

As many graduate students know, working on a dissertation is often isolating. In times past, we enjoyed the luxury of lengthy post-seminar discussions at Starbucks; now, we are focused on becoming specialists and on finishing. When I received a flyer in April of 2003 about a graduate student roundtable in Jewish gender studies, I was thrilled. The roundtable was initiated and facilitated by Shulamit Reinharz, founding director of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, in order to introduce graduate students in the field to one another and to offer them tools for dealing with mutual issues and attaining common goals. As participants' life circumstances figured into discussions on publishing opportunities, funding, and job searches, it occurred to me that I knew of no organization dedicated to supporting graduate students' work *and* their personal lives. Here was an opportunity for interested students to establish an independent group and to determine its purpose.

The Dafna Graduate Gender Group (DG<sup>3</sup>), named in memory of Dafna Izraeli, founder of the gender studies program at Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv, began by deciding what each member wanted to get out of group meetings. Orna Teitelbaum, a student at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley completing coursework on gender role formation in rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity, hoped to "enrich [her] intellectual self... and to broaden the base of people that [she] engaged with." Deborah Skolnick Einhorn, who is a Ph.D. student at Brandeis University researching contemporary American-Jewish women's philanthropy, sought to share work and to better understand current scholarship, the employment market, and challenges for women. As a group, we had in

common both the energy to support each other in our career/life pursuits and the wish to hear about each other's research interests.

During the past nine months since the original roundtable, the DG<sup>3</sup> has met four times in different locales around Boston. Members have taken turns circulating scholarship in advance, and



Some of the participants in the graduate student roundtable in Jewish gender studies, held in April 2003 at the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute: (left to right) Shulamit Reinharz, Nizan-Deborah Stein, Sheryl Mandlinger, Deborah Skolnick Einhorn, Keren R. McGinity, Tobin Belzer, Susan Kahn, Miranda Rich Winer, Orna Teitelbaum.

have provided feedback on each other's work. In addition, members have discussed relationships with advisors, biological clocks, religious observance, and the toll of caring for ill parents. The intellectual and the personal mix freely in these discussions.

In order for a new group devoted to Jewish gender studies to endure and to attract more members, however, it must distinguish itself from organizations that already exist. Remembering hushed conversations about marriage and reproduction at the 2001 American Academy for Jewish Research graduate student summer seminar on history and memory, I suggested that our group

# THE ISLAND WITHIN THE ISLAND: A CALL FOR INTER-GRADUATE STUDENT SUPPORT

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focus on how, for scholars of Jewish gender studies, the personal and the intellectual inevitably intersect. "The personal is political" was the slogan of second-wave feminism in the 1970s.

Perhaps the motto of third-wave feminists could be: "The personal is professional." Now that women have gained entrance to the ranks of tenured faculty and risen as high as to become university presidents, junior scholars need guidance and encouragement about how to balance academic careers and personal lives. Our group, therefore, set as its goal to promote public discussion of this

critical issue within academia.

Although there is much work left to do, the future of the DG<sup>3</sup> looks promising. We are fortunate to know many accomplished scholars in Jewish gender studies willing to share their experiences of balancing personal and professional ambitions. My sense is that there are many graduate students in Jewish studies programs across the country who would be interested in similar networking opportunities.

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