. I have seldom found my life or the lives of other women I know reflected in the research literature. Being Jewish and coming from a working class background are two domains that are seldom linked. If one is Jewish, people automatically attribute personal and class characteristics that are not necessarily correct. Being a woman of color is also seldom linked with being Jewish. I am often asked "what" I am. I do not seem to fit in a particular racial ethnic category with which the people asking are familiar. Often Jews are considered to be White, but I have never identified myself as such. People tell me they think I am Hispanic, Arabic, Greek, or a combination of ethnicities.

The fact that my heritage is uncertain to others has afforded me opportunities to experience racism, anti-semitism, and sexism. For me, feminism has helped to ameliorate the negative impact of such experiences. I wonder if this is true for other women?

#### Research Questions

The following research questions were proposed to guide this exploration into the lives of Jewish feminist women who live in small towns.

1. What does it mean to be Jewish? How do people, and in particular women, identify as Jewish? Is Jewish a spiritual, ethnic, cultural, racial, or religious identity, a combination of these, or something else?

2. What does it mean to be a feminist? What are the definitions or ideologies of feminism that women incorporate into their lives?

3. How do women incorporate Judaism or being Jewish and feminism? How do these two aspects of the self co-exist? How do they influence each other?

4. How do Jewish feminist women negotiate living in an environment that is ideologically conservative and predominantly Christian?

#### Operational Definitions

Unlike in Orthodox Jewry, no standard of Judaism or

Jewishness was imposed for this study. Participants were asked to define who they were as a Jew. For some it was strictly an ethnic, cultural, or racial identity. Others saw it also as a spiritual one. The term **Jew** or **Jewish** is generally used to connote ethnic or cultural identity, while **Judaism** refers to spiritual or religious aspects of one's life.

As an ideology and an identity, feminism has different meanings for different women, resulting in as many definitions as there are women who proclaim themselves to be feminists. Contrary to essentialist feminism, standpoint, postmodern, and multicultural feminisms recognize the many threads that comprise identity (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, and age as well as other social constructs) (Baber & Allen, 1992; Collins, 1989; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; hooks, 1989). Researchers utilizing a standpoint, postmodern, or multicultural perspective acknowledge the importance of examining how these threads intersect, mesh, and clash.

Essentialist and positivist feminist perspectives and research have been criticized because of their neglect of the multifaceted nature of women's lives (Baber & Allen, 1992; Dickerson, 1994; hooks, 1989; Spelman, 1988). In earlier studies, "women" became synonymous with "White

women", (Dickerson, 1994; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Spelman, 1988) just as in early research on identity development, "human" became synonymous with "White males". For the purpose of this study the term **feminist** is used loosely. Participants were asked to give their own definition of feminism. There was no litmus test of "acceptable" feminism.

Initial identity development research used White males as the basis for all exploration (Enns Zerbe, 1991; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Lott, 1981; Reid Troutman & Kelly, 1994; Spelman, 1988; Young, 1994). The data were either extrapolated to women, or more often women were totally absent from the research and its conclusions. When women were included, it was generally to discuss their weaknesses (as compared to men's strengths), to lament their inability to achieve full development, or to justify their submissive role (Enns Zerbe, 1991; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Lott, 1981). In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist psychologists such as Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982), and Belenky (1986) sought to develop new or altered theories of development that recognized and honored what women did and who they were in their own right. Their goal was to lift women from their submissive roles and to elevate their female attributes to a plane on the same level with those of males. Nevertheless,

some of these theories reduced "women" to "woman", implying that all females face the same situations and with the same options (Reid Troutman & Kelly, 1994; Spelman, 1988, Stacey, 1990). While it is important to acknowledge the ability of these researchers to bring women to the focus of research it is also important to go beyond that and recognize the need to examine the intersection of gender with race, class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and other social constructs.

For the purpose of this study, **self** or **selves** encompasses the aspects of personality and identity that are a part of each person. The crux of this study was the examination of the development and co-existence of the Jewish and feminist self and how these selves, as well as other aspects of the self such as those emerging from race, ethnicity, class, culture, professional status, age, and sexual orientation, are informed by one another. In this study the constructs **self(ves)** and **identity(ies)** are used interchangeably.

Race is a term that also has layers of meaning. To some it refers to three groupings of peoples, Negroid, Mongoloid and Caucasoid. The United States census has gone beyond these groupings in asking people to identify their racial status. Hispanic (not white) and Native American are

categories that have been added to Black/African American, White, and Asian/Pacific Islander. On many census forms the term White has replaced Caucasian. This change can be problematic for groups of people including Arabs, Jews, Greeks and others who can be dark in complexion and non-Western European in how they look. Many do not identify as White nor are do they receive the full privilege that is accorded to Whites in United States culture. For the purpose of this study **race** is used more loosely than "scientific" classification to acknowledge people's experience and identities.

CHAPTER TWO  
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The literature on identity development spans most of the 20th century. Although the overwhelming majority of the early literature deals with White male development (Enns Zerbe, 1991; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Lott, 1981), in the 1970s and 1980s scholars, mostly feminist psychologists, began examining the development of women (Belenky, 1986; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). This trend came about through the development of feminist theory, initially in the field of psychology. Early feminist theorists were struggling to find ways to acknowledge and research the lives and experiences of women. Pioneers in the field provided a doorway through which others would walk. Although today's feminist theorists and scholars owe a debt of gratitude to these pioneers, a new school of scholarship has emerged that places an emphasis on acknowledging diversity and the multiplicity of women's (all women's) lives (Baber & Allen, 1992; Dickerson, 1994; Reid Troutman & Kelly, 1994; Spelman, 1988).

Feminist theory provides an avenue for researchers to explore the lives of women and other marginalized groups that heretofore have been missing from the literature (Baber

& Allen, 1992). Feminist research not only makes women the focus of study but also is research conducted for the purpose of effecting change (Baber & Allen, 1992; Osmond & Thorne, 1993; Smith, 1987; Stanley, 1979). No single version of feminism exists, but rather many different feminist perspectives are available. Although the focus of the research is on women's lives, how their lives are examined, who is included in the investigation, and which questions are asked can differ (Young, 1994). Gender is still at the crux of inquiry, but standpoint, postmodern, and multicultural feminists stress the importance of investigating the intersection of gender with race, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, and other social constructs.

The following represents a review of literature in the areas of feminist standpoint theories, Jewish feminism, and Jewish identity.

#### Feminist Standpoint Theories

As more women of color and diverse experience have entered the academy, research on and for women has become more diverse. Such scholars as Spelman (1988), hooks (1989), Collins (1988, 1990) and Dickerson (1994), have opened up the research discourse. They note that in previous feminist research, the experiences of White middle-class women were

generalized to all other women. In many of these earlier studies, the race and class of participants were not even acknowledged (hooks, 1989; Reid Troutman & Kelly, 1994; Spelman, 1988). If women of color and diverse experiences were included in studies, their data were nevertheless not analyzed according to such diversity. Gender was seen as the only salient influence - disregarding the intersection of gender with race and class. Women of color, Jewish women, poor women and others of diverse experience deal with issues that are coupled with gender. Race, ethnicity, and economic status are significant filters for the gender experience. Such women experience marginality not just from a gendered perspective but also through the effects of race, class, and ethnicity.

One of the prominent feminist perspectives is standpoint. Although some researchers may use it as a way of narrowing the focus on women (Baber & Allen, 1992) for the purposes of this study, standpoint is used to broaden the scope of investigation to encompass women who are Jewish and feminist and whose perspectives were not previously included in studies of adult development, and to identify my place in the research process. Standpoint theory enables researchers to acknowledge the precept that certain members of a society experience a different reality as a consequence of their

oppression (Collins, 1988, 1990; Harding, 1986; Swigonski, 1994). A cornerstone of standpoint theory is that the perceptions and beliefs of marginalized people can provide an objectivity that may not be found in the dominant culture (Collins, 1988, 1990; Harding, 1991; Swigonski, 1994).

### Black Feminist Standpoint

Collins (1989, 1990) was one of the first Black feminist researchers to use the terms insider/outsider or the outsider within to exemplify the position of marginalized people. Her research focused on Black women who worked in domestic situations for White employers. These women were privy to the comings, goings, and intimacies of their employers. They were able to peer in at the lifestyle of White middle and upper class women and families. But while they were knowledgeable about the world of their employers, the White women and families they worked for generally knew very little about these Black women. All the White families needed or cared to know was that the work was being done. Collins recounts that often the employees felt invisible. The women and families for whom they worked would go on about their daily business without even acknowledging their presence. But Black women, other people of color, and those with diverse experiences do not have that luxury. In order to survive it is paramount to know who possesses

power, what kind of power they can wield, and how to manipulate the power holders when possible and keep out of harm's way (Collins, 1989, 1990, 1991). Rather than feeling degraded by their employers and their circumstances, these women were able to maintain their dignity and self-esteem. Many felt a sense of power in knowing personal information about their employers while maintaining their own privacy.

Although her study concerned Black women employed as domestics, Collins recommends the use of feminist standpoint to learn about the lives of other people in other life situations. As a Black woman, Collins shared a similar status to that of her research participants but she also acknowledged the privilege she has gained through her education and position in the academy. This position has enabled her to be an insider and an outsider at the same time. This positioning is true for many women in the academy and other places that have long been strongholds of patriarchy. These are women who like the Black domestics are privy to the comings and goings of their male and White counterparts but because of their gender, race, or ethnicity, may experience privilege only at the fringes.

Advocates of feminist standpoint emphasize the value of knowledge that emanates from marginalized people. Their knowledge and experience have the potential for being more

complete and less compromised than those of the majority group members (Collins, 1990). It is not necessarily in the best interest of the minority to maintain the status quo of the majority. The minority have little to gain by aiding in the propagation of false or distorted information about the dominant population. Because they have less to lose, they can be more critical in their analysis and assessment (Nielsen, 1990). One of the precepts of standpoint theory is that individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more credible than those who have merely read about such experiences (Collins, 1989, 1990; 1991).

Jewish feminists have been able to benefit from the progress made by Black feminists and others. The following is an examination of Jewish feminist writings that deal with the intersection of Judaism and feminism, what it means in both the Jewish feminist and larger communities to be a feminist Jew, and the conflicts that may ensue.

#### The Jewish Feminist Experience

One of the complaints that feminists of color have lodged at White feminists is their initial disregard for other forms of oppression besides gender (Collins, 1988, 1990, 1991; Devault, 1990; Reid Troutman & Kelly, 1994; Spelman, 1988). Many women have experienced racism,

classism, heterosexism, and anti-semitism within the Women's Movement. Many White women in the movement did not want the focus on gender to be derailed by these other issues. They contended that gender oppressed women most (Collins, 1989, 1990, 1991; Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). This may have been their experience because they did not have race and class issues to contend with. Unfortunately a struggle to see who is the most oppressed or who has had the worst experience is not uncommon in U.S. society. But that struggle is a divisive tactic that keeps marginalized peoples separated from one another and from joining with one another to seek redress. hooks (1984, 1989) has asserted that it is futile to argue about which oppression is primary. She argues that it is of greater benefit to all to determine links among oppressive systems and to understand their interactions.

This issue has plagued many Jewish feminists. As will be discussed later, some of their concerns about race, ethnicity and culture are similar to those of Black, Hispanic, and Asian women (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). However their position is seldom given the same weight or credibility. Because they might identify themselves or be identified by others as White, their oppression as a Jew can be ignored or trivialized. For

example, they are often told that they have White privilege and their concerns of anti-semitism are based on history rather than the here and now (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996).

Others wonder why any feminist would want to claim her Jewish roots, identity, or religion (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Umansky, 1991; Umansky & Ashton, 1992). To many non-Jewish and some Jewish feminists, Judaism is the epitome of patriarchy. But this stance neglects to recognize the patriarchy within Christianity, Islam, and other religions and the larger community.

Jewish feminists have started to write about their own experiences as Jews, feminists, and Americans. These are women who may identify themselves as secular, reformed, conservative, or orthodox Jews.

#### Jewish Feminist Standpoint

In her book Deborah, Golda and Me (1991), Cottin Pogrebin wrote of her life as a Jew and a feminist. She gave voice to the experiences of many Jewish women. She was harassed by the Jewish Orthodox community for trying to destroy their sense of Jewish life and tamper with their construct of Jewish morality. These criticisms are not unlike those hurled at feminists by the religious right and politically conservative communities.

Cottin Pogrebin also spoke of the anti-semitism she experienced within the feminist community. Because she was Jewish she was expected to answer for Israel's actions toward Palestinians. This is not unlike other marginalized people's experience of being expected to answer for the actions of others in their group or being held up as a representative of an entire population. Seldom do people of the majority culture face this situation. The actions of one White male are almost never generalized to all White men. When Cottin Pogrebin brought up her concerns of anti-semitism she would often be shouted down. Her concerns were often written off as Jewish or Zionist paranoia. Many people believe that anti-semitism does not exist anymore just as there are those who believe that the Holocaust never happened. To be rejected by a community in which one has heavily invested herself is especially painful. For Jewish women this rejection can occur within the Jewish community as well as within the feminist one. But Cottin Pogrebin further wrote of her continuing struggle as a Jewish feminist and her triumphs in reaching out to other women and establishing a community and network of Jewish feminists.

Historically, links and support between Jewish and Black communities have existed. Jews have figured prominently in the Civil Rights and other progressive

political movements (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Lavender, 1986; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). Blacks and Jews have supported one another when dealing with White supremacists and other neo-nazi factions. The current wave of animosity between both communities is particularly disturbing. Rather than trying to determine who has to contend with the greatest amount of suffering and discrimination, both these communities should heed the advice of hooks (1989), as previously mentioned. Being marginalized within the feminist community is the concern of other women of color as well. Only recently have more women of color and diverse experience felt that they have a place within the Women's Movement. More and more feminists realize the necessity of moving beyond a gender-only outlook, to acknowledge the importance of ending and work towards an end to racism, heterosexism, ageism, and anti-semitism.

Many Jewish feminist writers and scholars have questioned the nature of Jewish Orthodoxy and the way of life its adherents are trying to preserve (Lavender, 1986; Kaufman, 1985, 1992; Umansky, 1991; Umansky & Ashton, 1992). This work includes a number of orthodox women who also consider themselves feminist. They contend that a woman can be an Orthodox Jew and a feminist. What many of these women have done is not abandon the tenets of orthodoxy but reframe

them (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaufman, 1985, 1992; Umansky, 1991; Umansky & Ashton, 1992). They contend that rather than sublimating women, orthodoxy can uplift them. They see their role not as secondary but equal to men's. They believe that women do not have to have the same roles as men to feel equal. Although women are forbidden to participate in all but family-related rituals, they make the most of these rituals. Because there is little interaction between men and women outside of the family, orthodox women are able to establish a strong women's community of their own, a community that celebrates the biological as well as the spiritual aspects of womanhood and Jewish women.

Women of all Jewish denominations have been successful in reclaiming ancient rituals and developing new ones that celebrate the lives of women. For reformed and conservative women, the prayer book and other materials have been revised to eliminate gendered language. Cottin Pogrebin and others have rewritten the Haggadah, used during the holiday of Passover to commemorate and reflect on the Jews' exodus out of Egypt. In these feminists versions, women are no longer at the margins and in some revisions they take center stage.

A concern of non-orthodox feminists is that women are considered a distraction to the men's holy work and study in Orthodox Judaism. Even within the synagogue they are

relegated to spaces behind doors or curtains so as not to detract the men from their holy mission. Women are a distraction, one that can eroticize even the most sacred of traditions (Lavender, 1986). Because men are weak willed and easily tempted, women must be hidden from view and forbidden access (Lavender, 1986; Kaufman, 1985, 1992). Rather than requiring men to curb their salacious desires the onus and blame are placed upon women. This tendency dates back to Genesis where Lillith and Eve are held responsible for successfully tempting Adam to break his covenant with God (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Lavender, 1986). Now thousands of years later women are still paying the price for this interpretation of Genesis. Even though many Orthodox synagogues no longer require women to be hidden from view, they are still forbidden to participate fully in all aspects of the Jewish religion solely because they are not men. Women are still considered to be unclean during menstruation and husband and wife can not be intimate at that time. Many ascribed this concern directed at menstruating women to the mystery that surrounds a woman's biology. Many cultures considered this to be a time when women are most powerful which, by orthodox standards, could translate to most dangerous (Umansky & Ashton, 1992).

As with the Christian religious right, orthodox Jews

refer to scripture as the basis for the way women are treated and their submissive status. They refuse to accommodate their religious principles to a modern and secular world (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaufman, 1985, 1992; Umansky & Ashton, 1992).

Building on the discussion of what it means to be a feminist Jew, it is equally important to examine what it means to be Jewish. Is being Jewish merely a religious designation, is it a cultural, ethnic affiliation or could it be more than that?

#### Jewish Identity

It took generations and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country....It is probable that it is the Jewish community - or more accurately perhaps, its remnants-that in America has paid the highest and most extraordinary price for becoming white. For the Jews came here from countries where they were not white, and they came here in part because there were not white, and incontestably-in the eyes of the Black American (and not only in those eyes) American Jews have opted to become white.... James Baldwin as quoted in Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996, p.117).

In her article Jews in the U.S.: The rising costs of whiteness (1996) Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz paraphrased Baldwin by saying that "Before America, no one was white." She explored the racial, ethnic, and cultural identities of Jews in the United States. Unlike other minority groups, Jews do not neatly fall into one racial category. Many Jews identify

themselves as White for lack of any other classification. But are Jews White and if not what classification do they fall under? Jews have few choices. According to the U.S. census a person can be White, Black/African/Afro American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic not of White descent, or Native American. Although many U.S. Jews originated from Eastern Europe, whose people are classified as White, they do not necessarily associate with this designation. Jews were seldom accepted as citizens in the countries that they resided in. So even though my immediate ancestors come from Russia, I do not necessarily consider myself of Russian origin.

Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996) explored her life as a Jew and later on as a feminist Jew. While growing up in New York in the 1950s, she lived in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. In this environment she did not have to reflect on what it meant to be Jewish and more specifically what it meant not to be Christian. She described a life in which being Jewish was taken for granted and seldom articulated. This was her experience until she moved to the Pacific Northwest in the 1970s. There she was no longer surrounded by family or engulfed in a Jewish environment. Being a Christian was openly equated with being virtuous and normal and being a Jew cast her as an outsider who was somehow suspect. At that

point Kaye/Kantrowitz was forced to examine what it means to be Jewish in a Christian dominated society and how this identity influences her life choices and experiences. Other authors have written of somewhat similar experiences (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Evans, 1993; Langman, 1995; Lavender, 1986). Similarly, those who have lived in the south and midwest where Jewish neighborhoods and communities are not the norm are forced to contemplate the meaning of being Jewish. As with Kaye/Kantrowitz, many of these other writers found that their sense of Jewishness intensified rather than diminished in such settings. In large metropolitan areas they had the choice or luxury of blending in with other Jews. Where there were large communities of Jews many never felt the need to affiliate with a synagogue because Jewish culture surrounded them. But where the community of Jews is either minute or hidden, even many secular Jews find a need to seek out other Jews. Some do not join synagogues for religious instruction or fulfillment but to connect with other Jews. History has taught Jews that isolation is dangerous just as overt identification can be dangerous. Many Jews who would never deny their identity are at the same time reluctant to overtly admit it. Some try to pass as members of the mainstream group while others will let people assume that they are Italian, Hispanic, or of some other dark-skinned

ethnicity. But while they may gain in access to the majority culture they can lose a sense of their heritage. For history has also taught Jews that one cannot run away from who one is and that trying to do so can lead to greater loss in the end. A person may be successful for a time at assimilating into the mainstream but there is always the potential of being found out. Once one is designated as "other" she or he can lose connections with the dominant culture and have nothing to fall back on.

This then brings the discussion back to the question, what does it mean to be Jewish? Who or what are Jews? Is it merely a religious designation or is it something more? According to Jewish law anyone born of a Jewish mother is Jewish for life. Even if that person were to convert to another religion, he or she would still be considered Jewish (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991). Jewish converts to Christianity are often labeled "Jews for Jesus". Although on the one hand that label still recognizes their Jewish origins, on the other hand it may actually be used by the Christian culture to show other Jews that one can accept Jesus and still be a Jew. Jews and other non-Christians report feeling increasing pressures to convert to Christianity (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Lavender, 1986). Some churches create entire ministries just for this purpose. Even though many

Christian leaders acknowledge that Jews are God's Chosen People, apparently there is some disagreement over what they have been chosen for. There are many Christians who do not even realize that Jesus was not only born a Jew but died a Jew (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996).

Jews can be as confused as gentiles as to what a Jew is. So where do Jews fit in the identity schema? Is Jew a racial, cultural, or religious category? According to Langman (1995) to define Jews as a racial group is problematic because people of varying races are Jewish. But to relegate those who are Jewish to merely a religious identity does not fully reflect the experience of Jews in the United States and elsewhere. Whereas Langman suggested that Jews be considered a culture or an ethnicity this still leaves many Jews in a quandary as to what category or box to check on forms requiring information about racial affiliation. Kaye/Kantrowitz suggested that rather than trying to squeeze Jews into current categories, a new one should be developed, preferably one that acknowledges the marginalization of being non-Christian while at the same recognizing the White skin privilege that many Jews can access. If creating a racial or ethnic category is too difficult, Kaye/Kantrowitz suggested a term that would acknowledge what she terms "the cultural war against all

non-Christians (p. 124). "Christianism" is the term she has developed. Acknowledging that some might find this term awkward and harsh, she claimed that most "isms" seem that way - at least to those who are in the dominant position. Christianity, like heterosexism, is a way of defining who has power and privilege. This refers not only to Jews but to any group that is marginalized as non-Christians.

#### Summary

Judaism, Jewish ethnicity, and feminism as ideologies and identities are multifaceted. Their place in an individual's life can vary from person to person as well as evolve throughout a lifetime. Limited research has been conducted on the meaning of feminism and Judaism in individual women's lives. How and why Jewish women become feminist, the intersection of feminism and Judaism, and how each informs and guides their lives are domains that have received little attention. In addition, the intersection of the Jewish and feminist selves with race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age among other social constructs has nearly been invisible in the literature. The layers of identity act as filters and catalysts toward experiences. Choices and options are determined not only by gender but by these other characteristics as well.

The results of this study provide a window into the lives of women who call themselves Jewish and feminist. The data acknowledge and provide information on the variety of definitions of feminism as well as the diversity of those who are Jews, both as ideologies and practices. What does it mean to be Jewish and feminist? Are the choices, options, and experiences of Jewish feminist women different from those of other feminists and non-feminists? Do Judaism, a Jewish identity, and feminism provide guiding principles, or an ethic, that women utilize?

As stated in the introduction, feminists and Jews have been blamed and praised for a variety of conditions in the United States. The media have developed a concept of "the feminist" and "the Jew". Neither of these reflect the variety of feminists or feminisms that exist not the extent of diversity within the Jewish population. As feminism and Judaism can be important and life shaping perspectives for many women, it is important that the richness and diversity of feminism, Judaism, and Jewish feminists be recognized. For many of these women discovering the self is an on-going journey that lasts a lifetime.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Rationale for Qualitative Method

This study focused on the lives of 12 women, including myself, who identify themselves as both Jewish and feminist. As participants were asked to reflect on the development and nature of their Judaism or Jewish self and their feminism or feminist self, qualitative methods were employed.

Qualitative methods are well suited for the study of personal experience (Gilgun et al., 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Tesch, 1990). They provide a means for participants to tell their stories in their own words and allow them to control how much they will disclose (Daly, 1992). This type of methodology can open previously closed doors and give voice to untold stories.

In using feminist standpoint as a guiding theory, it is essential that the researcher look within before asking others to reflect on their own lives. As earlier stated, I chose this topic as a means not only of exploring the intersection of Judaism and feminism in other women's lives but also as an opportunity to explore these intersections in my own life as well. Reflecting on and disclosing of one's own life enables the researcher to be more sensitive to and respectful of others when they are asked to do the same. I

feel that constructing my own narrative made me even more attentive to the needs expressed by the other participants and helped insure that their voices were heard. As I asked the women who participated in this study to tell their story, the following is my own narrative.

#### Personal Narrative

My interest in this study is both personal and academic. As a Jewish feminist living in a small southern town I was curious to see who else, similar to me resided here, how they coped, what type of lives they led, and who they were as feminists and Jews. From an academic perspective this study represents a means of exploring how context [environment] shapes experiences and thus influences development throughout the lifespan.

I was concerned about whether I might be too involved and whether my personal stance might cloud my judgement or impose itself on participants. Before starting this project and throughout its duration I kept a journal that has included personal reactions as well as field notes. This provided a mechanism for me to be authentic as feminist, Jew, and researcher.

I grew up in a working-lower-middle-class Jewish family. My family is fairly new to this country. My father's family came in the 1890s and my mother's in the 1920s. We

moved to California from New York, for a better life, when I was three.

I have often wondered what my life would have been like and who I might have become if we had stayed in New York. In New York we would have been surrounded by family, at times embracing and at other times suffocating, not unlike most families. I would have grown up with other Jewish people, gone to schools that had Jewish students, and lived in an environment that although perhaps not always completely accepting, would have encompassed an awareness of Jews and Judaism. Growing up in San Diego and San Bernardino California did not afford any of this sense of community. Throughout elementary school I was always the only Jewish child in my class and unless one of my siblings was in the school at the same time, usually the only Jewish child at that school. I went to a different school almost every year. There was a Jewish boy at the one school I attended for three consecutive years. We were in the same grade but never in the same class.

Although I was generally very enthusiastic about school, at times I felt a great deal of anxiety, which usually revolved around the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter and the Jewish holidays of Hanukah, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur. This was during the 1960s

when prayer in school was the norm and multiculturalism was not a concept. My earliest memory of my being different as a Jew was in the second grade. It was near Christmas time and we were going to sing Christmas Carols. I love singing and I do not mind a round of "Jingle Bells" now and again, but back then the school celebrations were overtly religious which meant overtly Christian. Somehow I had gotten it into my head that if I uttered the words Jesus Christ something horrible would happen. I do not remember anyone saying anything specifically about this but with hindsight I have been able to surmise the origins. I knew that bad things happened to Jewish people and one of the reasons was because we did not believe in Jesus. Maybe I felt that if one did not say the name one would not invoke the anger. Always taught to be polite and respectful I stood up and joined in on the more benign songs but then it came. To this very day the song "Away in the Manger" can cause me to shiver. As the class started to sing I stood there with my mouth closed. The teacher noticed that I was not participating and stopped the entire class. She asked me why I was not singing. Of course I could not tell her. First of all I would have to say "it" and put everyone at risk and second there were all those students staring at me. I stood there unable to speak. She waited and asked again, but still I said nothing. Then

she told the class that "Unless Phyllis is going to sing nobody gets to sing." I stuck to my guns and for the first time, but not the last, I heard the word insubordination and I was sent to the principal's office. Normally a very good and cooperative student, I usually made a visit to the principal in December and March or April. In other years it was because I refused to participate in the Christmas program or to make Christmas cards/gifts. If I asked to make Hanukah cards the teacher usually had no idea what I was talking about. One year a teacher insisted that we were making Christmas cards for parents and that was that. No longer using silence I became hysterical and was sent to the principal's office.

By the time I was in fourth grade I had become pretty savvy about how to stand up for myself. Rarely were my parents ever called in, because I was usually able to resolve the issue. We had moved to a new area and during my first week of class I was able to assist someone else in his struggle, a boy who was a Jehovah's Witness. It was against his religion to say the Pledge of Allegiance. On the first day of school we all stood up, as he did and while we were all facing the wall, each muttering our own version of the pledge, he stood silently. The teacher asked him why he was not saying the Pledge. Either he was too intimidated or he

decided not to respond but when the teacher continued his harangue the boy started to cry. I decided that nothing was worth making someone cry and especially in front of one's peers. From that day on I have refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Although I knew nothing of feminism or the women's movement, I would say this was my first feminist Jewish act of protest.

My parents taught all of their children to be proud of who they are and never to apologize to anyone for being Jewish. Although my father was encouraging and told my sister and me that we could grow up to be anything we wanted, there was definitely a double standard. The boys and girls were assigned separate chores, with the girls doing the inside work and the boys the outside jobs. This might have been equitable except that we almost always lived in apartments where by anyone's standards the outside work is minimal at most. I was continually arguing with my parents about this gross unfairness, because it just did not seem right. Even with my mother, sister and myself employed outside the home, it was still assumed that we would take care of these chores. This argument continues to this day. During family get togethers my brothers spend most of their time watching television. I have decided to go on strike; during the last few get togethers I have refused to do

anything. I am not sure if anyone other than my mother gets the point but at least I no longer wear myself out physically or emotionally to a frazzle.

My family has had to contend with anti-semitism and other forms of prejudice. San Diego had numerous residential areas that were restricted and on several occasions we were refused housing. My father was very dark complected and "ethnic" looking. Although my mother was very fair complected, she looked other than White. Both spoke with a New York accent which did not help. One of my brothers and I are also dark complected and I am sure if people were not discriminating against us because they knew we were Jewish it was because they thought we were something other than White.

On a trip back to the east coast to visit family, when I was eight years old, we had one particularly unsettling experience. While in Atlanta we stopped to get gas and I went over to the drinking fountain. As I bent over to get a sip a man came rushing out to stop me. He told me I could not drink from that fountain. In my naivety I thought it was because it was a fountain for adults and there was a "special" one for children. It seems that I made the mistake of drinking from the fountain that said WHITES ONLY.

In high school many teachers and students thought I was Hispanic. When I applied for need - and scholastic-based scholarships for college I was confronted by a counselor who knew I was Jewish. She thought I was trying to pass myself off as someone in need - meaning Hispanic or an ethnicity other than Jewish. She could not believe that my family was actually in financial need. This concept did not correspond with her beliefs about Jews. To this day I am not sure if everyone else had to bring in as much documentation as I did to prove financial need.

It was in high school that I first became aware of feminism and feminists. I became involved with Planned Parenthood and the YWCA. Fortunately, for me, the YWCA that I was connected with had little to do with the Christian religion. It was through these two organizations that I was able to hear some of California's and the nation's best known women politicians. We went to Sacramento and had the privilege to meet with Shirley Chisolm, March Fong, and others. The timing of our trip was planned to coincide with the California State Legislature's debate on the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment. We were there when they voted to adopt the amendment. Even though our group was mixed racially, culturally, and by class and some of our experiences and specific outlooks may have differed, at that

place and time we felt a special kinship.

My sense of who I am as a Jew has not only been brought into question by non-Jews but within the Jewish community as well. When we lived in San Diego we were affiliated with a Reformed Synagogue that was a Jewish Temple on Fridays and Saturdays and a Unitarian Church on Sundays. It was the practice of that synagogue to have girls go through the same instruction as boys, culminating with a Bat Mitzvah at age 13. No differentiation was made between the importance of the ceremony for boys and for girls. I studied at Hebrew School assuming that I would be Bat Mitzvahed. When I was 12 we moved from San Diego to San Bernardino, a city that had only one synagogue. To try to appease as many people as possible the synagogue was Conservative. They did not acknowledge Bat Mitzvahs for girls until 1970, when I was 16 years old. By then I had lost interest and the idea of having yet another focus of study did not appeal to my adolescent sensibilities. I did go through confirmation which also occurred when I was 16. Our class decided to be avant garde and each student created her or his own presentation and means of self-expression. Students sang, danced, recited poetry, or enacted scenes from such works as "Anne Frank's Diary." I decided to write a poem that expressed my feelings as a Jew. Although today I would like

to change the gendered language I have to remind myself that I wrote this in 1970 when I was only 16. Here is the poem I wrote and read:

I am a Jew but not because I come to Temple  
Friday nights and Saturday mornings,  
I am a Jew but not because I stand here being  
confirmed for the knowledge I am to have  
learned these past years,  
I am a Jew but not because I eat gefilte fish  
and matzo,  
I am a Jew but not because my father's a doc-  
tor or a lawyer,  
I am a Jew but not because I have a large nose,  
dark skin and hair.

But I am a Jew because of my thoughts, beliefs,  
and feelings. My thoughts of justice, freedom,  
and love for all. My beliefs that all men are as  
one and there is one God of us all and my feel-  
ings that someday the world will be free and at  
peace.

People's reactions were mixed. Some students and congregants thought I was slighting those who had become doctors or lawyers, others came up to assure me that my nose was not big and that many wish they had such a small (meaning non-Jewish looking) nose.

In addition to gender and ethnicity, one is defined by class. My family was working-to-lower-middle-class and throughout my childhood we were always one paycheck away from disaster. My mother went to work when I was 8 and provided the stable of the two incomes. My father was a salesman who worked on commission, so if he did not sell his

products, he received no money. At times we lived in low-income government housing, shopped at thrift stores before it became trendy, and depended on the hand-me-downs of others. This was not the experience of most of the other Jewish people we knew, and it often made me feel like "other" within the Jewish community.

Throughout my life people have been confused about who or what I am. I found that the elders with whom I worked had a need to label me. In California, people thought I was Hispanic, Arabic, Greek, or Italian. When I lived in Washington State, Native American was added to the list. If people could not come up with a specific category it was assumed I was of mixed heritage. So in my lifetime I have experienced racism, anti-semitism, and sexism. Because of this I have never felt or affiliated with being White. Even as an adolescent I marked "other" when asked to complete demographic or census information. Each time a bureaucrat called to find out what I meant by "other." When I explained there was generally a longer than usual pause on the other end of the line. Today on many forms they do not even have the category of "other." One can be White, African American/Black, Hispanic - not of White origin, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Native American. The category White is supposed to encompass all persons of western and

eastern European decent and peoples from the Middle East. I cannot imagine that many Arabic people have experienced the same things that those from Sweden do. although I have generally not had to deal with the overt racism that someone who is Black or Asian might, neither have I experienced most of the benefits that people of light skin and nordic features get.

One of the other defining experiences I have had as a woman was when I was in my early twenties. I went to the movies with a co-worker at the local mall. We did not realize nor were there any notices that all the mall doors were locked, except one location after 11:00 p.m. If we had known this we would have parked our cars nearer to this exit. As it was we had a great distance to walk and it was raining that night. As we approached our cars, my friend had looked over her shoulder and told me not to look back. Of course, the first thing I did was look. I saw a man a few feet behind us exposing himself. As we tried to quicken our pace he grabbed the back of my dress. I was wearing high heels (the last time I ever did) and found it difficult to run. The man grabbed hold of me and tried to push me to the ground. I resisted with every fiber of my being, hitting him with my purse and trying to kick him. He grabbed me from underneath my dress, tore my pantyhose and underwear and

tried to rape me. At the same time my friend was standing there motionless - frozen with fear. She could not speak and she was unable to assist me. Finally I was able to place the heel of my shoe on his instep with extreme force. He let go and I ran. I remember yelling at my friend to move and dragging her along with me. I saw him get in his car and rather than leave the area he tried to run us down with his car. For some unknown reason, to this day, I pushed my friend into her car and I went into mine. I started after him in my car but at that point I was only able to tell that he had Texas license plates and a Datsun. I motioned for her to pull her car into a coffee shop parking lot. There was a police car and I wanted to report the incident. At this time I was employed as an investigator in the San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office. Even though I am sure I was frantic I know that I gave very specific details of the incident. The officers appeared to be taking it all down and said that a detective would contact me. When the detective did call, she revealed that the police report stated only that the man had exposed himself. It included nothing about the attempted rape and the assault that actually occurred. The detective, while thorough, was not very sympathetic. She kept telling me that I was lucky that "nothing happened." She was not the only person who responded in that manner. I

received the same reaction when I went to see a counselor and spoke with women who had been through the rape experience. I felt I was resented for having escaped, as though this reinforced the women's own guilt for not having gotten away. It was a very difficult and confusing time for me. I had been assaulted but did not know where to turn. So I turned inward and it was not until nearly 15 years later that I was able to acknowledge what had happened to me.

This experience taught me that as a woman I was vulnerable and physically at risk at any time. Much later, in graduate school, a student in a Human Sexuality class uttered the phrase that I have always disliked. After I had unexpectedly told of my experience he said, "But don't you think you're stronger because of what happened?" I know I lashed out at him maybe as a substitute for the man on that rainy night. But when people say something like that it implies that somehow I should feel gratitude toward the perpetrator and be thankful that the trauma occurred. I will never have the opportunity to know the type of person I would have become without this experience. Maybe I would have been even stronger and more self-assured. I am sure I would have been more confident about my personal safety and less suspicious of men. I would not have felt that I no longer had the freedom to go out at night or to travel by

myself. I have overcome some of these fears to the extent that I try not to let that one event and that one man dictate my life. But even still, nearly 20 years later, I am always acutely aware of my surroundings and of anyone near me.

When I moved to Blacksburg, Virginia, to attend graduate school, I had no idea that I was moving to the South, the south that was part of the Bible belt. When I thought of Virginia, I thought of it as a suburb of Washington, D.C. I mistakenly thought of it as being more aligned with the east coast than the south. I was wrong. I was shocked at the conservative nature of the students as well as some of the faculty and the staff. I had not realized that the population would not be as diverse as that in other places I had lived. And needless to say there was a very small Jewish community. I have felt a greater sense of isolation, as a Jew, living here than anyplace else, perhaps because I do not have the buffer of my family. Here I feel more threatened as a Jew than I do as a woman. I have had people make anti-semitic comments and ask intrusive questions when they find out I am Jewish. I have had people ask me whether I feel guilty about Jesus or short changed because I never got to celebrate Christmas. Of course those are questions from people who are at least knowledgeable

enough to realize that Christmas is not a Jewish holiday!

