

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: SEEING THE CANVAS THROUGH THE EYES OF THE
 PAINTER: THE EXPERIENCE OF SECULAR JEWISH
 COLLEGE STUDENTS

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This hermeneutic phenomenological study is concerned with understanding authentic Being and our experience of the Other within the context of higher education. By engaging phenomenologically with college students in the process of becoming secular Jews, I revealed the phenomenon of secular Jewish being. I had twenty-six conversations with seven students—my co-travelers—at a mid-size, public university in the mid-Atlantic.

My co-travelers expended substantial energy considering what it meant to see as a Jew, to be seen as a Jew, and what it was like to see their own Jewishness. My co-travelers found that their metaphorical Jewish canvas was elusive and paradoxical. They experienced a campus environment that felt out-of-control to them due to the overwhelming presence of Christianity. Whether it was experiencing overt celebrations of Christmas, anti-Semitic remarks, or just an uncomfortable reaction from a peer, my co-

travelers doubted whether they mattered as Jews. Consequently they reworked their Jewish canvas to make it more appealing to the dominant White, Christian culture.

Furthermore, my co-travelers experienced the existential dilemma of discovering that they could choose what kind of Jew to become. Realizing they had choices revealed how the seemingly immutable aspects of their Jewishness were actually constructed. Ultimately my co-travelers determined that they would need to re-interpret their religious inheritance to become the kind of Jew they aspired to be.

This research journey enhanced my appreciation for the transformative power of phenomenological listening and the tension between *being* and *doing* in student affairs. Facing anti-Semitism and a lack of understanding and openness to the experience of secular Jewishness kept my co-travelers from making meaning and fully engaging in the campus. How do student affairs professionals balance the many demands of our work while creating meaning making environments where students can uncover their authentic Being? The experience of my co-travelers suggests answering this question by increasing the emphasis on the beings of our students and our selves.

SEEING THE CANVAS THROUGH THE EYES OF THE PAINTER: THE
EXPERIENCE OF SECULAR JEWISH COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2004

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PREFACE

DISCOVERING HOPE AND GAINING MEANING

Sometimes I think that I was forced to withdraw into depression because it was the only rightful protest I could throw in the face of a world that said it was all right for people to come and go as they please, that there were simply no real obligations left....Pretty soon, it seems unreasonable to be bothered or outraged by much of anything because, well, what did you expect? In a world where the core social unit--the family--is so dispensable, how much can anything else mean? (Wurtzel, 1994, pp. 196-197)

When I was about ten years old I used to visit my friend Aaron at his family's new house. We would walk a block or so, cross over a guardrail and somehow magically exit from his suburban subdivision and enter an eden-like forest rich with vegetation, resplendent with color, and safe with trees. One day, after not visiting the ravine for a while, Aaron invited me over to his house. He wanted to show me what had happened to this idyllic place. We walked over to where the ravine had been--except now there was a housing subdivision. New, large houses dominated, with freshly rolled out green grass and new streets and driveways that were smooth as any street I had seen before. I was overwhelmed with disbelief. I studied the area for evidence of the ravine, but it had been flattened. Where were the creek and little waterfall? What about the beautiful trees that had created a canopy over our heads? They were all gone to make room for these houses.

The destruction of a seemingly natural habitat to build a housing development is not a recent occurrence; is there a city or village in the United States that lives in harmony with its natural habitat? Nonetheless, as a boy it shocked me to see a beautiful place eliminated without a trace of evidence. It did not occur to me that Aaron's house, and my house for that matter, were built on top of similar idyllic landscapes. I did wonder, however, why a new subdivision was needed when a perfectly good one already existed.

This introduction to capitalism, the real estate industry, and the United States ideology was lost on me at the time, but the lesson that the natural was not something to take for granted was internalized. Coping with a loosely coupled world of fleeting beauty and the ever-present potential for loss I bypassed opportunities for embrace. Maintaining a relative distance from the things and people that I felt closest to I found that I could take a detour around intimacy thereby avoid the pain resulting from loss. An ironic or invulnerable attitude, a mocking of the incongruity between the real and ideal, were suitable approaches to avoid intimacy. After seeing something I loved destroyed I developed a fear of extending that love to anyone or anything else. This story, then, is one ingredient in my desire to avoid the vulnerability that comes with love.

I preface the subsequent study with the story of a ravine being turned into a treeless housing tract and my reaction to it to bring to the surface my purpose for engaging in this research. Levin (1989) wrote that “The gift of nature is the gift of an *unfulfilled* capacity, an *unrealized* potential, an *unfinished* task” (p. 2). The ability to hear the voice of another is a gift because it can be used to bridge the distance between humans. In *The Listening Self* Levin (1989) suggested that the pathologies of the lifeworld, the oppressive conditions and ideologies that rob humanity of their humanity, are related to a forgetful way of hearing. When we ignore the task of listening we inevitably ignore our fellow humans. When we maintain a distance between fellow humans, and ourselves perhaps to cushion us from pain, we also are inserting a gap that undermines our ability to listen and ultimately care (Dass & Gorman, 1985; Levin, 1989). In my attempts to avoid loss and protect myself I have put limits on the degree to which I will genuinely listen to the other. These limits or protections interfere with my ability to

care and undermine my engagement with anything outside myself. This research, on the contrary, is concerned with understanding the experience of engagement with the other, risking vulnerability, and being hopeful in a world that rarely makes sense.

I think present day reason is an analogue of the flat earth of medieval period. If you go too far beyond it you're presumed to fall off, into insanity. And people are very much afraid of that. I think this fear of insanity is comparable to the fear people once had of falling off the edge of the world. (Pirsig, 1974, p.151)

I remember the first time I heard that some people would rather die in a burning building than run out and be seen naked. At the time, I could not quite grasp the depth of shame that could force someone to accept death rather than be exposed. (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 40)

Dread reveals Nothing. (Heidegger, 1975, p. 249)

The uniquely modern occurrence of filling a ravine to build houses with two-car garages not only destroyed a gift of nature, it is also symptomatic of a larger loss of meaning pervasive in a society lacking in permanence. Loss of meaning--also known as nihilism--results from a disconnection from our Being of beings. On the surface, to make meaning of the world translates into making sense of the world. When we are dumbfounded by events it becomes difficult to know how to act or react. So making sense or knowing is related to doing. When we cannot make sense we struggle with what to do and perhaps ultimately with what to be. Meaning-making then becomes an existential quagmire. Even if we momentarily turn our back on the world to check whether there is consistency between who we think we are and the self we have become, do we fear that the craziness of the world will surprise us and ultimately destroy us (Kegan, 1982)? If we do not have a sense of ourselves, can we make sense of the world around us? If we cannot face the question "Who am I?" are we really equipped to make sense of the world? Kegan asserted that meaning making has to do with the self, but also

with the other, because “meaning depends on someone who recognizes you. Not meaning, by definition, is utterly lonely. Well-fed, warm, and free of disease, you may still perish if you cannot mean” (Kegan, 1982, p. 19).

Nietzsche noted in the late nineteenth century that, “Nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals” (Nietzsche, 1975, p. 131). Nietzsche was referring to the values of the Enlightenment, including universal Reason and the “glorification of Man” (Levin, 1989, p. 13), which have “encouraged technocracies of social domination and cultural fantasies of an absolute control over nature” (Levin, 1989, p. 13). In the twentieth century this led to an exacerbated separation between “what man is from what man does” (Pirsig, 1974, p. 25), making it more and more difficult to care about what we do. In concrete terms this translates into a disconnect from our world, from nature, and a “sense of drifting without purpose: our sense, that is, of homelessness and rootlessness” (Levin, 1989, p. 13). To avoid seeing or hearing the poverty in our cities and rural areas, the abuse in interpersonal relationships, or the suffering of our natural habitat requires intentionally closing off our seeing and hearing. When we stop seeing and hearing then we lose the ability to make sense of our world. Similarly, “We may have a difficult time facing the suffering of others because we don’t know how to deal with *our own* pain and fear” (Dass & Gorman, 1985, p. 14). What happens when we cannot make sense of the world? Do we distance ourselves from the world to maintain any semblance of control for fear of falling off into madness? Do we hide our fears and close off our Beings so completely to escape being exposed?

This is a study focused on the voices and Beings of individuals dedicated to restoring and engaging in meaning-making. At the beginning of the twenty-first century

our society is faced with deep rooted nihilism. Single grand narratives, stories “of mythic proportions...big enough and meaningful enough to pull together philosophy and research and politics and art, relate them to one another, and--above all--give them a unifying direction” (Anderson, 1995, p. 4) have broken down, leaving individuals searching for purpose. Levin (1989) added that the byproduct of scientific and technological progress has been an “increasing forgetfulness of Being, through its domination, reduction and reification” (p. 13). As a consequence, Levin (1989) argued,

Symptoms of collective depression have begun to constellate: emptiness, deadness, despair, narcotization. The culture of narcissism has led to nihilism, the negation of meaningful Being; and this, in turn, has been felt as a deep sense of immeasurable, unnameable loss. (p. 14)

A loss of Being. What might the experience be of individuals who are recovering their Being, reclaiming meaning, and restoring hope?

Specifically, I am interested in the experience of Jewish college students who have intentionally chosen to live lives as secular Jews. I choose this topic with excitement, but not without concerns. One of my primary fears, speaking out as a Jewish man and giving up my anonymity as a White, middle class man, is also one of my primary motivations to take on this study. I am attempting to avoid the pitfalls of nihilism and narcissism by taking the risk of opening myself up to my Being with the idea that by answering “Who am I?” questions I will create a space for others to engage in a similar process. My goal is not merely introspection, but to gain personal meaning and purpose as well as work with other Jews for social justice.

If it is difficult for me to openly name myself as a secular Jew, how might it be for others? In the college and university setting where there is an increased emphasis on identity, what is the experience of students who articulate an identity as secular Jews? I

ask these questions because it is important to me as a secular Jew, and issues which impact one segment of the Jewish population inevitably impact the rest of the Jewish population (Klepfisz, 1990a). But I also raise questions about the experience of being a secular Jew because I hope to uncover ideas and thoughts about identity, the university experience and the purpose of higher education. By taking an in-depth, textured, nuanced look at the experience of secular Jews I hope to turn what we know about Jews on its ear. Similarly, I hope that this interaction with this type of Jewishness will make the reader re-think education, particularly higher education. Finally, though, I hope that the words of secular Jews will stand in stark contrast to the “emptiness, deadness, despair, narcotization” (Levin, 1989, p. 14) that Levin suggested is plaguing society.

What is higher education for if not to foster students’ meaning-making? Most pedagogues would likely agree that our responsibility goes beyond being vocational educators. Our call is to “educate,” the latin root for education. That means educators are called upon to draw out or bring out something latent (Giroux & Aronowitz, 1985). Some would suggest that that latent something is human consciousness (Brown, n.d.) or potential. Human potential is subverted when humans have lost touch with how to act to transform their world. Paulo Freire (1970) argued that merely depositing bits of information into the heads of students is not education. Education is teachers who engage with students with hope to improve the world and their communities. However, if students approach education closed off to hearing and not open to seeing then they will lack the meaning-making required to practice the type of education that Freire advocated. Similarly, if educators conceal their true convictions and separate themselves from their teaching, are they able to practice transformative education (hooks, 1994; Zinn, 1994)?

How does higher education accommodate the experience of secular Jews--Jewish students committed to transforming the present by strengthening and reforming Jewish culture as well as working toward a utopia dedicated to justice?

I simply did not know how to be an active Jew in the world. (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 153)

Jews then raise in an especially acute way the general question of what it means for one to have an identity, to identify with a culture, and to be identified in terms of cultural membership. (Goldberg & Krausz, 1993, pp. 2-3)

As the reader will come to realize from the pages that follow, there is no simple definition of secular Jewishness. Secular Jewishness can be described as a border identity (Giroux, 1992) in the sense that it cannot be circumscribed, but transgresses the rich cultural aspects of Jewishness and the variety of Jewish categories such as: Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Mizrahi, chasidic, reform, conservative, orthodox, reconstructionist, Zionist, anti-Zionist, German, Russian, and Ethiopian. While much has been written on (some of) these individual categories, in comparison little is known about secular Jewishness. Furthermore, the word secular seems to trip up Jews and those who are not Jewish alike: “How can a Jew be secular? So is Judaism not a religion then?”

I am interested in learning more about the experience of Jews who are secular not by default or only as an appeal to universal ethical codes. What is it like to be a Jew who has intentionally chosen a lifestyle informed by her or his Jewishness but not necessarily by biblical codes? Perhaps one commonality among secular Jews, and some might suggest all Jewishness, is the pursuit of being more human. The notion of Tikkun Olam, to repair the world from oppression, environmental destruction and the degradation of mind, body and spirit is central to many Jews even though our actions are not always consistent with this idea.

This is a study that uses hermeneutic phenomenology to acquire an in depth look at the experience of being a secular Jewish person in the United States. I am concerned about the experience of the Jewish person who asks challenging questions about their Judaism. I am interested in what happens when a Jewish person enters into quarrels with their Judaism. I am interested when a secular Jewish person partakes in actions that are so ultimately Jewish that Judaism is challenged. While the first chapter explores how I have turned to this topic of secular Jewish being, I want to state here the importance of focusing on Jewish being. Just as education is a contested terrain with many arguments about what education is and who gets to define it and practice it, there are similar questions about Judaism. I do not intend to equate education with Judaism, but uncovering the experience of being a secular Jew who quarrels with Judaism will hopefully reveal the potential for education. How does education create environments where students can struggle with the questions that directly impact how they view the world? How well does higher education understand the experience of Jewish students? How should higher education respond to students whose actions in the world are informed by their Jewishness?

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a methodology that allows us to understand how the practices of secular Jews are an interpretation of the essence of their being (Dreyfus, 1991). So this study asks: What is it to be a secular Jew? Instead of focusing only on the critical incidents that have shaped the development of a secular Jewish identity, or using a statistical instrument to measure Jewish identity, this study is interested in what it is like to be a secular Jew. By listening to the day-to-day experiences of Jewish people who are asking and acting in ways that challenge conventional interpretations of Judaism, our

taken-for-granted understanding of or our presumptions about secular Jews will be undermined. The rich descriptions of these day-to-day experiences are intended to provide such an in depth rendering of the experience of secular Jews that the reader will be compelled to act on the insights revealed by this study.

Despite the increasing use of hermeneutic phenomenology as a research methodology, a number of personal conversations with student affairs faculty and administrators have revealed that this methodology is not very well understood. Critics see this method and philosophy as marginal to the day-to-day practice of student affairs.

In fact, however, hermeneutic phenomenology is particularly concerned with the day-to-day experience of its subjects, in this case, students. Yet, hermeneutic phenomenology goes against the grain of much of the positivistic research in higher education that emphasizes generalizability of results. Successful hermeneutic phenomenological studies do not produce conclusions; rather, they provide such rich descriptions and interpretations of the essence of being that the reader cannot walk away without feeling compelled to act on what she or he just read. Hermeneutic phenomenology makes important contributions to practice precisely because practitioners are often moved to change their practice based on the questions raised by hermeneutic phenomenology. Because the philosophy undergirding hermeneutic phenomenology is confusing and challenging, hermeneutic phenomenological studies risk being perplexing and off-putting. The emphasis on being and the snarled web that being represents tend to bewilder readers precisely because of our removed nature from our own beings. By challenging readers to experience the narratives of students, hermeneutic phenomenological studies are not esoteric, because the reader must grapple with her or

his own day-to-day practice. These studies frequently raise questions about the reader's priorities, assumptions, and roles. These questions rarely have easy answers nor can they simply be dismissed. Hence, hermeneutic phenomenological studies are central to making education purposeful, just, and democratic due to the challenging questions they raise.

This mixing of activism and teaching, this insistence that education cannot be neutral on the crucial issues of our time, this movement back and forth from the classroom to the struggles outside by teachers who hope their students will do the same, has always frightened the guardians of traditional education. They prefer that education simply prepare the new generation to take its proper place in the old order, not to question that order. (Zinn, 1994, p. 7)

The following hermeneutic phenomenological study intends to bring to the forefront the voices of students whose actions to transform education and the world are informed by their secular Jewishness. I begin though with my voice and my journey. How have I found my way to secular Jewishness? With this beginning I hope to come out from behind the curtain and in full view of the reader. As I stand on the edge leaving the myth of objectivity behind, I hope the reader will join with me in a dialogue about what it means to exist in our world, the ability to change ourselves and the world, and finally the potential for higher education to play a fundamental role in this transformation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This was a personal journey that would not have been possible without the support, care and mentoring of selfless individuals. Without the love of my parents, brother and sister and their lifelong belief in me it would have been difficult to sustain my hope that I could complete this journey. I am especially thankful to them.

I feel fortunate and lucky that so many individuals instilled their faith in me and my potential to complete a doctorate. In particular I want to thank Kathleen Rice, Mark Warner, and Susan Komives. It is difficult for me to imagine completing this project without their incomparable support as well as the support of three supervisors, Marsha Guenzler, Lee Ward and Anna Lynn Bell. In addition, I am thankful to Debbie Brawn, and Debbie Pine, James Madison University colleagues who made personal sacrifices so I could take the time to complete this journey.

The libraries at Fresno State and James Madison University were instrumental in completing the dissertation. I did not expect to find critical texts on hermeneutic phenomenology or secular Jewishness so easily and was surprised and thankful for each library's impressive collection.

My seven co-travelers made this journey possible. I am most grateful to them for trusting me with their life stories. Kelly Grennan, Leilani Kupo, Laura Owens, and Scott Rogers provided much needed relief from the overwhelming task of transcribing conversations. I am thankful to them for sharing this demanding work with me. Numerous conversations with Houston Hill, Amy Ginther, and Lisa Kiely laid the foundation for this work and made the journey enjoyable.

Significant revisions took place in the hospitable comfort of the Cool Spot in Staunton, Virginia. I am indebted to Lester Bowers for serving an unparalleled, Jazz induced cappuccino in this most conducive environment.

Jim Greenberg's thoughtful questions and caring presence helped shape the questions I asked of myself as well as my participants.

Francine Hultgren introduced me to the power and responsibility of phenomenology. It has forever changed the way I practice. I am thankful to Francine for also creating a space where I finally uncovered my unique Jewish voice.

Evi Beck introduced me to a rich tradition of secular Jewishness and challenged me to understand the societal influences on my Jewish voice. I am grateful to Evi for her belief in and willingness to ask hard questions of me.

Since I met Jan Arminio in 1991 I have been appreciative of the way she has enhanced my self-confidence by listening and trusting me. By reading numerous drafts and providing critical feedback Jan made the completion of the dissertation possible by helping me immerse myself in the texts of my co-travelers.

I am especially grateful to Marylu McEwen for expertly guiding me through the dissertation experience. Marylu has been a mentor and inspiration to me since 1991. Marylu's thoughtful, humble, empathic and scholarly way of being helped make this an intellectually and personally rewarding experience.

My Sweetie Renée's love and immeasurable faith in me inspired me to work late into countless nights writing and revising. The journey of this dissertation coincided with Renée and I bringing our love, Genevieve, into the world. I hope Genevieve inherits a planet where authentic listening is prized and authentic Being is fostered.

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CHAPTER I

THE TURNING

All practice of anything has humanity being at home with itself as its underlying intent, its context, its living philosophy—and humanity being at home with itself is awesome. (Connelly, 1993, p. 34)

In January of 1987 I woke up in the middle of the night to discover an other. Five years later I reawoke in the midst of a deep sleep to discover a stranger within myself (Kristeva, 1991). I was fastened to this other. By 1994 I had stayed awake long enough to get to know this stranger—this foreigner—this neighbor—this other within me. Our relationship was deep, complex, fascinating and confusing. Looking at this other was like looking at and through a window. I caught a reflection of myself while simultaneously seeing the outside. Waking up to this new window meant discovering a whole new self—a self that had been there all along.

The following introduction Todorov (1984) wrote to his study of Columbus’ interactions with the other provides a jumping off point for my study as well:

My subject—the discovery *self* makes of the *other*—is so enormous that any general formulation soon ramifies into countless categories and directions. We can discover the other in ourselves, realize we are not a homogeneous substance, radically alien to whatever is not us....But others are also “I”s: subjects just as I am, whom only my point of view—according to which all of them are out *there* and I alone am in *here*—separates and authentically distinguishes from myself. I can conceive of these others as an abstraction, as an instance of any individual’s psychic configuration, as the Other—other in relation to myself, to *me*; or else as a specific social group to which we don’t belong. (Todorov, 1984, p. 3)

I read Todorov’s quote over and over. Who is this “other”? Am I not alone in myself? What is my identity if it is not coherent? Am I not a me with an other that is not me? To follow the story of the “other” in my life I read Todorov’s (1984) account of Columbus’ travels to what is now called North America. The fact that Columbus left a

legacy of exploitation, naïve curiosity, domination, paternalism, ethnocentrism, desire and repulsion of the “other” is critical to making meaning of our present interactions with the “other.” For Columbus the “other” was Native Americans, the “new” continent that he “discovered,” but it was also Columbus himself. Columbus’ interactions with Native Americans were ripe with contradictions. His initial observations regarded the Native Americans as the most peaceful people on earth, even as he was deceiving them. Later when Columbus was stranded in Jamaica he described Native Americans as wicked savages. Columbus’ presumptions about Native Americans were a reflection of Columbus’ biases, stresses, and insecurities rather than an accurate representation of the “other.” Just as Columbus required labels for the “other,” so have I. And just as Columbus needed to change these labels when he needed a new explanation for his angst, so have I.

The discovery of “others” in my life has created a new viewshed to sift through my autobiography. But, why? Why am I sifting through my autobiography? Turning to my story leads me down a path in the hopes of finding a clearing where I will uncover the essence of this research exercise. I lift up my story to spark the reader into his or her own journey as he or she reflects on my text, but this is also an attempt to find a metaphor for my study. The purpose of such an autobiographical exercise is not only intended to uncover my Being and the perspective I bring to this research exercise, it also uncovers what the research is *really* about. As van Manen (1990) said: “A phenomenological researcher cannot just write down his or her question at the beginning of the study” (van Manen, 1990, p. 44). I cannot simply say at the outset: “What is the essence of secular Jewishness?” or “What is it like to be a secular Jewish college student?” without also

putting forward how I found my way to such questions. If I pose these questions now, before I share my autobiography, the reader may misinterpret or underestimate the nature of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

In this chapter I pose many questions of myself to help me gain closer proximity to the nexus of this research exercise. Although the ultimate question here is “What is it like to become a secular Jewish college student?,” I need to first raise questions of myself to ensure I enter this research journey in a phenomenological frame of mind. As Gadamer (1960/1989) instructed: “The path to all knowledge leads through the question” (p. 365). There are many questions in this autobiographical chapter including my closing four questions. These are all intended to help the reader understand how I have found my way to my ultimate or orienting question as well as spark the reader in her or his own journey.

Who am I?

In January of 1987 I enrolled in Introduction to Women’s Studies at the University of Minnesota and was surprised to learn about the pervasiveness of sexism in the United States. At the same time I gained new insight into my identity by making deeper connections with peers through student organizations. On my many walks across the Mississippi River on the cold and blustery Washington Avenue Bridge questions surfaced. Was I sexist? Was I committed to participating in social justice struggles? I began to look forward to these walks because I was imagining a new self. As blocks of ice inched their way down the river, fundamental questions about my identity found their way into my brain and gave me access to thoughts never before imaginable. Who is Steve Grande? What does it mean to be Steve Grande—a male in the United States? Who is Steve Grande—son of Barbara and Don Grande? And while I was at it: Who are my

parents—could it be that they are not perfect like I always thought they were? This led to another new question: Who is Steve Grande—inheritor of a Jewish heritage? Many other questions never rose to the surface. My brain was too crowded. Nonetheless, my name was momentarily bracketed.

Stopping to look over the rail, river below, sun above, I wonder who I am. Raising “who am I” questions was like asking whether Steve Grande was really Steve Grande. Did my name accurately describe me? Did I feel at home with my name? Examining the stories of my name revealed the complexity and inconsistency of my identity and uncovered something deeper—my being. Like driving down a one-way dead-end street, picking up my name and shaking out the stories is a reflective and uncovering process with no easy way out; I must imagine a new way of being in the world. Ultimately, then, this search into my name is emblematic of my diasporic condition—my separation from home. Will I ever find comfort in my being—in my name?

At Home with My Name

My school house, the house in which I grew up and the house of worship were and are supremely important in shaping my desires for feeling at home with my name. The physical places of my growing up years, like our dining room table which hosted so many Passover seders or the view of my parents’ heads coming from the back seat of various cars during heated conversations, have helped form my conception of an unachievable inner home of peace. My ability to read and interpret my autobiography of my places has helped me realize that I negotiated a discord described by Connelly (1993) as “the practice of being home” (p. 31). However, this “is the practice of living

paradox...being bounded yet summoned to leap into the boundless” (Connelly, 1993, p. 31).

Learning the Boundaries

Every year on Passover, in the house in which I grew up, my immediate family and members of my extended family would go around the table reading out loud the story of the Jews’ biblical deliverance from Egypt. Using the Haggadah, which told the Passover story and provided the structure for the Passover seder, we would read and discuss the mythical four sons who were curious about why the story of Passover is told every year. In our Haggadah we were told the following: The wise son is wise because he asks his father what all the laws, rules and regulations given by God mean. In response the wise son is instructed on all the laws of Passover. The wicked son asks “What does all this mean to you?” By saying “to you” we were taught that the wicked son was removing himself from the community and denying God. Underlying the wicked son’s question is that the laws of Passover, which his father holds, are open to interrogation; therefore, the father is supposed to take offense at such a question and make the wicked son feel uncomfortable. The simple son is only able to ask “What does all this mean?” He is given a simple answer that God freed the Jews from the bondage of Egypt. The son who does not even know how to ask the question should be told by his father that the story is told to remind us of what God did for the Jews when they left Egypt.

Our Passover seders were punctuated with heated discussions about what this story meant. Was the wicked son really wicked? What was so wise about the wise son? In retrospect I see that our questioning was acceptable as long as we never questioned the ideology loosely cloaked by the four sons. That is, as long as we asked questions *like* the

wise son the conflict was healthy. At the time, it seemed that the best seders were the ones with repeated rising and falling action as adults and children got into heated discussions about burning moral issues triggered by the Haggadah. But I also remember the fear I felt when one of my uncles would not go along with the discussions. He posed wicked questions that obstructed the process. Asking questions about the rules was wise (e.g., Why are there certain laws about how to make pickles? Why do you have to wait before you can open the oven? Why did you have to reach under the water heater to light a match off the pilot light?). However, the moment *Judaism* was questioned the questioner became wicked (e.g., Why do you follow laws when making homemade pickles? Why do you even worry about when to open the oven? Why don't you just light a new match instead of going in the basement and reaching under the water heater?) I thought I did not understand the message from the four sons, but the fact that I feared being the wicked son meant that the story had its intended effect.

Diane Lee (1991) juxtaposed puzzles with wicked problems. Puzzles are linear with a clear set of instructions and a beginning and end. Wicked problems, though, have multiple solutions and contain multiple truths. Does the wicked son suggest that there are multiple truths about being Jewish? Are wicked questions asking if there is more than one answer to the question of how to be Jewish? The word "wicked" has its origins in the word "wicca" and "witch" (Ayto, 1990). Wiccans have been ostracized in many societies for being pagan. Wiccans ask wicked questions of traditional religion. Is this what the wicked son is doing too?

What kind of son am I? My parents must have had some ideas of what they wanted when they gave me the Hebrew name of "Shalom." "Shalom" is a fitting name

because it means “hello” and “goodbye” in Hebrew. Hello to this new child and goodbye to the state when the child did not exist. However, my parents explained to me that my birth coincided with “race riots” in Milwaukee, and therefore I was born at a suburban hospital, not downtown like originally planned. Since the word “shalom” also means peace this would seem like an appropriate name for the time period in which I was born. But what does it mean to live up to the name of Shalom? What does it mean to be peaceful? Can one be a “wicked son” and be peaceful? While some chant: “There can be no peace without justice,” others shout “Just give me some peace and quiet.” For some people, then, peace is about working, creating, and emancipating, while for others peace is about maintaining or establishing an undisturbed environment. In my search for home and name what kind of wicked questions have I asked and what kind of peace have I tried to create?

My Brother—The Other

My brother, Roger, and I, despite sharing a bedroom for many years, had very different childhoods. He had one of “alienation” and I had one of “angst” (Edgerton, 1991, p. 95). Roger suffered. There are countless family pictures from the late 1960’s to the late 1980’s where everyone is smiling except Roger. Roger was clearly in pain and I was his witness. Despite his pain, Roger struggled to live more than anyone else in our family. There are so many “Roger stories,” stories that my mom and I would sit and laugh about because Roger had pushed the envelope further than we thought it could be pushed. When Roger and I would be off on some adventure inevitably I would ask, “Are you sure we should be doing this?” Roger’s reply was always “Don’t worry Steve!” From climbing the muddy Lake Michigan bluffs to riding in the car with Roger before he

had his license, but after he had already gotten in trouble for driving without his license, I was always told “Don’t worry Steve.” But I did worry and my parents rewarded me for it. So Roger’s childhood was one of alienation. He was always pushing for a new adventure. Could he walk to school drinking beer? Could he explore music like Jazz, Blues and Rap that otherwise would never find their way into our household? He may have felt alienated, but the risks he took to make sense out of his life allowed him to live and to breathe life into me.

Roger coped with the lack of his life by struggling for a life. I coped with the injustice of our differences by remaining silent. I had a voice inside my head and that was enough for me. Externally I knew what to do to please—to keep the “peace”; internally I could entertain visions of what I really wanted to be. Yet, these visions of being Roger without the work that it took to be Roger were troubling. By reinforcing the image of Steve I was rewarded. This was a paralyzing lesson. Being Roger meant pain; being whatever I was meant short-term comfort. Why couldn’t I combine the humanity of Roger with the comfort of Steve?

During my junior year in high school my parents and I were going to drive down from Milwaukee to visit my sister at Indiana University. With the car packed, my mom had received a call that Roger had skipped out early from high school. At the last minute Roger was found and told that his privilege of staying home alone had been revoked and he would be joining us on our trip. Somewhere between Milwaukee and Indiana I remember my father banging the steering wheel and yelling, “Damnit Roger!” as the Pontiac station wagon with the synthetic wood exterior careened down the road. This is not my only memory of my father banging the steering wheel in response to something

Roger had done to disappoint and frustrate my parents. On this particular trip we stopped at a “Holidome,” a hotel in Indiana to call my sister, Jill, to let her know that we would be arriving very late. As kids in swimsuits ran to the pool and parents put down deposits for miniature golf, my parents learned from Jill that there was a party going on at our home in Milwaukee. Jill had called there to see what was taking us so long, but one of Roger’s friends answered the phone. Apparently Roger had given the house keys to a friend so they could have a party in our absence. After calling the neighbors and the police, we headed for the parking lot. I dreaded the rest of the trip. Now my father had another reason to yell at Roger. I knew the moment my dad stopped yelling he would think of another reason to be angry with Roger. As we passed the pinball machines I reflexively hit the start button on one and a ball popped out—a free game. We stopped so I could play and my father said to my brother, “That’s what happens to good kids.”

My father knew the pinball machine was a fluke, but he not could help himself. This had been the script for so long—we were all typecast. Roger was the troublemaker and I was the peacemaker. Roger cried as a baby. I waited quietly for my food. Roger was always making a mess of things. I would do things like poke holes in the bottom of the full milk carton or fill up the blender with a variety of baking ingredients in the middle of the night. This was considered adorable. Roger did things and my dad got angry. I primarily read the sports page of the newspaper, was unmotivated in school, and earned poor grades, but my dad hardly ever lost his temper with me. Perhaps Roger was the wicked son and I was the wise or simple son?

Tire Tracks Turn into Footprints

How do I reconcile being my parents' son and being myself? For some there is no difference. There is not even the language to ask such a question. But on one of those walks across the Washington Avenue Bridge with all those questions flying through my head I felt compelled to ask the question. And now I do not know how not to ask. As my parents are proudly looking over their respective shoulders at the footsteps which they have left for my size nine and a half feet, I occasionally slip in my attempts to locate a different set of footprints.

For I have now become the wicked son. My actions have asked the ultimate question. As I have attempted to live up to my name and discover a home a chasm has emerged, perhaps one that was always there, between my parents and myself. As I have dug down to discover the stranger within me I have found myself. As I have reached outside of myself to connect with the other I have become wicked.

There we were, the four of us, sitting in my mother's blue Toyota Cressida in the parking lot of Kopps, my favorite restaurant in Milwaukee. Incidentally, some said that the diner on the TV show *Happy Days* was modeled after Kopps. It was not the connection to the TV show that got me to Kopps for seventy-three days in a row; it was the delicious frozen custard! If the rules of the Passover holiday had not forbid me from eating a double scoop chocolate cone (only 50 cents!) who knows how long my streak would have persisted? But on the day that we sat in my mother's car, which still smelled brand new even though it had to be at least eight years old, I was not focused on a chocolate cone. Denise and I, visiting from Minnesota and now sitting in the back seat, fought with my parents who sat in the front seats. This was not the first or the last of many verbal explosions between my parents and me over my relationship with Denise and now with Renée. As a matter of fact, this was the same car in which a couple of years earlier I had told my parents that I was in a relationship with a woman named Denise. On that night my dad seemed calm, at least on the exterior, when he asserted that: "I assume with a name like Denise that she is not Jewish." As the car exited the freeway, I tried to resist the descent into wickedness by thinking of Jewish women named Denise. It did not occur to me that it did not matter how many Jewish women were named Denise. The Denise that I was dating was not Jewish.

The early fights about my interfaith relationship were somewhat outrageous in my defensiveness and my parents' relentlessness. Despite the fights and disappointments, my parents strove to maintain the relationship especially through visits to me in college. During one ice-cold Minneapolis visit, one of these fights began as we were driving a rental car. Stopped on Cecil Street in the parked car outside of my apartment, the cold began to settle in, but the arguing continued. My parents were using one of their reasons (from an arsenal of reasons) of why I should not date a "non-Jewish" woman. Who knows what my reply was this time? I felt that I was not being heard, but it took me years to express that. So on this bone-chilling day I ran out of responses to my parents' well-articulated rhetorical devices. These were not just well argued reasons why I should not be dating Denise. These were spears that felt like they were piercing my weak sense of identity. As I yelled something nonsensical at my mother and father, I got out of the car and started to walk. At some point on my way down Cecil Street, I looked behind me and saw my apartment on one side of the street and my parents in the car on the other and I asked myself "Steve, where are you going?"

The footprints I made on the Cecil Street sidewalk during that particular Minnesota deep freeze were never going to take me too far from my parents. I had always been the obedient son, striving not to upset my parents. The thought of exiting our relationship tapped the same fear that I felt when my uncle did not go along at the Passover seder. Now with over ten years of deep divide and hurt, I try to embrace the contradiction of loving my parents while pouring energy into my interfaith marriage to Renée, thereby challenging their most sacred beliefs. Simultaneously creating two sets of footprints in opposite directions under the guise of "peacemaker" or wise son no longer

works. However, flipping between dichotomous roles of wise son and wicked son has also failed me. The struggle gets complicated when my actions contradict the many years of training at being the peacemaker. Perhaps I have been an appease-maker rather than a peacemaker—feeling bad for using my parents support to cut my own path; deliberately not following in the footprints supposedly left with my best interests in mind.

Bracketing Contradictions

Until free people invalidate the myths and conceive of the possibilities offered by emancipation, slim is the possibility of authentic self-direction on the individual and social levels. (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 126)

My father, brother and I are on a trip together to London, England. We stay in a small, strictly kosher hotel because of my father's commitment to Orthodox Judaism. On Friday night Roger and I return to the hotel from an afternoon of poking around London to meet my father, who has just returned from Friday evening Sabbath service. In the hotel dining room Sabbath is being observed and we are seated next to a woman and a man who live outside of London and are staying at the hotel for the evening. Following the prayer over the wine, the washing of the hands, and the prayer over the bread, my father engages in a conversation with this couple. My father, in one swift motion, turns to his left and smiles at me. Then he places his hand on my knee, turns to his right, and laments to the couple that the horror of interfaith marriage plagues the Jewish community in the United States. My father insists that this deplorable act not only destroys the Jewish community, but in the presence of anti-Semitism Jews are practically marrying the enemy. With a smile on his face my father squeezes my knee—blood on blood—and then makes a connection with a stranger. My father has clearly staked out his moral position thereby disconnecting from me, all the while he is squeezing me—holding me—showing

his love and hope for me. Sharing his distaste for interfaith marriage to this couple allows my father to demonstrate his Jewish commitment while also pushing aside all the other immutable things we share with these strangers: Our Whiteness, middle-class status and heterosexuality. This announcement of monolithic Jewish identity clears a path that prevents the “other” from standing in the way.

The story of the London hotel is a metaphor for experiencing love intermingled with disappointment and frustration. I am held as I attempt to pull away. I maintain appearances as I hide my confusion. I cope with chaos by mentally removing myself. These are the contradictions of a life lived as Steve Grande. These contradictions compromise my name and separate me from home. Does rediscovering these internal contradictions bring me closer to finding a home? If I hold up my identity—in a sense pull it out outside of myself—examine it, relive it, and claim it, what happens?

In the past when faced with compromising my name or my aspirational home I have simply done some mental house cleaning. I coped by forgetting or getting rid of the chaos of the unknown. Forgetting the pain. Closing my eyes and my mouth. Ignoring the contradictions of my authentic home. All this forgetting led to a childhood that provided no reflection. Instead my memories were monolithic and myth-like. I could not touch my history because it “was viewed as rational, as if it could be no other way” (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 126).

Dangerous memory: In August 1993, while writing my Master’s Thesis, I remembered in vivid color the intense differences in Roger’s and my childhoods. As the tears streamed down my face and my face dropped into my hands I wondered if I was complicit in some way. Uncovering this latest layer helped me invalidate the myth of my

childhood as a two-dimensional space inhabited by tightly strung memories. I came to realize why I did not want to be Roger—look at the challenges he faced. And I came to realize why I did want to be Roger—he lived outside our family. Edgerton (1991) wrote: “The alienated are, I believe, closer to having a sense of the social construction of alienation-producing circumstances” (p. 95). Roger experienced terrible pain, but at the same time always helped me see. Roger and I used to joke that I could remember all the little details of our life: the fogged up windows of our kitchen on Fridays; the basement of our rabbi’s house where late night Passover seders took place; the weird brown vinyl backs of the synagogue chairs. But not remembering the different ways we experienced growing up made all my other memories un-interpretable and forgettable just as easily as they were memorable. Mitchell (1996) suggested that violence acts as an eraser rubbing out the memory and the pain connected with that memory. Perhaps the violence here is the different childhoods experienced by Roger and I. Is it surprising, then, that I could remember the images of my childhood, but not in any depth?

When I have tried writing about the first African American person I knew, our “cleaning woman” named Lola, I have only been able to recall flattened images like the pattern of our linoleum floor or the way Lola’s payment was placed on the kitchen table. These “clean” memories rearrange the uncomfortable memory of a Black woman employed in my White, Jewish home. “Clean” memories defuse the pain and confusion by simply erasing it.

As I locked up my most painful memories and I avoided the feelings that would have dragged the memories right out of me, Roger sharpened my lenses to the ideology of my family, racism, and Israel. Perhaps this is why I have always been suspicious of the

laws of Judaism that were presented as natural and intractable. I was able to be cynical of the laws, but I feared breaking them, just like I feared walking away from my parents or being like my uncle on Passover. This was my tensionality of being wise and wicked which led me to negotiate ways to expose contradictions at home and at school using a less confrontational approach than Roger pursued.

Edgerton (1991) clarified how living an alienated life is fundamentally different than living an angst-ridden life. She explained that alienation is “displacement in the midst of place” (p. 95), and people who are aware of the circumstances surrounding their alienation feel extra pain. Roger had the painful gift of being able to see how family practices were constructed to work against him. “Angst is not so much a result of being disconnected as being dissatisfied with the connection” (Edgerton, 1991, p. 95). Whereas Roger was estranged from the family, I was in limbo. I appreciated the security and privilege that came along with being the obedient son but was uncomfortable with the setting. I saw friends and relatives who spoke their minds, challenged authorities and took action. If I acted that way it would leave my home unrecognizable.

Finding my Place in Jewish Space

All the chairs at Beth Jehuda, my parents’ Orthodox synagogue in Milwaukee, face East toward Jerusalem. However, when I was there, I probably was really only looking as far as New York City—not Israel. Nonetheless, much of Judaism is oriented toward coming together in a homeland.

At the end of the Passover seder following hours of telling the Passover story, discussing the mythical four sons, asking the four questions, observing rituals upon rituals, consuming a full meal including hard boiled eggs, soup, gefilte fish, and fruit compote, when most participants are near, if not, asleep, the fourth and final cup of wine is filled. Raising our glasses we read from the Haggadah in Hebrew: *Le-shanah ha-ba’ah be-Yerushalayim!* Then in English: Next Year [may

we celebrate Passover] in Jerusalem! Momentarily rousing ourselves out of sleep we shouted the obligatory statement in unison. Then the relatives and friends got their coats and returned to their homes. We cleaned up as best we could. And then we went to sleep.

Although...I did not have dreams about waking up in Jerusalem. Israel, at the time, felt more like a land of anonymous Jews than my homeland. As I reflect on that universally Jewish saying “Next Year in Jerusalem” I realize that even as the words of defiance to our current diasporic situation escaped my mouth, I did not believe them. New York City, not Jerusalem city was where I wanted to be. The thought of moving to Jerusalem made me wince. Even at an early age my conception of home did not allow for a Jerusalem. When I was eleven years old I visited the city of Jerusalem with my family. Even at this age I was able to detect how different this city felt than any other place I had ever been. Jerusalem was surreal. But what did I imagine when we shouted “Next Year in Jerusalem!”? Rules, constraints and answers. New York City had the potential to be so much more. It was not simply that one of my friends from childhood seemed unhappy after moving from Milwaukee to Israel. Or that when we approached the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem this friend threw-up in a paper bag. My conception of Jerusalem was undoubtedly intertwined with my conception of Judaism.

The image of the lower East side of New York City was the kind of Judaism that attracted me. I longed for the scenes, smells, sights, and sounds of Guss’ Pickles on Essex Street between Grand and Hester. I distanced myself from much of Judaism besides this image of standing in line at Guss’. Most other kinds of Judaism disgusted me. Disgust when I see a conservative Jewish leader, frustration when Israel initiates new settlements, or embarrassment when I feel too much attention is given to Jewish issues. These fears feed into larger fears of being classified as a Jew no different than the Jews with whom I

disagree. I have often felt that I was a different Jew—not like the other Jews. I crouched behind this image of a Jewish identity constructed all by myself from top to bottom. I convinced myself that I was not the embarrassing Jew, the conservative Jew or the Jew who oppresses Palestinians. I convinced myself that I was a good Jew not confused in the minds of others with all the other Jews. I have been in hiding fearing that I would be found out as just another Jew. If I was found I might be treated like so many other Jews have been. My fear of anti-Semitism led me away from other Jews and reinforced my internalized anti-Semitism.

Ironically, it was on the night that I told my parents about my first interfaith relationship that we went to see the film “Crossing Delancey” which describes how a Jewish woman cannot find happiness with all the “non-Jewish” men she dates. Finally she meets an average guy, Guss, of Guss’ pickles. He is a nice Jewish mensch and they live happily after ever. I left the movie desiring a Guss’ pickle, which did not exactly make sense to me. If I could not understand how I desired New York City Jewish while being with a non-Jewish woman how was I going to explain it to my parents?

The memory of the contradiction that I felt on that December night as we walked from the movie theater to the parking lot seems like a long time ago until I let myself feel the feeling, and then I recognize its proximity to this current research exercise. As I have returned in my mind to my mother’s car, the Passover table, and the occasional confusion of my childhood home and attempted to feel the contradictions that make up my name I have gained a greater awareness of new questions. When I walked across the Washington Avenue Bridge in 1987 I realized that I could ask dangerous questions about the Judaism that I had been taught, but other aspects of my identity were not open to interrogation.

The Women's Studies class that Winter provided me with tools and words to explore what it meant to be male and what it meant to be Jewish, but I did not have the capacity to combine those concepts to wonder about what it meant to be a Jewish male. It took almost another five years before I could extend my limited understanding of male privilege to begin to claim and examine my White privilege. And it was only after I began to delve into my White racial identity that I was able to discover a locked chest full of memories possessing secrets about me and my interaction with the other. Claiming that chest and discovering the key which unlocked the memories required claiming my name. Pushing the chest away or ignoring the key allowed me to ignore feelings of humanity. It allowed me to trick myself into believing that I was perfect—similar to the way that I had paved over my painful and joyful childhood by designating my parents “perfect.” Unlocking the chest meant giving up the myth and false sense of control that comes with thinking that I am invulnerable. Unlocking the chest required claiming unfavorable aspects of myself such as my disgust with my Whiteness or my internalized anti-Semitism that I had been more comfortable projecting onto others. Unlocking the chest required claiming interpretations of my life story I had used to romanticize the other in order to build my own self-esteem.

My Four Questions

Remembering the stories of my family finally got me inside that chest. An open chest has provided me with the enjoyment and pain of three-dimensional memories, but I am saddled with a new responsibility that was unavailable when my other was invisible or unable to be claimed. These contradictory memories are stories with consequences. For instance, I now realize that Roger and I had very different childhoods and I may have

been partially responsible for those differences. I see that in the United States I have been and continue to be the recipient of privileges for many immutable aspects of my identity, such as my Whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, and lack of a disability. I understand that being Jewish has provided me with the gift of difference and the burden of being taught by society to hide this difference. This new understanding of the politics associated with my identity has challenged me to see the larger implications of my name. Claiming my name and “coming home” is more than acknowledging that I have privileges not provided to others or identifying how my lenses have been ground due to my Jewish heritage, it means taking action on my name. That is, just coming to terms with the many ways in which society is structured to benefit me is only the first step in claiming my name. If I stop there then I reinforce the myth of an individualistic society where introspective individuals have their heads locked in their own respective chests without an acknowledgment that there are keys to new chests—or even collective chests perhaps.

For my Bar Mitzvah I received a number of certificates from family friends indicating that trees were being planted in Israel by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) in honor of my accomplishments. At the time I probably would have been happier with a gift that I could play with, but it was nice to think of a barren land turning into a field of young trees and eventually becoming a forest.

The only problem with my imagination was that it was wrong. I had been a co-conspirator in myth-making. As I unearth and interpret this story of JNF trees I realize it has much to say about my Judaism and my name.

Buhle (1993) described how Zionists falsely portray the founding of Israel:

Zionism resettled a uniquely ‘homeless’ people into a largely uninhabited country whose backward peoples would benefit from the presence of the induced civilization; it thereby served to protect and regenerate world Jewry and Jewish culture, inevitably helping to produce a more peaceful, cooperative world. (p. 42)

Buhle (1993) went on to write that “Not a single of these tenets, all widely purveyed and believed during the 1950s-60s, is true” (p. 43). Similar to the way I have dealt with my own story, the history of Israel also has been presented as a myth to cover over its contradictions and dangerous memories. This romanticized history, whether it is personal or national, has the effect of cementing roles and undermining questioning.

The trees planted on barren land in my honor were actually being planted on land that had belonged to Arab Palestinians. The gift of the trees represented Jews and the barren land represented Palestinians. The myth of the trees hid a much more complex history of my homeland. Israel is a sanctuary for Jews—a place where Jews can just be Jewish. This safety of Judaism not being a difference cannot be underestimated. Unfortunately, wrapped into this safety are also policies of repression by the Israeli government.

When we chanted “Next Year in Jerusalem!” at the end of the Passover seder I did not know about the forced invisibility of Israeli gays and lesbians, Israeli women having to wait sometimes a lifetime for husbands to grant a divorce, and the oppression of Arab Palestinians. When our family visited Israel I was confused by much of what I saw, but I do remember a certain freedom I felt. To a degree I could relax and not have to fear being Jewish.

The history of the people inhabiting the land of Israel has remained hidden. In my mind Israel went from being the homeland of my Jewish brothers and sisters who did not really seem like brothers and sisters to a state that is intimately linked to colonialism, United States exploitation and racism. Israeli invasions into and attacks of civilians in Lebanon; Israeli crackdown, violence and exploitation of Palestinians; and Israeli

homogenization of Judaism are all disturbing depictions of my supposed homeland. When my own Judaism was undifferentiated—an unbracketed part of myself—Israel was a country under attack and surrounded by Arab neighbors. As I have begun questioning my Judaism and coming to terms with my internalized anti-Semitism, I have become more critical of Israel. I now live the tension of claiming Israel while wondering how what occurs in Israel could possibly reflect my way of being Jewish.

To be ultimately Jewish means to not accept an Israel that smashes difference. I can reject the repressive policies by the Israeli government all I want, but I cannot deny that all this violence in my homeland is being supposedly done for me. Minnie Bruce Pratt (1991), a White woman, asked “What was being done in my name?” (p. 51) following the killing by Ku Klux Klan members of four White men and one Black woman at an anti-Klan rally. I need to ask what Israel is doing in my name. Some Israelis would say that I cannot understand because I do not live in Israel. Others would call me a self-hating Jew and suggest that I hold my anti-Israel beliefs. I must acknowledge that my disdain for my name has helped me see a more complex Israel. However, it is the reclaiming of my name which shifts my critique and action from a basis of anger to love and expands the focus from Israel to the United States.

And now we have finally come to the questions that helped me find my way to this research exercise. My connection to Judaism means asking wicked questions about my history, organizing and coalescing with others, digging up dangerous memories for the sake of a more just future, and reclaiming my name by asking: What is being done in my name?

Similar to the Four Questions read at the Passover seder, I also have four questions. Interestingly, the seder questions, which are considered wise, contain similar answers year after year. The challenge is how to live the answers. In my attempts to reveal my true name, I have uncovered wicked questions that also challenge me to live Jewishly. These are my four questions: To use my societal privileges and the subordinated aspects of my difference as a strength to confront oppressive ideologies—is this not Jewish? To take a minority stand based on the idea that humans can be more human—is this not Jewish? To suggest that Jewish diaspora, my separation from home, is not a physical separation, but a separation between my being and my doing—is this not Jewish? To use my position as a cultural and ethnic minority as a means to undermine hegemony and exploitation through intellectual, passionate, and spiritual challenge—is this not Jewish?

My attempts to answer my four questions are emblematic of my struggle to live as a secular Jew. Shaking the stories from my bracketed autobiography has brought my paradox to the forefront. It has challenged me to live up to my name, to conceptualize a home of vitality that requires leaping into the boundless—into my other. Living up to my name requires asking who else is using my name and what purposes my name is serving. Dwelling in my name requires acknowledging my existence as a secular Jew.

Shifting to Pre-Understandings

This process of coming to know myself as a secular Jew has allowed me to turn toward a new question: What is at the essence of secular Jewishness? To respond to this new question has required putting forward rich descriptions and elaborate, perhaps even contradictory, text that through interpretation authentically reveal the experience of being

a secular Jew. This phenomenon of being a secular Jew cannot be reduced to a short, precise definition. There are no clear and pronounced boundaries to frame this phenomenon. Most stories, narratives, and texts of Jewishness and Judaism act as a reflector of what secular Jewishness is not. Most sources for information on what it is to be a Jew shed light on how to be a religious Jew, not a cultural or secular Jew. As opposed to relying on a definition based on what it is not, this study is an attempt to put forward the experience of becoming a secular Jew. Although the current texts of secular Jewishness are often powerful and revealing, there is nonetheless a paucity of these texts. More are needed, for I believe there are college students who can benefit from these texts. The stories and interpretations from this dissertation ideally will be voices that students can call upon as a way to further announce their Being.

Through conversations with secular Jewish college students where we discuss the day-to-day experience of secular Jewishness, becoming a secular Jew, being a secular Jew among other Jews, and the words of secular Jewishness, I hope to reveal the essence of secular Jewishness. Through conversations, interpretation, writing, and re-writing I hope to render portraits of secular Jewish college students that are intricate, complex and even contradictory and that these portraits will draw in the reader to participate in the life lived as secular Jew.

This is an exercise in reclaiming possibilities lost when Judaism is presented as monolithic and literal, devoid of challenging interrogation. This is a project exploring what it means to ask questions, but also what it means to take action on those questions. This is a dissertation intended to move from discourse to a new way of being in the world (Ricoeur, 1991). It is about connecting with and listening to the voices of secular Jews

who have come before and with me and resisted in the name of peace and humanity; Jews who have bracketed their complex and contradictory identities; Jews who have claimed their being through reflection and action to transform the world (Freire, 1970).

CHAPTER II

EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON

In dead of winter imprisoned within
the imprisoned earth it was a leap
defiant of all eternal laws patterns.
Beneath the frozen earth it came to be
like a splitting of an inner will
a wrenching from a designated path
a sudden burst from a cause unknown
And then in spring it opened: a lemon yellow
in a pure red field.

Our words deny the simple beauty
the wild energy of the event. *Anomaly*
deviant mutant we're always taught
as though this world were a finished place
and we the dull guardians of its perfected forms.
Our lives are rooted in such words. (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 159)

How do our words imprison us in a mindset? Are we prevented from seeing possibilities? Does our language undermine our ability to listen? Has our lexicon, that toolshed of words which shape how we see and make sense of the world, given meaning to our life while steering us away from the absences of meaning—moments where we do not have words?

Words. How important can a seemingly random combination of vowels and consonants be to the self?

Take the word “Jew.” Often used with disdain, the word “Jew” has frequently stood in when we do not have words; when confusion erupts about “abnormal,” “unusual,” “non-traditional,” “communist,” or otherwise non-mainstream behavior. Jew is a quick label probably most painfully remembered from Nazi Germany where yellow Stars of David with the word “Jüde” on them were sewn on the clothes of Jews. Visually and eventually physically setting Jews aside from the rest of the German population

provided a visual receptacle for all sorts of projections (Cantor, 1995; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1994). One word was simply sufficient to reduce a complex, diverse, contradictory and impossible to define people into a hated non-human group of things.

