

Choosing Limits, Limiting Choices: Women's Status and Religious Life

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Fundamentally Faithful

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Debbie Kram: I first want to thank the organizers of both Hadassah Brandeis Institute and JOFA for inviting us all together today. A very quick recap of my favorite JOFA conference moment: listening to Norma Baumel Joseph teaching us some years back in New York the *teshuvot* of Rav Moshe, specifically one about *hakafot*, quoting from a *sheilah* that was presented to Rabbi Yehuda Kelemer of Young Israel of Brookline at that time. Rachel Isserow, a good friend from Brookline who now lives in Israel, stood up and said, "I was the one who approached Rabbi Kelemer with that *sheilah*!" It's a favorite JOFA moment because it shows how we interweave our personal lives with our respect for authority and our challenge to authority, our acknowledgment that we are the ones who are asking those questions.

Today's panel will be talking about some of the answers to those questions based on their research. "Fundamentally faithful": women who define themselves as Orthodox range from envelope-pushers to highly traditional loyalists. Today we're going to hear about some of the social and psychological factors that attract women to Orthodoxy and determine their movement in and out of our religious communities. Personally, I have to say, as was said previously by other panelists, that Orthodoxy is who I am. It's not a choice; it's who I am.

We're going to be hearing from three wonderful speakers. First from Dr. Michelle Friedman, a psychiatrist in New York, who's the director of pastoral counseling at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School. Next from Stephanie Wellen Levine, who's a lecturer at Tufts University, and if you haven't yet seen her book, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*, it's available in the Feldberg Lounge across the hall. It's a wonderful story of her experience living with Lubavitch teenage girls in Crown Heights. And thirdly, from Dr. Debra Kaufman, a distinguished professor of sociology at Northeastern University who has done a great deal of research with *ba'alot teshuvah*. They have been posed with questions that they have incorporated into their remarks, as each panel has before them. In the interest of time, I'm sure they'll be addressing these questions themselves in their remarks, and I'm pleased to introduce Dr. Michelle Friedman.

Michelle Friedman: I'm going to read the questions that were raised for us, the panel, to consider, because they really helped frame my thinking, and they also gave me a good joke: "Here are some questions we hope you will address in your remarks. Please analyze the tension that women feel between their religious commitments and their personal, psychological, and professional lives. Why do religious feminists stay both religious and feminist? How do they do

that? Why do some women reject feminism, at least in theory? How do they explain their lives to themselves?" Now with all this tension inside, outside, stress, strain—we definitely need a shrink in the organization. Here I am.

I'm going to tell you in just a few words about the perspective that I'm coming from. Then what I'd like to do is spend the bulk of my time talking about some of the psychological and social factors—although my colleagues on the panel are much more schooled in sociology than I am and will do that more fully. But I'll talk about psychological factors that support traditional religious structures, that are alluring to women from the outside who come into the religious world, and also that keep women there. Then I want to talk about the tension that I believe all women feel to different degrees in some way or another. I don't think that there's any woman—I don't care if she's in New Square or in Mea She'arim—who doesn't see a bus ad, is not exposed to the Internet, or who doesn't go to a doctor's office and have a conversation with somebody there. There's far more permeability and exposure to different cultural influences than communities sometimes wants to acknowledge. Then I want to play a little bit with the issue of how women resolve—maybe that word is overambitious, how do women *sustain* these tensions? Cutting to the chase, it's an individual thing for each and every woman. There are macro- and micro-level resolutions or adjustments or compromises that all women make.

Now for myself, as I've already said, I am a psychiatrist. People have said a little bit about their own journeys. Although my parents are survivors, I come from a very secular background and came into religious life on my own. In some ways, that frees me up to be more of the "anthropologist on Mars" when I'm hearing stories from all quarters of the religious community. I'm not coming from any really defined place myself in those communities. I am a

psychiatrist in Manhattan, and I've been in practice for over twenty years. As there are very few Orthodox women psychiatrists, I have had the privilege of consulting with and having people referred to me from all quarters of the religious Jewish world. I've probably seen several hundred [clients]—mostly women, a few men, but exponentially more women from the extreme, extreme right of the religious world, with the exception of *khabbad* women who rarely seek my services. I think that is because the *khabbad* community, having so many *ba'aot teshuvah*, probably supplies its own psychological infrastructure. But certainly I see many women from Satmar and some of the other smaller *khasidish* communities, the *agudah/yeshivish* world, and certainly the modern Orthodox world. I have many vignettes, which I will tell you in some disguised ways, to illustrate my points.

In addition, I hope to draw on material that comes from the end of a five-year study. I've done with several colleagues. We've just put the final touches on the first write-up of a five-year, data-driven research project on the sexual lives of observant women, a topic which I'm sure a few people in this audience might be interested in. Some people may be familiar with the 1999 Laumann study out of Chicago, which looked at sex in America. It was a study of about 1,500 women and an equal number of men, and looked at very, very detailed indices, in first-person interviews, live interviews with subjects. My colleagues and I designed an anonymous questionnaire that the respondents mailed back, and we then analyzed the data. We used many of the same indices as Laumann, and then we developed a whole new series of indices to try to look not just at how do the sexual lives of observant women compare to the general American population but at the impact of observance of *taharat ha-mishpacha* on women's sexual life. Through that study, we were really privileged to get an enormous amount of data and many

clinical vignettes as well.

So, what are the psychological factors that support traditional religious structures? This of course has been said before, and said very eloquently, but I think it deserves to be mentioned again that many women, despite the various cultural, family, and complex psychological pressures, deeply subscribe on a faith level to the belief system. Of course, it is very difficult to separate out what we “learn from mother’s milk,” from the deepest of family messages, to tenets of faith that we think we understand only in adulthood. Women talk in a very devoted way about their belief. But when women come to me in my office as a psychiatrist, they are not coming about this issue. Women don’t come to my office because of struggles with the tensions between feminism and religious life. They’re coming because they have the same problems of living as everybody else. They’re coming because they’re anxious, because they’re depressed, because they have marital problems, OCD, schizophrenia, and on and on.

