Editorial Comments

My first editorial, almost four years ago, encouraged the submission of good qualitative work to *JMF*. Since then we have not been flooded exactly, but such manuscripts have been trickling in. In the present issue the reader will find an article on the state of qualitative family research, as well as a fine substantive example of it. First, LaRossa and Wolf raise some basic issues about the relative status of qualitative research in the family field. In the other presentation, Kaufman interprets qualitative findings within a well-articulated feminist perspective, thereby accentuating the theoretical potential of qualitative analysis.

In the aforementioned editorial, I described qualitative research as likely to increase our capability to discriminate between questions that are worth asking and those that are not. In retrospect, this was not the best way of expressing it since, if properly conceived and executed, *all* theory-oriented research—qualitative as well as quantitative—should lead to further relevant questioning. What I did have in mind at the time was the idea that, compared with its quantitative counterpart, sound qualitative work—by virtue of its limited or nonexistent dependence on numbers per se—must follow different and perhaps more intuitively chosen paths between theory and empirical reality. Therefore, the major difference between qualitative and quantitative analytical strategies seems to lie in the realm of theoretical method rather than—as is often assumed—that of research design and data analysis. Since the art of theory building seems essentially that of relevant questioning, we may expect qualitatively and quantitatively oriented social scientists to pursue different lines of questioning. *How* different such questions are and how they are conceived lies beyond the scope of this brief comment. Suffice it to note that, at this writing, qualitative researchers seem more concerned with the internal dynamics of social processes, while their quantitative colleagues tend to focus mostly on process structures and outcomes. At the present stage in the development of our field, it would be both premature and pretentious to declare that either approach is better or more "scientific."

I do believe, however, that a strictly research-technical comparison between qualitative and quantitative family studies is dangerously one-sided and only leads to mutual stereotyping. We already are exposed to a dichotomy in which "quantitative" is associated with connotations of hard-nosed and/or scientific while also being perceived as superficial and linked to the real world through models that make sense to those who concocted them but not to those who actually experience reality. In contrast, "qualitative" seems to imply both insight and depth of understanding but also softness of data and a mode of interpretation and validation that relies mainly on the imagination of the researcher and the gullibility of the reader. All this strikes me as nonsense. As we all know, there is nothing intrinsically hard or scientific about quantitative techniques; nor is participant observation or in-depth interviewing per se any more insightful or profound than good survey research. Many of the materials that fill the case books and tapes of participant observers and clinicians are impressionistic and purely anecdotal; and, by virtue of their atheoretical nature, they remain trivial and irrelevant to our attempts to explain the dynamics of either familial or marital processes. The same holds for a good number of the so-called explanatory models which are diligently fabricated and tested by committed disciples of the printout.

So we are left with two different approaches to the analysis of marriage and the family. It would be reassuring if we could argue convincingly that the two are complementary, so that knowledge obtained through one could be integrated with that gained through the other. At this point, however, we have no real evidence that this is true. I *am* convinced, though, that whatever integration or synthesis ultimately is achieved must find its roots within the domain of questioning—a much neglected part of family social science. As long as the rationale for many of our research questions is based on value positions, media appeal, or funding considerations, our potential for integrating our findings with those of our colleagues will remain a matter of chance rather than design. This will be especially so when different analytical approaches are followed. And confusion will continue to plague us.

JETSE SPREY
Editor

PATRIARCHAL WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF NEWLY ORTHODOX JEWISH WOMEN

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Although it seems obvious why men might turn to a community steeped in patriarchal tradition, it is much more difficult to explain women's attraction. To explain their attraction the author conducted in-depth interviews with 75 newly orthodox Jewish women. Although many of these women began their journeys toward Jewish Orthodoxy partly as a backlash against feminism or any liberation movement they perceived as placing individual freedom above social responsibility, the data also suggest that almost all of them selectively incorporate and adapt some protofeminist values about the family and about men. This article explores the ways in which these women seem to make "feminist" sense out of patriarchal religion and social strucuture.