Similarly to reduce the horror of Nazi Germany to a few words or an image of a yellow star allows the incomprehensible loss of life to be simplified and exploited merely for the purpose of making a point (Fein, 1988). Yet it is the Holocaust in Germany that most precisely illuminates the irony that Jews have tried for thousands of years to string together a meaningful narrative to answer the question, “What is it to be a Jew?” Yet time and again our oppressors have answered that question for us in chilling and often genocidal ways. Turning our words against us makes us weary and suspicious of language. Words, often invisible because they are a mere device to accomplish the task of communication, become much more. The narratives of our lives, the stories that we use to make and re-make meaning, and the ability to refer to oneself as “I” and other as “you” all require words. When words are taken away to leave us voiceless or the meaning of words is so twisted around that our use of these words becomes a betrayal—of ourselves, then words are no longer invisible.

This project is an attempt to expand our lexicon as well as raise questions about the words we think we already know. By asking: “What is it to be a secular Jew?” we are required to immediately think in contradiction. Pairing the word “secular,” which suggests non-observant, assimilated or even profane, with the word “Jew,” which is often misunderstood as simply referring to a religion, invites confusion. This marriage of non-observant with religion challenges us to problematize the word “Jew.” Listening to the words of Jews who have intentionally chosen a secular Jewish identity might provide us

all, whether we identify as secular Jews or otherwise, with words that help us wonder if the “lemon yellow” flower “in a pure red field” is more than an anomaly, act of deviance, or mutation. Grabbing on to the experience of the secular Jew and raising it up for all to see makes public a contradictory identity and may act as a mirror to reflect other identities of contradiction as well as the injustice that often keeps the light from reaching these identities.

In this chapter I put forward my pre-understandings about the phenomenon of secular Jewishness. As I discuss below, by taking a hermeneutic phenomenological approach it is necessary that I describe my biases and pre-conceptions before embarking on a phenomenological study. To accomplish such a task I have had to lay down my understandings of the philosophy that has provided access into such a phenomenon. It has also required that I make explicit my implicit understandings of what it means to be Jewish and secular. Through the use of stories, poetry, and philosophy I have attempted to uncover my initial thoughts about what it means to be a secular Jew. What follows are the words that I have used to make sense of Jewishness as well as a presentation of Jewish text.

I am, Therefore I Think

As I expressed in the previous chapter, to be Jewish has meant to experience contradiction. The feeling of paradox undergirds this chapter as well. Embarking on a hermeneutic phenomenological dissertation requires that I grapple with one of the key phenomenological thinkers, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). The split between Heidegger’s philosophy and his involvement in the Nazi party represents an extreme example of the incongruence between thought and action. Heidegger’s name is a

testament to what? To a philosophy that encourages individuals to wholly reveal their context or surroundings in order to unveil their Being of beings and thereby connect intimately with others? To a philosopher that betrayed his ideas to become a member of a group that attempted to exterminate Jews, Gypsies, Gays, lesbians, and people with disabilities? The idea of intimacy and the action of annihilation are obscenely contradictory, yet Heidegger represents both.

Here lies the paradox and even the scandal: how could this thought (Heidegger's), a thought so devoted to remembering that a forgetting (of Being) takes place in all thought, in all art, in all "representation" of the world, how could it possibly ignore the thought of "the jews," which, in a certain sense, thinks, tries to think, nothing but that very fact? How could this thought ignore "the jews" to the point of suppressing and foreclosing to the end the very horrifying (and inane) attempt at exterminating, at making us forget, forever what, in Europe, reminds us, ever since the beginning, that "there is" the Forgotten? (Lyotard, 1988/1990, p. 4)

Heidegger used the word Dasein to describe how we wonder about our being as a way of being human (Dreyfus, 1991). Heidegger suggested that it is through Dasein that we come to know the essence of the covered-over lifeworld. Discovering or recovering the lifeworld where human beings put aside our theoretical orientation to the world and instead bring to the surface our humanness would allow people to connect authentically. Bracketing our conceptions and pre-understandings allow us to be present to the world and specifically enter the world of the other in an authentic way.

Being, by its nature, is forgetful and constantly covering over meanings. Heidegger's phenomenology though is devoted to remembering the primordial way of being. How do I make sense of the incongruity of phenomenological work on remembering with the Nazi desire to make the world forever forget the existence of Jews?

The fact that Heidegger entered the Nazi party in 1933 does not allow me to dismiss the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger. Instead, I begin by turning the philosophy around and use it to understand and ask the questions of Heidegger that he suggested we ask of our being and lifeworld. What does it mean to live in a society that is moving with seemingly unstoppable inertia toward greater and greater injustice? What does it mean to obey the laws when the laws are unjust? Somehow Heidegger answered these questions with entrance into the Nazi party (Krell, 1977; Safranski, 1994/1998). What might those same questions mean to us now?

Interestingly, Heidegger grew up Catholic and studied theology before turning to philosophy and metaphysics. As Heidegger began to work out his radical metaphysics he rejected the Catholic Church (Safranski, 1994/1998). Heidegger maintained that he was Christian, but opposed many of the formal religious practices of his youth and in a sense continued Nietzsche's work on thinking about the death of God (Safranski, 1994/1998). Heidegger eventually enters the National Socialist party and is appointed rector of Freiburg University. Heidegger holds this post for only a short time and his actions, as rector and following his resignation, are difficult to summarize. He attempted to persuade Nazi officials to not dismiss several Jewish faculty members while also being silent as death camps were being constructed and Jewish friends were being forced to leave Germany (Safranski, 1994/1998). Clearly Heidegger was a National Socialist and acted in ways characteristic of anti-Semitism, yet in his lectures and writings there is no trace of anti-Semitic remarks (Safranski, 1994/1998).

Historically, Heidegger is probably not that unusual—just another example of an individual whose actions contradict the humanity of being because he or she was swept

up in the fervor of stereotypes, projections, and scapegoating of the times. When I judge Heidegger I must also judge myself. This does not mean letting Heidegger off the hook because he was merely emblematic of the era; Germans, albeit few in number, transcended the horror of the times and helped Jews and others. Nonetheless, I hold Heidegger accountable with the idea that I then hold myself accountable.

However, my turning to phenomenology and my concerns with Heidegger cannot stop there. I must keep the paradox of Heidegger always in mind. How is it possible that Heidegger, devoted to remembering, could have joined the Nazi party, dedicated to forgetting and exterminating humanity? Is there something about Heidegger's thought that makes it possible to believe in Nazi propaganda? Heidegger's story is fairly common; an intellectual, like so many others, succumbing to inhumane politics, however I must hold him to a higher standard because of his thought and ideas (Lyotard, 1988/1990). Furthermore, where was Heidegger's rebuke of Nazism after Nazi crimes against humanity were revealed to the world (Lyotard, 1988/1990)? Heidegger's silence from 1933 to his death in 1976 requires me to answer the paradox of his life with the determination to not employ hermeneutic phenomenology carelessly. My response to the gift and the burden of Heidegger is to care. I will care about the tension of Heidegger. I will care about Being and ultimately I will care about the forgotten other (Levinas, 1961/1969).

Dialogical Writing

Secular Jewishness may craft particular answers to these questions of what it means to live in a society pervaded by injustice. However, before uncovering the experience of being a secular Jew I need to "say" a few words about these types of

questions. When I ask: What does it mean to live during a certain time period? or What does it mean to obey certain laws? I am asking meaning questions: What does it mean to the individual at the time and to humanity in general? How people make meaning or avoid making sense is a crucial part of this chapter and will be discussed below.

However, before a discussion on making meaning can take place I need to be more explicit about who is doing the meaning making. As I sit at my computer and type this paper or as you read it we are “I’s” engaged in an activity. We read, think, write and react. As I write I consider if the way I have strung words together is logical and makes sense. But I do not consider this in an abstract universal way, but think specifically if you, my readers, will understand what I am writing. The process of writing is one of dialogue. Without ever speaking to or completely knowing my readers I imagine their logic and feelings and attempt to make my writing fit or challenge their thought process. Hence, I am engaged in a dia-logical process (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Without readers whose logic and feelings shall I appeal to? If I presume that my arguments make sense without considering how a reader would understand them, then am I only writing for myself? Even authors of traditional, positivistic social science who use a third-person “voice,” (Shotter, 1991) and seek universal truths (Barritt & Marshall, 1992) still consider the reader’s reaction even if this dialogue is hidden by the style of writing. Writing is a form of dialogue whether we share our words with others or keep them to ourselves. Similarly, thinking is also an experience of dialogue and is dialogical (Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

The Cartesian Myth

With the words “I think, therefore I am,” Descartes captured the premise that as humans we are governed by an opposition between mind and body (Hermans & Kempen, 1993) where “one’s own *self*...exists somewhere ‘inside’ one, as something unique and distinct from all else that there is” (Shotter, 1991, p. 137). To grow up in the 20th century in the United States it would be difficult to not be captured by the Cartesian idea that our thinking can exist closed off from all other influences (Sampson, 1991). For instance, the idea that we need to study children to see if their thinking is influenced by television rests on the Cartesian premise that we “all existed from birth as separate, isolated individuals *already* containing ‘minds’ or ‘mentalities’ wholly within ourselves” (Shotter, 1991, p. 136). Historically, “how we *account* for our experience of ourselves” (Shotter, 1991, p. 136) has usually begun at the “Cartesian starting-point” (Shotter, 1991, p. 137) where we have been taught that our personal identity was created and achieved as something separate and discrete from an “outside” world (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Shotter, 1991). Dualisms emerging from Cartesian thought, particularly between mind and body and between self and other, reinforce the notion that the self is a centralized force possessing its own thoughts and ultimately its own identity (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Shotter, 1991).

The hermeneutic phenomenology championed by Heidegger contradicts the Cartesian starting-point. The Cartesian starting point assumes that we are the authors of our own “text” and we own that text (Shotter, 1991). Proposing a dichotomy of cloistered minds separate from all other minds and separate from all objects of the seemingly outside world, Cartesian philosophy rests on the myth that we exist as independent and

autonomous beings. Whereas the Cartesian tradition emphasizes epistemology—how we come to know and the separation between the knower and the known, hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes ontology—our being in the world (Dreyfus, 1991; Richardson, 1986). The theoretical orientation implicit in the epistemological perspective requires a relation to the world similar to the technician in the laboratory. The knower or the technician attempts to discover the guiding principles of our lives (Dreyfus, 1991) or the truth without accounting for the separation that has been constructed between the knower and the object to be known. Interestingly, student affairs work draws heavily on the tradition of epistemology and rests on the assumption that there is a separation between the knower and what is known (Dreyfus, 1991; Richardson, 1986).

The Heideggerian approach differs radically by attempting to bring to light the “‘mindless’ everyday coping skills as the basis of all intelligibility” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 3). Heidegger suggested that individuals can never be entirely absolute about the reasons or the background underlying their behaviors or practices. Instead, and what makes Heidegger unique, is that he tries to describe our understanding of being from within that understanding. Suggesting that our social context is the base for how we make sense, Heidegger wishes to understand the “shared everyday activities in which we dwell, an understanding that he says is closest to us yet farthest away” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 8). According to Heidegger, when we attempt to grasp our self through broad, universal, or theoretical descriptions we will lose our self because we will lose our context. Instead, hermeneutic phenomenology renders a vivid portrayal of how our background practices work to the people who share or dwell in these background practices. This portrayal reveals our understanding of our being. However because our background is not static

and since the context for our practices is continually changing there is the need for continual reinterpretation.

Submitting My Pre-understandings

The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much. (van Manen, 1990, p. 46)

This is a chapter about placing brackets around the notion of my understanding of secular Jewishness. I wish to take hold of the phenomenon of the Jewish person making sense of his or her name and momentarily place this phenomenon outside of my previous knowledge of such a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). That is, I wish to not merely examine the phenomenon of the Jewish person making her or his embedded being conscious, I hope to put aside all our assumptions and pre-understandings we might have of such a process in order to avoid coming to conclusions which would prevent myself and the reader from coming to see the essence of such a phenomenon. Van Manen explained that trying to eliminate or throw away our pre-understandings of a phenomenon would probably subvert our efforts because our suppositions are likely to “creep back into our reflections” (van Manen, 1990, p. 47). Van Manen insisted that it is “better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions and theories” (p. 47).

In this chapter, then, I put forward my pre-understandings of the experience of being a secular Jew not merely as an acknowledgment of my beliefs, but as an important step in the process of discovering the lifeworld of secular Jewishness. Whereas the first chapter of this project tells the story of my awakening to the chasm between my name and the essence of who I am—my introduction to secular Jewishness—this chapter is

intended to help me put aside my subjectivity and preconceived notions about the phenomenon, remove the layer of theory and scientific axioms which distances me from the phenomenon, and present a vivid and metaphorical portrayal of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Finally, the purpose of the exploration of the phenomenon is to not fall into the Cartesian mindset of presenting what I know through a presentation of the latest professional literature (Barritt & Marshall, 1992). Instead I want to open up the conversation by putting forward a rich woven description of the context of secular Jewishness.

I begin with attempting to uncover what it means to be Jewish and specifically what it means to be a secular Jew. Before I can enter the world of secular Jewish college students I need to bring to the surface the larger phenomenon of being Jewish and in particular being a secular Jew. By getting closer to my pre-understandings of the essence of secular Jewishness the stage is set to understand the experience of college students who are in the process of becoming secular Jews.

College students are unlikely to be secular Jews. That is, the experience of being a secular Jew is different from becoming a secular Jew. Although both being and becoming are evolving experiences, becoming implies a process of exploration and searching not suggested by being. Theorists such as Sharon Daloz Parks (2000), who defined spirituality quite broadly to include the process of “seeking and discovering meaning” (p. 7) in many contexts, suggested that college student spiritual development is about discovery and opening up meaning, essentially the experience of becoming not being. Yet, to understand what college students are becoming, this chapter attempts to uncover what it means to be a secular Jew. As Irena Klepfisz (1990a) discovered when speaking

with Jewish college students across the United States, very few students have a secular Jewish vernacular. They are unfamiliar with the history of secular Jewishness that thrived a mere 50 years ago. For instance, the three Jewish authors in *Inside Separate Worlds: Life Stories of Young Blacks, Jews and Latinos* (Schoem, 1991) discussed frustrations and concerns with religious Judaism, but seemed to have no awareness that there is a way of being Jewish that is secular. One of the authors, Joey Goldman (1991), described how he was not like other Jews:

Sometimes I feel that I'm not really Jewish since I'm not a part of what Jewish-American society is (something I still haven't defined for myself very clearly). I've had a lot of Jewish experiences, some positive and some negative. I can look back on my feelings about them and continue to explore in the directions I want to go. (p. 274).

Joey as well as the other Jewish authors in *Inside Separate Worlds* reflected the experience of becoming. They were each engaged in the intentional process of attempting to make meaning of their Jewishness by uncovering the language of their youth, stories from childhood and experiences with others.

“In my understanding, whether faith is connected to a deity or not, its essence lies in trusting ourselves to discover the deepest truths on which we can rely” (Salzberg, 2002, p. xiii). Sharon Salzberg (2002), like Sharon Daloz Parks (2000), suggested that faith is a process whereby human beings uncover their deepest truths and then stake their lives on these truths. This study is concerned with what it is like to embrace a broader understanding of faith or spirituality as well as what it is like to attempt to uncover these deeper truths.

To reveal the essence of what it means to be a secular Jew I intentionally use terms and expressions like “uncover” or “unveil.” These words imply that a phenomenon,

in this case secular Jewishness, is covered or veiled and phenomenology will help reveal this phenomenon. The phenomenon may be covered over because the phenomenon is unknown or forgotten. I suggest in this chapter that secular Jewishness is indeed both unknown and forgotten (Klepfisz, 1990a). Revealing the phenomenon implies removing the cover that keeps us from fully experiencing secular Jewishness. Therefore, in conjunction with an uncovering of what it means to be a secular Jew, I also attempt to reveal what words are recovered to help us make meaning and provide intentions for our actions.

Jewish Diaspora

It is my hope that an ontological engagement with secular Jews, a being with secular Jews that reveals what it is like to dwell as a secular Jew, might make explicit the anomaly, deviance, and even annoyingness that is secular Jewishness. From what is being a secular Jew a deviation? What is it about secular Jews that is peculiar? Might the earth be less frozen than we are led to believe? Might the potential exist for more anomalies?

Might discussions with secular Jews reveal a language of hope and meaning making in a society that routinely ignores such words? Might being with secular Jewish college students bring to the surface the feelings, experiences, and aspirations of secular Jews in ways that move us past taking their experience for granted? Might the experience of secular Jews hold a challenge for us to ask not only “What is?” but also ask: “What might be?” A secular Jewish identity is often misunderstood as merely nonobservant or assimilated to mainstream culture (Klepfisz, 1990a). Although this is inaccurate, it is this thinking and ultimately this language that keeps secular Jewish practice invisible.

In the previous chapter I asked if the diasporic condition of being Jewish is not a physical separation from home, but the paradox between being and doing. As I attempted to portray in the first chapter, questioning my being—my name, has led to a whole new understanding of my home. That a crucial aspect of being Jewish is our diasporic condition only heightens the importance of paying attention to the Jewish relationship to home. This distance, which I have uncovered through questioning and wondering about how I am in the world, has awakened me to my sense of feeling exiled. I need to be clear that my feeling of exile is very different than the physical and emotional separation from home that political prisoners, refugees, and victims of violence experience. I am more fortunate than I can express to not have been physically and forcefully separated from my home and family. The exile I refer to may seem esoteric and rather unimportant when compared to individuals who are physically exiled. However, as I asked above, how might we all learn from individuals who are negotiating the exile, the “narrow bridge” (Brettschneider, 1996) between who they are and what they would like to become.

Illuminating Jewish being has required me to uncover and share aspects of my Jewish home that are not particularly attractive. This public demonstration of my angst not only strains the taken for granted relationships in my home, but it also serves as a parallel for another aspect of the contradiction of a Jewish life lived in the United States. By devoting a dissertation to Jewish being I am blurring the often firm line between private Jewishness and public Whiteness that many White mainstream Jews, including myself, maintain to avoid anti-Jewish oppression. Letting the light stream into the hazy cellar of Jewish being will hopefully clear a path for Jews and others to take part in questioning and carrying contradictions to the surface for examination. However, I

should not be surprised if some Jews will suggest that I keep the cellar door locked for the very legitimate fear that others may use my dissertation as an excuse to express anti-Jewish thoughts and behaviors. This brings me back to the question I raised earlier: What is being done in my name? What impact will my unmasking Jewish being and home have on Jews? And while I can never control the answer to this question, how might I understand this question to take action to respond?

Discovering Keys; Unlocking Doors

Earlier I introduced the idea of a deeply buried chest full of stories about my interactions with the other. Finding the chest was intriguing, exciting and ultimately overwhelming. The chest represented new insight beyond mere self-awareness. It seemed similar to the profound changes that can occur when a White person, after years of denying or simply not seeing how he or she received privileges for his or her skin color, realizes that he or she is White (Arminio, 1994). Opening the chest required significant action. It required locating a key and using it. Opening the chest was a process not merely a fixed event. I needed a key. The definition for the word key is “a means of gaining or preventing entrance, possession, or control” (Mish, 1984, p. 659). So a chest can be unlocked with a key, but it first must be closed or locked with a key. The etymological origins of key are traced back to the following definition:

An instrument, usually of iron, for moving the bolt or bolts of a lock forwards or backwards, and so locking or unlocking what is fastened to it...that which opens up, or closes, the way to something; that which gives opportunity for or precludes an action. (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.)

So the key is an opportunity to unlock and open our selves up. Yet the key can preclude action by locking our thoughts and memories away. Using a key is like using a tool to cleave. Cleave means “to split or divide by or as if by a cutting blow” (Nichols, 2001, p.

247). Ironically though, cleave also means to “adhere firmly.” The key is a tool where we split ourselves up, but it also can be uncovered to piece ourselves back together. Or perhaps it is the other way around. The key is used to piece ourselves together and eventually we unlock the chest to discover all the splits—all the places where we do not adhere firmly—and what we have done with all the cutting blows we have received?

What is the experience of being a secular Jew in the United States? Does being Jewish translate into a slew of hidden and locked chests full of secrets and painful reminders that also may hold keys to a liberating and authentic voice? What is the experience of being a member of the dominant group and benefiting from that membership, while also being a member of a targeted and often invisible group? What happens to the feelings of a Jewish person? Perhaps membership in the Jewish group requires a storage unit for all the contradictory feelings that go unexpressed. Are there keys that would unlock these contradictions and dialectics? When I discovered the chest I was afraid that whatever was inside may make me unrecognizable to myself. What happens when the key is used?

Sitting in front of my open chest overwhelmed with memories I discovered more keys. As I discussed in the first chapter I learned that my parents were not perfect and therefore I could never achieve perfection either. I slowly claimed the idea that it would be impossible for me to create my identity from top to bottom. Instead, claiming the chest required claiming splits or contradictions.

Canvasses of Contradictions

Old paint on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens it is possible, in some pictures, to see the original lines: a tree will show through a woman’s dress, a child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea. That is called *pentimento* because the painter “repented,” changed

his mind. Perhaps it would be as well to say that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing and then seeing again. (Hellman, 1973, p. 3)

To claim the chests—the splits—requires claiming the parts of ourselves that we may be ashamed of and may leave us feeling unbalanced. When we open the door to our past, to the people and the histories that make up who we are, the ground likely will feel unstable; for the concealed paint strokes of our past may reveal an image that contradicts our current reflection.

As I have tried to make sense of the complex stories that make up secular Jewishness I have found that I needed to employ a guide. The various layers that make up Jewishness are overwhelming, and adding the layer of secular only adds to my confusion. I needed a guide whose own story, while adding to this complexity, may also clarify the background of secular Jewishness. In addition, this guide allowed me to enter into much needed dialogue (although imaginary) with her to compose a richer and in-depth canvas that is secular Jewishness. Both the story and the writing of Irena Klepfisz are what guided me to and now into secular Jewishness.

The autobiographical prose and poetry of Irena Klepfisz provide a rich description of the struggles and joys of being a Jewish lesbian feminist who is also a secular Jew. Irena Klepfisz is a Holocaust survivor. While some writers may not acknowledge what informs their practice, clearly Klepfisz's writings emerge from her life as a survivor as well as an individual who has struggled to live. Adrienne Rich (1990) described Klepfisz as beginning her life with "almost total disintegrative loss—of family, community, culture, country and language" (p. 14). Through writing and action Klepfisz "has taken up the task of recreating herself as Jew, woman, and writer by articulating that destruction" (Rich, 1990, p. 14). Klepfisz's writing is realistic and visionary in that the

poetry and prose do not clearly delineate where one aspect of her identity ends and another begins. Instead Klepfisz takes on the contradictions, overlaps, and layers inherent in her identity and history.

Klepfisz is a writer of prose and poetry, an activist, and an educator. Her life is an articulation of a powerful secular Jewishness that has challenged and struggled with oppression, political action, and narrow definitions of religious Judaism. Klepfisz's writing does not circumscribe secular Jewishness neatly. Nor does her writing simply state how secular Jewishness is practiced. Instead, by describing the many forces that came to bear on her Jewishness, she has demonstrated that secular Jewishness is not a static set of pre-defined practices but a way of being that is continually being produced and reproduced through critical thinking, acting in community, and bringing forward histories. This complexity implicated me and illuminated the filters that probably made it difficult for me to find this guide sooner. In what follows I will use the stories and writing of Irena Klepfisz to bring forward the background of secular Jewishness. By coupling the prose and poetry of Klepfisz with other writers I hope to render a vivid and metaphorical portrayal of secular Jewishness.

Entering the Text

Irena Klepfisz was born on her father's 28th birthday in Warsaw, Poland in 1941 as the Jewish community was facing almost total destruction. Having a fair skinned father with blue eyes, Irena and her mother were successfully smuggled out of the ghetto in 1943 before the Warsaw uprising. Irena was put in a Catholic orphanage while her mother, passing as non-Jewish, became a maid for a Polish family. In the meantime, Irena's father, Michal Klepfisz, smuggled weapons and materials into the ghetto for the

uprising. On the second day of the uprising and three days after his thirtieth birthday, Michal Klepfisz was killed. He died as he killed a German soldier to clear an escape route for his comrades. The rest of the group escaped safely. The next day a friend buried Michal in the courtyard in an unmarked grave. Irena Klepfisz wrote in response to this clandestine burial:

The shock of not finding his name
is always the same. Unused to his
anonymity, I close the books angry
that his body was not discovered
and remains buried in an unmarked grave. (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 29)

Irena grew up without ever having or knowing her father. Instead, her father's heroic legacy saddled Irena with a contradiction. Eventually, Michal Klepfisz's life is chronicled in a variety of books describing the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and Irena searched through these books for her father. Who is this man she never really knew? Irena wrote about how her father, "the missing one," would be "present" at night in her mother's and her apartment in New York City:

And when the two crowded
into the kitchen at night
he would press himself between them
pushing, thrusting, forcing them to remember,
even though he had made his decision,
had chosen his own way
rather than listening to the pleas of her silence
(she once said: I never complained about his activities
and Michal said he was glad I was not like other wives
who wanted to draw their husbands back into safety)
he would press himself between them—
hero and betrayer
legend and deserter—
so when they sat down to eat
they could taste his ashes. (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 38)

Her father died so others could live. Yet Michal Klepfisz's heroism left Irena Klepfisz with a great loss.

Irena's father was a hero in the uprising, but history often ignores how the family is impacted by such practices, especially when the hero is a man. In *In My Mother's House*, Kim Chernin's (1983) painful and moving recounting of her mother's life, Chernin explores growing up in a Jewish, "Communist, materialist, atheist" (Chernin, 1983, p. xvii) household that did not believe in Judaism, but nonetheless observed Passover and Chanukah by celebrating the revolutionary aspects of the holidays. Despite tremendous efforts, Kim Chernin's mother, Rose, was unable to attend to her daughter and be a committed activist. For instance, during the height of the McCarthy "Blacklisting" era Rose Chernin spent six months in jail. Kim Chernin rebelled against her mother and spent a considerable amount of her life making sense out of a childhood spent with an extended family of members of the Communist party. Kim Chernin's stories illuminate the struggle Rose Chernin faced balancing immediate family and personal needs with the organizing and utopian dreaming that was a fundamental part of her identity. When *In My Mother's House* is placed next to Irena Klepfisz's opposing feelings about her father, a core contradiction of secular Jewishness is revealed. Rose Chernin regrets that she did not spend more time with her daughter, but she also acknowledges that the work she was doing kept her alive, especially after the loss of her first daughter. Rose Chernin's work demonstrates hope in the future, a future where her daughter will hopefully flourish. Similarly, Michal Klepfisz's battle against the Germans is part of a much larger, yet rarely acknowledged history of resistance to the Germans during the Holocaust (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1989; Klepfisz, 1990a). Jews can look back on

the Holocaust, and if it is possible to see through the fog of near genocide, they may be able to take pride in the fact that Jews died trying to live.

Was Michal Klepfisz fighting an impossible battle? Was it worth sacrificing his life if he might never see his daughter again? Similarly, was it “worth it” for Rose Chernin to go to jail to fight against United States xenophobia at the risk of missing her daughter’s formative years? Had Michal Klepfisz internalized the masculinist stereotype that the only solution was to fight? Was Rose Chernin caught in a “Catch-22” reserved for women where she could not be a good mother and pursue her dreams? It is impossible and unnecessary for me to attempt to answer these questions with Michal Klepfisz and Rose Chernin in mind. However, Michal Klepfisz and Rose Chernin’s lives raise important questions about the secular Jewish imperative to act and the role gender plays in those actions.

Left with no memories of her father and only sketchy accounts in books, this early part of Irena Klepfisz’s life is where her search for answers begins. This search is not necessarily to get a definitive account of her father’s death, but to find some signal from the way her father lived his life that might provide some clues on how Irena Klepfisz might proceed. Similarly, Kim Chernin wrote her mother’s story for seven years only to find after every attempt that something was missing.

I was so preoccupied with the struggle to be different from my mother that I did not notice how much I regretted my failure to become one of the things she undeniably is. For my mother, in spite of critical ideology and personal ambivalence, is very much a Jewish woman. (Chernin, 1983, p. xvii)

Chernin eventually realized that to capture the spoken word of her mother she had to let “my mother’s voice disappear into me and return through me, in the voice I would eventually give to her story” (Chernin, 1983, p. xi). Klepfisz and Chernin’s dual

orientation to the past and the present are indicative of a vision of the future composed of a continuously reinterpreted past.

Klepfisz's and Chernin's routes to the past are laced with Jewishness. Klepfisz's Poland of her origins is deeply anti-Semitic with the loss of her father and family as well as her eventual displacement caused by the near genocide of Jews. Chernin, by undertaking her mother's stories, stumbles on to a path that is uniquely Jewish, as well. What is this Jewishness at the origins of Klepfisz and Chernin's lives? Why throughout history have Jews, such as Michal Klepfisz, been beaten, raped, or murdered because of their Jewishness? Why is it not surprising that Rose Chernin, a Jew, was at the forefront of the Communist movement in the 1950s?

The Text of Jewishness

There is no easy definition of the term "Jew." As described above, historically the word Jew has been thrown around carelessly, staying in place only long enough to serve the interests of the dominant group. As hard times would befall a particular population or country the word "Jew" would be picked up again. "It's the Jews" was a way to rally the troops, the people or whomever did not identify as Jewish or successfully hid their Jewishness. The mantra would continue by assigning mythical properties to Jews and thereby scapegoating Jews as the source of evils (Cantor, 1995; Cohen, 1980; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1994). While the word Jew has been used to redirect attention from the real sources of oppression and hard times, this is not to suggest that the term only exists in relation to what it is not. Nonetheless it has been much easier to explain how their oppressors are wrong in the way they portray Jews than it is to put forth a definition of Jews. Telling the story of Jews requires simultaneously delving into the

history of anti-Semitism, for how we understand Jews is always intermingled with anti-Semitism (whether we are aware of it or not). The stereotypes that have informed what we think Jews look like, act like, talk like, and are like are ever changing, but as we examine different aspects of them we will come to realize that being Jewish cannot be safely ensconced in terms like race, ethnicity, religion or culture.

Books upon books have been written on what it means to be a Jew. Lives are devoted to interpreting the five books of Moses to ultimately decipher how one can behave in accordance with Jewish law—that is, how one can behave Jewishly. Every April, at Passover Seders throughout the world, Jews and friends and relatives of other faiths engage in heated conversations about what it means to be a Jew. Rarely, whether a person is reading a book, talking to a Rabbi, or participating in a Passover Seder, can one get a concise answer to what it means to be Jewish.

So then, what makes a person a Jew or Jewish? Traditional Jewish law asserts that a Jewish mother passes Jewishness to her children. Therefore a child who may be raised as a Christian or Muslim but who has a Jewish mother would be considered Jewish by traditional Jewish scholars. More liberal interpretations have recently argued that a Jewish father also passes Jewishness to his children. Madeleine Albright, the former United States' Secretary of State, challenges either case. Raised in a Catholic home she was alerted in 1997 that three of her grandparents had died in the Holocaust because they were Jewish. Before immigrating to the United States from Czechoslovakia, Albright's parents converted to Catholicism. When they arrived in their new country Albright's parents hid their Jewishness from everyone including their own daughter (Hyman, 1998). Is Albright Jewish? A traditional Jewish reply would indicate that Albright is surely

Jewish because although she has not been practicing as a Jew she descends from Jewish heritage.

If having a Jewish mother (or father) is technically enough to make me Jewish, then what makes me different from those who do not descend from Jewish lineage? Is the difference merely a technicality that has been blown out of proportion by our oppressors? Or is there something or some things that are uniquely Jewish? Often Jewish “behaviors” have been enough to set Jews apart (which is often the underlying reason for the behaviors in the first place). Jews may be easily identified as Jews when you see them walking out of a synagogue, when you pass by their house and instead of Christmas lights draped on the exterior a Chanukah menorah is in the window, or when you see an individual wearing a necklace with a star of David hanging from it. However there are many more times when it is not clear someone is Jewish. What leads an individual to identify as Jewish? How does a Jewish person even know she or he is Jewish? Certainly when an individual is raised in a Jewish household the individual is seemingly Jewish. But what would qualify as “Jewish child rearing?” If a Jewish childhood is a prerequisite for Jewishness where does that leave the Madeleine Albrights, the Jews who find out much later in life that they are Jewish, or the individuals who knowingly descend from Jewish lineage but are raised in another religion? What about the individuals who consider themselves Jewish, but are not considered Jewish by the Jewish community—are these people Jewish (Meyers, 1993)?

No one is simply Jewish, period, end of sentence. “Social identities are not just givens, they are not simply established facts” (Goldberg & Krausz, 1993, p. 1). To be Jewish is like a “slipping tangle...produced and reproduced against a complex of social,

political, cultural, technological, and economic conditions” (Goldberg & Krausz, 1993, p. 1). Goldberg and Krausz argued that whatever one is is heavily influenced by the conditions in which he or she finds him or herself and how he or she makes him or herself in that environment. To define Jewishness while ignoring the context in which that Jewishness is practiced would be mistaken. At any time in history it would have been impossible to wrap all Jewish practice in a neat abstract definition or description. Although, “for so many thousands of years to be a Jew and to be a member of the Jewish religious community were virtually the same thing” (Putnam, 1995, p. 108). This problem of definition was complicated by the societal changes set into motion by Cartesian thought. The modernist notions of identity and autonomy intensified the differences among Jews, their practice and their ideology (Fein, 1988). Modernism undercut repression, allowing new forms of Jewishness to develop, further increasing Jewish diversity (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Putnam, 1995). With postmodernity and the experience of multiple dimensions of identity (Anderson, 1995; Giroux, 1992; Reynolds & Pope, 1991) and identifications with multiple groups (Montefiore, 1995) Jews become even more difficult to peg. Is there no thread, though, that connects me with pre-modern Jews? That is, if the context is so important in determining what is Jewish does this mean there is no vein running through all Jews over time or across time zones?

Jews and Religion

What makes a Jew a Jew? Religion? But I was an atheist raised by an atheist. A relationship with Israel? I was a non-Zionist internationalist raised by a non-Zionist internationalist. A feeling of community? I had known so few Jews growing up. A race? To Hitler and much of Europe, yes, but here, mostly not, although a few White supremacist groups in the U.S. do include Jews among those they would destroy in order to protect the so-called “racial purity” of Euro-Americans. (Mitchell, 1996, p. 162)

Some Jews assert that a blood line connects all Jews and that the blood line is passed down through the family. Stone (1988) described the image conjured up by the notion of a blood line as, “a rush of blood coursing down the generations, undiluted and unalloyed. Our collective fantasy is that the same blood that surged through our ancestors surges through us with undiminished power” (p. 39). The Jewish family that preserves the blood line extends beyond the nuclear to include the community: “Another common term for the extended community, *Bet Yisrael*, is more exactly translated ‘the house, or ‘family,’ of Israel. ‘Israel’ here is the name of the collective, as well as the name of the ancestor; home, kin, and community are the same” (Fredman, 1981, p. 49). Family bleeds into community and community bleeds into family. So when I married Renée it was not only upsetting to my parents because it was considered a serious religious transgression, but it also separated me and my parents from their community. Furthermore, my stepping out of the Jewish faith challenged the metaphorical Jewish blood line.

The notion of a giant blood line connecting all Jews or even one Jewish family through the generations would require a liberal interpretation to be scientifically acceptable. As Stone (1988) explained, “Each one of us is the product of a confluence of strangers” (p. 40). I am the product of two families, my father’s and my mother’s. Each of my parents is the product of two families. If I conclude that I am the product of my great-grandparents’ families then I am the product of eight families. If I go back seven generations than I am the product of 128 families (Stone, 1988). “The blood that coursed through a great-grandparent or even a grandparent is but a thin trickle of our own” (Stone, 1988, p. 40). According to Shoumatoff (as cited in Stone, 1988), the blood from previous generations thins with every new generation so that only “1/128 of the genes of

an ancestor seven generations back will reach you” (p. 40). “We use the myth of blood as a foundation and build the myth of family definition on top of it” (Stone, 1988, p. 40). It is family stories, Stone (1988) demonstrated, that “define the family, saying not only what members should do, but who they are or should be” (p. 31).

If stories are what makes a Jew a Jew then which stories need to be brought forward to convey what is essentially Jewish? Would religious stories tell the tale of Jewishness? That is, if stories of Judaism were brought forward would they reveal what it is to be Jewish?

Perhaps the blood that connects Jews does not necessarily flow through our veins, but through our voices. When I meet a Jew the connection I feel precedes my knowledge of their religious practice. This feeling of comfort that comes from being with other Jews is not that we share the same religion, for often we do not, it comes from something else. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996) warned that if we mistake Jews as simply a religion we ignore the complexity that is Jewishness:

To reduce *Jewishness to Judaism* is to forget the complex indivisible swirl of religion/culture/language/history that was Jewishness until, in the 18th century, Emancipation began to offer some Jews the possibility of escaping from a linguistically/culturally/economically isolated ghetto into the European “Enlightenment.” To equate Jewishness with religion is to forget how even the contemporary, often attenuated version of this Jewish cultural swirl is passed down *in the family*, almost like a genetic code. (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996, p. 124)

If religious practice defined being Jewish, then how would one explain Jews who strongly identify as Jewish but who ignore biblical codes as guides for behavior and practice? Furthermore, if religion were the defining factor, which Jewish religion should be used? In the United States there are Modern Orthodox, Chasidic Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Jews as well as agnostic, and atheist Jews.

There is also tremendous diversity within each of these categories, for instance, feminist, Ashkenazi, and Sephardi. Once you leave the United States the diversity only increases. For instance, in Israel there is a persistent debate about who is really Jewish (Pogrebin, 1991). Orthodox rabbis, who are officials of the Israeli state, are in favor of restricting Israeli citizenship to Jews who have converted to Judaism by standards set by Orthodox rabbis. By making Conservative and Reform conversions invalid in Israel, this religious change would undermine the current Israeli Law of Return which grants citizenship to anyone who is Jewish. This struggle over “Who is a Jew” is a struggle over who gets to do the defining. It is a fight to see who has power to name. And it is fight to see who can bend history and tradition to support ideology.

Clearly, using religion to define who and what is a Jew would be a misguided effort. This effort would attempt to smash the complexity of Jewish being into bits cemented together by a mythical past (Buhle, 1993). The history of Jewish involvement in politics, education and art would be lost by a religious definition. This vibrancy of political involvement is an expression of Jewish identity (Fein, 1988) that would be undercut by an overarching definition of Jews as merely a religion. Historically, religiously observant and nonobservant Jews have found political involvement, particularly involvement in “leftist” causes, and being Jewish to be synchronous (Fein, 1988). This involvement has not only been to expand the religious rights of Jews but often to work toward universal ideals of democratic pluralism, freedom and justice (Fein, 1988). We must search for another way to define Jewishness that attends to this moral tradition and discuss how it is imprinted from generation to generation.

Jews and Race

Some refer to Jews as a race and the way Jews have been treated would seem to reinforce such a categorization. However, are Jews really a race and does such a categorization bring forward what is essentially Jewish? Rare has there been a time when the dominant group has not cast its projections upon Jews and demarcated an inferior and inaccurate image entitled Jew (Gilman, 1991). The treatment of Jewish people of all origins seems to parallel the historical treatment of non-dominant racial groups. Racism has thrived on assigning mythic properties to groups whose boundaries are ever changing, but always decided by the racists, the dominant group (Pinar, 1993). As with any non-dominant group certain negative genetic qualities are linked with physical attributes. In the case of Jews the nose has been used as an indicator of Jewish, and thereby inferior, origin.

As a teenager I remember Jewish peers physically altering their appearance with an operation on their nose. At the time, I knew enough to believe that my nose was not prominent enough to worry about being a target. However, I did not understand fears of anti-Jewish behavior and therefore assumed since “Nose jobs” were so common that rhinoplasty was a rite of passage, especially for Jewish girls. In the poem *Nose is a Country...I am the Second Generation*, Aishe Berger (1989) alluded to the complex story underneath the bandages of the broken nose:

My mother promises me
a profile
like Greta Garbo...
At eight I learn the word *rhinoplasty*
and it becomes a goal in my future
like becoming the first woman president
or flying to the moon. (p. 137)

Berger (1989) began her poem with: “Nose that hangs on my face like a locket with a history inside...” (p. 134). What history is attempting to be broken when the hammer is taken to the Jewish girl’s nose? What does the disfigurement of facial features indicate about Jewish boys and girls? The penalty for having a prominent nose, a genetic feature seemingly uninfluenced by the environment, must be severe enough to warrant taking part in this medical procedure. Attempts to alter a genetic feature, or in other words assimilate a normative feature into an individual’s physical appearance, suggests a desire to avoid being linked with an inferior group and a desire to being linked to a superior group. Modern rhinoplasty, as a matter of fact, began over 100 years ago with exactly this notion in mind. Jacques Joseph, a Jewish orthopedic surgeon in Berlin, performed the first modern operation to reduce the size of a patient’s nose in 1898 (Gilman, 1991). Throughout the next 36 years Joseph performed nose reduction operations on patients who were and were not Jewish. But the reason for the operations was to reduce the psychological anguish of being a victim of anti-Semitism by reducing a “‘Jewish nose’ to ‘gentile contours’” (Gilman, 1991, p. 187). Despite working in Germany right up to the beginning of Nazi power, Joseph was not able to make Jews invisible. The yellow star affixed to the clothing of the Jew made the size of the nose, the style of speech and the color of the eyes either redundant or an aberration.

The hammer taken to the Jew’s nose was an attempt to break out of the boundary entitled “Jew.” Presumably if an individual is attempting to change his or her physical features for fear of persecution then that individual fears racial oppression. Logically, then Jews are a race. How else to explain that Irena Klepfisz and her mother, Rose Klepfisz, were able to escape from the Warsaw ghetto by using their fair skin and blue

eyes to “pass” as Christians? The Nazis were tricked because Irena and Rose Klepfisz did not look like Jews. Yet, what are Jews *supposed* to look like? And if Jews are a race, which one are we?

In the 18th and 19th centuries European Jews, like the Irish, were considered scientifically black or “swarthy” (Gilman, 1991; Roediger, 1994). For instance, Viennese Jews during this time period were easily identified as Jews because they suffered skin diseases thought to reflect the immorality of the Jew. The diseases were actually caused by the filthy conditions of living in poverty. Nonetheless, Jews became associated with skin diseases, syphilis, and a black-yellow skin. By the middle of the 19th century “being black, being Jewish, being diseased, and being ‘ugly’ come to be inexorably linked” (Gilman, 1991, p. 173). A similar feeling toward Jews was expressed in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century. The poverty and segregation of Jews on the Lower East side of New York City were supposedly symptoms of Jewish inferiority and a lacking of Whiteness according to eugenicists (Sacks, 1996).

Whereas the German Jews and other immigrants who came to the United States from Europe before 1880 had for the most part successfully assimilated into the White population (Sacks, 1996; Takaki, 1993; West, 1996), the huge, diverse wave of European immigrants between 1899 and 1914—20 million in all (Fein, 1988)—were unable to pass as White (Roediger, 1994; Sacks, 1996; Zinn, 1980). Ten percent of this wave of European immigrants were Jewish (Fein, 1988). Assimilated German Jews were embarrassed by the “greenhorns”—the unassimilated Jewish immigrants (Takaki, 1993; Trillin, 1996; Wood, 1994). For instance, Jacob Schiff, a Jewish man living in New York, actually raised enough money so that incoming Jewish immigrants would be diverted

from New York harbor to the Galveston, Texas port. New immigrants were then provided with support to settle in the Midwest instead of New York and not “embarrass” assimilated Jews (Trillin, 1996).

Although Jews sought to lose their “greenhorn” status and become more “American” they were increasingly victimized by anti-Semitic violence (Takaki, 1993). The hostility faced by Jews was also visited upon Southern and Eastern European immigrants as well as Asian immigrants (Sacks, 1996; Zinn, 1980). Sacks (1996) and Takaki (1993) have demonstrated that the anti-Semitism faced by Jews during this time period was part of racist movement which coincided with increased immigration to the United States and migration into predominantly Christian communities. Jews were clearly victims of racial hatred.

One example of this anti-Semitism was the development of new admission policies at East Coast universities with the specific intent of driving down Jewish enrollments. In 1920 at Harvard University, for instance, the Jewish enrollment had peaked to 20% of the student body. To lower Jewish admissions, applicants were required to submit a passport photo as part of their application package. Because so many Jewish immigrants had “Anglicized” their names the picture was intended to be a way to screen out applicants with Semitic features (Takaki, 1993). At Columbia University a psychological test based on the World War I army intelligence test (which was developed by eugenicists) was required as well as information on religion and a personal interview (Sacks, 1996). According to Jerome Karabel (as cited in Sacks, 1996), the present use of test scores, grades, and information on character and well-roundedness to select applicants are based on the anti-Semitic admission standards of the 1920’s.

If Jews were facing extreme anti-Semitism how did they make up such a large proportion of elite colleges and universities? Jewish immigrants and their children were able to pursue higher education at a higher proportion than other immigrants due to Jews' unique background (Sacks, 1996; Takaki, 1993). Unlike most other immigrants, the background and experience of Jews, especially in the garment trades, happened to match the booming garment industry in New York City (Takaki, 1993). So this wave of immigrant Jews, although faced with hostility, also entered the United States at an advantageous time (Sacks, 1996). Success in the garment industry coupled with the fact that a large percentage of Jewish immigrants were literate allowed Jews to attend universities and colleges (Takaki, 1993). Entrance into higher education was also aided by changes taking place in the nation's colleges and universities. Moving from a mission to prepare students to be members of the elite to a professional training ground, Jewish applicants were initially more widely accepted (Bonner, 1986; Sacks, 1996). Despite the success of Jews during the first few decades of the 20th century, compared to non-immigrant Whites, Jewish success was actually quite limited. Except for the rare Jewish lawyer, doctor, or professor most were restricted from entering numerous professions other than elementary and secondary school teaching. And despite the fact that Jews were able to gain work in the garment industry and as teachers, most Jews were not upwardly mobile before World War II (Sacks, 1996). To paint a picture of Jews immigrating to the United States and "making it" within a generation would be a severe distortion.

This is the first half of the story of how European "Jews became White folks" (Sacks, 1996, p. 78). When Eastern and Western European Jews came to the United States at the beginning of the 20th century their skin pigment stayed the same, but their

race slowly became White (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). “Success, [Jews] sensed, would come in time: anti-Semitism and the strangeness of these shores eventually would not keep Jews from being full citizens in large part because it couldn’t take their White skin away” (Wood, 1994, p. 105). With World War II and the GI Bill, structural and attitudinal changes took place that allowed Jews to break out from the Jewish race into the White race (Sacks, 1996). These changes did not erase anti-Semitism, but they did allow Jews to pass as the norm—as Whites.

Like most chicken and egg problems, it’s hard to know which came first. Did Jews and other Euroethnics become White because they became middle class? That is, did money whiten? Or did being incorporated in an expanded version of Whiteness open up the economic doors to a middle-class status? Clearly both tendencies were at work. (Sacks, 1996)

The GI Bill initially almost exclusively helped White men. Eventually, though, it led to the increased size of colleges and universities which increased access for Jews (Bonner, 1986). The GI Bill also heavily influenced not only the huge build up of suburbs in the United States, but who could live in those suburbs. Although government financial support was crucial to building the suburbs the government also helped make sure that these places were almost exclusively White which now included Jews (Sacks, 1996).

One bitter complaint that many African Americans have had with Jews is that Jews became White (Berman, 1994; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Wood, 1994). Jews came to the United States as black, although not exactly the same black as African Americans (Berman, 1994), and quickly discovered that to be an American success meant becoming White—something Jews could or almost could do. The challenge for white skinned Jews to become White while holding on to their Jewishness is at best an internal tug-of-war rarely balanced (Wood, 1994). For even as Jews attempt to take the protagonist role in

the Horatio Alger story, defending meritocracy and even opposing Affirmative Action, there are Jews in the United States who due to skin color, language, body size, religious practice, or even their hair cannot easily assimilate. There are even Jews who seem to match most of the categories of the powerful American norm described by Audre Lorde (1995) as White, Christian, heterosexual, middle to upper class, educated, thin, and male who still intentionally break their noses. If Jews are White then how are we to understand the sheer diversity of Jews whose skin color is not White? If Jews are not White then how are we to understand the Jews who have cashed in on their melatonin to secure economic and professional success? If Jews are White can they still be Jewish? To complicate things, Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996) pointed out that a Jew in New York City may seem White, but in the Midwest or the South may seem to others as Jewish. When living on the West Coast Pam Mitchell (1996) was asked, due to her appearance and vocal inflection, whether she was Jewish. But she was also asked for the same reasons if she was from New York. Even as Jews have economically “made it” they still hold on to physical attributes which anti-Semites target. However, this is not to suggest that all Jews share similar physical attributes. Clearly the complexity here overwhelms a scientifically shaky term like race. Furthermore, to attempt to encapsulate all Jews in a term like race would likely suggest that all Jews have white colored skin reinforcing the domination in the United States of the European, Yiddish culture over other Jewish cultures.

Jews may not neatly fit into a racial category and may even reveal how race is socially constructed (Frankenberg, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1993), but this does not mean that race is not an important factor to consider when trying to understand what is a Jew in the United States. Bringing race forward as we try to understand the context of

Jewishness helps complicate things and therefore provide a richer portrait of Jewishness. Instead of classifying Jews as a race, perhaps it would be helpful to see Jews as Jewish and occasionally members of a race. Some Jews are Jewish and White; others are Jewish and Black. Some Jews with White skin may lose some or much of their White skinned privilege when they are easily identified as Jews because of religious practice or social activism. Due to ignorance, other Jews might be viewed only in racial terms such as Black Jews (Thomas, 1996). Then there are Jews with White skin who will attempt to use middle or upper-class trappings to hide their Jewishness and emphasize their Whiteness (Yeskel, 1996).

Jews and Culture

While the culture of Yidishkayt and the Yiddish language are rich sources of history and joy for many Jews they have also tended to dominate over other Jewish cultures and languages. The image popularized in film and books of relatively light skinned Jews originating from Eastern Europe and speaking Yiddish as they entered the harbor of New York, which roughly describes my heritage, erases the diversity of the Jewish people. The first Jews in the United States were actually Sephardic Jews (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). Some Sephardim (the plural for Sephardic) had dark skin and origins back to the Iberian Peninsula (present day Spain and Portugal), spoke Ladino, a mix of Spanish and Hebrew (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; Kaye/Kantrowitz & Klepfisz, 1989) and lived throughout Europe. Then there are Mizrahi Jews who often have dark skin and were the minorities in Arab countries and Turkey, yet minorities to Muslim rather than Christian culture (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996). These Jews often spoke a language that mixed Hebrew and Arabic. Ashkenazi (coming from the Hebrew word for

German), Sephardic or Sephardi (coming from the Hebrew word for Spain) and Mizrahi (meaning Eastern) are descriptive, yet they fail to convey the effects of assimilation, migration, interfaith relationships, and anti-Semitism on these groups. For instance, how do these categories help us understand Isabelle Maynard who grew up in a Russian-Jewish community in China (Maynard, 1989)? How would Rachel Wahba, “a brown-skinned Eastern Jew” (Wahba, 1989, p. 69) and the child of Egyptian and Iraqi parents, be categorized? What category would be appropriate for Laurence Mordekhai Thomas, a Jewish African American man, who consistently surprises White skinned Jews in the United States due to his skin color (Thomas, 1996)? Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996) asserted that Jews are a “people whose experience eludes conventional categories of race, nationality, ethnicity, geography, language—even religion” (p. 123). So defining what is Jewish as a whole may be impossible, but if you ask someone if she or he is Jewish the individual usually knows the answer anyway (Goldstein, 1993). Perhaps attempting to discover the parameters of Jewish identity is pursuing the wrong goal. Instead, identifying ways that Jewishness clarifies or brings the world into clearer focus for Jews might be more helpful.

Just as the family as an idea must be rebuilt every generation (Stone, 1988), similarly ethnicity and culture must be reconstructed in a similar way—through stories. Kincheloe (1991) uses Erich Fromm’s expression of social narcissism to describe this type of behavior, because group members “consider the group as important or even more important than their own lives” (p. 130). Zemach (1993) argued that Jews must respond to their Jewishness in the same way you or I would if we happened upon a drowning person. Instead of merely watching the person drown, stumbling upon an accident

implores us to act and attempt to save the drowning person. We do not have time to ask, “Why me?” or, “Is this a life worth saving?” We can reflect on our choice later. According to Zemach (1993) Jews must not get caught up asking “Why me?” about whether it is worthwhile to maintain Jewishness. Inheritors of Jewishness, Zemach claimed, must continue Jewishness if for no other reason than because it could kill the Jewish culture not to. Zemach (1993) bemoaned the substantial loss of creative Jewish culture in the United States: “In some ways, tracing Jewish life in America is like walking through a bombed-out city, where skeletons of buildings mutely bare witness to the life that once thrived there” (p. 124). Zemach implored his Jewish readers to take action to save Jewishness because others have died for it. He asserted that Jews must deliberately pass down their inherited Jewishness because we owe it to our progeny. We do not have a right to interrupt a thousands year old culture just because we do not think it is valuable, according to Zemach.

Zemach illuminated a central contradiction in the text of Jewishness. If Jewishness is not deliberately passed down to the next generation it will eventually die. However, which Jewishness should be passed down? I agree with Zemach that if we so completely hide our Jewishness it will eventually go away and never come back. Since Jewishness is not a code of rules or a fixed set of practices, the only way I see to maintain Jewishness is to add our unique name to it. The stories and voices that act as metaphorical blood among Jews must be reappropriated from generation to generation (Putnam, 1993). While the stories that are told and lived change and the memory fades there is still the word Jew.

Bearing the Text

To suggest that one is Jewish because she or he is at the culmination of the blood line, because that is her or his religion, or because others died for the sake of preserving Judaism or Jewishness makes Jewishness out to be something that one does out of obligation. It ignores the role that Jewishness and Jewish stories in particular play in making meaning. Even the stories that all Jews seem to know such as the Holocaust are too complicated to ever be *known*. It is the stories that are passed down that we inherit and try to make do with. These are the stories we pick through to try to make sense out of how to be Jewish.