Sometimes these clusters of symptoms are activated by or expressed in the language of their cultural and religious life, but that’s not what my patients are coming to me to complain about. Their religious life is rarely the agenda that they have come to me as a psychiatrist to talk about. I can sometimes ask questions about things that interest me, but my charge really is what they have come to me, as a physician, to deal with. But I do hear from these women that many of them do accept—and we can talk about what “accept” means—a psychosocial religious explanation of women’s role that they have been taught at home and in school. The short version of that, which they relate to me, is the belief that Jewish women’s status is special, different from men’s, and that different but equal is very powerful. These women assume the responsibility that they are the guardians of tradition. It is their job to maintain *sni’ut*, to thwart male sexual

temptation, to keep the system safe. They take this on in very serious ways. I had one woman from Rockland County whose husband wished that she would wear less boxy clothing, and that she would do different things. He's the one who would like her to be more "modern," and she's the one who says no. This is a woman who wears a *sheitl*, the kind of string *sheitl* that's sewn to the hat, and she does not want to change. She feels that's her charge to be the guardian of her tradition.

I hear an attenuated version of this stance from more modern women who feel a responsibility to limit their exposure to alternative and provocative worldviews. I was talking to a young woman who went to an Ivy League college, and I asked her, "So what was it like for you, sitting in these classes where people were comparing Bible to western philosophy?" This extremely intellectually gifted young woman answered, "At times I felt, 'should I be listening to this? Should I be reading this? Is this for me?'" I could hear—and she confirmed this—that the question, "Is this for me?" is deeply ingrained very, very early on, particularly in girls and women who are entrusted to keep their tradition safe. Women always make jokes about this. You know, "Why can't men keep their pants zipped? Why is it that women are the ones who have to be practically in *chadors*?" But this is something that the women are taught from very early on.

Another psychological factor that supports the status quo, the traditional, gendered religious system, is that many religious women see male religious responsibilities as entirely burdensome. They think it is preposterous to want to do more than they already have to do. Who would want to do more than they already have to do? It is fascinating to me to hear how powerful and permeating these ideologies and these stances are. Now, I'm not saying I accept these as the bottom-line truth. I'm describing it to you as something that is very deeply held.

Most Orthodox women do not feel comfortable talking the language of feminism. I hear material from them that expresses symptomatically constriction, confinement, even oppression, but they don't use those words. For the women who do find themselves creeping out from that world, playing around the edges, experimenting, it's only much later that they might apply some of the language of feminism to that experience. But women experience tension and they experience strain in the language of their own lives. I'm going to give you an example of such a thing. I saw a woman from a very extreme Satmar sect in her second trimester of one of her many pregnancies. From the moment she walked into my office, I was struck by the playful chic of her maternity wear. She's sitting there talking to me about her anxiety, and I'm listening to her and wondering "How did she get that blue velour top to match that skirt? How did she get that pashmina? How is an ultra-hassidish woman getting away with wearing these totally funky glasses with rhinestones?" So I asked her about her fashion, and she said took out pictures of her husband and kids at a *bar mitzvah*. She says that people have said to her she should really change her clothing style, because it is going to impact on her kids' *shidduchim*. When she related these comments to her husband, his answer was " You know what? Don't change anything because if they don't like the way you dress, they're not going to like us." This may not be what JOFA is entirely about, but this is a profoundly feminist statement that this woman is expressing in her extremely educationally narrowed life. This is her expression of her autonomy, of her capability to make an independent decision that happens to be stylistic.

How do women experience this tension? I was talking about it in terms of symptoms, but I think all of us deal with emotional and cognitive dissonance all of the time. People, women, Jews have to deal with this and have to figure out some way to make compromises. For example,

we are all sitting here very comfortably in this beautiful room in Waltham, Massachusetts. Some people have come to join this conference and graced us from Israel. Some in this room are planning to move to Israel, but most of us ardent Jews, lovers of Israel, do not have active plans to move imminently to Israel. We are living somehow with the emotional and cognitive dissonance of knowing that there's something that we could do, ought to do, should do, it's a unique moment in history, but we're not doing it. You find a resolution that works for you, that helps you with your own anxiety. There's a kind of post facto rationalization and compromise that people work out.

I said that I would refer to this sex study, so I can't not refer to that, right? That would really be cruel and inhuman! About four hundred women answered [our questionnaire], but we threw out about twenty because they didn't fit our criteria, they were not scrupulous enough in their adherence to *taharat mishpacha*. So we have 380 totally adherent women, and 90 percent of them had gone to *kallah* classes, most of which they found not helpful in terms of their sexual life, although fine with other kinds of things. We asked, "What do you wish your *kalla* teacher had taught you?" We categorized the answers. One response that came up over and over was about basic sexual anatomy and physiology, male and female. Another big one was "I have a right as a woman to sexual pleasure. It's not a favor my husband does for me. Why did it take me fifteen years to find this out?" Now that is something that is as basic as can be, but it's kind of a "feminist agenda." A woman's right to experience her body in a full way in a religious marital context is something that needs to be taught. It's not necessarily implicit.

Another thing that we found is that one of the biggest predictors of sexual dissatisfaction was the patterns of communication, meaning who initiated sex in the couple. If it was the man

most of the time, that was a high predictor of sexual dissatisfaction. Another fascinating finding concerned denominational differences in terms of sexual satisfaction and dysfunction. On this score, denominational differences absolutely melted. Whether a woman was *haredi* or modern was far less significant than whether she was *frum* from birth or a *ba'alat tshuvah*. The *ba'alot teshuvah* had a much higher rate of sexual satisfaction. This is not necessarily correlated with premarital sexual activity. What we infer is that there was a different notion, a different imparting of sexual style, of sexual autonomy, of sexual opportunity to women who did not come from *frum*-from-birth homes.

So how do women resolve these tensions? They make compromises within the system. One of the compromises, which I think you see a lot in the modern Orthodox world, is to be a feminist in the street and a traditional woman at home; allowing fathers, husbands, and even sons to make decisions, to set tone. That's one way women resolve tension that they find too difficult to sustain. Certainly, some women can't achieve compromise and leave the religious world. I find that a very sad compromise, and hopefully, it is just a temporary interruption of religious life and these women find alternate expressions of Jewish faith and community. But I think leaving is a reality of what some women do. Another resolution—and I'm going to end with a story that illustrates this—is to become a change maker oneself, and to actively apply oneself to influencing systems and institutions, as we've heard from the wonderful women at this conference who are involved in education. The story that I'll leave you with is of a woman who did not come to me in a clinical setting, but whom I was privileged to interview in a program we both participated in. She's a woman from *Toldot Aharon*. She is from Mea She'arim, from an extremely large family of about sixteen or seventeen kids. She had a very, very difficult time in

that family, as is not so uncommon, because of the incredible needs of many, many small children, and she herself decided to limit her family to just five children. Her husband supported her choice but nobody else in her family did. They always pitied her, and every time somebody else was pregnant: "Ach, it should only be you!" But it was a very, very deliberate decision. She, interestingly, became a nurse, and she saw it as her mission to try to educate other women about the possibilities of choice. I asked her at the end of this interview—somebody was translating—whether or not there was anything else in *Toldot Aharon* that she wished she could change, and she said, no, she was okay with everything else. She was making a *shidduch* for her oldest son, she was fine with everything. Then I said, "Do you consider yourself a feminist," and she thought about it and she said, "Yes."