This study explores the attitudes, values and experiences and concerns of newly orthodox Jewish women (called *baalot teshuva* in Hebrew) who have voluntarily entered a world many regard as patriarchal and oppressive to women. There is ample evidence attesting to women's second class status within Jewish orthodoxy. Feminists have emphasized the most blatant, and at times the not so obvious, areas of discrimination and oppression. They have asked for changes in divorce law (in orthodoxy only a man can initiate and obtain a divorce), inclusion in the secular leadership of Jewish communal agencies and for concrete changes in the structure of the community (from day care centers to the acceptance of single mothers and homosexuals within the Jewish community). The inviolability of the Jewish code of laws in orthodoxy prevents the possibility of women challenging a legal system created and continuously defined and redefined by males (Baskin 1985). Moreover, if women are not encouraged or given the opportunities to study the very texts from which the interpretations of those laws derive, they cannot challenge those laws in a manner that will be perceived by the community as authentic or legitimate; or to develop female leadership.

Rachel Adler, a leading feminist and critic of Orthodox Judaism, describes the orthodox woman's ritual responsibilities in the follow way:

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> A woman keeps kosher because both she and her family must have kosher foods. She lights the *Shabbat* (Sabbath) candles so that there will be light, and, hence, peace, in the household. She goes to the *mikvah* (ritual bath) so that her husband can have intercourse with her and she bears children so that, through her, he can fulfill the exclusively male *mitzvah* (commandment) of increasing and multiplying (1983, p. 13).

Theology's role in transforming women within Judaism is paramount to feminist Suzannah Heschel:

> Questions of role and identity cannot be raised outside the larger context of the images which give rise to them and the theological positions which legitimate them. . . . Clearly, there is a need for theological reinterpretations to transform women in Judaism from object to subject (1983, p. xxxii).

However, the ways in which the *baalot teshuva* describe their experiences within patriarchal living suggest a range of feeling and experience many feminists might not expect. The data suggest that these women selectively adopt and even incorporate protofeminist attitudes and values into their familial lives. Most puzzling is the finding that although many *baalot teshuva* began their journeys toward Jewish Orthodoxy partly as a backlash against feminism and any "liberation" movement they perceived as placing individual freedom above social responsibility (see Tipton 1982 for similar findings among young Americans in movements in the seventies), they also maintain a gender identity deeply informed by and consonant with many values associated with some contemporary feminists, specifically those who celebrate the female, her life cycle experiences and feminine attributes (For a fuller discussion of second wave feminism and the *baalot teshuva* see Kaufman 1985a; 1985b; 1987).[1]

To understand these seeming paradoxes, it is important to understand the significance of Jewish orthodoxy from these newly orthodox women's perspectives and experiences. Beginning with the assumption that these women share in the construction of social reality and that their experiences are central to the construction of that reality, the focus of this study revolved around the following questions: How do these women react to the world of Jewish orthodoxy; reflect upon the meanings of phenomena in that world; wield symbols and communicate about those symbols? What do they incorporate, discard, and choose to ignore as they practice orthodoxy? The answers to these questions help us address the paradox of how these women seem to make "feminist" sense out of patriarchal religion and social structure and how they seem simultaneously to accommodate and resist patriarchy.[2]

SAMPLE

The data consist of in-depth interviews conducted with 75 newly orthodox Jewish women in the early 1980's[3] in five major urban areas across the United States.[4] Most women were between 16 and 34 years of age at the time of their orthodox conversions and all had identified in some way with countercultural youth. One-third claim they had once identified with the women's movement.

Several methods were used to locate respondents. Interviews with leading rabbis, lay community leaders, and known *baalot teshuva* in each community helped to locate respondents according to three identifiable frameworks in Jewish orthodoxy—modern, centrist, and ultraorthodox (hasidic). Once within these settings, the referal method or snowball technique of sampling was employed, thereby identifying smaller interactive groups of *baalot teshuva* in each community.[5]

Of the seventy-five women reported here, all are married, forty-five are hasidic, twelve are centrist, and eighteen are modern. Of those married, almost all married men who were also *baalei teshuva* (plural of newly orthodox Jews). The husbands were often as uneducated about Jewish orthodoxy as their wives. In fact, the demographics suggest that if there were any differences in Judaic background between husbands and wives, the wives more often than the husbands were better educated (knew more Hebrew and/or had a better Jewish education). Almost all these women had become *baalot teshuva* before they were married and before they met their husbands.