I have had students quote the New Testament in their papers and not understand why that is inappropriate. I have been astounded at how literal they are in their interpretation of scripture and how little they know of other faiths and belief systems. This ignorance is a luxury that those of us who are not Christian do not have.

Probably one of my defining moments as a Jew living in the south occurred at a county school board meeting. A segment of the populace wanted to change the names of school holidays back to "Easter" and "Christmas" from "Spring" and "Winter". Over 1,000 people attended the meeting and police were everywhere. School board members and their families had been threatened with violence and the meeting was a volatile situation. If I had not been at the meeting nor lived in the south for the past few years I would not have believed what ensued. If I had been watching it on television I would have thought that this was a caricature of "the South". But I saw what happened in person and it was frightening. I felt so much hatred, with the majority of it directed at those of us who were considered "other" and "outsider". Because of the verbal altercation I had with some of the people sitting nearby, my friends and I were fearful when we left the meeting. I truly believed that we were under the threat of a

physical attack. This situation brought back not only my own memories but those that have been instilled in me of over 2,000 years of Jewish history.

But as uncomfortable and at times unwelcomed as I have felt because of being Jewish I have found a strong community of feminist women who are accepting of me and genuinely interested in my experiences and beliefs. I have never had any reluctance about speaking of my feminism. On the first class day of each new semester, when I am introducing myself I always let the students know that I am a feminist. Sometimes I hear short gasps and often I see concerned looks, especially from the male students. I then explain what feminism means to me and how it guides and informs me as an instructor. Students seem relieved after this explanation and I hope that by the end of the semester I have been able to dispel some of the myths about feminism. Over the last few semesters I have also talked about being Jewish in the context of courses that deal with race, class, gender, and family issues. Including my own background as an example has been an interesting experience for me, one that makes me nervous but also empowers me.

Although I have found acceptance as a feminist within the women's community that acceptance has not always extended to my being Jewish. On several occasions

activities, lectures, and conferences, that are sponsored by the women's community, have been scheduled on Jewish holidays. On many occasions the event has been rescheduled when the conflict has been brought to the attention of the organizers. But there have also been several times when the organizers have refused to reschedule. I and others have been told that the date chosen was the only one available. This has to be one of my least favorite and one of the worst excuses. If I was planning something where I wanted the entire women's community to feel invited and if Christmas or Easter were the only days available I would not do it. If the women's community, and especially those in small towns, wants to garner support and receive recognition and respect they must also extend it.

So who am I as a Jew and a feminist? How do these principles guide and define me? Contrary to what some people might believe, I find the two very compatible. My initial identity as a Jew shaped my belief in fairness, honesty, and respect for myself and other people. This has meshed very well with my sense of feminism. Although I focus on gender, I also believe that all marginalized people should have a voice, an equal voice that needs to and should be heard. As far as the patriarchal nature of Judaism, I recognize that it is not much different from other religions or the so-

called secular community. One can be a Jew and not believe in all the tenets of Judaism. I have no problem in rejecting the patriarchy while grasping onto what I believe to be the true nature of Judaism and the Jewish people. I subscribe to the belief that how we act and treat other people and what we do in this life can be more important than what we believe.

It is sometimes difficult to interview other people about their lives but to "interview" oneself and to be honest with and about oneself can be an overwhelming task. In chapter five I will relate how being involved in this research project has affected my own sense of self as a feminist and as a Jew.

#### Sample Selection Process

For this research the sample consisted of women who identified themselves as both Jewish and feminist. Participants were recruited both directly and through the snowball method to provide additional leads on potential participants (Rubin, 1983; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The initial means of recruitment was an announcement placed through a feminist listserver based at the university but reaching beyond the local community. The announcement asked directly for study participants and referrals. The numbers of participants recruited directly and through the snowball

method were about equal. The only determinants for inclusion in the study were that participants reside in southwestern Virginia and identify themselves as Jewish and feminist. Because part of the focus of the research was to explore the diversity of feminism and Judaism in women's lives I applied no litmus test to gauge the type and extent of these identities and I held no preconceived definition of Jewishness or feminism.

#### Description of Participants

Participants consisted of 11 women aged between their mid-twenties and mid-fifties. Six women were over the age of 40 and five were younger (see Table 1). All but two of the women were originally from large metropolitan areas such as New York City and Philadelphia. The two who were not from the northeastern part of the United States grew up in the West or the South. Participants' length of residence in Southwest Virginia was between six months to over 20 years. Most of the women came to this community either to attend school or because they or their husbands were offered employment. The majority of women were in academic careers or graduate school. Most were associated with universities as faculty or students. All but one of the women either had or were completing a graduate degree. Their fields of study and employment varied. The majority of the women were

married and all identified themselves as heterosexual.

Table 1:

Participant Demographic Information

<u>Demographic Characteristics</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
AGE	
20-29	3
30-39	2
40-49	5
50-60	3
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	
Bachelor's Degree	1
Master's Degree	4
Doctoral Degree	7
REGION OF BIRTH	
Northeast	10
West	1
Southeast	1
PARTNERSHIP STATUS	
Married	7
Single	4
Engaged	1

## Data Collection

Participants were asked to take part in a face-to-face interview that was tape recorded. Interviews lasted from one to two hours. The location and time of the interview was left to the convenience and comfort of each participant. The only necessity was that we conduct the interview in a location where background noise would not interfere with the quality of the tape. Six of the interviews were conducted in my office, four were conducted in the offices of participants and one was conducted at the home of a participant.

To provide a venue for discussion on the development, meaning, and integration of a Jewish and feminist identity, an interview guide (Appendix A) was developed. The guide encompasses domains that pertain to both Jewish and feminist identity development, and to the intersection of race, class, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation, among other social constructs, with Jewish and feminist ideals. The format of the guide was open-ended questions with content areas pertaining to reflection on the Jewish and feminist self and particularly the context of living in a small town. Participants received a copy of the guide prior to the interview so they would have time to reflect on the questions, raise any concerns over the content, and suggest

other or alternative content areas. In actuality most of the participants stated that they were too busy to go over the guide prior to the interview.

### The Role of Shared Cultural Assumptions

In discussions with non-Jews, questions about the role of the Holocaust were raised. I was queried as to why I did not ask participants questions concerning any possible relationship between the Holocaust and Jewish identity. The Holocaust is a lived reality for most Jews, regardless of whether or not they lived through or lost family in concentration camps. There is an underlying assumption that the Holocaust has irrevocably impacted Jewish identity. Because of the Holocaust I was taught, as were most Jewish children, that I was never completely safe except when in the company of other Jews. This may account for the perception of Jews as being clannish held by some non-Jews. More importantly, this may also explain the need for Jews to seek out and connect with other Jews. The need to connect may be even more urgent when Jews are living in an environment that is not receptive to Judaism and predominantly Christian.

I must admit that as a Jew, rather than a researcher, I assumed the effects of the Holocaust and did not specifically ask them about it. A non-Jew conducting a

similar study on Jewish identity may have included specific questions on the Holocaust. Although the Holocaust may stand out as an anomaly in human experience for non-Jews this is not necessarily true for Jews. Although the experience of the Holocaust is significant and overwhelming it is also a chapter in a history filled with horrors.

#### Data Analysis Process

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed by myself and a paid transcriptionist. I read each transcript several times before developing coding categories (Marshall & Rossman, 1988). I employed data analysis techniques described by Allen (1989) and Bogdan and Biklen (1982). After several comprehensive readings of the transcripts, I initiated the coding process by noting categories or themes that emerged from the narratives. Strauss and Corbin (1990) discussed in detail the process of coding and likened it to one of comparing while questioning. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) proposed that each category should be assigned a number and that each piece of data that fits in that category be given the corresponding number. They recommended that this process be continued until the categories have been narrowed down to between 30 and 50. These 30 to 50 categories should focus on the research questions and those with the most substantiation. Once these final coding categories have

emerged, each is assigned a new number and the data are re-coded according to the final set of categories. After this has been accomplished, Bogdan and Biklen recommended sorting the data by numbers - placing each number in a separate pile. This can provide a clearer means of determining how the data fit into the categories. Themes, patterns, similarities and differences should become apparent. Whereas the final categories emerge from the narratives, initial categories are developed from the research questions. I refined the initial categories and the final categories (Appendix B) including areas such as Growing up Jewish and Feminist, The Journey to Feminism, The Role of Children and Being a Jewish Feminist in a Small Town.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

As we have for centuries listened to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak. (Gilligan, 1982, p.173)

#### Introduction

When reading through the transcripts of the interviews for this study, I was struck by the flow and rhythm of each woman's life. To preserve the integrity of their stories, I decided to present them as case studies. In this way each woman's description of her life and lived experience is respected. Each story is constructed along four broad thematic areas. In the first, Growing up Female and Jewish, are participants' perception of what it was like in their family of origin to be a girl and to be Jewish. This section is broken into two areas: Being a Girl and Being Jewish. Being a Girl contains participants' reflections on what it was like to be a daughter, sister or granddaughter in their family of origin. Many of the participants pointed to experiences in their youth that provided the gateway to the feminists they became in their adulthood. Some of the participants discussed family rules related to gender and others talked about experiences that helped define their gender. The section on Being Jewish includes participants'

views on what it meant to be Jewish and especially on the role of females in their Jewish families. This section covers their early impressions of Judaism and their identity as a Jew. How their family of origin influenced their identity in their youth and then how this initial identity relates to their current one is discussed.

All of the women in this study discussed the how and why of becoming feminist, their definition of feminism, as well as the evolution of their feminist self. These topics are explored in *The Feminist Journey*. Next, in *Being a Jewish Feminist in a Small Town*, is information about the possible influence that living in a small, conservative town has on participants' Jewish feminist identities. Having discussed how they developed a Jewish and a feminist identity, in the final section I explore *The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism*. Participants reflected on how and if these two identities and ideologies clash and co-exist. In addition, some of the women talked about how they have decided to or plan on rearing their own children within the contexts of Judaism and feminism.

Each of these threads builds upon the other and when woven together provide insight into the lives of women who are Jewish, feminist, and reside in a small town. Each story enables the reader to see the development of the Jewish, the

feminist, and the Jewish feminist self.

To ensure confidentiality and protect their identity and privacy, I gave each participant a pseudonym. Whereas the use of a pseudonym may be routine in many studies, in this one it became essential, as the community of Jews, feminists, and particularly Jewish feminists is small in Southwest Virginia. For pseudonyms I chose the names of women from the Bible and Jewish folklore who are known for their wisdom, courage, and deeds. The names were assigned at random and there is no direct correlation between the pseudonym and the participant to whom it was assigned. Table 2 provides information on each participant by pseudonym.

Table 2

Information on Participants by Pseudonym

Pseudonym	Age	Current Occupation	Region of Origin	Tenure in SW VA	Partner Status	Parent Status
Leah	50s	Student	Northeast	1 yr	Divorced	0 Child
Lillith	40s	Student/ FT Profsnl	Northeast	20+ yrs	Married	3 Child
Sarah	30s	Faculty	Northeast	2 yrs	Married	0 Child
Ruth	40s	Faculty	Northeast	1 yr	Married	0 Child
Hannah	40s	Faculty	Northeast	19 yrs	Married	2 Child
Deborah	40s	Univ Staff	Northeast	9 yrs	Married	3 Child
Rachel	30s	Student	Southeast	2 yrs	Engaged	0 Child
Esther	50s	Faculty	West	20+ yrs	Married	2 Child
Miriam	20s	Profsnl	Northeast	7 yrs	Single	0 Child
Tovah	30s	Student	Midwest	3 yrs	Single	0 Child
Eve	50s	Faculty	Northeast	20+ yrs	Married	2 Child
Phyllis	40s	Student	Northeast	6 yrs	Single	0 Child

## Leah

Leah is a woman in her 50s who has led many lives. She is an artist, musician, student, and has been employed in several different professional capacities. Although she is originally from the east coast, she has lived in other regions of the United States. She came to Southwest Virginia to live the life of a student and complete a doctoral degree.

### Growing up Female and Jewish

#### Being a Girl

Leah grew up in what she calls "an untraditional family". She grew up with three brothers and she was the second eldest child. Although her father was patriarchal he did not differentiate in his treatment between her and her brothers. She said:

I was the princess, I hate to admit it. I could do anything my brothers could do, my father gave me that.

Leah believes that his feelings toward her resulted from his relationship with his own mother.

My father's mother was very much the matriarch of the family, and a very strong woman who always did things her own way. She use to run by the beach until she was 9 months pregnant. Always did things her own way. And my father saw a lot of those same qualities in me - he was close to this mother. So he nurtured a lot of that in me. I could do anything my brothers could do.

Although her father was the patriarch, he participated in the children's daily upbringing. As a writer he was often

home and would tend to the children's needs such as feeding and bathing. This was not the experience of most of Leah's friends. When friends came over and saw her father at home, during the day, they asked if he had a job? Leah believes this provided her with the insight that men and women need not have specific roles based solely on gender.

Leah's mother was reared more traditionally and when Leah's maternal grandmother visited there were problems. When this grandmother lived with the family she voiced her concern that her granddaughter was not being brought up properly - in a lady like manner. Leah recalled:

... for instance at nine years old when my grandmother was living with us she was going to domesticate me and I was very much against domestication. She use to say that I was always on rooftops more that I was on the ground and it bothered her - she was very traditional. And it became very hard for me because I would have to stay in and do the dishes. Which means just filling the dishwasher but it was still separating me from my brothers which I was not used to.

Leah's grandmother's concept of what it meant to be a girl was in direct conflict with how Leah had been raised. Because her family valued the "art of arguing" or proving one's case, Leah decided to take matters into her own hands. Although she and her brothers were not encouraged to defy their parents they were encouraged to express and to stand up for themselves. To get the point across that she did not appreciate being singled out from her brothers, merely

because she was a girl, Leah explained how she handled the situation:

So at nine years old I had a sit down strike in front of the sink and I stayed there until my father came home, which was rather late. And I explained to him that, "You always told me I could do anything my brothers could do", which was not popular, that kind of thing. My brothers kind of beat me up because they had to do the dishes after that.

Although she enjoyed the equal opportunity at home, Leah noted that it did not necessarily prepare her for what to expect from those outside of her immediate family. She feels that her family was more gender neutral then what was experienced by other families in the 1950s and 1960s. She was encouraged to get an education and pursue her artistic talents rather than prepare herself only to be a wife and mother. This encouragement came from both her parents. Although her mother was reared in a more traditional household she never told her daughter that she could not do something because she was a girl. Leah summed up her experience thus:

So I grew up in a very untraditional household, so my roles were very definitely reversed from the traditional ones which caused conflict, especially from the outside. And my mother who was brought up very traditionally didn't exactly know how to deal with me because I was rebelling against those traditions and yet underneath, I found out later on in life that it was something she really enjoyed.

## Being Jewish

Leah's family's sense of Judaism or being Jewish was mixed. She explained that:

my father refused to acknowledge his Judaism. He changed his name because a lot of his publications were not published under his real name. He resubmitted all of his manuscripts with his pseudonym and everything was published. So there was a high anti-semitism in the publishing world.

Her mother celebrated would keep all the Jewish holidays and they went to Temple on the "important occasions." And although she was not brought up in a traditional or religious Jewish home, Leah still strongly identifies culturally as a Jew. Part of her father's concern was that if they were "too Jewish" they would be targets of anti-semitism. This was a concern that was felt and experienced by many Jews in the United States (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996).

Leah's identity as a Jew is also ethnic. Although Jews can have many different appearances, Leah said that has been mistaken for everything from "Arab, Italian, American Indian" and that, "I'd rather identify myself with who I am rather than someone speculating."

### The Journey to Feminism

When asked to discuss her concept of feminism and its influence in her life, Leah stated that she was a feminist before someone coined the word. When asked to give a working

definition of feminism, Leah explained that

it is a freedom of defining who I am with my wants and desires. I don't feel I have a barrier.

She further stated that she has found her weight to be more of a barrier than her gender. People may prejudge her more because of her size than because she is a woman. This is a new experience for Leah, who until a few years ago was not overweight. Her own concerns about her weight are more related to health than appearance.

Leah was hesitant in using the term feminist to describe herself. She felt that it was a term that not only had negative connotations but that it was connected to the past. Although she believes in the tenets of feminism and would tell people that she was a feminist if asked, Leah seldom uses the term herself.

One thing I will identify myself early as a Jew, rarely, rarely as a feminist. Because it carries so much, it carries a time element it really is a part of the 60s culture and no one knows what it is and it has been stereotyped to such a negative degree that people don't understand it. So I would rather discuss gender issues or demographic issues and gender roles.

#### Being Jewish and Feminist in a Small Town

Although she grew up in New York City, Leah has lived in New England and now Southwest Virginia. Since leaving New York, she has primarily lived in small cities or towns. During the interview I asked if she had a different sense of

who she was as a feminist and a Jew since leaving New York. One of the things she was most conscious about, living in small towns especially in New England and the south, was her mannerisms. She found that she needed to rein herself in, not be too effusive. She tried not to talk as much with her hands or as passionately as she once did. Leah has found that behavior that seemed common in New York is conspicuous in other parts of the country.

When comparing New England to Southwest Virginia, Leah found some similarities as well as differences.

I've run into some anti-semitism there [New England]. Down here everyone is friendly but you're not sure about their sincerity. So there's a strange thing that goes on. I have decided to identify myself immediately as being Jewish. And you know the old joke - well we have a synagogue here in town on Church Street yet. But I find that it's, there's a slight similar strain between New England and here, they're both White - as far as racially - and I've learned to mingle and have changed some of my own cultural ways. And to some of those things I have acquiesced to just because I don't want it to become a barrier. And yet among close friends, who are not, most of my friends are not Jewish, I'm very comfortable and can be myself. But it was that initial initiation of understanding that I have some things that are normal in my life that are not normal for many cultures. Then I can use my sense of humor to overcome rather than get angry.

When asked about confronting anti-semitism in small towns, Leah again referred to her humor as a way of dealing with people. She found that her sarcastic wit or her willingness to educate people usually worked. She believes

that most people say things out of ignorance and once they get to know a real Jewish person, they often change their minds.