Fein (1988) wrote: “Jews are not in the antique business” (p. 31), searching and attempting to recover the one authentic Jewishness. Being Jewish is based on interpretation—a search for usable truths: “Authenticity requires not imitation but active interpretation...” (Fein, 1988, p. 31). There is no overarching definition of Jewishness. It is too wide and diverse and at the same time too intricate. What makes one Jewish is often played out in small ways. As Jews we do not always know why we do what we do. That is, we do not always have the words to say what Jewishness is. Yet, somehow Jewishness persists. Our lives are an interpretation and a new writing of Jewish text (Fein, 1988). Reducing Jewishness to a religion, race, ethnicity, or culture would ignore that being Jewish is a performance of a text. Perhaps Joe Wood (1994), who wrote about African American and Jewish relations, described it best when he suggested:

When we were little our parents whispered words about History in our ears and we silenced some of the much we knew in our hearts, what we were born with, the much, but each day we grew and grew and then we saw the stuck pages and the words stuck to our bodies like old bandages... We pulled away the leaves and smelled the sharp bitter scent of our selves and then we eyed the terrible naked shivering fruit and now we knew we'd been quickened with light and spit. Our

loving families could never tell the secret...: the heart is raised on a mess of stories and then it writes its own. (p. 128)

Words as the Text of Identity

The story of Irena Klepfisz's survival of the Holocaust is also a story about language. Irena and her mother, whose name is also Rose, somehow survived Poland, although they were completely alone and isolated. After the war Irena learned Polish in kindergarten in Lodz. In 1946 Irena and her mother emigrated to Sweden where Irena spoke Polish at home, learned Yiddish from other survivors, and spoke Swedish at school. At the age of eight, Irena and her mother landed in New York where they entered a culture of *Yidishkayt* and specifically the Bundist movement that Irena's parents had been a part of in Poland. Klepfisz (1990a) pointed out in her essay *Secular Jewish Identity: Yidishkayt in America* that being a part of the Jewish Labor Bund in the United States where it had been uprooted from its origins in Eastern Europe surrounded Klepfisz with paradoxes and contradictions. Bund members argued that Yiddish was the mother tongue, not Hebrew, which was associated with Zionism. Klepfisz, herself, had learned Polish to pass as a non-Jew and Yiddish was not really her "mother tongue." As a matter of fact, Klepfisz's survival of the Holocaust was partly due to her mother's "impeccable Polish (with no trace of a Yiddish accent)" (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 173). Bundists did not believe in Zionism but articulated that "Jews have a right to be anywhere and everywhere" (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 143). Yet Klepfisz's loss of family members and her existence in the United States testified that Jews were hardly welcome everywhere. Nonetheless, she embraced the *Yidishkayt* culture as it took hold of her. A little part of Poland seemed to have found its way to the United States and she was in the middle of it. The uprootedness of this culture was remembered with memorials to the resistance.

Klepfisz felt sadness and pride from these remembrances and learned “that a Jew didn’t separate herself from her people—even when she could” (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 146).

While Irena Klepfisz’s experience of displacement is extreme, it is a horrifyingly typical Jewish experience. Although many third, fourth or later generation Jews in the United States may not identify with the longstanding Jewish themes of immigration, crossing borders, and wandering, most Jews came to the United States precisely to escape excruciating conditions in Europe, South America, Asia and Africa. It is likely that the stories of these previous generations live on in today’s Jews. How the stories have been appropriated and reappropriated as a way to make sense of the present is not known.

Despite the contradictions swirling around Klepfisz’s first years in the United States, she did not become aware of them until later in her life. Considering that the Yiddish language itself as well as the culture connected to it has a history of contradictions (Klepfisz, 1994) it is to be expected that these paradoxes are such a part of the fabric they would be indecipherable. It was only years later that Klepfisz uncovered these contradictions. Klepfisz’s story of leaving the Yiddish language and coming to English is a metaphor for the pressures on the greater Yiddish language and culture. In *Queens of Contradiction*, Klepfisz’s (1994) introduction to *Found Treasures* (Forman, Raicus, Swartz, & Wolfe, 1994), a book of stories written by Yiddish women writers, Klepfisz traces the history of Yiddish. The story of Yiddish provides an important backdrop to view Klepfisz’s life and secular Jewishness.

A Brief History of Yiddish

“Throughout Europe Yiddish was a spoken language—a language of ordinary life, home, business and social relations—and became linked with the ‘secular,’ with

feeling and women” (Klepfisz, 1994, p. 26). Klepfisz warned the reader, though, to not oversimplify Yiddish. For instance, the split between religious and secular was not nearly as pronounced as it is today in the United States, nor was Yiddish exclusively a women’s language. Yiddish not only is heavily influenced by Hebrew, but it is written using the Hebrew alphabet. At the risk of leaping over some important history, I want to reiterate Klepfisz’s description of the development of Yiddish in the 19th and 20th century. In the 19th century Yiddish texts were characterized as “‘women’s literature,’ though they were written by men and their intended audience included men and women” (Klepfisz, 1994, p. 28). Yiddish was a downgraded language that only barely literate men and the masses (read: women) spoke and read. At the end of the 18th century early Hasidic Jews adopted Yiddish to rebel against rabbinic authorities. From Hasidim sprang a populist following excited to communicate with God in their own language without having to understand all the biblical texts. Although women had already been using Yiddish to communicate with God, Yiddish briefly gained new merit from men. Unfortunately the Hasidic choosing of Yiddish had the effect of a double edged sword. It took men to legitimize Yiddish (by defeminizing it) and eventually when the Hasidim moved away from their populist roots Yiddish was left behind.

Another crucial aspect of Yiddish history which still plays out today was the reaction to the enlightenment. Whereas the enlightenment and the advent of modernism provided a means for Western European Jews to gain citizenship by abandoning Yiddish and other Jewish cultural practices, Eastern European Jews were unable to achieve citizenship so easily. For Eastern European Jews Yiddish and Hebrew were the languages that became signifiers of nationality (Klepfisz, 1994). In the West Jews were able to

become members of nations, such as Germany or France but in Eastern Europe, which was ethnically more diverse, nationality was more complex. While some ethnicities demanded their own states, Jews did not have any territory to claim as a state. Instead, secular Jews “held on to Jewish languages as defining their national territory” (Klepfisz, 1994, p. 31).

By the end of the 19th century with anti-Semitism still wreaking havoc upon Jews, Zionism emerged as an alternative to end the *galut*—the Diaspora. Part of the dream of a Jewish state, wherever it was to be, was that the national language would be Hebrew. Opposed to this dream, radical socialists believed that anti-Semitism would end, not with a Jewish state, but when workers joined together. Yiddish for the early Bundists became “the language of the working class and as a cornerstone of Jewish identity” (Klepfisz, 1994, p. 32). The modernist influence continued and a key contradiction emerged in Yiddish culture. Women were called upon to be politically active, as is evident in any number of stories from *Found Treasures* (see “Zlادتke,” “Reyzele’s Wedding,” “Through the Eyes of Childhood”). Ironically, though, while women became more politically active, they were still expected to be responsible for the obligations that came with traditional gender roles. Similarly, men advocating for greater respect of Yiddish and being in favor of liberating women from restrictive roles, nonetheless advocated defeminizing Yiddish. Contradicting themselves, male intellectuals turned Yiddish away from women’s voices while referring to it as the “mother tongue” (Klepfisz, 1994).

Implications of Yiddish

In my experience, Yiddish is an incredibly expressive language. How many times did I hear that there was not an English equivalent for a Yiddish word? While I learned

how to read Hebrew during my eight years at a Jewish, private elementary school, I assumed that Yiddish was a language of the past and it never occurred to me that I could learn it. Ironically, when Yiddish was spoken it seemed like a real, alive language. I always intuitively knew beyond the literal definition what the old woman at my parents' synagogue meant when she would pinch my brother's cheek in awe, while exulting "ahhh, what a shayna punim!" (what a beautiful face!). Yiddish is a language full of life. Yet it is hardly spoken anymore.

My mother understood a lot of Yiddish, but did not speak it. My father knew a few terms which I learned over the years. When my father would come home from jogging: "Oy am I shvitzing" (Wow am I sweating!). When my father could not sit at the dinner table a moment longer: "I've got a case of the shpilkes" (I've got ants in my pants). As my dad's impatience rose quickly while he waited for my mom to be ready to go to some occasion he would often yell up the stairs: "Krutzahois!" (Hurry up! How much longer do you expect me to wait!). Kvetch, kvell, kibbitz. Shmegegge, shmendrick, shlemiel. Tsuris, plotz, potch. All these words and others bring back positive childhood memories. These words remind me of stories. As a matter of fact each word practically is a story (Yiddish has a large German influence). For each word was not merely a word. It was an experience and it spiced up the whole sentence around it. Unfortunately, Yiddish was not taught in our "Hebrew" school.

Speaking Yiddish was like being granted permission to be the class clown. Edgerton (1991) described the class clown as having "one foot in each culture, that is, the culture of the formal...system and that culture lived 'underneath' and 'around' the formal system" (p. 83). Yiddish exposed the contradictions of society while breathing life into its

users. Speaking Yiddish allowed one to be in two camps because Yiddish—the language itself—accommodated other languages (Rosten, 1968). Yiddish made the ordinary extraordinary by giving new words to old experiences. But let me be clear: Yiddish is frequently patronized as a cute or funny language (Klepfisz, 1990a), yet it is a language like any other with dictionaries, rules, and idiosyncrasies. Because it was almost destroyed with the shtetls of Europe and because it is thought to be the language of the old world with stereotypical short, hunched over, bearded men and stereotypical doting Jewish mothers Yiddish is not taken seriously (Gilman, 1996). This depiction of Yiddish can be used to buoy the stereotype of Yiddish as a crafty language used to manipulate others to succeed economically (Gilman, 1996). Yiddish is actually a much more diverse language associated with socialist, progressive politics as well as sexism and classism.

This excursion away from the stories of secular Jewishness and Irena Klepfisz's life is intended to illuminate the tangle of Yiddish with its threads of assimilation pressures and sexist oppression. Furthermore, having a more accurate depiction of Yiddish history allows us to make sense out of the past that radical socialist secular Jewishness calls on as one of its foundations.

Moving Away to Get Closer

When Irena Klepfisz entered the public school system and eventually City College of New York she was gradually pulled away from her home and culture. Despite the thousands of Eastern European immigrants in New York there were no curricular efforts to draw out the rich cultural resources of the students' home communities. When it came time to write her Honors English thesis, Klepfisz was torn between an analysis of three American Jewish writers or Herman Melville. Her choice of Melville signaled that

the pressure from school to assimilate had achieved its intended outcome. Klepfisz later realized: “I simply did not know how to be an active Jew in the world” (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 153).

And our tongues have become
dry the wilderness has
dried out our tongues and
we have forgotten speech. (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 216)

School taught Klepfisz away from Yiddish and the language of home.

I assumed, [Yiddish] would be waiting for me whenever I got home, whenever I needed it. At the age of 21, it never occurred to me that it might need my support to ensure its survival. I never thought that as a secular Jew who defined herself through Yiddish culture, my sense of self was inextricably bound up in its existence, that when *it* was in jeopardy, *my own identity* was in jeopardy. I never realized that it was the mirror that made me visible to myself as a Jew. (Klepfisz, 1990a, pp. 153-154)

When Klepfisz went to study English Literature in Chicago some aspects of her background lay dormant, perhaps waiting for the right time to rise again. While Klepfisz actively performed the politics of her youth during the 1960's in Chicago, the Bundist philosophy of her youth “resisted translation” (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 154). Since Yiddish was the glue that held the Bundist way of life together and Klepfisz was immersing herself in the “American environment” (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 154) Yiddish was put aside. Speaking Yiddish “was an expression not only of love of a language, but of pride in ourselves as people...it was the symbol of resistance to assimilation, an insistence on remaining who we were” (Klepfisz, 1990a, pp. 154-155). Yiddish was what told Irena Klepfisz who she was by providing edges and boundaries for her culture.

Dialectics of Jewishness

Eventually Klepfisz returned to Yiddish when she began to teach Yiddish classes. It was then that she became “acutely conscious of the extreme effort, the commitment

required to keep a language and culture alive in an environment that, at best, is indifferent” (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 155). But now Klepfisz faced a new dilemma. In the intervening years she discovered feminism and came out as a lesbian. Whereas when she came to Chicago she unconsciously slipped away from the Yiddish culture (perhaps to consciously allow her feminist politics to ferment and lesbian identity to come to the surface), now she was unsure how to merge her new identity with the old. The Bundist culture that so strongly took a stand against oppression did not include homophobia under the rubric of oppression. Nor did it embrace gays and lesbians. Yet, Bundist culture deeply imprinted the notion “that a Jew didn’t separate herself from her people—even when she could” (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 146). Klepfisz described the dilemma: “I knew that the moment I declared myself a lesbian, I would become a stranger” (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 72). Keeping her Jewish life separate from her lesbian life was no longer possible. To maintain the culture of *Yidishkayt* demanded full attention, but this seemed to mean making her feminist and lesbian identity invisible. As Klepfisz began to draw back from her Jewishness, sociopolitical influences stepped in to pull her right back. With books like *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (Beck, 1989b) more feminists were acknowledging Jewish issues and anti-Semitism within feminism (Pogrebin, 1991). In addition, Israel’s controversial invasion of Lebanon challenged Jews to reconsider their relationship to Israel. As Klepfisz attempted to educate others about anti-Semitism and Jewish identity she came to realize that her struggle to merge her Jewish text with the text of her life in the United States was hardly unique.

In Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz’s (1996) story of coming to understand the importance of being Jewish she wrote:

What is clear is this: the more outside of a Jewish ambience I was, the more conscious I became of Jewishness. Like Marshall McLuhan's perhaps apocryphal remark: *I don't know who discovered water, but I'm sure it wasn't a fish*. Inside a Jewish environment, where I could take for granted a somewhat shared culture, an expectation about Jewish survival, where my body type and appearance were familiar, my voice ordinary, my laughter not too loud but hearty and normal, above all, normal,...in this environment, I did not know what it meant to be a Jew, only what it meant to be a mentsh. I did not know that mentsh was a Jewish word in a Jewish language. (p. 132)

Klepfisz's experience of getting tossed around the ocean of politics, history and self as well as Kaye/Kantrowitz's experience of being Jewish in an unlikely place to be Jewish demonstrates how Jewish identity is a dialectical process. Goldstein (1993) described dialectics: "A point reached does not change until it is affected by something from without, something logically contingent with respect to the point reached" (p. 90). If we apply the notion of a concept to Goldstein's definition then we can suggest that a concept does not change until an idea outside of the concept but related to the concept is brought forward. "That contingency changes the context within which the concept functions, brings about a conceptual tension—what many writers call a contradiction" (Goldstein, 1993, p. 90). Is Jewish identity dialectical in a similar way?

Differentiation

Do we need to be away from certain aspects of who we are to embrace them? Or in Heideggerian terms: To make the ordinary extraordinary, do we need to be a visitor to our taken for granted context? Kegan (1982) in *The Evolving Self* suggested that the activity of human evolution is responding to the question: To what degree do we differentiate ourselves from the world? That is, to what extent do we see the world as a natural extension of ourselves? To what extent can we see the context of ourselves as context? While the content of our answers to these questions may change, the goal never

does; according to Kegan we are always striving for equilibrium. We continually renegotiate what our attention is subject to and what is the object of our attention.

The example of coming to recognize my gender privilege may help illustrate the subject/object balance and the striving for equilibrium. As I described in the previous chapter, until I took a Women's Studies class I never gave much thought to my gender. I did not think about being a man when I applied for a job, walked down the street at night, raised my hand in class, got rowdy with friends, was asked for my opinion in a group setting, used my voice, downplayed the voices of others, and so on. Similarly, I never questioned whether my accomplishments and achievements had something to do with my gender. So I was subject to my maleness. Without having to think about it my gender was affecting my experience in the world. Kegan (1982) described it this way: "Something cannot be internalized until we emerge from our embeddedness in it, for it is our embeddedness, our subjectivity, that leads us to project it onto the world in our constitution of reality" (p. 31). For example, "When the child is able to have his reflexes rather than be them, he stops thinking he causes the world to go dark when he closes his eyes" (Kegan, 1982, p. 31). My experience in the Women's Studies class led to the crisis described in the first chapter. Discovering my maleness came as a shock because it was deeply embedded within me, but the shock was doubled when I realized that I also saw the world through my maleness. Not only had I found something that was buried, but this covered over thing was impacting how I behaved, acted upon others, and how I was treated. This new discovery meant I could never permanently return to the equilibrium that was with me when I walked into Ford Hall on the first day of class in January of

1987. Thrust into disequilibrium, my maleness had moved from my undifferentiated self to the object of my attention.

A fundamental change occurred for me in the Women's Studies class. Until that course I was able to assimilate previous assertions of my maleness into my preexisting position or reality. That is, although I witnessed and participated in sexism before the Women's Studies class my defenses were strong enough to resist seeing how being a man implicated me. Instead I found a way to appropriate the experience to my structure and avoid disrupting my equilibrium. When I could no longer assimilate sexist experiences, when my "evolutionary position" (Kegan, 1982, p.41) could no longer stand the challenge, I needed to internalize what I was seeing and hearing. "Any real resolution of the crisis must involve a new way of being in the world" (Kegan, 1982, p. 41). The previous chapter is a description of my struggle toward equilibrium. Hopefully I have given some flavor of my efforts to strike a truce (Kegan, 1982) between assimilation and accommodation of my self. Ultimately though, I hope I have given the reader a taste for my struggle to make meaning as a secular Jew. Kegan asserted that every balance achieved and each truce that is struck is epistemological, a better knowing of the world. While we are coming to know the world by moving from subject to object and from embeddedness to differentiation we are simultaneously experiencing this activity or movement. Therefore, "I use the word 'meaning' to refer to this simultaneously epistemological and ontological activity; it is about knowing and being, about theory-making and investments and commitments of the self" (Kegan, 1982, pp. 44-45). For Kaye/Kantrowitz and Klepfisz emerging from their embeddedness in Jewishness allowed them to act, as opposed to react, as Jews.

In student affairs these moves from embeddedness to differentiation would be described as a transition to a new way of thinking and relating to authority (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Perry, 1968/1999). The move from subject to object is a shift from relying on external authorities to make meaning to developing an inner voice to ponder meaning. In Perry's (1968/1999) scheme of cognitive development this is a move from dualism to multiplicity. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) are quick to point out that this process of differentiation may vary by gender, though:

“Unlike the male student, who takes up the banner of multiplicity with vigor, the young women usually approaches multiplicity much more cautiously” (p. 65). Belenky et al. asserted that women approach multiplicity or subjectivism differently than men because men are socialized to be authorities who separate and differentiate from others.

Nonetheless, the relationship to authorities is an important aspect of the developmental process. The shift of Jewishness from embedded to differentiated is potentially risky for Jews because it signals that Jewishness may lose some of its authority.

Letty Cottin Pogrebin (1991) described this process of her Jewishness—her context—moving from subject to object:

Growing up in Jamaica, New York, I didn't think about being Jewish because I didn't have to. For me and my friends at Public School 131, or at the yeshiva or at Hebrew School, being Jewish was just another word for being ourselves. We were Jewish the way we were nine or twelve years old; we just were. (p. 146)

Over the years Pogrebin grew dissatisfied with Judaism—the religious aspects of being Jewish. She hid her disconnection, alienation and anger from the public. Similar to Irena Klepfisz, Pogrebin slipped away from her Jewishness without peering back to see from what she was slipping away. As she became an active and public feminist she did not intentionally bring her Jewishness to her feminist work and she found it impossible to

bring her feminism to her Jewishness. History stepped in with Pogrebin (1991), just like it did with Klepfisz:

Until other people's hostility propelled me into Jewish secular consciousness, you would not have known that I did not feel like a Jew in the world. I didn't know it myself. Until my brush with anti-Semitism, being Jewish was something I took absolutely for granted, something so intrinsically me that I never gave it a second thought. (p. 146)

Anti-Semitism forced Pogrebin to make Jewishness the subject of her attention and as a result grapple with the joys and contradictions of being Jewish.

Historical Splits and Gaps

So much of Irena Klepfisz was lost before or just after she was born. These absences are a part of who she is and mark her reflections on the past. Her attempts to make sense out of the present and plan for the future are clouded by this nothingness.

So much of history seems
a gaping absence at best a shadow
longing for some greater
definition which will never come
for what is burned becomes air
and ashes nothing more. (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 203)

Klepfisz looks back for answers and sometimes all she discovers is more pain and puzzlement. A past of resistance makes her proud, but how is that pride sustained when it is paired with the horror of the Holocaust? Except for her mother, Irena had lost her entire family by 1944. There were others like Elza Frydrych whose parents died as members of the resistance. Elza survived as an orphan and Irena treated her as a sister. Elza immigrated to New York, but eventually was overcome with depression and committed suicide. Irena reflected on her lost sister:

I am walking home alone at midnight. I am raw with the pain of her death. I wonder. Is it inevitable? Everything that happened to us afterwards, to all of us, does none of it matter? Does it not matter what we do and where we live? Are there moments in history which cannot be escaped or transcended, but which act

like time warps permanently trapping all those who are touched by them? And that which should have happened in 1944 in Poland and didn't, must it happen now? In 1964? In Chicago? Or can history be tricked and cheated? (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 192)

Somehow Klepfisz lives on. She does not understand her desire to live.

Eventually she realized that, "History keeps unfolding and demanding a response" (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 193) and concluded that the present provides a perspective on the past, just like the past provides a perspective on the present. But Klepfisz also wondered if the past continues disguised as the present: "The Holocaust without the smoke" (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 193). And the present exists to fill up the holes, to cover over the pain of the past.

For Adrienne Rich (1989), delving into her past to make sense of her Jewish identity required making public her Jewish father who hid his experience of anti-Semitism and hid much of what made him Jewish. She also had to claim her Gentile mother, her background in the South and learnings about what it meant to be a woman and a lesbian. In *Split at the Root* Rich (1989) described the pervasive and intense pressure to be the right kind of "American." Rich was raised to avoid the door to the hazy cellar of Jewish being I described earlier. That is, she was taught to resist the complexity that made up her past, avoid other Jews because they would make Rich appear "uncivilized," and deny the injustices and oppressions surrounding her. She wrote of the confusion she felt when she brought her contradictions to the surface: "Sometimes I feel I have seen too long from too many disconnected angles: white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once-married, lesbian, middle-class, feminist, exmatriate Southerner, split at the root: that I will never bring them whole" (Rich, 1989, p. 89). Rich had hoped that in writing about her pursuit of a Jewish identity she might shed meaning on racism and anti-

Semitism. While Rich's essay eloquently portrays how her identity figures in her ability to fight racism and overcome internalized anti-Semitism, she also realized that claiming is not merely an acknowledgment of the different aspects of her identity, but being accountable to them. Rich (1989) ends the essay by committing to engaging in all that makes up her identity, describing herself as "the woman trying, as part of her resistance, to clean up her act" (p.90).

What act or actions is Rich trying to clean? Is her struggle with her identity emblematic of the challenge of making our "act" consistent with who we are? How might the diverse and paradoxical parts of ourselves translate into actions? And, if there are all these parts to people, what holds them together?

"My adult life has been an archeological expedition through memory and psyche..." (Mitchell, 1996, p. 156). Growing up amongst upheaval, abuse, and trauma Pam Mitchell (1996) has attempted to gather her roots, "however splintered, hidden, and tangled and mangled and stretched beyond capacity they may be" (Mitchell, 1996, p. 157). For Mitchell, uncovering and unlocking buried chests has meant claiming her experience as a survivor of incest and rape, as a child of social activists, but also as a member of a family torn apart by classism, anti-Semitism and sexism. Born to parents active in the communist party—a Jewish mother from Eastern Europe and a Christian father from West Virginia—Mitchell (1996) wrote that "the common denominator" (p. 157) among her mixed heritage, "is the displacement and the poverty and the alienation: an absence. In the tradition of too much of White America, this void is 'supposed to' be filled by hating African Americans and by worshiping the almighty dollar" (p. 157).

While Mitchell's parents did not subscribe to this tradition of racism and materialism, the void was nonetheless filled with violence.

Mitchell is proud that her immigrant and working class ancestors did not succumb to government pressure to participate in racist scapegoating (Mitchell, 1996). Both her maternal and paternal heritage is made up of rabble-rousers. However, the red baiting and "McCarthyism" during the 1950's resulted in anti-Semitism and anti-Communist hysteria that led to the loss of Mitchell's father's job. As Jews, Communists and atheists Mitchell and her family were targets for violence by the community. Mitchell (1996) claimed that because her family was "ostracized and too weak and disorganized" (p. 159) Mitchell and her sister were victims of sexual and physical abuse by neighbors. In addition, due to the self-hate and desperation among family members Mitchell's own parents were "child rapists and worse" (p. 159). Mitchell (1996) wrote to her niece:

But if that abuse, the incest and the torture were nails in the coffin of our "family" as family, the cause of death was social forces that were beyond any individual's control and started long before any of us was born. I doubt you learned a whole lot in your high school history classes [in Los Angeles] about the pogroms and persecution of Jews that brought your great-grandparents to New York, or about the poverty and expropriation and exploitation, the black-lung disease and company towns and murderous Pinkerton goon squads that forced your grandfather's people off their land to scatter from the West Virginian hills, moving to industrial areas to find work. (p. 159)

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1991) wrote: "To be a Jew is to tangle with history" (p. 12). For Pam Mitchell the tangle of her history meant memories that were for a long time unbearable. Mitchell, though, has chosen to bear these memories. Etymologically, the verb to "bear" comes from to "carry," or to "give birth" (Ayto, 1990). As I mentioned above, the word "key" has roots in the word "germinate" which means "springing to life" (Ayto, 1990, p. 253). Carrying the painful memories around and eventually giving birth

to them allowed Mitchell (1996) to recognize how she had been “in hiding” (p. 167) from herself. Through counseling, support groups, and books on reclaiming identity (mainly by women of color), Mitchell was able to raise a home. That is, for Mitchell her work in claiming her memories as well as her history were the key, the germination for a new home.

My brother Roger’s search for home,

was like a Mobius strip: I always ended up back where I had started, despite any new course I or my family would chart. I discovered later the difficulty in leaving a youth without reference points. My parents’ erasure of clear road signs left me without an ability to mark change or distinguish the good from the bad. They were determined instead that I be destined to dwell on that narrow, emotional plane which they defined as “home.” (Grande, 1996, p. 1)

Might the absences and voids in our life—the wordless moments—be filled in with repression and persecution? Might the places where we do not adhere firmly—the splits and silences—be cemented over by an inability to act or speak? Adrienne Rich (1989) described the experience of getting a skirt altered during her first year in college. The seamstress, seemingly a recent European Jewish immigrant, in whispered tones asked if Rich was Jewish. Rich’s (1989) reply: “Eighteen years of training in assimilation sprang into the reflex by which I shook my head, rejecting her, and muttered, ‘No’” (Rich, 1989, p. 79). Only later could Rich wonder whether the “No” was directed at the seamstress or perhaps herself. Rich described this betrayal of herself, the seamstress, and of a moment of humanity as different from others due to its memorability.

There are betrayals in my life that I have known at the very moment were betrayals: this was one of them. There are other betrayals committed so repeatedly, so mundanely, that they leave no memory trace behind: only a growing residue of misery, of dull, accreted self-hatred. Often these take the form not of words but of silence. Silence before the joke at which everyone is laughing: the anti-woman joke, the racist joke, the anti-Semitic joke. Silence and then amnesia. Blocking it out when the oppressor’s language starts coming from the

lips of one we admire, whose courage and eloquence have touched us: *She didn't really mean that: he didn't really say that*. But the accretions build up out of sight, like scale inside a kettle. (Rich, 1989, p. 80)

These betrayals, sometimes spoken and sometimes silent, are refusals to bear ourselves. They are refusals to give birth to humanity. Instead they are more like locking a memory in a chest which will sit at the end of the bed or next to the couch never to be opened.

Pam Mitchell's efforts to turn her family legacy away from self-hate and abuse has required her to give rise to a silenced past and recover the usable parts. Mitchell then is attempting to glean from her past without repeating it. Her discovery of a home made up of secular Jewishness and the rich parts of her Christian past is an attempt to fill the void that is so often filled with violence or silence. Mitchell's (1996) "search for a place to call home, a place from which to take a stand" (p. 167) is a description of the creation of a place from which to act. Similar to Adrienne Rich's struggle to "clean up her act" described above, Mitchell's search for home is an attempt to create a new and authentic text for her life. For Mitchell to be a secular Jew she has needed to uncover the apparatus that has gotten in the way of her being herself.

The experience of bracketing one's contradictions or acknowledging the paradoxes of one's home is exemplified in the writings of Adrienne Rich and Pam Mitchell. Friedling (1996) cautioned though that efforts to "recover" from one's past through remembering, while uniquely consistent with Jewish and feminist approaches, may instead lead to a new covering. A feminist emphasis would focus on recovering silenced voices and healing the pain from patriarchy. A Jewish approach would work to recover buried stories to help understand the present. Friedling's (1996) close reading of the autobiographies of three Jewish women recovering from addiction "discuss[es] the

way[s] in which ethnicity and gender shadow and disrupt the telos of recovery and throw into crisis the symmetry of identity” (p. 107). An identity that has experienced or witnessed suffering cannot be neatly rebuilt. Friedling (1996) asserted: “The intersecting discourses of Jewishness and feminisms expose and disturb the homogenizing, reductive logic of recovery rhetoric” (p. 106). “The rhetoric of recovery presupposes that a Truth exists and might be found by peeling away layers that conceal an authentic core” (Friedling, 1996, p. 108). To achieve this core there are various dichotomies that require deconstruction. Friedling provided a few examples: mind/body, self/other, public/private, voluntary/addiction. According to recovery rhetoric an individual will attempt to reestablish the first term as the norm by uncovering the second term and marginalizing it. So recovery “operates through a logic of negativity in which the prescribed norm is found in opposition to an imagined ‘Other’” (Friedling, 1996, p. 108). Ironically, though, Jews and women and particularly Jewish women have usually been the marginalized other in Western societies. So recovery of an identity risks lessening or closing off the other aspects of ourselves. The paradox of recovery is that in the process of reclaiming identities we may privilege one identity over another. This reclamation nonetheless gives us a place to stand—a place to exercise our voice.

The word “recover” or “re-cover” is actually the same word as “recuperate” and is rooted in the word “regain” (Ayto, 1990). Delving into chests of suffering, pain, and loneliness is an effort to recuperate from the pain. However, might this “regaining” lead to a re-covering or a new covering? Pratt (1991), in making sense of a personal history which included being raised to be racist and anti-Semitic, found that it was attractive to disassociate from her own culture by covering it over:

In order to feel positively about ourselves, we may end up wanting not to be ourselves, and may start pretending to be someone else. This may happen especially when we start learning about the strong traditions of resistance and affirmation sustained for centuries by the very folks our folks were trying to kill. (p. 57)

Bringing the pain of the past forward, into the present, may present us with a reflection that we may insist is not—cannot—be us. According to Dass and Gorman (1985) often our response is to make our concrete memories abstract and eventually explain them away. If we induced the pain in another we are likely to search for the reason for our behavior outside of us (Chödrön, 1994). If we are the recipient of the pain we may deny that what we experienced was in fact painful, but instead normal or deserved. Is our denial of the pain a form of re-covering? How might we bring forward our past without denying it or locking it away in a chest even more difficult to open? But how necessary is it to regain this past? Does recuperation really require us to revisit the pain?

Some would argue that if we do not intentionally revisit the past our interpretation of the present will be a replication of the past. Take for example the psychological impact of racism in the United States: Expanding on Toni Morrison's argument that the result of racism for the racist and victim is a fragmented self, Pinar (1993) argued that "If what we know about ourselves—our history, our culture, our national identity—is deformed by absences, denials, and incompleteness, then our identity—both as individuals and as Americans—is fragmented" (p. 61). If our personal history is a series of stories with just a beginning and an end, but no middle; or a series of paintings which upon closer inspection belie our reality; or a series of improbable theatrical productions, then any new experience is a threat to denial and has the potential to reveal these gaps or distances within us. Pinar (1993) suggested that not only are we "what we know....We are,

however, also what we do not know” (p. 61). Seemingly if we do not confront the absences, denials, and gaps in our history then how are we to behave? Adrienne Rich (1989) provided language for just such a dilemma:

I didn't understand then that I was living between two strains of Jewish social identity: the Jew as radical visionary and activist who understands oppression first hand; and the Jew as part of America's devouring plan in which the persecuted, called to assimilation, learn that the price is to engage in persecution. (p. 88)

The process of recovery seems to begin with the process of naming. Finding language to describe what happened, what made us what we are. To name requires words. To give voice to one's self requires vocabulary. Where might one find the language to name? Can we give voice to our identity without a community of listeners? How does our vocabulary influence our ability to name ourselves? Are there words that bring our history to the forefront, without trapping us into reliving our past (Montefiore, 1993)?

The work of writing and reading provides us with language to make sense of our experience. Sibylla Paterson (1991) wrote about living with a violent husband amidst a community losing hope in the future. “I was searching for something that could help me understand it all” (Paterson, 1991, p. 28), “...the poetry [of T.S. Eliot] helped me. It helped me deal with my life, to give me words to explain to myself what it was like” (Paterson, 1991, p. 28). Paterson's (1991) engagement with texts while sitting at the library one day led to a moment of ecstasy, a moment of joy and sadness: “I became connected to the human expression on those pages, and I knew then that we, all of us, struggle valiantly and in our own ways, to understand what it means to be in this situation of living” (p. 29). Are the stories of Rich, Mitchell, my brother Roger, and Klepfisz a search for words that will build a home? Might words give our life meaning and protect

us from the crisis of not knowing what is happening? Is this the trick of language, though? Words provide us with meanings, but with meanings that are never final, always open to reinterpretation (Weinsheimer, 1985). Is delving into our past in a search for who we are actually a scrolling through the text of our life searching for meaning? And when we search for meaning are we ultimately concerned with human connection?

Paterson (1991) found in her books, “among the chaos of...grief and joy” (p. 30) that the authors were struggling like herself “to grasp the same things. Love and anger, power and weakness, change and apathy, control over history, control over nature, science and truth, belief...a quest for atonement” (Paterson, 1991, p. 30). What feelings might arise when we cannot find the words to make sense of our past? “We search and struggle and want to know because ultimately we do not want to be alone. Our existential crisis is a crisis of alienation” (Paterson, 1991, p. 30).

Co-Authoring Texts

Contradictions within and outside Jewishness turned Irena Klepfisz away from her roots and against herself. The Jewish text wrapped around Klepfisz was about social justice and fighting for the underdog, but unaccepting of gays and lesbians. This Jewish imprint that implored never separating oneself from Jews also gave Klepfisz the ability to express her dissent with Jewish actions in the United States and in Israel. Like the shell game played in New York’s Times Square, Klepfisz was faced with a losing proposition. Whichever shell she chose would leave her empty and lacking. Instead of covering over the splits and gaps of a hallow identity Klepfisz has partaken in a textual engagement and rewriting. Weaving together secular Jewishness, the Holocaust and gay/lesbian issues from a feminist and working class perspective, Klepfisz has attempted to create a new

text that embraces the contradictions of her identity by exposing those very gaps and splits which her identity dilemmas hinge upon. Klepfisz (1990a) has acknowledged that her writing is not necessarily linear because her life is not.

The leaps, ellipses, zigzags are the result of a specially developed thought process, one that is not linear because it is always interrupted, frequently free-associative and haphazard, rarely schematized. We think. But we think differently. Sudden realizations, half-finished paragraphs, an outline, a sketch. But no smooth development, ordered philosophy. (p. 19)

It is Klepfisz's way of describing her writing and how it is an outgrowth of her own life that makes me realize that she has also described the elusive nature of self.

The phrases and sentences and the metaphors and poetry crafted by Klepfisz are elements of a literal and figurative text. Thus, the writings of Irena Klepfisz give voice to life as text. In Klepfisz's (1990b) poem *Bashert*, which Adrienne Rich (1990) described as "a poem unlike any other I can think of in American, including Jewish-American, poetry" (p. 19), Klepfisz described how she had become a "keeper of accounts" by accumulating within her the stories of others. In one part of the poem Klepfisz inserts extra spaces between words to symbolize the struggle in recalling memories:

Old rarely seen types. Gone they say forever. And yet I
know they can be revived again that I can trigger them again.
That they awaken in me for I have felt it happen in the sight
of strangers or someone suddenly grown alien. Whenever I have
seen the judgment the coldness and indifference the
distanced curiosity. At those moments I teeter shed my
present self and all time merges and like rage like pride
like acceptance like the refusal to deny I answer

Yes. It is true. I am a keeper of accounts
*Bashert*¹ (Klepfisz, 1990b, pp. 199-200)

¹ Yiddish for "inevitable, (pre)destined" (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 183)

We do not begin life “with two independent entities, individual and society, that are otherwise formed and defined apart from one another and that interact as though each were external to the other” (Sampson, 1989, p. 4). As I indicated above, I mistakenly believed that I was the author of my own text uninhibited and uninfluenced by family, culture, history and society. My struggle and Klepfisz’s as Jews are what we do with the Jewish text passed down to us. Fein (1988) described this challenge: “...what the peoplehood of the Jews must mean is that the stories Jews live are, for better or for worse, interpretations of the text” (p. 32). Fein submitted that “Our books, our memories, our dreams, and yes, our lives—these are the text” (p. 32).

The English word “text” originates in the Latin *texere* which primarily meant “built” but secondarily meant “weave” (Ayto, 1990). A literary composition was a metaphor for text (Ayto, 1990) and perhaps a life is another metaphor for text. As we build our lives there are stories from our family, culture, and history at the foundation. And at the risk of mixing metaphors, we unconsciously and perhaps consciously weave a text contingent upon that foundation as we cope with our present day circumstances.

Harry Brod (1988) pointed out that “For the Jews, storytellers are philosophers. Jewish sages and texts teach through stories” (p. 1). Perhaps it is not surprising that Jews have “a deep love affair with texts” (West, 1996, p. xiii) due to Jews’ “relative material prosperity and existential anxiety...and an incurable fear of being targeted and attacked as powerless underdog or omnipotent masterdog, and an indescribable anguish in the face of perennial homelessness, hence restlessness” (West, 1996, p. xiii). Texts are anchors; they are boundaries (Fein, 1988). For religious Jews the biblical text offers a mirror for constant comparison. For secular Jews the lives of Jews who have come before us are the

texts that we weave into our own story. This is difficult, though, because secular Jewish restlessness undermines home building efforts. When secular Jews uncover their everyday way of making sense of the world what text will be uncovered? When secular Jews look for a place to stand, a textual home, what will it look like? Will the text of secular Jewish being be consistent with the text of secular Jewish doing?

To build a home with a foundation from another time and another place is hard, sometimes seemingly too hard. Whose language shall we use? The old? The new? A combination? Which philosophies will guide us? How will our home reflect a foundation that is underground and covered over by the cellar? Might we purposely stay busy to avoid the cellar? Or might we regularly visit the cellar, but only to fill it up with possessions and accomplishments—to tell the foundation that, yes, we are doing something, albeit something different from what the foundation intended to support?

No wonder so many Jews have pursued an Eastern philosophy such as Buddhism (Kamenetz, 1994). Jews have been looking for some help to sit still for just a moment and hear the stories of our life. When we have not been wandering, running, or hiding, from our oppressors we have been fleeing from ourselves. So Jews, like all others, have needed help to feel at home with ourselves and our stories. However, even with the help of Eastern philosophy can we really ever be home? Heidegger suggested that human beings are never at home in the world and that efforts to create a secure home are misguided (Dreyfus, 1991). According to Heidegger, metaphorical home building is an attempt to give us a safe place to stand and give our lives meaning, but it is misguided because such activities attempt to cover over the true nature of humans (Dreyfus, 1991; Richardson, 1986).

Rootlessness

Humans, Heidegger posed, despite our public roles, our private responsibilities, and the connections we may feel with others, are fundamentally rootless (Dreyfus, 1991). Our essence as humans is our existence and that is the one place where we can feel rooted (May, 1958). Otherwise we are rootless in the sense that who we are is nothing more than a bunch of stories which we continually interpret and re-interpret. We can never get to the bottom of who we are because there is no bottom. Instead, we are based, in a sense, on nothing (Heidegger, 1975). This is difficult to grasp because to define nothing would make nothing something. Similarly, when we are faced with the idea that as human beings we are bottomless, how are we to understand bottomlessness? Dreyfus' (1991) interpretation of Heidegger is helpful here:

Human beings do not already have some specific nature. It makes no sense to ask whether we are essentially rational animals, creatures of God, organisms with built-in needs, sexual beings, or complex computers. Human beings can interpret themselves in any of these ways and many more, and they can, in varying degrees, become any of these things, but to be human is not to be essentially any of them. Human being is *essentially* simply self-interpreting. (p. 23)

According to Heidegger (1977a) as human beings, we go through our days unaware of the groundless aspects of our beings because the constructions of our culture give the world and ourselves meaning. Not just the physical constructions, such as buildings, wooden spoons, and shoes, but the metaphysical constructions such as beliefs about human nature, morality, and interpersonal connection provide us with invisible guide wires giving the impression that there is a ground where these wires are fastened. As we put on our shoes we are unlikely to think, "These shoes are an essential piece of equipment for me to achieve my desires." However, when the shoes fall apart or when we use a wooden spoon to hold up a window we are more likely to realize the meanings

we have attached to these tools. Similarly, in the instances when we do not have words to describe what we are hearing or when we reduce complex situations to simple words a spotlight is pointed on words not merely as words but as tools we use to make sense. On those rare occasions when we are speechless we are perilously close to a void, an expanse of nothingness, dangerous because we risk acknowledging that the guide wires are actually floating like a kite snapping in the wind, rather than taut and secure as we had believed.

Our day to day practices seem like human nature because that is what we have been led to believe. However as Dreyfus (1991) asserted, because our

condition is one of such radical rootlessness...we plunge into trying to make ourselves at home and secure. Thus the conformist, everyday activities in which human beings seek to give their lives some stable meaning reveal to Heidegger a flight motivated by the preontological understanding each human being has of his or her ultimate ungroundedness. (p. 37)

The rare experience of groundlessness is when possibilities are revealed and our projection is illuminated. Since this bottomlessness melts away our constructed meanings and prevailing public interpretations, our desires or futural projections (Caputo, 1987) are revealed. Not constricted by everyday interpretations or handed down meanings, new possibilities that are usually hidden become available to us.

We exist by projecting towards possibilities with which we identify ourselves, but this projection is grounded in an understanding at which we have already arrived. We are never able to choose our possibilities from the ground up, and our existence is in this sense out of our own control, possessing a momentum we do not ourselves generate. We find ourselves carried along, and never able to set or plant ourselves in such a way as to determine, once and for all and for ourselves, our own course. (Richardson, 1986, p. 132)

We experience anxiety when our essential condition as groundless is revealed to us (Dreyfus, 1991; Richardson, 1986). It is very unsatisfying, Richardson (1986) has

argued, to grab hold of the contingent nature of our existence. The myth of intentionality is debunked by our rootlessness. The text that we are weaving may then seem arbitrary.

Falling

Our goals and desires may seem meaningless when we realize our arbitrariness, or as Heidegger called it, our thrownness (Dreyfus, 1991; Richardson, 1986). “Social action now appears as a game which there is no point in playing since it has no intrinsic meaning” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 180). That is why when the transparency of our being is revealed we are likely to flee. Heidegger described this as falling from the anxiety provoked (Richardson, 1986). “Falling as an existential structure is Heidegger’s term for the way Dasein is by its very nature drawn away from the primordial sense of what it is” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 225). So we fall from the contingency of the world to avoid facing the arbitrary origins of our meanings (Richardson, 1986). “Falling amounts, then, to our effort to recapture or to maintain our immersion within some particular system of assignments” (Richardson, 1986, p. 137) so that we may resume our concern with the everyday (Caputo, 1987).

While our bottomlessness may be revealed in moments of speechlessness. Levin (1989) also argued that there is

a deafness which shields us against a deep-seated ontological anxiety—little deaths from moment to moment; and this is a deafness to silence, a listening which constantly insists on making noise, or surrounding itself with other people or audio equipment, in order to fight off the horror of a “deathly silence”. For many people, silence is the nothing for hearing to hold on to, is an experience of unbearable anxiety, and not the gift of a resting-place...for the quiet recovery of the weary soul. (p. 79)

The sounds we use to distract ourselves from anxiety and accelerate our falling exacerbate the split between our being and non-being. Rollo May (1958) found that this

anxiety is profoundly connected to the notion of freedom. When our rootlessness is revealed our freedom to act is questioned. If everything is arbitrary and the meanings we make are merely the meanings that our culture has assigned, then how are we free to choose? While our choices may not be predetermined they are seemingly groundless (Richardson, 1986). The anxiety provoked by such a revelation, though, indicates that indeed we do have freedoms, even if they are barely decipherable (May, 1958). For what would we be anxious about if we had absolutely nothing to lose? That is, why would we be anxious to lose our freedom if we never had it in the first place? Ultimately then we are anxious about our being becoming a non-being. We are anxious that all meaning will dissolve into nothing. Without meaning what is left? We are anxious, then, about the one non-negotiable aspect of our life—our death (May, 1958).

While falling may be a natural reaction to the anxiety provoked by our rootlessness (Caputo, 1987; Richardson, 1986; Dreyfus, 1991), might the momentary vision of our thrownness undermine our everyday concerns? Even as we rededicate ourselves to our everyday activities to avoid the anxiety of our rootlessness, we are likely to experience moments when we authentically listen to our ontological anxiety or revisit the referential meanings of tools, such as words. These are moments of doubt (Kegan, 1982). This doubt that rises through the cracks in the cement sidewalk exposes the splits and gaps that were buried and held together under the belief that we were the creator, owner and operator of our text. Doubt exposes that the text that holds us together is just a text. If we were born and raised elsewhere the text and the meanings we make based on that text would differ as well.

Existence

How does one build a house of stories while acknowledging her or his contingent history and future—her or his groundlessness? While human beings may never fully comprehend our essential nature, we do have the ability to ponder our existence (May, 1958; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Perhaps, the place to start is to acknowledge our groundlessness. As Irena Klepfisz (1990a) asserted “To wait until we can speak smoothly and completely is dooming ourselves to silence” (p. 20). Instead we can raise to the surface our context and our culture—the referential meanings we use to make sense. If we do not have roots then all we have is our existence, and in that case then all we have is our experiences and our interpretations of those experiences. In the case of secular Jews: What are the experiences of secular Jewishness? If secular Jewish college students were to reveal their context and their culture, what would it look like? What are the referential meanings of secular Jewishness?

Heidegger suggested that our fear of death emerges from the anxiety of our rootlessness. What if we listened to the crisis of anxiety rather than fleeing from it?

Within this crisis we seek to communicate, to learn to teach, to join with others and to bend others to our will. We dominate, we submit, we engage in activity because activity reduces anxiety. We create edifices to belief systems in the hope of nearing the mark so that we can at last be secure. The quest leaves us at times “with the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings.” I think the release comes when we stop trying so hard to apprehend everything and return for a moment to the still point [a place of peace]. (Paterson, 1991, p. 30)

Paterson (1991) gave voice to the crisis of anxiety and fear of death. She suggested that despite our groundlessness meaning is revealed when we are open and still in the face of anxiety.

Finding Meaning

For Irena Klepfisz there has not necessarily been a place of peace. Instead she has made meaning by bringing the fissures of her identity to the surface as she has worked for peace. What is unique about Klepfisz is not that chasms of her identity make it difficult to associate with the various communities she claims membership, but that she has given voice to the overlapping aspects of her identity. By holding her experiences accountable she has held the communities that she claims and that makes claims on her accountable. Klepfisz has challenged mainstream Judaism to accommodate the rich diversity of the gay/lesbian community. She has challenged Israel to move away from oppressive policies and actions toward Palestinians. She has challenged Jews in the United States to nurture their Jewish culture whether it is secular or religious. This work in making her communities more inclusive—which is ultimately peace work—has created a shelter for others to take cover even if they did not understand the storm. Klepfisz has engaged in bringing the pain of the past to the present through words with the hope that the world can be better. She has faced a world of meaninglessness as a survivor of the Holocaust. She has revisited that meaninglessness in working class jobs (Klepfisz, 1990a) and as a victim of sexism and heterosexism. Klepfisz experienced radical doubt (Kegan, 1982). She wondered if she could hold herself together with the anguish exploding inside of her. Yet Klepfisz has managed to go on. And where we would expect only pain, hope has pulsed and spread through Klepfisz. It does not make sense that when you have witnessed the worst humanity has to offer that belief in humanity can grow. Klepfisz (1990b) has wrenched herself from the designated path that observers like myself may assign to her to become “a purple flower standing solitary in a yellow field” (p. 159).

If life is as meaningless as Klepfisz experienced it, or as groundless as Heidegger described it, how does one go on living? If one's circumstances are seemingly arbitrary then how does Klepfisz make sense of the horror she has experienced? As a secular Jew, lacking biblical texts as guides, how does Klepfisz proceed? Furthermore, what is the point of continuing with life in which one only control the microscopic? Earlier I quoted from Klepfisz's (1990b) poem, *Solitary Acts*:

So much of history seems
a gaping absence at best a shadow
longing for some greater
definition which will never come
for what is burned becomes air
and ashes nothing more. (p. 203)

Klepfisz's efforts to grab on to her heritage seem fruitless as the meanings evaporate into thin air. Yet, this poem is dedicated to Irena Klepfisz's aunt Gina who took care of Irena after Michal Klepfisz was killed and Rose Klepfisz was too sick to care for her. Gina died during the war in a Polish hospital and was buried in a Christian cemetery. The poem continues:

So I cling to the knowledge of your
distant grave for it alone
reminds me prods me to shape that shadow. (p. 203)

Her history seemingly meaningless, Klepfisz nonetheless continues to bury her hands in history. But this is not an effort to dig out whatever she can before it disappears. Nor is it an effort to assign meanings to history to create a path where one really does not exist. Klepfisz's hands dig in the dirt because this is her ground. Later in *Solitary Acts* she wrote:

Gina I must tell you: today I
felt hopeful as I knelt close
to the earth and turned it

inch by inch sifting the soil
clearing the way for roots
of vegetables. I felt so hopeful
Gina that with repeated years
and efforts the monotony of daily
motion of bending and someday
the earth would be uncluttered
the debris cleared.
There is I know no reason
for such hope for nothing destroyed
is ever made up or restored to us.
In the earth are buried histories
irretrievable. Yet what philosophy
can justify any of our emotions?
Like the watercolors from Buchenwald—
if you can imagine! The stench
from the chimneys just the sounds
of the place. And yet someone felt
a need to paint. And did. (p. 208)

Painting as a prisoner at Buchenwald or growing a garden in poor, afflicted dirt seems incomprehensible, perhaps even ridiculous at first glance. Yet this is an expression of being so strong that it is easily misunderstood. To create art that is ultimately a pursuit of humanity (Dreyfus, 1991) amidst such obscene inhumanity suggests that even at the height of non-being there is still being. Being cautious here to not merely mine the Holocaust for lessons without also being sensitive to the tremendous and overwhelming loss, I insist that we can learn from the Holocaust, however, and hopefully learn enough to undermine policies, behaviors, and organized actions which destroy humanity.

Irena Klepfisz's life reveals that even if everything is stripped away from a person meaning ensues when our being comes to the forefront. Despite the trauma, loss, and oppression, meaning ensues for Klepfisz, even though she is a secular Jew. Creation amidst destruction has a transcendent quality to it. When we clear away our masks, roles, fear of non-conformity, and allow our being to rise to the surface, others, even those

engaged in behaviors designed to avoid their being are touched (Frankl, 1984; May, 1958). It is doubly moving when the proximity between being and non-being is almost indistinguishable. Witnessing the revealing of being at these times often brings tears to our eyes or makes us turn away because it is too much. But what are we turning away from? What is too much?

Hope

Viktor Frankl (1984) asserted that “Mental health is based on a certain degree of tension...the gap between what one is and what one should become” (p. 127). While Kegan (1982) suggested that we strive for equilibrium, Frankl (1984) argued that “What man [*sic*] actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task. What he needs is not the discharge of tension at any cost but the call of potential meaning waiting to be fulfilled by him” (p. 127).

Frankl, a survivor of Aushchwitz and other Nazi death camps, wrote about a particularly cold and windy day when he limped in torn up shoes two to three kilometers from Auschwitz to a work camp. On his way to the site all he could think of were the overwhelming problems he faced. When would food materialize? Would he be mistreated by the foreman? Would the capo abuse him? How would he fix his shoes? Frankl (1984) wrote: “I became disgusted with the state of affairs which compelled me, daily and hourly, to think of only such trivial things. I forced my thoughts to turn to another subject” (p. 94). Frankl imagined himself in front of an audience in a comfortable hall. “I was giving a lecture on the psychology of the concentration camp! All that oppressed me at that moment became objective...I succeeded somehow in rising above the situation, above the sufferings of the moment, and I observed them as if they were

already of the past” (p. 95). Once Frankl was able to make his experience an object his suffering was relieved. “Emotion, which is suffering, ceases to be suffering as soon as we form a clear and precise picture of it” (Frankl, 1984, p. 95). Frankl, without minimizing his own or others suffering, suggested that suffering “is an ineradicable part of life” (p. 88) and that we have choices in how we respond to our suffering. While we may need help in seeing those choices, Frankl (1984) offered testimony of those who made meaning in the most meaningless of environments:

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from man [*sic*] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way. (p. 86)

Frankl tells the story of a fellow prisoner who had a vivid dream that revealed the date the war ended. The fellow prisoner told Frankl that by the end of the month the war would end and liberation would be delivered. The hopes of the man were raised, but as the promised date drew closer the news from the war front grew dimmer. The day before the supposed liberation the man became severely ill and died the following day. Despite the prophetic dream there was no liberation on this day. While the cause of death was attributed to typhus, Frankl (1984) suggested “that the ultimate cause of my friend’s death was that the expected liberation did not come and he was disappointed...his faith in the future and his will to live had become paralyzed” (p. 97). To survive the Nazi death camps, Frankl argued, life had to be approached from a perspective that was altogether opposite, perhaps counter-intuitive. Instead of searching for the answer to what meaning could exist in the most meaningless of times, Frankl suggested that the prisoners needed to ask what answers could be given to the questions asked by life. That is, “Life

ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks it sets for each individual” (p. 98). According to Frankl since the tasks differ among everyone so does the meaning of life. To be in a position to survive the death camps meant grabbing on to the philosophy that his or her task in life was to suffer and the response to this task was unique to each individual. Frankl (1984) wrote of such a philosophy:

For us, as prisoners, these thoughts were not speculations far removed from reality. They were the only thoughts that could be of help to us. They kept us from despair, even when there seemed no chance of coming out of it alive. Long ago we had passed the stage of asking what was the meaning of life, a naïve query which understands life as the attaining of some aim through the active creation of something of value. For us, the meaning of life embraced the wider cycles of life and death, of suffering and of dying. (p. 99)

Frankl gave examples of two different men he knew in the camps that were close to committing suicide. Both men said they did not want to live because they expected nothing more from life. Frankl, though, suggested to the men that life expected something from them. For one it was a daughter waiting for him, for the other it was unfinished books on science that only this man could write. “When the impossibility of replacing a person is realized, it allows the responsibility which a man has for his existence and its continuance to appear in all its magnitude” (Frankl, 1984, p. 101).