METHODOLOGY

Focused and structured interviews were not useful in mapping the world of these newly orthodox Jews. The interviews began not with specific questions and probes, but with the women themselves, their concerns, their perspectives.[6] They spoke not as those nurtured, secluded and structurally dependent upon orthodox communities or institutions all of their lives (and therefore easily marked as a byproduct of that particular environment), but as those who had at some time in their young adult lives made a choice to embrace the structural and theological conditions of traditional living. None had any familiarity with Orthodox Judaism: Of the seventy-five women, only twenty had ever attended Sunday school and five had gone to a late afternoon Hebrew school program three times a week.

A number of predefined topics were covered in each interview. Such topics focused on the history of these women's embracing of orthodoxy, their beliefs, practices, knowledge and feelings about orthodoxy, their current familial and communal life-style, and their views about gender-roles and feminism. The interviews lasted from two-and-one-half to five-and-one-half hours with an average of slightly over three hours each. A ten page demographic questionnaire was left with each respondent along with a stamped envelope for its return.

To understand these women's links and ties to one another, families, community and to the theology they embraced, I spent many weeks in each community. While not an ethnographic nor participant observation study, I used many of these techniques. I attended lectures, sabbath services, classes, informal afternoon gatherings, sisterhood meetings, and coffee get togethers. I also found myself changing diapers, walking in parks, celebrating Jewish holidays, accompanying one woman to the hospital on the birth of her first baby, sharing La Leche and LaMaze notes from the days when my own children were that young. I visited wig shops (orthodox Jewish women are required to cover their hair when in public), went to *mikva* (ritual bath-house), sat behind a *mechitza* (partition between men and women in

the synagogue), ate meals in strictly kosher restaurants, to put into a concrete context the experiences these women described (see Roberts 1981 for a detailed discussion of feminist methodology).

Refiguring Patriarchal Meaning: Celebrating the Feminine

As predominately middle-class, educated and somewhat liberal youths, these women stuck out in many directions in their late teens and early adult years. Like countercultural youth (Wuthnow 1976; Glock and Bellah 1976; Tipton 1982; Breines 1982) who protested the Vietnam War, the amoral use of technology, the racial, ethnic and gender injustices and those who moved in other religious directions these women found the quality and focus of contemporary living deeply troubling.

Of the women studied, including those who came into their young adult years during the waning days of the counterculture, one out of three had had some experience with oriental/mystic traditions (especially Zen, transcendental meditation, and yoga) and/or one of the personal growth movements such as est or scientology. Twenty-five women claimed to have identified with and/or participated in the women's movement. Ten had been actively involved in feminist consciousness raising groups. Moreover, twelve women admitted to active involvement in the proabortion campaigns of the early seventies. All describe themselves during their searching years as pro-choice and claim that certainly in appearance they were "liberated" women.

In part, because many had personally experienced or feared the familial and economic instabilities of our times, these newly orthodox women reject all secular liberation movements and quasi-religious communities, which, they feel, compromise responsibility to the family and community and promote individual autonomy and self-fulfillment (see Z. Eisenstein (1981) for a fine analysis of the links between individualism and the limitations of liberal feminism). For instance, many who had joined human growth potential movements found them to be a trap. One woman referred to her early seventies experiences with transcendental meditation as if it were "a great big organized be-in". "Something was missing," she continued, "I didn't want to be, I wanted to do. I wanted to feel I could make decisions that would lead to right actions." "Feeling good" and "actualizing oneself" through many of the human growth potential movements or oriental/mystical traditions did not seem to provide for community and "right living on a here and now, day to day basis," as one woman phrased it.

All women expressed some concern about the loss of clear rules and expectations in marital, familial, and sexual relationships. Discussing their relationships prior to orthodoxy, some emphasized their relationships with men who were unwilling or unable to make lasting commitments. One woman put it this way:

> There I was 25 years of age. I had had my fill of casual sexual relationships, drugs, communal living. I looked at myself and said: What will I be like at 40 years of age? An aging hippie with no roots and maybe just a history of bad relationships? I wanted something true and lasting.

For many the "dark side" of individualism had become a real, not merely abstract or theoretical, problem. Freedom at the expense of commitment was a theme prevalent in many of the interviews. Secular versions of liberal feminism were not satisfactory either. Several women compared their feminist experiences to the ways in which Jewish Orthodoxy spoke to them as women.