Stephanie Wellen Levine: I thought it would be best to start off with a bit of personal background. I am myself secular. I am in no way Orthodox. But I've always been really, really fascinated by religious faith and passionate religious observance, to the point where I spent a little over a year, while I was in graduate school, living with the Lubavitcher Hasidim of Crown Heights. My focus was on the teenage girls in the community. I wondered what it would be like to grow up in a culture like theirs. The issue was riveting to me, so I actually became, to the extent possible for me at that time, a Lubavitch teenage girl. That's the context for my remarks. I also consider myself to be a very strong feminist. I don't even have to think about that. That's very much a part of my identity, as well as being secular.

These qualities of mine led me to expect to feel very sorry for the girls I was getting to know. I went in with an open mind, as you'll see, but I was absolutely expecting not to be impressed, to put it bluntly. I knew, as you all know very well, that there were stringent

expectations for dress, diet, belief, and behavior, and that girls and boys lead completely separate lives outside of their families (school, camp, and social events were all single-sex). I also realized that these young women would be marrying at a very early age, and that they were barred from becoming rabbis or even counting in a religious quorum. You all are used to wrestling with these issues, and to many of you it's not shocking. To me, it was shocking. As I wrote in my book, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*, about my experiences, "The possibility that these girls' lives could be anything other than the platonic essence of feminine subjugation seemed as unlikely as a suckling pig on a Shabbos table." And really that is not an exaggeration.

On the other hand, as I've said, passionate religious faith has always intrigued me. I entered this group expecting to be impressed with the mystical thought, which I knew was a part of Hasidism, and also the close community. But I was bracing myself for the unpleasant context of the girls' gender-oriented situation, and the boxes that they were going to be put into. I went in there with one question foremost in my mind and in my heart, which was, how on earth do these young women remain within the fold? What social and psychological factors would keep them there? That was very much on my mind as I entered.

I imagine that some of you have spent time in this community or a similar community, so it may not shock you at all to hear that, within days, all of my preconceptions were quashed to the ground. Luckily, I was willing to have them quashed to the ground and actually very happy to experience that. The shy, meek, unadventurous Hasidic girls engrained in my imagination never appeared. Instead I discovered these wild girls; they tore through the halls and yelled and screamed and teased their teachers and just were lovely. I mean, so dynamic. Some of you who

teach in these schools may not think it's so lovely. At times I actually pitied the teachers. Some of you may resonate with that. But it was wild to me, given my preconceptions. Aggressiveness and *chutzpah* were valued. I asked students, "Who in your school tends to be well liked?"

Almost universally, the response was "the loud girls." The loud girls, of all things. I found this very ironic since, in the mainstream, middle class high school I went to, that was coed and prided itself on egalitarianism in every sphere, the loud girls generally were seen as obnoxious bitches. They were not well liked, whereas the loudest boys were typically famous for their spirit and wit. For them, it was great to be loud, but for the girls, it was actually not at all great.

These girls impressed me in other ways as well. They had a very impressive level of self-awareness. I was expecting to find beauty in their passionate religious faith, and indeed I did. That was wonderful. They had a truly awe-inspiring sense of their own personal power to affect the world. There's a belief in Lubavitch, which I'm sure virtually everybody in here is well aware of, that the Messiah will be coming soon, and that one person's actions could determine when this happens. If a girl (or anyone else, for that matter) is good in even one small way, that might bring the Messiah. If she's bad in some way, that might be a deterrent. This is the level of power they felt. While this is very controversial, and some people don't like aspects of it, which I well understand, it gave many Lubavitchers such a strong sense of their identity and their ability to influence the entire universe that I couldn't help but be impressed, despite the political issues. Because of this, they took their personal growth very seriously, which was great.

I wasn't shocked by these strengths, but I frankly was shocked by the benefits many girls took from the gender-specific aspects of their lives. For the most part, I was very impressed by the girls' single-sex lives. I know from various discussions we've had here at the conference that

there are many opinions on this issue. We just heard one person say that, for most girls, it's a very good thing, and somebody else say that she was very passionate about having the coed situation. I want to explain at the outset that I feel very strongly that different people thrive in different circumstances, so I am not, with a capital N, saying that everybody should go to a single-sex school, that's it's the best for everyone. But I did see the benefit to a single-sex experience, even though I was expecting to dislike it very much. The girls were able to be loud and aggressive. We talked earlier about whether gender is biological or somehow sociological. I definitely came to the conclusion that this aggressive tendency that some people think is biological in boys is, if you go by these Lubavitch girls, sociological. They were aggressive with a capital A. Very often. Again, not always. There were no boys around to take the stereotypical role of the loud, aggressive male—so many of the girls took this role for themselves.

Another key aspect was that the girls were not pushed to become sexual. Again I was skeptical of this, as many secular women are. But I quickly found myself being riveted by it. The girls had a youthful exuberance at age seventeen and eighteen, when most other seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds I've known have lost that and have developed a certain insecurity. They want to present themselves in a certain way, because they know that they're being judged as sexual creatures. I didn't see that among the Lubavitch girls until the next stage, when they're looking for a spouse. That's a whole different story. But until that happens, there's a certain freedom that actually was very inspiring to me. I'm not saying that nobody should be having sex before marriage, even, which might be an unpopular comment in here. Still, I was quite impressed.

We were asked to consider what keeps Orthodox girls and women in their communities. Frankly, in my experience, what kept most of them there was that they were quite satisfied. I

didn't have to look for nuances. Most of them were happy, so why would they leave? For most girls, as Michelle said of her community, feminism was a vague, faintly sinister concept in their minds, not at all something that they identified with. It was something they'd heard about through the grapevine that they knew wasn't for them. That was their interaction with the concept of feminism.