Frankl, amid indescribable human suffering, found hope. Amid despair he was able to use Nietzsche’s words “He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any how” (Frankl, 1984, p. 97). He discovered a responsibility to live. Howard Zinn (1994) tells a similar story. Joining the Army Air Corps in 1943, Zinn went to basic training in Missouri where he made his two closest Air Force friends, Joe and Ed. Of the three, Zinn was the only one who survived World War II. Zinn considers himself lucky; lucky to

have escaped the web of poverty that so many hard working people are never fortunate enough to escape; lucky for surviving the war; lucky to have eventually found meaningful work; and lucky to meet inspiring and remarkable people. According to Zinn, this undeserved gift of luck has a responsibility attached to it. Because Zinn was lucky and his two Air Force friends were not he feels that he owed them something: “Sure, I want to have some fun; I have no desire to be a martyr, though I know some and admire them. Still, I owe it to Joe and Ed not to waste my gift, to use these years well, not just for myself but for that new world we all thought was promised by the war that took their lives. And so I have no *right* to despair. I insist on hope” (Zinn, 1994, p. 12).

How might secular Jews experience hope? Klepfisz, Frankl, and Zinn hoped that the world could be better. They hoped that humans would find their humanity. Is this thinking at the heart of secular Jewishness?

Remembering

Do we need to remember to have hope? Do we need history to believe in the future? In the case of my brother, Roger, when he retraced his experience in our family it would seem that any flame of hope would be extinguished by disappointments, missed opportunities, and painful encounters. Similarly, Pam Mitchell’s story of abuse, intertwined with her Jewishness would seem to suggest that there is little to be hopeful for as a Jew. However, Roger, Pam Mitchell, and Irena Klepfisz seem to be spiritually nourished because moments of humanity escaped the violence and abuse which paved over much of their childhoods. A nuanced remembering that avoids essentializing the inhumanity of our pasts seems to be necessary to have hope. As a matter of fact, claiming these moments of humanity has fueled Howard Zinn’s optimism. Zinn (1994) has

maintained hope in an otherwise depressing world because “History is full of instances where people, against enormous odds, have come together to struggle for liberty and justice, and have won—not often enough, of course, but enough to suggest how much more is possible” (p. 4). Furthermore,

Everything in history, once it has happened, looks as if it had to happen exactly that way. We can't imagine any other. But I am convinced of the uncertainty of history, of the possibility of surprise, of the importance of human action in changing what looks unchangeable. (Zinn, 1994, p. 101)

If we turn over the dirt again and again and keep on working at it we may find other stories. Stories that replenish our hope. Stories that claim us. Realizing that the earth is not frozen, that there are hopeful stories is vital. Because if we relent and allow history to be “viewed as rational, as if it could be no other way....the more it appears that society is governed by rational and intractable laws” (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 126). The danger in succumbing to this belief is that often the laws are arbitrary, yet intentionally constructed to benefit the few and oppress many. Remembering the variegated text of secular Jewishness is essential because the stories will either be forgotten or cleaned up to pump life into a narrow definition of Jews.

But, “Remembering is hard work: Elites stucco the rooms of history with myth. Trauma and guilt repress experience. We remember selectively and forget collectively” (Stimpson, 1997, p. 36). If we rely on established accounts to make sense out of the past our hopes may be diminished. We may conclude that we are alone and that the social forces impacting our story are actually a fabrication. In regard to Jewishness: Jews who have found a secular connection to their Jewishness but are unable to locate secular Jewish narratives may find it difficult to live a secular Jewish life. Irena Klepfisz (1990a) found that the college students she interacted with were unaware of secular Jewishness as

an option because the stories of secular Jewishness have gradually disappeared. Surely the texts of secular Jewishness have been buried under the rubble from the destruction of thousands of Jewish communities in Europe and the elaborate psychological and emotional scaffolding supporting the state of Israel (Buhle, 1993; Klepfisz, 1990a). The assimilation of Jews in the United States has also greatly contributed to the erasure of complex stories of thriving secular Jewish communities (Prell, 1996).

Jews in the United States have a remarkable history of activism, survival, and creativity (Fein, 1989; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1996; West, 1996). The stories of Jewish immigrants in the United States making sense of being Jewish in a country that gave them some space to try out being Jewish and American are incredible. For Jews had never had such an opportunity—a freedom—to simultaneously be a culture and a nationality (Fein, 1988). But the balance between Jewish and American has never been easy and the scale has often tipped in favor of American. As described above, Jacob Schiff rerouted Jewish immigrants from the New York Harbor for fear that these new immigrants would make his Jewishness perspicuous. Similarly, Jewish girls predilection for “nose-jobs” has been a way to hide their Jewishness. Efforts to eliminate “Jewish” accents (Klepfisz, 1990a; Maran, 1995) are indicative of a fear of being seen as “too Jewish.” While these acts are not simple and reducible only to pressures of assimilation they are indicative of assimilation as an eraser: An eraser of Jewishness in the present and the past. With the freedom and momentum to be American, Jews in the United States are able to choose when, how and if we want to be Jewish (Fein, 1988; Rubin-Dorsky & Fishkin, 1996). This is not to imply that Jews do not continue to be targets of anti-Jewish attitudes and violence. Nonetheless, the Jewish experience in the United States is unique

because most Jews are not consistently reminded, badgered, and restrained for being Jewish. Because Jews can forget their Jewishness, memories and history are also forsaken. That is, if an American lifestyle—not a Jewish-American lifestyle—is chosen then a corresponding narrative is also chosen. That “set of stories which define values and purely positive goals, and fixed points of historical significance” (Thomas, 1996, p. 172) which ennoble Jews are lost when assimilation is pursued. When Jews forget their history it becomes like a museum rarely visited—the Jewish parts of the text are frozen. Consequently the Jews of the United States past become exhibits—oddities—humorous and clever, but not agents (Klepfisz, 1990a).

Judaisms in any age emerge from the ways in which the Jews of that age struggle to make sense of—and use of—their past, a past that includes not only the texts and their interpretations, but also their memories and their histories. (Fein, 1988, p. 49)

When we use nostalgia to romanticize and plasticize the past we change the appearance of the past while avoiding our present reality (Klepfisz, 1990a). That is, it is easy to romanticize the Jewish immigrants to the United States of the early 1900s. They spoke Yiddish which Jews may associate positively if their childhoods were peppered with Yiddish expressions. Jewish immigrants lived crammed together in New York City (Kazin, 1951), but close enough for support and excitement. Jews were employed in the garment or dry goods industry where they did not face the hardships that they did in Eastern Europe. But we purify the past if we ignore how Yiddish was associated with daring political stands (Klepfisz, 1990a; Takaki, 1993). Jewish ghettos resulted from segregation, attacks on immigrants, and an inability to afford nicer apartments (Takaki, 1993). Let us not forget the dangerous working conditions, labor strife, socialism, communism, and pressures to assimilate and lose one’s accent (Klepfisz, 1990a; Maran,

1995; Prell, 1996). Of course, there were many Jews who did not stay in or never immigrated through New York (Calof, 1995; Grossinger, 1997) and a diverse population of Jews who immigrated before and after the great wave of immigrants of the early 1900s. If history is delivered to our doorstep in a neat little package infused with meaning, it is likely to circumvent a remembering that will reawaken the dangerous memories. If we assimilate this neat package into our own story without further inspection are we bypassing the truth to avoid our being?

What is the sake of remembering and what is at stake with remembering? The word “remember” comes from the Latin word “memor” which meant mindful. The origins of remember then are to recall to mind (Ayto, 1990). When we remember we are bringing something back to our minds. While remembering requires thinking it is also a bodily sensation. To re-member requires bringing something back bodily. Remembering is a means to reveal our being because it can reawaken us to bodily sensations covered over by our everyday coping and theoretical approach to the day-to-day. These bodily sensations have a direct, unmediated connection to our being. When we revisit memories of our childhood, for instance, we may find that they are “inscribed in the body” (Smith, 1992, p. 87). A smell in the present may draw us back to the past. A postcard or photo may tap a hidden memory. This physical connectedness between the past and the present (Smith, 1992) have “the potential...for giving meaning to present activity” (Smith, 1992, p. 88). Similarly, when memories are connected to our history a text or narrative is created.

Thomas (1996) suggested that “Without a historical narrative it is impossible for any people to flourish in a society that is hostile toward them” (p. 173). Even if Jews

frequently do not feel the sting of anti-Semitism, we are bombarded in the United States with pressure to hide our differences. If Thomas is correct that a historical narrative is needed to flourish in the United States then secular Jews will need to bring to the surface the heterogeneous stories from our memories and histories.

As Klepfisz (1990b) pointed out:

Old rarely seen types. Gone they say forever. And yet I
know they can be revived again that I can trigger them again.
That they awaken in me for I have felt it happen... (p. 200)

Naming

Throughout this chapter I have pondered the experience of wordless moments—those experiences where we are left without words. I suggested that at these times we are on a cliff overlooking nothingness. As we stand on this cliff words are like a rope. Words are an invitation to be pulled away from nothingness into our preexisting cultural meanings. As I articulated earlier, for anti-Semites the word “Jew” has often been used as a means to avoid nothingness by serving as a receptacle for projections. For the Jew—the scapegoat—the word “Jew” and the contradictory stereotypes associated with being Jewish are likely to engender feelings of shame and constraint. To stand at the edge of a cliff and announce “I am a Jew!” is likely a frightening proposition to most Jews. Yet that is what we are—that is our existence. However, words, whether in the form of edicts, rules, or derogatory comments, have been at the root of anti-Jewish purges, riots, and behaviors. Is it surprising that a Jew may try to find ways to eliminate or downplay her or his association with the word Jew?

In the United States individuals facing oppression implicitly understand that the cherished idea of meritocracy (McIntosh, 1988) is as a myth. Oppressed individuals are

not judged solely on their merit in this society. In response to this myth, Jewish communities have adopted narrow definitions of Jewishness in order to gain acceptance from mainstream society (Ackelsberg, 1996). Ackelsberg (1996) pointed out that “The tendency to totalize and repress differences seems greatest in communities subjected to significant levels of oppression from without” (p. 89). When Jewish communities mirror societal repression of differences they are appealing for acceptance from that same oppressive society. Attempts to minimize diversity and difference are manifested in traditional Jewish communities when Jewishness is defined to be synonymous with religious observance (Hertzberg, 1994; Prager, 1988). To announce: “I am a secular Jew” risks belittlement and derision from traditional Jews. While individuals who are not Jewish may not understand, care about, or even hear the word “secular” in that announcement, many Jews are likely to view the joining of the words “secular” and “Jew” as at best odd and at worst sacrilege. How might secular Jews, as they attempt to find the positive associations with the words that make up their homes, eschew repression of differences that result from oppression and lack of acceptance?

According to Frankl (1984) a belief in the future depends on how we answer the questions asked by life. When we move away from a preoccupation with how or what we should do and become engrossed with why we live, our lives will invariably gain meaning. Responding to our circumstances is made difficult though when we lack stories of those who preceded us (Zinn, 1994). Without “a full, accurate enabling sense of the past” (Stimpson, 1997, p. 36) hope must persist without vital nourishment.

Lacking a historical narrative, secular Jews may not even have the words to say: “I am a secular Jew.” While words may be the rope that pull us away from nothingness,

they also may might be the harness that allows us to sustain a vision of our existence. For instance, until I read Irena Klepfisz's articulations of her secular Jewishness I was unable to say "I am a secular Jew." Beck (1989a) found that "Naming separates one group from another" (p. 174). Naming also "creates a space where others like you can join" (Beck, 1989a, p. 174). Naming secular Jewishness builds bridges to other Jews creating a wider and more elaborate text of secular Jewishness.

Beck (1989a) asserted that Jewish lesbian-feminists, like Klepfisz, live at the intersection of Jewishness and gay/lesbian identity—just "elsewhere" for each group. Gay/lesbian communities often reflect dominant Christian assumptions, while Jewish communities often make it impossible to live the lesson Klepfisz learned from the Holocaust memorials: "that a Jew didn't separate herself from her people—even when she could" (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 146). That is, Jewish gays and lesbians have traditionally been unaccepted by the heterosexual Jewish community. However, overcoming silence and making "a public declaration of identity, a statement that becomes a responsibility both to oneself and to the group" (Beck, 1989a, pp. 173-174) creates a new way of being and a new place for people to come together. "Naming oneself is a way of speaking truth, and a way of claiming power that challenges the traditional owners of the name" (Beck, 1989a, p. 174). The definition of the word "Jew" expands when lesbians, feminists, African Americans, and secular Jews claim it. While naming is liberating and exciting it also has the potential to be isolating and painful. By publicly identifying as a Jew I may lose some of my taken-for-granted White privilege. Calling attention to my secular Jewishness as a cultural identity within the Jewish community, while potentially infusing new meaning into the notion of Jewishness, also risks rejection for blasphemy. Insecurity

about whether one is Jewish enough is so rampant among Jews (Klepfisz, 1990a) that publicly identifying as a secular Jew has the potential to elicit strong opinions. Naming alone, without an overt community of support, can be frightening. Yet it is naming that often creates community and changes the world (Grumet, 1992). Clearly, if secular Jews in the United States are to exist as secular Jews, there is the need for naming, speaking publicly and creating a community.

But, what is the fear? What keeps people from naming?

Jews' understanding of themselves can never be separated from anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic stereotypes (Breitman, 1988). For instance, Meredith Maran (1995) acknowledged that for fifteen years she had rejected and forgotten that she was Jewish. Reflecting on her sudden Christmas Eve realization of her Jewishness Maran (1995) stated:

I realized then that despite my childhood yearning to belong to the society of Jews, I had absorbed through the leaky membrane between my parents and me their apparent conviction that to keep themselves and their children safe from anti-Semitism, they must distance themselves from that group and every member of it. (p. 173)

Stereotypes shame us; silence us. Kaye/Kantrowitz (1991) described the conflicting stereotypes about Jewish men which undermine positive identification with the Jewish community: While Jewish men supposedly control Wall Street, the world's economy and the media, Jewish men are also the *schlep*, *nebish*, hunched over, old-world, victim of the Holocaust. Jewish men are the Israelis who break the bones of Palestinians, but are also the intellectuals—minds lacking bodies and motor skills (Gilman, 1996). Some Jewish men may react to these stereotypes by being ashamed and by hiding their Jewishness. Others, in their attempts to demonstrate how the stereotypical

labels are false, may end up over-compensating by taking on traditional and oppressive male characteristics (Breines, 1990).

Stereotypes of Jewish men, while damaging, constraining, and hurtful, also risk undermining men's privilege. Most men find it difficult to make their oppressor status salient because it so often disappears into norms and expected behavior. Since being male is supposedly normal men tend to forget about it and see themselves as individuals (Brod, 1988). However, when my maleness is conjoined with Jewishness, a marginal categorization, maleness cannot so easily escape the spotlight by hiding behind the backdrop known as the hegemonic mythical norm (Lorde, 1995). Jewishness puts one at the front of the stage. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Jewish women are often misperceived as large and the recipient of many more stereotypes than Jewish men. Jewish women are already exposed to sexism as women which makes their Jewishness more visible. Jewish men, especially in more traditional households, are often taught that their dominance is natural and therefore may be in even greater denial about their Jewishness (Gottfried, 1988). For example, Joey Goldman (1991), a White Jew from Atlanta, wrote:

At the University of Michigan I felt a greater bond with other Southerners than with other Jews. When I was in Colombia I pretended—and often successfully—to be Colombian, even though I was nothing but a gringo to everyone around me. When I took aerobics I was a man—because often nobody else was. (Goldman, 1991, p. 274)

Goldman seemed to enjoy and struggle with attempting to be someone else. Not coincidentally Goldman's (1991) essay was entitled: *I'm Not Really Jewish*. However, even when Jews conceal their "outward marks" (Bullock, 1996, p. 5) or more obvious aspects of Jewishness they then only emphasize their difference in another way (Bullock,

1996). Jews may try to hide from the stereotypes, but it is usually too late—the stereotypes have already found Jews.

A web of stereotypes exist for the Jewish woman: At once she is considered powerful due to her Jewishness, but as a woman it is assumed that she has little power because Judaism is a patriarchal religion (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1991; Pogrebin, 1991).

Stereotypes of Jewish women combine with prejudice against powerful women, pressuring us to cloak our strength lest we be seen as pushy; hide our desire, lest we be deemed oversexed.... mute our feelings, lest we be judged overemotional. (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1991, pp. 7-8)

This contradiction of stereotypes places Jewish women in a series of double binds that Jewish men escape. Women of color who are not Jewish frequently view White, Jewish women as solely White and unaware of their skin privilege. White, middle class women are likely to see Jewish women as aggressive, loud and pushy rather than polite like the silent, albeit powerful, norm (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1991). Furthermore, internalizing these stereotypes encourages Jewish women to avoid the limelight, to be silent, and to not challenge the stereotypes for fear of being labeled (Klepfisz, 1990a). Ironically, as Jewish women are silenced they are still tagged as being pushy.

This web of stereotypes sets up Jewish women for lives of contradictions. After a woman is put in a situation where she has no good choice she is blamed for making the “wrong” choice (Frye, 1988). Klepfisz (1990a), Isaacson (1991) and Korn (1994) remind us of the violence that was done to Jews during the Holocaust when families were forced by the Nazis to choose which member would die. As the “‘chosen people’ Jews are bound to the notion of choice, but unable to choose” (Friedling, 1996, p. 120). Nonetheless, Klepfisz (1990a) claimed “Jews must choose and risk for peace. That we

must choose justice despite our fears. That our fears are real, rooted in history, but they cannot control us or stop us from making choices” (p. 128).

Anti-Jewish stereotypes and behaviors have the power to silence by breaking up Jewish communities. Naming counteracts that silence by providing language to strengthen community voice. But naming complicates matters for Jews and those who are not Jewish. When Jews speak from their existence they will demonstrate the tremendous diversity within the Jewish community. Similarly, when secular Jews name the sheer variety of entities that are included in their beings Jews will find that there is no single Jewish narrative that could possibly encapsulate such diversity.

With its various spokes of culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, religious background, and geographical region of origin Jewish identity is rather intricate. Considering the feelings engendered by each one of these characteristics, how does a Jew bring together the ways she or he has coped with the multifarious components to her or his identity? Finding one’s uniquely secular Jewish voice by hearing the voices of others will seemingly facilitate a way for secular Jews to make “I am...” statements. Speaking from one’s existence has the potential to expand words like “man,” reorient thinking about words like “White,” and challenge assumptions about words like “heterosexual” and “gay” and “lesbian.” Furthermore, standing at the edge of the cliff and joining a narrative by shouting “I am a secular Jew!” confronts our taken-for-granted thinking about the word “Jew.”

However, naming alone is not enough. Publicly identifying as a secular Jew is critical, but simply naming becomes meaningless if existence as a secular Jew has no further meaning than that one is a non-observant Jew. Being a secular Jew must mean

something. This is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of secular Jewishness. There are many Jews who are not religiously observant (Fein, 1988; Rubin-Dorsky & Fishkin, 1996), but what makes an individual an intentional secular Jew? As secular Jews attempt to carve, mesh, and improvise a secular Jewish identity how do we avoid the modernist dichotomies that underscore oppression? That is, if naming is not enough and we must create a boundary around secular Jewishness, how do we avoid making that boundary an oppressive one (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1991)?

Secular Jewishness

Through definition, a word becomes a term: rigid, predictable, and invulnerable to the twists and turns that a word receives both in dialogue and in the history of the language in general. (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 1)

I have submitted my pre-understandings in this chapter with the intention of revealing the experience of secular Jewishness. These pre-understandings do not suggest a bounded entity simply labeled “secular Jewishness.” Instead they illuminate entry points, edges, and corners of something that is difficult to describe and seemingly impossible to circumscribe. My pre-understandings are a series of attempts to broach or “pierce...in order to draw the contents” (Mish, 1984, p. 180) of secular Jewishness. The Latin root of the word “broach” means pointed or projecting (Ayto, 1990). Through interpretation of stories, poetry, and philosophy I have attempted to point the way toward the experience of being a secular Jew. Simply defining secular Jewishness might give some flavor of how secular Jewishness has been practiced, but a definition does not reveal secular Jewish potentialities (May, 1958). The etymological root of the word define is the Latin word “finis” which means to finish (Ayto, 1990). Instead of defining

or finishing secular Jewishness I have attempted to broach or open the subject for discussion.

To enter the phenomenon of secular Jewishness I puzzled over the question: “what is a Jew?” I suggested that each Jewish person bears Jewish stories. How each Jewish person interprets or makes meaning of these stories will determine how she or he experiences being Jewish. I discussed the importance of the words that make up Jewish stories and how these words often remain hidden until the Jewish person steps outside his or her taken for granted context. Seeing one’s context anew illuminates the contradictions of Jewish being and for secular Jews requires delving into the tangle of history. Raising the contradictions to the surface from uncovering this history helps make meaning and bridge differences. From the hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy of Heidegger and the existential philosophy of Rollo May and Viktor Frankl, as well as the stories and poetry of Irena Klepfisz, I asked whether weaving a text with this expanded lexicon of Jewishness held the potential to find meaning despite humans’ bottomless nature. This led me to wonder specifically how secular Jews engender such a text. Since secular Jewishness will otherwise remain hidden and undiscussed within the larger text of Jewishness I submitted that it is through hope, remembering, and naming that secular Jews will work to find themselves.

Reaching for the Self

Historically secular Jews’ hope for personal and political transformation, desire for guidance from history, and yearning for words to describe their existence has not taken place in a vacuum. Secular Jewishness has always simultaneously been a reaction to religious Jewishness and a philosophy in and of itself. How might current day secular

Jews' efforts to create a text of personal and political transformation involve reaction to and solidarity with religious Jews, assimilated Jews, and individuals who are not Jewish (Kinberg, 1996; Klepfisz, 1990a)?

Baruch Spinoza, the well-known 17th century philosopher who lived in the Netherlands, was one of the first secular Jews. Spinoza was banned from the Jewish community, rejected by his fellow philosophers, and alienated from Dutch society for his radical critiques of God and for not identifying with the religious aspects of his Jewishness (Yovel, 1990). By making his views known Spinoza was alienated, but he was also a harbinger for other secular Jews. Spinoza's life created a space for future secular Jews to practice.

Spinoza's ex-communication partially resulted from his wicked questioning of dogmatic Jews. Spinoza was not interested in debates about semantics and theology. He focused on the spirit of Jewish teachings as opposed to the "letter of the law." Spinoza was hardly anti-religious. Instead he imagined a different way to practice faith:

Faith is a matter of love, not of knowledge, and to worship means to live in justice and charity. To do good is the only true law of the Torah, and those who are zealots of the letter of the law are not God's defenders, but His enemies. (Runes, 1995, p. 10)

Spinoza clearly posed wicked questions. By focusing less on religious doctrine and more on doing good, observing divine principles, working toward justice and loving the other (Runes, 1995), Spinoza was creating multiple ways or paths of being Jewish.

Although religious authorities rejected Spinoza's ideas, his philosophy eventually caught on during the enlightenment. With efforts to make Jews seem less different from their Christian surroundings, Jewishness slowly became equated with a religious practice as opposed to a cultural tradition (Klepfisz, 1990a). This narrowing definition of

Jewishness eventually created a jumping off point for Jews who insisted on their “Jewishness while denying Jewish observance” (Klepfisz, 1990a, p. 194) as central to Jewish culture. Secular Jewishness originated from its dialectical relationship with religious Jewishness.

In the past secular Jewishness had clear political and cultural components: Secularism was never associated with assimilation, but with a fierce determination to preserve Jewish identity through Yiddish and Yiddish culture. Committed to social justice and class struggle, all its proponents advocated *gerangl*, struggle, and radical change...and all integrated art and politics, introspection and activism, a concern for Jewish survival and for the survival of other peoples. (Klepfisz, 1990a, pp.195-196)

With the Holocaust, the establishment of the state of Israel, and assimilation the old secular culture has largely disappeared (Klepfisz, 1990a). The fact that a rich Jewish culture can exist outside the synagogue is unknown to most contemporary Jews (Klepfisz, 1990a).

Weaving a contemporary text of secular Jewish existence is likely more dialectical than definitive. That is, it may not always be clear to a secular Jew precisely what contemporary secular Jewishness is, but she or he probably knows what secular Jewishness is not. For instance, Jews who cannot find themselves reflected in religious Jewishness may stumble upon secular Jewish life. As a senior in college Joey Goldman (1991) described how he learned from his rabbi that he could make his own meaning from the Torah. Goldman (1991) explained:

By being given the opportunity by my religion to question and complain about the manner in which things were taught and learned, as well as what the true meaning of Judaism was, I felt that I could find a comfortable place for myself within the religion. (p. 270)

Goldman questioned Jewish religious services, his relationship with his Jewish peers, his place in Jewish culture, and whether he wanted to be a Jew. After attending Rosh

Hashanah services Goldman (1991) realized: “I wanted to be Jewish. If I search, I thought, I might be able to find the Jews I wanted to be with. I could find a Jewish subculture I was seeking” (p. 274). Goldman discovered that religious Judaism was not for him but being Jewish was at the essence of his being. This tension between secular and religious Jewishness is how some Jewish individuals can find themselves and their way in the world. Hence the study that follows asks: What is the experience of becoming a secular Jew?

The polarization between a commitment to Jewish religious observance and a commitment to Jewish culture outside of the synagogue is so heightened that the relationship between these two poles is rarely acknowledged (Klepfisz, 1990a). Might secular Jews uncover the essence of their being by bracketing their experiences with religious Jews and the larger dominant culture?

Reaching for the Other

For Heidegger’s authentic individual, anxiety does not arise...from the conflict between moral and religious absolutes, but rather from the experience of the absence of any absolutes orienting one’s existence. (Vogel, 1994, p. 2)

Secular Jewishness cannot be practiced in isolation. Irena Klepfisz made sense of her Jewishness not only through her writing, but through her activism. Similarly, Kim Chernin’s mother, Rose, could only truly be herself when she was participating in political organizing. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, Pam Mitchell, and Joey Goldman tell similar stories. Finding oneself as a secular Jew requires a community of others.

Emmanuel Levinas (1961/1969) suggested that our potential, as humans, for truly being human exists in our relationship with the other. For Levinas, who studied under Martin Heidegger, but broke from him, “The ultimate questions are ethical rather than

ontological” (Jay, 1990, p. 85). Levinas suggested that existence could not be reduced to a concern only for the self or being. Instead when humans are face to face with the alterity (otherness) of the other, transcendence occurs. Levinas (1961/1969) asserted that “The face to face remains an ultimate situation” (p. 81). When human beings meet or see the face of the other “it involves a calling into question of oneself, a critical attitude which is itself produced in the face of the other and under his [*sic*] authority” (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 81). Desiring to comprehend the life of the other, according to Levinas (1961/1969), involves an overflowing of the “I” by the other suggesting that the intellect is overflowed by the alterity of the other. Levinas (1961/1969) was clear that human beings can never fully comprehend the other, nor is a metaphysical knowing that separates the knower from the known desirable. Instead the desire to know and be face to face with the other involves an obligation to the other. Levinas believed that the self should submit to the other and suppress “self-interest in order to honor alterity” (Jay, 1990, p. 85).

“To approach the Other is to put into question my freedom, my spontaneity as a living being...” (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 303). Being open to the alterity of the other and submitting to the other ironically allows human beings the possibility to be freer (Levinas, 1961/1969). When submitting to the other a true freedom is made possible because cultural systems and assignments that keep us from connecting to the other are illuminated. Being open to the other allows human beings the possibility to take ethical stands against systems that accept violence and narcissism. Existence in the world, according to Levinas, requires experiencing the other and being demanded to be in

relationship with the other. According to Levinas, to be in the world means to encounter otherness and to respond to that otherness.

Levinas criticized Heidegger's account of authenticity as "morally nihilistic because it fails to do justice to the social dimension of human life" (Vogel, 1994, p. 7). Elaborating on these criticisms, Vogel (1994) asserted that Heidegger "cannot explain how the very existence of other persons imposes restraints on how one may rightfully exercise one's freedom" (p. 7). Although Jay (1990) criticized Levinas for putting forth a philosophy that is more prescriptive than descriptive and for Levinas' inability to apply his philosophy to injustices taking place in Israel, Levinas' introduction of the other and ethics is nonetheless an important antidote to Heidegger.

Because secular Jews are focused on discovering their humanity through transforming the world Levinas' critique of Heidegger is crucial. However, Levinas suggested that truth is found through the other by submitting to the other (Clark, 1992; Levinas, 1961/1969). Erich Fromm takes the notion of submitting to otherness and grounds it ontologically. Fromm (1981) described the voice which "calls us back to ourselves" (p. 19). This is the voice that has "intuitive knowledge of what is human and inhuman" (p. 19). Fromm cautioned that submitting to the other when the other makes inhuman demands is dangerous and requires a response of disobedience. Fromm called on humans to uncover and revitalize the voice which calls us back to our humanity. Instead of submitting to the other, Fromm implored humans to retain "the separateness and integrity of one's own self" (p. 3) while also developing "human solidarity with our fellow creatures" (p. 3). Obligation to the other should not be confused as obedience to the other.

Pointing Toward the Question

In the previous chapter I introduced the notion of a buried chest possessing memories, secrets, and keys about myself and my interaction with the other. Earlier in this chapter I discussed how opening the chest revealed my contradictions—the places where I do not adhere firmly. It has been through my interaction with the other that I have revealed myself. Are there chests for other secular Jews? Are there receptacles for secular Jews where words wait to be called up as a new text is woven? How might secular Jews find themselves? Will it be through the other? What might the voice of secular Jewishness sound like? How do secular Jews find their voice of humanity while engaging in solidarity? Joining with other secular Jews I look forward to engaging in hope, remembering and naming to reveal the essence of becoming a secular Jew.

This chapter asked the following question: What is it like to be a secular Jew? I now set aside the pre-understandings I put forward in this chapter to engage with Jewish college students attempting to become secular. The next chapter describes the mode of inquiry I use to draw out the experience of Jewish college students becoming secular. The following chapter describes the themes that emerged from my conversations with Jewish college students. In the concluding chapter I put forward the meanings I made from this research journey.

CHAPTER III

MODE OF INQUIRY

We often find ourselves in situations where, to fully be ourselves would be to sabotage the research enterprise. (Goodson & Walker, 1995, pp. 192-193)

We shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else, the unity and true meaning of phenomenology. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. viii)

For years I wandered through left-leaning bookstores looking for a certain kind of resonance. I would check out the philosophy, theology, perhaps cultural studies and even the fiction sections. With trepidation I would open books thinking “is this it?” Yet the words did not resonate. Casually I was searching for voices of a Jewishness that might sound like my voice, but would more clearly articulate and announce words that I could not seem to form. With just a few keywords like socialism, lower East side, political and spiritual I would scan bookshelves. The books that I discovered tended to either be too religious in nature or lacking a critical perspective. Unaware of the many influences on my voice and the filtering accomplished by my ears, I enrolled in a course entitled “Jewish Women in the International Perspective.” However, before I signed up I had to make a visit to the university bookstore to see the books—maybe these would be the voices and words that I had been searching for. I scanned the titles and opened a few of the texts without any idea that indeed I had come upon the voices that I had been seeking.

From the readings, discussions, and writing in “Jewish Women in the International Perspective” I found that I had been searching for voices that could articulate a powerful secular Jewishness that challenged and struggled with oppression, political action, and narrow definitions of religious Judaism. I found voices that could not neatly describe secular Jewishness without also describing the many forces that came to

bear on how this Jewishness is practiced. This complexity implicated me and illuminated the filters that probably made it difficult for me to find these voices much sooner. The discomfort I occasionally felt when doing this reading was a result of internalized anti-Semitism, intermingling with my own sexism and heterosexism. I have come to realize that this secular Jewishness is intertwined with feminism and sexual orientation. As a reader of this work, then, my feelings about being a White, heterosexual, Jewish male are pulled to the surface. At times I have ignored these feelings; however, it has been fruitful when I have stuck with the feelings for this has opened up secular Jewishness in a substantially broader way to me.

The listening for voices, looking for words, and striving for an existence based on a particular vernacular is indicative of my efforts to look for help in interpreting and understanding my existence. There was something inside myself that required clarification and the voices, stories, and text of the other have acted as a hermeneutic to open up this secular Jewish part of me. This opening of the text of myself, which is described in Chapter One, was made possible partly by the ideas of hermeneutic phenomenology. Similarly, in Chapter Two where I put forward my pre-understandings—my “horizon of already granted meanings and intentions” (Palmer, 1969, p. 24)—was enhanced by the philosophy of interpreting our existence that is hermeneutic phenomenology. For hermeneutic phenomenology did not provide the answers, but provided a way for me to be open or available to the text of others and myself. Hermeneutic phenomenology challenged me to let the way of being-in-the-world revealed in the texts of others be shown within their context. It also allowed new

questions to come to the surface instead of zeroing in on false answers and eschewing deeper meaning.

What is hermeneutic phenomenology? How have I used such a philosophy as a mode of inquiry to undergird this study? Precisely, what were the methods of the current study? Those are the questions at hand in this chapter.

Opening the eyes of the reader to the phenomenon of becoming a secular Jew required a philosophical framework and research methodology that was able to explore the essence of such a phenomenon. This approach must ultimately allow a seemingly unnoticed phenomenon to show itself not constrained by the pre-understandings elaborated in Chapter Two. This mode of inquiry must be open to the multiple truths and wicked questions of secular Jewishness. Hermeneutic phenomenology was the chosen methodology because it challenged me to suspend or bracket my previous experience with this phenomenon, expand my taken for granted horizons and reveal the experience of being a secular Jewish college student as it is lived.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Martin Heidegger's formal conception of phenomenology (Dreyfus, 1991) in his highly influential book (Krell, 1977) *Being and Time* is "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself" (Heidegger, 1977a, p. 81). While reading and re-reading this confusing quote an image of what such a conception might mean slowly develops. Phenomenology seems to be about something appearing as it naturally is, but within its context. Put another way: Phenomenology is apparently about seeing something for what it is. However, what is this "something"? Does it not always appear naturally? According to Heidegger (1977a) the "something" is the phenomenon.

The word phenomenon, derived from the Greek expression “phainomenon” which originates in the Greek verb “phainesthai,” means “what shows itself, the self showing, the manifest” (Heidegger, 1977a, p. 73). Phenomena are what are visible. They are the “coming to presence” (Krell, 1977, p. 32). Phenomena are at times highly visible while are at other times an indicator of something not visible or concealed. Heidegger (1977a) provided the example of symptoms of an illness. From the visible symptoms, we can infer or interpret the type of illness. The illness is making itself known, but not showing itself (Heidegger, 1977a). Because of our taken-for-granted approach to the world phenomena may be physically visible to us, but unrecognizable because we are too busy coping with getting through our days to reflect on the meaning structures of our lifeworld. So phenomena are covered over, either forgotten about, distorted in their present meaning, or waiting to be discovered (Heidegger, 1977a).

Phenomenology is directed toward explicating the roles of individuals, bringing to light ways of being, and surfacing hidden everyday concerns. These roles, ways of being, and concerns, according to Heideggerian phenomenology, are an interpretation of the Being of human beings. The actions of human beings are interpretations of the essence of humans as humans, and phenomenology is the study of those essences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). So from humans’ habitual, unreflected actions there is some flavor of our essence—our Being of beings. Phenomenology is a way of being which allows essences to be revealed. Essences are the Beings of beings. Heidegger differentiates between Beings with a capital “B” which refers to essences and beings with a small “b” which refer to human beings as we are in the world. Phenomenology is the human science of

unveiling Being; of making the implicit explicit, the ordinary extraordinary, and the covered uncovered (Heidegger, 1977a; van Manen, 1990).

Hermeneutic phenomenology then is a combination of the interpretation of hermeneutics with the illumination of everyday taken-for-granted revealed by phenomenology. While phenomenology is about letting essences rise to the surface, hermeneutics is about how our existence is actually an on-going interpretive act. Existence, from Heidegger's perspective, means to be a self-interpreting being (Palmer, 1969). Phenomenology uncovers how wide awake human beings are to our existence. Dreyfus (1991) suggested that Heidegger believed that human existence is not dependent on being conscious but actually the reverse. So humans exist but this does not guarantee an awareness of our existence.

From the time you wake in the morning until you sink into sleep, you are "interpreting." On waking you glance at the bedside clock and interpret its meaning: you recall what day it is, and in grasping the meaning of the day you are already primordially recalling to yourself the way you are placed in the world and your plans for the future... (Palmer, 1969, p. 8)

Hermeneutics joined with phenomenology is the study of essences through interpretation of our everyday way of being-in-the-world. According to van Manen (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology is the study and interpretation of human phenomena by getting at what is most essential to being. Hermeneutic phenomenology aims to illustrate the meanings we make as we live in our lifeworld. Phenomenological research is ultimately committed to illuminate the meaning structures that are preventing us from being fully human (van Manen, 1990).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is an approach to recall ways of being human. It attempts to recover the authentic that becomes buried, forgotten, and distorted as part of living (Caputo, 1987; Dreyfus, 1991). By returning to the world before we had developed meaning structures to explain our experience humanity is rediscovered (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). However, we are never able to contain the entire essence in our thought—this

reduction is too large (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). “To do hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal” (van Manen, 1990, p. 18). Being, by its nature, is not only too large to be absorbed, but it seeks concealment through its everyday practices. Nonetheless, unearthing Being holds the only promise for being more human.

Being and Dasein

So, what is Being? Being is the nature or essence of a phenomenon. “Being is not a substance, a process, an event, or anything that we normally come across; rather it is a fundamental aspect of entities...” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. xi). The tension of Being is that you are not just Being you must work on being Being (van Manen, 1990). This work on being Being is about transcending possibility by moving toward authentic Being or being one’s self. Phenomenology then is concerned with “what sort of beings we are and how our being is bound up with the intelligibility of the world” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 3). Being is the essence of something in the world that is described through the word Dasein.

“The being which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its Being we formulate terminologically as Dasein” (Heidegger, 1977a, pp. 47-48). Dasein is defined as being-there or the human way of being (Clark, 1992; Dreyfus, 1991; Richardson, 1986). Dasein is “the kind of being that is open to Being” (Krell, 1977, p. 32). “There are two ways of being. Being-human which Heidegger calls Dasein, and nonhuman being” (Dreyfus, 1991, p. xi). “Dasein...refers to that entity or aspect of our humanness which is capable of wondering about its own existence and inquiring into its own Being” (van Manen, 1990, p. 176). Hermeneutic

phenomenology is not ultimately concerned with Dasein, but with Dasein's way of being and aims to illuminate human existence or being-in-the-world (Dreyfus, 1991; Palmer, 1969). Because of human beings' groundless or bottomless nature we fill up our world with constructions to make the world make sense. When humans inquire into the meaning of our daily practices—why we do what we do—our hidden constructions become visible. When we ask questions about our taken-for-granted activities we are inquiring into our Being. When secular Jews disclose their ordinary, everyday way of coping or being-in-the-world, without pre-determining the meaning of these actions, this will elicit the meaning structures of secular Jewish Being.

Jewish Identity and Jewish Being

To be in the world of students who are secular Jews I had to locate Jewish students who identified themselves as secular. Yet identifying as a secular Jew and secular Jewish being are not the same thing. That is, to study secular Jewish identity is categorically different from studying the phenomenon of secular Jewish being. Arminio (1994) made a similar distinction in her phenomenological study of White racial Being. While the needs of this study require that I ask students to self-identify as secular Jews, it is noted here that identity is not confused with Being. Identity exists within the tension of Being (Arminio, 1994). Identity development is an individual process where we come to terms with the pieces that are identified by others which make up ourselves (Arminio, 1994; Sarup, 1996). Sarup (1996) submitted:

Identity is a construction, a consequence of a process of interaction between people, institutions and practices and that, because the range of human behaviour is so wide, groups' maintain boundaries to limit the type of behaviour within a defined cultural territory. (p. 11)

Kierkegaard described identity as a self-definition of the current commitments of an individual (Dreyfus, 1991). For me those commitments are, for instance, being White, male, middle-class, Jewish and heterosexual. In the previous chapter I discussed my commitment to my gender. Similarly, when I began to see myself as a member of the White race, I was able to ponder how race played a factor in my desires, relationships, feelings, and past successes and failures. According to Kierkegaard, as these commitments change so does one's identity (Dreyfus, 1991). Although I had a commitment to my Whiteness before I was even aware of it, I questioned that commitment when I became aware of it. Helms (1993) defined racial identity as a sense of "group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular group" (p. 3). So my racial identity changed when I became aware of it. I began to question whether the boundaries of Whiteness were ethical. I grew uncomfortable with being committed to a racial group that unfairly accorded me privileges not available to other racial groups. As Sarup (1996) asserted "Identity is to do not with being but with becoming" (p. 6). The more I grapple with my racial identity the more I seek ways to become more human.

This was not a study then of commitment to Jewishness or the degree of Jewish identity. Studies of this nature tend to equate Jewish identity with commitment to religious Jewish values (e.g., Amyot & Sigelman, 1996). However, this was a study that examined the experience of making sense of one's Jewish identity. It engaged with students who were trying to make sense of who they were and what they were becoming as secular Jews. In Arminio's (1994) study of White graduate students attempting to make sense of having a White identity she found that: "For sojourners along the journey

of White racial Being, this notion of possibility brings hope in that constructed meaning can be opened up to allow for new meaning, authentic meaning” (p. 71). When the sojourners could see past the commitments and boundaries of their identity, they could seek being more human. In the current study, the hermeneutic phenomenological mode of inquiry acted as a conduit for students who identified as secular Jews to discuss what it is like to experience this identification. This method emphasized listening to and interpreting the stories of how students did and did not experience being a secular Jew on a day-to-day basis. By paying careful attention to the words students used to describe their frustrations, joys, and disappointments as well as their moral dilemmas, struggles to be in community, and challenges to act, this method acted as a means to authentically reveal the experience of becoming a secular Jew.

How did I experience the essence of becoming a secular Jewish college student? Hermeneutic phenomenology is a method of deconstruction (Lyotard, 1988/1990; Schürmann, 1990) that eschews dogmatic philosophy. “Deconstruction interrupts, throws out of gear, the derivations between first philosophy and practical philosophy” (Schürmann, 1990, p. 1). That is, hermeneutic phenomenology is a kind of ontology—a study of beings—that problematizes a Cartesian or dualistic way of thinking. By not resting on false dualisms that separate the mind from the body and the knower from the known, hermeneutic phenomenology bears the words and experience of participants in such a way that undermines traditional dogmatic or established beliefs. This undermining is akin to the work of Spinoza in the seventeenth century and to the wicked questioning of today’s secular Jews. Similar to the way Spinoza’s questioning of dogmatic Judaism and his philosophy of ethics (Runes, 1995) opened up new ways of living, hermeneutic

phenomenology pays attention to human's concrete reality. Freire's (1994) description of speaking as an educator to Brazilian laborers provides a helpful metaphor to understand the power and challenge of listening to an-others' concrete reality. After Freire lectured on Piaget to the group one of the workers confronted Freire for not understanding the world of the people he was speaking with. Freire described his frustration following the meeting:

"I thought I'd been so clear," I said. "I don't think they understood me."
"Could it have been you, Paulo, who didn't understand them? Elza asked, and she went on: "I think they got the main point of your talk. The worker made that clear in what he said. They understood you, but they needed to have you understand them. That's the question." (Freire, 1994, pp. 26-27)

Hermeneutic phenomenology pulls forward the concrete realities of humans to create multiple paths for humans to live multiple truths. By having conversations about what the lifeworld or way of being-in-the-world was like for secular Jewish college students, the essence of secular Jewishness was revealed.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research

Because phenomenon in the phenomenological understanding is always just what constitutes Being, and furthermore because Being is always the Being of beings, we must first of all bring beings themselves forward in the right way if we are to have any prospect of exposing Being. (Heidegger, 1977a, p. 84)

One of the certain challenges of employing a hermeneutic phenomenological method is that it must be done correctly to authentically bring the phenomenon forward. However, the correct way of doing hermeneutic phenomenology is not always clear. For instance, in van Manen's (1990) discussion of the procedures, techniques and methods of human science research he paraphrased Gadamer (1989): "It has been said that the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method!" (van Manen, 1990, pp. 29-30). While this absence of a strict method may be interpreted as a less

rigorous research enterprise, in actuality this lacking in a “predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques, and concepts” (van Manen, 1990, p. 29) is indicative of the way of hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology is bigger than a set of rules or procedures; it is an approach, an orientation, and an attitude taken to phenomenon. The practice of hermeneutic phenomenology requires a certain comportment or manner of being. Heidegger suggested that because hermeneutic phenomenology is about discovering how people make meaning in their existence a preset list of questions or procedures would keep the phenomenon from surfacing (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology is a rigorous and demanding approach because the researcher must attempt to be phenomenological. To be phenomenological means letting the phenomenon largely determine how to proceed (van Manen, 1990).

Dwelling in the Existence of an Other

Whereas traditional, positivistic research requires the researcher to actively pursue answers through directive techniques, hermeneutic phenomenological research implores the researcher to be pointing toward the phenomenon so she or he will be drawn in (Heidegger, 1977b). The example of the cabinetmaker’s apprentice provided by Heidegger (1977b) is a helpful metaphor. The apprentice is not only learning how to use the tools, or how to build certain forms. The cabinetmaker to be must “respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within the wood—to wood as it enters into man’s [sic] dwelling with all the hidden richness of its essence” (p. 379). Similarly the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher must be drawn into the phenomenon in a way that he or she dwells in it. To dwell in a phenomenon is a rigorous calling demanding a different type of thinking than traditional scientific research. This

thinking is “less exact but no less strict” (Heidegger, 1977b, p. 367). Heidegger (1977b) described it as an “elusive sort of thinking, whose object steadily withdraws, and which can be of consequence only if it pays heed to its own movement and direction” (p. 367). The thinking of hermeneutic phenomenological research must move beyond describing the experience of others or the researcher’s reaction to witnessing the experience of others. Hermeneutic phenomenological research is difficult and unique because it exacts a thinking that enters the lifeworld of the individuals experiencing the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

Hermeneutic phenomenology may seem abstract due its ontological nature—its concern with meanings people make of their existence. Lacking specific steps and procedures, this method might appear less relevant than other forms of research. Yet when drawn in to hermeneutic phenomenology I have come to realize that it is anything but abstract or irrelevant. This method is concrete in that it concerns itself with the way individuals are in the world. Furthermore the manner necessary to dwell in the existence of an-other requires a palpable way of being. Van Manen (1990) asserted that research oriented to the lifeworld of another means being involved in the lived space, body, time and relation of oneself and another. Hermeneutic phenomenological research reflects a concrete way of being to bring a phenomenon forward.

Questions Point the Way

Gadamer (1960/1989) asserted that questions are what allow the researcher to be open to the phenomenon. Gadamer (1960/1989) asserted that “The path to all knowledge leads through the question” (p. 365). As is discussed below, questions are critical to the experience of being in conversation with the participants in my study. To be open to my

participants and ensure that I stayed pointed to the phenomenon of secular Jewishness required that I lived the questions of this study (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). To live the questions of this study required posing phenomenological questions to myself.

To ensure that I was pointing toward the phenomenon I used the following questions at occasional outlooks along this research journey: Have I suspended my pre-understandings so I am fully available to the phenomenon? Am I engaging in ontological listening (Levin, 1989)? Beyond hearing the words of the other, have I been tuned into the “consonances and dissonances, echoes and resonances, tones and undercurrents of meaning, of sense, of feeling, communicated only through the listening-space around language and between language, or by it, but not in it” (Levin, 1989, p. 195)? Have I remained pointed toward the phenomenon while sharing bracketed personal stories, texts, poetry and other means to draw out the Being of an-other? Have I maintained a hermeneutic and phenomenological orientation to the text of the other?

These questions guided me in my attempts to stay pointed toward the phenomenon. Based on the way of hermeneutic phenomenology, I also developed a plan of action (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002) that would ideally help me dwell in the phenomenon of secular Jewishness. This plan provided an approach allowing me to maintain a phenomenological stance as I navigated my way through the ambiguity of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Journeying Into Secular Jewish Being

Although hermeneutic phenomenology cannot be simplified to a method of collecting texts, this methodology does suggest approaches that will reveal the concrete reality of students, make meaning of the texts of others and finally bring forward

recommendations for improving the lives of others (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) posited six interrelated methodological themes epitomizing the practice of hermeneutic phenomenology. While this study is guided by all six themes, three were particularly helpful as I put together my map for the research journey:

1. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
2. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
3. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. (van Manen, 1990, p. 30)

Furthermore, Arminio and Hultgren (2002) brought to light that studies focused on meaning making, such as the this one, are judged by their “goodness.” The authors posed six dimensions of research goodness that research studies must embody and explicate. Included among these six are the following:

1. Researchers must be mindful of the power they display in representing the voices of their participants....
2. It is through the interpretation process and its presentation that new insight is gained....
3. It is not for the sake of research that we embark upon this work, but rather to improve the lives of others. (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002, p. 450)

The outline below for the journey into secular Jewish Being is based on van Manen (1990) and Arminio and Hultgren’s (2002) recommendations to dwell in and interpret the words of my participants by writing and re-writing about the experience to eventually reveal themes and recommendations for practice. The process of gathering participants, entering into conversations, interpreting the text of my participants, writing and re-writing, and making recommendations for practice are detailed below.

Identifying Co-Travelers

Through various means I attempted to locate college students who identified as secular Jews. Using a snowball sampling approach (Patton, 1990) I made contact with administrators, faculty members and students at a mid-size public university in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia who I thought might have contact with students that are or know identified secular Jews. This public university with approximately 15,000 students is located in a small city of 40,000 residents. Recent estimates put the Jewish population at the university at approximately 400 students (M. S. Goldberger, personal communication, January 29, 1999).

It was my intention to select six or seven students to participate in the current study and meet with each student a total of approximately five hours over a two-month period in an attempt to adequately reveal the phenomenon. Recent phenomenological studies with college students or recent graduates successfully uncovered phenomena using a similar number of participants and conversations (Arminio, 1994; Rice, 1996).

Through conversations with and emails to approximately 25 administrators and faculty, as well as 150 students I was directed to students who might consider themselves secular Jews (Appendix A). I sent an electronic mail to nominated students inviting them to consider participating in the study (Appendix B). In the email inviting participation I included my phone number, email address and an attached interest form. The form, adapted from Rice's (1996) form, allowed students to express their interest in the study (Appendix C). On the attachment I requested that students indicate their desire to participate, secular Jewish status (according to the students' self identification), gender, age, and available times for meeting. This information was used to select a diverse group

of students on as many dimensions of identity as possible. If I did not hear back from the nominated student within a week or did not receive enough information on the students' correspondence I sent an email to elicit additional information.

It is important to note that I had met two students prior to the beginning of my study. Jordan was a student employee in the office where I am employed. I had met Jordan on several occasions, but was not his supervisor. Jordan's supervisor, who was aware of my study, referred me to Jordan. I met Jenn on an "Alternative Spring Break" where twelve students participated in Hurricane relief and I served as faculty/staff "learning partner." On the return trip from North Carolina I mentioned this study to Jenn. Jenn described herself as a secular Jew and expressed interest in participating in the study. I followed the same procedures described below with Jordan and Jenn as I did with the other participants.

When considering potential co-travelers it was important to not define secular Jewishness too narrowly. However, it was also vital that individuals who would assist me in revealing the phenomenon identified as secular Jews in a cultural way. As described in the previous chapter, defining secular Jewishness is fraught with difficulties. Nonetheless, it was important that students who were interested in entering into dialogue had some connection to being secular and Jewish in self-identified ways. As I supposed in my pre-understandings, being a secular Jew is not a static identity. Instead I suspected that individuals who identified as secular Jews would be engaged in an on-going struggle to find language to articulate their experience and locate actions consistent with such an identification. I needed to create a space for the diversity of Jews that may come forward to be in this study. However, I also needed to establish realistic boundaries around the

idea of Jewishness and secular Jewishness to increase the likelihood that I would reveal the essence of becoming a secular Jew. Therefore I limited participation in the study to students who indicated that they were raised “Jewishly” by one or more Jewish parents. I allowed students to self-define the meaning of being raised “Jewishly.” When selecting students I attempted to maintain my orientation to the phenomenon while being open to the variety of ways secular Jewishness may manifest itself.

Twelve students, of whom seven were chosen, expressed interest in participating in the study. I did not select five students to participate. Some students indicated on the interest form that they were religious Jews. This made them poor candidates for this study. Some students expressed interest too late. Finally, more women students expressed interest than I could accommodate in my attempts to achieve a relatively gender balanced group of participants. When I selected women students I kept in mind my desire to select as diverse a group as possible in hopes of bringing forward a variety of rich voices and experiences. Participants completed a Participant Consent Form (Appendix D) to alert them to the risks and benefits of participating in the study as well as the goals of the study.

The seven participants are introduced in Chapter Four. However, it is noteworthy that of the five women and two men I entered into conversations with, all seven were White and six students identified as heterosexual. After I completed my conversations with these seven students I determined that I achieved redundancy. There is not an ideal number of participants with phenomenological research. Instead, redundancy implies that I have dwelled in the narratives of my participants and have uncovered a quality and depth that will make a deeper understanding of the phenomenon possible (Jones, 2002).

Although more participants would have certainly added even greater depth, these seven students provided rich narratives with ample text to develop intricate and compelling themes.