I wear it purposely [Jewish identity] and I use humor a great deal. I said before that I find myself in positions of constantly educating. It also keeps the remarks down. And I also don't fit all the stereotypes. I'm not wealthy, I'm not quote cheap, I have jewelry, good jewelry but I don't wear a lot of it. So I'm constantly breaking those barriers just by my presence. And because I'm proud of the fact of who I am I don't go around announcing it to the world. ... and I've been in other professional arenas where there has been some anti-semitism which I've felt it, not comfortably, but I have certainly dealt with it.

When I asked Leah if she had been asked questions about being Jewish she responded with:

Oh yes and the strangest question I've ever had someone ask me, it came out of the blue is - Why do all Jewish women wear bathing caps in the ocean?

When asked if living in a small community where few Jews resided made her feel more self conscious or inhibited, Leah replied:

it does seem that that flavor of anti-semitism or prejudice makes me more culturally sensitive, more public.

#### The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

Leah felt that her Jewish identity and heritage had influenced her sense of herself as a strong woman. She had a number of strong Jewish women in her family to help guide her. When asked what role she felt Judaism played in her

development as a strong woman Leah explained:

I think it [Jewish identity/culture] did. And I think because a lot of the Jewish women were strong, I felt like I had some precedence to follow. Yet society was very traditional and therefore it was the conflict between where I was and how I define myself. And I always tried to be myself but I might have to transition more delicately in some place than others.

For Leah then, Judaism or her identity as a Jew, not only co-existed with her feminism but in fact may have been the impetus for it. Rather than being polar opposites it was Judaism that laid the ground work for feminism. This in fact is a prevalent theme through all of the participants' interviews. As will be discussed later, growing up as an "outsider" and being labeled different proved to be empowering for many of these women. For them there was no contradiction in being Jewish and feminist.

### Lillith

Lillith is a woman in her 40s who is the mother of three children. She is also a doctoral student and works full time. As Leah, she is originally from the northeast but has lived most of her adulthood in Southwest Virginia.

#### Growing up Female and Jewish

### Being a Girl

Unlike Leah, Lillith grew up in a more traditional family where her father was the patriarch. Roles and rules

were defined by gender. When asked how her family might have influenced her sense of herself as a woman or her concept of feminism, Lillith spoke of her difficulty with her father:

I was rebelling against my father who was patriarchal, head of the household who did not value his daughters very much. I have a brother and a sister and it was very obvious from the way that the resources were distributed, in our family, that my brother was the valued child. And so growing up I've always felt a strong need to assert myself as a woman. I've never wavered from that.

In further discussing how her relationship with her father has shaped her own attitudes, Lillith says:

You have to understand my father died when I was 15, so that really set me up for some hard times because I basically didn't like him, I felt abused by him, not physically, but certainly emotionally. And here he died when I was in the height of my liberal rebellion and I couldn't rebel against him and I felt very guilty for disliking him.

Lillith's relationship with her father influenced her initial career choices. Her father believed that the only profession suitable for women was that of a teacher. For Lillith this meant that she was not going to teach, under any circumstances. She refused to take typing classes because she thought they were too stereotypical female and chose to go into a field that was male dominated - in many ways just to spite her father. It is now with maturity, increased self confidence, and the internalization of her feminism that she is making choices for herself rather than to spite her father.

## Being Jewish

As did many of the participants in this study, Lillith lived in a community, while growing up, where Jews resided in large numbers. Although her family was not orthodox or always affiliated with a synagogue, they had a very strong Jewish identity. When I asked Lillith how she identified as a Jew, she responded that it was a cultural, ethnic, racial, and spiritual identity. Although her hometown had a large Jewish population, Lillith said there was still a Christian bias in the schools and the community.

You know even though I grew up in a neighborhood that was probably almost 50% Jewish - this was a long time ago and there were still problems. We still sang Christmas Carols. I remember very distinctly that the Christmas Carols made me terribly uncomfortable and worse yet when I was in sixth grade, we had a Christmas Play and the principal asked me to play Mary. And you know I was terribly conflicted, I couldn't say no to the principal, on the other hand I knew my parents would kill me if I did this, you know. So I finally just had to tell my parents and they interceded for me and the upshot was that there was no Christmas play and it was very obvious that it was because my family had complained about it.

This experience, as well as others, provided Lillith with the knowledge that Jews can be outsiders even in communities where they are well represented.

## The Journey to Feminism

When asked for a definition or concept of feminism, Lillith had this to say: "I think it's equal rights for

women." Asked how this ideology was shaped or if she had a defining moment for her feminism, Lillith related this story:

The very formative part of my life was doing a Master's in a male dominated field. This department was very male almost misogynous at least it was when I was there and I finished my degree. So it might have changed, I'd like to hope it has. That was very formative for me because I came into that feeling I was a feminist but being in that program, seeing women treated the way they were made me even more inclined to want to fight for women's rights....and also how to make women more successful in some of those fields, how they can be more successful because it was tortuous for me in that program.

Lillith also pointed to her father's attitudes as helping to define her own. Being diminished by her father fostered the need to achieve and be validated elsewhere. After her father's death, Lillith's mother became more supportive of her goals. Her mother, in fact, went back to school for a graduate degree and began working outside of the home. This provided a positive role model for Lillith.

#### Being Jewish and Feminist in a Small Town

Although she grew up in the northeast, Lillith has lived in Southwest Virginia for most of her adulthood. She feels that the environment here has had an impact of her sense of both Judaism and feminism. In relationship to her Jewish identity, Lillith noted that:

Being active in a synagogue is kind of a thing I'm much more likely to do here that I would have

in a large synagogue in a big city because it's very personal, it's not very materialistic like many of the large synagogues are. I have a lot of freedom to experiment because almost anyone's labor is valued. So I, you know, can have more power than I would and more effect really more power than I could in a large synagogue. Plus I really feel the need to connect here, because there are so few of us and for my children's sake. It's important to know, you know make a Jewish home for them here and for them too feel connected. And you know let's face it, we're in the Bible Belt and if you don't protect your interests you can get walked on very easily.

Lillith believes that living in a small town has strengthened her Jewish identity rather than diminishing it. When she lived in larger cities she never felt the need to join a synagogue. She felt secure in knowing that there was a large Jewish community surrounding her almost like a buffer. In referring to this Lillith stated:

It certainly strengthened my identity, there's no doubt about it. We lived in [name deleted] before we lived here and it's a fairly big city with several synagogues and basically we never went to the synagogue there. We had friends who were Jewish and we celebrated holidays and all that stuff and had some Jewish identity but we have much more here. I mean I always knew I would be a cultural and ethnic Jew, but to be that religious, I mean we basically go to services every Shabbat. I could never have imagined myself doing that before we moved here.

When she was asked what it meant to her to be a Jew,

Lillith stated:

There's a strong history and tradition, a strong ethic. I like the large circle of life. Particularly ones that involve music. I really enjoy that connection, both with the distant past and with the

community itself, here because we're pretty small and we get to know each other pretty well.

When asked how this identity or ideology had been shaped

Lillith said:

Oh it's been shaped by my parents and my family background and then even probably more so living in a small town where there aren't very many Jews.

Lillith has found being a feminist, in a small community, less complicated than being Jewish. Because of her university association, she finds there is a strong feminist community that she can participate in. She is seldom questioned to explain her feminism in the same manner that she may be asked to discuss being Jewish.

#### The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

As much as her father may have influenced her decisions when she was younger, Lillith's children have been a tremendous influence in how she leads her life now. She feels as a Jew and a feminist that she models appropriate ways of acting for her children. She wants them and encourages them to stand up for themselves as Jews and men and women. Lillith talked about her concerns for her children having to deal with more overt forms of anti-semitism than she was confronted with. School programs are overtly Christian and she feels that her children are handicapped for being "other". On the other hand, she believes that her children are very self-confident in who they are and what they

believe.

As far as gender she believes that her sons treat women with respect and as equals. Her daughter, who is in college, is majoring in Women's Studies. Although they are close she is concerned because her daughter is computer illiterate. This is particularly perplexing because everyone else in the family are "real computer hacks". I asked if this may be her daughter's form of rebellion. Lillith agreed that it might be but she did not want it to handicap her daughter the way that some of her forms of rebellion handicapped her.

For Lillith, Judaism and feminism are complimentary ideologies and identities. They both acknowledge and honor education, family, and striving to assist others. She feels no conflict in being a Jew and a feminist. Of course she acknowledges changes that have been made to the services and liturgy at the local synagogue. But rather than diminish the content of the service, Lillith believes that including women strengthens and adds dimension to the liturgy and the community.

#### Sarah

Sarah is a woman in her 30s who has moved to Southwest Virginia, in the last few years, from the northeast. Although she grew up in the northeast she went to school in

the midwest and in New England. She has lived the longest period of her adulthood in the midwest. Her career is centered around women's issues in the work place, in the classroom, and in research.

### Growing up Female and Jewish

#### Being a Girl

Like many of the women who participated in this study, Sarah comes from a traditional home, at least in terms of gender. There were specific chores and expectations for boys and girls. As Sarah explained:

I have two brothers and a sister. And the two girls are in the middle and I'm the younger of the two girls. But you know dinner would end and the boys and my father would adjourn to the living room. And then the girls had two choices, either you go help mom, or if as we started to do, if we complained about the fact that there is a double standard and that the boys don't have to help, mom turns into the martyr and says, "Fine I'll do it myself". So those were our two options and more and more I went to making her a martyr because I just couldn't handle the double standard of the boys not having to do things that the girls had to.

Sarah discussed how the chores that the boys did were not equivalent to what the girls were assigned to do. The boys were to mow the lawn and take out the trash. But as Sarah pointed out the lawn and the trash were only done weekly while the dishes, laundry, meals, and cleaning were done at least daily. Because of her continued complaining and trying to point out the injustice in the arrangements Sarah was

"categorized in my family, actually tagged as the feminist."

### Being Jewish

Although she is not a practicing Jew, Sarah said she still has a strong Jewish identity. She further commented:

I'm Jewish on both sides. All my parents, all my grandparents, everyone as far back as we know is Jewish. And I was raised in a home that practiced reformed Jewish. I went to synagogue, I had a Bat Mitzvah, I was confirmed, I did the full thing. Now as an adult, well sort of late adolescence into my adulthood, I had some disagreements and they were a few, some of those with Judaism and I have found that for me that it's not important to go to synagogue or do those sorts of things. However, I still, I very much identify myself as a Jewish person because I think of that as a cultural identity.

When asked what being Jewish meant or how her identity or ideology had been shaped, Sarah replied:

Well, what it means to me has a lot to do with tradition, background, family. It's the religion that has been passed down to me through my family. I think in particular of my mother who has been the more observant of my two parents. She was raised in a conservative home. It meant a lot to her that she was raised that way, and it meant a lot to her that we be raised that way. On my father's side, my paternal great grandfather was a Rabbi. There is a congregation on the east coast called by our name. Its a Hasidic Congregation. There's this sort of maverick family member, who's been doing family research on the name and he's traced us back to some 16th century Rabbi somewhere. So it's a tradition, a proud tradition to me and it means a lot in that sense, that it's a lineage.

Some of the concerns and fears that many Jewish children feel for safety have been transmitted down through the generations. Even if one did not directly lose family

during the Holocaust, most Jews are aware of its horror and history certainly shows that being Jewish can be equated with being in danger. Sarah talked about her own family's history:

My father as a kid got beaten up for being Jewish. He was born in 1932, his parents had, well his grandparents had fled the pogroms in Russia. There was a family legacy that being Jewish could get you hurt. My parents would talk about the Holocaust, my father would talk about the Catholic kids beating him up because he was Jewish and even though we never encountered any of that because our school was so heavily Jewish, you still, we were aware that not everyone liked Jewish people.

As with many Jews, Sarah questions how her identity should be labeled. For her it is her cultural and ethnic identity. She takes issue with those who use it as a racial category:

I remember having a discussion with a class one time about whether Judaism is a race. And a couple of people in my class, who were not Jewish, said they thought of Judaism as a race. And I never thought of it that way, and I still don't think of it that way. I think of it as an ethnicity because there are multiple races depending on Sephardic or Ashkenazi. So when I think about my race, I tend to think of it as White, eastern European, if I'm going to go back. When I think about race in the context of feminism, I tend to think about even as a Jewish person I sometimes feel a little uncomfortable with Jewish feminists, identifying themselves as a race, sometimes that makes me nervous, because I think that I have benefitted from White privilege. And I think I have certainly benefitted from class privilege. And I can't say, "Well because I'm Jewish I've been marginalized in the same way that an African American person has been marginalized." I'm just uncomfortable with that, so that's my personal take on that.

## The Journey to Feminism

When asked to give a definition of feminism, Sarah responded:

I kind of define it in its simplest terms as equality, equal opportunity and the freedom from words, stereotypes and to know women's scope and narrative potential. There's lots of other ways to define feminism, lots of other people who would choose different words, but I tend to define it in that broad way, which to me suggests that a lot more people are feminist than may believe it. Because if you ask they'll say yeah, I believe in equal opportunity but I'm not a feminist. So that's the way I tend to define it.

When asked when she first heard the term feminism Sarah thought it was probably in college and that she immediately latched on to it. Sarah went to a private women's school starting in junior high through high school and although she formalized her sense of feminism in college, she believes it was this school that helped to plant and nurture the seeds. The teachers were encouraging of her capabilities and urged her to succeed. Although her family was pro-education she feels that the environment at the school is what spurred her on to attend not only college but graduate school. Sarah feels that the teachers and many of her classmates were excellent role models of strong, successful women.

## Being Jewish and Feminist in a Small Town

Living in Southwest Virginia is not Sarah's first experience of living in a small town. She has also lived in a small isolated area of New England as well as a mid-sized city in the midwest. But moving to Southwestern Virginia has proved to be somewhat different from her previous experiences:

Living here I definitely had the sense that I was much more of a minority that I had ever been before. For example, I remember being home, I think it was the first week I was here, I hadn't started work yet and I was unpacking boxes in the house. I had the news on, the noon news and they break into, they had something called God's Minute. It was an explicitly Christian prayer in the middle of the noon news and I kept thinking, "How can they do that?" You know, how can they so that, I mean it wasn't even ecumenical it was Jesus, and I thought this was really strange.

Sarah also commented that although people may not seem overtly anti-semitic they are overt in their assumption that Christianity is accepted by everyone. She and her husband have purchased a house out in the country and although people have been gracious and accepting she cannot get away from the fact that she is living in a predominantly Christian environment:

I have felt more surrounded, not again that there's been anything remotely like anti-semitism, but as I drive around there are half a dozen churches, many of them Pentecostal or Baptist. It's just really the assumptions that get me, that people are Christian or at least will put up with it. It's that equation in this part of the country, the assumption that

it's ok with everybody to talk about Jesus all the time and that you're just a good, upright moral person (referring to Christians) and that really bothers me.

But rather than diminishing her sense of identity, Sarah believes that the environment has strengthened it.

I always identified myself as Jewish and whether I belong to a synagogue or not I always will but it [living here] certainly has cemented my identification with it and it has made it stronger.

When asked if she had encountered experiences ranging from anti-semitism to curiosity about being Jewish, Sarah related an experience she had talking to a group of children at a local church:

So I came into this class with these 10 year olds and they were thrilled, they were just thrilled. This one little boy, right away said "You're Jewish, that is so cool." And they had a ton of questions and the questions ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous. This one little boy, very bright and had clearly done a lot of reading, and had read about the Holocaust and had questions about it and the numbers tattooed on the arms and very complicated questions. And then the other kids were still sort of stuck on do Jews celebrate 4th of July, you know a lot of secular holidays. And at one point I told them that the Jewish, that we had just switched, that Rosh Hashanah had just passed and we had just switched to a new year and it was whatever, 5757. And the kids wanted to know why the year is different from 1996. The teacher sort of lead them along and why we call it 1996 and how it dated from Christ's Crucifixion. So they remembered that and I then knew I was sort of treading on thin ice, well Jewish people don't think about Jesus the same way you do. And my husband and I had talked a long time before hand how to, he said, "Well I don't think you should talk about that." I said, "How can we not talk about that, that's the fundamental difference?" I said to them that

Jewish people don't think of Jesus as the Messiah. And they looked at me and said, "What do you think he is?" "We think he was just a man, we don't think he was the Messiah" and they said, "How do you know, could you be wrong?" I said, "No we're pretty sure that we'll know when it comes along." And one little boy at the end very innocently raised his hand and said, "But now that you've been here," he said, "What are you going to do when you go back, are you just going to fake it?" It was a very sweet and earnest question and it wasn't even like they had proselytized to me but he thought that somehow just being in that building had converted me. And I said, "No, just because I think one way and you think another way doesn't mean that I'm wrong and you're right or you're wrong and I'm right either, we can think differently about this." They were very excited, very enthusiastic but the level of ignorance, as welcoming as they and their parents were, they really were, I was appalled by the level of ignorance. Because as a Jewish person you're never allowed to be that ignorant about Christianity.

Whereas being Jewish gave her sense of otherness, feminism gave the feeling of inclusion. Sarah had few concerns with her living as a feminist in a small town.

Her comfort as a feminist may in part stem from Sarah's close alignment with the women's community. She believes she is fortunate to work in the women's community because she is expected to be a feminist. She does not have to make excuses or pretenses for her actions or her words. On the other hand, she feels she also gets "pegged" by other people's definitions of feminism and they might make assumptions concerning what she will say and do in given situations.

## The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

When asked how she saw feminism intersecting or connecting with Judaism, Sarah replied:

In some ways I think of both of them as marginalized identities. I think about them both as resisting something that's in place. And sometimes they just blend together because something that you might call the patriarchy as a feminist is not so different from fighting against the sexist Rabbi or the father, the father and the mother who tell the boys to go sit down and the girls go clean up. And sometimes it all blends together and certainly Judaism has its own patriarchy firmly in place. So it sounds like they are both on the margins in some ways that connect.

As did many of the other participants, Sarah saw ways that her sense of Jewishness had actually prepared her for who she would become as a feminist:

There are things about Judaism that I really treasure in terms of a cultural identity. There are certain kinds and these are the things that I feel like I still believe in and stick too even though I've discarded all that stuff about God. That is the sense of mitzvot [good deeds, kindnesses], doing mitzvot, that was something that really sunk in. That mattered to me and you think that sense of doing mitzvot has carried over into my feminism in terms of wanting to help people. Feminism is something that can help people that not just gives me, individually a better life but can really produce positive social changes.

Through the course of the interview Sarah realized another connection:

I guess I'm realizing as I talk, as you asked about the connections between Judaism and feminism, that I tend to lump together what I think of as patriarchal ways of thinking and what I think of as Christian ways of thinking. I tend to, not

that Jews aren't guilty of their own forms of patriarchy, but who has the power, and I tend to lump together all of that, that very Christian mind-set with the patriarchy.