But I would be remiss to end the story here. A small but vibrant minority had deep-seated problems adjusting to the community's gender roles. Since my book and my research focus primarily on individual stories, I want to give you a sense of some of those. Rochel is one young woman who was really fascinating to me, riveting. She lost faith at a very young age, just didn't believe, and this made her very upset. As you can imagine, she was like a stranger in the Promised Land. Nearly every night, she cried herself to sleep over this. There were aspects of her culture that she loved—the family meals, the togetherness, the community—but she just didn't believe. Everything seemed grounded in this absurd fiction to her, and it was awful. She ended up not observing. Her parents kicked her out. It was terrible for her, and one issue that was paramount in her mind was women's roles. She wanted to be able to study like her brothers, and she was irked that her father sat at the head of the table, unlike her mother. Gender was central to her. Now, Rochel actually defined herself as a feminist—the only one among the girls whom I'm going to discuss. The girl who left was the girl who did define herself as a feminist.

There's another very interesting young woman whose name is Leah. She's similar to Rochel in some ways. She also felt a fundamental clash between her desires and her culture. The essential difference was that she believed, even more rivetingly than most of the girls. She was a limit-pusher in some ways, but she had the most passionate faith that you could possibly

imagine. She had a deep-seated issue with her role as a woman in the Hasidic community. Since she believed so strongly, she assumed she would have to conform to these expectations, but she was dissatisfied. She admitted to a certain amount of misery, and I sensed much more deep-seated misery from talking to her about these issues. It was very sad. She was awkward around kids, she hated cooking, and she hated cleaning. She admitted all this to me, but she knew what she was going to have to do, and she was constantly trying to negotiate it. There was no feminist consciousness here at all. Leah was not a feminist; she simply felt at odds with what she was expected to do.

I'll mention another young woman briefly, just to tantalize you and get you thinking about the range of girls I encountered. She became a doctor. She did not question her gender role—she was very excited about marriage and children—but she also wanted to be a doctor. As you can imagine, in this community, it was very difficult. People thought it was odd. But it really wasn't that much of a problem because, frankly, she would assimilate her ambitious career within a fundamental role she felt comfortable with: Hasidic wife and mother. So it was tough, but she wasn't really questioning deep-seated values.

The woman who I think speaks most profoundly to this JOFA conference is Leah. It makes me sad, even now, to think about her. I've been in touch with her. She is married, but I hear she's not all that happy. In her ideal world, perhaps she'd be the man in the family. She'd be the studious rabbi, and her wife would be taking care of the kids and doing all the stuff that she does not enjoy in the slightest. But that's not an option, obviously. Or maybe she'd enjoy life as a single woman without children. *Halakhically*, technically, this would be fine, but sociologically, it was so profoundly against anything that anybody expected of her that she just

couldn't do it. She was stuck.

What do we do with a Leah? How do we keep her in this community that she believes in so strongly and passionately without making her miserable, without putting her into a role that conflicts with her fundamental sense of herself? That is my question, and if any group of Orthodox people can grapple with this, I think it's JOFA, so I think I'm going to leave you there.

Debra Kaufman: "The big lie of male supremacy is that women are less than fully human. The basic task of feminism is to expose that lie and fight it on every level. Yet for all my feminist militancy, I was, it seemed, secretly afraid that the lie was true, that my humanity was hopelessly at odds with my ineluctably female sexuality, while the *rebbitzin*, the wife of the rabbi, staunch apostle of traditional femininity, did not appear to doubt for a moment that she could be both a woman and a serious person, which was only superficially paradoxical, for if you were absolutely convinced that the Jewish woman's role was ordained by God, and that it was every bit as important spiritually as the man's, how could you believe the lie?" (Ellen Willis, *Rolling Stone Magazine*, April 21, 1977, p. 76). This is the quote with which I began my book, *Rachel's Daughters*, about *ba'alot teshuvah*, women who have returned to Orthodoxy. Someone asked me, by the way, at lunch to please explain the terms that we're using. For instance, "returning" to Orthodoxy is probably a misnomer, certainly in English. One cannot return to a place that one has never been. *Ba'alot teshuvah* who "return" to Orthodoxy refers to those who have embraced Orthodoxy as adults. *Ba'alot teshuvah* refers to women who were born Jews, but who have lived their lives outside of Orthodoxy, and who, in their adult years, become *ba'a lot teshuvah*—mistresses of return.

The first point I'd like to make today is that I'm talking about a group of women who are

different from other Orthodox Jewish women. I'm talking about those who have made a conscious choice sometime in their young adult or adult years to embrace Orthodoxy. Most were, at best, minimally identified as Jews before their "return" to Orthodoxy. This leads to the second point that I want to make: Orthodox women are not a monolithic group of women. What I think is emerging today, and I hope will be explored later in our discussions, is just how varied Orthodoxy is, and the many ways in which it can be expressed. *Ba'alot teshuvah* differ from those brought up as Orthodox from birth, or "FFBs" ("frum from birth" or Orthodox from birth), as we've come to call them, and from those who have converted to Judaism and have become Orthodox. Not only do *ba'alot teshuvah* differ from those born Orthodox, but they differ among themselves as well. They spread themselves across the continuum from modern Orthodoxy to ultra-Orthodoxy. Today I'm referring to my book *Rachel's Daughters* which explores the values and attitudes of 150 *ba'alot teshuvah* living in different cities within the United States. One third of them refer to themselves as former feminists. Most identified with the feminist movement and were young adults in the late sixties and early seventies. One way in which these women differ from FFBs is that most have experienced, for the most part, a far less restrictive life in their growing up years. They are more readily able to talk about their life experiences and to use feminist rhetoric when speaking about themselves as women. They bring to the Orthodox community a language and a willingness to talk about their past experiences. Moreover, the *ba'alot teshuvah* vary in their practices and Orthodox beliefs. The modern Orthodox are more likely than the ultra-Orthodox, for instance, to speak critically and with more consciousness and awareness of their past lives and of their present experiences. They are less likely to explore the mystical aspects of Judaism and to be professional, full-time workers. In other words, the

modern Orthodox are still far more a part of the secular world than those who find themselves, as Michelle said, to the wall.

Differences among *ba'alot teshuvah*, depending on where they are situated within Orthodoxy and the community of which they are a part, are fairly well documented by others who have studied *ba'alei teshuvah*, as well. This is particularly true around the body, reproduction, and sexuality. Except for the hassidic women, for instance, almost all have admitted to the use of birth control, either the pill or the diaphragm, at different times over the life course. Most of the women I studied have familiarity with Talmudic texts and continue to study in all-female study groups. However, modern Orthodox women are more likely to study *gemara*, for instance, than ultra-Orthodox women. The focus on the body, especially during and after niddah, created in many of these women a heightened sensuality toward the female body and toward other women. This was more readily expressed as sensual among modern Orthodox women than among Hasidic women. I think these aspects of sexuality and sensuality, as perhaps a consequence of sex-segregated living, have been given little attention or exploration. What I mean is that we tend to focus on the consequences of sex segregation in terms of reinforcing male and female differences and inequalities, not generally on the effects of such on the women themselves and their perceptions of one another. Interestingly, almost all the *ba'alot teshuvah*, especially among the modern Orthodox, claimed that according to *halakha* they were entitled to be sexually satisfied. Indeed, one woman said to me (although I was not able to find any halakhic evidence to verify it) that her husband was commanded to kiss every part of her body. So some of you might want to pursue that to see if it is indeed *halakhically* true.