Due to the demands of my full-time position I was not able to enter into conversations with all my participants during the same semester. The demands of transcribing each conversation and returning the transcription in a timely manner required me to only meet with two or three students a semester.

I referred to the students who participated in the study as co-travelers because they were largely responsible for the insights and questions produced. Each student not only invested substantial time and energy in the project, but they invested themselves in bringing the phenomenon to the surface. Without the efforts of the co-travelers I would not have been able to have more than a series of pre-suppositions and understandings. Yet qualitative researchers “are in a precarious position for they are always in danger of using others to build the world in their own image” (Goodson & Walker, 1995, p. 190). Using the term co-travelers was another way to ensure that I did not exploit the students, but maintained my orientation to the question.

Entering into Conversations

Discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the question. (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 363)

My mother has always told me about my Talmudist great-grand-fathers: I have imaginary images of these old men who spent their nocturnal life studying the Talmud. I see them—there are photographs—I see these old men with their skullcaps, an enormous book before them that they have studied all their life because one can neither learn it nor know it, one can only read it, study it and interpret it....I must be a Talmudist of ‘reality’! I have the impression I am before an infinite, but unusual book: in the Talmud the words are written; in my book the words are not there. It is by dint of contemplating and listening that I see words

appear.... And it is in listening that I come to see. (Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, pp. 56-57)

Dialogue in itself is a major stepping-stone to being more human and therefore a way to reveal our essences. I engaged in dialogue with each co-traveler with the hope that our conversations would slowly unveil the essence of becoming a secular Jew. Although this hope guided me in our conversations, I attempted to avoid putting the hope in the forefront of my mind. Instead of primarily focusing on the ends, I attempted to dwell within the means of explicating everyday experience. “The object of the conversation is what both want to understand, and it is by reference to this object that they reach a mutual understanding. The joint object, not the partners, conducts the conversation” (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 209). The phenomenon guided our conversation rather than the pursuit of conclusions. Conversations were not interviews (van Manen, 1990). I did not pepper the participants with questions in hopes of finding the answer. Instead, through conversations, I attempted to open up the question of “What is it like to be a secular Jew?” Because being Jewish is connected with so many other aspects of being it was essential that I elicit concrete experiences of secular Jewishness. As van Manen (1990) warned individuals engaged in phenomenological research: “Be constantly mindful of one’s original question and...steadfastly oriented to the lived experience that makes it possible to ask the ‘what is it like’ question in the first place” (p. 42).

Gadamer (1960/1989) asserted that hermeneutic inquiry is dialectical and “has the structure of a question” (p. 362). It is dialectical because the person must express an openness to experience alterity—difference. This openness allows the questioner to experience her or his limits and find out what she or he does not know (Gadamer, 1960/1989). The openness initiates the dialectical process and questions maintain the

dialectical process. Gadamer and Heidegger (1977a) have both insisted on the difficulty of asking questions. Presumably, asking questions would be preferable to coming up with answers. However, as Gadamer (1960/1989) stated “In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know” (p. 363). Questions then are an instrumental part of the phenomenological conversation because they open up the questioner to the unknown.

Weinsheimer (1985) asserted in his interpretation of Gadamer’s (1960/1989) *Truth and Method* that “Genuine questions, like genuine doubts, occur to us. They happen to us and are not something we do” (p. 208). Questions are at the core of conversation and ultimately at the core of knowing. Yet what are genuine questions? According to Weinsheimer (1985) genuine questions open up the self and the phenomenon. In contrast, a question that does not reveal the essence “does not reach the state of openness but precludes reaching it by retaining false presuppositions” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 364). Genuine questions are not inspired by closure; rather the answers lead to new questions and closer proximity to the phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) presented the challenge of phenomenological questioning:

To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being. Even minor phenomenological research projects require that we not simply raise a question and possibly soon drop it again, but rather that we “live” this question, that we “become” this question...I can only genuinely ask the question...if I am indeed animated by this question in the very life I live. (p. 43)

Becoming the question of what is it like to be a secular Jew was perhaps the most challenging portion of this project. I discuss this challenge more in Chapter Five; however, it is worth noting here that the challenge of doing phenomenology is not the lack of specific or concrete methods, but the difficulty in maintaining a hermeneutic and

phenomenological orientation when my tendency is focus on ends not means.

Nonetheless, there were approaches that were part of my plan that attempted to help me genuinely ask the question: “what is it like to become a secular Jew?”

Conversations were conducted in my office on campus which is part of a suite of offices, but ensured privacy. Conversations began with the question “What has it been like to become a secular Jew?” I used this question as a jumping off point. This question could then lead in hundreds of different directions. These various directions were all appropriate as long as I lived my orienting question: “What is the essence of Jewish college students becoming secular?” Living the question meant not having an answer already in mind and waiting to see if it was correct. Rather the stories, incidents, and memories of co-travelers revealed the essence through concrete, untheorized lived experience. It was then that I was able to make the phenomenon intelligible.

The conversations evolved differently with each individual, and I attempted to let the phenomenon emerge on its own. There were occasional questions such as: “What has it been like to be a secular Jew in your family?” or “Where might you turn when you are seeking further understanding or support?” that were selected to elicit specific experiences and language that may not be revealed from the first question. Similar questions were helpful to start a conversation or disclose the phenomenon in a new way. Questions of this nature are listed in Appendix E.

I asked co-travelers to answer the following question on the interest form: “Do you view yourself as a secular Jew? Please describe (use as much space as necessary).” Co-travelers described memories and experiences in their answers, which made for good

conversation starting points. Bringing forward memories is particularly important in hermeneutic phenomenological studies because memory is

Always at work: it is continually going on, often on several levels and in several ways at once...there are few moments in which we are not steeped in memory; and this immersion includes every step we take, each thought we think, each word we utter. (Casey, 1987, p. ix)

Creating a space where my co-travelers could explore memories while shedding pre-assigned meanings and representations, allowed them to return to “the things that matter” (Casey, 1987, p. xii). Remembering stories and experiences counteracts the forgetfulness that covers over Being (Casey, 1987; Lyotard, 1988/1990). To help my co-travelers uncover Jewish memories I asked them to bring in objects, free write about their Jewishness, or consider other representations or artifacts of their Jewishness. These approaches were intended to bring to light memories that may not have been available otherwise. As Casey (1987) indicated when “one memory channel to the past becomes closed off, others often open up—indeed, are often already on hand and fully operative” (p. xi). One co-traveler brought in a poem that represented the intersection of her Jewishness and lesbian identity; another brainstormed a list of all the ways that she was Jewish.

Steven Jones (personal communication, April 13, 1995) warned that being too directive in questioning and too assertive in maneuvering the conversation may make the researcher miss the phenomenon. One of the remarkable teachings of phenomenology is that the truth might be right in front of us, but our veiled nature makes it impossible to know it (Heidegger, 1977b; van Manen, 1990). Opening up to listen, asking genuine questions and sharing my dwelling in the phenomenon with co-travelers offered the possibility that the phenomenon would eventually show itself.

Gleanings from the Text

I had twenty-six conversations with co-travelers. At the conclusion of each conversation I prepared a transcript based on the tape of the conversation. Transcribing is an ordinary process in the sense that it simply requires typing the words from the tape onto the computer. However, transcribing is also an extraordinary and arduous process because it demands attention to the detail of every word that is said by the co-traveler. It was not unusual when double-checking my transcribing for me to discover where I had inserted my own word in the place of my co-travelers'. Staying open to the words of my co-travelers required care and alertness throughout the experience of doing phenomenology.

I did receive assistance with transcribing three conversations from three College Student Personnel Administration graduate students enrolled at the university where I conducted the research. I trained these students and they signed an agreement to protect the confidentiality of my co-travelers (Appendix F).

My focus after transcribing was on the accuracy to which I could interpret the text. Through interpretation of the text the meaning structure and lifeworld of the students was unveiled. I attempted a similar openness and orientation with the text as I did in my conversations with the co-travelers. By entering into a dialogue with the text I initiated another dialectical project. By dwelling in my question I entered the stories, memories, and thoughts of the students in a new way by paying attention to the language that the students used to relay their stories. "Ordinary language is in some sense a huge reservoir in which the incredible variety of richness of human experience is deposited" (van

Manen, 1990, p. 61). Returning to the original meaning of words provided an approach for uncovering the meaning structures which obscure Being.

Making Meaning

I interpreted the conversations with the hope of making the essence of secular Jewishness intelligible (van Manen, 1990). By mining meaning from the text it was my intent to produce themes that would capture the phenomenon or in van Manen's (1990) words give "shape to the shapeless" (p. 88). To make the meaning that would elicit themes, I needed to ensure that my interpretations were accurate renderings of the students' experiences. How would I know, though, if I had arrived at an accurate understanding or meaning? Gadamer (1960/1989) suggested that

a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. (p. 269)

I employed several approaches to ensure the meanings I made of the co-travelers' stories were accurate. After each conversation I produced and shared a transcript of our discussion. In the subsequent conversation I would check with my co-travelers to ensure the transcript accurately represented what they said. In addition, during our conversations I would share with my co-travelers the meanings I was making. Co-travelers would frequently clarify or even reject my interpretations. Following these meetings I would rethink these interpretations and attempt to be with the interpretations. At the conclusion of all my conversations I sent an overview of Chapter Four to my co-travelers to seek additional feedback. It was critical that my story made sense to the students who told it (Jones, 2002). One co-traveler, after reading the overview, expressed concerns that I did not accurately represent his experience. I kept this concern in mind in my rewritings of

Chapter Four. Two of my co-travelers were intrigued by the overview and asked for an entire draft of Chapter Four, although neither of these two students provided feedback on the entire chapter.

In an attempt to get additional perspective on the meanings I made of my co-travelers' narratives I also shared the overview of Chapter Four with two small groups. One group was made up of faculty and staff with an interest in student affairs and spirituality. Another was a group of Jewish students who had not participated in my study. Several of these students were secular and two were more religious in nature. I made substantial revisions to more clearly explicate my themes based on the questions posed from these two conversations.

According to Gadamer (1960/1989) interpretation begins with our pre-understandings and is replaced with more suitable understandings. But understanding in Heideggerian terms is an epistemological and ontological task, for we only come to know when we are able to experience being in the world differently. There is no way to insure that our interpretation of the experience of the other is entirely accurate because understanding cannot be simplified to such a degree. "‘Understanding’ ...is the projective sketch of the horizon within which things are set free to be the things which they are...Interpretation is the way understanding gets developed, filled in, articulated" (Caputo, 1987, p. 69). The best I could do was to be forthright and explicit in my pre-understandings and themes so that they are "deep enough and ample enough to encompass the matter at hand" (Caputo, 1987, p. 67).

Themes emerged from the interpretations. Van Manen (1990) noted that metaphorically themes are like "knots in the web of our experiences, around which

certain lived experience are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes” (p. 90). Themes can also be likened to narrow doorways providing a place to enter and dwell in the phenomenon. The understanding allowed by themes provides a way for the reader to care for the individuals experiencing the phenomenon and a place for the co-travelers to enter a new level of dialogue about the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

Themes, as van Manen described, are a way into the phenomenon. For the reader themes are a way to develop a vernacular of the phenomenon. Themes make the phenomenon accessible. For the author, creating themes provided a way to make meaning of hundreds of pages of transcripts. Uncovering themes required being with the text and then writing about what the text meant. Themes did not begin to emerge until a great deal of writing and re-writing fleshed them out. Initially I proposed dozens of tentative themes, but for those themes to be the meaningful “knot” that ties together experiences required ample writing. If the writing produced a text where the reader could enter the phenomenon then perhaps a theme had been revealed. At times I was certain I had come across a theme when I had compiled quotes that seemed to share a similar essence. Writing and re-writing were the integrity, though, that held the theme accountable. With writing some themes felt apart. Other themes split into two. Jones (2002) related the notion of theme to a story:

The story told must be one that is recognizable to those who told it; that emerges directly from their words, behaviors, and the contexts influencing the study; and that holds together as coherent, believable, and cogent to all who read it. (p. 468)

Was I able to create a cogent story using the words of my co-travelers? This was my way of knowing whether I had created themes.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing

Van Manen (1990) referred to phenomenological research as a poetizing activity. Just like a poem can evoke our covered over humanness so can phenomenology. Yet when a poem is stripped of its text and reduced to a mere summarizing word the poem is essentially powerless. Similarly, reducing a phenomenological study to a key finding or one significant result undermines the whole research enterprise. Hermeneutic phenomenology is intended to evoke what is human. The stories of co-investigators, the interpretations of these and other texts, and the use of language to draw out humanity are lost if reduced to an executive summary.

The writing is critical in hermeneutic phenomenology. Writing is another way to enter into dialogue. Oriented from the question and pointed toward Being human, the writing and the re-writing are intended to act like a file slowly stripping the layers covering over Being and revealing essences.

The Self as Researcher

An investigation into Being really ought to be able to inquire about the Being of any being—an elephant in the jungles of India or the chemical process of combustion on Mars—any being at all. Yet only one being consistently made itself available each time a question arose: “the human beings who pose the question.” (Krell, 1977, pp.18-19)

The meanings made from this study cannot be separated from how I make meaning (van Manen, 1990). It was through my pre-understandings and suppositions that I created the opening to initiate the current study. While I have been highly influenced in how I think about the phenomenon, I am ultimately responsible for the content of the study. An interpreter is a fundamental part of the interpretation. As an interpreter I have intended to respect and care for the text so that my pre-understandings enhance the text.

At the outset of this chapter I quoted Goodson and Walker's (1995) reflection on doing research "to fully be ourselves would be to sabotage the research enterprise" (p. 193). In hermeneutic phenomenological research the opposite is true. Maintaining a strong orientation to the question while letting myself surface created the opening to have conversations with my co-travelers.

Looking Back

At the end of any specific hermeneutical phenomenological research project there are always new questions that the researcher could not have conceived until he or she had sufficiently entered the phenomenon. It is at the end of this study where I offer new questions and discuss how I have changed as being a part of this study.

CHAPTER IV

REVEALING SECULAR JEWISH CANVASSES: THEMES FROM OUR JOURNEY

When one sees one's life as a thrown projection, the alienating sense of the self as the enduring presence of a particular type of substance is undermined, and the way is paved for grasping human existence as temporal, as a "happening" (Geschehen). And with this transformation of self-understanding comes the potential for a new insight into the temporality of Being in general. (Guignon, 1983, p. 136)

We need to be reminded that eyes which "see" may yet be blind.... Are we ourselves blind, to the degree that what we see through the eyes, and what we experience of their essential nature, is only their seeing in its everydayness? (Levin, 1988b, p. 121)

What is hermeneutic phenomenology? Although I have discussed the methodology and method of hermeneutic phenomenology in previous chapters I return to this question for this important juncture in the life of this study. As I delve into a description of my journey with co-travelers—my research on secular Jewishness with Jewish college students—that question of hermeneutic phenomenology continues to demand a response from me. Throughout my conversations with co-travelers and my interpretive work during and after the conversations the question of whether I was engaged in hermeneutic phenomenology has tugged at me. I have answered that question by asking more questions: How am I experiencing each co-traveler's experience? What possibilities are being revealed in the text of my conversations with co-travelers (van Manen, 1990)? What does my understanding of the texts of my co-travelers reveal about myself? Have I stayed oriented toward the phenomenon? Have I revealed the essence of the phenomenon of what it means to be a secular Jew? Have I been present with my co-travelers in a way that I could hear their essences and not simply my own resonance?

I discovered that to do hermeneutic phenomenology I needed to live these questions (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; van Manen, 1990). What *is* the experience of a Jewish college student becoming secular? The answers to this question and subsequent ones were constructed by my co-travelers and me as we engaged in the process of revealing the canvases of secular Jewish being.

The process of revealing secular Jewish being was more difficult than I had imagined. Living the question meant living with the ambiguity and uncertainty of learning to see. I naively entered this project with the belief that I would meet with co-travelers in rural Virginia who had a well-articulated secular Jewishness. On the contrary my co-travelers were able to describe the experience of being a Jewish college student, but the experience of being a secular Jew was so close to them and evolving, that it was difficult at times for my co-travelers to describe what it was like. My co-travelers' secular Jewishness was not differentiated from their being. As I stated in Chapter Two, differentiation is a shift in perspective from awareness of one's self as subject to awareness of one's self as an object. For example, during those times when my co-travelers' Jewishness was differentiated they were no longer "subjected" to their Jewishness. Instead it became the object of their awareness and scrutiny.

My co-travelers' secular Jewishness was evolving, undifferentiated and not fully understood. How did I dwell with my co-travelers to reveal this part of themselves? The defining challenge of this study then was whether I, in initiating a journey of revealing our covered over beings, could engage phenomenologically with the texts of my co-travelers for this uncovering to occur. We were engaged in a project of letting what *is*—

our covered over authentic Jewishness—come into view. How did I create an environment for authentic being to occur?

The first question I asked my co-travelers was: “What is it like to be a secular Jew?” or “How have you come to be a cultural Jew or a secular Jew?” After I asked the opening question the experience of being in conversation changed. By discussing the day-to-day, ordinary experience of being Jewish and becoming a secular Jew we were able to enter a phenomenological space focused on revealing lived experience. Attending to the ordinary eventually revealed something deeper and extraordinary. Slowly my co-travelers’ thrown projection was made visible. That is, our conversations revealed how our everyday way of being in the world is a way to cope with the primal sense of who we really are, our arbitrary nature, and our freedoms. The conversations revealed our ontological selves and our ontic selves in the sense that our discussions removed the wrapping over what it was like to be a Jewish college student seeking a secular Jewish experience.

My opening question made our Jewishness the centerpiece of the conversation. Placing our Jewishness on the table for us to see revealed what it was like to look at our Jewishness as well as what it felt like to have others see our Jewishness. Our conversations also revealed what it was like to see as a Jew. One of my co-travelers, Jenn, described how being Jewish influenced her seeing: “It’s also kind of how I perceive the world. You know? I think you can see it through a different set of eyes, like I think I see it through Jewish eyes, you know?” Jenn’s way of being in the world is rooted in her Jewishness. So Jenn’s remark suggested that her way of comprehending the world is intertwined with her understanding of what it means to be Jewish.

I experienced the lifeworld of seven Jewish college students: Al (short for Alison), Allison, Asya, Elana, Jenn, Jes, and Jordan. What follows, then, is the bringing forward of texts to unveil the experience of being a secular Jewish college student. It is an invitation to the reader to get behind the eyes of my co-travelers and me to see what it is like to see Jewish. This chapter delves into the themes from our conversations and concludes with a bridge to the implications of this work.

Each of my co-travelers viewed the world through Jewish eyes. Our conversations were dialogues about how and what they see. To see is defined as “to perceive with the eyes; look at” or “to perceive (things) mentally; understand” (Nichols, 2001, p. 1190). The act of seeing then is an act of perception. But, what is perception? Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that perception comes first before seeing: “It is first of all because we have present at this moment to us a perceptual field, a surface in contact with the world, a permanent rootedness in it, and because the world ceaselessly assails and beleaguers subjectivity as waves wash round a wreck on the shore” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 207). Perception is the continuous act of making and re-making sense of our surroundings. Whereas interpretation reveals the possibilities of a text (van Manen, 1990), perception reveals our rootedness in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). How we see and make sense is influenced by what we know. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) instructs: “All knowledge takes its place within the horizons opened up by perception” (p. 207).

Asya’s experience of trying to make sense of the experience of being Jewish illuminates the process of perceiving with Jewish eyes. Asya easily connected with her Russian heritage, but struggled to describe her Jewishness. One way that Asya stayed connected to her Russian background was volunteering to teach English to a local family

of recent Russian immigrants. During a visit with the family the mother described her feelings about Jews. Asya's reaction to this experience made her aware of her Jewish eyes:

She keeps saying that "Jews are very smart, Jews are very this, Jews in Russia were very..." She's generalizing so much. Being so stereotypical. It's kind of annoying. It's not like I'm going to tell her to stop and I wouldn't even to know how to articulate it in Russian anyways so I'm not going to even go there. So I kind of smile and nod and get on with the next lesson. She was, she was talking about God and religion and Jesus... I couldn't even understand most of it because it is religious talk. I can barely understand it in Russian, or in English, I don't even know how, but I just kind of smiled and nodded and like. Just when I am faced with issues of religion even maybe that: a generalized of religion or of like Israel... Then it becomes, it makes me very aware of like: "Whoa, my background is of Judaism, how does that relate? Or how should that shape my ideas? How should that, or how does it shape my thinking this way?" Maybe I'm being... you know like the devil's advocate type: You have an idea than you take the opposite stand just to make sure you're seeing it for what it is and you are looking at it from all sides kind of the thing.

When Asya used the expression "seeing it for what it is" to describe her desire to understand what it meant to be Jewish, she was attempting to interpret the phenomenon of being Jewish to reveal its essence and possibilities. Experiences like the one with the Russian family brought Asya's Jewishness to the foreground and she "saw" or perceived that there was more to this phenomenon than meets the eye. With her Jewishness brought forward Asya tried to make out the "shape" of being Jewish. Playing "devil's advocate" with her Jewishness, Asya used a form of argumentation to try to reveal the edges or boundaries of her Jewishness.

The experience of seeing, like Asya's experience above, is analogous to the experience of doing hermeneutic phenomenology. Phenomenology is the process of letting the essence of a phenomenon be seen for what it is, but phenomenology is also a process of revealing or uncovering. Seeing is an act of perceiving. However, humans are

not cameras and we do not simply take pictures of what is “there” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). We idiosyncratically view our surroundings and, as Heidegger instructed, a phenomenon can be occurring right in front of our eyes that we do not perceive. Seeing is an act of perception that occurs with varying degrees of consciousness and thoroughness. We can see, but do we make meaning from what we have seen? To see, then, is also about “coming to know” and understanding, hence the expression “I see what you are saying” or “I see how it is.” The expressions “We’ll see about that” and “let’s see” imply that seeing is about considering or thinking something over. Etymologically the word see has its origins in the Latin word *sequi* which means to follow or to come after (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). This illuminates the biggest challenge for my co-travelers: answering the question of what comes after acknowledging their secular Jewishness.

My conversations with these seven Jewish college students reveal a hidden meaning of what cannot be seen at first glance (Guignon, 1993). These students follow generations of Jews, yet my co-travelers struggled to see how to be Jewish. Ostensibly, they shared a sense of trying to reveal the gestalt—the pattern—of their secular Jewishness. Becoming a secular Jewish college student entailed a process of discerning the patterns that underscore the structures of their being. This kind of becoming required a new type and more authentic way of dwelling in the world that involved facing the structures of their existence (Vogel, 1994). My co-travelers attempted to make out a gestalt of their being so they could see the shape of their futures. “The *Gestalt* is a structural event in which a figure differentiates itself from a surrounding ground” (Levin, 1988a, p. 9). The process of differentiating involved perceiving and interpreting our

thrown projection. It was a process of seeing and not seeing as well as process of being seen and remaining unseen. It was a process of envisioning and lacking a vision.

This chapter explores what it was like for my co-travelers to attempt to reveal the figure or shape of one's secular Jewishness. Often my co-travelers felt they were not seen as Jews, let alone secular Jews. However, just when it seemed their Jewishness had begun to fade into the background they would be surprised, like Asya in the story above, when their Jewishness was drawn out by interactions with peers or anti-Semitic experiences. I devote this chapter to bringing forward the experience of following in the footsteps of generations of Jews, while simultaneously looking away and setting out in one's own direction. My co-travelers were trying to uncover a new way to be Jewish but struggled to see how to make their way and rarely saw other Jews on the path.

The taken-for-granted process of seeing is actually quite complicated. Although the bodily experience of all five senses is taken for granted, our postmodern culture prizes seeing over all other senses. In our society, seeing is privileged over hearing, tasting, touching and smelling through the Internet, television, movies, virtual reality, video games, as well as the intense need and desire to be seen (Gergen, 1991). Levin (1988a) asserted that within modern history and the discourse of metaphysics vision has been "elevated to the position of paradigm for knowledge and rationality" (p. 7). Yet the problem is not simply that seeing is valued over other senses; it is that our culture is centered on superficial seeing. As I stated above, the etymological root for seeing is *sequi*, which means "to follow" or "to come after." Inherent in seeing is a moral obligation to be compelled to act on what was seen. Our society though has reversed the meaning of seeing. We are overwhelmed with images and instead of acting we are

compelled to complacency. We have nearly lost the art of seeing. How do we internalize the meaning of an image? Can we pause and look? This was my ultimate struggle in conducting this study. Could I go deeper than superficial seeing? Could I dwell with the narratives of my co-travelers and truly see the essences of my co-travelers?

This project, then, was centered on reclaiming seeing and reclaiming our Jewish eyes. My co-travelers were attempting to see how they could be secular Jews; however, we could not seem to pinpoint secular Jewishness. Instead we moved along an unmarked path, questioning our background and envisioning a future of deeper spirituality. We could not see secular Jewishness because it cannot be seen without envisioning. Seeing is an act of perception—making sense of what is visible. Envisioning is imagining what can be. My co-travelers did not have guides and they rarely knew where to seek guidance, but they had the confidence bestowed upon them from their Jewish upbringing to believe that a deeper spirituality was possible.

After an introduction to my co-travelers I will examine what it was like for my co-travelers to try to see their Jewishness. Following this examination, I will describe what it was like for my co-travelers to see a world that seemed to be awash in Christianity. I then attempt to understand what it was like for my co-travelers to make sense of their secular Jewishness. Finally, I conclude with an exploration of what it was like for my co-travelers to attempt to envision a future—to see the unseen and gain new insight into the temporality of Being.

Who is Seeing? Introducing My Co-Travelers

I experienced the lifeworld of seven Jewish college students: Al (short for Alison), Allison, Asya, Elana, Jenn, Jes, and Jordan. My co-travelers and I explored what

it meant to live lives as Jews becoming secular. To have a context to understand and make sense of my co-travelers' stories and experiences, I have briefly introduced my co-travelers below.

Al grew up in a Northern Virginian household that observed many Jewish traditions. She was involved in Jewish youth organizations, attended a Jewish camp and visited Israel. Al and I met during the spring semester of her third year in college. She described her current feelings about being Jewish: "Right now I am going through a personal struggle with trying to re-identify with my Jewish identity that I strongly embraced in high school and have rejected a lot of it in college."

Allison and I met during her second semester in college. She described herself as a secular Jew who values her Jewishness highly and is "proud to say that I am part of such an amazing group of people... The whole idea of family 'togetherness' and a bond shared with other Jews is what's most sacred to me."

Asya was raised in south Florida where her family was not particularly active in a synagogue and Asya was not involved in Jewish youth organizations. Asya grew up in an environment where formal Jewish practices such as regular attendance at a synagogue were atypical. Asya described her Jewishness growing up: "It was there, but it wasn't." Asya easily connected with her Russian heritage, but struggled to see or make out her Jewishness. Asya wrote that being Jewish "is the only faith that I even have an inkling of... and since I was raised under this religious 'roof' I guess I would consider myself a Jew." Asya tried to see her Jewishness from all angles to make sense of it. Asya was completing her last semester of college when we met.

Elana and I met during her second year of college. Elana grew up in Brooklyn surrounded by a range of traditional rituals and cultural practices. Elana described a Jewishness rich in mysticism and symbolism that she did not always understand. Elana's Jewishness was a mix of religious elements from the Sephardic and Ashkenazi traditions as well as cultural elements similar to the practices of Israeli secular Jews.

Jenn's unique background positioned her to wonder about her Jewishness. Jenn's mother was raised in a Catholic family but became disenchanted with Catholicism. Before marrying Jenn's Jewish father, Jenn's mother converted to Judaism. Over the years Jenn's mother has become more involved in Judaism to the point where she now is an administrator at her synagogue. Jenn "attended temple regularly growing up, had a bat mitzvah and participated in all the Jewish holidays," but was nevertheless confronted by people who doubted whether she was an "authentic" Jew. Jenn was raised in Northern Virginia. Our conversations overlapped her second and third year in college.

Jes' journey to make meaning of his Jewishness has been hard and painful. However, Jes expressed hope that he had turned the corner on his previous substance abuse and could enter into a more healthy relationship with his Jewishness. He was excited to be living a secular or cultural Jewishness that embraced the past, but was also open to possibilities. Jes grew up in a rural area outside of Charlotte, North Carolina and his family attended a Lubavitch synagogue—a type of orthodox synagogue—until he was sixteen. Jes was attending college part-time during the semester we met.

Jordan seeks out difference to learn about himself. From literally traveling around the world to ensuring that he spent time with people different from himself in college, Jordan shared stories in which his experience with differences gave his Jewishness more

clarity. Jordan grew up on Long Island, New York and was very involved in Jewish youth organizations. He described himself as a “spiritual, somewhat religiously practicing Jew. I pray somewhat regularly to G-d, but also give appreciation to the sun and moon, stars, trees and nature.” Jordan was in his third year in college.

Canvases of Jewishness

My co-travelers struggled to describe their Jewishness. Where does it start? Where does it end? What is the foreground? What is the background? What is Jewishness and what is just being human? What is the pattern or gestalt of disparate experiences of Jewishness? These questions go to the heart of my co-travelers’ experience. Trying to determine the pattern of one’s Jewishness is like trying to uncover the patterns of an abstract painting. One can try to identify the parts of the overall structure, but sometimes they blend into the background or seem disconnected from the rest of the composition. My co-travelers’ attempts to see their Jewishness were like attempts to see just such an abstract painting. One can puzzle over an abstract painting and keep coming back to certain elements—the brush strokes, the splash of paint in the upper left-hand corner, the way certain colors are luminescent—but not make sense of the whole composition. What does the painting mean?

Our conversations were attempts to make meaning of the paintings of my co-travelers’ Jewishness. My co-travelers could see the colors, the brush strokes and at times even make out a gestalt. However, when it came to specifically seeing their secular Jewishness, my co-travelers were less able to identify that particular pattern. At times my co-travelers’ sense of their Jewish self remained hidden—covered over like an unfinished

painting in a private studio. On other occasions their Jewishness was proudly exhibited for others and themselves to see.

Elana used the metaphor of an artist painting a canvas to describe what it was like to discover the layers of her Jewishness and identity. Elana was enrolled in a philosophy course that challenged her to reflect on the way she made meaning. She was also reading the Oscar Wilde book, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and wondering why the people in that book “just seem so much more intelligent” than the people in her own life. Elana lamented that she and her friends were not substantially intellectually engaged, especially in comparison to the characters in the book. She went on to describe the differences in the way people in the book conversed compared to her own interactions: “Like I compare it to the people and the conversations I have here. And just like I’m talking about the weather. I’m talking about the new building they’re building and I don’t feel it has any effect on my life. These people seem to be talking about everything that affects their life.” Elana was excited about her attempts to examine her own thinking and lead a more meaningful existence. Elana became particularly animated when she discussed one passage from early in the book:

Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul. (Wilde, 1890/1998, p. 6)

Elana was amazed with how this quote made her view paintings differently. Is it possible to see a painting through the eyes of the painter? What does a painting reveal about the painter? Elana grappled with the idea that the essence of the painter could be interpreted through the canvas. The idea that there is more in a painting than just a picture

provided Elana with language to describe the sense that there was more to her, and to her surroundings, than what is first apparent. Elana described how she saw things differently:

I can see things a little bit different, a different type of perspective than what I did before and I feel smarter, like it makes me look at what I do that I have always taken for granted. I think I mentioned here a couple of times when I say: “oy vey.” No one knows, and I never realized I said it. And then when people are like: “Oh what are you saying?” I’m like: “oh because my grandmother and my grandfather speak Yiddish, it’s a Jewish thing.” And it is not strictly with Judaism, it’s different things that I do, my habits I never think to look at and I look at it and I never think to see how it affects other people.

Kegan (1982) suggested that humans are continually seeking a balance between what they are subject to and what is the object of their attention. Humans are repeatedly attempting to answer the question of what is themselves and what is their context or culture. Elana realized that it had not occurred to her to critically look at or see her embedded Jewishness. Yet Elana’s life was a complex portrait of Jewishness. To answer these questions of differentiation Elana emerged from her embeddedness in Jewishness and began to examine her Jewish canvas. As Elana was trying to make sense of her Jewish eyes—her way of seeing Jewish—she also was trying to figure out what her Jewish canvas looked like.

Metaphorically, my co-travelers and I were revealing and adding paints to our pictures of our Jewish essence—our Being of beings. Our conversations were attempts to make the canvas less embedded and more visible or differentiated. Ostensibly then, this chapter is dedicated to seeing the paintings through the eyes of the painters. Dasein, the human way of being, is future oriented in the sense that when humans take action we are making future commitments. Dreyfus (1994) explains that from a Heideggarian perspective human beings “are special kinds of beings in that their way of being

embodies an understanding of what it is to be” (pp. 14-15). Each of my co-travelers’ way of being resulted in a painting of what it means to be.

These paintings were not simply two-dimensional self-portraits, nor were my co-travelers the sole creators of these productions. Family members, culture, and traditions had contributed significant portions of the paintings. The paintings were also complex compositions that joined the abstract with the realistic. There were aspects that seemed finished and other parts, like secular elements, that were clearly works in progress. The unique environment of college, especially compared to home, made the patterns, brush strokes and colors of my co-travelers’ Jewish self-portraits more apparent. Experiences of being jolted out of an undifferentiated and unexamined Jewish life, like Elana’s, came up for all my participants. Through interactions with others my co-travelers would get a glimpse into their Jewishness—their canvases were revealed. Insights into what it meant to see the world through Jewish eyes were also revealed. What their Jewishness meant, that is, what the patterns of their Jewishness looked like, were difficult to describe though.

Part of the challenge for my co-travelers was that the college environment revealed a complex Jewishness with contrasting colors. In college, lacking a safe place to make sense of these contradictions, my co-travelers sometimes set aside their complicated portraits of Jewishness. The overwhelmingly Christian environment acted as an unrelenting press, however, and prevented my co-travelers from suspending their Jewishness.

Transparent Jewishness: “Something That You Have to Find”

Asking my co-travelers to see their Jewishness was much more difficult than I had anticipated. It was like wondering what it is like to see. If our vision is good or we have adequate corrective eyewear we see without pondering what this experience is like. Answering the question “what is it like to see?” may be difficult because one does not need to consider or understand the meaning of seeing to see and navigate one’s way. Similarly, my co-travelers’ Jewishness was so natural to them that it was hard for them to see. My co-travelers would attempt to respond to my direct questions about being Jewish, but often their responses would be like Allison’s:

Steve: It sounds like that it is hard to define.

Allison: It really is... Nothing is really coming.

Allison eventually shared stories of being a cultural Jew, but not without struggling. She went on to say: “I think that spirituality is something within yourself—something that you have to find.” Allison struggled to find the words to describe this something within her self. Al also struggled to describe what it was like to be a secular Jew. Near the end of our second conversation I tried to bring her back to her concrete experience since her tendency was to focus on her attitudes and beliefs. To get Al to describe her day-to-day experience of being Jewish I reminded her of the emphasis of the study and asked her what it is like to be culturally Jewish. Al had a one-word reply: “Me.”

Asking Al what it was like to be Jewish challenged her to compartmentalize her identity and describe her Jewishness independent of the rest of her being. Slowly, though, Al’s and Allison’s experience of being Jewish emerged through life stories and descriptions of the unique experience of being Jewish in college.

Heidegger suggested that it is “when things are temporarily unready-to-hand in this way that we catch a glimpse of the web of functional relations” (Guignon, 1993, p.12). The challenges of being Jewish in college increased my co-travelers’ awareness of their Jewishness. The web of functional relations was exposed by an inability to use the coping mechanisms from high school that allowed Jewishness to remain an invisible or covered over part of my co-travelers’ identity. Questions about Judaism existed before college; there were cracks in the religious foundation; however, the safety of home did not require that these fissures be resolved. For instance, Elana’s doubts, at the age of twelve, about religious practices and specifically her concern about publicly reciting prayers that she did not understand led her to not have a bat mitzvah. Elana’s questioning took place in an environment surrounded by traditionally religious Hasidic (also known as Hadisha) Jews. Despite this thoroughly religious environment questions arose:

My dad works in Borough Park where most of the Hadisha people are and like the men are dressed [in traditional garments] and the women and children. I don’t like how, I bet, I don’t know, I mean if you are comfortable with your life and that’s how you are brought up and that’s how you love it that’s great, that’s wonderful. But then if you are going to put me in that situation I don’t know, I wouldn’t agree with it... because I was brought up differently... Conversations with my father, readings, even sometimes Hebrew school or talking with my friends. You know like when you are in eighth grade or seventh grade and you are first questioning things, where I lived, I lived in Brooklyn where most of my friends were Jewish... We’d sit like during lunch we’d talk about it... I didn’t even go to Hebrew school, like I went for a little bit and then I was like: “I wasn’t even learning anything.” They just teach you how to read out of the bible, you are not understanding what you are reading. I was really, really frustrated with that and they’re preparing you for your bat mitzvah and I’m reading out of the torah, I’m like: “I don’t even know what I’m saying. What am I saying to these people? Like if I’m not understanding it then why say it and be bat mitzvahed?” So I didn’t have one.

What it’s like to not understand what you are saying? For Elana it meant she could not stand up in front of her community and speak words she did not understand. At

age twelve Elana's Jewishness reversed course and became an object of her attention. Her Jewish canvas was exposed. Until then there was no distinction between Elana and Elana as Jew. This experience illuminated a malleable Jewishness—a work in progress. For a time Elana's Jewishness had lost its transparent quality and was a distinguishable part of her identity. Despite this new awareness of her Jewish canvas and these new questions, Elana did not doubt the existence of her Jewishness. Although the stage was set for future questioning, Elana went on to practice many elements of religious Judaism. The culture of her family and surroundings allowed Elana to continue practicing religious Judaism and avoiding resolution on her deep down concerns about being Jewish. It was not until Elana experienced the unabashed freedom of college and began a relationship with a boyfriend who is not Jewish did Elana more fully face the web of functional relations.

In high school questions about Jewishness could more easily be resolved or set aside by the culture of family or Jewish involvements. My co-travelers' Jewishness was, for the most part, transparent or see-through. Jewish eyes were simply eyes. Canvases of what it meant to be Jewish were nearly finished portraits painted by others. Although college helped make these paintings visible, they could not be revealed simply by asking “what is it like to be Jewish?” Instead experiences of being Jewish needed to be drawn out and then my co-travelers and I could ponder the meanings of these experiences.

Paradoxical Canvases: “That Jewish Thing”

When some of my co-travelers caught a glimpse of their Jewish canvas they did not always know what to make of it. Asya's canvas, for instance, had the quality of emptiness or nothingness. Asya recalled the paradox of growing up Jewish: “It was there, but it wasn't.” This sense of invisible Jewishness was reinforced by the way Asya

remembers her mother's explanation of Judaism: "You're Jewish because you are not anything else." Asya found this explanation empty and described it as "being this blank canvas." Asya tried to look directly at her Jewishness and saw nothing. It is reminiscent of the way Gertrude Stein famously described the missing sense of character in Oakland, California, her hometown: "There is no there there." Asya did have Jewish experiences growing up; however, she did not know what those experiences meant or if the meaning was even of any importance. Asya and I came to refer to being Jewish as "that Jewish thing." This phrase describing an entity, or even a canvas, was equally dismissive. Definitions for the word "thing" range from "some object that is not or cannot be specifically designated" (Nichols, 2001, p. 1359) to "anything that is or may become an object of thought" (Nichols, 2001, p. 1359). For Asya, clearly both of these definitions describe her experience of making sense of the Jewish "thing." Sometimes Asya's Jewish canvas was blank, meaningless and of little worth; on other occasions the canvas was seemingly blank, but under closer scrutiny actually revealed a complex portrait. Asya summed up her experience of being Jewish: "It can be a thorn, but it also can be very pleasurable."

"The Jewish thing" for Al was also paradoxical. Although Al indicated that she grew up in a "traditional household" she also noted that: "We were conservative for a while. And then for a number of reasons... we switched to a reform congregation when I was in third grade... I don't know, we kind of faded in Judaism." Al's family "faded in Judaism"; however, Al maintained her Jewish connection with her Jewish involvements. "There were a lot of activities and I thought that was a good way to be Jewish without my parents forcing me to."

Al found comfort in being in predominantly Jewish environments; these experiences though also surfaced the contradictions of her identity. Al's description of this time in her life is laced with paradoxes: "I attended a reform camp, I loved the camp, I didn't like the people. Went to Israel the next summer. Had a blast. It was also at the time, especially at camp, when I was dealing with a lot of depression." She went on to say:

I hit my lowest the end of my sophomore year. Went to Israel after my sophomore year in high school. Went to Israel, came back, didn't do anything real Jewish the summer after my junior year. I guess I kind of liked not being a Jewish person. I had always been the token Jew in elementary school. But nobody really cared and attending such diverse middle schools and high schools you know it didn't really matter that, you know, I was any different. But I definitely felt different. It's still a Christian dominated world even though it was a very diverse area. And I kept very active in USY [United Synagogue Youth] until my senior year and I think that was based on a lot of the things that I didn't want to deal with, which is looking back on how depressed I had been in high school.

In high school Al experienced starkly dichotomous feelings within Jewish environments; she discovered comfort and solace but also experienced confusion and depression. Al reached the pinnacle of pain and frustration when she came out to her rabbi during the summer after her first year in college.

I stopped in to see the senior Rabbi and I was really struggling with a lot of things. My parents weren't really talking to me... And here's this Rabbi that I've known for eight—my mom planned his wedding—I mean this is, helped plan his wedding reception when he got re-married. Very close to the family and I said well, I couldn't even say it. I said they found out about my ex-girlfriend. And he was standing there, he was in his sixties, was holding some magazines, and he was just kind of flipping back and forth. And it dropped to the floor when I said that. And he got real nervous and he looked down and that fidget, you run your hands through your hair when you don't know what to do. And he said, "Well, that's hard for parents to deal with." And I am thinking to myself, you know they always tell you when you have problems to go to your clergyman... And you know my parents and I aren't getting along and my sister doesn't know what's going on. And my Rabbi can't even look me in the face. You know? And it's still really hard for me to deal with. It's the one part, as far as coming out, that I have not gotten over.

Al described this experience as “the last straw.” “I just felt completely torn away from religion.” Al could not view her Jewishness the same way after such a significant disappointment. Although coming out helped Al reveal her Jewish canvas, the overt silence from an important member of the religious community left a permanent mark on her canvas.

What is it like to be a painter of a canvas with unrecognizable features and seemingly irreconcilable elements? My co-travelers experienced the confusion brought by this question. Asya pondered what to do with a canvas that at first glance seemed devoid of meaning. Al questioned how she could embrace a painting that so thoroughly did not reflect her full self. It is not surprising then that the confusion and bewilderment generated by these canvases would lead my co-travelers to find ways to ignore them or set them aside.

Fading Jewishness: “Whoa, My Background is of Judaism!”

In college my co-travelers felt seen in ways they had not in high school. Their Jewishness made them visible to others and to *themselves*. In high school my co-travelers’ Jewishness was just “there.” In college, however, particularly when my co-travelers were misunderstood, ignored, or stereotyped, Jewishness became the object of their attention. These canvases of Jewishness, though, would fade from my co-travelers’ attention as other academic or social concerns would crop up. For instance, Al mentioned that it was hard being Jewish in college; however, it was not hard everyday. She suggested that it is “Only three or four times a year that I have to deal with it. Three or four days a year, I can’t imagine a Black student who has to deal with it every day or a Hispanic student. You know, come on.” While Al actually suggested that she thinks and

considers her Jewishness more than a few days a year, her statement does reflect the sense that the students I conversed with were able to put their Jewishness aside or suspend it as they went through their days. Whether it was experiences with students who were not Jewish or just living in a Christian-dominated environment, my co-travelers would then have experiences that would challenge them to claim their hidden Jewish canvases.

When the mother of the Russian family that Asya was tutoring began making generalizations about Jews, Asya became uncomfortable. She later realized that this experience with people who are not Jewish “makes me very aware of like: ‘whoa, my background is of Judaism, how does that relate? Or how should that shape my ideas? How should that, or how does it shape my thinking this way?’” Asya and my other co-travelers suggested that their Jewishness went into hiding only to be drawn out and problematized.

Jenn, who was employed as an aerobics instructor at the campus recreation center, told a story about the surprising experience of being confronted by another Jewish student for not observing the laws of Passover. Jenn’s co-worker insisted that when Jenn ate a brownie at work she was eating “chometz,” the Hebrew word for food inappropriate to consume during the eight days of Passover.

I was eating the brownies and I was like: “Do you want one?” and she looks at me like I was the devil and she’s like “You are evil.” And I was like: “Why?” And she’s like “Well.” She’s like “First of all the chometz.” And she’s like: “You shouldn’t be eating that.” And I was like: “Oh my god!” And she totally, like she didn’t yell at me, but she was just like: “Well, why aren’t you keeping like pesach or whatever?” ...It was like the weirdest thing because she was almost like scolding me. She says “don’t tempt me.” And all this stuff. And I was like: “what in the world?” I didn’t feel like a bad person... but it was just kind of weird. Like how other Jewish people, like maybe, if someone knew I was Jewish and they saw me like how other people view you.

Jenn was jolted out of an undifferentiated Jewishness. Although she had just returned from her family's Passover Seder, which she described as an immersion in cultural Jewishness, her life in college was often absent of Jewishness. Jenn, like my other co-travelers, could go through her days giving little thought to what it meant to be Jewish. Several of my co-travelers told stories of being surprised to meet other Jews on campus. This experience, then, was remarkable to Jenn not only because of the unusual occurrence of interacting with other Jews on campus, but that she was being scolded for her lack of Jewish practice. Jenn's hidden Jewish canvas had been taken to the "court of opinion," judged and found guilty.

Revealing Portraits: "It's Out in the Open That I'm Jewish"

The experience of my co-travelers was that they could go through their days as invisible Jews. They could exist and rarely reflect on their canvases of Jewishness. Their Jewishness would seemingly fade from their attention and dissolve into their being. Despite these hidden canvases, my co-travelers always had Jewish eyes. Regardless of whether they considered their eyes—their way of seeing—as Jewish, they carried with them the sense that they saw the world and were seen by the world differently. This sense of being different was reinforced by experiences in college.

My co-travelers received a clear message from the campus environment about the status of Jews. This notion was never spoken and my co-travelers never even articulated it to me. However, after reviewing all my conversations with co-travelers the message is unmistakably clear. The ignorance of peers to my co-travelers' Jewishness and what that Jewishness meant was a reflection of the values of the larger environment: Jews do not usually exist here.

Allison was introduced to this notion relatively early in her college career. As a first year student from a predominantly Jewish area, Allison described a discussion in her first semester writing class:

My teacher asked a question: “Have any of you experienced a culture shock so far?” And I raised my hand and I said: “Yes. Since I grew up in a large, mostly Jewish community it’s been a huge culture shock for me because there’s not many Jews here. It’s difficult sometimes, but—” People were really interested and they kept asking questions. So I kept answering questions. Some of the questions were like: “Do you believe in Jesus?” I was like: “No, because I’m Jewish.” They’re like “Oh, then what do you believe in?” So I said: “One God.” And they’re like: “That’s strange.” They just didn’t understand so I tried to explain it the best I could, but it’s hard to. I don’t know, people, I guess now that it’s out in the open that I’m Jewish, people look at me differently.

Allison perceived that her Jewish eyes were revealed. Her disclosure alerted the entire class—it was out in the open—that she was Jewish. Allison had inadvertently made her Jewishness “closed” when she arrived on campus and the effect of the class discussion was “to uncover, lay bare, or expose to view” (Nichols, 2001, p. 928) her Jewishness. What is it like to feel uncovered or exposed? Furthermore, what is it like to be exposed and then be put in the position to be the spokesperson for a culture or group?

Allison had the experience of revealing her Jewishness in a setting where Jewishness was not the norm. The class found this unique trait interesting and perhaps perplexing. Allison said that “It was different, it was something I never experienced before... It felt good. At least they were interested. I guess it was uncomfortable because of the ignorance level. They just did not know.” Allison experienced a very different reaction from her friends from home who were not Jewish compared to her non-Jewish friends in college. “The few friends—the friends I had that weren’t Jewish—still knew about it because all their friends were Jewish. You know? So. Kind of strange.”

Canvases on Display: "What Does the Jewish Community Think?"

Compounding the "strangeness" of being open about her Jewishness Allison discovered that she was being put in the position of being a Jewish spokesperson. Allison struggled to respond to the questions. For instance, "This one girl was asking all these questions I could not answer. I was like: 'I'm not very religious so I don't know all the answers.' I was like: 'I wish I could help you, but I just don't know.'" Jenn had a similar response to Allison's when she considered what it is like to try to be a Jewish spokesperson: "It's really weird. People, like, ask me questions about it often. I'm just like: 'whoa.' I never know the answer. I'm like: 'I don't know.' I'm like: 'I can't help you, really.'"

Both Allison and Jenn described experiences where they wanted to ease the discomfort of others who did not know. They were in the position to provide answers, but felt like they did not know. The verb "to know" has several definitions including "to perceive or understand as a fact or truth; apprehend clearly and with certainty" (Nichols, 2001, p. 735). Allison and Jenn felt uncertain about the facts and truths of Judaism and were even wondering if they could critique those facts and truths. Their desire to help, then, was undermined by their insecurity about Judaism. As long as "knowing" Judaism was defined as having the facts and ultimate truths then Allison and Jenn were going to feel unknowledgeable.

In contrast Al was used to being asked to be the Jewish spokesperson, but tired of having to represent an infinite number of contrasting opinions. Furthermore, the challenge of being a Jewish spokesperson was exacerbated by being asked to speak for all gays and lesbians. Al expressed her frustration with these dual roles:

I'm sick of being the educator. I just want to be Alison. And I've worked very hard at portraying the message that I will answer any questions, but I just want to be Alison. I don't want to be gay Alison. I don't want to be Jewish Alison. I just want to be Alison. And my friends have done really well with that and I know some of them have struggled.

Al was appreciative that her friends began to understand her reluctance to speak for all Jewish people. Nonetheless, she still received spokesperson type questions: "I'm sure you've gotten that 'What does the Jewish community think about that?'" Al attempted to respond by demonstrating Jewish diversity: "Well, which 800 people do you want me to talk about?" Although Al was still uneasy with answering these kinds of questions, she developed a way to respond that demonstrated that her reply was just one opinion among many.

The challenge that Al, Allison and Jenn faced in being Jewish representatives was that they felt a responsibility to not just accurately reflect their respective Jewish canvases, but the canvas of the entire Jewish people. As each one of these co-travelers came to know the layers, contrasts and texture of her own Jewish canvas, each co-traveler also developed an appreciation for the contrasting colors of the expanding Jewish canvas. This sensitivity increased their appreciation for the nearly impossible task of being a representative for the entire Jewish population.

Controlling Visibility: "I Don't Want to be Labeled"

What is it like to engage in an effort to control how others perceive you? What is it like to be in negotiation with how others perceive your Jewish canvas? What is it like to attempt to shield other's view of your Jewish eyes? Several of my co-travelers

described experiences or ongoing attempts “to exercise restraint or direction over” (Nichols, 2001, p. 291) how others perceived their Jewishness. The word “control” has numerous definitions, but as a verb it is often defined to mean “dominate, regulate or command.” It implies having power over something. My co-travelers were attempting to control or gain power over how they were seen.

Jenn was considering offering her organizing talents to help the Jewish student group, Hillel, increase its visibility and become a more dynamic organization. She feared, however, that by speaking up at meetings and potentially representing the organization her Jewishness would be on parade for others to analyze. She also feared that speaking up would change her status on campus. She would lose control of the way she was perceived. Jenn and I discussed what it would be like for her to speak up about improving Hillel:

Jenn: I also think that if you did something like that, I mean, for somebody who doesn't really make like, your Judaism, or my religion known to a lot of people, you know, it's kind of being like...

Steve: It puts you out there, doesn't it?

Jenn: Yeah, it's not even being like, hey I'm Jewish, it's, HEY I'M JEWISH!

Jenn imagined that a public pronouncement of her Jewishness would completely transform her experience on campus. Jenn was certain that a more public Jewishness was sure to elicit all sorts of unspoken questions and attributions based on assumptions and falsehoods. Jenn was under the impression that she was in charge of how she was perceived and this scenario would likely mean a loss of control in how she was seen. Jenn's ability to control how the canvas was seen would be substantially lessened.

Asya placed a high priority on being seen as intelligent, thoughtful, and well reasoned. “I want to sound the most intelligent that I can and not make any rash decisions about anything because I don’t want to be labeled as extreme.” This desire to control how she is seen as a Jew placed Asya in some awkward situations. For example, Asya was at a gathering with her co-workers unaware that it was the first night of Hanukkah. Asya’s boyfriend mentioned that Asya is Jewish to her supervisor. Asya was caught off guard and uncomfortable about the resulting interaction with her supervisor: “My boss here was like: ‘How was Hanukkah?’ I was like: ‘Oh thanks, I forgot, I got to call my grandmother.’” Asya was chagrined that she was exposed as Jewish, but did not know it was Hanukkah. Even though traditional religious observances are not important to Asya, she did not feel comfortable nor did she have the opportunity to explain her way of being Jewish to her supervisor. Instead, Asya’s ability to control her visibility was weakened by her insecurity about her unresolved Jewishness. Asya had closely monitored who would be able to view her Jewish canvas. Exhibiting her unresolved and unfinished canvas without the opportunity to provide interpretation was particularly embarrassing. To complicate matters, Asya was also disappointed that she felt compelled to keep her canvas unseen.

Becoming Invisible: “I’m Allowing Everybody to Forget”

“You can just be absorbed... by the majority... I don’t have to... walk around with a Star of David. I can choose to be not religious; I can choose to not participate in Judaism or any other religion. It is very easy to just be assumed into Christianity—and it is very easy to live like that.” What is it like to “be assumed into Christianity”? Asya suggested it was relatively easy to put aside her Jewishness and let others believe she was

Christian. Asya described a phenomenon known as “passing.” When the verb “pass” is used in this way it is defined as “to live or be known as a member of racial or ethnic group other than one’s own, esp. to live and be known as a white person though having some Black ancestry” (Nichols, 2001, p. 967). Pass has several other meanings that when paired with experiences of my co-travelers helps elucidate the experience of passing.