> You know, before I became *frum* (orthodox) I was in a feminist consciousness raising group. We talked a good deal about our problems . . . about being women, students, lovers, and working women . . . we talked about whatever it was that was going on in our lives at that time, but we never really were able to formulate anything beyond or larger than ourselves. . . . We were good at defining the negatives. I needed something that spoke to me directly about being a woman.

Still another woman put it this way.

> In Judaism there is a positive assertion of who we are as women . . . the older I get the more I realize how good that is . . . I have found meaning in all this ritual . . . meaning I have never really had at any other time in my life. Torah [Five Books of Moses] has so much to say to me as a woman . . . My feelings about myself as a sexual person . . . the family purity laws[7] are so in line with me as a woman. . . . it is commanded that I not be sexually taken for granted that I have two weeks each month for myself. . . . It is mind boggling to me to think that this wonderful Torah knows who I am as a woman for centuries.

The specialness of woman and the importance of her sphere of activity was stressed throughout the interviews and often juxtaposed to a rather rigid conception of what was described as feminism. For these women, feminism represents the liberal tradition equated with the "early" Betty Friedan and the National Organization of Women. That is, feminism for most of these women (who were not familiar with some of the more recent changes in feminist thinking or Betty Friedan's *Second Stage*), is defined as the women's liberation movement primarily focused on dismissing differences between men and women and on the world of work, where equal pay is the most important issue.[8]

By idealizing the feminine and emphasizing gender differences already present in this sex-aggregated community, these women develop powerful images of themselves and their activities. Excerpts from conversations with three women illustrate their celebration of gender differences and how they make positive use of symbols and rituals within Jewish Orthodoxy.

Miriam, a thirty-six year old biologist with five children living in an ultraorthodox community, emphasizes the moral discipline women provide for the orthodox community:

> The world needs more of what we do as women naturally. We must teach and guide men. You know in orthodoxy women are not required to do any of the time-bound *mitzvot* [commandments].[9] Men need the discipline we don't. We are closer to God—we are the *Shekhina* [in-dwelling of God]. We provide understanding—knowledge toalone means nothing. We have a natural understanding of things. We don't need to

> go to *shule* [synogogue] three times a day or study regularly to fulfill our bond with God. Our discipline is in the everyday actions of our lives, in our intuitive understanding of what is right.

In response to my probing what she meant by "intuitive" and "natural" understanding, Miriam responded with the following:

> Look, I don't mean that we should not take advantage of education and other opportunities. Chaim [husband] agrees with me when I say that Dvorah [daughter] should be afforded every opportunity to go to medical school. She is very good in science, like I was. This, of course, after she has had a good religious education and has her values straight. You know, there are orthodox women doctors. There is nothing in orthodoxy that prevents women from receiving advanced training or education. In that sense we can do everything a man can do . . . but we have a different understanding, you know, a different way of going about it.

The following exerpts are from a recently married childless twenty-four year old law student named Aliza. While she is not ultraorthodox, but self-identified as centrist, she has just told me of her fondness for hasidut, the philosophy associated with Hasidism.

> There is no doubt that what I love about it is the way in which women are understood. The intensity of women's relationship to God is overwhelming. I think women are the collective unconscious way of safeguarding prayer in Judaism. Women in the Bible are known for their prayers—Sarah, Rachel, and Chana. They have such an intense relationship to God . . . it reminds men that what goes on in *shule* [synagogue] is not important but that the relationship to God is. We are the holders of the key for the most important aspect of inner life. The experience of being a woman in Judaism I would say is like Jungian "anima"—a profound introspection and inner intensity.
>
> I like the fact that the men and the women are expected to reach holiness through different means. I think it suits our personalities. Before I was married I tried davaning [praying] in an all woman's *minyan* (prayer quorum), but I always felt something was missing. I like being with men and being separated. It makes two statements simultaneously—that we are separate, different, yet together.

The following exerpts are from Debra, a thirty year old modern orthodox mother of three and a journalist.