Although many of participants in this study became affiliated with a synagogue once they had children, Sarah is not so sure that if she has children she will. Her husband is a gentile and neither one of them is actively practicing their religion. Sarah says:

I don't know how I'll react when I have children, but somehow I doubt that I'll be getting into the synagogue, I think I can transmit the message in other ways.

### Ruth

Ruth has recently moved to Southwest Virginia. She is originally from the northeast but has also lived in New England. She is a faculty member at an area college. Most of her life has been spent in larger, urban areas.

#### Growing up Female and Jewish

##### Being a Girl

Ruth's family was somewhat traditional in its practice of Judaism as well as its values concerning gender. Throughout her life the messages she received concerning gender were mixed. It seemed that she was on fairly equal footing with her brothers but this did not necessarily extend to her father's perception of her outside of the

family. Ruth has three brothers and she is a middle child. Ruth discussed her family's stance on gender and how it related to whether or not she would attend college and if so what the appropriate major would be. Although her father was initially against sending her to college, Ruth got some surprising support from her mother and her older brother. This was also the moment that Ruth's feminist consciousness began to come to the fore:

My father was pretty traditional and I think it actually started when I was applying to college and my father didn't want to send me to college and my mother basically said, "I am going to send her to college, I'm going to send her and I'll pay for it." And that was the only time I ever heard my parents argue. And my oldest brother also, who was already in college, also was a part of the whole thing and it was amazing. I'd never really, I never thought that I wouldn't go. But then there was like this strange thing that came out of my father saying, "Oh she's just going to be a piano teacher and get married". So I mean that's when it became kind of jelled. And I think that growing up with my brothers, especially my oldest brother and my youngest brother, I was always part of the family in the same way that they were. And so I got my identity as just one of the guys, which is a problem sometimes cause you're sometimes not one of the girls.

Ruth talked about her father's initial lack of confidence in her abilities as a student. She said that she was pretty intimidated by him but now that she has achieved such a high stature he is proud of her accomplishments and that he has a doctor for a daughter.

## Being Jewish

Ruth's family was fairly observant in their practice of Judaism. They attended their synagogue regularly and Ruth went through the religious instruction that was available to girls. Although her brothers were Bar Mitzvahed she opted not to go through a Bat Mitzvah. She says that she was too shy. She feels she has a cultural, ethnic, spiritual, and religious connection to Judaism. She was active in youth organizations in her adolescence and is very forthright in letting people know who she is. When asked what it meant to be a Jew, Ruth put it this way:

It's funny but in some ways being a Jew means sort of having a different way of thinking about time. And there's this sort of dual thing that's happening, you know you're sort of living in Christian time, but you know that there's this other one that's really going on its own way. And so that's really kind of, in many ways, 'cause a lot of things that I do that have to do with being Jewish because I don't practice that much any more. I go to services occasionally but not very much. But when I have to light the candles, you know, on Friday nights that's something that's always changing. And so, but it's something that doesn't, so I mean, that's the kind of thing that makes me, gives me the sense of being Jewish.

## The Journey to Feminism

When asked about her definition of feminism or what it meant for her to be a feminist Ruth explained:

I think what it means to be a feminist is basically to be able to be myself, basically. To be myself as a woman and to have equal opportunity.

Unlike Leah, who felt she had been born a feminist, Ruth's feminist identity slowly evolved. Her evolution was nurtured by experiences concerning her mother's death, her mother's encouragement and faith in her abilities, and the educational and professional attainments Ruth has achieved.

#### Being a Jewish Feminist in a Small Town

Although this is Ruth's first experience of living in a small town she seems to have adjusted well. As with many of the participants in this study, Ruth said she has a greater sense of identity and connection than when she was living in communities with larger Jewish and feminist populations:

In fact I feel more connected because I came here and immediately went to High Holiday Services and met some new faculty who were also Jewish women, so I sort of keep that connection going.

Ruth also talked about how she was less closely affiliated with formal Jewish practice when she lived in the northeast. That was because her husband, although he was Jewish, was not as interested as she was in attending services.

#### The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

Although today Ruth feels that her Judaism and feminism accommodate one another, this has not always been the case. She told of a particularly painful experience that shook her sense of faith:

For a while I completely rejected Judaism. I completely rejected it, not as a way of life but as a religious institution. It was most difficult

for me when my mother died and I was going to services every morning, I went with my father to pray and one time I came and they like looked at me and said, "We can't use you", because they needed a minyan [a minyan consists of 10 men, which is the number needed to conduct prayer]. And it was at that point that I thought, this isn't for me. I mean, who are they? It was so soon after she had died. They were idiots, you know, but it was what they believed. And it felt, it was really horrible.

Ruth felt rejected and deemed not fit to pray because of her gender. This was at a time when she was reaching out to her community to help her cope with the loss of her mother so this rejection was particularly poignant.

Ruth does not have the same feeling in her interactions with the local Jewish community. The Rabbi is female and the services are much more inclusive. She has even been asked to participate in leading the service but has declined due to lack of time. Ruth has established a sense of community that is inclusive of both her feminist and Jewish selves.

### Hannah

Hannah was born in the northeast but has lived most of her adult life in various locations throughout the south. Like many of the participants she is a faculty member at an area college. Her family life was not as traditional as that of some of the other participants. She received a great deal of support for her artistic and educational aspirations from her mother and her maternal grandmother. She has two

brothers and her family practiced reformed Judaism.

### Growing up Female and Jewish

#### Being a Girl

Much of Hannah's concepts related to gender emerged from the time period in which she grew up. Hannah was in her adolescence during the 60s and was involved in the Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements. Her mother was also a strong influence for her:

My mother, who never held a job and was a housewife and a frustrated artist and always a person who kind of wondered what she could have been if she had not gotten married at 18 and gotten a job. She always encouraged me to go for whatever I wanted to. Never said, "Well since you're a girl you'll never want to do this" or "Marriage is going to be a big thing for you or let's talk about how many children you want." She never made me feel that I would be happy only being one kind of person, and never led me to believe that any opportunities would be denied me because I was a girl. So I think she sort of gave me the foundation for that.

In addition Hannah received both emotional and financial support from her grandmother:

My grandmother who was an immigrant.... she had not gotten much education. She just barely finished high school because she came over here as a 14 year old having to learn the language. But she always told me that she would support any education that I wanted to get. In fact, she paid for all my graduate school, so I had very strong support for going to get an education and never any indication that his would be something hard for me because I'm a girl.

## Being Jewish

Hannah feels that her Jewish identity encompasses both cultural and ethnic aspects. These days she no longer feels a spiritual or religious connection to Judaism. She says:

It's cultural and ethnic and it's not very spiritual. It's sort of remembering the holidays and rituals and traditions, but there's not much of a spiritual element to it. It's more of a, I think an ethnic identity.

Initially she was raised in a family that identified with conservative Judaism but when there was a family crisis they found reformed Judaism more accepting:

I was raised in a conservative home and my grandparents were, on one side were actually orthodox. And my grandmother on the other side was reformed. And so that when my parents got married, I guess they became conservative and we stayed conservative until my younger brother was found to have a really severe reading disability and in order for him to be Bar Mitzvahed we had to go to a watered down sort of a service, which the conservative wouldn't do, so then we went to the Reformed Temple, and then once he was bar mitzvahed, that was pretty much the end of everybody's religious training. So I would say I was brought up in an extremely hypocritical conservative environment that turned reformed at the first opportunity.

When asked what it meant to her to be a Jew, Hannah responded:

What does it mean, 'cause I would always say that yes I am Jewish, I think it means to have a relationship to lots of oppressed Jews in the past. You know, my parents were both of the age where my father was in the war, and when we were growing up in the fifties, everybody was very aware of the Holocaust. And so to be Jewish meant that you identified with people who were really oppressed

at one point and who were a minority, even though the town that I was in was not, you were not a minority. It meant that you have lots of musicians and brilliant scholars in your heritage, even if it wasn't your immediate family, and to me, I don't know, it meant more rituals or traditions, that there were family holidays and marks on the calendar to be celebrated. There was also that relationship with Israel in the sense that you knew there was always a place you could go and that we were lucky that we had grandparents who had managed to get out of Russia and Poland before things started to get so bad. But there was always an awareness that touched our lives, people we knew and that, that was somehow you're history too.

### The Journey to Feminism

Although she had staunch support from the women in her family, Hannah did meet with resistance from some faculty in college:

My involvement with feminism started when I was in college, just recognizing that women are not always given the same opportunities as men. I started in music school, I wanted to go into theory and conducting, that was what I was interested in, and I was told, "Well women don't really have any opportunity in that field, so why don't you go into music education?" And this was a good school that I had to audition to get into. I think that just continued to spark the hurt, the anger that, "Well I can't do everything that I want to do." So I think it was a personal thing but also I was brought up in a family that always said everybody ought to be able to try to do whatever they can to satisfy their own potential and there should never be any denying of opportunities for reasons of gender or race.

In this respect Hannah said that she:

Sees feminism as an egalitarianism kind of movement, that should free men as much as it frees women.

In addition, Hannah's awareness of feminism came about during the 1960s and 1970s and she stated that she was critical of the media portrayal of feminism and feminists:

My awareness of it started in the 70s when the women's liberation movement started getting media coverage. And the media loved to cover really stupid stuff, like here's some women burning their bras. And to me, feminism wasn't about burning bras, it was about equal rights. Equal pay for equal work and stop looking at women purely as sex objects.

#### Being a Jewish Feminist in a Small Town

Unlike the other participants, Hannah's experience of living in a small town have resulted in a diminishing of her connection with Judaism rather than strengthening it. Although like many of the participants, she is married to a gentile, this has not affected her sense of identity or connectedness. She feels it is the isolation as well as a heightened sense of "otherness" and not belonging that have caused this change:

Well I think it's [living in a small southern town] very much weakened it. I feel I'm very much an outsider and it's very strongly shown me that I can never belong in the south, where I've been for 19 years and will never be a part of. And you know in a sense that's also strengthened my understanding of myself as an individual. I can stand being apart from a community, although I miss it. But it's very much made me have a kind of negative identity.

Like the other participants, living in a small town has increased Hannah's sense of being an outsider and "other." But unlike most of the participants she did not feel she

could take refuge in the Jewish community. Hannah further explained:

If I were asked here, "Well what are you?" I would say, "Well I'm not a Christian." That's the first, where it used to be, "Well, I'm a Jew." But now I say that I'm not a Christian, but saying that I'm a Jew doesn't mean much to anybody down here. So like "Oh what's that? Is that some form of Christian?" I mean I have heard that too. And I've married a non-Jew, but I'm not sure that in itself weakens my own identity. We've lived in other towns, where I've been the only Jew, there were no other Jews. They had never even met a Jew before. So, I think it's definitely weakened my possibility that I could ever become a spiritual person. That might have been different if I'd lived in the city or I lived in a place where talking about spiritual issues with other Jews might have kind of kept that alive. Instead I see it as kind of a negative thing because I've been excluded so much.

In addition to how this has affected her own identity, Hannah is concerned about its effects on her children:

I guess I always try to remember the holidays that were important to me mostly because I wanted to give my kids some sense of tradition. They know what Passover's about, although neither of them would consider themselves Jewish. They're all just non-Christians. Sort of an odd marriage type, you know, in some ways it's sort of watered down, I'm watering down and eventually I guess when they have kids their kids will either be Christian because they marry into it, or else they'll also be nothing.

Hannah feels she is questioned more concerning her Judaism than her feminism. As with many of the other participants, she feels an academic environment may be a bit more receptive to feminism than the general community. She has been asked questions by non-Jews such as:

Well I know you're Jewish and everything, but you still believe in some way that Christ was important, right? Kind of like you know, "What's the secret way that you worship Jesus?"

She was even asked by her husband's grandmother, "So how do your people celebrate Christmas?"

Quite poignantly, Hannah summed up her experience:

Well probably my greatest trial in being Jewish is not turning Christian. Probably a lot of Jews would even be kind of ashamed to admit that they even toyed with the idea, but when you are without a community you think very strongly about, "Well how could I become part of this community?"

A primary focus of Hannah's concern has been her children:

It would have been so much easier for my kids if we could have belonged to a church and they could have had a youth group, because my kids have kind of been outcast. My son now gets accused of being satanic just because he's not Christian.

#### The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

Initially, because of her distance from Judaism, Hannah did not see a direct intersection between Judaism, or her sense of Jewishness, and feminism:

I was trying to think if they were really interactive or if there is some sort of link, but I think I really have, I've completely shut down on my spiritual identity as giving, I don't know, I guess values and attitudes and ways of acting and I, so I'm not sure that now I would say that there's any real intersection between those two identities. In fact, I would say that the longer I'm away from being around the general Jewish population, the more closed that identity gets.

But upon reflection, Hannah also thought about her identity as a mother:

Probably more in being a mother. That's probably where the issues have brought both of these identities out. How to bring up my children and who I am in relation to my children. Giving them some sort of value base. Mine was I guess from my parents' religious identities and the way that they were brought up. To make them aware of themselves a little bit as having some cultural background of being Jewish. And also being a mother who is going to try to raise them in the most egalitarian way, despite the fact that my son really did prefer trucks and balls and my daughter really did prefer dress-up clothes and dolls. But that's how I view the intersection.

### Deborah

Deborah is in her 40s and as did most of the participants, she grew up in the northeast. Although she has lived in Southwest Virginia for nearly 10 years, she has spent most of her adulthood in the northeast. At the time she came to Virginia, she was completing her doctorate. She is employed as professional staff at one of the area colleges.

#### Growing up Female and Jewish

##### Being a Girl

Although she was raised in a family that practiced orthodox Judaism, Deborah's home life was not necessarily traditional. Her mother worked outside of the home from the time Deborah was two years old. Her father never questioned this and assisted with some of the household chores. Deborah believes that all this was possible because her father was

easy going. There were two children in the household, Deborah and her sister. Much of her comments about being a girl related to Judaism.

### Being Jewish

Deborah and her family attended an Orthodox synagogue and it was her father, rather than her mother, who was the most observant:

My father was somewhat orthodox, my mother was Jewish by upbringing but she did kind of what my father wanted in terms of Judaism. We were kosher in the house. My father was kosher, my mother didn't care so in the house we were kosher. When he traveled or wasn't around, then we weren't quite as kosher. But the house stayed kosher. We went out for Chinese food, though, and stuff when he wasn't around.

Although in her own house the rules were not specifically related to gender, Deborah found this not to be the case at the synagogue:

I went to Hebrew school three days a week and for women, girls, I guess, Jewish girls they were thought to be kind of, they had to go to Hebrew school but they weren't thought to need the same things that men did.

The girls in the synagogue did not go through a Bat Mitzvah but instead put on a play that culminated with a party.

When she lived in the northeast, Deborah never felt her being Jewish challenged and brought into question. She did not pay that much attention to the tradition and the ceremonies because:

It wasn't like I felt like I needed to do any of that to keep my Jewish identity because I grew up in a place where there were lots of Jews around and it wasn't an issue about doing those kinds of things. Everyone just did it. You didn't even think about it.

Unlike the majority of participants, Deborah married a Jewish man. They were married in a Jewish ceremony but they were not affiliated with any synagogue. When they were first married they were both students and the only times they attended a synagogue was to celebrate somebody else's wedding or other special occasions.

#### The Journey to Feminism

Deborah believes that her first feminist role model was her mother:

I think growing up, I think my mother was one of the first feminists around, I think. Because she, out of all the friends that I had, she was the only one who went to work. And I've never understood the reasoning behind that because I don't think she thought of herself as a feminist. And she never quite explained why she went to work.

When I asked if there was a financial need for her mother to work, Deborah responded:

No, it wasn't at all financial. It wasn't that she was trained in some field that she really needed to express. She worked as a secretary or like a clerk in the court systems. And she always worked since I was, I don't know, two maybe. I guess she never felt the need to explain why. And she just kind of worked.

When how her mother's working affected her family,

Deborah replied:

She also did the cooking and was responsible for a lot of the woman type things, but not as much I guess because she worked. You know, my father did a lot more than a lot of the other fathers did. I hated the fact that my mother worked when I was young.

Although she may have hated her mother's working,

Deborah realized that her mother set an example for her to follow:

So that's I think where some of my ideas started. It was okay for women to go to work and it was just expected that women go to work. I mean that was the way I saw it. And it was just as important that my mother work as it was that my father work.

Although she had had the experience of having a mother work outside the home, her husband had not. She found she needed to educate him on the finer points of marriage as a partnership:

I guess when I was dating my husband, I guess, I've tried to impose some of that on him, that our relationship is a partnership. and when we started talking about getting married, he was very confused. We were both students, both grad students, and he was saying, "Well I can't support you." His mother didn't work, his father supported his mother. His mother is the complete opposite of a feminist, whatever that is. And so he didn't know another way of thinking and I tried to educate him in what I thought was another way of thinking.

Deborah also commented on how she is rearing her children, all boys:

And then my children, I really try my best to bring them up in a home that's equal and show them the way I think that women should be treated. I feel the need to do this because I'm not sure they're getting it anywhere else. I think my husband is sensitive to it, and he knows what not to say, but I don't think he's as likely to feel the need to kind of make sure that they're getting that side of it. Because I really feel the rest of the world gives them the other side. From the youngest age they would say things like, we would go to a toy store and they would say, "Oh this is the girl's aisle." And I started "Why is that? Why is it the girls' aisle? Anyone could play with those toys. And I bought them dolls and stuff and they played with them and liked them and they still play with stuffed animals.

When asked to describe what feminism or being a feminist means, Deborah elaborated:

Feeling equal to men in most respects. I'd say just feeling equal and able to do just about anything a man could do and wanting to portray that to other people, especially my family.

#### Being a Jewish Feminist in a Small Town

Although the academic community is accepting of her feminism, Deborah has found that in the larger community, she has had to contend with gender issues as much as those concerning being Jewish. She related one such experience:

I have an interesting story about the feminist thing. When my kids were little, they went on a field trip to the fire station, and I went along as a parent helper. And the fire, whatever he is, the fireman, fireperson, was showing all his equipment and he made a statement that women could not be firefighters because they were not strong enough. And I was like, what!, how could he say that? So I wrote him a, I didn't talk to him at the time, and I wrote him a long letter about why I thought that that was an inappropriate thing to

say, especially around children, and why it wasn't even true. And he called up and apologized, but even in his apology it was clear that he didn't quite understand what I was trying to say.

But in her own experiences, Deborah finds that her feminism is more readily accepted and understood than is her Judaism:

I think the university is more accepting of the feminist identity than it is the Jewish, because I think there's a lot more feminists than there are Jews. And I just know like every year when Yom Kippur rolls around, I always take the day off and I feel this need to explain that I'm not coming to work because it's Yom Kippur. And Yom Kippur is the holiest day of Jewish holidays and, you know I don't feel that need to explain feminist kinds of things.