Often their descriptions included a heightened awareness of their own sexuality through

the ritual acts of being a woman. For instance, when referring to the laws of *niddah* one woman stated that it was like being a bride all over again. The anticipation of resuming intercourse maintained a passion in the marriage many felt would have been lost after the first few years of marriage had it not been for *niddah*. My argument here, by the way, is that sex-segregated living and the sharp division of labor between men and women within Orthodoxy helps to create a particular sensuality between and by women toward one another.

Perhaps one of the greatest distinctions between *ba'a lot teshuvah* and other Orthodox women, however, is that *ba'alot tshuvah* are more likely to be in greater conflict with their families of origin than those who are Orthodox from birth. Therefore, not only are they likely to have tensions between their needs and wants as women in a patriarchal tradition and to have trouble balancing their commitment to community with a commitment to self, as we have heard about Orthodox women in general, but they are also frequently in tension with their families of origin—their parents, their siblings, their aunts, uncles, and cousins.

In an article I wrote entitled, “My Mother’s Daughter, My Daughter’s Mother,” I write about the most poignant of these conflicts. It’s usually between the daughter and her mother. For instance, one mother says to her daughter, “Take that *shmateh*,”—Yiddish for “rag,” which in this case, refers to the scarf that the woman is wearing to cover her head—“off your head, and use the talent you have for thinking, not for baby-making. Is that why we spent so much money on your Ivy League education?” Another bit of tension between a daughter and her parents is this one, where a young woman recognizes with great sadness that she, although she adores her parents, is moving farther and farther away from them, not only in geographic distance, but emotionally. She laments, “We have to drive, not fly, because we have to bring our own utensils

and our own food. We cannot visit over the weekends or Jewish holidays because we will not drive on *Shabbat*. We also then have to explain to the children why grandma and grandpa use the lights on *Shabbat*, heat the food, and ride in the car. You can imagine how difficult it is for us. We don't want to hurt my parents but, of course, it is inevitable. My mother loves to cook and tries to buy the right food and all, but it almost always presents a problem."

And finally, one very perceptive young woman says, "By becoming Orthodox, my parents feel I am saying to them 'I am a better Jew than you.'" So the tensions are very great. It's not that I don't believe that Orthodox women have tensions with their families, but I do believe that they are heightened for *ba'a lot teshuvah*.

In my book, I refer to the *ba'alot tshuvah* I studied as "post-feminists." Time limits any in-depth discussion now, but I hope you will pick this up again in our discussions, because it has been mentioned by the others on the panel as well. Until recently, our focus on religious-right women in general has been almost exclusively on their participation in anti-feminist activity. While generally it is true that women who turn to patriarchal religious traditions outrightly reject feminist politics, recent data also suggest that some women make claims for an enhanced status for women and for greater claims upon men as husbands and fathers within those patriarchal traditions. While these religious-right women may attack feminism and feminists, often what underlies this hostility is a wariness of men's morality and consequently, of feminism when it appears to support men's irresponsibility. Therefore, despite many religious-right women's distrust of feminism, their focus on raising women's status, promoting female interests, and altering gender-role behavior, particularly of men as fathers and as husbands, resonates with issues long of concern to feminists. Indeed, when feminism was first introduced in America, as

Linda Gordon reminds us, it referred to the sanctity of motherhood.

“Post-feminist,” rather than anti-feminist or sexist, is the term that I and others have used to describe the gender consciousness and the family and work strategies of many contemporary women. The *ba'alot teshuvah* incorporate, revise, adapt, and in many ways, politicize many of feminism's central goals. Destabilized family and work conditions and the difficulty of bringing about any real change in the private arena of life, most particularly, again, in the role behavior of men, suggests a rejection of the secular and an embracing of the sacred, where there are strict rules of conduct for men as well as for women. The *ba'alot teshuvah* argue for their choices within a contemporary familial context. Now, here comes the sociological analysis: like many early feminists, they juxtapose the family oriented and family- friendly community of Jewish Orthodoxy to a larger world run amok with aggressive individualism and materialistic values. In that sense, their embracing of Orthodoxy is as much about what is wrong with the secular, as it is about the joys of the sacred. From the family purity laws to the value and divinity accorded to them as wives and mothers, the *ba'alot teshuvah* regard this as institutional protection. Within Orthodoxy, they are no longer dependent upon individual males but upon a theology that they believe is “feminine in principle.”

In sex-segregated communities, women can participate daily in a community of women whose social and religious practices represent the ethic of care and commitment they value, and often what they had been seeking before they found Orthodoxy. Sex-segregated living reinforces a woman-centered identity and reasserts the importance of female-linked practices and symbols. Sociological discomfort with the world during times of gender-role disruption and upheaval is what I would count as a very important aspect of the embracing of Jewish Orthodoxy by many of

these *ba'alot teshuvah*. There are few institutional and cultural changes to support those upheavals outside of Jewish Orthodoxy. *Ba'a lot teshuvah*, perhaps more than other Orthodox women, are better able to assess realistically the sacred and the secular world. "Better the devil I know," said one woman to me, "than the one out there that is more subtle and more hidden." She ended by saying to me, "When we clean up the patriarchy out there, I will be more willing to talk to you about the patriarchy within Orthodoxy." What maintains these women's commitments to both self and community is that they grow ever more dependent upon the women in their own community in building a sense of self and a sense of communal self. There is then the need for the creation of women's networks of support all the way from birth to death, and over all the many life-cycle events. Therefore, I would argue that living in a world of women reinforces all the very things that Jewish Orthodox women value so much. Thank you.