> I know this is going to sound strange to you but I feel like a spiritual feminist. Often when I awaken in the morning and I am saying my prayers I feel this profound spirituality, it's actually liberating. I go to this wonderful workshop once a week. It is offered by a *frum* [orthodox] woman who is a psychologist. There is music, meditation, group exercise, and, since most of us are vegetarians, some veggie snacks. We study the role of the feminine in Jewish thought. I feel so in touch with myself and the rhythms of my body. We've learned a lot about Jewish mystical thought, too. In the past I have taken a lot of courses—mostly having to do with ethics . . . but this workshop for women is the most important one. The others just make me know what

> good sense the Torah makes for personal living and mental hygiene, but my course on feminine spirituality relates the most to me as a woman. You know, I don't just feel good but I feel connected to a past and to a future.
>
> I think in a world that isn't *frum* most women are male-identified. I think before I became orthodox I was like that. You know, what's male is better. Not in Judaism. If anything it is a bit reversed. Difference doesn't mean inferiority. In fact, only in Judaism have I found out who I really am. I am different, not just because I am Jewish, but, also because I am a women. I have taken part in anti-nuclear demonstrations because I truly believe that women, more than men, understand those things which are life threatening. Those insights are all there in the Torah. I like being with other women a good part of the time, I like studying about myself and other women with other women, I like being separate with other women. It is a real sense of strength for me.

These women celebrate the feminine and the domain most associated with the female in religious orthodoxy—the family. Marriage and family are key components in the structure of Orthodox Jewish women's everyday religious lives. One woman suggests that marriage is at once a personal and a sacred act. Through her familial practices as wife and mother she is able, she claims, to make a "dwelling place for God below." Another woman stated that marriage is the symbol of the highest relationship possible: "The day God gave the Jewish people the Torah is called the day of his wedding." These *baalot teshuva* assert an unambigious "pro-family" stance based on strong assertions that the family, like the spiritual, is essentially their realm. They take from orthodoxy the religious values consonant with the "light" and nurturance they, and the tradition, define as essentially female.

The *baalot teshuva* focus on the most powerful and sacred images of themselves and their functions in this religious tradition. These women reclaim and emphasize classical theological sources to describe their roles as orthodox Jewish women. Moreover, they make explicit the strong family-centered values that orthodoxy prescribes for both men and women. For instance, the family, "their" domain, is described as "the sanctuary on earth." They often refer to the *Shabbat* (Sabbath) as "feminine" or as "a taste of the world to come." Among many of the hasidic women there is an implicit belief that they "will prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah." Still others associate the female with the "indwelling" of God. These powerful images evoke for these women a sacred community of which they are a principal part, in direct contrast to the male, secular culture most have consciously rejected.

Practicing Jewish Orthodoxy: Making "Feminist" Sense of Patriarchal Social Structure

Perhaps, however, these *baalot teshuva's* discussion of the family purity laws are the most instructive of how these women seem to make "feminist" sense out of patriarchal religion and social structure. The laws of "nidda" and "mikva" as part of the family purity laws (one of the three most important social practices pertain-

ing to orthodox Jewish women) demand that there be a sexual and physical separation between husband and wife during her menstrual cycle. According to Talmudic law, separation between husband and wife should be maintained for at least twelve days, five for the actual period of flow and seven additional days during which no bleeding is visible (called clean or white days). On the evening of her seventh clean day, or any day thereafter upon her choosing, a woman goes to the *mikva* (a ritual bath).

"During nidda", explained one particularly articulate woman, "the woman falls between categories of life and death". She noted that when she teaches seminars, she often introduces non-legal, but traditional, sources of explanation to frame discussions of "nidda" and "mikva".

She explains:

> For instance, when it is questioned why women and not men are still subject to impurity rituals I look to traditional explanations . . . you can find one that suggests that women are closer to God because of their ability to create life and that they are, therefore, subject to purity rituals . . . still another views the woman's body as the second temple. I like to think of a woman's cycle as part of all the sacred time rhythms in Judaism—the *Shabbat*, holidays . . .

All the women rejected the term "unclean" as an uninformed and mistaken translation of "nidda". Many explained that impure is a better translation for its places the meaning of "nidda" and "mikva" in the sacred context in which it belongs. "Blood", argues one woman, "is the symbol of both birth and death. This is recognized in the balance between "nidda" and "mikva"; the first is the mourning of our temporarily lost capacity to give life, the other a celebration of our capacity to give life." Not one woman doubted the importance of the "mikva" to the community. As one woman put it: "There is no doubt about it . . . if a choice has to be made a community has to build a "mikva" before it can build a "shule" or even acquire a "Sefer Torah" (Five Books of Moses):" While not directly challenging the sacred status of the Torah in orthodoxy, these women use the legal tradition to their own advantage. While these women may be making a virtue of their impurity (an in so doing accommodating themselves to patriarchal interpretation), they are simultaneously claiming strong traditional sources for normative and institutional support for women's sacred status within Judaism as well.