To pass can be defined as “to cause to be accepted or received” (Nichols, 2001, p. 967). Passing implies being accepted as something, perhaps even if one really is not that thing. It also implies getting away with something such as “*to pass bad checks*” (Nichols, 2001, p. 967). To successfully pass my co-travelers made assumptions about what it took to be accepted or received as White, Christian or “American.” To pass as White, Christian and American they also needed a group to act as a counterpoint to juxtapose the dominant with the subordinate. For instance, Asya used an outspoken Latina friend as her counterpoint:

I have a friend who is Puerto Rican and Mexican and she is so proud of it, like she is head of the Latino club here—she’s so into it. She loves Puerto Rico and she loves her heritage, she’s all about it and she’s had many—I mean she’s physically, you can tell she is Hispanic, or that she’s not American. I think maybe because of that she’s made herself be like: “this is who I am.” She has had to be that aggressive about her like background because you can’t hide it and I can. Therefore I’m more timid, I can afford to be more timid about it. Maybe if I was Black or if I was Muslim you know physically someone could tell.

Using her Latina friend, Asya explained how it was possible to pass as a real American.

Asya’s White skin coupled with her invisible Jewishness was her approach toward acceptance. She could go through her days keeping her Jewish canvas a secret.

Elana’s description of passing expands on Asya’s attempts to achieve acceptance. Drawing comparisons with African American students immersed in their race, Elana asserted that she would not be as bold in sharing her true feelings.

If I have in my room like Jewish stars everywhere and Hebrew posters and Israeli flag and I think that's just such an overboard of what you are if you are trying to prove to other people this is what I am... you're making it harder for them to accept you. I think if you do things little by little, they'll get more used to the little things than, let's say, if I do hang up like something ethnic about myself, they'll be like: "oh that's interesting"... I would never overdo like my room with Jewish stuff... definitely a challenge, and people don't want to be challenged.

Elana equated sharing her Jewishness with inviting conflict or confrontation. Elana suggested that challenging people will "always end up with something negative... something bad said behind your back." For Elana passing was a passport to equilibrium, the status quo and comfort—the dominant group. It just made sense to Elana to not generate conflict by being so public about her Jewishness.

Passing, then, was a way for my co-travelers to be accepted. By playing down what made them unique and playing up their commonalities with the White, dominant culture, my co-travelers gained acceptance into the dominant group.

My co-travelers courageously acknowledged that racist stereotypes allowed them to pass. One way my co-travelers were able to gain acceptance was to share the views of the dominant group. This kind of passing would be defined as "to let go without notice, action, etc.; disregard" (Nichols, 2001, p. 967). Passing based on shared stereotypes is more like an arrangement where the dominant party allows the subordinate party to pass without scrutiny. Jes described how he had recently lived in an apartment complex where, as the racial diversity was increasing, the condition of the neighborhood was deteriorating. Jes recognized that the perception by White people was that the complex and neighborhood had become undesirable because people of color made the neighborhood unsafe and dirty. Jes admitted he was susceptible to this kind of scapegoating and acknowledged that when he began to see changes in the neighborhood

he assumed it was caused by people of color. Jes explained: “So I say that’s my American identity. I mean it’s there and it gets us into trouble—we have names for people that are outsiders and they’re goyim or shiksas or shvartzes or whatever.” Jes understood that not only was his acceptance tied into stereotyping, but that his Jewishness was influenced by this desire to fit in. Terms like goyim, shiksa or shvartze are derogatory and stereotypical Yiddish words that have fallen out of fashion due to their offensive nature. Jes eloquently described the downfall: “I think we all have that integrity and compassion for all other human beings in our hearts and I only think what makes us sabotage that within ourselves is fear of not being able to exist as an individual.”

The fear of not existing is a fear of not meaning. It is a fear of being forgotten. It is the worry of being nothing. Standing on the cliff of nothingness, my co-travelers discovered that by suppressing their Jewishness under a layer of Whiteness and Christianity they could climb to temporary safety. For instance, Jes chose to use stereotypes to become a more acceptable Jew to the dominant culture. He could be regarded as a good Jew, essentially allowing others to disregard his true Jewishness. Jes had the ability to absorb the characteristics of the dominant culture in a way that even if he did not completely hide his Jewishness he could manipulate his Jewishness to make it more palatable.

My other co-travelers described instances where they tried to minimize the gap between being Jewish and being American to ease their fears of being different and ultimately being ignored and thereby not existing. With the ability to set aside their Jewishness and the desire to be a part of the accepted group, my co-travelers could enjoy privileges extended to members of the most dominant groups on campus while avoiding

targeting as members of a “minority” group. Jenn puzzled over this as she wondered what it meant that her grandparents lived in a neighborhood that had an increasing African American population.

On one hand, I’m like “they’re just Black who cares?” But on the other, I mean, what if you were thinking of your grandparents, old and feeble, well into their 80’s and like there are all these Black people moving-in to their neighborhood? It’s not like you know. It’s not like you are racist—well maybe that is kind of racist... And then I guess when you think about living in a Jewish neighborhood, like in Potomac or Gaithersburg or something like that. You know like, I don’t know. Someone wouldn’t be like: “oh my god my neighborhood’s getting overrun by Jewish people.”

Jenn tried to figure out if her fears of African Americans were an example of racism while also determining if similar fears existed about Jews. It occurred to her that perhaps her fears were irrational and that her experience was very different than people of color due to her White skin and the ability to hide her Jewishness.

I don’t think I go around being like—talking to minorities and being like: “I feel your pain.” You know! Definitely it’s not the same thing... On a smaller scale it kind of is... I think there are a lot of people out there who probably have Jewish friends, whether they know it or not, and probably you know consider themselves to be ethnically diverse and tolerant of others, you know. But at the same time like, I think that Jewish people are just kind of another category that just get lumped into people’s heads. Oh Asians: “I think this about them.” Oh Black people: “I think this about them.” Oh Jewish people “I think this about them.” It’s just because it’s not our skin color, you wouldn’t know it right off the bat.

As Jenn made this statement it was as if she was discovering that the barrier between dominant and target was less static and defined than she previously thought. Jewish membership in the dominant group was tenuous if the Jewishness was revealed. Passing is also defined as “to cause or allow to go through a barrier” (Nichols, 2001, p. 967) and, in the case of my co-travelers, hiding their Jewish canvas or manipulating the canvas by adopting aspects of the dominant culture allowed them go through a barrier into the dominant group.

To pass, though, also means “to die” (Nichols, 2001, p. 967) and what is dying when one passes? Asya described the pain of passing: “It’s almost like I am allowing everybody to forget. So I’m going to celebrate Christmas which means no one is going to understand the importance of being Jewish.” What is it like to allow everybody to forget? What is it like to go through your days with a secret—keeping something to yourself? Al suggested that being Jewish meant being invisible: “I don’t get as much anti-Semitic comments here. I mean here being different is being Black or being gay and a lot of people don’t acknowledge being gay so it’s all Black and White. There’s no Hispanic, no Asian, there’s no Jewish, there’s no Muslim—it’s Black and White. So I guess there is a positive side, sort of. If there’s such a thing.” In Al’s world being Jewish was not good or bad, it was invisible. Elana, discussing the differences between being African American and Jewish, believed that African Americans are more likely to connect with other African Americans than Jews with other Jews. Whereas African Americans are clearly minorities, Jews are not and “Judaism sort of relaxes in the background.” As my co-travelers let the environment ignore their Jewish canvas or even highlighted some touches of Whiteness and Christianity on their canvas, my co-travelers’ Jewishness relaxed in the background. Jewishness was not a source of continual anxiety. Perhaps their Jewishness was dying a little, but it was not a noticeable decline—except on occasion.

Jes compared himself with Ben, a student involved in Hillel, who impressed Jes. Ben was outspokenly Jewish and Jes, already struggling with a host of issues, wished he could be as comfortable with his Jewishness as Ben:

I kind of envied him, I didn’t really like the Jewish people that I was meeting. Maybe I felt kind of shy around him, maybe I envied the fact that he could

interact with them comfortably. He knew he was Jewish and he was comfortable doing that and he got his life outside of Hillel, but he also had his life within Hillel. Part of it, and I wasn't part of it. Or I distanced myself, I didn't want to be part of it. I had enough to deal with, I didn't want to be a Jew on top of that 24 hours a day.

The lure of passing is that it provided my co-travelers cover when they did not want to expose their Jewishness. Not only were they hiding as Jews, but they were also gaining entry to a more dominant group. My co-travelers found that this passport to the dominant group came with the downside, though, of losing their Jewishness and missing their connection to other Jews. Ignoring or hiding their Jewishness meant they could be part of something, but it also meant part of them was dying. Yet, risking disclosure and reviving their Jewishness meant confronting the fear of not meaning.

Historically the dilemma of passing has beleaguered Jews often with life or death consequences. Many Jews carry with them the knowledge that their ancestors were forced to choose between staying with their families and facing certain death or escaping and living, but being entirely alone and saddled with feelings of loss and guilt. My co-travelers faced a dilemma with consequences that are in no way as dire. Some of my co-travelers did not even feel like they faced a dilemma. Jordan, after reading my first draft of this chapter, clarified that he was hesitant to share his Jewishness in international settings where he felt threatened but in college "I was happy to tell people about my Jewish life, upbringing, practices." In contrast to some of my other co-travelers, Jordan felt comfortable being an outspoken Jew. So did my co-travelers really face consequences for passing? Does it matter if one's Jewishness is not being nourished? What if the Jewish canvas is rarely exhibited or the words elicited by viewing the canvas are rarely spoken?

Perhaps the consequences of passing are invisible, just like Jewishness often was for my co-travelers. Asya summed up passing as a form of insincere Jewishness: “It wouldn’t be right for me to say that I’m Jewish and not somehow live it. I think that disgraces other Jews. I think that it is rude to go around—almost like a mask. You are saying: ‘I’m Jewish when I’m around Jews, and then when I’m around Christians I’m not really Jewish.’ It is too easy to be able to adapt that way.” Asya seems to be suggesting that being Jewish is not about comfort, effortless and relaxation. My co-travelers expressed disappointment when they did not fully express their Jewishness. It was like they were facing the abyss of nothingness and as humans they did what humans do: Instead of engaging this difficult and complicated challenge, they sought refuge and comfort in the very thing that makes it harder to be Jewish—being invisible.

Misunderstood Canvases: “You Don’t Look Jewish”

The college environment perplexed Elana, and Elana, likewise, perplexed her peers. The university was a place that had not seen or understood much Jewishness. Elana described what it was like to relate to students in college: “None of my close friends are Jewish... Most people I talk to are like: ‘Oh, I’ve never met a Jewish person before or if I did I was never really friendly with them’ or ‘I had this one Jewish friend once.’ You know?” Elana missed the shared language of her home where on the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, people would greet each other with the customary saying “Le-shana tovah.” Elana experienced confusion and misunderstanding with language in college: “Here it’s like: ‘what are you talking about?’ Like they can’t even pronounce it.”

What is it like when your first language is foreign to those around you? I suggested to Elana that it sounded frustrating and at times miserable. Elana

acknowledged the challenges while downplaying the intensity: “It’s a little weird being here, a little disconnected...I’m not really offended by it, I’m not really uncomfortable— if I thought about it all the time I’m going to have a miserable time, I don’t want to think about that all the time so I sort of put it in the back of my mind because it’s not really brought up that much for me to be thinking about it.”

Elana would let her Jewishness “relax” in the back of her mind until an incident drew it out. For instance, Elana discovered that people were surprised when they found out that she was Jewish. “When I tell people I’m Jewish they say: ‘you don’t look Jewish, I thought you were Italian.’ ...It’s weird, what are we supposed to look like anyway? What do we look like?” Jenn had a similar experience. She described explaining to a friend that her last name had German origins. The friend had assumed Jenn was Italian and was surprised by Jenn’s German heritage. Jenn explained that her surname was a common German last name “He was like: ‘Whoa Jenn!’ And he was like: ‘You Aryan!’ And all of the sudden I was like: ‘What!’ I mean he has no idea that like I’m Jewish or anything like that.”

Jenn and Elana were caught “off guard.” They scurried to defend themselves and their Jewishness because they did not look like some mythical Jewish norm. It was a surprising turn of events given that Jenn and Elana were not making their Jewishness highly public; yet, when they shared this fact, it was met with suspicion. Jenn was put in the even more unusual position of having to defend that she did not come from anti-Semitic lineage. What is it like to go through your days being misunderstood? For Jenn and Elana it was easier to keep their respective Jewish canvases hidden.

The Wrong Kind of Jewish Canvas: "Bad or Defective Genes"

Despite the relatively rural location of the university, most students who attend are from metropolitan areas in Virginia and points north. Jes suggested that in his transition to college he had taken on the characteristics of a new person. "When I first came here I was kind of like a very scared person trying to kind of hold onto what I had from where I was growing up in North Carolina." The milieu of Jes' first eighteen years differed fairly radically from the university.

I grew up in a not very economically stable family. Large animal veterinary medicine was my dad's chosen career wasn't really a big money maker. Especially if there was a drought... In the late eighties my dad was starting his practice, the county in which I grew up in Union County, North Carolina, the agrarian base kind of plummeted and so it's tough. You really do see a lot of stereotypes, you know from wherever, of Jews being financially well off or at least good with money and I saw my family as the opposite. As maybe bad or defective genes or something.

Jes articulated the experience of growing up as an outsider. He felt that since he grew up in a religious home in rural North Carolina he was not like other Jews and did not want to be mistaken for a "stereotypical" Jew. Jes feared that by identifying with other Jews in college he would lose what made him unique. However, this uniqueness also frustrated Jes because he could not be an insider. In college this tension played out for Jes in his hesitancy to relate to other Jews.

Jes felt that he had to "gentrify myself because everyone here was not from North Carolina and not Jewish." In Jes' efforts to be seen differently and feel like he fit in at college he began to look at himself and his Jewishness differently.

The Jewish people I met I felt kind of resentful toward them mainly because they grew up in an experience that was different from mine. Not that my experience was anything negative per se, but I think I always did feel as an outsider, especially growing up in North Carolina in the country... I wanted to be sort of

part of that culture and I was Jewish, but I didn't really see myself as part of the general Jewish community... [in college] or anywhere else I would seem to be.

What is it like to be Jewish but feel like you are the wrong kind of Jew? Jes negotiated the tension of seeing the world in ways that he felt differed not only from other Jews, but also people who were not Jewish. He struggled with how to come to terms with this difference and with himself. It took years for Jes to become comfortable enough with himself that he could find his place with other Jews.

Even other family members from places that are more generally identified as communities where Jewish people exist: New Jersey, New York. I resented those family members to a point. I considered them to be too stereotypical, sort of clichéd, parodies of Jewish America, Woody Allen, so I wasn't really, I didn't really want to make a bond with them. Recently I see more of a universal Jewish aesthetic instead of trying to sort of reject it and claim individual Jewish aesthetic for my life, and to my identity.

Jes was not at home with himself and felt like an outsider in almost any environment. Jes described his experience as grappling with himself as a Jewish person: "I think I've been fighting it for a long time." Jes attributed his substance abuse to his struggles to cope with these internal fights.

Until Jes discovered universal Jewish ideas that transcended his experiences and the experiences of his family and peers, Jes could not be "at home" with his Jewishness. He resented the colors of his canvas. Jenn also had the experience of feeling like the wrong kind of Jew. When peers doubted whether Jenn was an authentic Jew because her mother converted to Judaism, Jenn was experiencing another dimension of the phenomenon Jes lived. Jenn, in contrast to Jes, was relatively comfortable with her Jewish background, but had to fend off assertions that she was only half Jewish. Jes, on the other hand, rarely felt at home with his Jewishness. Being a Jew with "defective

genes” seemed to matter more to Jes than to Jenn. Whereas Jenn was accused of being an inauthentic Jew, Jes felt like the wrong kind of Jew.

Canvases Painted with Pride: “I Didn’t Even Want to Breathe In”

My co-travelers felt proud of their Jewish eyes, the unique perspective that came from being Jewish as well as the unique way they were situated to see the world because of their Jewishness. This pride sustained them whether their Jewish canvas was hidden or on display. Their pride was reinforced by a fear of what would happen if they took on Christian characteristics as well as by a sense of Jewish superiority.

Allison discussed the pride she felt in being Jewish after having an intense, all-night conversation about Christianity with a Christian friend, Ashley. Allison described the experience: “She wasn’t trying to convert me, but she just wanted to inform me and I guess preach what she’s supposed to be preaching ‘cause that’s what her job is I guess. That’s what she said.” Parts of the conversation related to death and the “afterlife” for Christians which scared Allison and left her wondering: “And then I went back in my room after we had this whole long conversation ‘cause I was like, ‘oh god, maybe I should convert?’ And I was like: ‘What am I talking about? That’s ridiculous!’” Allison recalled having doubts about her faith in Judaism during the conversation, but then reassured herself following the conversation. “I caught myself and I was like ‘No, no, no Allison, go on, you’re Jewish, you know? You can’t be converting because of somebody who was talking to you about it one time.’” Allison elaborated on what it was like to doubt her faith during and after the conversation:

When we were just starting the conversation and I said, “You know, Ashley, you can’t try to convert me because my parents will disown me.” Like jokingly, but then I was like, well actually, they probably would if I did convert, but, like, and then I called my mom a few days after we were talking and I mentioned like my

conversation with her [Ashley] and she was like, “Allison, are you becoming Christian?” and I was like, “No mom.” She’s like, “Because if you are, I will be so angry.” ...I was like, “Ma chill out, I’m not, I’m Jewish you know” You know? And I was like, “Come on Ma, you know me better than that.”

Allison’s conversation with Ashley was a test of faith. As she tried to make sense out of the experience she then faced a different test from her mother. Allison suddenly found herself facing the question: “What kind of Jew are you going to be?” However, Ashley and Allison’s mother had two very different answers in mind. Allison’s test of faith experience was interpreted as an opening for Ashley to perform her “job” and interpreted as the corrupting influence of college by Allison’s mother. Allison resolved this dilemma by studying the texture and paints of her particular Jewish canvas.

Although Allison came away from the conversation frightened by the bible verses Ashley was quoting, she eventually developed a clearer picture of her own Jewishness because it could stand up to this test. Allison was afraid of what would happen to her if she started to believe some of the tenets expressed by Ashley. She worried what would happen to her relationship with her parents. Allison channeled this fear into pride evidenced in Allison’s reflections on the conversation: “I’m really happy that I’m Jewish because I have a mind of my own and I can decide what I believe and what I don’t believe and when some things sound fishy to me I can look it up and then I can see if it’s true or not and I have a mind of my own.” Allison felt that in contrast to Ashley, she had the freedom to choose what she believed. A “mind of my own” meant that Allison could decide how to paint her Jewish canvas. Although Allison acknowledged that there were individuals, such as her parents, that influenced the appearance of the painting, she was proud that her Jewishness let her decide how much influence to permit.

My other co-travelers shared this feeling of Jewish pride, but some felt troubled that a sense of superiority was coupled with this pride. Elana, for instance, was embarrassed by her pride because it was fortified with disrespect and contempt for Christianity. Elana confided that she would look down on and distrust people who are Christian even if they expressed a similar spirituality to her own. Elana suggested somewhat ashamedly that even if her Christian boyfriend, Shelly, believed in Jesus she would feel that “he’s wrong.” Although Elana is certain that she does not openly express this “disrespect” for Christianity, she is embarrassed that the thoughts go through her mind.

I’m not being openly disrespectful, but in my head. Even Shelly’s mom, when she talks to me about her crosses and how she puts the flowers and how she really loves me and she believes in Jesus. She’s really very religious. I’d be very respectful about it, but I would be snickering in my head like: “You’re ridiculous.” And they are doing, she’s just as religious as the Chasidic people are...I can be so accepting of Buddhism. I can be like: “That is so cool you believe in Buddha or whatever.” Or any type of African religion. I think it’s amazing to believe in spirits. I can actually sit there and talk to them about it and not feel resentful at all. But then with Christianity, I think, I don’t know. I don’t know why I feel like that. I don’t know if I feel like it’s a threat.

Elana’s sense of superiority over Christianity bolstered her Jewish pride. This feeling of being “right” sustained her when thoughts and ideas about Christianity may have felt threatening. Woven into Elana’s Jewish canvas was a sense that beliefs and ideas of Christianity could extinguish her canvas. Dating a man who was not Jewish did not seem to hold this threat, but there was no place on her canvas for the ideas, symbols and artifacts of Christianity.

I remember when I was younger if I even said the word “Jesus” in my head I’d feel really bad. Shoot, and then I would say it over and over in my head just to piss myself off. You know when you do that? I do it sometimes. I just do it. It’s like a bet. I feel so bad to even think of him. Always thought I would be punished if I ever considered believing in the Catholic religion, Catholicism... There’s no

reason to feel weird to go into a church because I don't believe in it, but the first time I ever went with my friend Andrea for Christmas I felt like I was holding my breath. I didn't even want to breathe in, it was so, I was just like, and I felt like so uncomfortable. I didn't like it. Whatever I did, I grew older and I grew up, I knew that I believed in whatever I believed in I didn't feel like if I'm there that means I'm going to be punished. You know I believe in Jesus just because I went to church, it's not true. I think I thought that way because my dad didn't like it. He didn't feel it was necessary for me to go to church. But it was an eye opening experience. I liked it. I thought it was fun. I liked the songs they sang.

Elana's insecurity about Christianity was tied into her fear of what would happen to her Jewishness if she got too close to Christianity. Repeating the word "Jesus" was a test to see what would happen if she let Christianity in such close proximity to her Jewishness. Could Elana's Jewishness stand the test? What would it take to displace it? This test gave Elana a glimpse of how temporal her Jewishness was. She had adopted a Jewish canvas that if she did not make her own might be susceptible to Christianity. As Elana revealed more of her Jewish canvas to her self, these tests became less important. Elana went from fearing that her canvas could be extinguished by Christianity to feeling that her Jewishness was superior to Christianity.

The word "pride" can refer to self-respect or even "a feeling of gratification arising from association with something good or laudable" (Nichols, 2001, p. 1050), but pride can also slip into a sense of superiority, such as an "inordinate opinion of one's own dignity" (Nichols, 2001, p. 1050). My co-travelers seemed to feel proud of being Jewish simply because it felt good to be associated with Jewishness, but at times being Jewish also meant an "arrogant assumption of superiority" (Nichols, 2001, p. 1050).

For instance, without shame, Jes animatedly expressed this feeling of pride and superiority when he described how Judaism had survived centuries of onslaught.

We've done a lot, we adapt, we can hide. We can come forward and we do that depending on what we need to do and we have survived a lot longer than a lot

larger groups of people... They are all worshipping Jesus Christ and... they gave up their culture to be part of the Jesus Christ incorporated and we stayed independent. We're still around, and they try to kill us, and they try to convert us and you know put us in a oven and dude I still say I'm Jewish... And I'll put it out, put it down to that, and all the Jews in the world they are still around. I'm proud of that, I love that.

Jes loved that Jewishness existed despite attempts throughout the generations to extinguish Jews. For Jes that made Jewishness superior to other faiths and religions that were unable to stand up to attempts to be converted. My co-travelers felt proud that Jewishness had survived even under seemingly impossible circumstances, but they also felt superior to other faiths, particularly Christianity. Christianity, like no other religion, was like a flame that illuminated my co-travelers' Jewishness. Therefore because of its perceived power to extinguish my co-travelers canvases Christianity had to be treated with respect and fear.

Seeing Canvases of Jewishness: Facing the Web of Functional Relations

When my co-travelers' awareness of their Jewish eyes was heightened and their eyes were opened to their Jewish canvases, paradoxes were revealed. These paradoxes of Jewishness would fade from view only to reappear when my co-travelers' Jewish eyes were noticed or revealed. Being out in the open as Jews meant being asked what it was like to be Jewish, but it also meant being frequently misunderstood. Some of my co-travelers feared or were uncomfortable with this openness and preferred to keep their Jewish eyes less conspicuous and their canvases hidden. Intentionally and inadvertently my co-travelers manipulated their canvases or kept them hidden to control how they were seen. This attempt at passing as White and Christian involved sacrificing meaning. By making their Jewishness invisible my co-travelers were being accepted as something they were not and ultimately sacrificing authenticity.

The evolving Jewish canvases of my co-travelers had moved from the subject to the object of their attention. My co-travelers' experience of being Jewish was revealed in complex and layered portraits of Jewishness. The intricacy of the canvases seemingly expanded with the increasing visibility of the canvases. What is it like, though, to attempt to reveal an evolving Jewish canvas in a predominantly Christian environment?

Reflections of Christianity

What is it like to look out through Jewish eyes and see reflections of Christianity? My co-travelers could go through their days and experience the college environment as relatively neutral, but then an instance or a particular holiday season would remind them that college was saturated with Christianity. The fact that the dominant group of students on campus was Christian was not the problem for my co-travelers; rather, the problem was how Christianity was manifested in the environment. Whereas in the previous section I explored what it was like for my co-travelers to see their Jewish canvas—in this section I uncover what it was like to live in a community where displaying a Jewish canvas is uncomfortable and even potentially risky. University practices, evangelizing groups, and individual anti-Semitic actions frustrated my co-travelers and challenged them to reconsider their role on campus.

A Dominating Environment: "You're in Christian-Land"

My co-travelers related many stories of feeling conspicuous or frustrated by being in the religious minority. When discussing private and public incidents where she was on the receiving end of evangelizing Christians, Al exclaimed: "Can I tell you how many times I have been told to find Jesus since I've been here?" Al was frustrated with the amount of times her Jewishness was experienced as a defect that needed to be fixed.

Jordan recounted stories of being confronted by preaching and proselytizing Christian students. He recalled a dinner the first semester of his first year with a senior who had very different religious views. They met at the main dining hall and were discussing abortion rights. The senior was agitated by Jordan's "pro-choice" opinions.

He starts getting worked up, it turns out, he throws his tray on the table, slams it down, starts screaming at the top of his lungs "YOU MURDERER! YOU MURDERER! You are going to burn in hell! Blah blah blah" and this is my freshman year, first semester in college and this kid is screaming at the top of his lungs and calling me a murderer. God knows what everyone is thinking? ...and [he] storms out and the whole entire place is silent, I'm sitting there like you know so I guess just sort of shrugged my shoulders and was like: "What can I say? I believe in a woman's right to choose!" I sort of like made a joke out of it. Everyone laughed, but it was intense.

First semester, freshman year is a time when students intensely desire to control how they are seen. Jordan, though, was quite conspicuous—there was no hiding that evening. When the student slammed his tray, he metaphorically slammed Jordan into the predominantly Christian environment. To slam is to "strike... with violent, noisy impact" (Nichols, 2001, p. 1233). Even though Jordan was able to make a joke and relieve some of the tension, Jordan described this experience as "scary." He went on to say: "I have met some pretty crazy people" in college "that's for sure." Jordan realized later that this "scary" and bewildering experience was an example of some of the dangers of interacting with people who are dogmatic about their faith.

Other co-travelers shared stories and experiences of being slammed—of being recipients of evangelizing and proselytizing. Evangelical groups are a dominant force on campus, and their members were often the main players in these stories. Jenn relayed experiences from the day she moved in to her residence hall, freshman year, when members of a campus Christian group helped her family carry her belongings into her

room. Group members then shared information about the group and invited her to a meeting. Jenn described the interaction:

And it's not like they're trying to shove anything down your throat, they're not like you know, "You owe us because we lugged your computer up, like..." It's not like that, you know? But at the end they're just like, "Here's where we're meeting, just come." And you're just kind of like, I mean, it hits you just as soon as you get here, you know?

This experience quickly inculcated Jenn to the less than neutral Christian environment. The college environment did not simply exist; Jenn articulated that it "hit" her. Jenn suggested that the accumulation of similar experiences from her first day on campus left an angry residue.

For instance, during Jenn's sophomore year a Christian group implemented an elaborate marketing ploy where a group member named Russ wrote a highly visible editorial in the student newspaper explaining why students should believe in Jesus. On the day the article appeared hundreds of students wore bright orange shirts with the following question in big letters: "Do you agree with Russ?" There were simultaneous programs and additional marketing efforts. When Jenn was approached on that day to complete a survey for the organization, she finally could not contain her frustration: "I almost like punched her in the face. She was like: 'Do you agree with Russ?' And I was like: 'Noooo!' She was like: 'Why?' I was like: 'I'm Jewish, OK?'" Jenn felt the press of this hegemonic Christian environment and wanted to "hit" it back. When Jenn used the word "hit" she meant it like its primary definition: "to deal a blow or strike to" (Nichols, 2001, p. 625). The word "cleave" has a similar definition as "hit." The word "cleave" is defined as "to split or divide by or as if by a cutting blow... to cut off; sever" (Nichols,

2001, p. 247). On this day Jenn felt severed from the community and angry that she could not “adhere closely; cling” (Nichols, 2001, p. 247) or cleave to the community.

Jenn struggled to explain what it felt like to be on campus with hundreds of students wearing “Do you agree with Russ?” t-shirts: “You’ve got like 500 people parading around campus in these shirts.” To Jenn the students were not merely wearing the shirts; there were 500 students “parading around” in the bright orange shirts. These experiences did not necessarily make her doubt her Jewishness, but it did make her feel insecure:

You know they’ve got strength in numbers, like I said, like if so many people think that. I mean, I’ve never questioned my own faith, and I don’t think anybody, I don’t think any Jewish person here has really, like questioned their faith, but it’s almost just like, it’s not even like envy. Because I don’t think I’d want to be a part of a big kind of organization like that either. But it’s just kind of like, I don’t know, it’s just unsettling. I don’t know. Like, not like I’m envious of them, or I want to be part of something like that, but at the same time, I don’t know....it’s tough, it’s just a tough situation to be in.

Jenn described her feelings of living in an environment so heavily saturated with Christianity: “The other day, I was almost like, you know what, I put in my four years of like being around Christian people, like predominantly, and I’m like, I don’t really think I can do it anymore.” Similar to Al and Jordan’s frustrations described above, Jenn wanted to just be herself and not face the occasional haranguing—the “sermonizing discourse” (Nichols, 2001, p. 598)—for being Jewish.

I described Jenn’s frustrations with the dominant Christian campus milieu to Jes, and he tried to avoid investing his emotions: “I feel for them, but man I had to get over that early in my life because it’s just everywhere. You’re in a Christian-land, don’t forget it.” Jes was essentially saying that it’s not worth fighting or trying to “hit” it back. To

retain a sense of Jewishness meant not engaging with or cleaving to the larger environment.

*An Out of Control Environment: "Everywhere You Turn
There is Something to do With Christmas"*

My co-travelers experienced an acute sense of frustration and discomfort during the December holiday time. Despite being a public university, every December the campus had a "holiday tree" lit up at night on the central quadrangle and hourly Christmas carols played over the campus chimes. My co-travelers had strong reactions to walking by the "quad" and seeing the tree or being interrupted in class with the sound of the chimes.

Asya, who admittedly enjoys the Christmas season, found the college environment to be overwhelming: "At first, I was like: 'You know this is okay, it's nice, it's fine, you know.' But then I was thinking: 'this is a little out of control, this is way too much, everywhere you turn there is something to do with Christmas.'" Asya described what it was like to hear the chimes while in her philosophy class: "It is such a non-sequitur, something so random like we're talking about the uses of man or how people should live, or how they should find truth and here we are and Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer is playing." Asya experienced the chimes as a jolt or a cutting blow from her focus on learning. Many students experienced the Christmas Carols played on the chimes as an interruption to class sessions, but as a Jew Asya's experience of the chimes was even more jarring. The chimes reinforced the hegemonic environment that problematized Asya's identity as a Jew. Instead of being able to solely focus on class, the chimes dealt a cutting blow to Asya's attention to the class material and forced her to question her membership in the campus community.

A common definition of control is to have power or influence over something. The phrase “out of” is defined as “deprived of” (Nichols, 2001, p. 940). In the stories described above my co-travelers felt they were deprived of the ability to influence the outcome; they felt stripped of their power—it was “out of control”.

Jenn related an experience that took place during her final presentational speech class of the semester. One student gave a speech on “twelve ways to get into the spirit of Christmas.” This speech was followed by a speech on how “your problems can be solved by having Jesus Christ come into your life.” After the first speech Jenn noted on the student’s evaluation to “just realize there are other religions out there besides Christianity.” However, Jenn was so flummoxed after the second speech that she did not evaluate it:

I just like wrote a note being like, “I feel like I’m too biased on this subject matter to give you like a... grade.” I was like, “sorry.” So I didn’t even grade him, but as I was leaving I was just like fuming... I couldn’t believe this guy... Basically what he was doing was like, being like, “I have an answer to all of your suffering, come talk to me and you know, I’ll convert you,” basically is what he was saying. And I was like, I’m like, I was just like, “I don’t understand this school.” I was like, “this is just the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever seen in my entire life.” Isn’t that crazy?

Jenn walked out of the speech class onto the central quadrangle and was faced with the “holiday” tree. “And then you come outside, and you’re just like looking at the Christmas tree and people are like Merry Christmas! And you’re just like go on, you know, I’m going to hurt somebody.”

This story reveals the degree to which the environment was saturated with Christianity as well as the struggle to be Jewish in that environment. Jenn articulated that it was the accumulation of the various incidents that led to her frustration and anger. Jenn’s experience of leaving class, only to be confronted by Christmas revelers, was

bewildering. Her sense that this university was an inclusive environment where she could be herself was in serious doubt. Jenn, as well as my other co-travelers, were members of an out of control environment that on occasion would strike a cutting blow through my co-travelers' connection to the campus.

Seeking Meaning: "They're Giving Away Christmas Carols"

What is it like to experience an out of control environment? My co-travelers described how they tried to regain influence and meaning when the environment felt overpowering. For instance, Elana described what it is like to be Jewish on campus during the winter holidays:

Being Jewish here? It's really hard. Listening to Christmas music all the time. My roommate plays like Mariah Carey and Backstreet Boys Christmas music and oh my God, I'm here and I'm singing songs and I know them all by heart. I wish I had Hanukkah music to play.

Elana quickly corrected herself: "I don't really like Hanukkah music that much." Nonetheless, Elana's realization that she had inadvertently learned the lyrics to Christmas songs was an indication that the dominant environment was seeping in. Consequently she found herself wishing for Hanukkah music—something she truly did not want—to regain a feeling that who she was mattered.

Particularly during the winter holiday season Al desired more than a token acknowledgment on campus that there are other faiths in addition to Christianity.

I mean and the religious messages here are everywhere. It's in the Christmas songs; it's the Christmas decorations they put up in ISAT [an academic building]. That's really great that they have a winter choir, but it doesn't do any good if you add a couple Jewish songs.

Al suggested that she was not wishing for a lot, but simply more inclusiveness and less focus just on Christianity. For instance, she wished that the winter concert was not merely a pseudonym for “Christmas concert” with one or two Jewish songs thrown in to appear inclusive. Ostensibly for Al to feel better about attending this university she was seeking more than a token acknowledgment that she existed there.

Jenn described the stresses of being on campus during December:

Well, I think personally, it’s more stressful than anything. Oh my god, yes... I mean, there’s a Christmas tree... there’s a big, like bell choir out on the commons right now, like ringing away... what is going on here? They’re giving away Christmas carols, oh my god, so, the whole big production, I don’t really, it’s not that I don’t like it, ‘cause I think everyone kind of gets into stuff, it’s not that I don’t like it, but it’s almost just like, hello?! Something else somewhere, anything like, a menorah, like some sort of other, to acknowledge the fact that there are other religions... I really have noticed a severe lack, like of any other sort of festivities, so I don’t know, it’s pretty obnoxious.

For Jenn the bell choir “giving away Christmas carols” symbolized everything that was challenging her about being Jewish on campus. To Jenn this seemingly innocent act was the ultimate example of Christian dominance on campus. As my co-travelers discovered, many members of the community who were not Jewish did not question the multitude of Christian symbols and artifacts on campus. This contradiction made the “giving away” even more painful because there was such a dramatic lack of understanding of what it meant to be on the receiving end of the “carols.” Jenn’s peers, who seemingly thought they were performing a good deed for the community by giving away the carols, were actually inflicting pain on some of its members. This innocence coupled with ignorance fueled Jenn’s anger and confusion.

Jenn, like my other co-travelers, thought that she meant something to the campus. Through campus involvement, relationships with professors and simply feeling

comfortable strolling the campus, Jenn had had the perception that she was an important member of the community. Jenn's experiences of feeling like she did not mean anything to the campus forced her to wonder if she mattered as much as she had thought.

Extra Attention: "Oh, You are Jew?"

Despite the dominance of Christianity, some members of the community went out of their way to recognize my co-travelers' Jewishness. However, when my co-travelers' Jewishness was recognized, the meaning of the recognition was not always clear. Al described receiving a holiday card from a friend:

It was a Christmas card and she wadded it up very neatly in a perfect little square and she wrote Hanukkah over Christmas. It was cute. She tried to make it look like the real card. It was fun. It's fun when people do it. It's nice when they at least make the effort to acknowledge that's it's not my religion.

Al appreciated that her friend recognized that Christmas can be experienced as an overpowering influence.

Jenn was surprised when a friend hosting a holiday party took the extra time when preparing Christmas decorations to make a drawing of a menorah. The friend then went out of her way to make sure Jenn saw how inclusive she was. The friend said: "Jenn! Look, I put a menorah on here." Jenn was unsure how to respond and even felt some cynicism about this incident. Jenn went on to say: "People aren't just like, 'oh you're Jewish, cool,' and that's it. Like people remember it." Jenn was perplexed with how to respond to her friend who made the menorah drawing. She felt appreciative that at least someone had "remembered" her Jewishness, yet it seemed like her friend wanted something more in return than a simple thank you.

Elana described to me how she was relieved that she never had experienced anti-Semitism in college: "But I've never...not on campus here, I've never been like 'oh,

you're a Jew.'" Elana was prepared that if she heard the expression "Oh, you are a Jew," something negative was implied or would come after.

When Allison's new roommate discovered that Allison was Jewish she said, after a pause, "oh, you are Jewish." Just like Jenn hinted at and Elana feared, Allison's roommate said this expression with pause and gravity. Allison described the phone conversation with her new roommate that took place prior to the beginning of the semester:

We had had a very long conversation. She asked me what I did this summer and I said I worked at a Jewish Community Center as a counselor and she's like: "a Jewish Community Center?" And I was like: "Yea." And she didn't know what that was, and she was like: "Oh, are you Jewish?" and I said: "Yea." And then she like paused. It felt very strange for me. And she's like: "Oh, you are Jewish." Like it was hard for her to say or something. I don't know. But then that was it—that was the end of that conversation. Maybe she felt uncomfortable, but hopefully she's not uncomfortable now. I don't know, it's weird.

The sense of being looked at differently and the feeling of not knowing or uncertainty of what it meant to be different was captured in the expression "oh, you are Jewish." Allison's confusion stemmed from her new roommate's obvious discomfort with learning of Allison's Jewishness. However, Allison did not know what this meant. Whereas Al felt confident in understanding what her friend was trying to express, Jenn and Allison were less confident with the meaning of these interactions. Being recognized as a Jew could mean appreciation for Jewish existence and Jewish being. However, it could also mean something more troubling, as is described below.

Being Targeted: "Hey Jew, What's Up?"

Some of my co-travelers shared troubling incidents of being targeted by individual acts of anti-Semitism. Other co-travelers felt thankful that they had not experienced these acts, but felt fearful that they could happen.

Allison related stories of hearing anti-Semitic comments directed at her by her hall mates. One male student consistently referred to Allison as “Little Jew.”

Everyday he’s like: “Hey Jew, what’s up?” I don’t know, it’s like it’s funny to me, but I guess it’s redundant. Like every second it’s in my face. And then there’s this one time... they’re making all these jokes about Jews and he said something and I went fairly crazy. He... called me a “kike”. Or he said something to that extent, like something with that word and I just hate that word so much. And he just kept saying it. I’m like: “Stop!” And he’s like, he was just like, I don’t know, it was just really, I did not like that.

Allison eventually realized that many members of her residence hall discovered that she is Jewish from over-hearing these remarks. Allison did not seem particularly worried when her peers referred to her as “Jew.” However, when the comments began to sound more stereotypical and hateful, she became concerned and she spoke up.

It’s something I value highly and I’m not trying to hide it. I’m Jewish, you know? But, when it comes to stereotypes that’s the one thing I just can’t stand. When people are like: ‘Here roll a penny, she’ll go get it’ like stupid things like that. That definitely annoys me to no end.

Similar to Jenn’s experience with the environment, Allison experienced the cleaving effects of individual acts of anti-Semitism. She was pushed away by the hurtful and frustrating remarks, but she also attempted to avoid getting pulled into interactions with the peers who made these remarks. In our conversations she often played down these seemingly upsetting experiences while discussing strategies to avoid reinforcing Jewish stereotypes.

In Allison’s efforts to cope with anti-Semitic stereotypes she found herself in positions to educate people who are not Jewish. Allison shared with me how she responded:

Hopefully the people that have said these things if they come in contact with another Jewish person they’ll remember: “Oh yea, I knew a Jewish girl that wasn’t like that at all.” So hopefully that will help... When people say: “You

don't look Jewish because you don't have a big nose." I'm thinking: "I don't know that many Jews who have big noses anyway." I don't know, I guess being cheap, I don't want to seem cheap because that's the big stereotype: Jews are cheap. So I try to be generous as much as possible... I mean I'm into fashion and everything, but not so much that it is in excess. Some people think that: "Oh Jews, they want everything. You know they buy real expensive things." I try not to do that. It's pretty bad that people think that. That Jews are cheap and they only care about themselves and they want this and this and this for themselves. That's not true.

Allison's efforts to educate others put her in the challenging position of making life choices to single-handedly debunk stereotypes. Although Allison did not suggest that she had experienced pain for being on the receiving end of these comments, she found that she was seeking out other Jews more frequently and trying to act in ways that would not reinforce "the big stereotype."

My other co-travelers were also aware of anti-Semitism and some expressed fears of being targeted by anti-Semitic remarks. Elana and I had a conversation about anti-Semitism and I described how another co-traveler had been the target of overt anti-Semitic remarks. Elana's reaction to my brief description indicated her concern with losing control of a situation because she is Jewish. Elana sought clarification: "[This incident happened] here?! ... How did they know she was Jewish? ... Okay, after she told them they called her stuff... Are they her friends or just people in passing... That's messed up. She doesn't say anything to them?" Clearly Elana was disturbed by this incident. Not only was she worried about the victim, but she tried to determine the likelihood that she would be on the receiving end of anti-Semitic remarks. After I clarified the incident for Elana, she expressed disappointment that these types of incidents occur. Elana's relief with not experiencing anti-Semitic remarks was mixed

with an awareness that anti-Semitism is “out there” and if she is open about her Jewishness she may receive looks and comments.

Fearing Anti-Semitism: “She Thinks I Have Horns”

The etymological root for the word “fear” from Middle English is “fere” and means sudden attack or danger (Nichols, 2001). Contemporary definitions refer to the emotional state of the individual experiencing fear, for instance, “a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger...the feeling or condition of being afraid” (Nichols, 2001, p. 481). My co-travelers were afraid to enter environments or situations where they would likely face anti-Semitic remarks and looks. What is it like to be Jewish in an environment where it feels dangerous to exist?

Al, for example, related her fears of student teaching in the local schools. Surprisingly, many of the local, public elementary schools offer students Christian education during the school day. A break is provided and students have the option of receiving Christian lessons immediately adjacent to school grounds, sometimes on a bus. Although students are not required to attend, many have reported feeling ostracized for not attending. Al talked to an education professor about teaching in this kind of environment as a Jew. ““Are they going to look for my horns and tail...?” He laughed, thinking I was being funny. And then he realized I really wasn’t kidding. And he stopped laughing. I think that scared him a little too and it really, to me it’s scary.” Al’s fear of being a target for anti-Semitism and subject to Jewish stereotypes was not unique. Other co-travelers expressed this fear as well.

Allison feared that her new roommate would harbor these stereotypes. When Allison told her new roommate on the phone that she was Jewish and received a cooler

response than she expected, she feared she was being stereotyped. “I was like, ‘oh great she thinks I have horns...’ What’s going through her head now? She thinks I’m horrible. All these things. I just didn’t want to her to think badly because of all these stereotypes she’s heard.”

Although the origin of the stereotype of Jews having horns is debatable, the impression that Jews are bizarre or are secretly the devil persists. Al and Allison were painfully aware of the stereotype. It is not surprising that my co-travelers felt some distress about entering environments where they feared being labeled as something evil or strange.

Jordan experienced profound fear while traveling in Egypt. Jordan befriended some Lebanese men without telling them he was Jewish. After a day of touring the men said: “Well we accept anyone, except Jews. If you were Jewish and you came there [to Lebanon] we’d probably kill you because we like to kill Jews.” Jordan went on to describe the experience:

And that was pretty intense. So I was like: “Oh, okay. Well have a nice day, goodbye.” I basically ran from that situation as tactfully and quickly as possible. That was sort of like, that was pretty intense, you know. That sort of did hit home because one, I felt like it was a dangerous situation and two, it was like I just spent the whole day with these guys and we were friendly and now they were like: “here’s the whole religion thing again.”

Jordan’s fear of sudden danger was a concern beyond being looked at as evil or bizarre, but as someone who should not exist.

Asya described what it was like to be asked on campus if she was Jewish: “That is something that is very personal. That’s like asking somebody if they are with somebody. It is not something like just on the surface like asking somebody: ‘what classes are you

taking? What's your major?" Asya's hesitation in sharing that she was a Jew was that she might be making herself vulnerable once others had this information about her.

The fear of entering an environment and facing danger was an on-going concern for my co-travelers. The danger was not necessarily violent in nature; instead it was the sense that perhaps they should not exist there. My co-travelers did not necessarily experience anti-Semitic remarks or threats, but the overwhelmingly Christian environment generated insecurity amongst my co-travelers.

Seeing Christianity; Seeing Oneself

Carse (1994) explained that there is an inextricable link between how human beings see themselves and how they are seen. If a person is seen as someone who should not exist then it is likely that they will begin to doubt whether she or he belongs or means something. Whether it was proselytizing organizations trying to convert or individual acts of demonizing anti-Semitism, my co-travelers were aware that their Jewish eyes were seen as defective or reinforcing stereotypes. University practices like the "holiday tree" suggested to my co-travelers that they are not truly members of the community. These bewildering practices, particularly around the winter holidays, suggested that my co-travelers actually did not exist. This fear of non-existence did not stop my co-travelers from seeking a secular Jewish being, though. The following section explores how my co-travelers reveal their Jewish eyes and attempt to paint a secular Jewish canvas in this less than hospitable environment.

Choosing to Paint Secular Jewish Canvases

"Being Jewish is a choice; it's a conscious choice," Jes argued. He went on to say: "We have a choice to make that connection with all those thousand of years of

history. We really don't have to... That's... being culturally Jewish in America." Jews are "bound to the notion of choice" (Friedling, 1996, p. 120), and Jes articulated the centrality of this notion in how Jews live as Jews. Jes suggested that making the choice is an everyday dilemma:

And that's our ability, we can hide, we can shrink back—Maybe that's why we have people that don't understand, they think, they are very, they are always struggling to find their identity as Jewish people because it's a choice and it's a choice that not everybody makes.

My co-travelers were in the process of making a choice to become secular Jews.

When I began this study I expected to meet students who had a well developed sense of what it meant to be a secular Jew. I set that expectation aside for my conversations with my co-travelers and discovered students who were applying the paints to a canvas of secular or cultural Jewishness with confidence, concern, ambivalence and excitement. My co-travelers were evolving in their understanding of and desire to be cultural or secular Jews. For instance, my co-travelers recognized the expression "secular Jew" but rarely used the term to describe themselves. My co-travelers were trying to envision how they would be and "secular Jew" did not resonate with them. It seemed that my co-travelers needed more time to be with the process of choosing before they were ready to use terms like "secular" or "cultural" to describe their Jewishness.

The process of discussing our futures as secular Jews led us to a clearing where we caught a glimpse of our life as a thrown projection (Guignon, 1983). The experience of asking questions about what kind of Jews we were going to be led us to an existential crossroads where we were faced with the question: "What does it mean to choose?" My co-travelers discovered that their Jewishness was part of that thrown projection. Their Jewishness was arbitrary and constructed, but it was real and immutable. In other words,

my co-travelers stumbled upon an enormous dilemma: On the one hand Jewishness was practically in our blood, it had been such an unmistakable part of our lives since we were born. Yet in a practically infinite universe the fact that we are Jewish can feel like a chance occurrence and we are faced with the choice of how to respond. Jenn described it this way:

It's like... you were born into it and that's just how, before you knew any different that's just how you knew life was. You know, before you knew that other people didn't celebrate those things and other people didn't eat gefilte fish.

The experience of becoming a secular Jew was a process of choosing: Choosing to be Jewish as well as choosing to be secular. This choice meant deciding to be different from religious Jews and painting a canvas that was seemingly like no other Jew. The process also involved ongoing questioning: Questioning central Jewish tenets as well as questioning one's self. It involved a desire for a new way of being and a yearning for a different kind of Jewish community. Becoming a secular Jew also meant grappling with the dilemma of whether to speak up as a Jew and as a secular Jew. Finally, becoming a secular Jew meant deciding how my co-travelers were going to live their life. It meant struggling with choosing to be authentic and facing the existential dilemmas that come with such a choice.

Choosing to Be Jewish: "This is Me Because I Have Chosen It"

What is the experience of choosing to be Jewish and choosing to try to be a secular Jew? Jews are not forced to be Jewish. In the United States in the beginning of the twenty-first century Jews have the choice to select living Jewishly as one option from any number of possibilities. Then, within the choice of living Jewishly, Jews have to decide what kind of Jew they are going to be. Even if Jews choose not to choose, a choice

is still being made. The current dilemma of choosing is seemingly a historic anomaly. Being able to relatively freely choose differs radically from times when Jews were forced to make the impossible choice between two bad (or worse) options. Yet, Jews are still bound to choice in so many aspects of their lives. My co-travelers are one example of Jews who have consciously and unconsciously chosen when to reveal their Jewishness in an attempt to control how they were perceived and treated.

In addition to attempting to control how they were seen, my co-travelers also realized that they could choose what kind of Jew to be. Allison found the choice liberating. She described the experience of choosing as a recent phenomenon becoming available to her in college.

I guess it sort of felt like I had to be Jewish because that's what my parents—that's what was expected of me. My parents sent me to religious school. They made me go and even though maybe I didn't want to go, they made me go. I'm glad they did now. And now it is more I know I don't have to be Jewish at all. If I wanted, I could just become Buddhist, but I guess I realized... how important it is to me.

Allison exemplified the move of Jewishness from subject to object. Previously Allison's Jewishness was just an indecipherable part of her. Allison, though, came to the understanding that she could reshape or rework her Jewishness. All the parts that seemed fixed were now open for consideration. The formerly finished canvas of her Jewish youth could be touched-up, reworked, or painted over.

Asya described choosing to be Jewish as a choice between being intentional and being a "blank canvas" where you abdicate the decision making to the larger culture or surroundings.

For me it's very important to be able to bond with something individualistically before I can bring it on as my own and I think that makes your experience so much better, and so much—see you more for who you are instead of being this

blank canvas and everything kind of influencing you, just doing everything at once. I want to be selective; this is me because I have chosen it not because it's been imposed upon me. Because what my parents are expecting of me is just as bad as me expecting my [non-Jewish] boyfriend to be Jewish. Like it's almost like just the same expectations that I could never—or him expecting me to be Christian. That's just hollow, that's empty.

Asya sought to intentionally fill in her canvas with the colors and types of paints that she chose as opposed to doing what was convenient or expected of her. Asya suggested that not only did she have responsibility for making the choice of what kind of Jew to be, but if she did not fulfill that responsibility she would be empty, hollow or “meaningless” (Nichols, 2001, p. 433).

Once my co-travelers realized that they were choosing how to paint a canvas with portions inherited from their family, culture and tradition they began to look at the experience of painting differently. Approaching the canvas with a palette of paints opened up a host of questions: What parts of the canvas would be preserved? What parts would be painted over? What parts were easily understood and what parts were confusing? The experience of choosing was gratifying for Jes, Allison, and Asya because it signaled intentional acts designed to give their life some shape—some meaning. Although Jes, Allison and Asya realized the immense responsibility in being able to decide to be Jewish, only Jes described that phenomenon as being remarkable. Allison and Asya did not interpret the process of choosing as extraordinary, it was just something you had to do as a Jew.

Questioning the Words: “What are You Saying? Why are You Jewish?”

The origins of my co-travelers' understanding that they had choices about living Jewishly were found in the questioning that was nurtured in traditional Jewish practice.

Co-travelers like Jordan, Elana and Jenn described what it was like to grow up in an environment where asking questions was nurtured and considering the words of Judaism was expected. Jordan described it this way: “I found in Judaism they would always encourage us to think about the words—what are you saying? Why are you Jewish? That’s how it was part of the organization I was a part of. But, so I appreciate that. That enabled me to grow and realize why being Jewish is important to me.” What did it mean for Jordan to “think about the words”? For Jordan this was not only another way to say that everything about being Jewish was open to questioning, but that the rudimentary elements—the molecules, the atoms—the very roots of Jordan’s Jewishness could be put under the veritable microscope and be examined, debated and questioned. Similar to the import Asya placed on her responsibility to choose what kind of Jew she was to become, Jordan stressed that he made intentional choices through questioning what kind of Jew to become.

From reading the words of religious Judaism my co-travelers developed questions that were to determine what kind of Jews they wanted to become. Jordan, for instance, was critical of Jewish teachings and literal definitions. He focused on the essence of the teachings and approached praying critically: “When I read out of the prayer book... I feel like every passage that I read basically, I take three fourths of it... saying, you know: be a good person, have a good week, do good things.” Later he said: “I’m at a point where I am not going to say the words if I don’t believe them anymore. I sit there next to my friends who are saying things and I’m thinking to myself: ‘They don’t believe this.’ So, and I question them: ‘Why do you say the words if you don’t believe them?’” The words

were critically important to Jordan for they were what he used to make sense out of his Jewish canvas.

During Elana's preparation for her bat mitzvah, Elana began to take a closer look at the scripture—the words—that she was preparing to recite to her community. Elana was raised in a predominantly Jewish environment surrounded by Hasidic Jews and conservative Jews. Elana described how she began to question of the words: “Conversations with my father, readings, even sometimes Hebrew school or talking with my friends.” Elana's doubts about religious practices and specifically her concern about publicly reciting prayers that she did not understand led her to not have a bat mitzvah.