Debbie Kram: Excellent. I want to thank all our panelists and as the moderator, I have the privilege of posing a question to them before I open it up to the audience. The question, which I'll read to you in a minute, which the panelists have all seen, has been asked at every panel so far, but it will be interesting to hear the answer from this group. I want to frame my question with a few words of *Torah*. We know that *Pesach* can't be far behind, since *Purim* is next week. *Ve-higadeta le-vinkha*, or has JOFA has so creatively rewritten that line, *ve-higadet le-vitekh*, "tell your children"—we're referring here to the story of the Jewish people. There's a very interesting interpretation of the *ve-higadeta le-vinkha*, or in our case, *le-vitekh*, that this *tsivui*, this commandment, was actually given to Moses to tell his own children about the story of the exodus from Egypt, since they were the only members of the Jewish people who were not present. They were in *Midyan* with Tsiporah. Think about that for a minute. Think about what

that means for us and our work in terms of advancing women's learning, advancing women in the power structure, and advancing women in Orthodoxy. What does that mean for the next generation if our own children are not aware of what it is that we're doing here today? My question to the panel was based on your work in the field. Can you address the generational divide between women who have actively strived for consciousness-raising in the Orthodox community on women's issues for the last twenty-plus years, be it concerning meta-*halakhic* issues or societal ones, and a younger generation who have been raised with these realities, and who are just not as passionate about advancing the movement? I'm interested in your answers.

Michelle Friedman: I think this gives us an opportunity to bring together a lot of the ideas that other panels have talked about, and I'm going to talk about two things. First of all, I think that young women now, as has been said before, take for granted a great deal of what is accessible to them. Short of being like a NASA astronaut or chairman of some super-duper board, the entry level into most graduate schools, most training programs, etc., is nowhere what it was, let's say, thirty years ago. So, while it might be very hard to be a cardiothoracic surgeon in New York, there's not that many women who want to do that. Whereas if you want to get into law school or medical school or this or that, you can get going. So young women do not perceive the same level of block as, certainly, we did and people before us.

I want to bring up something again from the sex study which was a really interesting finding. When we looked at the women's premarital sexual experience, it was like the two lines of American and Jewish samples went in totally different directions. The women of about fifty—and above were far more sexually experienced premaritally than the women in their twenties—our daughters' age. But starting back, I'm going to say around 1970 to 1975, there was a

dramatic upswing in the premarital sexual experience of the general American population. So, as

I said, these two lines cross and diverge tremendously.

One of the points that Deborah made today, which is in her book, is that people perceive Orthodox Judaism and conservative cultures of most sorts as being very pro-family. These are conservative cultures that support marriage, child-rearing, etc. Jewish women, even committed Jewish women, are marrying later and bearing fewer children. This is not lost on young women. The sort of sexual free-for-all out there is not lost on young women either, and that's coupled with the premarital chastity emphasis—the whole *shomer negiyah* thing—that is much more powerful in young women's education today. All of these factors come together, and young women are extremely concerned about making it in conventional society in terms of getting married young, not missing the boat, not being one of these forlorn singles, however they see it, on the Upper West Side, where I live. At the same time, the barriers to the conventional professions that they want to enter are really not so high. So I think those two factors are among the many that lower the incentive to be committed in an outspoken way.

Stephanie Wellen Levine: I would definitely echo a lot of what Michelle said, and I have a bit to add on my own. The community that I looked at was a little different from modern Orthodox communities, where this would be a very central question. It really got me thinking about a lot of relevant issues. I was thinking about the fact that there has actually been a lot of consciousness raising, even in Crown Heights. For example, there's now a bat mitzvah club, or at least there was when I was there, in Crown Heights. It was very exciting. It was girls around twelve years old. They would get together and discuss how they felt about being twelve and coming of age and wrestling with their identities, becoming Jewish women as opposed to children. It was

emphasizing coming of age in a way that girls didn't used to do. If you were to ask the girls if they enjoyed it, they would say, yes, it's fine, whatever. They liked it but they weren't that passionate about it. They really weren't engaging with the fact that this was a new-fangled thing, and their mothers and teachers had worked hard to do it, and they had had to buck all sorts of trends and expectations. They were not engaging with that. It was just fun.

And that's just one example. There was a lot of stuff that went on that the girls just took for granted, like the sun rising every day. There was nothing about the fact that it was very different in the past. In secular universities, you have a lot of girls who want to be the lawyers and doctors and all this stuff, but if you ask them "are you a feminist?" they say, "Oh, no, definitely not." It's ironic. You can ask them, "Do you like having the right to even debate whether you are or are not a feminist at X University, which used to be all male?" There was a time when just gaining that right was a feminist fight. The mothers in this community, who came of age during the more political times, didn't consider themselves to be feminists, either. So you don't have that sort of overt tension—we are feminists, and we define ourselves as feminists, and this is terrible. Here, our daughter, she's in medical school, she's not even thinking about the fact that she didn't used to have the right to do this. It was much more of an undercurrent than we typically think, I would imagine, even in the modern Orthodox communities, as opposed to in the Lubavitch community.

One final thought: right-wing Orthodox communities, of which the Lubavitch, of course, is just one, have actually become more right wing in recent years than they had been in the girls' grandmothers' generation. Several of the rebels had a generational alliance with their grandmothers against their mothers. The girls would complain, "I can't even go roller skating in

a coed place,” and the grandmother would say, “Ach, yes, between you and me, that’s ridiculous.” And the mother is holding her ground. So in terms of the issue of generational conflict as it relates to pushing the boundaries, it’s not what we typically expect, which is to get more and more liberal in a kind of straight line: most conservative in the past, moving towards more liberal. As I’m sure most of you know very well, that is not the case in these sorts of right-wing Orthodox communities.

Debra Kaufman: I want to pick up on what Stephanie said. I don’t think that’s the way change occurs. I don’t think it’s linear; I think it’s bumpy. I think it’s roundabout, and I think that we are in the midst of change, and I think Orthodoxy itself is experiencing enormous change. Just pick up any one of Sylvia Fishman’s books, and you know that change is here. The generational divide is only a divide in the context in which we put it. For instance, some of the *ba’alot teshuvah* mothers bring with them both rhetoric and experience that informs their children’s lives, whether they overtly tell them that or not. The children inculcate that thinking, although not perhaps explicitly. The children may find a way of expressing their differences and similarities to their mothers, and it may turn, for instance, not on feminism per se but on a feminist ecological issue. They may look more to the ecology as a way of expressing the liberalism of their mothers, rather than focusing on whether or not their own children can roller skate with boys. They may be looking at other issues that bring them into the secular world in a slightly different way and in a feminist way. Rather than feminism, many believe that it is halakhah that has brought them to thinking in what may be interpreted as feminist, or perhaps, better, post feminist thinking. I’ll end with a statement that one *ba’al teshuvah* woman made to me: “Orthodox women, rabbis? Yes, it will happen. I’m in no hurry,” she said. “Another 300

years.”