This same process is apparent in their discussion of the function of family purity laws. Almost all women noted the positive functions of such laws. Although newly married women were more likely to complain about the length of sexual separation, those married over longer periods of time and with more children emphasized the positive effects of those laws over the adult life-cycle. On woman notes: "When we were first married, I found it hard to consider sexual separation as a positive thing. In fact, during my menstrual cycle I felt I wanted to be held and loved more than at other times of the month. But I must admit over the years it truly serves as a renewal . . . it is really like being a bride again . . . well almost". Even among the newly married, many claimed that forced separation heightened desire. Referring to the sexual separation from her husband during "nidda", one woman noted:

"The separation restores our passion and places the control of it in my hands".

Many feminists have pointed to the way in which menstrual taboos have been a way to control and demean women and the insidious way such beliefs continue in our contemporary culture (see Douglas 1966; Culpepper 1974). Yet the *baalot teshuvas'* acclaim for the laws of "nidda" and "mikva" suggest a range of experience and meaning not anticipated by some feminists. Because these women have to attend intimately to their bodies to engage in sexual activity according to "halacha" (religious law), many speak of an increased awareness and harmony with their bodies they had never known before. Comparing their sexual lives prior to and after their embracing of Orthodoxy, these women claim a control not known before and a newfound respect for their bodies and their sexuality. They repeatedly reminded me that they cannot be "taken for granted."

In answering questions about abortion and contraception, these women were consistent in their belief that orthodoxy gave them latitude in making reproductive decisions. None doubted that in Judaism the mother's health (mental and physical) takes precedence in matters concerning childbearing and rearing. Except for hasidic women, most women readily distinguished between continual childbearing and the need for quality family relationships and a healthy family environment. Most of the "centrist" and "modern" orthodox women, and even some among the "ultra-orthodox" women currently use or have used contraception at some point in their marital life cycle.[10] As one woman put it: "Family planning does not necessarily mean small families."

Specific data on the frequency of sexual intercourse and sexual satisfaction and experimentation were not forthcoming. Modesty rules inhibit truly open discourse about such details. Therefore, the data on sexual practices are limited. However, it is quite clear that these women believe that the laws of "nidda" and "mikva" function positively for women within marriage.

Yet despite their profamily stance and their emphasis on gender differences, these women are not restricted to practices traditionally associated with familial roles. Three-quarters of them currently work, and almost all intend to participate in the paid labor force at some time.[11] All but three of the women with children under the age of six who worked, held either part-time jobs or jobs with flexible hours. The flexibility needed to maintain dietary laws, the many holidays, and the Sabbath encourages both men and women either to take part-time jobs or positions allowing great personal autonomy and decision making. Almost all of the women who did not have advanced degrees intend to retrain and or obtain more education before returning to the labor force.

Whether they work or not, all of those women with children living at home use some form of child care or day care services regularly. Irrespective of their wives' work status, all husbands have some responsibility for the care of children. All husbands were responsible for some regular domestic activity as well—the most usual activity was weekly grocery and meat shopping. In addition to their husbands' help, one half of those women who work full-time have someone living in the household to help with the childcare responsibilities and/or housekeeping. Many of the live-in help are young women who are in the process of "converting" to

orthodox Judaism. Of the remaining women, almost all have at least weekly help with housekeeping.[12]

Several reasons account for husbands' participation in household labor and their clear presence in the home. Men's religious obligation to pray three times a day and to study necessitates flexibility in their work patterns. This flexibility often allows them either to work at home or to be home during the day. Their presence in the home and the strict observance of holidays and the Sabbath as family-centered events, structures frequent interaction among husbands, wives, and children. Moreover, men's frequent and consistent presence in the home fosters a strong family-centered orientation for them.