Deborah discussed her concerns about what her children were being taught in the local schools. In fact she recounted that it was not until her children started school that she realized how predominantly Christian the area was:

I guess I didn't feel that quite as much until my kids started school. And then it was just scary, you know, the amount they learn about Christmas, and Easter, and I started getting angry about it. My husband and I started speaking up, and we have every year around Christmas. And sometimes we get fed up with it, you know, 'cause we don't want to do this anymore. But we'll go and we meet with the teachers we'll make a point about how we feel that it's inappropriate to bring any kind of religion into the classroom. And it's almost as if they don't hear us.

Since moving to this area, Deborah has had greater concern for her family's safety:

My kids wanted Jewish stars....So they asked for Jewish stars and I get them Jewish stars, and then I start thinking, well , I don't know if I feel

comfortable with them wearing them around here. They wear them, it's under their shirt. I just tell them the issues. I said you can wear them but some people might not like it, you know and I'm not sure how they'll react. So they decided they want to wear them but they want to put them in their shirts.

Asked how her children if her children are confronted with anti-semitism in the schools and how they handle it

Deborah replied:

I think the younger ones deal with it all the time, but I'm aware of it. My oldest son is very verbal and very outgoing and he's got a strong Jewish identity, very strong, and he's good at verbalizing it, and he deals with it, I think a lot. And I think he deals with it really well. I mean better than I could ever do it. You know people have called him names and he's reacted, I think appropriately. But he's pretty popular anyway, so he doesn't have that as much as I think some kids might.

Deborah concurs with many of the other study participants that living in a small town, especially one that it is predominantly Christian, has had a substantial effect on both her Jewish and her feminist identities:

I think it [living here] made me stronger because although it was there to some extent, I didn't recognize it because I didn't need to back when we lived in the northeast. And I think the more that I hear the opposite, the more I feel the need to be more secure in my feminism. Just like Judaism, it's the same kind of thing. I have to be more aware of it because I feel the pull the other way from the rest of the world.

## The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

Deborah believes that her although her feminist ideology has influenced the evolution of her Jewish identity there are some conflicts:

I think that my feminism influenced my Jewish ideology because growing up in my orthodox kind of way, it just didn't make sense to me that women didn't have the same capabilities as men. And that really turned me off to the religious aspect of Judaism. Here, the Jewish community, I mean women could do anything men could do, which is wonderful. And I think that's great. Now the interesting thing is though that gets in the way of some of the cultural kind of things because the way I grew up is very different from the way things are being done now. Especially when they start changing things in the Prayer Books from the way it's stated to be more neutral. So I struggle with that because on the one hand I want it to be like that for my feminist side, but my cultural identity has real problems with that because it's not the same as it was when I grew up.

### Rachel

Rachel is one of the few participants who was not reared in the northeast. Although she has lived most of her life in areas throughout the southeast, she has also resided in other areas of the United States and the world through her education and her profession. Rachel has lived in Southwest Virginia for two years and is in her early 30s. Rachel's family consisted of her parents, three older brothers, and herself.

## Growing up Female and Jewish

### Being a Girl

Because of their nomadic lifestyle and because she was the only girl, Rachel was raised in a nontraditional household in terms of gender. She was encouraged to try anything and was never told she could not do something because she was a girl. Rachel believes that she learned her sense of fairness and equality from her family:

I think I was taught it from my parents. Because I have three older brothers and I'm the only daughter. They made it pretty clear that women, I mean that things should be equal between men and women. And my dad used to always give me stories, he used to try and make me angry about it, "Do you know that women get paid less than men?" and these kind of things, just to, you know, hoping to make me not just stand for it, or not to let it happen.

Although her father encouraged her to demand equality, in their own home the work load was not always shared equally. Rachel's mother started to work outside the home when they settled in a city in the southeast. When asked how chores were divided at home, Rachel responded:

In the home it's not like that [equal] at all. I mean, my mom did all the cooking. And my dad was a complete incompetent in the kitchen and my mom took care of all the financial matters. So, no, they taught it, but it definitely wasn't the way it was at home.

I asked Rachel if she ever brought up the double standard and the reaction she received:

My parents, they liked for us to be confrontational, so they didn't have a problem. I'd bring it up all the time. I could rag my father about it, 'cause he didn't do his share of the household chores or whatever, and he'd say, "Yeah, I'm from the old school." That's his generation, my generation has to be different. But he wasn't about to change.

Rachel also found some of the rules in school to be discriminatory towards girls. She was athletic and resented coaches who tried to get her to play one sport or another just because she was a girl:

I remember that in high school there were things that bothered me in school along some lines of sending different messages, like in sports. I don't know if this is right but I used to always refuse to play volleyball because, and I still do, because in high school, I mean at the time they'd always have the girls play volleyball and the boys play basketball. And I played basketball with my brothers all the time and I always wanted to play, and it was just not done. But no one else ever seemed to see it as a problem. So, I mean, there were small things like that, but in general I don't really remember any, ever feeling that I didn't have a certain opportunity because I was female.

### Being Jewish

Rachel's Jewish upbringing differed dramatically from that of the other participants. Her family often lived in areas where not only was there no synagogue but often no other Jewish people. Although she has not had as much formal religious training as some of the other women in the study, her identity as a Jew is strong. What is problematic for Rachel is that she often feels ill equipped as a Jew:

I guess it shapes how I define myself as Jewish, you know living in the south. But I don't know how it would have been different if I'd have been elsewhere. Like I don't know if it, I mean it would be something I just took for granted.... Because the friends that I have from New York that are Jewish, they know so much more about being Jewish. I mean they know, some of them can read Hebrew and know how to participate in all these holidays, what to do. And there are so many holidays, it was always just a family event. When I go to, like at college if I would go to a student celebration of Passover, it made me nervous like my family might be doing it differently. Like I don't know what they're doing.

But even with a lack of community and external support, Rachel's parents always taught her to be proud of who she is. Rachel said that her identity as a Jew is primarily cultural. Possibly most significant and probably because of where she grew up, being Jewish was equated with being different:

I was always told that I was Jewish without any definition of what it meant or anything, except that it meant I was different from other people, especially the community who were in the south growing up, and that there's this whole history of being Jewish and to be persecuted, and that this was somehow important. And so a lot of the ways that it was defined for me was as being other, and as being disliked a lot of times.

An experience that relates to the danger that Jews can find themselves in happened to Rachel when she was in grade school:

Once I was beat up for being Jewish, when I was younger. And it was so funny 'cause it was, the boy that did it was a son of a minister. And I think he had seen something on t.v. or something

about Jewish people and he was like acting it out. That was kind of scary.

### The Journey to Feminism

It would seem as if Rachel's entire life has been a journey to feminism. She has seldom felt hindered by her gender nor has she let being a woman deter her from her professional goals. Rachel is in a male dominated profession that demands both physical and mental prowess. She has often been the only woman or one of the few women in her classes as well as at job sites. When asked to give a definition of feminism or what it means to her to be a feminist, Rachel replied:

Feminism for me, I guess, is about not having the fact that I'm female hold me back in any way in my interaction with people or in achieving anything. I know a lot of people look at feminism as a whole different perspective. Like a lot of people want to think feminism is a science or like it's a different perspective. And I guess to some degree that's true, but for me, that part of it hasn't been that important as much as just an equality issue. The barriers that other people create by the way they might view women.

As indicated in the statement above, Rachel is not necessarily political in her concept and expression of feminism. She is somewhat hesitant to use the label of feminist as a way of describing herself. This is especially true if she is the one initiating the labeling. But when asked if she is a feminist, Rachel did not hesitate to acknowledge it.

## Being a Jewish Feminist in a Small Town

Much of Rachel's experience living in small towns has already been discussed. It is difficult for her to assess the effects as this is the only life she has known. She said when people find out she's Jewish they do ask questions and she has certainly encountered anti-semitism. Generally they want to know either how she celebrates Christmas or if she feels cheated because she does not celebrate Christmas. Interestingly one of her more glaring experiences with anti-semitism occurred when she was talking to a new neighbor who had just moved from the east coast:

As far as here, a neighbor of mine is, her family is really anti-semitic, and I think she is a little bit. Her husband is of German descent and I think he is a little bit. And the reason I know that is because she told me these things about her family and about Jews before I told her that I was Jewish. And when I told her, she kind of tempers what she says a little bit.

When I asked if she was the first Jewish person this woman had met, Rachel explained:

No, you see that's just it. She's not from the south, she's from New York. I really can't remember, but it was one of the first days that I met her, it came up. And we were probably talking about her being from New York and how I was from New York, and then somehow it [the woman's parents' anti-semitism] came up. And I said, "Do your parents know any Jewish people?" and she goes, "Well that's just it, they know tons of them," you know in quotes, "They're surrounded by them up there in New York and that's why they can't stand them." It was just like, "Well before you go any further, I have to tell you, I'm Jewish."

## The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

When first asked, Rachel could not think of ways that her Judaism and feminism intersected. I then asked if she thought that there were any commonalities between the two or that one had influenced the other. Here is her response:

I don't really think so I mean, like I had never really thought of it till now and...I mean except indirectly. I mean in the sense that growing up Jewish around, without any other Jewish people around, made me feel like an other. And then my parents taught me it was okay to feel like an other, or to not conform or whatever, to be whoever I was and to not let other people define me and that kind of thing. So in that way, indirectly, something might have influenced my feminism. But I don't know about directly.

### Esther

Like Rachel, Esther did not grow up entirely in the northeast. When she was still in grade school her family moved out west. She also attended college and graduate school out west. Esther is in her late 50s and has lived in Southwest Virginia for over 20 years. As with most of the participants she is employed in a professional capacity at one of the area colleges.

#### Growing up Female and Jewish

##### Being a Girl

Esther's family was not traditional from a gender perspective. Her mother worked outside the home and she was

not only encouraged but it was expected that she would go to college. She had very little to discuss about her earlier years but did point out some incongruities in what her mother told Rachel she should do and the choices that her mother had made for herself:

The peculiar thing was that, and this is something that my sister and I have talked about, my mother didn't give us, when my mother talked to me about why you should go to college, and we had some pretty intense conversations about it, it was always because maybe my husband would die and I would have to support myself, and I need something to fall back on. And years later I confronted her about this. And I said, "Why did you do this? You were a working woman." And more than that she was a woman who was happiest with her work associates and not with her other life. And she said, well actually she had always worked and it has always been difficult. And she has always felt that not only did she have a job, she was the only one who was responsible for the family, and the only one that got blamed if anything went wrong. And when we moved out west, she said she saw for the first time these women leading very comfortable lives as housewives. And really she wanted that for us, because it seemed so much easier than all of the struggle that she had gone through.

### Being Jewish

Esther's family was very active and prominent in the Jewish community where she grew up. Esther says she took being Jewish very seriously when she was younger:

I went through Sunday School and I was salutatorian of my Sunday School class all this stuff and was active in BBG [Jewish youth group] and all of that.

Esther also discussed how being Jewish influenced her love

for learning and ideas:

I would say part of how I felt about being Jewish was that being Jewish meant that you took the life of the mind and education seriously and that exposed you to a lot of ideas. I use to feel really out of step because I would go to Sunday School and I was interested, and I wanted to know things, and I think I read every book I could get my hands on in the Sunday School library. And so I took being Jewish seriously and going to Sunday School seriously and I can say, while I wasn't real focused on education, I always took ideas seriously. And I think that came from being Jewish.

Esther further elaborated on her Jewish identity:

Well I think it's part of my history and it's part of who I am and when I was in college and I really felt that being Jewish made me different and that these were important differences and unchanging differences. So it's my identity. I thinks it's an ethnic and a historic identity and to some extent it's a spiritual identity.

#### The Journey to Feminism

Whereas she was encouraged to get an education and was involved in student activities when she was in college, it was not until later, in her adulthood and more specifically with the advent of motherhood, that Esther connected with feminism:

Actually I'm one of the women that sort of came into feminism through having children. I didn't work when my children were small. And I felt that having children really put me in touch with being a woman and with women's experiences. And you know, I think there were some key experiences. I'm in my 50s so the Civil Rights movement was going on during my formative years and after all was said and done, a lot of us looked at that and said,

"Gee, women really didn't have a part in a lot of things that went on." We were supposed to do the xeroxing and make the coffee, and that clicked, and there were moments, I had two kids in diapers around the time, I don't know if you remember this but Wilbur Mills took a dive in the reflecting pool and I was reading the newspaper and listening to the radio and thinking this is one of the most powerful men in the United States and what does he know about my life or the lives of people like me. And one of the things I got interested in at that time was the most under-represented political group - young people. And it's because of the lack of energy and the lack of voting, all these things, so that was part of my political consciousness.

Esther further honed her feminist ideals while looking for employment after being out the job market to rear her children:

Coming back in and trying to get back in the job market was also a real educating experience. And I paid my dues and I stayed home and I took care of my family and I was a great mom. But it didn't help me in the world of work. And it's been, it's taken me a long time to get any kind of position or control, and I'm still fighting for control issues.

Today, Esther is more confident about herself and her ability to stand up for what she believes to be right. She is an activist in a variety of situations. She continues to work with adolescent and young adult college students and finds the work rewarding.

When asked to give a definition of feminism, Esther responded:

I just think it has to do with equality of personhood and being respected and being a full member of my community.

## Being Jewish and Feminist in a Small Town

Esther has lived longer in Southwestern Virginia than any other place, since becoming an adult. Like the majority of participants who are married, her husband is not Jewish. When they first came to the area they were affiliated with the local synagogue. Esther believes that this was mainly for her children. Both her children went to Sunday School and her son was Bar Mitzvahed. It was her daughter's decision not to be Bat Mitzvahed. Although Esther has had to contend with anti-semitism or ignorance from the general community she has also had some disagreements and disappointments from the Jewish community. While she is still in close contact with many of her Jewish friends, she is no longer affiliated with the synagogue. As with some of the other participants, affiliation does not seem as crucial, now that her children are grown.

Similar to the other participants, Esther joined the synagogue and participated in community activities to provide a sense of culture for her children. She believed that this was important while living in an area where Jews were vastly out-numbered. As shown earlier, although she is no longer an active member in the synagogue, Esther still has a strong identity as a Jew.

## The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

For Esther, it was her feminism that enabled her to confront the Jewish community when she felt that she or others were being treated unfairly. Her willingness to advocate for herself and others was not always appreciated by everyone within the community.

Esther also believes that it was Judaism and feminism together that gave her the motivation to finish her education and not get married when everyone else was:

My mother was a working woman and I was very strongly oriented. Partly my parents told me they'd kill me if I didn't finish college. So, I was oriented towards education and not towards early marriage. And where we lived, the girls that I grew up with, I was one of the last ones to get married. I got married at about 24 and that was really unheard of because most of my friends were married before they were 21. The Jewish girls back then were married very young.

### Miriam

Miriam is a woman in her mid-twenties who holds a professional position not associated with any of the area colleges. She came to Southwest Virginia to attend college and has stayed on to develop her professional career. Miriam is a single woman without children. Like most of the participants, she is originally from the northeast and has lived in Southwest Virginia for the past seven years. She is actively involved in the Jewish community and the local

synagogue.

## Growing up Female and Jewish

### Being a Girl

Miriam grew up in a family that included her parents, an older brother, and a younger sister. She says that duties were not gendered and she cannot recall her brother being given preferential treatment just because he was a boy:

I grew up as a tomboy. I have an older brother and a younger sister. And I was just always a tomboy, doing stuff with my brother and my sister, too. I mean I still played with dolls and stuff, but I was a tomboy through and through. And I wouldn't let anyone tell me what I couldn't do. Because if my brother could do it, I could do it too. My brother took out the trash. We cleaned windows and then later on, whoever took out the trash and everyone did the dishwasher.

All of the children in the family were encouraged to further their education. At present, Miriam is the only one who is on her own. Both her siblings live at home and neither is employed in a professional capacity similar to Miriam's. Her parents are forthcoming with their praise and her father is especially appreciative that she is self-sufficient.

Miriam's mother has worked outside the home for much of Miriam's youth and continues to do so. This provided Miriam with a positive and less stereotyped gender role model. While her Miriam and her siblings were still in school, her mother also went back to school to earn a graduate degree.

## Being Jewish

Although her family strongly identified themselves as Jewish, they were not strict in their practice or observance of Judaism. As many of the other participants have earlier stated, living in cities with large Jewish populations afforded them the luxury of being surrounded or at least closely connected to Jewish culture without being affiliated with a synagogue. Miriam and her two siblings were Bat or Bar Mitzvahed and Miriam believes that her parents and especially her mother would be disappointed if they do not marry Jewish persons.

When asked how she identifies or what it means to her to be Jewish, Miriam responded:

Judaism is a religion that isn't just a religion, it's a way of life basically. I mean, not so much for someone who isn't, who doesn't go by the laws of kashrut [kosher] or anything like that. But it's, you know, there are so many traditions and just a lot of things that I feel are part of my, not just something I do on Friday nights, it's a way of thinking.

When asked how she identified herself racially, Miriam hesitated. She feels that Jewish is an ethnic identity and not necessarily a racial one but she also has difficulty in identifying herself as White. She is dark complected and as others have mentioned is often mistaken for many other ethnicities.

## The Journey to Feminism

Although she is in a male-dominated profession, Miriam stated that she had never really thought of herself as a feminist before her participation in this study:

Until now, like until hearing about your study and everything, I never really would have called myself a feminist, but I thought about it a lot and to my definition, everyone has their own definition of what a feminist is and, unfortunately most of the people who aren't feminist who have a definition, it's a bad one. And I just think that being a feminist is not a bad thing, it's unfortunately looked upon as being a bad thing, so it makes you feel like you shouldn't be one.

Miriam went on to give her own definition of feminist:

Feminist would be a woman who, I mean she doesn't have to be aggressive, she doesn't even have to be that assertive, maybe. I mean, it's someone who believes that women can do anything they want to do. I mean, my mom always told me that you could be whatever you wanted to be. And you know what, I am in a male dominated profession and I'm a woman.

### Being Jewish and Feminist in a Small Town

Many of Miriam's experiences of being feminist in Southwest Virginia are more related to her profession than her geography. She believes that she would still be dealing with much of the same gender bias if she were in New York. The difference that she might experience would be having more women in her field but not necessarily in equal proportion to the men.