Debbie Kram: Thank you. I can open the mike now for questions. I'm going to take two questions at first, then we're going to open it up to the panel, and then we'll do two more.

Q: Hi. My name is Minnie Yazgar. I'm a senior at Barnard. You've spoken very well about the psychological attractions to the Orthodoxy way of life. What have you witnessed in women who were formerly Orthodox and were attracted to a lifestyle outside of Orthodoxy? Do you have some anecdotes to share about their conflict embracing the secular world and rejecting Orthodox lifestyle?

Q: My name is Malchi. I have two questions, actually, for Stephanie. I've been looking forward to meeting you. I read most of your book, and as a researcher, and listening to what you were talking about, I was wondering how you, as a person, grappled with the excitement and the vibrancy that you described at the beginning of your presentation and then the sad anecdote that you ended your presentation with. I don't know what that has left you with as a person who's seen both of them.

Another question that I had was about how representative you think the young women you met with are of the actual community and the women who are living in the community?

Michelle Friedman: There have been very few studies on those who leave. It depends where they are in their life cycle, so that if you leave at an earlier stage, when you don't have family, when you don't have children, you can leave, and you suffer some of the consequences, or you build on what you've taken from the community. But when you're vested in the community, when you have children, and when it may involve a *Get*, then you have other complications. So it would depend on where you are in the life course as to how you handle it.

Michelle Friedman: As a psychiatrist, I can't think of people that I've seen who have left.

Women get sent to me who are in distress, and they might leave, and the community will employ a lot of services to try to address that distress, because maintaining family, meeting the community, is of crucial significance. First of all, a lot of women from the very far right-wing world don't have the skills to make it very far. So once they have left, they probably don't have the funds to come see me, frankly. But it's very, very hard to leave. I tend to see a number of young women who are right at the end of their Beit Yakov year. They're about to go to seminary. They know what's next, and there's a kind of a panic, a really severe panic that I've seen. Then sometimes I see these young women who are in their second year of marriage, and they have one baby, and they might be pregnant again, and there's a kind of inner apathy, like an absolute flat line. They're just living this life, and there's a very, very sad feeling about this.

I'd like to do something a little unusual and to call on somebody in the audience, if I might, Dr. Heller Winston, whom I got to know while working on my presentation. She has studied men and women who exit the *Hassidish* world. Maybe you could just say a few words of observation about what that's like? You're from CCNY, right?

Heller Winston: Yes. I'm not quite a doctor yet, but thank you. There's a tremendous amount to say about this. What was exactly your question about people leaving?

Q: I asked about the psychological attractions to leaving and the tensions and the conflicts that go along with it.

Heller Winston: Well, I didn't study this as a psychologist, I've been looking at it more as a sociologist, but the tensions generally seem to have to do with what happens when people have to leave a community that they're very, very attached to and very involved in. And, as Michelle

said, especially the skills that people lack. In terms of what attracts people, you can only imagine what would attract people who've been very cloistered to the secular world. It's not hard to imagine what might be attractive to anybody who's lived in a very sheltered way. The specific attraction to the secular world can be anything from movies and reading books to not having to be in an arranged marriage, which is a huge one. It's just such a vast, vastly complicated situation, it's a little hard to address it. But suffice it to say that I have met a lot of women who have left these communities or who are in the process of trying to leave them.

Debra Kaufman: From personal experience—my nephew is a *ba'al teshuvah*, and one of the reasons that I became so interested in *ba'alei teshuvah* is because of him.. He has ten children, and there's no doubt in his mind that one of those children, Rachel (pseudonym), may leave the community. And he almost always says to me, "And if Rachel does go, you'll take care of her, won't you, Aunt Debby?" So I think that it's always an issue, although I think if you're brought up in an exceedingly isolated community, and you have very few skills to be able to operate in the world outside of that community, it's much less likely that you're going to be able to leave. On the other hand, in many of the less rigid communities, young people are being introduced to all kinds of things, and they do have skills, and it's a built-in consideration, and it's a built-in worry.

Stephanie Wellen Levine: Among the people who did leave, and I did meet several, a lot of times it was a shock, and they had a really hard time dealing with even minor aspects. At one point, I was together with a whole little clan of rebels whom I got to know and wrote about. I asked them, "Most of you guys have left, you've been going around the city, spending time. What is it like to make non-Jewish friends?" In my ridiculous mind, I just assumed that of course

they had made non-Jewish friends. But they were obviously mortified and looked at each other, and finally one of them sheepishly said, “Well, we don’t have any. We’ve talked about this a lot. We don’t know how to have non-Jewish friends”—even though they were not observant.

I believe your first question was how I personally grappled with this experience of, on the one hand, the beauty of the religious passion and all that that I talked about and, on the other, the horror of the girls who can’t fit in and what they have to deal with. I was on an emotional roller coaster. I would wake up, go to school, spend some time with the “typical girls”—and I don’t like that word, but use it for lack of a better term—and be having great fun and be so impressed to the point where I was just elated. Then at night—it was generally at night—I would go and spend time with this clan of rebels. They were miserable. I think this is going to speak also a little bit more to the person who was interested in people who had left. One common reason was, as I mentioned, loss of faith. Another woman I wrote about left and then came back and is now sort of half living [in the community.] She has her own trajectory of life. She was artistically very, very talented, musically very, very talented, and her gifts were not supported by the community. She didn’t want to listen to just Jewish music. Her talent demanded, in her own mind, that she get other exposure, and this was a big problem. To me, in terms of the emotional resonance, it was very, very painful, to see somebody grappling with this, struggling to become an artist but having the community clamp down.

And in terms of how representative—it’s funny, I get asked this a lot. I profiled seven girls in depth, and then I wrote about many more who make cameo appearances. People said to me, “Those girls are disproportionately rebellious.” They were furious. But I say that several of them—at least three of them—were very, very typical. Again, I don’t like that word. But they

were normal, typical. They had very typical conflicts, but they were very happy in the community, despite the fact that they had little issues with the clothing and all that. I wanted to capture that experience, and I wanted to capture the beauty and wonder of growing up Lubavitch and fitting in. So several of the girls that I profile and that I write about in the book are very typical. But I will not deny for a second that there is absolutely a disproportionate emphasis on girls who for one reason or another were limit pushers, some of whom left the community, some of whom did not. For example, the doctor was not typical, but she was a very thrilled Lubavitcher. Some of them are much more in that camp. Why did I do that? It wasn't to be difficult or to slam the community. I did not want to do that at all. I wanted the community to like the book; but I, as a person, am very interested in the concept of rebellion and in questioning, so of course, when I went into Lubavitch, I was still interested in this, and you can't just write about one rebel. Rebellion is a very nuanced kind of situation, so I had to write about several rebels. I don't think anybody in here would want to read an encyclopedia written by me about Crown Heights, so I had to pare down somewhat. So, in fact, the book was disproportionately about rebels, but there was a very good representation of "normal girls."