Elana presented this period in her life in a relatively matter-of-factly tone. Yet this experience of not having a bat mitzvah was essentially a public pronouncement that there were certain words that were held in high esteem by the community that she was not going to say out loud. To preserve her integrity Elana was willing to risk how she was seen in her community.

Elana, however, did not necessarily voice all her questions about Judaism. Elana recalled that at the age of twelve she was curious about certain practices of religious Jews, but feared asking a teacher: “I thought it, but I never actually asked them, I would be too like: ‘What would they think if I asked them?’” Instead Elana made meaning about religious Judaism through her observations:

I don't regret it [not having a bat mitzvah] at all. My friends, they had bat mitzvahs and I went to their parties and it was fun, you know, but it wasn't a big deal. I don't feel people made a big deal for the girl to have a bat mitzvah. It was more of a big deal for my brother to have a bar mitzvah, to have *bar mitzvahs* was more of a push, like I wasn't even pushed for it so I don't feel like I missed out on anything.

Elana's observations about how girls and women were treated differently from boys and men led to additional questions about religious Judaism. This observation gave Elana the confidence to ask further questions about the words of Jewishness even if she did not voice these concerns to religious authorities. Asking questions bolstered Elana's ability to consider her canvas in college.

Jenn realized that despite her many years of attendance at Jewish Sunday school, her mother's active involvement in the temple and her family's observance of religious holidays, she really did not feel that educated about Judaism.

I couldn't sit down and like describe to you everything ... And I don't know what the Torah teaches and all that stuff. Like I just don't. I've never read any of it, really. I mean, because you can kind of, I mean I went through kindergarten to tenth grade straight of schooling... So it's kind of, I guess, it's kind of hard to support what you believe in, if you don't even know what you really believe.

Jenn was exposed to the words of Judaism, but did not understand what they meant. Jenn seemed to be asking similar questions as Jordan: "What are you saying? Why are you Jewish?" Jenn did not have answers to these questions, though.

What did it mean to question the words of Judaism? Questioning is an act of differentiation where awareness of one's self shifts from subject to object. Jordan was not only comfortable with wondering about the meanings, but prized this part of the Jewish tradition as a way to get closer to what Judaism meant to him. Elana and Jenn were also comfortable with questioning the words, but had less clarity about what it meant for their Jewishness. Nonetheless these questions gave my co-travelers a glimpse of their canvas. Even if it was for just a moment, my co-travelers saw a canvas with inherited paints and colors. Remarkably, they also witnessed that they were contributing to the painting.

A Jewish Voice: "I Don't Know if I Should... Speak Up?"

My co-travelers felt compelled as Jews to speak up or take action for social justice, but fears of being subject to anti-Semitism and insecurities about Jewishness undercut this desire for some of my co-travelers. Allison described her uncertainty in confronting others on their anti-Semitism: "I don't really know what to do, I don't know if I should say something, if I should speak up? Or just let it slide? And then get really angry on the inside and don't let it out." What does it mean to speak up? Whereas "speak" means "to utter words... with the ordinary voice" (Nichols, 2001, p. 1259), speak up or speak out means "to express one's opinion openly and unreservedly" (Nichols, 2001, p. 1259). What is it like to speak up? And what is it like to not speak up—to "let it slide"—and get angry only on the "inside"? Allison, for example, felt caught in a double bind. If she expressed her opinion openly, she may have "opened" herself up for additional comments and verbal abuse. If she reserved her true feelings, however, she might experience additional pain of not expressing how she truly felt. Allison feared displaying her canvas publicly, but experienced the pain of keeping her canvas shrouded.

Asya debated about what to do with her opposition to the "holiday tree" on campus. As she imagined bringing her concerns to the administration she worried how others would react to her unfinished painting. Her feelings about being Jewish were so mixed that she feared she was not the right Jew to make this opposition public.

I want to be able to not worry about how I am going to be perceived if I speak out against the tree and people thinking: "Well because she's Jewish, that's why I know she's Jewish, she doesn't care if she's rude or whatever." I don't want to worry about it. I want people to know me for who I am.

Asya found that her concerns about how she would be perceived and labeled as a Jew consistently outweighed her frustrations about the campus Christian displays. She feared being seen as pushy, naïve or, ironically, insensitive. Furthermore, because she was so uncertain about her Jewishness, she imagined that her arguments against the displays would not be well articulated: “I think because I’m unsure about my role as a Jew and like what it means to me, that’s why I feel the fear. Because I don’t have the knowledge to back up what I’m going to say.” Asya was also experiencing a double bind. She could not speak up until she was sure about her Jewishness and the related facts. However, when would Asya be sure? When would she be “free of doubt as to the reliability” (Nichols, 2001, p. 1317) of Jewish facts? When would Asya feel like her canvas was truly ready to be displayed?

Jenn imagined that if she spoke up against the displays she would also be subject to criticism. Her fear of speaking up about the dominant Christian environment was that it would appear like she was overreacting.

With the Holocaust you always hear people being like, “You know, never again.” And you can’t let the Holocaust happen again, you need to speak up when you see stuff like that happening. But I almost feel like that’s kind of... trite now. Like anytime, like, Jewish people are being oppressed, it’s like, “No never again, never again.” But... I almost feel that if that like, if stuff was going on here and we started to protest, it would almost kind of look like we were overreacting, you know, like, like people would be like: “Dude, what’s the big deal, we’re not trying to like oppress you.”

Jenn had clearly weighed the potential reactions for speaking up and imagined that if she expressed her opinion, her arguments would be undermined by suggestions that she was overreacting. Jenn imagined how deflating it would feel to work up the energy and courage to confront somebody only to have that individual turn around and

accuse Jenn of reacting too strongly. Jenn's fears of proudly displaying her canvas only to have it received with doubt and derision stopped her from speaking up.

*Doubting Judaism: "Different Parts of My Life...
Collide... and Crash"*

Part of the experience of choosing to be Jewish was making sense out of what role religious Judaism would play in my co-travelers' way of being Jewish. My co-travelers were raised as Jews such that being Jewish was understood to mean practicing some form of Judaism or religious Jewishness. My co-travelers never actually equated the two terms, Jew and Judaism; however, it was clear that these terms were used synonymously in my co-travelers' formative years. That is, my co-travelers were not raised with language about secular Jewishness. As a result, my co-travelers struggled with how to articulate their secular Jewishness. For instance, Jordan described how he felt about his Jewishness: "I'm sort of at a confused point, I guess with religion, I'm sort of unsure. I'm sure I'm Jewish and I believe in, but religion—organized religion as a whole—you know I'm still at the point where I don't know how I feel about it." Jordan had doubts or hesitation about being a religious Jew. Yet he lacked the language to describe the kind of Jew he was becoming. Jordan said "I believe in a lot of concepts from Buddhism and Rastafarianism especially when I travel and meet different people, especially I just sort of had this connection with Rastafarianism lately." By the end of our conversation, Jordan was starting to experience some fatigue and said: "I think I've had enough talking about religion for the day." Jordan and I were talking about much more than religion that day. We were discussing possibilities of being Jewish that involved bringing together elements of various faiths and cultures. Using the term "religion" may have been a causal reference; however, it seemed to suggest that it was difficult for Jordan to disconnect

being Jewish with being religious. So doubting and questioning Jewish faith required overcoming the challenge of creating a new vernacular of secular Jewishness.

Developing a secular Jewish vernacular often came about as a result of experiencing some doubt with religious Jewishness. Being doubtful means “a reluctance to be convinced... a strong feeling of uncertainty or indecision about something” (Nichols, 2001, p. 396). When Jes first doubted his Jewishness it was experienced as disappointment, but also as a hint that he may need to look beyond formal religion for answers and spirituality.

Jes’ interactions with orthodox Jews during his bar mitzvah preparations, particularly the Hasidic Jews in the Chabad sect, heavily influenced his view of Judaism and eventually colored his picture of Jewishness. At the age of twelve Jes was already sensitive to issues of race and racist thinking among some Jews. While Jes was preparing with his rabbi for his bar mitzvah he asked his rabbi whether he believed in the “curse of Ham,” a biblical misinterpretation suggesting that Africans descended from the biblical Ham. Ham’s son was cursed by Noah for seeing his father naked. Jes was demoralized that the rabbi believed this racist notion. “I’m like: ‘I’m not going to be part of that.’ I couldn’t be. I felt like I couldn’t be a part of something like that.” Jes experienced the rabbi’s thinking as racist and dependent on stereotypes. This experience opened Jes’ eyes to the collisions that can occur when he tried to pull together his values with certain parts of his Jewish background. Jes realized that he needed to be critical of the words of religious Judaism.

When Al considered the role that formal religious practice would play in her life, she thought back to negative experiences she had had with Judaism and religion. For

instance, the experience of being preached at during the campus Take Back the Night rally was a galvanizing moment for Al. “I’m thinking, here’s the time for us to come together and you’re telling me how much everybody here needs to find God and their own connection to God... like you should really turn to religion and I’m thinking, no, religion is not my haven.” Conversations about religion with students in the campus organization supportive of gays and lesbians were not comforting either. “It hurts me here, when we have discussions, especially in the gay group on campus, and they talk religion and I think wow, what a wonderful time to have a religion discussion, you know, and it ends up being Bible bashing and Bible quoting.” Al hoped to find a spiritual experience that incorporated the comforts of the religion of her youth with her identity. Al lamented her current state: “I don’t like to think that such different parts of my life could collide like that and crash, but really they do.”

Al sought a new vernacular of secular Jewishness that acknowledged her doubts with traditional Judaism and her lesbian identity. Instead, as she tried to bring elements of her identity together, they collided. To collide is “to strike one another or one against the other with a forceful impact” (Nichols, 2001, p. 262) and comes from the Latin root “collidere” which combines the words strike and together (Nichols, 2001). Instead of different parts of Al’s identity being able to exist together in the same space or on the same canvas they clashed with each other. This clashing led Al to further doubt religion.

Doubting Judaism is a tension between possibilities for a new Jewishness and a displacement from former ways of being. Uncertainties about religious Judaism led my co-travelers on a search for new paints, or new ways to represent their Jewishness.

Doubts can also lead to displacement, though, and involve a loss of community. A canvas

reflecting the collisions caused by doubts would seemingly portray some stark contrasts. However, this canvas would also demonstrate some connection or togetherness between these colliding forces. For my co-travelers secular Jewishness was born at the point where the two opposing ideas came together and struck.

Seeing Differently: "You Have such a Different Perspective"

Regardless of my co-travelers' Jewish background, they all were attempting to paint a canvas reflective of their unique way of being Jewish. My co-travelers grew up with a Jewishness that was synonymous with Judaism, but were beginning to discover that if they chose to paint a secular canvas then they would need to see their Jewishness differently. These paints, though, would emerge from the gifts of traditional Judaism. Jordan, for instance, a Computer Information Systems major in the College of Business, described how his experiences with traditional Judaism helped him see differently than his classmates. Jordan described the challenge of balancing familial pressure to pursue a career in business, with his personal motivation to get a degree in business without compromising his integrity.

My brother's an accountant working for one of the big five accounting firms. My cousin, who was born a day later than my brother, is working for a competing big five accounting firm. My other cousin graduated law school two years ago and is a big time lawyer and my other cousin is an investment banker... So that's what my family does, so that's like their thing. That's not my thing. Not even close and you know what? It's probably Judaism that made me realize that wasn't my thing by getting involved in service and all this. By getting involved in religion I realized those weren't the things for me.

I asked Jordan to describe what it was like to have familial pressure to pursue a traditional business career while also having a passion to improve the world. Jordan responded that it felt great to have a unique perspective and speak from that perspective:

Sitting in my classes and my teachers talking about money and this and that and everybody gets all into it and I just raise my hand and I just love to express my feelings like just say: “What are you all talking about? This isn’t where it’s at. There is so much more to life. Friends and family and love and community and compassion and learning, and not just business, but learning about life and people and travel and experiences.” And even with my parents and my brother will say: “You have such a different perspective.” I love the fact that they view me like that because I am different and I want to share that perspective with them and have them gain an appreciation for it, which they do over time.

Jordan suggested that it was his “Jewish eyes” that helped him perceive injustice and allowed him to find his voice to speak up on these issues. However, clearly it was not simply being Jewish that gave Jordan this perspective or he would not have differed so dramatically from his family. It is this subtle distinction that makes my co-travelers’ sense of Jewishness unique. Jordan, for instance, suggested that it was his traditional Jewish upbringing that taught him to think critically and motivated him to strike out on a unique path. Jordan pulled together the Jewish values he prized from his upbringing, eschewed the contradictions he perceived in religious Judaism, and set out to create his unique self-portrait. Jordan was able to find a key, something to unlock the different parts of himself as well as something to pull the disparate parts together.

Jordan contrasted his merging of secular and Reform Jewishness with a less flexible approach: “It doesn’t say: ‘This is the way it is, and this is the only way it is.’ There are many ways it is and you pick and choose what ways you want it to be.” Another source of pride for my co-travelers, then, was this feeling of choosing to paint a nuanced and unique canvas that might be like no other. For Jordan the point was not to simply paint a new and unique canvas, but to fully appreciate his entire canvas; from the inherited aspects to the parts that he created. Jordan was not interested in scraping off portions or even painting over other elements. Instead Jordan prized all the elements and

the focus was on interpreting the inherited portions and creating new portions that reflected his burgeoning spirituality.

Yearning for Secular Jewishness: “They Have Places Like This in the World?”

Al felt that the Jewish part of her self was slowly decaying in college and had turned into a “joke.” She hoped to take her Jewishness more seriously by finding a spiritual outlet such as the gay-friendly synagogue in Washington, D. C. (Al did not appreciate the off-campus synagogue at college). “I need to find something. And I just feel so it’s [Jewishness is] not really that much a part of me. Like it’s a joke. You know, when I’m sitting around. It’s more something to joke about than it is who I am.” Al’s Jewishness had turned into a joke, “an object of laughter or ridicule, especially because of being inadequate” (Nichols, 2001, p. 715). Al’s Jewishness had become inadequate in college and clearly she yearned to be more spiritual. To yearn means to long for and comes from a combination of the old English word for eager and the German word for desire (Nichols, 2001, p. 1517). While my co-travelers did not use the word “yearn” in our conversations, there was a “depth and power of the desire” (Nichols, 2001, p. 1517) to be Jewish expressed by my co-travelers that is best captured in this word. However, there was an equal and opposing force stopping my co-travelers from fully immersing themselves in secular Jewishness.

When Jenn visited her father’s extended family in Newton, just outside of Boston, she felt a warm and comforting Jewishness. Jenn described Newton, “They close the public schools for Jewish holidays... Like they got kosher delis all over the place. So it’s just like: ‘They have places like this in the world?’” Jenn could not believe the stark contrast between a community with a relatively large Jewish population compared to the

meager Jewish community in college. Similar to Al, Jenn felt that her Jewishness was not developing in college. She yearned for an environment where she could freely be Jewish. Following graduation Jenn enrolled in the Peace Corps and was placed in the mountains of Honduras. Perhaps this was ironic, but as a long term visitor to Honduras Jenn probably does not expect a Jewish community and appreciation for Jewishness that she seemed to hope for in college. Jenn's expectations are likely more realistic and as a result her Jewish canvas might develop in unexpected ways.

Asya had been trying to commit to better understanding the role that Jewishness would play in her life, but she consistently got sidetracked. Asya would begin a semester with a commitment to learning more about being Jewish, yet the semester would pass without this commitment ever being fulfilled.

At the beginning of the semester I was like: "I'm going to do this and I'm going to learn and I'm going to go and be part of Hillel and search out." ... I felt like I had an epiphany. And then it's like: "Oh, but I have everything else to do." And it is more pressing that I get everything else done. It's easier to think that's more important.

Asya's desire to not "deny" her Jewishness and her eagerness to find out what being Jewish meant to her seemed to get continually postponed. Asya originally believed there was a destination ahead where her feelings about Jewishness would be resolved, and she simply needed to fulfill the commitment in getting there. Asya came to realize, however, that she was on a path that was much less linear than she had originally thought.

Being raised in a household in the midst of a heavily Jewish community where her family regularly focused on Jewish symbolism and Jewish art fostered Elana's desire to practice the mystical elements of Jewishness. Elana was introduced to Jewish mysticism by her parents but was confused about how to incorporate it into her life. "I

know it through my father because my father is fascinated by it, my mother is fascinated by it... it opens up a different door.” That door for Elana is an entryway into an essence of Jewishness. She desires to walk through it, but was also cautiously standing back, pausing and waiting. Elana complained that Jewish leaders did not emphasize Jewish mysticism, but clearly Elana was also reluctant to be the one to place that emphasis in her own life. For Elana the questions about Judaism and her relationship with her boyfriend, Shelly, may have held her back from walking through this symbolic doorway.

Whereas there are “Chabad houses” where anyone is welcome to learn how to practice Chasidic Judaism, Jes wished that there was a secular home for similar kinds of conversations. “There should be something, there should be a movement for young people to go out and find a spirituality without the pressure of having to go into the Hasidim.” Similar to Al, Jes yearned for a space where he could practice Jewishness that conveyed the comfort of the Lubavitch synagogue of his upbringing without the religious elements. Perhaps if there had been an established place on campus where unfinished canvases of Jewishness could be displayed and discussed my co-travelers might have felt like they were uncovering a more fully realized secular Jewishness.

Seeking a Secular Jewish Canvas: “I’ve... Paved My Own Way”

Asya felt like she lived in her “own world” as a secular Jew. Lacking mentors, family members and peers, she felt she was alone or paving her own way on the path to secular Jewishness. She described it this way:

I think it is difficult because I haven’t found somebody like a mentor that lived the way that they live and the way that I want to live. I haven’t found somebody who is a secular Jew, totally comfortable. Even the woman I worked with that we corresponded back and forth a little bit, I don’t really hang out with her, I don’t really see her all the time so it’s difficult to observe how she’s Jewish... so I have the way my parents are and then I have my grandmother, they are two pretty big

extremes neither of which I necessarily want to cling to. So I'm kind of looking for that middle road and I haven't found anybody who really lives like that, that's why it makes me harder to see that realization because I've kind of like paved my own way and it's like it's hard to be a pioneer and not that I don't think I'm the first person to ever think this way but as far as I'm concerned I am—for my own experience, my own world.

Ironically, Asya was not alone in this feeling. My other co-travelers also expressed frustration in feeling alone on the path to secular Jewishness. The difficulty in seeing a path was exacerbated by the feeling that they were uncertain about the direction of the path and whether they were even on the path. Asya lacked anyone or anything to cleave with. She did not have role models, books or family members that would help her understand life as a secular Jew.

Jes contrasted the feeling of lacking Jewish role models as a secular Jew with growing up Chasidic: "I... am almost grateful that I grew up in something that was a little bit more rigid because at least I know where one of the stones lay." The "stones" of Jes' religious youth acted as landmarks and occasionally pavers for him to more easily navigate his way. The path had been cleared by the many who had traveled before him. The stones marked and smoothed the way for easier travel. As secular Jews my co-travelers were never sure if they could see the stones on the path and whether they would see anyone else on the path. Yet my co-travelers also felt some pride as Jews and power from being unique and making independent decisions.

The experience of seeking secular Jewishness was challenging for co-travelers like Asya and Jes who would have benefited from meeting other students in a similar position. Paving their own way meant keeping their Jewish canvas relatively hidden and limited the opportunities to openly discuss what it was like to choose to be a secular Jew and paint a Jewish canvas.

Existential Jewishness: "What's the Point of Freedom?"

As Jenn wondered what role Jewishness would have in her life she questioned some of the tenets of Judaism that she had not previously questioned:

Because you were like: "I've always been doing this so this must be the right thing for me to do." And then once you start to realize the whole process is arbitrary, you know like, you are just kind of whatever you were born into, like I mean you figured it out, but on the other hand I've already got all these cultural traditions so it's something, not something that I am stuck with but it's just now what I know to be my life.

When Jenn realized that being Jewish was arbitrary in the sense that she could have just as easily been born in a different family with a different faith or religion, her ability to question being Jewish changed. However, since Jenn was raised in a Jewish home she acknowledged that Jewishness was a central, almost immutable, part of her being. Nonetheless this freed Jenn to ask what kind of Jew she would be.

Asya came at these existential questions from two opposite perspectives. Asya acknowledged that her family made sacrifices for her to have the freedoms and choices available to her. What responsibility does Asya have to that tradition?

What's my responsibility to my grandmother and my parents...? And now that I'm in a place where I can relatively express who I am, even know that it's still difficult underneath it all, but more freely, I'm not going to be persecuted and put in a ghetto, you know killed because I'm Jewish... What's my responsibility to that struggle they had? Like the Holocaust, what's my role in that? Is it just the role of the individual, humanitarian or is it more so the fact that I take on Judaism and pass it on to my children and continue that legacy, so I don't know.

Asya felt accountable to the family and tradition that contributed so much to the way she experienced the world. Her canvas would have to always reflect this struggle. At the end of our last conversation Asya made a realization with very different consequences, though. She was trying to figure out what kind of Jew she would become

and found guidance in her journey to a well-reasoned Jewish spirituality from Kierkegaard's views on Christianity:

We talked about this in philosophy. One of the philosophers we studied was Kierkegaard: You are not Christian because you go to church and your family is Christian and you celebrate Christmas. You are Christian because of your relationship to God and what it means to you and the struggle you go through and finding who that is and how to express that in your daily life without being reprimanded by other Christians or held to a standard that people are imposing on you for no apparent reason. I think it is very poignant. I think that is very, like that is a core of what I am getting to. Me being Jewish, if I am going to be Jewish it has to be part of me, it has to be every part.

Asya's realization that for Jewishness to be "every part" of her she had to consider what constituted her being. This reconsideration forced Asya to come to terms with the existential quality of her Jewishness:

I have never been given this kind of opportunity; I have responsibility; I have to answer to myself. Before with my family it was just do what they want and at least I knew my boundaries because I had what my parents were saying and I had what other people were saying, but I really didn't have my own way of thinking.

Asya realized that the boundaries that she had taken for granted were constructed and could be revised or even ignored. Asya had yearned for a well-defined Jewishness with clear expectations and boundaries. She came to realize that she had unbounded freedom to construct her spirituality which came with an immense amount of responsibility.

This realization led Asya to ask this question of her self and of secular Jewishness: "What's the point of freedom if you're not going to—in your heart, in your soul and in your mind—you don't believe in what you are doing?" Asya was dazzled by this new found freedom, but she quickly realized that she felt as accountable to this freedom as she did to her ancestors.

Asya discovered that for her to claim that she is Jewish she had to have some kind of practice, whether it was community service, getting together with family on holidays, making Jewish food or starting her own traditions. “I don’t know if I can just say that I’m Jewish and not really practice.” Originally what made it difficult for Asya to reveal her Jewish canvas was that she sought a foundation of Jewish facts to support her spirituality. Asya compared her feelings about Jewishness to her personality in classes: “Like you know in class, I’m not the first one who is going to raise my hand up unless I know that I have all the facts.” However with Jewishness, “you are never going to have all the facts. If you want to be able to initiate, make a difference, sometimes you have to go into it because you feel it... You know, I’m just getting rid of the embarrassment, you know all the things you learn from like grade school.” For Asya then, her journey toward secular Jewishness would be a journey toward her thrown projection with a conscious remembrance of her elders.

From taking an introductory philosophy class and from trying to explain Judaism to her boyfriend, Elana discovered that she has begun to think more critically about her Jewishness. Elana explained that her philosophy class has taught her to think differently: “just looking, like not from me, but taking my self out and looking at the whole thing in just like general. Like me within the general world... I don’t know, it’s really weird.” Elana was grappling with how to step outside of her customary way of thinking and perceiving. She was on the brink of experiencing the world differently:

I’ve never been a fan of philosophy at all; I hated it. I thought people questioned too much, it was stupid, like get over it, but... I mean you question things and you understand things more. Like you question the little things which can end up leading to even the understanding of what is around you.

At our last conversation Elana noted, “Just because I am me and I am with me like twenty-four seven, all the time, I should know who I am and I don’t.” Elana described this experience of coming to better know herself as: “You feel like something is taking off in me. For real, like what things really are.” Elana was opening her eyes to her true Jewish canvas. She was in the process of questioning and revealing. As she revealed a more complex portrait she began to ask larger questions.

Elana realized that her relationship with Shelly felt “real” or concrete while her Jewish background felt “psychological” or unreal. Elana’s ponderings pointed her to the existential juncture that Asya and Jenn grappled with: “And then I was like: ‘Well, how about if I do, I end this special feeling with him, then it’s for nothing?’ You know it [Jewishness] was something I was brought up with that is more psychological than it really is religion.” Elana was beginning to realize the arbitrary underpinnings of Jewishness. As her parents began to warn her about her interfaith relationship, her doubts about religious Judaism grew. She pondered why she would exchange her relationship with Shelly, who is real, for Jewishness that Elana is not sure “really counts.” Elana’s spiritual journey had landed her at an existential crossroads. Choices that were seemingly non-existent only weeks earlier were now important decisions that would substantially affect her relationships with her boyfriend, parents, and Jewishness.

The Choice of Existence

When the novice painter approaches the canvas there is likely to be some hesitation before the painter dips the brush in the paint and applies the brush to the canvas. The hesitation may be more pronounced if the painter were working with an already painted canvas. The pressure grows as the painter considers how to balance the

history of the painted canvas with the need for the new painting to reflect the essence of the painter. The painter has the freedom to choose where the brush will touch canvas, but the choice will forever change the canvas.

My co-travelers' eyes were opened to the idea that they could choose what kind of Jews to become. Making this choice meant deciding what connection to have with the thousands of years of Jews who paved the way for my co-travelers. Making this choice was also influenced by my co-travelers' understanding, or lack thereof, of the language and beliefs of religious Judaism. As the choice was being made about what kind of Jew to become, my co-travelers were also in the position to speak up on social issues. Several of my co-travelers were hesitant to speak up due to fears of anti-Semitism. My co-travelers sought a secular Jewishness that pulled together the disparate elements of their identities. This was most challenging for AI who described elements of her Jewishness as literally "crashing." Finally, my co-travelers were faced with the biggest choice of all: To choose whether to be a secular Jew when the arbitrary nature of our being is revealed. My co-travelers chose to be Jewish, but the challenge of living this existence will be whether they can focus on the development of their Jewish eyes and painting their Jewish canvases.

The Temporality of Being Jewish

I began this chapter with two quotes. The first quote suggested that when humans come to terms with their truly arbitrary and rootless existence a transformation occurs. Seeing one's life as a thrown projection allows humans to gain a greater sense of our transitory nature and gain an appreciation of how our meanings are constructed (Guignon, 1983). Seeing one's existence as impermanent or temporary opens possibilities

for living differently (Dreyfus, 1991). When we catch a glimpse of how our meanings are constructed we fear that our existence is threatened (Richardson, 1986). However, seeing one's rootless existence also reveals possibilities. To be in touch with one's temporality and the possibilities of a rootless existence involves rethinking the notion of time.

The second quote suggested that our eyes can deceive us. One may think one is seeing the essence of something only to be fooled by the everyday meanings assigned by one's culture. Seeing the essence of something is more difficult than one may be originally led to believe. The meanings and workings of one's culture can make it intensely difficult to be open to the possibilities of existence. We are so immersed in our culture how do we experience the authentic being of another?

I return to these two quotes now because they reflect my experience of attempting to bring the essence of my co-travelers forward. I articulated the challenge of engaging in hermeneutic phenomenology in the questions I asked at the beginning of this chapter. As I have attempted to immerse myself in the narratives of my co-travelers, I have found that I needed to rethink my temporality. That is, to be with my co-travelers and reveal the possibilities of their text I needed to dwell with others in a way that I was not accustomed to. It required a new way of seeing that would allow me to be open to the essence of others. To "do" phenomenology I needed to be phenomenological. This was more difficult than I anticipated. It is this challenge that I describe in the next chapter.

My co-travelers brought forward unfinished canvases of Jewishness. They described what it was like to see their Jewishness and the difficulty of doing this seeing in a hegemonic environment. They tried to put together a palette of paints of secular Jewishness that they would use to paint their Jewish canvas. As my co-travelers'

visualized their unfinished canvases, they caught a glimpse of their temporary existence. My co-travelers discovered that their canvas challenged them to consider their Jewish inheritance as well as the freedom to create a different existence. What does it mean to catch a glimpse of one's existence? What might it mean to be able to paint one's own canvas? What is it like to paint a canvas of one's existence without a community to view completed works? These are the questions of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT DO THE CANVASSES MEAN? MAKING MEANING FROM OUR JOURNEY

I must have been 7 or 8, squatting on the summer-hot pavement with my sister, scrawling disappearing messages on the concrete with snapped leaves of an ice plant, when it occurred to me that people could agree on the name of a thing, in this case, a color—the green of the translucent fluid that oozed from the leaf, which we determined was chartreuse—while seeing it very differently. I understood that when my sister agreed on the name chartreuse, she might, in fact, be seeing what I call red or yellow or blue. I began to see language less as a bridge between people than as a threadbare rope tossed from one edge of a precipice to open hands at another. (Bartlett, 2002, p. F01)

This was a study about revealing and becoming. My co-travelers were attempting to expose their inherited, yet covered-over canvas—their way of being Jewish. They were also attempting to envision something that did not fully exist yet—their way of being secular. Essentially this was a study about the experience of attempting to realize one's authentic Jewish Being. This study attempted to respond to a culture and society faced with endemic nihilism (Levin, 1989) by bringing forward authentic Being. What is Being, though? Our Being of beings is our covered over essence revealed through a rich description of our concrete reality (Freire, 1994) or everyday way of being. Listening to the language of our everyday way of being slowly reveals the meanings we have attached to the things that matter to us as human beings.

My co-travelers and I used language to engage in the process of uncovering the meanings of our Jewishness. Each of my co-travelers revealed the paints, brush strokes and texture of a larger canvas through the sharing of stories, feelings and beliefs. I made meaning of my co-travelers' language through listening, asking questions, sharing my stories, laughing and even crying. Language was what made it possible for us to connect with each other. At times my co-travelers or I could barely describe what it was like to be

Jewish. On other occasions I found myself wondering how a co-traveler's experience or description connected to her or his Jewishness. This highlights the challenge of doing phenomenological work. I needed to have open hands to the threadbare rope of language to bridge the gap between myself and my co-travelers' authentic Being. How does one be open to the language of another?

In this chapter I attempt a response to the question of how to be open to the being of an-other by returning to the themes of the previous chapter. By looking at the meaning and implications of the themes I gain a better appreciation for how to be with others in my work as a student affairs professional. I begin by describing my experience of being with co-travelers as a metaphor for the challenging work of being an educator. I then re-enter the themes to raise new questions about secular Jewishness and the role of educators in drawing out authentic Being. I raise up the themes to look for threads that connect the themes to issues and challenges in higher education. I conclude by looking back on the journey and asking new questions of myself.

Being With the Being of Co-Travelers

My desire was to always be with and understand my co-travelers, but I have come to realize how easy it was for the words of my co-travelers to plummet from the metaphorical edge of the precipice, alluded to in the above quote, never to be caught. I needed to create a phenomenological space to transcend the chasm and draw out my co-travelers' essences. To receive the words of my co-travelers I needed to be in a way that let the language of their experience emerge. As van Manen (1990) instructed: "It is in and through the words that the shining through (the invisible) becomes visible" (p. 130). How did I be with my co-travelers to let the essences of their being shine through? It was

precisely this “being with” that I struggled with. For my co-travelers to reveal their Being of beings I needed to be with them. To truly do a phenomenological study I needed to immerse myself in the experience and lifeworld of my co-travelers. Dreyfus (1991) explained the importance of dwelling in the language to reveal essences:

Once one has been socialized into a community’s practices, as long as one dwells in those practices rather than taking a detached point of view, words are simply heard and seen as meaningful. Only dwelling in our linguistic practices reveals their sense. (p. 219)

Revealing the authentic sense of our language will reveal something much deeper—our Being of beings. Engaging in phenomenology involved a be-ing with my co-travelers where I sat on the precipice open to receiving the “threadbare rope” of language of my co-travelers.

The process of making themes from this language was seemingly simple yet surprisingly complex. Although I go through my days interpreting and making sense out of phenomena, the kind of interpretation required in this project differed from day-to-day interpretation because it necessitated getting at the essence of an experience and making that essence explicit. Entering the lifeworld of my co-travelers by being with hundreds of pages of transcripts while bracketing my pre-understandings and staying oriented to the phenomenon was challenging. The only way to arrive at the themes presented in Chapter Four was through the heart of phenomenology—writing. My goal was to make the structures of meaning of secular Jewish college students more visible through “direct contact with the experience as lived” (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). It required writing and re-writing until I revealed the essence of being a secular Jewish college student.

once
when i saw a tree cut in half

i said in surprise
it is wet
and you said back:
it is a living thing
and we tend to forget
that like blood
this transparent
dew leaks life (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 89)

Engaging phenomenologically with co-travelers reminds me of the heart of student affairs work. Whether I emphasize student development or student learning the focus as student affairs professionals is on how to help students make meaning. Being with co-travelers required me to step back and consider how open I was to the meaning making experiences of students. Throughout this study questions of how deeply engaged I was with the complex narratives of my co-travelers have tugged at me. I have worried that I was not honoring the language of my co-travelers and for my convenience simplifying the meanings of my co-travelers' experience. I have repeatedly stated that my hope was to engage with students in a way that authentic meanings would emerge. Yet, I also hoped to make progress toward completing this work. These two hopes seem to oppose each other. I found myself faced with this question: How do I stay pointed toward the phenomenon of secular Jewishness, while also maintaining my hope of completing this project? The conundrum here was that phenomenology demanded me to focus on being and my desire to see this work to conclusion emphasized doing. Similar to doing student affairs work, I was struck with how to balance being with the need to do. How could I develop a coherent text based on hundreds of pages of complex, overlapping, non-linear, unfinished narratives? At one point I attempted to create themes by taking my printed transcripts and cutting them into themes. As I tore through the pages with scissors I realized I was trying to establish a linear order over something with exceeding

complexity. Eventually I set aside an entire binder with cut up quotes to return to the language of my co-travelers in their full context.

This tendency to separate being from doing and seeing from acting reinforces the meaninglessness that plagues our society (Levin, 1988b, 1989). Taking the scissors to my co-travelers' narratives unnecessarily and artificially distanced myself from my co-travelers by making the words merely a means to an end. Returning to the language of my co-travelers was where I most closely balanced being and doing. Allowing myself to see and care for the canvasses of my co-travelers and letting go or suspending my emphasis on doing brought me closer to pulling together the narratives of my co-travelers in a meaningful way.

frankly
i don't want to disturb
the current scheme and it is
inconvenient to say the least
of you to come now at this time
when i had it all so well arranged
insisting with your monotony
on the pain (Kelffisz, 1990b, p. 91)

By attempting to create a phenomenological space for my co-travelers to share their experience we discovered that to exist in college as evolving secular Jews was inconvenient and required disturbing "the current scheme." Several of my co-travelers used the expression "sort of" to describe how they modified their Jewishness. My co-travelers navigated the college environment by "sort of" being Jewish. For instance, Al said it was "sort of" positive to not have to disclose her Jewishness and keep it relatively hidden. Elana suggested that her Jewishness "sort of relaxes in the background." Jes described how he desired to fit into the college culture: "I wanted to be sort of part of that culture."

My co-travelers did not deny their Jewishness, but to fit in to an environment where Jewishness was not the norm they regulated the extent to which they publicly shared their Jewishness. My co-travelers kept their unfinished Jewish canvasses unseen. To be “sort of” was a way to not fully be inconvenienced by living in a less than hospitable environment. However, a “sort of” existence sometimes required cleaving—cutting parts of oneself up to adhere or be part of a community. This cleaving kept my co-travelers from fully being themselves in college.

What are the implications of my journey with co-travelers? What does it mean that I struggled to balance being with my co-travelers with my need to complete my work--a cleaving of being and doing? What do I do now that I realize my co-travelers struggled to authentically be in college? The process of making themes about the experience of being a secular Jewish college student allowed me to develop “a theory of the unique” (van Manen, 1990, p. 155). This theory strengthens the intimacy between knowledge and action. That is, by not glossing over the lived experience of secular Jewish college students and avoiding generalizations about this experience my hope is that we arrive at a theory that increases our understanding of a particular experience and moves the reader to action. This chapter then is devoted to clarifying how being with my co-travelers moves us from an immersion in the text to commitments to action (Ricoeur, 1991).

In Chapter Four I revealed the experience of attempting to envision secular Jewishness. From experiencing the seeing of others, how does our seeing change? The etymological root for the word “see” means “to come after” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.), directing us to act on what we see. What follows in this chapter is a journey back

into the themes of the previous chapter and the meaning I make of those themes. I will then return to my bracketed pre-understandings to see how my journey with co-travelers challenges me to reconsider my previous understanding of the phenomenon of being a secular Jewish college student. Van Manen (1990) reminds us that the reason we engage in this research is not to make abstract generalizations about education and pedagogy. The hope here is that this research changes our orientation to students so that we can make commitments to creating forms of education that lead to democracy, fairness, liberation and justice and ultimately environments where students can make meaning to authentically be. I will therefore suggest concrete steps to act on what was learned from the experience with my co-travelers. Finally, I conclude by discussing how I will live differently as a result of making this journey.

Themes From Our Journey

The themes from my journey with seven Jewish college students help me better understand what it is like to be a secular Jewish college student. Although I have more thoroughly explored these themes in the previous chapter, I briefly review the themes here to provide a context for postulating implications and meaning from my journey.

I came to understand the experience of being a secular Jewish college student through the metaphor of seeing. From reading and re-reading the texts of my co-travelers the notions of Jewish eyes and Jewish canvases began to catch the light of my interpretation. Jewish eyes were the lenses that filtered my co-travelers' world, and the partially visible canvases were an acknowledgment to others that my co-travelers were Jewish. My co-travelers saw things from a Jewish perspective and if others found out my co-travelers were Jewish, my co-travelers felt like they were seen differently. As is

evident in the previous chapter, how one sees cannot be easily separated from how one is seen.

Uncovering the gestalt—the patterns that underscore the structures of our being—is like revealing an unfinished painting in the midst of creation. My co-travelers were in the process of discovering what their canvases—their gestalt—looked like as secular Jewish college students. This was a process of renegotiating the subject-object balance and moving from a transparent to a visible Jewishness. It was a process of realizing their eyes were actually Jewish eyes. It also meant catching a glimpse of a complex and at times paradoxical canvas.

What was it like for my co-travelers to open their eyes to their canvases of Jewishness? Being situated at the apex of juxtaposing and conflicting forces—choosing between hiding and being visible in a hegemonic Christian environment—put my co-travelers in a position where they frequently went from keeping their Jewishness hidden from public view to exposing it and then back again. The clearing where my co-travelers would reflect on their Jewish eyes would often become concealed as they coped with other day-to-day stresses of the college environment. My co-travelers discovered that they could go through their days in college as invisible Jews. Their Jewishness would be invisible to others as well as themselves. Then, without thinking about their Jewish eyes or their Jewish canvas, they would be surprised back into awareness of their Jewish self by an incident or experience.

Regardless of how frequently they considered their eyes—their way of seeing—as Jewish, they carried with them the sense that they saw the world and were seen by the world differently than students who are not Jewish. My co-travelers found being Jewish

in college as something of an oddity. Their Jewishness felt like a defect in relation to the majority, Christian students. Questions, statements, and assumptions by my co-travelers' peers reinforced the feeling that Jews did not typically exist in this area. Consequently some of my co-travelers made appreciable efforts to conceal their Jewishness as an attempt to gain influence or control over how they were seen by others.

Concealing Jewishness was also accomplished through downplaying one's Jewishness and joining the majority culture on campus. Using traditionally oppressed groups like African Americans or Latinas, as counterpoints some of my co-travelers described the experience of gaining entry to the more dominant group. Hiding one's Jewishness was a way to gain acceptance from the majority culture and "be assumed into Christianity." Passing was a way to downplay the differences between being Jewish and being a member of the White, Christian culture. It was also intended to mitigate fears of being seen as different, experienced as subordinate or even being ignored. Disclosing their Jewishness would threaten my co-travelers' access to the privileges extended to members of the dominant group, but it would also open the possibility of deeper meaning.

Despite this desire to not always be seen as Jews, my co-travelers felt proud to be Jewish. Intermingled with this pride was a sense of embarrassment for feeling superior over Christianity and observant Christians. Although my co-travelers struggled to relate to other Jews, and some wondered if they were the right kind of Jews, they still felt proud to be Jewish. My co-travelers respected Jewishness for its survival through centuries of onslaught, and feared Christianity for its ability to extinguish Jewishness.

Thus, my co-travelers' Jewish "lenses" were made more explicit by living in an environment saturated with Christianity. From their first days on campus my co-travelers were quickly "hit" or "slammed" by an overwhelmingly Christian environment. Whether it was being on a campus that overtly celebrated Christmas, being targeted with anti-Semitic remarks, fearing anti-Semitism, feeling uncertain about Jewish beliefs or being on the receiving end of Christian proselytizing, my co-travelers at times felt cut off by this "out-of-control" milieu. In this place of overpowering Christianity my co-travelers were forced to wonder what it meant to be Jewish and if their Jewishness meant anything to the campus.

Several of my co-travelers articulated what it felt like to be seen as different and expressed uncertainty about what it meant to be different. For instance, the expression "oh you're a Jew" generated fear among some of my co-travelers because it was unclear if it signaled anti-Semitism or a more sensitive acknowledgment of difference. My co-travelers were aware of misconceptions that existed about Jews, and some even tried to act in ways that would not reinforce stereotypes. Nonetheless, some of my co-travelers experienced overt and intentional acts of anti-Semitism. Through oppressive Christianity the campus made it difficult for my co-travelers to be openly Jewish and hesitant to engage with the campus.

In this less than hospitable environment my co-travelers attempted to understand the meaning of their Jewish canvas. Lacking the taken-for-granted community and expectations of home, the freedoms of college revealed to my co-travelers that they truly could choose how (or whether) to be Jewish. My co-travelers experienced the choice of what kind of Jew to become as an existential dilemma. The experience of choosing was

inextricably intertwined with making sense of the religious lexicon of my co-travelers' youth. My co-travelers not only questioned the words of religious Judaism, but also discovered that they needed a new vernacular to support their secular Jewishness. My co-travelers experienced the challenge of an uncertain vocabulary when they were in positions to speak up on social issues as Jews. On occasion they found themselves hesitating because of their unresolved feelings about being Jewish and their fears of anti-Semitism.

All my co-travelers were yearning for a deeper and more satisfying spirituality, yet some of my co-travelers' efforts to seek out a secular Jewishness became sidetracked. Although my co-travelers were not necessarily consistently pursuing a secular Jewishness, they knew what they desired. My co-travelers imagined an inherently non-religious Jewishness that was nevertheless informed by traditional Jewishness and even incorporated religious Jewish elements. My co-travelers had substantial doubts about religious Judaism, though, that stemmed from hurtful religious experiences where they felt confused and disconnected from family, community and authority figures. Their efforts to create a new and unique Jewishness involved determining how to bring together various elements of their identity such as their sexual orientation, spiritual interests and commitment to social justice.

Ultimately our conversations revealed an unresolved existential dilemma. Even though each co-traveler knew they were Jewish, they also began to realize that they had the responsibility to choose what to do with this inheritance. This uncertainty was exciting and daunting. The lack of a significant or formal secular Jewish community meant that each of my co-travelers felt essentially alone on the journey to revealing their

secular Jewishness. Furthermore, lacking role models, books and guides made it even more difficult for my co-travelers to see the pattern or gestalt of their secular Jewishness. My co-travelers caught a glimpse of the structures of their existence. Although there is no way to easily or cleanly resolve a dilemma of these proportions, my co-travelers seem committed to turning toward their essence and making their multifaceted portraits of Jewishness visible.

What Does it All Mean?

In Chapter Two I submitted my pre-understandings to initially bring forward the phenomenon of secular Jewishness, while also setting aside my assumptions before engaging in this research endeavor. After experiencing the lifeworld of my seven co-travelers and doing the work of generating themes from our conversations I have entered the phenomenon of secular Jewishness newly and more deeply. I have devoted the next portion of this chapter to discussing how student affairs professionals, faculty and other members of the campus community can view their work differently in light of the stories of my co-travelers and the meaning I have made from these narratives. This section also addresses new questions that have emerged after taking this journey with my co-travelers. Finally, I make suggestions for concrete action.

When I began this project I expected to find students who were seeking to transform the world through secular Jewishness. In a world where narcissism has led to nihilism (Levin, 1989)—a loss of meaning—I hoped to discover students who were engaged in the process of meaning making through a well-articulated secular Jewishness. I set aside these hopes and understandings when I entered into conversation with my co-travelers. During my conversations I attempted to maintain a strong orientation to the

phenomenon of coming to know what it is like to be a secular Jew by keeping these pre-understandings—my “horizon of already granted meanings” (Palmer, 1969, p. 24)—bracketed.

Although the students with whom I entered into dialogue struggled to specifically articulate their experience as secular Jews, they clearly were engaged in a project of reclaiming hope and meaning. By asking existential questions of how to live with an inherited canvas of Jewishness while attempting to envision a secular being, my co-travelers were clearly engaged in a search for meaning. In effect, I had direct contact with the experience of becoming a secular Jew. My co-travelers did not have a coherent secular Jewishness with concise definitions, intentional practices, and formal understanding of what it meant to be secular. They were in the process of becoming, and when I listened closely to the details of their day-to-day lives I heard voices of a nuanced, secular Jewishness.

From Embeddedness to Differentiation

Jewishness is too complex, nuanced, and contradictory to be encapsulated concisely or reduced to a dictionary definition. Jewishness persists despite the lack of a definition, because Jews are continually interpreting and re-writing Jewish text. I encountered co-travelers who were in the midst of this struggle to figure out how to live lives as secular Jews and uncover the boundaries or edges of their Jewishness. Their struggle to define what Jewishness meant and “re-write Jewish text” was like painting a self-portrait to determine what is themselves and what is their context. The process of uncovering a gestalt for their Jewishness meant emerging from their embeddedness in the inherited canvas of their families and culture. It meant finding a new way to be in the

world where my co-travelers were not subject to their Jewishness. Instead their Jewishness became an object of their attention. This process of differentiation meant realizing that they did not inherit a finished canvas, but the mere paints to coalesce into a new painting revealing the culmination of who they are as Jews.

My co-travelers' experience suggested, though, that I neglected to acknowledge in Chapter Two the process and complexities of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001). I had asserted that Jewishness is defined by the grappling with the stories of our Jewishness and the creation of a Jewish canvas based on those stories. I have come to realize, however, that the canvas of our Jewishness is intricately connected to our ability to paint. That is, the ability to portray our Jewish canvas—the culmination of who we are as Jews—is dependent on our ability to make sense out of what it means to be Jewish. The complexity of such a task is multiplied when we consider the role of family, racial identity, and gender identity, for instance, in the development of the canvas.

What can student affairs professionals do to support students' movement from embeddedness to differentiation? What can our campuses do to support students in the process of revealing the gestalt of their being? Baxter Magolda (2001) seemed to pose a similar question at the conclusion of her longitudinal study when she asked how faculty and staff could be good company on students' travels toward self-authorship. Baxter Magolda described the process of self-authorship for the students that participated in her longitudinal study as "the capacity to internally define their own beliefs, identity and relationships" (p. xvi). Baxter Magolda began her study in 1986 with 101 first-year college students. Baxter Magolda noted that the original 101 participants in her study did not make substantial gains toward self-authorship until after they graduated from college.

To understand the post-college experience Baxter Magolda continued her study with 39 students. Although Baxter Magolda primarily described an epistemological process, her work is helpful with this ontological study because it sheds light on how the process of coming to be is related to the process of coming to know. Baxter Magolda described coming to know as a process of self-authorship. Students are more likely to become authors of their lives by moving from a phase of borrowing or adopting external formulas to work through uncertainty to a realization of the dilemma when the formulas no longer adequately function.

Similar to the students in Baxter Magolda's study, my co-travelers took various routes to arrive at a "crossroads" where they were abandoning former ways of knowing and developing their internal source of making meaning (Baxter Magolda, 2001). According to Baxter Magolda (2001) the crossroads "was a turning point that called for the letting go of external control and beginning to replace it with one's internal voice" (p. 94). My co-travelers negotiated a dialectic between external and internal, between embeddedness and differentiation. My co-travelers were considering the shift from external formulas to an internal voice, but were negotiating expectations of community and family. To suggest that my co-travelers were or needed to become the sole authors of their text or painters of their canvas would ignore the important role family and community play in my co-travelers' understanding of self. Instead my co-travelers were and would clearly continue to be co-authors of their new Jewish text.

How can student affairs professionals be good company on students' journey toward co-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001)? Colleges must recognize that for Jewish students the role of family cannot be underestimated. The importance of fostering

communities that support the process of meaning making cannot be ignored either. In addition, universities must be a place where students can attempt to bring their full selves together so they are most ready to learn. Furthermore, student affairs professionals and faculty members must develop the art of being with the ambiguity of Being. These ideas are elaborated upon in the following sections.

The Role of Family

“I think, okay, this is a pretty big revelation. I think the reason why a lot of the cultural aspect of it doesn’t carry to college is because like my cultural sense of Judaism comes from my family, most everything that I do that’s Jewish involves my family.” As Jenn acknowledged in the above quote, a crucial part of my co-travelers’ Jewish context, which I neglected to acknowledge in my pre-understandings, was my co-travelers’ families. My co-travelers’ sense of being Jewish was practically synonymous with their sense of being a member of their family. Clearly, family was enormously influential in the meanings my co-travelers’ assigned to being Jewish. This would help us understand why several of my co-travelers were “turned-off” by the local synagogue. Their perception of a formal Jewish observance was based on their family experience. The religious services, physical structure, congregation and surroundings of the local synagogue were not a close enough match to the synagogue at home. Even as my co-travelers doubted many aspects of Judaism, they still derived comfort and reassurance from the traditional religious aspects of their homes.

My co-travelers were navigating an unfamiliar terrain where the formerly comfortable and helpful ways of understanding family and Jewishness required re-thinking. Jordan, for instance, was aware of family and societal expectations and was

consistently attempting to negotiate choices that flew in the face of these expectations. Jes suggested that his addiction was a form of coping with family and cultural expectations. By actively participating in the recovery process Jes was becoming an author of his experience. Al's parents' and rabbi's negative reaction to her coming out challenged Al to define her Jewishness differently. The "formula" of Jewishness was clearly no longer working for her. These three students exemplified the process of cleaving from or renegotiating family expectations to bring better clarity to their canvases.

My other co-travelers expressed less comfort in making such a severe break from their family. Asya, for example, expressed a great deal of doubt about her considered re-definition of Jewishness because she feared the reactions of her grandmother and stepfather. Allison, Elana and Jenn questioned core values and beliefs handed down through their parents' Jewishness, but envisioned a Jewishness where their family relationships would not be threatened by their choices. Some of my co-travelers were only able to envision their authentic self by breaking away from family and traditional Jewish expectations, while for others that was a decision to still be negotiated.

Connecting Contradictions

But like all schema incomplete
for between the grey and fleshy
crevices strange blossoms grow
in brazen colors. For us it is
the ancient sign that every life
has its secret longings to transcend
the daily pressing need
longings that one day must flower (Klepfisz, 1990b, p. 160).

My co-travelers and I remembered stories from childhood, inspected the meanings we attached to religious Judaism, made sense out of experiences with people

that are not Jewish, and attempted to better understand ourselves. As we engaged in this process some of my co-travelers recognized that perhaps their spirituality and way of knowing, ultimately their secular Jewishness, may not be coherent. It may just barely stick together. Near the end of our last conversation Asya acknowledged: “you can... still be whole” despite the contradictions. In Chapter Two I suggested that being a secular Jew means that one does not “adhere firmly” because one is split by paradoxical experiences. When my co-travelers opened their eyes to the contradictions of their identity such as forgotten experiences of anti-Semitism or inconsistencies within religious Judaism the paint strokes of their canvas betrayed their current reflection. How did my co-travelers pull together the diverse and paradoxical parts of themselves?

In Chapter Four I acknowledged that being a secular Jew involved experiencing paradoxes, not just in the past, but during college. For instance, Jordan cobbled together a spirituality that drew heavily from his Jewish background, but also from Buddhism and Rastafarianism. Al occasionally immersed her self in other cultures by attending feminist retreats or presentations about the experience of various racial groups. This allowed her to experience the different parts of herself. Jes found strength and order in some of the laws of Judaism while choosing to not practice other components. Although my co-travelers could not articulate a coherent secular Jewishness they were indeed working hard at authoring a text of secular Jewishness that encompassed a variety of epistemological, ontological, and spiritual elements.

The telling of Jewish stories began to illuminate the contradictory meanings of my co-travelers’ canvases. Each co-traveler was coming to know these meanings and determining how these might figure together in one painting. Although it was not easy to

do this new seeing, my co-travelers appreciated the opportunity to engage in this exploration. For instance, when Elana began to pay attention to the details in her life—the covered over phenomena—she began to see differently and attributed this new seeing, at least partially, to our conversations. Nearing the end of one conversation she commented, “You’re asking me to look at some things in my life that I wouldn’t sometimes even look at and it’s helping me every time I talk to you.”

As I journeyed with my co-travelers I would occasionally worry that my co-travelers were not truly secular Jews. Before departing on a journey with co-travelers I was concerned that my co-travelers would struggle to articulate secular Jewishness; however, a new question surfaced during this study: What if one of my co-travelers displayed a Jewishness that seemed inconsistent with secular Jewishness? I tried to suspend this question and stay open to my co-travelers. I did, however, feel challenged when my co-travelers could not articulate the experience of being secular. This concern was compounded when my co-travelers used words like “Judaism” to describe their current experience. I worried: What if I am not doing the dissertation I thought I was? Ultimately my fear was of not completing this project. So the phenomenological process was occasionally undermined by my fears about accomplishing my goals. Once I slowed down and tried to be more open to my co-travelers’ experience I became more comfortable with this complexity and contradiction. For instance, Elana, Jordan and Jes were clearly choosing to incorporate religious elements into the secular being. My fears that these students were not purely secular were eventually replaced with a deeper understanding of what it meant to be secular. Nonetheless, these concerns about doing a good job were at times distracting and jabbed at me throughout this project.