On the other hand, living in Southwest Virginia has provided an education in being Jewish and definitely in the minority. Miriam has had several interesting interactions with the general community that centered on gentiles' lack of knowledge about Jews and Judaism:

A friend was over and we were playing a game and then there was a knock at the door and I didn't hear my roommate, he's closest to the front door, get up. So like, okay, well I'll get up. So there's these two guys in the long black coats and the short sleeve shirts, you know the ones on the mountain bikes. I knew exactly who they were, I've seen them many times. But they never came to our house, which is surprising....So I started talking to them and I opened the door and am like, "Hi." He's like, "I'd like to share something about Jesus Christ with you." And I'm like, "Well to tell you the truth I'm Jewish and I'm really not interested, thanks anyway." And he's like, "You're Jewish, oh." It's like, "Are you a practicing Jew? Can I ask you a question?" And I said, "Sure go ahead." "Do you still follow the laws of Moses?" And I said, "Well what do you mean by that? The 10 Commandments? I mean that's pretty broad. Give me an example." So he goes, "So do you still sacrifice animals?" And I was like, "No." And he said, "When did you stop?" And I asked my friend when did we stop sacrificing animals? And he said, "When the temple was destroyed." And the guy's like, "Oh really? When was that?" I responded, "A couple thousand years ago."

As have many of the other participants, Miriam has had a number of people tell her that she is the first Jewish person that they have ever met. This was something that she never experienced living in the northeast.

Since coming to Southwest Virginia, Miriam's connection to Judaism and to a Jewish community has strengthened. She

is an active participant in the synagogue, attends services regularly, teaches Sunday School and Hebrew. In part she attributes this new found connection to living in Southwest Virginia but also she credits her recent trip to Israel. In many ways she felt she had come home when she was in Israel. She said it did something to her that changed her forever.

As earlier stated, Miriam's feminist experiences have centered around her profession. She is one of three women in professional positions at her firm and many of her male colleagues still view the women as a novelty. She has had to change positions because of a male supervisor's attitudes but is comfortable at her new location.

#### The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

When asked if her sense of Judaism or Jewish identity was at odds or compatible with her feminism, Miriam responded:

They're compatible. I don't make them compatible.  
I don't put any religious restrictions on who I am.

Although she is now more observant, Miriam, like many of the other participants, does not necessarily concur with all the tenets of Judaism. Since she does not belong to an Orthodox or even conservative congregation, Miriam has the flexibility to choose those tenets she wishes to follow. While some might criticize this as cafeteria style Judaism (similar to criticism directed at American Catholics),

Miriam and many of the other participants believe it made their practice more meaningful.

### Tovah

Tovah is a graduate student at a college in Southwest Virginia. She is originally from the midwest and has lived in other parts of the southeast. Tovah is in her early 30s and is single with no children.

#### Growing up Female and Jewish

##### Being a Girl

Tovah comes from a small family that consisted of her parents and an older brother. Although they were traditional in their religious upbringing, family life was somewhat more gender neutral. Both Tovah and her brother were encouraged to go to college and both have attained a high educational status. During the course of the interview Tovah could not relate any specific incident that pointed to gender inequity within her family. Where she did experience a division between men and women was in the synagogue that they belonged to.

##### Being Jewish

Tovah grew up in the midwest and although she and her family lived on the outskirts of a metropolitan area they did not live in a community with a sizable Jewish

population. Tovah discussed how this influenced her experience of being Jewish:

Where I grew up my family we lived out a little further west than most Jews, so I didn't grow up around Jewish kids, really, except in our synagogue, but predominantly the schools I went to had very few Jewish kids, so I grew up feeling very unique and somewhat ostracized. But I chose to look at that as being more unique and kind of special.

Tovah's family attended a Traditional [Jewish denomination] Synagogue. Tovah explained that this is a sect that is somewhat orthodox but that men and women are not kept apart. She did have a ceremony similar to a Bat Mitzvah but because she was a girl it was not held on Saturday. Ceremonies for girls were held on Sundays while the boys were celebrated on the Sabbath. Although women's participation was limited, Tovah explained that when she was young the women conducted their own service. Although they were relegated to a back room, Tovah acknowledged that this was somewhat radical for the time and that synagogue.

When she was in her late teens, Tovah made a decision that had a significant impact on her identity:

In some ways I lost my identity, I think, at age 16 or 17. I had a nose job. You know it was something that was, I had never heard of that. I lived with all the other Jewish kids, I didn't know this was being done. One day I came in and saw my nose in the mirror as I was walking by and my mother talked about it, and I didn't really know that much about it, and I went ahead and did it. And I don't think people recognize me as Jewish. I

guess I feel like I pass, people don't know.

Tovah talked about how her Jewish identity is evolving and her desire to learn more about Judaism. When asked how she identifies as a Jew or what it means to her to be Jewish, Tovah responded:

I'd say it's probably more cultural, mostly. Recently a little bit more spiritual. It's changed in the sense that I feel like I'm not a very knowledgeable Jew, and what I know is what I recall and what I've taken from my family's culture, and in a lot of ways we weren't very Jewish. My father's a very big, he's into the intellectual side, he takes classes. He doesn't like us to say that, but he's more like into the learning part and my mom's not into it at all.

Tovah's experience is not dissimilar to many of the other participants. As girls they were not provided the same level or depth of education as boys. And even many Jewish males in modern U.S. culture are not any more knowledgeable. It may be that what people learn as children has little meaning unless they see it modeled by adults and incorporate it into their lives. I am not sure that this is not exclusive to Jews.

#### The Journey to Feminism

Tovah says that she did not "get into" feminism until college and feels that she came later to it than some of her friends:

I guess my last semester of my last year, some of my friends were really getting into women's studies, courses and I took one, I really liked that course. Everything made sense, it wasn't like oh that's obvious, that's stupid, it was like uh-huh, uh-huh, it just seemed to make sense. And I think that pretty much then the people that I spent the most time with in college were people who were

strong believers in the outdoors and experiential learning and it kind of meshed very well with feminism and the idea that women and men are doing the same things and equally capable of, and taking leadership roles and working to help others, younger students sort of experience the world and see the way groups operate and can operate in a similar fashion. So, I was fairly involved with this group that was trying to explode myths about who could and couldn't do what.

Although Tovah believes in the basic tenets of equality she does take exception to the insistence by some feminists to view all women as disadvantaged and somehow victimized. She believes that this narrow view may be a stumbling block for many young women to accepting feminism because it gives the term such a negative connotation. Tovah also stated that she believes there are many different types of feminism and that each is valid for the person who holds that belief.

#### Being a Jewish Feminist in a Small Town

Although Tovah has lived in other areas of the southeast, she says that she has noticed how much more of a minority she is as a Jew in Southwest Virginia:

Here in town, I felt much more, it's much more, I think when I'm more in the minority I feel my identity more. You can still meet kids here who don't, who haven't met Jewish people.

Because people may not recognize or associate her with being Jewish, Tovah has not had any overt anti-semitic experiences or people asking her questions about Judaism. She has dealt more with issues related to feminism than

Judaism within the academic community. Her experiences of being in a conservative academic department are similar to those of other participants. She has had to confront or question faculty and other students concerning their attitudes or disregard toward women.

Tovah has connected with a Jewish women's group and other Jewish women on campus. Most of these are women, who like herself, are exploring their Jewish identities.

#### The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

Like many of the participants, Tovah has struggled to bring her Jewish identity in alignment with her feminist principles. Likewise she started this journey while living in this small conservative town with its small community of Jews:

And so coming from a tradition that was very traditional, women, we're just not equal. It's not equal and I don't accept it. So I just rejected the whole thing for a very long time. Because I kind of didn't want to give up that tradition that was comfortable and pick up something new. Reformed just to me didn't seem like, it's watered down. It's not in Hebrew. Even though I'm like, "I don't understand what I'm saying," but still it wasn't the same kind of comfort. And I haven't been more ready to formulate my own kind of what it is to me, which is what I think this group [Jewish women's group] is doing. It's like, it's bringing in Jewish historical tradition, songs, celebrations, and stories, but it's doing it in a way that I never experienced it before, which is really wonderful. And it's like, "Okay, well whatever you were taught it's not that important." Look at what's here, there's a wonderful plate of things, we just have to sample from it.

## Eve

Eve grew up in the northeast and has lived in various parts of the United States. She is in her early 60s, has lived in Southwest Virginia for over 20 years and this is where her two children were born and reared. She is employed in a professional capacity at one of the area colleges.

### Growing up Female and Jewish

#### Being a Girl

Eve had very little to say about her family of origin and how it related to her identity as a female. Her family did stress education and she was expected to go to college.

#### Being Jewish

During her youth, Eve's family was not affiliated with a synagogue. She said:

I never went to synagogue, I mean the only time I went to synagogue when I was growing up was for relatives' weddings and bar mitzvahs. We took the holidays off, we never went to synagogue, I never had a Jewish upbringing.

Eve did not discover her Judaism or Jewish identity until she was in college and involved with the political movements of that time:

I guess basically you could say that I was coming to Judaism very late in life and my coming to Judaism was really shaped by things like the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Viet Nam Movement. The only kind of thing that made sense in Judaism was the something that fit in with the Civil Rights Movement. Its really kind of political rather than anything else.

## The Journey to Feminism

Ironically Eve believes it was through Judaism that she first came to terms with her feminism and her ability to stand up for herself and other women:

Strangely enough, I was thinking about this, it was within the Jewish community. When we came here, the services were held in somebody's house, we did not have a building, we did not have anything. There was a person who had the only Torah in town and he therefore defined the services. I can't remember exactly what happened but there was some kind of blow up and he literally took his Torah and left town. So we basically had to start from scratch and the congregation bought a Torah ....but the problem came whether or not women were going to be allowed to read Torah. I think that was probably my first feminist act because I missed all that feminist stuff because the whole 1970s schtik, I just completely missed because I was either doing academics or having babies. But I basically demanded the right. So that was I really think my first overtly feminist act. There have been more since.

Eve has been very active in the women's community both on campus and in town. She is most proud of her development of a mentoring program for other women in her department. Like some of the other participants she is in a male dominated field and she has had to struggle to get herself and other women acknowledged. Eve's definition of feminism is basically that women should get their fair share.

### Being a Jewish Feminist in a Small Town

As with many of the other participants, Eve did not become affiliated with a synagogue until moving to Southwest

Virginia and having children. When her children were younger she was an active member in the synagogue and the Jewish community. Since her children have grown she has withdrawn from her prominence but still retains strong ties with a number of people.

One of her primary reasons for becoming affiliated was to ensure that her children would have a sense of their own Jewish identity and culture. Both of her daughters were Bat Mitzvahed and both identify themselves as Jewish and feminist.

Her oldest daughter is currently dating a gentile and while she and her husband like the young man, Eve expressed some concerns:

My daughter's boyfriend is not Jewish and I don't know if they're going to get married or not. I think, I remembered he asked her if she wanted a stocking [for Christmas] and I think she said yes and that got me really mad. If they get married I'm going to have to, I think that could be a really dicey thing, he's a nice fellow and all but there's no way I could go to a wedding service where Jesus Christ is mentioned, I just cannot do that. I hope that she has enough sense to be married by a judge. If I end up paying for it, that's what I will pay for.

Eve has not had to contend with overt anti-semitism in Southwest Virginia. Most of it has to do with ignorance and people's inexperience with Jewish culture. She says that her Jewish identity is primarily ethnic and political.

As a feminist, Eve has been in the position not only to educate her students but faculty and other people in the general community as well.

#### The Intersection of Judaism and Feminism

Most of Eve's battles in Southwest Virginia have been feminist rather than Jewish. This includes the academic as well as Jewish community. Although she retains a strong Jewish identity it is her feminist identity that is predominant. She does not believe that her feminism is related at all to her Judaism. Eve did say that because she is a feminist she can no longer be a Zionist. She finds a conflict in Israel's treatment of Palestinians with her feminist principles. She says that her feminism is related to her academic work and to assisting women on campus.

#### Summary

Although all of the women in this study identified themselves as Jewish and feminist what that meant in each of their lives was different. Their concepts of both feminism and Judaism have evolved throughout their lives. Each has found a new sense of who she is as feminist and Jew since moving to Southwest Virginia. The confines of a small conservative town oddly enough have enabled most of them to spread their wings as Jews and feminists.

Most of the women who were strongly affiliated with a synagogue or the Jewish community were those who had children. Rearing children presented a greater urgency to have a formal relationship with Judaism and its community. For many this urgency waned as their children grew. Although they may retain ties with individuals in the Jewish community many have discontinued their formal affiliation and active participation.

Most of the women saw a connection between being Jewish and becoming a feminist. Being marginalized as a Jew made it easier for some to recognize their marginalization as women. No one saw a conflict between her feminism and who she is as a Jew. Most of the participants talked about how they were able to incorporate aspects of Judaism that had meaning and discard those that did not. Although most of the participants have a similar definition of feminism - equality for women - they have incorporated and acted on this concept differently, as discussed in Chapter 5. Who they are as Jews, their evolution of identity, and the effects of living in a small town are also discussed in the next chapter. In addition, how these matters relate to the feminist standpoint will also be explored.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

You can't listen to someone else's story until you've heard your own. (Dancy, 1997)

#### Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the development and co-existence of Jewish and feminist selves. In particular I looked at how living in a region that is politically conservative, is predominantly Christian, and has limited Jewish and feminist populations might affect both selves. Interviews were conducted with 11 women who identified themselves as both Jewish and feminist. In addition I completed a narrative that consisted of my own journey of discovering who I am as a Jew and a feminist, as well as my experiences of living in a small, conservative, predominantly Christian town.

In conducting this study I needed both to acknowledge my standpoint and assumptions and to set them aside. I needed to be able to listen to the respondents and hear their voices without using my own as a filter. This demanded that I deconstruct my experience and discover those assumptions. Although I anticipated commonalities between myself and the other participants, I could not assume their existence. Before interviewing participants I constructed my

narrative. I kept a research journal that included field notes as well as personal reactions to the interviews and research process. This provided a system of checks and balances that enabled me to listen carefully to the narratives of participants.

The initial research questions that guided this study revolved around the development and intersection of Jewish and feminist identities. The initial areas of inquiry included the meaning of being Jewish, the meaning of being feminist, how women live their Judaism and feminism or how Judaism and feminism co-exist, how Jewish feminist women negotiate their environment, and the effects of living in an environment that is conservative and predominantly Christian on a woman's sense of herself as a Jew and as a feminist.

In the next section I will discuss the findings and the insights they have provided.

## Discussion

### Being Jewish

All of the respondents in the study agreed on certain aspects of their identities as Jews or what it meant to be Jewish. Each of the 11 women acknowledged that being Jewish was a cultural identity and all of them viewed themselves as cultural Jews. Most of the women also used Jewish as their ethnic identity. Participants disagreed as to whether being

Jewish is a racial identity. This issue has been debated in the literature as well (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Langman, 1995; Lavender, 1986). If Jewish is a racial identity, then how do people who are Jewish and Black, Asian, or Hispanic identify themselves? Are they biracial? Are people who are White and Jewish biracial? Most of the literature and some of the respondents acknowledged that Jewish is not a racial category (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Langman, 1995). Calling it such becomes problematic when connecting it with the diversity of races of people who are Jewish. Jewish may therefore be seen as an ethnic classification much as Italian or Irish is considered an ethnicity. But as it is also a religious designation calling Jewish an ethnicity can be confusing. Would people who convert to Judaism considered themselves ethnically Jewish? Although this study does not resolve this issue it does add depth to the debate.

Is being Jewish similar to being Christian? Do people who are Jewish enjoy the same privilege as those who are Christian? The answer for many Jews, at least in the United States, is no. Then is there a need, as Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996) suggested for an alternative category? She advocated the use of a term such as Christianity to acknowledge the privilege of Christians and the outsider status experienced

by those who are non-Christians. Langman (1995) concurred about the need to label Jews as other than White. As a therapist he suggested that Jews experience discrimination and isolation but not necessarily in the same way as Blacks and those of other racial minority groups. He believes that therapists often overlook this concept when treating people who are Jewish. A client's feelings of isolation and depression may be related to her or his non-Christian or "other" status. Clients may be hesitant to disclose that they are Jewish for fear of experiencing negative repercussions. Because of this, the anti-semitism they experience can be ignored or trivialized.

Although many of the respondents identified their race as White, some spoke of their discomfort with this classification. They used the category for lack of any other but seldom believed they received the full benefits associated with being White. Others used Jewish as their racial category because they felt no association with the category of White. This was especially true for respondents who were dark complected and in their own words "ethnic looking". I have often found myself in a quandary about my race. Because I am dark and "ethnic looking", people often assume my race is other than White. In prior years, census and other demographic forms usually included the category

"other" in the list of races. This allowed respondents to record their identity as they viewed it. But recently the category of "other" has disappeared from demographic forms. I have opted either to leave the race information blank or to write in my own category, of Jewish. This issue may not be as complicated if demographic forms used the term Caucasian rather than White. To many people, Caucasian encompasses much more meaning than the term White, or at least provides a sense of inclusion. To me, White refers to anglo, which does not describe who I am or others of semitic, mediterranean, and latin backgrounds. Perhaps this is why Hispanic and Native American have become separate categories. This points out how the concept of race is socially constructed and fluid. For myself, until they come up with a better or more inclusive term than White, I will continue to mark other or no box at all.

Although few of the women identified religiously or even spiritually as Jews, being Jewish was still a significant aspect of their lives. It is difficult for many non-Jews to understand this (Lavender, 1986). Many Jews in the United States consider themselves to be secular Jews (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996), implying that being Jewish is more than a religious designation. Although the purpose of my study was not to develop a

solution for this issue, the findings validate the need for further research on the classification and self-identity of Jewish people.

### Being Feminist

All of the women in this study agreed on some basic tenets of feminism. Any differences occurred in degree rather than in basic ideology. They all agreed that being a feminist meant that they believed in equality between men and women and that women should not be denied opportunities based solely on gender. They differed in the actions they took for themselves and others. Some of the respondents, especially some of the younger women, identified themselves as feminist from a personal perspective. For women who had children, they saw their feminist role as activist, mentor, and guardian for their children. Women who had sons wanted to make sure that they grew up respecting women, and those with daughters wanted to make sure that they had access to educational and professional opportunities.

Other women incorporated feminist activism and mentoring into their professional lives. They participated in and contributed to the women's community in a variety of capacities. They felt a responsibility to mentor junior faculty members, colleagues, students, and co-workers in order to assist them with navigating a hierarchy that can be

patriarchal and daunting.

Being a Jewish Feminist

Judaism is perceived to be a patriarchal institution by many non-Jews and Jews alike (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaufman, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Lavender, 1986). Although many of the participants acknowledged that Judaism, especially orthodox Judaism, is patriarchal, they were nevertheless able to maintain both a feminist and Jewish identity. They did this by reframing Judaism for themselves. Many of the participants discussed how they discarded those aspects of Judaism that did not acknowledge women as equal members. They were able to reconstruct a Judaism or a Jewish identity that placed women on a level plane with men. Those participants were active in the local synagogue and discussed the decision to refrain from using gendered language in prayer books and rituals. In addition, a women's group was formed that acknowledged and celebrated women's lives. Similar practices are reported in the literature on Jewish feminism (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Umansky & Ashton, 1992).