Q: My name is Alexis Gerber. I'm a senior at Tufts University. I've spent three years arguing with my academic advisor, who is a Catholic feminist. She claims that women in traditional religion are oppressed, whether or not they experience that oppression. Do you believe this is accurate, why or why not, and on a more personal note, what would you tell my advisor? I love her, by the way. She's great.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Tell her to read Elizabeth Shusler Fiorenza . . . She does read her?

As a feminist studying Orthodox Jewish communities, as an academic feminist, I took as

my first point that if we take feminism seriously, that is if we take the methodology seriously, we start with women's voices. We start where they are, and we start with lived experiences. We don't take categories of oppression and theories of oppression or theories of brainwashing or whatever. We don't take those and then put the data in them. In other words, we look at the data before theory constructs them. I think that's really very, very critical as a feminist, to debate that point with your academic adviser—not to categorize all women. We're not talking about some monolithic category, whether we're talking about feminism or we're talking about religious-right women.

Q: I'm Sue Fendrick. I'm a Conservative rabbi and I say that with some awareness that there are so many women at this conference whose learning is far greater than mine and who are equally, if not much more deserving of that title. One can't say one is a woman rabbi here without acknowledging that, in my opinion.

I have a two-part question. One is that all of you sometimes talked about traditionalist Orthodox women rather than modern Orthodox women. I would love to hear from each of you what you think are the one or two points that modern Orthodox feminists, loosely, the JOFA cohort, need to hear usefully from what you've said, aside from generally learning about the world and learning about other Jews.

The second part is, have any of you done, or are any of you aware of, studies or narratives of Orthodox feminists? How do women who identify themselves as feminists within Orthodoxy describe, handle, and juggle the tensions? Many women in this room are living examples of that, but I'm wondering if there has been any kind of collective work done from a scholarly perspective on the question of the psychological supports for staying, or leaving, and

why similar women of similar cohorts don't identify themselves as feminists, on the one hand, or leave, on the other hand.

Debbie Kram: Would you be willing to repeat your first question about modern Orthodoxy?

Q: Given that you mostly talk about more traditionalist women in your work, in your presentations, what are the important things for modern Orthodox, and particularly Orthodox feminist women to hear, in your opinion, from what you've said?

Debra Kaufman: I'll begin, because there are puzzled looks on these faces, and so I'll just do a little patter till they get their answers together. I thought I had spoken about modern Orthodox women. In fact, that was one of my first points: the women spread themselves over Orthodoxy, and modern Orthodox *ba'al teshuva* women are more likely to be fully engaged in the secular world in ways that the other are not. They're more likely to have professions and to be full-time workers. They're more likely to use the feminist rhetoric when they speak and to appeal to feminist arguments when they make their appeals, wherever they choose to do so. Is that what you wanted to hear about? About modern Orthodox Jewish women in that sense?

Michelle Friedman: I guess this is a good advertisement for psychotherapy. Maybe this answers the woman about what to say to her adviser. I think that modern Orthodox women are in the position where they most consciously see the wealth of possibilities before us. We see the beauty of tradition, we have more of a sense of choice. Maybe we have been given more resources, more examples, and more awareness. We also are overexposed, maybe have too much choice, and are going a little nuts from it. My advice is to expect there to be conflict and to be honest about it: to be honest about what one is feeling and what one's loyalties are and what are the strong pulls, and to try to understand as much as possible. Although I joked about this being an

advertisement for psychotherapy, any way that works is good with me. [You must understand] what you're bringing from your past into the present, what influences come to you now. That's why I say to your adviser, I think that the hallmark of feminism should be our choice, should be opportunity, should be freedom to pick what really works for somebody, and if—as in Deborah's study—someone who is a totally identified feminist chooses to become an extremely cloistered person in whatever society, that is a feminist choice. So my advice is to be open to the different absolutely expectable strains of conflict. It doesn't necessarily run smoothly and easily.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I think I have something to add too. This is in no way only found among Orthodox communities. I think people in general like labels and sometimes feel animosity towards people who fall into a different camp from them. As in many other spheres, I find that also within Orthodoxy. My message would be to try to transcend some of these boundaries and to think about what we have to learn from a community like this. For example, I'm a feminist modern Orthodox woman, so coeducational schools, that's the strain that I'm [feeling], because that kind of fits my consciousness at this point. So, be a bit more open minded. Be open to the type of spiritual passion that a community like this has, rather than seeing only the bad. My message would be to be open to some of the good there and commune with some of the spiritual passion that might influence your own spiritual passion. I guess that would be my message along those lines.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I think I have a better notion now of what you're asking. I think what you see in the Orthodox community and among those who call themselves feminists is a balancing act between the self and the community going on all the time. One recognition that has

to be made is that not all choices that feminist Orthodox women make are feminist.

Shulamit Reinharz: I'd like to make a comment as a social scientist about this panel. This panel was very unusual and very strong, I think in part because we have a participant observation or anthropological view—which is Stephanie's—coupled with a psychiatrist's view of the clinical, deviant case, that is, the people who are not content within their community or have some sort of physiological response to it; and then we have the sociological, which is Debra's, which is primarily but not exclusively interview-based. So, we have different understandings of the Orthodox Jewish girl, *ba'alei teshuva* and members of right-wing communities. There were differences among the three, which we should keep in mind, but also we have difference in methodology. To the extent that these three perspectives together plus others give us a full view, a better understanding, I think that we should make a call that studies of Orthodox Jewish women's lives be multidisciplinary, in order for us to understand what they are. There are problems with taking a strictly text-based approach to what a Jewish woman is, which is what we have been using for hundreds of years—that is, a woman is the way she is described in the text. But starting with Tamar El Or, who began to do anthropological studies, we have sociological and psychiatric [studies], which is totally fabulous, and interview-based [studies]. We have a much more grounded view, and there probably are literary perspectives.

I would like to acknowledge the presence among us of Tova Mirvis, who has written two books about Orthodox Jewish women's lives that are fictional but deal with the tensions. So, I'd like to encourage many different methodological perspectives to understanding these issues.

Debbie Kram: I want to thank all of you for your attention. Like any good Jewish text, there's

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going to be some *makhloket*, some controversy, and that's what makes it so interesting to study.