The lived experience of paradox defies categorization and as a result my co-travelers' experiences cannot be collapsed to a neat summary. Only something as complex and multifaceted, like a canvas, could contain and even embrace the contradictions of being a secular Jew. For instance, Asya may never need to resolve her appreciation of Christmas with her love of being Jewish. Similarly, Al may continue to celebrate her Jewishness through immersing herself in the experience of other groups and cultures. It is incumbent on student affairs professionals to stay open to the ambiguity of secular Jewishness. The challenge for student affairs professionals is similar to mine. How do I be with students even when their experience does not jibe with my pre-understandings? How do I slow down and be with students if I am focused on accomplishing my goals? How do I provide space for students to learn and change without projecting my own fears on to them? In the above Irena Klepfisz poem she suggests that flowers grow in unfinished and unlikely places. For student affairs professionals to help students make meaning we have to be ready for the "flowers" to grow in unexpected places. The paradoxes can be frustrating and confusing, but how can student affairs professionals suspend their fears about completing their work and be open to helping a student to fully realize one's Being?

The Search for Jewishness; the Search for Community

The ability to see differently opened the eyes of my co-travelers to a more complex canvas reflective of their secular Jewishness. Our conversations were opportunities for my co-travelers to make sense out of their family's Judaism. Yet the conversations were also where my co-travelers envisioned a new Jewishness inherited from their families, but reflective of their emerging secular Jewishness. However, if I had

not engaged in these conversations when would my co-travelers have had the opportunity to explore their Jewishness? There was little support beyond our conversations for such a personal journey. There is only one Jewish organization on campus and its programming does not typically support these kinds of discussions. Imagine if my co-travelers had not faced these kinds of questions about Jewishness until after college or not at all.

Furthermore, how many other secular Jewish students do not have a community to make sense of their Jewishness?

My co-travelers were dedicated to remember, name and dream their Jewishness, but they lacked role models, books and other guides for this journey. Besides our conversations, there did not seem to be a place where my co-travelers could converse or seek guidance on becoming a secular Jew. Asya described what it was like to lack a guide: "I've kind of like paved my own way, and it's like it's hard to be a pioneer." Elana was also seeking guidance for understanding a disparate set of mystical, religious and spiritual elements of Judaism. She mentioned that she would like to do some reading to better understand the various elements of her Jewishness, so I asked her what kind of book would be helpful. Elana replied: "I have no clue. I would have to get like fifty like different types." Elana was seeking texts that would ask deep questions about Judaism, provide concrete answers and reflect the diverse and seemingly contradictory facets of her Jewishness.

Some of my co-travelers looked to other Jews for support but were turned off by Hillel, the Jewish student organization, as well as by the local synagogue. Without role models or a formal organization and uncertain which texts might be helpful, my co-travelers journeyed alone toward secular Jewishness. Sibylla Paterson (1991), an author

seeking hope during depressing circumstances, suggested that the yearning for understanding our existence is ultimately a search for community. Essentially my co-travelers were trying to understand what it meant to exist as Jews. What is the experience of searching for Jewishness alone? Can one be Jewish without a community? How long will my co-travelers be able to maintain their search for secular Jewishness without the company of other travelers on a similar journey?

Colleges and universities do have resources to promote this kind of exploration. Even if Jews are a small minority within the campus, programs and services can still be established to support Jewish students' capacity to paint a unique Jewish portrait that does not merely mimic the dominant or inherited Jewish canvas. For instance, the University of Michigan, the University of Maryland and several other campuses offer inter-group dialogue programs that provide opportunities for students to meet in structured settings to discuss their identity. In addition, learning communities, capstone seminars, film festivals, art exhibits and special collections in libraries all offer opportunities to pull together students, faculty and staff to discuss the experience of being a secular Jew. My co-travelers gave voice to the importance of having their unique experiences explored and acknowledged by the university. They also provide a glimpse of the effects of having the opportunity to have good dialogue. Educators can summon minimal resources and still help students begin the process of revealing the rich and complex portraits of their being.

By simply engaging in phenomenological dialogue I was able to be in good company with my co-travelers. Revealing being and making meaning is not easy work, particularly for my co-travelers who lacked guides, let alone communities, to share their

experience of becoming secular Jews. Clearly my co-travelers valued the opportunity to get together to shed light on their covered over experience. Jordan noted during one of our conversations that “since we started doing this, every time there has been so many things that I have been like: ‘I should write that down and mail it to Steve.’” Being able to make sense of experiences cannot be underestimated. Richard Light (Light & Schroeder, 2002) discussed the experience of doing research at Harvard University that was the basis for the book *Making the Most Out of College*. He was surprised when the students that he interviewed acknowledged how important it was for them to be asked about their experience. One student told Light: “I have been here almost two years, and no person on this campus has ever asked me to reflect a little bit about my experience” (Light & Schroeder, 2002, p. 20). Light indicated that he heard this over and over again.

My co-travelers struggled to see new possibilities. They lacked the language and they lacked a community of listeners. So they journeyed alone. What would have happened, though, if my co-travelers could have engaged in dialogue with others (in addition to me) about the experience of becoming a secular Jew? How would my co-travelers’ college experience have been different if there had been metaphorical galleries where they could share their evolving canvases? As Light (Light & Schroeder, 2002) indicated, students lack opportunities to reflect on their experience. If students do not enter into dialogues about their being and are not asked to reflect on their experience, then what is education accomplishing? If higher education does not create environments for students to reflect on the questions that claim them, will meaning ever be brought forward?

Yet secular Jews are a minority within a minority and why should a campus spend the resources on such a small group? Are there not already enough sub-groupings on-campus? Levine and Cureton (1998) commented that, with the increasing emphasis on differences on campus, “perceived and real isolation between diverse groups seems unbridgeable” (p. 91). Increasingly students are more likely to identify with the specific elements that make-up their identity (Levine & Cureton, 1998). For instance, developmentally some students are more likely to identify with being Korean American than merely Asian American. Now I am asking campuses to be sensitive to secular Jews in addition to the burgeoning list of groups. Yet to understand Asian Americans one needs to understand the experience of Korean Americans. The term “Asian American” would not exist without the populations, dialects and sub-cultures that it contains. Similarly, to truly understand what it is like to be Jewish the secular experience cannot be ignored. For a campus to imply that it acknowledges the Jewish experience while ignoring the experience of secular Jews reinforces the notion that some Jews are the “other” to the norm of the religious Jew and therefore do not need to authentically be Jewish.

Hearkening

We live in a culture that promotes reified seeing and privileges seeing over listening (Levin, 1988a, 1989). Yet, it is authentic listening that holds the most promise for undermining nihilism and uncovering our existence (Levin, 1989). Levin suggested that there is a type of listening called “hearkenening” that has the power to transform the way people engage with each other because it restores meaning through a spiritual connection between people. Hearkening is pre-ontological in that it brings us back to the

understandings that we subsequently lost as our culture overwhelmed us with new meanings. Harkening allows us to retrieve an ontological authenticity. What if students had the opportunity to engage in hearkening dialogues? How might students discover their authentic canvas if they were truly listened to without judgment? What can campuses do to create environments that foster the power of listening?

Universities do a great deal of storytelling, but spend substantially less time helping the members of our community understand stories. For instance, most university orientations expend tremendous effort at telling the university story—the story of their history, expectations, rules, policies and procedures. These monologues suggest that students are minor players in writing the story (Palmer, 2000). What would happen if the university suggested that the student is entering an evolving community of learners that placed a high value on hearkening—a listening without the ego—where each student would spend their time revealing their authentic existence? Indeed, consider how the experience of my co-travelers may have been different if they had experienced a campus that would have placed a higher value on listening without judgment. What if this value was threaded through the curriculum, the values of each student affairs and administrative department, and the practices of student services personnel? The university would have been a more inclusive environment for my co-travelers had there been a dedication to understanding the experience of the other through listening. Seemingly my co-travelers' interactions with classmates would have been less threatening and the university administration would have seemed more open to receive feedback about university practices if there had been a commitment to hearkening.

Cleaving for Community: The Severed Ties of Anti-Semitism

When I considered the challenges my co-travelers faced in being Jewish I wondered what the experience would have been if my co-travelers more visibly exhibited their Jewishness. For instance, what if a co-traveler had chosen to wear a necklace with a Jewish star? How difficult would it have been for a student who was more inclined to publicly share her or his Jewish canvas? What would it have been like to be increasingly different from the norm, to exist as visible Jew in a college dominated by Whiteness and Christianity? Love (2002) suggested that the more dominant a campus culture, “the less one is able to deviate from the norms, the less one is able to tentatively probe a commitment” (p. 367). My co-travelers felt cut off from fully experiencing college by the culture and people on campus. Experiences with evangelizing students and campus Christian traditions severed my co-travelers connection with the community. This was not a hospitable environment for my co-travelers to reveal their authentic Being. Nonetheless, my co-travelers still sought to cling to this community. What changes can be made to campus culture that will allow Jewish students an opportunity to reveal their Being?

Overcoming Overt and Covert Anti-Semitism

How does one be Jewish in an environment where the assumption is that everyone is Christian? My co-travelers frequently faced this question. Whether it was subtly communicated by individual faculty, staff and students or conveyed through broader, campus-wide approaches, my co-travelers received the message that Jews are an anomaly. When Christian peers or faculty and staff would realize my co-travelers’ Jewishness it was surprising for both parties. Most of my co-travelers were startled to

interact with peers who had not met Jewish people before, and my co-travelers' peers were surprised that there were people with other faiths besides Christianity on campus. My co-travelers may have raised the awareness of some of their friends and classmates to the experience of Jewish students. Despite this new awareness, some members of the community still relied on the assumption that Christianity is the normative and superior experience in their interactions with Jews. For instance, my co-travelers reported that there were professors who assigned exams on major Jewish holidays and showed little flexibility in rescheduling. When talking with staff in the admissions office I mentioned that I had not seen any Jewish people on campus displaying overt examples of their Jewishness (e.g., Jewish star necklace, skullcap, etc.). The staff members laughed because it seemed altogether improbable that a student who would make one's Jewishness so visible would select this environment. Al described her Jewishness as a "joke." Perhaps the campus environment had become a joke, "an object of laughter or ridicule, especially because of being inadequate" (Nichols, 2001, p. 715) for its inhospitableness. Is it really surprising that my co-travelers would feel the need to "pass" as members of the White, dominant group in this kind of environment?

It does not, however, take much for the campus to seek out more inclusive approaches which not only help students feel better about being on campus, but also represent the increased potential for mentoring environments to develop. The faculty senate should guide faculty about the scheduling of exams and due dates on religious observances and adopt a policy for missed classes due to religious or spiritual observance. This policy should be placed in the faculty handbook and on all syllabi. Campus calendars should include holidays from various religions not just Christianity.

Campus programmers should be conscious of these holidays when scheduling major events. Even though my co-travelers may not have been observant, religious holidays like Yom Kippur and Passover were still very important days to spend time with family or make alternative celebrations.

There are a variety of ways that universities can communicate to their community that faiths other than Christianity are accepted and welcomed. Communication from the President's office as well as the Vice Presidents should not hesitate to acknowledge important days and events for various faiths as a way to increase the sensitivity of the community to the diversity of its members. The entire campus can benefit from an increased awareness of the experiences of students from "minority" faiths. Workshops, panel discussions and interactive experiences can be offered for faculty, staff and students to learn what it is like for Jews of various religious and spiritual backgrounds. Faculty members from departments like cultural studies, history, philosophy, psychology, religious studies, or sociology can moderate discussions and offer an academic context for these discussions.

Many students are in a place developmentally where they are open and even eager to learn about various faiths (Parks, 2000). Classes and student affairs programs that address wellness should welcome the opportunity to educate students on the many ways to be spiritual without advocating certain faiths or attempting to convert. Training of advising, residence hall, orientation, student activities and counseling center staff should take into consideration the spiritual development of students. An awareness of the variety of ways of being Jewish by a broader array of the campus would have created a

community more likely to embrace my co-travelers as well as undermine the traditions of proselytizing and celebrating Christian holidays on campus.

A word of caution when educating the community about Jewishness:

Conversations about Jewishness become problematic when Jewish faith is defined narrowly, equated with Zionism, the political movement that supports the existence of the state of Israel, or portrayed as synonymous with unequivocal support for the Israeli government. Clearly delineating the difference between Jewish faith and Zionism is critical to foster greater understanding. Similarly, increasing clarity on the differences between anti-Semitism and anti-Israel attitudes is also crucial to any conversation about Jewishness. For instance, my co-travelers ranged in their understanding of current events in Israel. Asya complained about the dominance of anti-Palestinian views in Israel and the United States. Elana, on the other hand, was considering a move to Israel to help resist the Palestinian intifada. Jenn acknowledged that she was unaware of current events in Israel: “I mean, I don’t even know what’s going on in Israel but I know something is going on.” Clearly education is needed to overcome overt and covert anti-Semitism, but it is critical that the education does not reinforce stereotypes or further misinform the community.

Empowering Students

Parks (2000) suggested that mentoring environments are critical for students to develop spiritually. For my co-travelers being on a campus that seemed to ignore their Jewish background was hardly a productive environment for this kind of spiritual development. Although some of my co-travelers, like Jes, were resigned to the dominance of Christianity, others wished they could effect a change. Several of my co-

travelers expressed concern and frustration over the existence of the Christmas Tree on the campus quadrangle and Christmas carols playing on the campus chimes. Asya wondered how to express her dissatisfaction with these symbols: “What can I say? What can I do?” Asya considered contacting a member of the administration, but then worried: “I can imagine the looks I’m going to get if I did go through with asking and challenging.” My co-travelers did not express their concerns about the chimes and tree to the administration so following the conclusion of my conversations I spoke with the Vice President for Student Affairs. The Vice President was not responsible for these “cultural artifacts”; however, he embraced my concern and was receptive to making the campus more inclusive. The following year the tree was again placed on the Quad, although it was renamed a “Holiday Tree.” Although this did not satisfy some of my co-travelers, it did indicate a slight move toward recognition and inclusivity. This most recent year the Christmas carols were not played indicating that the voices of my co-travelers may have been indirectly heard. However, consider how the campus missed an opportunity to directly involve students in re-thinking a troubling and exclusive campus tradition. How might the students and campus benefited had there been the expectation and receptivity that students question and challenge university symbols and artifacts?

The responsible campus will stimulate conversation on the meaning of such symbols and teach students how to effect change. Educators will also realize that when teaching students to recognize and overcome anti-Semitism, some students will be struggling with internalized anti-Semitism. For example, a Jewish student involved in the campus Hillel chapter who was not a co-traveler, but a member of the small group of Jewish students I met with near the conclusion of study, mentioned to me that she was

contacted one November by a member of the Student Government Association regarding the placement of a large Menorah on the campus quadrangle. Although this was clearly an inclusive gesture by the student government, Hillel had expressed no interest in placing such a large symbol in a campus public space. Hillel members did not desire this kind of attention to their Jewishness. I assumed that Hillel members would have preferred to have neither a Menorah nor a Christmas Tree or any other religious symbol publicly displayed. When I spoke to several additional members of Hillel I was surprised to find that some were not even opposed to the campus “Holiday tree” or the Christmas carols. This suggests to me that our society is so saturated with Christianity that Christian symbols placed in the public sphere are less likely to be questioned. Furthermore, students may be less likely to question the aims and desires of the institution. Nevertheless these Christian artifacts on public college campuses continue to ignore constitutional law mandating separation of church and state. Even if Jewish students are not concerned it is still incumbent upon educators to challenge students to wonder about the appropriateness of such symbols and artifacts.

Whiteness and Jewishness

The desire to feel included in the overwhelmingly Christian environment led my co-travelers to occasionally conceal their Jewishness. By hiding their Jewish canvas they could avail themselves to the privileges of being White. My co-travelers expressed concerns that if they made their Jewishness public not only would they have to defend something that they were questioning, but they would also be subjected to anti-Semitism. Although not all of my co-travelers could necessarily recall experiencing anti-Jewish

behaviors, comments or environments in college, their fears of anti-Semitism nevertheless motivated them to conceal their Jewishness.

The insidiousness of anti-Semitism is that it works to reinforce racist divisions. My co-travelers had the luxury of disappearing into Whiteness. They seemed to do this almost unconsciously by simply making a point to not disclose their Jewishness. They also did this consciously by creating an “invented other” (Brodkin, 1998, p. 183) by using generalizations about African Americans, Latino/a Americans and even other Jews. Although my co-travelers did not suggest that by hiding their Jewishness they were intentionally embracing Whiteness, a consequence of hiding their Jewishness was that it reinforced racist divisions. By publicly claiming Jewishness and Whiteness, Jews may lose access to privileges but they also begin to undermine the oppressive nature of Whiteness. The formulas that Whites use to govern their relations with other Whites are disrupted by a public Jew/White combination. Inevitably questions arise: Will a Jew/White understand a racist joke? Can I make gross generalizations about another race to a Jew/White? What is a Jew/White? What is race?

Passing allows White Jews to avoid risking their place, especially in Christian dominated environments. It also inhibits Jews from fully revealing their Jewishness. Brodkin (1998) warned Jews that “embracing the privileges of Whiteness seemed to cost them the loss of a meaningful Jewish cultural identity” (p.183). By shrouding their canvases, my co-travelers often did not spend time or energy to see their Jewishness. Asya seemed to express this concern when she described hiding her Jewishness: “It wouldn’t be right for me say that I’m Jewish and not somehow live it. I think that disgraces other Jews... It’s kind of like a dual identity.” Although some of my co-

travelers were admittedly frustrated by the energy they expended in hiding their Jewishness, they also appreciated the status that Whiteness afforded them.

Jews cannot be considered a race, but considering the race of Jews is critical. Jews reveals how the notion of race is purely an evolving construction used to privilege and oppress. The arguments regarding whether Jews are a race are a distraction from the problematic ways anti-Semitism and racism work seamlessly to discourage Jews from being publicly Jewish. Jews in the United States are fortunately not currently subject to the type of overt anti-Semitism that marked previous generations (Cantor, 1995). Nonetheless my co-travelers' desire to hide their Jewishness signals their awareness of the hegemony of Whiteness and Christianity in the United States. The dominance of these two categories cannot be underestimated.

Questions (En)gendered by Jewishness

Growing up with a Judaism that promoted questioning and independent thinking led my co-travelers to turn back and question the very heart of Judaism itself. Frequently questions about religious Judaism were sparked by the gender restrictions imposed by traditional Judaism. Asya struggled to picture herself participating in a traditional Jewish environment because it was "gender delineated." She felt too constrained by the proscribed boundaries. Al's doubts about Judaism were exacerbated by the negative experience of coming out to her rabbi. Elana recalled the reaction to her choosing not to have a Bat Mitzvah as a lesson in the lesser importance accorded to Bat Mitzvahs compared to Bar Mitzvahs. Elana's doubts about religious Judaism were solidified as she became frustrated with Hasidic responsibilities for women such as "shaving their heads and wearing long dresses and not showing skin." Elana found the traditional gender

divisions disconcerting and a distraction from the more important mystical and spiritual elements of Judaism.

Furthermore, Jordan's political beliefs, such as his belief that women have a right to choose whether they would have an abortion, emerged from his Jewish upbringing. Jordan's Jewish background sharpened his sensitivity to political issues and contradictions including, ironically, the contradictions within the very Jewishness of his youth. For Allison the experience of having a Bat Mitzvah increased her self-awareness and gave her the confidence to begin a journey of questioning. Allison described how her Bat Mitzvah and subsequent experiences with Judaism promoted questioning: "What the meaning of your personal life is. That's what I am trying to find... The meaning of life. Through my cultural-ness—my Jewishness I can do that more easily. I guess it helps me to find the meaning of self."

Pearl Abraham (2002) addressed the dialectical turns of growing up Jewish and religious in the United States. Abraham asked: "From every angle, the circumstances of my life pointed me in the direction of a devout religiosity. I didn't follow this path, and the question is why" (p. 527). Abraham suggested that the answers lie in the unique combination of her immigrant family's outsider status coupled with the Hasidic teachings of her youth and the rugged individualism of the United States. A turning point for Abraham was when her aunt labeled her "dangerous" for acting in ways uncharacteristic of a Jewish girl. Instead of experiencing this reproach as a set back, Abraham took delight in this confirmation of her unique canvas. Abraham's dangerous or wicked questioning of her Judaism revealed a broad horizon of possibilities. Ironically, Abraham's Hasidic upbringing made this new canvas possible.

Similar to Pearl Abraham's search for meaning, my co-travelers gained new insight into their Jewish canvasses when questions about gender arose. Questioning was often engendered by a discrepancy between values and views about the role of women in traditional Jewish backgrounds. This emphasis on questioning gave my co-travelers permission to problematize religious tenets that appeared contradictory. Several of my co-travelers zeroed in on the seemingly unfair differences in the ways Jewish boys and Jewish girls were expected to be treated and behave. Awareness of contradictions within Jewish gender role socialization as early as high school among my co-travelers is intriguing because it suggests a heightened awareness to gender identity construction at an early age. What is less clear, though, is what this means.

Discussions of what it meant to be a Jewish man or woman were almost absent from my conversations. For instance, none of my co-travelers made mention of the "Jewish American Princess" stereotype. On occasion a co-traveler would acknowledge his or her gender identity, such as Al's description of attending a feminist conference. For the most part, however, my co-travelers did not make connections to their current gender identity. This could simply be a result of my inability to help my co-travelers make this connection. I would also suggest that several other factors were at play. Since my co-travelers did not envision participating in traditionally religious practices, at least partially due to concerns about gender inequity, there did not seem to be a need to discuss how gender was related to Jewishness outside of religious contexts. While sexism and patriarchy are prevalent outside of formal Jewish religious environments (Cantor, 1995), it is possible my co-travelers are unaware of the pervasiveness of sexism. Furthermore, Jewish students at the university who did not participate in my study have told me that

people in the Shenandoah Valley who are not Jewish are less aware of the Jewish American Princess stereotype than in the northeast. Although stereotypes about Jews still thrive in the Shenandoah Valley, it is quite possible that the “JAP” stereotype is manifested in other ways in the south.

Safe Spaces

It is imperative that as student affairs professionals we create safe spaces for students to do the questioning that reveals their canvases of contradictions. To create a safe space where Jewish students can share the contradictory parts of their identity without fear of judgment requires staff to understand the implications of being a member of various and potentially contradictory groups. My co-travelers acknowledged that there are very few places on campus where they do not have to cut themselves up into easily understood pieces. My co-travelers needed a place where they could experience the dialectical turns of being secular Jews. While organizations like Hillel are critical and important avenues for supporting Jewish students, my co-travelers did not see themselves reflected in Hillel. Nonetheless, my co-travelers desired connections with students who had similar experiences with Jewishness.

A college milieu that encourages students to become invisible, play down their differences or feel cut off is a less than ideal environment for learning. Although student activities offices cannot be expected to create special organizations for secular Jews with the hopes that secular Jewish students will eventually populate these organizations, they can join with student affairs units to foster environments where Jewish students are less likely to face overt and covert anti-Semitism as well as empower students to address anti-Semitism. Student affairs administrators and faculty members, though, must also delve

into the complexities of Jewishness and challenge students to understand the intersections of religion, race and gender.

Creating Authentic Canvases

My co-travelers were seeking a greater understanding of what it meant to be Jewish. This search for meaning often uncovered meaninglessness, though. My co-travelers' groundless nature (Heidegger, 1977a) was revealed as they tried to understand the meanings assigned to their inherited Jewishness. Questions and dilemmas about Judaism eventually shined a light underneath the meanings to reveal the "guide wires" propping up the meanings. My co-travelers' awareness of constructed meanings and prevailing public interpretations led them to an existential dilemma (Caputo, 1987). With my co-travelers' essential condition as groundless revealed (Dreyfus, 1991; Richardson, 1986) they were faced with the decision on how to be Jewish. Choosing showed my co-travelers that what made them Jewish was simultaneously immutable and arbitrary. Although my co-travelers felt that Jewishness was practically in their blood, they also came to understand that Jewish meanings, which seemed indisputable, were merely constructed.

Discovering a Secular Jewish Vernacular

Prior to the beginning of my conversations I understood that secular Jewish college students needed to be able to have a vernacular to describe their experience. They needed to have the ability to name, beginning with the ability to name one's self. My co-travelers, though, did not have a secular Jewish lexicon in the way that I had imagined it. This was evident at the beginning of my conversations. For instance, some of my co-travelers struggled with my opening question: "What has it been like to become a secular

Jew?” Or: “How have you come to be a secular Jew or a cultural Jew?” Although they could describe experiences, the language of the question confused them. Jordan’s experience of responding to my orienting question was indicative of other co-travelers.

Steve: So my one orienting question is: “What is it like to be a secular Jew?”

Jordan: Ummm, I need a definition of secular Jewish being.

My co-travelers had language for religious Judaism, and that was their basis for being able to talk about being Jewish. For instance, after a fascinating conversation about Jordan’s trip to the Middle East and his views on spirituality Jordan moved to end the conversation by saying: “I think I’ve had enough talking about religion for the day.” Jordan did not have the vernacular yet to describe his way of being Jewish. The closer our conversations came to discussing what it meant to be a secular or cultural Jew, the more my co-travelers struggled to put words around their experience. Al and Asya, for example, grappled with metaphors of Christian students who did not seem to practice formal religion to try to describe their conceptions of secular Jewishness. While this got them closer to making sense of secular Jewishness, they still lacked language.

I began Chapter Two with the following questions: “How do our words imprison us in a mindset? Are we prevented from seeing possibilities?” My co-travelers did not have language for the “other,” and in this case the “other” was secular Jewishness. While my co-travelers seemed to be finding their way toward a new Jewish text, some basic words about what it means to be secular would have illuminated their canvas. Which words would have helped, though? After all, what are the words of secular Jewishness? This seems to be a critical dilemma. My co-travelers have enriched our understanding of

what it means to be secular, but there is still a substantial need for a more extensive secular Jewish lexicon.

By using the expression “secular Jewishness” when inviting co-travelers to participate in this study and in my conversations with co-travelers I created boundaries around the study. Although my co-travelers and I were co-creators of new meanings of secular Jewishness (Gadamer, 1989), by using the expression “secular Jewishness” I also provided my co-travelers with language to describe themselves. My co-travelers acknowledged that they understood the expression “secular Jewishness” but had not used it to describe themselves prior to our conversations. When I entered into conversations with my co-travelers I attempted to suspend my pre-understandings of secular Jewishness. Nonetheless the tension of naming the category of secular Jewishness meant that I was creating a language for my co-travelers. Yet without creating the description “secular Jew” I never would have found my co-travelers. Perhaps each of my co-travelers will eventually develop a name for the way they make meaning of their Jewishness.

In Chapter Two I uncovered my initial thoughts about secular Jewish being. I suggested that in moments without words we are on a cliff overlooking nothingness. Words have the possibility of pulling us back to safety, but also away from authenticity. To the contrary, naming the un-named is like claiming our unclaimed existence. Words can open our eyes to our covered-over existence. Perhaps this helps explain the fear my co-travelers had in speaking up as secular Jews. While speaking up would have built a bridge to other Jews, it also would have challenged the traditional and religious definition of Jewishness.

All of my co-travelers were articulate and passionate and several were quite comfortable speaking out on social issues. However, the reluctance to speak up as a secular Jew must be seen within the context of anti-Semitism. In addition to concerns about being misunderstood and an inability to publicly describe their Jewishness, my co-travelers expressed fear of being subjected to anti-Semitism. Similar to other oppressed groups, a typical Jewish reaction to anti-Semitism is to narrow the definition of “Jew” to make Jews seem more palatable and acceptable to the dominant class (Cantor, 1995). By “cleaning up our canvases” and projecting an image of traditional, hard working, and God-fearing people, Jews hide diversity while gaining acceptance from the larger society (Klepfisz, 1990a). Secular Jewishness is the “other” to dominant religious Judaism and stands to complicate matters for Jews. Publicly naming oneself as a secular Jew holds the power to make the horizon of possibilities visible for more secular Jews, particularly those who do not even know the word “secular.” However, this public stance also challenges mythic Jewish unity and risks derision from Jews and non-Jews alike.

This phenomenological study attempts to contribute to the secular Jewish lexicon. I have focused on the words of what it means to be a secular Jew because they help make meaning of the Jewish canvas. Without words our seeing is made more difficult. Without words we can look at our canvas, but how do we acknowledge the pattern—the gestalt (Levin 1988a). Without words, how do we proclaim our secular Jewishness? Claiming the language is a fundamental part of working and reworking the Jewish canvas because it creates the possibility that secular Jews will articulate their Jewishness. The importance of developing good dialogue with students, as stated above, then cannot be underestimated. For it is through dialogue that students will come upon the wordless

moments, perhaps a phenomenological clearing, that compels their full and authentic being to emerge. This study then is a small opening. It begins to open our eyes to the larger canvas of what it means to be a Jew. Additional phenomenological studies would more adequately reveal the canvas and increase our lexicon of being.

Experiencing Groundlessness

As my co-travelers began revealing the essence of their Jewish being they came into closer proximity to uncovering their groundless essence. Jenn and Asya, for instance, began to acknowledge that their Jewishness had an arbitrary feel to it. They both agreed that they were indeed Jewish, however they came to understand that they just as easily could have been born into Protestant, Hindu, or Shiite Muslim families. Asya noted that her reference points for making meaning depended on her context or community: “And it’s because of the context of the community that you live in. If I lived in a black hole or a cave, and I never talked to anybody...” then she would lack the tools to make meaning. Elana referred to her Judaism as “psychological” implying that her Jewishness was a complex set of meanings not concrete, permanent and unchanging as she originally thought. This recognition of an arbitrary or psychological Jewishness gets behind the cultural sheathing to reveal the meaning producing constructions.

This exposure to groundlessness opened my co-travelers to vision (Levin, 1988a) and ironically led them away from nihilism. When my co-travelers discovered that they truly had a choice about the meanings they assigned to being Jewish they were overwhelmed (Dreyfus, 1991; Richardson, 1986), but they also began envisioning what kind of Jews they would become (Caputo, 1987). My co-travelers were emboldened by their traditions as well as by their freedom to make choices.

Spiritual Development

My co-travelers were in the process of becoming spiritually. They were in the early stages of determining and defining their Jewish faith. Parks (2000) and Salzberg (2002) suggested that faith is commonly thought to refer to religious beliefs when, in actuality, a more adequate definition of faith refers to meaning: “The activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience” (Parks, 2000, p. 7). Parks elaborated on this definition: “To be human is to dwell in faith, to dwell in the sense one makes out of life” (Parks, 2000, p. 7). This sense making is critical, according to Parks, because our lives depend on the assumptions we make about the world. “All human beings compose and dwell in some conviction of what is *ultimately* true... and then stake our lives on that sense of things” (Parks, 2000, p. 20). Conversations with my co-travelers surfaced some of these assumptions or truths about the world. These were not casual conversations about spiritual beliefs. Each co-traveler engaged passionately and energetically in this experience because there was truly something at stake (Blair & Freedman, 2002).

At the beginning of my last conversation with Jenn we discussed what it felt like to have non-religious faith. Jenn was slowly uncovering how her faith and religious convictions were splitting:

Steve: Like here are Jewish students who are passionate about being Jewish, but practice that in ways that aren't religious. It kind of sounds like—

Jenn: It sounds like an oxymoron or something like that. I know I was saying that I was talking to my parents, “yea, I'm helping this guy with his dissertation.” They're like: “Oh what are you doing?” And I'm like: “Basically I've learned that I am a horrible Jew. I never go to, I don't do anything and it's all my fault.” And they're like: “what?” I mean it's not what I came away from and it's almost like you sit back and like study yourself and I was like: “geez!” Like I really don't do

anything Jewish. It's kind of unfortunate that I came to that realization but I don't know.

Steve: Okay, but this came up last time too, though. What was the thing you said: "I'm a horrible Jew." Tell me more about that. What makes you think that?

Jenn: Well, I don't think I'm a horrible person obviously. I think I'm a pretty decent person and everything and like [pause] I don't know. I don't think I'm a bad Jew because I guess I am true to my beliefs and everything. Like I stick for what I believe in. And I don't go along with everybody else just because everybody else seems to think one way. But then I guess I'm a horrible practicing Jew because I don't really practice it at school.

What might the experience of my co-travelers been had college been a safe environment to consider what it meant to be Jewish beyond traditional religious observance? What might the experience of college been like for my co-travelers if there were more opportunities than just our conversations to reveal their Jewish being? How might the lives of my co-travelers changed had they been in an environment that recognized and appreciated the struggles and joys of being a secular Jew? These questions do not have simple answers, but they suggest that the university could have done more to support the spiritual and faith development of my co-travelers. As a matter of fact it is in the best interest of the university to foster faith development because it is essentially helping the student fully develop and gain meaning making skills.

Colleges and universities are under increasing pressure to be accountable to legislatures, higher education councils and even corporations (Shulman, 2003; Soley, 1995). Often accountability is defined in narrow assessments of learning or efficient use of resources (Shulman, 2003). Along with increased calls from legislatures for accountability is the strengthening of academic requirements in many disciplines. As disciplines increase the number of credits required to graduate, electives get squeezed out and students have fewer opportunities to explore topics of interest. These pressures make

it even more difficult for colleges to expend resources on creating mentoring environments that support spiritual growth and for students to spend time on seemingly less important activities like faith development. The narrowing of education and the increased emphasis on participation in activities that give the student the “competitive edge” in the marketplace leave little space for spiritual development.

However, if universities move away from helping students make meaning we are moving away from the central obligation of education (Giroux & Aronowitz, 1985). Meaning making and more specifically revealing the meaning structures that cover over our Being of beings is not only at the heart of this project, but ultimately education. Yet the focus on meaning making is being usurped by a narrow focus on accountability. The demands for accountability are not going to diminish soon so universities must expand our constituencies’ understanding of education beyond narrow definitions to include spiritual development.

Accountability to taxpayers goes beyond efficient use of resources and includes being accountable to the greater good and to a better world for future generations. This expanded version of accountability may challenge our colleges to look beyond assessments and formulas to concrete approaches that engage students in meaningful dialogue about everyday ways of being human. “Young adulthood is nurtured into being, and its promise most powerfully realized through participation in a community that poses a trustworthy alternative to earlier assumed knowing” (Parks, 2000, p. 93). How might our colleges and universities create these communities as a way to respond to external pressures? Universities can begin by studying the opportunities students have to engage in concrete meaning making experience when they transition in, through and out of the

institution (Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989). Are opportunities provided for students to wonder what truths on which their lives are staked on? Are students provided with opportunities to ask what education is for? Finally, are students encouraged to reflect how their education benefits the greater good?

There are many ways to promote meaning making and spiritual development. However with the push for accountability the definition of higher education is narrowing, making it more challenging for educators to support promoting spiritual development as a worthy endeavor.

Rethinking Spiritual Development

Parks' (2000) proposal for a new stage model of spiritual development offers an important addition to the theory on student spirituality and meaning making. Parks' model is helpful because it attempts to move beyond simply a cognitive approach to development and incorporates affective and social aspects as well. Parks' positing of the Young Adult stage of spiritual development seems descriptive of my co-travelers' experience. This is where an individual "recognizes that in the complex and contextual nature of the world one must take action, choose a path, shape one's own future" (Love, 2002, p. 366).

Parks also does an admirable job attempting to be inclusive of a variety of faiths in *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*. However, Parks neglects to acknowledge the dominance of Christianity in the United States. It is critical to recognize that the spiritual development of a Jewish student will be different from the spiritual development of a Christian student simply because being a religious minority requires coping with the stereotypes, fears and oppression described above. Certainly being a member of a non-

dominant religious group can also be a source of joy and pride; however, this does not lessen the fact that a student's relationship to the dominant group must be considered in any formulation of spiritual development. Integral to theories of spiritual development is an acknowledgment of how students come to know and make meaning (Love, 2002). Knowing and meaning making cannot be divorced from the influence of religious background. From religious teachings to oppression based on religion, the experience of religion strongly influences how people interact with the world. Religious background and relationship to the dominant Christian paradigm, therefore, must be central to any conception of spiritual development.

Being In the World of Co-Travelers

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
If I am only for myself, what am I?
And if not now, when?
- Rabbi Hillel

As I consider the experience of engaging in hermeneutic phenomenology I find that I continually return to Rabbi Hillel's well known, piercing questions. I have always stumbled over the transition from the first two questions to the last question. The conundrum at the intersection of the first two questions is challenging enough, but the third question does not let me put aside this irresolvable dilemma. I cannot simply wait until the answers come to me. Instead I must pursue a more authentic way of living now—Rabbi Hillel's third question waits impatiently for me: "If not now, when?"

The tension between the first two questions mirrors the positive tension I felt with this project. I engaged in this experience as a secular Jew desiring to learn more about myself through the experience of others. I wanted to more fully uncover my being. Yet I was also pained by the lack of available outlets for secular Jewish students to reveal and

make sense of their experience. I wondered what it is like to struggle with meaning making as an “other.” So I also engaged in this project to be for others. Ostensibly to be for myself meant I had to be for others. Perhaps this is another way of getting at the dilemma of Hillel’s first two questions. How does one be for others? If I could authentically be, then I could be for myself and others.

I discovered that authentic being is situated at the juxtaposition of existence and non-existence, of giving and receiving, of being a human and being part of humanity. Authentic being faces these existential dilemmas with openness and wonder. Authentic being always has a sense of the potential for non-Being and the freedoms that go along with the temporality of existence (Guignon, 1983). Authentic being—our Being of beings—is free from worry about conforming to social mores and customs simply for the sake of conforming. Furthermore, authentic being is purposeful in the sense that it lives its intentions as opposed to solely focusing on goals. To live one’s intentions is to live with a non-theoretical interaction with the world and in touch with the essences of others. Our Being of beings sees with wonder and is open to the fullness of beings (Levin, 1988a). Our Being of beings listens with an openness not undermined by the ego (Levin 1989). Authentic being involves a yielding. Levin (1988a) indicated that: “Yielding means giving up and giving over; but it also means allowing, accepting and receiving. In other words, it speaks of the unity or identity of the two, the two as one. That which is yielding, then, is a oneness, a harmony of opposites, which can become two-fold: a giving” (p. 60).

Did I reveal my authentic being in the process of being with co-travelers? In other words, was I able to be with my co-travelers? This is where Hillel’s third question re-

enters. Levin (1988a) noted that “More and more, we are alienated from an exceedingly precious gift of nature: the experience of Being” (p. 58). As I entered into conversations I struggled with how to claim the gift of Being. Throughout my conversations, as I tried to be with my co-travelers, I was continually running into Hillel’s question: “If not now, when?” I found myself asking: “If I could not authentically be with my co-travelers now, when am I going to be?” I was trying to go from my everyday way of being in the world to a being with co-travelers where I listened without my ego and was open to seeing the horizons of my co-travelers’ possibilities. Yet I was unable to suspend my ego and my openness got blurry and confused. I tried to be with my co-travelers, but a little, curious voice kept me from letting go and letting be. That is, even though I embraced the opportunity to be with my co-travelers, I found that my openness was undermined by my desire to control the process. I was trying to be in the conversation with my co-travelers, but then a little question would distract me: “Was that comment related to secular Jewishness?” or “Should I share a story here or just be quiet for a while?” “Oh my, this is an upsetting story, how should I respond?” or even: “How can I move this conversation from a recitation of attitudes to concrete description?” Hermeneutic phenomenology does not imply completely letting go and entirely losing sight of the conversational direction. However, I lost sight because I struggled to slow down and simply be with my co-travelers. It was a constant struggle to bracket or somehow stem the tide of internal questions.

Afterward I would listen and transcribe the words of our conversation and mysteriously the endless stream of questions that distracted me during the conversation dried up. I sat in front of my computer and often was surprised at missed opportunities

where I did not connect with a co-traveler. The little voice was not badgering me with questions. Instead, an emptiness appeared before me. This was the emptiness of not fully being in the world of my co-travelers.

I had tricked myself to believe that I was oriented toward the phenomenon of secular Jewishness and that I had to “help” or guide my co-travelers toward or into the phenomenon. Yet there were several occasions where a co-traveler was richly describing an experience, perhaps discussing a painful memory or sharing a discouraging interaction, and inadvertently through a question or comment I directed the conversation away from my co-traveler’s lived experience. Earlier, when I recommended that universities need to develop hearkening environments where listening occurs without the ego, I did not make this suggestion without the painful awareness of how difficult this is. To truly give up and give over; to allow, accept and receive (Levin, 1988a) is an ability that we are born with, but that we slowly lose (Levin, 1988a). This is not a skill, but a lost art that we may have forgotten. For universities to foster hearkening environments we need to create opportunities to recover our lost ability to be.

I struggled to recover my being partly because I was focused on my job. I was trying to write a dissertation and I wanted to make sure I did the conversations “right” so I would be able to more fully engage in my text. Ironically this desire to control the conversations led me to lose sight of where I needed to be. In my efforts “to exercise restraint or direction over” (Nichols, 2001, p. 291) this project I discovered that I answered Hillel’s third question, “And if not now, when?” with a reply of “later.” I did not allow myself to be fully in the present because I was trying to master the art of

hermeneutic phenomenological conversation. In my desperation to do a good job I focused on the future not on the “now” that is available from being-in-the-world.

Evidently I did not recall my previous attempts at being perfect described in Chapter One. In college I had attempted to block out complex childhood memories by fooling myself into believing I was invulnerable and “perfect.” Yet I played a similar ruse on myself during these conversations. My attempts to be perfect kept me from fully engaging with my co-travelers. Our conversations were still rich and full of fascinating experiences and stories, however my insecurity about doing a good job may have made it more difficult for my co-travelers to truly be with me.

I learned that there are subtle, albeit important differences between “being-with” and “being-in-the-world” (Ricoeur, 1991). In my preparations for and reflections on conversations with co-travelers I attempted a “being-with” my participants, but the real challenge was how to stay oriented to the phenomenon and be-in-the-world. By being-in I am not simply at the whim of the subjectivity of another, I am closer to the center of what it means to be. By more fully inhabiting the world, understanding is made possible. This challenges the subject-object relation I posited in Chapter Two. While the work of phenomenology is definitely in the writing, which I discovered again with writing Chapter Four, it is also in the challenge of truly being-in-the-world. For when I truly be then I create a space for others to be.

The experience of being with co-travelers has helped me reconsider Hillel’s third question. It was not until I attempted to make meaning from my experience with co-travelers that I became aware of the “everydayness” of this quote. I had been going through life puzzling over this quote without realizing it. I was hardly aware that I have

been using the third question as my compass to help me navigate the chasm between my being and my doing. I have taken the question as a direct challenge to live with integrity and truth. The urgency of the question has often stopped me in my tracks.

As a result of this research journey I have a new understanding of Hillel's questions and particularly the third question. It occurs to me that I have always interpreted this as an urgent directive requiring immediate action. To live with integrity means to act now. However this need for urgent action seemed to interfere with my ability to listen and be open to the experience of my co-travelers. Unintentionally I treated the conversations as a means to an end; a noble end, but an end, nonetheless. If I could have slowed down, perhaps I could have entered a non-theoretical world of essences where understanding is truly possible.

My reply to Hillel's third question is a new question: How do I slow down to dwell in the experience of the other? Adrienne Rich (1986) asked a similar question in her meditations on Hillel's three questions: "If not with others, how?" (p. 209). My tendency is to not linger, but to always know where I am going. I have developed strategies to hide this tendency, but truthfully, dwelling makes me anxious. By not slowing down long enough to dwell I am able to maintain control by not investing myself in the experience of others. I struggled to dwell with my co-travelers during our conversations as well as when reading our transcripts. At the time of our conversations I could not acknowledge it, but I feared what would happen if I dwelled. I knew I was not supposed to maintain such a tight grip, but I did not know how to let go. My anxieties to succeed would not release me. Desiring to do a good job prevented me from doing a great job.

Finally, I discovered I was not dwelling. As I worked to reveal my co-travelers' essences and maintain their truth, I feared that I was reducing their narrative to words that conveniently fit my pre-understandings. I feared that I was not dwelling in the complexity of my co-travelers' experience, but reducing their experience to conform to my narrow thinking. Merleau-Ponty (1962) defined reduction as more clearly seeing a phenomenon without theorizing it or basing it on my pre-understanding. However, another reduction is reducing the complexity of the text to make it easier to understand, such as reducing the truth of the text to make it fit a less complex theme. This was my fear. As I imagined returning to my co-travelers with my text of our journey, I feared that I had not created a space to be with the essence of their being. It was then that I realized there was another answer to Hillel's third question.

As my co-travelers and I live our lives as secular Jews there is no guarantee that our Jewishness will become easier to live. Anti-Semitism will likely wax and wane; some universities will become more sensitive while others will continue to be inhospitable for secular Jews; and evangelical organizations will continue to proselytize. Secular Jews will continue to be a minority within a minority and connecting with other secular Jews will most likely continue to be a challenge. Perhaps this is the challenge of being Jewish and particularly a secular Jew: Being a secular Jew is not about being comfortable, effortless and relaxed. It's about dwelling with the challenge of transcending contradictions to live a life of spiritual fulfillment.

There were many joyous occasions during my conversations with co-travelers where something funny struck us. Unlike the times where my attention was partially diverted by internal questions and concerns, the distracting thoughts were silent during

these authentic moments. As I laughed with my co-travelers, I let go of my fears and anxieties. During these moments of laughter the challenges of Jewishness were not lessened, but there was a sense that we shared the joy of this Jewish connection. These moments of dwelling with each other reinforced the joys of being Jewish.

It is my hope that the experience of revealing the canvases of being a secular Jew opened our eyes to authentic living. When the space is created for our Beings of beings to emerge, something truthful and powerful occurs. A taste of that truth was revealed in our laughter. Seeking authenticity is hard. Living authentically is seemingly impossible. However, all we truly have is our being. The experience of my co-travelers striving to be authentic will always be with me.

Higher education has seemingly more important and pressing issues to worry about than the experience of my seven co-travelers. Yet, what really is the point of higher education if our beings cannot truly be present to transform the world? The world is in dire need of authenticity. With the amount of inequity, suffering and unfairness dominating the planet there is a desperate shortage of authentic living. I am heartened by my co-travelers' efforts to reveal a secular Jewish being.

If not now, when?

APPENDIX A

EMAIL SOLICITING NAMES OF POTENTIAL CO-INVESTIGATORS

Letter to Students

Dear Orientation Program Assistants,

I hope you are all well. With the beginning of classes it's just not the same not seeing you around campus—I miss you. What you may not know is that when classes started for you a couple of weeks ago they also got going for me. I am finishing my PhD at the University of Maryland in College Student Personnel (Student Affairs). For my doctoral dissertation I am exploring the experience of Jewish college students. I am interested in what it is like to be a college student who is culturally Jewish, but not necessarily religiously Jewish. Perhaps you know someone who fits this description?

I am seeking co-investigators--students who would be willing to talk with me about what it is like to be a secular Jew. I'm not looking for a big commitment. I simply want to have several conversations with students about their experience. Students who have already participated have found the experience to be rewarding and enjoyable.

If you and/or someone you know is interested in participating or you just want to learn more please contact me at 568-2374 (w), 540-885-5475 (h) or grandese@jmu.edu .
Thanks for your assistance!

take care,

steve

~~~~~

Steve Grande  
Orientation and First Year Experience  
James Madison University  
(540) 568-2374  
grandese@jmu.edu

*Letter to Faculty and Administrators*

Greetings,

I oversee Orientation programs for new students here at JMU. I am also pursuing my PhD in College Student Personnel from the University of Maryland and am currently at the dissertation phase. I am studying the experience of Jewish college students. In particular, I am interested in Jewish students who are culturally Jewish, but may not be religiously Jewish. Do you know students that may characterize themselves that way?

Students selected to participate in the study will meet with me for 4 or 5 one-hour interviews. This is a wonderful opportunity for a student to discuss and explore her or his Jewishness. If you know students who might be interested in this opportunity please ask them to contact me at [grandese@jmu.edu](mailto:grandese@jmu.edu)/568-2374 or provide me with their names and I will contact them. In addition, will you forward this message to other faculty and staff who might know students who characterize themselves this way? Thanks for your assistance!

steve

~~~~~

Steve Grande
Orientation and First Year Experience
James Madison University
(540) 568-2374
grandese@jmu.edu

APPENDIX B

EMAIL TO INVITE PARTICIPATION

Dear [Name of student],

I am a doctoral student at the University of Maryland and work here at James Madison University. For my doctoral dissertation I am exploring the experience of secular Jewishness among college students. I am interested in what it is like to be a college student who is culturally Jewish but not necessarily religiously Jewish.

In my preliminary research I have found that being a secular Jew is rewarding and challenging, but that little has been written on this topic. Therefore, I am seeking co-investigators--students who would be willing to help reveal what it is like to be a secular Jew.

If you are willing and selected to serve as a co-investigator (investigating this topic with me), your commitment will consist of participating in approximately 3 to 5 one-hour conversations. These conversations will be audio taped, and only I, or a paid transcriber, will listen to the tapes. Your confidentiality is assured. I believe that participating in this study will help provide clarity regarding the secular Jewish experience, and I hope that you as a co-investigator will personally benefit from the opportunity to engage in a dialogue about your experience and identity.

Attached is a form where you can express your interest and willingness to participate in the study. Whether you desire to participate in the study or not please complete and return the form.

If you have questions about this study, feel free to contact me at grandese@jmu.edu or 568-2374(work)/540-885-5475(home). Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Steve

~~~~~

Steve Grande

Orientation and First Year Experience – Wilson Hall, room 215

James Madison University

(540) 568-2374

[grandese@jmu.edu](mailto:grandese@jmu.edu)



APPENDIX C

INTEREST FORM

Interest Form

YES, I am interested in participating in the research project exploring secular Jewishness conducted by Steve Grande.

No, I am not interested in participating in this study.

Please provide the following information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_ Can a message be left on this phone number? \_\_\_\_\_

If you are interested in participating in this research, on what days and at what times are you available to meet for a one-hour conversation?

Day

Times

Mondays \_\_\_\_\_

Tuesdays \_\_\_\_\_

Wednesdays \_\_\_\_\_

Thursdays \_\_\_\_\_

Fridays \_\_\_\_\_

Saturdays \_\_\_\_\_

Sundays \_\_\_\_\_

Do you view yourself as a secular Jew? Please describe (use as much space as necessary).

Please return to: [grandese@jmu.edu](mailto:grandese@jmu.edu) or Steve Grande, James Madison University, MSC 1010, Harrisonburg, VA 22807. Thank you for your support of my research study!

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I state that I am over eighteen years of age and wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by Steve Grande at the University of Maryland, College Park, Department of Counseling and Personnel Services. The title of the project is: A Phenomenological Investigation of Secular Jewish College Students.

I understand that the research involves the audio-taping of approximately 6-8 hours of conversations with the researcher. Audio-tapes will be transcribed only by the researcher or a contracted transcriber who has signed a guarantee to maintain complete confidentiality. Tapes and transcripts will be kept in concealed locations and will be destroyed one year after successful defense of the study. I understand that I will be asked to reflect on my conversations and on occasion submit my reflections or items which represent my reflections to the researcher.

To insure confidentiality, participants will not be identified by name to anyone verbally or in any of the written materials associated with this study unless I request that my actual name be used. When referring to participants in the text of the study only the participant's chosen name will be used. When quoting participants in the text care will be used to not reveal information that may undermine their anonymity. I understand that although the researcher will take these precautions he cannot fully guarantee that no one will guess my identity.

I understand that I may be asked to participate in a group discussion with other participants in this study. My participation in individual conversations, however, is in no way contingent upon my willingness to participate in a group discussion. Should I choose to participate in the group meeting, I agree that the content of this discussion will be kept confidential. I understand that the group meeting will be taped and transcribed.

I understand that the purpose of this research is not to help me personally but to better understand the day-to-day experience of secular Jewish college students. Self-knowledge, however, could be an outcome of my participation.

I understand that some of the topics discussed in this study may be challenging for me. I further understand that I am not required to discuss any topics I do not wish to. I understand that I am free to withdraw from participation in the study at any time without penalty.

For more information you may contact:

Researcher  
Steve Grande  
161 N. Coalter St.  
Staunton, VA 24401  
540-885-5475

Faculty Advisor  
Dr. Marylu McEwen  
3214 Benjamin Building  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD 20742  
301-405-2871

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

## APPENDIX E

### ORIENTING QUESTIONS

1. How have you come to be a secular Jew?
2. What are the words you use to describe yourself?
3. What has it been like to be Jewish in your family? At school? In college?
4. What has it been like to be a secular Jew in your family? At school? In college?
5. Have there been times when you felt compelled to hide your identity as a secular Jew? What was this experience like?
6. Have there been times when you felt compelled to reveal your identity as a secular Jew? What was this experience like?
7. Have there been occasions in which you felt you stood out as a secular Jew?
8. What is it like to stand alone as a secular Jew?
9. What is the experience of facing an ethical or moral dilemma as a secular Jew?
10. What is your history as a secular Jew?
11. Where might you turn when you are seeking further understanding or support?
12. What has being a secular Jew come to mean to you?

APPENDIX F

TRANSCRIBER CONTRACT

I agree to transcribe audio-tapes for Steve Grande of the University of Maryland, College Park, Department of Counseling and Personnel Services. I will be compensated \$30.00 by Steve Grande for each fully transcribed one hour tape.

I agree to keep all transcribed material confidential. I will not reveal any content from the tapes nor will I reveal names of the research participants if they are revealed on the tape.

After receiving a tape from Steve Grande I will return a completed transcription within one week.

I will save all transcriptions only to a floppy disk supplied by Steve Grande. When not working on transcriptions I will store the tape and disk in a secure and confidential location. When I have completed transcribing a session I will deliver the tape and disk to Steve Grande in Wilson Hall, room 215 in a sealed envelope. I will not make copies of the audio-tapes or disks supplied by Steve Grande.

If I have questions, comments or concerns about the content of the tape I will only ask Steve Grande or his academic adviser (listed below).

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information you may contact:

Researcher  
Steve Grande  
161 N. Coalter St.  
Staunton, VA 24401  
540-885-5475

Faculty Advisor  
Dr. Marylu McEwen  
3214 Benjamin Building  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD 20742  
301-405-2871

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