Many of the participants found that Judaism or being Jewish provided an avenue for rather than a deterrent from feminism. Having been marginalized as a non-Christian made it easier for them to recognize and acknowledge their

marginalization as women. In conjunction, they found that incorporating the tenets of feminism made it easier for them to demand and work for their acknowledgement within Judaism and the Jewish community. One participant, Sarah, said that she found Judaism and feminism to be connected because "they were both identities of marginalization." They are also connected because they are both ideologies of advocacy. For me, advocating for others is part of the legacy and responsibility of Jews. Historically, especially in the United States, Jews have been actively involved in civil rights. In prayers thanking God for freedom, Jews also ask for the freedom of all people. This resonates with aspects of feminism, and especially feminisms that advocate for ending discrimination on the basis of race, class, age, and sexual orientation, in addition to gender. For many of the women in this study, myself included, the advocacy ideologies of feminism and Judaism are complimentary.

#### Negotiating the Environment as Jews

The question of how Jewish women negotiate an environment that is conservative and predominantly Christian was of particular interest to me. Having moved to Southwest Virginia from Seattle, Washington, I found the environment to be particularly oppressive. This is not to say that Seattle has a large Jewish population, but the liberal

nature of the city ameliorated some of the isolation that a Jewish person could experience. I felt more accepted and less challenged because I was a non-Christian. Since living in Southwest Virginia my status as "other," meaning non-Christian, has been heightened. I was therefore curious to see if other Jewish women had this experience and if so how it affected their sense of who they were as Jewish persons.

All of the participants found that living in an area such as Southwest Virginia had focused their identity as a Jew. All but one of the respondents had grown up in larger metropolitan areas, where although Jews may not have been in a majority they were not such a significant minority. For those women who lived in metropolitan areas in the northeast this was particularly true. They felt engulfed in a Jewish culture, and because of this, most did not feel the need to be affiliated with a synagogue. The need to connect with other Jews in an environment where one feels isolated is reflected in the literature (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). Even women who identify as secular Jews found themselves joining synagogues to connect with other Jews.

For all of the participants, living in this environment provided a mechanism for reevaluating who they were as Jews. For all but one of the participants this resulted in a

stronger Jewish identity. However, Hannah found that her sense of isolation from a Jewish community weakened her identity and as she put it, "I once used to identify as Jewish; now I identify as a non-Christian." Without the spiritual aspects of Judaism to sustain her, Hannah was also losing her cultural and ethnic sense. This was particularly troubling to her where her children were concerned. Because they were not brought up as Jews or Christians they only thought of themselves as "other" or non-Christian. They had no specific identity to wrap themselves in.

Children seemed to be a primary motivating force for most of the participants to become affiliated with the local synagogue and to be active in the Jewish community. Many of the women with children remarked on how they wanted to be sure that their children were connected to Jewish culture and joining the synagogue was the only way they could ensure that. Most said that if they had remained in the northeast they may not have felt the necessity to join a synagogue as their children would have had alternative means of connecting with Jewish culture and ethnicity. This was such a motivating force that two of the women have curtailed their activities within the Jewish community and are no longer members of the synagogue since their children have become adults. Only one of the women, who did not have

children, Miriam, was a member of the synagogue.

Lillith and her family initially joined the synagogue for her children. She has been surprised to discover that where as for her, "Jewish" was once only a cultural and ethnic identity it has now become a spiritual and religious one. She is an active and prominent member of the synagogue and community and plans to maintain that involvement even after her children are grown. So rather than diminishing a sense of self, for the overwhelming majority of women in the study, living in an environment that is conservative and predominantly Christian has strengthened who they are as Jews.

#### Negotiating the Environment as Feminists

In tandem with how the women felt about the environment's influence on their Jewish self was its effect on their feminist self. All but one of the participants was involved in academia either as faculty, staff, or student. The academic setting presented an additional layer of patriarchal hierarchy to contend with. Nearly all the women who were faculty or staff found themselves involved in trying to change this system. They worked on university-wide and department committees that focused on, among other subjects, diversity, discrimination, making the university more family friendly, and women's issues. They found this to

be a positive outlet for their own frustrations as well as a viable avenue for effecting change.

In the introductory section of this dissertation I questioned whether being a feminist could ameliorate the feelings of isolation and nonacceptance associated with being a Jew. I found this to be the case for myself and I wondered if it would be true for any of the participants. I think the answer is yes. The majority of the women were very open and comfortable in identifying themselves as feminist. This seemed to be an acceptable mode of advocacy. Those women who were most comfortable with being called a feminist were the most involved in the women's community and causes. They found it to be a source of strength and friendship that flowed over into their personal lives. Those women who were not as comfortable were either new to feminism or, although they believed in the concepts, did not like the negative connotations that were associated with the label. This did not mean that they would deny being a feminist but it was not a term that they readily used to describe themselves or their ideology. These women were also not as active within or connected to the women's community.

#### The Role of Academia

Since all but one of the participants in my study were connected with a university at the time of the interviews it

is important to examine whether there is any connection between Jewish feminist identity and academia. As feminists all of the women were involved, in varying capacities and extents, with confronting the patriarchal structure entrenched in academia. Conversely because they were in an academic setting that included a women's studies program and a women's center, the women were able to come together to discuss, teach, and learn about women's issues and work to effect change. Such efforts to support women might be less prevalent in other professional settings. This is not to say that the women in this study or others at universities are able to organize with the "blessings" of the administration, but it does mean that they at least have some opportunity and space in which to do so. Several of the women discussed sexist incidents or conduct within their own department or other sections of the universities. They did note though that if they felt isolated they were often able to seek the support of other feminists on their campus.

Unlike feminists, Jews do not necessarily have organizations to call upon for support when confronting anti-semitism. On campuses in larger urban areas, where the number of Jews is greater, Jewish studies programs and associations for Jewish students, faculty, and staff often exist. But in more rural areas these associations may not

exist. Issues that participants dealt with, in relation to being Jewish, often mirrored their experiences in the larger community. The celebration or acknowledgement of Christmas, to the exclusion of other winter holidays, was a common concern of many participants. Some of the participants made it clear to colleagues that they were uncomfortable with Christmas symbols (tree, ornaments, nativity scenes) in the work place, whereas others, although uncomfortable, did not voice their concerns. Other concerns revolved around taking time off for Jewish holidays; events or meetings being scheduled on Friday nights, Saturdays, or Jewish holidays; and the general ignorance or ambivalence of colleagues concerning non-Christians.

#### The Role of Husbands

In reviewing my findings with colleagues they called to my attention the fact that when discussing family, the majority of participants referred to their family of origin or their children but seldom to their husbands. Of the 11 women participating, seven were married, one was divorced, one was engaged, and only two were single and never married. Of the married women, four were married to Jews or to men who had converted to Judaism and the remaining three were married to non-Jews.

Although I did not ask questions specifically about spouses, I did ask questions about relationships and family. Seldom did the women speak directly about the influence of their relationship with their husband on their own identities as Jews or feminists. The exception to this were women who had married non-Jews. Their husbands' acceptance or nonacceptance by the Jewish community may have had bearing on their own participation in that community.

Although participants may not have noted any direct connection between their relationship with their husbands and their feminism, it may be their sense of feminism that precluded discussing their husbands. All the participants knew that my study was being conducted from a feminist perspective, that I was only interviewing feminists, and that I was interested in their own concepts of feminism. The study was focused on them and their experiences. Perhaps as feminists, they allowed themselves to be the focus and further assumed that my only concern as a feminist researcher was their experiences as individuals. It is interesting to me that as a nonmarried, feminist woman, I did not notice this omission. This is an area I would like to explore further with these participants as well as with other feminist researchers.

## Implications of the Research

The results of this study have implications for both theory and practice. The findings provide insight into the interplay of feminism and Judaism or a Jewish identity. Although this study focused on feminists who are Jewish the methods are not limited only to women who are feminist and Jewish.

## Implications for Theory

### Feminist Standpoint

Feminist standpoint theory allows a researcher to look at constructs in addition to gender when studying the lives of women and other marginalized groups. Collins (1989) was one of the first feminists of color to articulate the need to widen the feminist research lens to include race, class, and ethnicity in addition to gender. Women of color, along with those who are from diverse ethnicities, classes, ages, and sexual orientations, experience life through these constructs as well as through the effects of gender. Marginalization, oppression, and discrimination are not exclusive to gender. It is as important to recognize the significance of these constructs in conjunction with gender as it is not to fall into the trap of developing a hierarchy of oppression (hooks, 1989). Arguing whether women experience more oppression as women or as Blacks, Hispanics,

Asians, Jews, or lesbians, is counterproductive. Rather than trying to decide whose oppression is more significant it is important to work towards the end of all types of oppression. It brings little solace to the person who is contending with discrimination to be told that her experience could be worse or that others are worse off than she is.

The use of a feminist standpoint, and especially as articulated by Collins (1989, 1990), provides an avenue for researchers to acknowledge their own locations as well as explore the intersections of gender with other social constructs. In her early research, Collins acknowledged her position as both insider and outsider. As a Black woman she had insider status when conducting research about Black women. But as an academic she also recognized her outsider position due to her class and educational status. Conversely, she found herself to be an insider as an academic in the field of research while at the same time she was an outsider as a woman and an African American. In this way, Collins was able to acknowledge both her privilege and her oppression.

This study opens up the discourse further to include ethnic and cultural constructs in conjunction with gender. Although there has been research about and narratives

written by Jewish feminists, research exploring the intersection of these two domains has been lacking. The findings from this study demonstrate the significance of both these constructs and their interplay in women's lives. Although these women faced marginalization as women and Jews, their feminist and Jewish ideologies provided a mechanism to contend with the marginalization as well as a means to effect change.

### Jewish Identity

As women, men, African Americans, Asians, Muslims, and Christians are not homogenous populations, neither are Jews. Both the literature and the findings of this study show that what it means to be a Jew or to be Jewish is as varied as the number of people who claim such an identity. Being a Jew can encompass religious doctrine, spirituality, or ethnic and cultural domains (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Langman, 1995; Lavender, 1986). But variation prevails even within each of these domains. The development of Jewish identity does not necessarily follow along the lines of biologically-based developmental theories. This study has shown that experiences, gender, and geographic location can significantly affect how a person may identify as a Jew. In particular, I found that geographic location can be as significant as many other

factors. Women who lived in an environment with a large Jewish population then relocated to one with a small population experienced change in their sense of self as a Jew. Rather than diminishing this sense, most of the participants found that living in an environment that was conservative and predominantly Christian enhanced their identity as Jews. Although living in an environment where being Jewish was not a novelty or a deficit, participants did not have to think about what it meant to be Jewish or perhaps even more significantly what it meant not to be Christian. This is an area that warrants further exploration not only with Jews but with other populations as well.

#### Adult Development

The findings from this study provide insights into the effects of the context in which one lives on adult development. Some of the more prominent findings revolve around the effects of geographic location and more specifically the cultural environment on racial or ethnic identity, and the intersection of a feminist identity with an ethnic identity.

#### Geographic Location - Cultural Environment

Development theories have examined a number of constructs that can influence a person's identity. These constructs can include family of origin, birth order,

occupation and relationship status (marital, parental, etc.). But seldom have researchers and theorists examined the possible effects of geographic location. All of the study participants, except for one, moved to Southwest Virginia from large urban areas, generally in the northeast. During the time they resided in the northeast their sense of who they were as Jews was markedly different from the way they later identified with Judaism after having lived in Southwest Virginia. Ironically their sense of being Jewish was vague when living in an environment where Jews were greater in number, they were surrounded by Jewish culture, and the larger community was more accepting and acknowledging of non-Christians. They were seldom questioned about being Jewish and they felt protected by their culture. It was not until moving to a location that was predominantly Christian and not receptive to Jews and other non-Christians, that their identity as Jews came into sharper focus. Living in this environment seems to have one of the most significant impacts on their sense of who they are as Jews. Their sense of self has developed along an unexpected path that they credit to their geographic location. This is an area that needs further exploration with Jews as well as with other populations.

### Racial or Ethnic Identity

Racial or ethnic identity can be extremely important in the development of a sense of self and well being. Being Jewish can represent some difficulty in determining where one belongs in the identity schema. Although many Jews do not feel racially White they may not have any other options from which to choose. But recognizing Jewish as only a religious identity is also problematic. The majority of Jews in the United States identify as cultural or ethnic Jews, although they may have no spiritual connection to the Jewish religion. Historically, not being a religious Jew does not provide protection from anti-semitism and violence.

It is difficult to explain the experience of being Jewish and especially difficult to explain the experience to non-Jews. Along with the ritual and traditions that are passed down from one generation to the next there is the history of violence and discrimination. Throughout their history, Jews have faced annihilation of their spirit and as a people. No doubt the sense that one could be attacked at any time merely because of one's ethnicity has a powerful influence on development. The impact of living in such a context generation after generation on processes of growth and aging merits additional research attention with Jews and other oppressed peoples of the world.

## Implications for Practice

The literature and this study have established that being Jewish is more than a religious identity. In the United States there are more Jews who identify as secular than there are those affiliated with any religious sect (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Langman, 1995; Lavender, 1986). Most of the women in this study identified themselves as culturally and ethnically Jewish. Jewish is therefore a category that needs to be acknowledged in research, therapeutic practice and education (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Langman, 1995). To identify them merely as White can diminish the experience of Jewish people (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Langman, 1995). Although many Jews may "look" White, they by no means enjoy all the benefits of White privilege (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Langman, 1995). History and modern day experiences have forced Jews to be ever alert for the dangers of anti-semitism (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Langman, 1995; Lavender, 1986). Although these concerns may seem like paranoia to non-Jews, such fears are very real to many Jews in the United States and throughout the world, even though they can be trivialized and ridiculed by the popular media and academia (Cottin Pogrebin, 1991; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). When researching the lives of people and acknowledging the

effects of social constructs such as race, class, and gender investigators must find a way to examine the multidimensional experience of being Jewish as well. Its influence over the lived experience of people who identify themselves as Jewish is far too significant to dismiss or miss. To assume arbitrarily that someone is White because they may look White and to interpret their narratives or responses to questions through this lens distorts not only their experience but also research findings. This construct, then also has implications for therapeutic, human service, and educational practices.

#### Limitations of the Study

Although this study opened up the research discourse to examine the intersection of feminism and Judaism and the effects of geographic location on identity, it was limited by the characteristics of the participants. To expand this research further, I would include Jewish feminists who were not associated with academia. To reflect the diversity of women who are Jewish and feminists better, women who are not as highly educated, in different fields and who live in other geographic locations should be interviewed.

## Research Ethics

The effects of living in a small town environment on identity is one of the questions that initially shaped this study. But living in a small town also shaped the findings that were reported and the manner in which they were related. Although some people may believe that living in a small community affords them the opportunity to get to know one another, it can present obstacles for research. As previously mentioned, the community of feminists is small in Southwest Virginia and the community of Jewish feminists even smaller. Because of the size of the community and the positions of some of the participants, maintaining anonymity became at the same time more urgent and more perplexing. Although the use of pseudonyms may be sufficient to disguise participant identity in many research projects this was not the case with mine. I found myself trying to manage the data in a way that allowed for the greatest depth and breadth while at the same time protecting the participants' identities. Some of the incidents that participants discussed would have added significantly to the findings but also would have disclosed their identity. I felt that if I did not protect their identities I could be placing them in personal or professional harm as well as placing my reputation as an ethical researcher at risk. Rather than

take this chance I opted for not including these portions of the data in the findings.

#### Future Research

To explore fully the use of feminist standpoint, research should be expanded to include women of diverse backgrounds including race, class, ethnicity, age, physical ability and sexual orientation. Not only would this bring greater diversity in the populations of research participants but also in those conducting the research as well. This can result in greater insight into the nature of feminism and the interplay between gender and other social constructs.

#### Personal Journey

The study that I initially proposed to do for my dissertation was different from the one I actually conducted. Initially I proposed to examine the diversity of feminisms and the women who call themselves feminists. I wanted to see how the feminist self interacted with other aspects of the self and how these aspects informed one another. I had decided to ask participants to complete a written narrative from an interview guide. I opted for this methodology over face-to-face interviews because of the limited diversity within the surrounding population. Because of time and funding constraints I thought I could reach a

wider array of potential participants through the internet and mail. My committee, in its infinite wisdom, told me that this was not feasible. I would not have any guarantees that people would complete the narrative and even if they did, they might not do so in a timely manner. It was then that my committee suggested interviewing women who were Jewish and feminist and living in Southwest Virginia. In part, their suggestion came from the narrative I included in my proposal as well as from their own experiences in conducting research.

My initial reaction to their suggestion was mixed. I liked the idea of being able to conduct face-to-face interviews, but the topic made me somewhat uneasy. I had difficulty in articulating this discomfort. By interviewing these women I felt as if I were exposing myself. I had no qualms in acknowledging myself as a feminist, because there was no apparent danger in that admission. Most people who knew me knew that I was a feminist, and I always identified myself as such to students and colleagues. Still I have learned, through my own experience and from the experience of those before me, that there is the potential for danger, rejection, and ridicule when people find out that one is Jewish. I was concerned for two reasons about having the word Jewish in my dissertation title. The reaction that I

received from assorted faculty and students at this institution and others, was rather unsettling. Either they were unable to understand the significance of studying this population (and I, especially initially, was not capable of fully articulating it) or I felt that I was being pigeon holed as someone who **only** does research on Jewish issues. I am sure that scholars who examine the lives of white men or women are not pigeon holed in this manner.

I have ever denied or shied away from my Jewish identity, but the climate in Southwest Virginia is not as receptive as it may be in New York or Los Angeles. The closest thing that I can liken this too is the experiences of gay or lesbian people when openly acknowledging who they are. Not knowing people's reactions, and more importantly how they will treat me in the future can make me anxious and scared. And as I write this, one other connection comes to mind. The way I felt about how I was treated by others, in relation to being sexually assaulted, is similar to how it feels for me to be a Jew in the United States. When I was assaulted, many people acknowledged that something bad happened to me but because it was not considered to be as severe as someone who was "actually raped," the depth or extent of my experience was not acknowledged by them or initially even by myself. The experience of being Jewish can

be dismissed in a similar manner. Many people may acknowledge that Jews face some discrimination, but because it is not considered to be as devastating as for someone who is Black, the Jewish experience can be trivialized or moved down on the hierarchy of oppression.

In many ways this study has provided me with the opportunity to get to know myself better. This is not an easy task nor is it one that is without pain and anxiety. But now that I am on the other side of the experience, I realize that rather than feeling inconsequential, this research experience has affirmed who I am and the experiences I have had. The only regret that I have is that I did not meet the women in my study sooner.