Finally, the data suggest that although most of these women do not focus on male privilege and authority in Jewish Orthodoxy, some maintain a strong belief that those areas that clearly mark women as second class citizens will eventually change. For instance, fifteen women knew of and ten were actively involved in GET, an organization of orthodox women designed to change the divorce laws which currently allow only men to initiate and obtain a divorce. It is interesting to note that such blatant inequalities in Orthodoxy were attributed to "poor" interpretation of "halacha" (Jewish code of law considered inviolable) not to orthodox theology. Interestingly, when asked about what they might want to see changed in Orthodoxy, a few women talked of changes in the synagogue and yeshiva. "In time," said one woman, "women will be able to read from the Torah and study the gemara. It will take maybe another 300 years, but it will happen. I'm in no hurry." While, one or two women could see the opening of men's roles to women, none wished dramatically to alter the practices associated with women in Jewish Orthodoxy.

DISCUSSION

Feminist sociology begins with the premise that women and their experiences are central to the construction of social reality. Loosely structured interviews allowed me to uncover the issues, concerns, and kinds of things that were of significance to these newly orthodox women, rather than the frequency of predetermined events, or those events and issues that male leaders of the community might consider important to these "converts". What are the issues and concerns of newly orthodox Jewish women? How do they react to the world of Jewish Orthodoxy and reflect upon the meanings of phenomena, wield symbols and communicate about them?

These women claim that much of what attracts and holds them in this traditional life style is the nature and description of the feminine and the female in orthodoxy. Both Hasidic and non-Hasidic women evoke classical Jewish sources to express their positive identification and participation in orthodoxy and, consequently, in the world at large. The selected bits and pieces of tradition and theology they choose to relate, strongly suggest that they consciously reformulate that orthodoxy in their own image.

Ironically, it is through their "return" to a patriarchal tradition that many of these women claim they are in touch with their own bodies, and the so-called feminine virtues of nurturance, mutuality, family and motherhood. It is in the sex-

segregated world of Jewish Orthodoxy that many of these women claim they have found their identities as women. They describe the orthodox community as normatively organized around feminine principles and values, and correlate that which is associated with the female in orthodoxy with the sacred and spiritual meaning of life.

Recognizing that social movements and/or ideologies which promise self-fulfillment and personal autonomy over familial and communal values almost always leave women at a distinct disadvantage (Ehrenreich 1983), these *baalot teshuva* negotiate their familial and personal status within Jewish Orthodoxy through the positive and sacred use of the symbols and structure associated with the female and the feminine. In so doing, they claim they hold men and the community accountable to them. For many, the formal world of patriarchy in Jewish Orthodoxy is preferable to the informal secular patriarchal one they have rejected. Concrete rules and expectations, especially about their lives as women in a community of believers, are an improvement, they claim, over the theoretical ideologies the political and social liberalism of the sixties and seventies advocated. They view themselves not merely as passive reflections of male imagery, but rather as moral agents for positive action. They not only believe in gender difference, they celebrate it.

Because they feel that many values and qualities associated with women, such as, mothering and the capacity for connectedness, are undervalued in society at large, these *baalot teshuva* link the feminine and the female with the sacred and spiritual meaning of life within the orthodox community. By so doing, they take the feminine (regarded in the secular world as low status and lacking authority) and turn it into a high status aspect of orthodoxy—the sacred. In the religious world, claim these women, femininity and that which is associated with it, is seen as a positive source of value, not only for the self but for the community as well. These *baalot teshuva* focus on "feminine" values which the community as a whole celebrates for both men and women. In this way, the *baalot teshuva* claim feminine qualities as normative for the community at large (see Handelman 1984). For instance, in Jewish Orthodoxy, passivity is equated with infinite capacity to receive divine understanding in the religious world. Both men and women are held to the practice of *tzniut* (modesty). That is, neither men or women are to present themselves in an aggressive or self-important manner.

Although many *baalot teshuva* began their journeys toward Jewish Orthodoxy partly in reaction against feminism or any "liberation" movement they perceived as placing individual freedom above social responsibility, the data also suggest that almost all of them selectively incorporate and adapt approaches to the family and to men consonant with a woman-centered approach characteristic of some contemporary feminists. Therefore, while most of these women openly reject feminism or what they perceive feminism ultimately to represent and advocate, they also maintain a gender identity deeply informed by many protofeminist (although depoliticized) attitudes and practices. Like some second wave feminists (Miller 1976; Rich 1976), the *baalot tashuva* celebrate the feminine not only by contrasting it with the masculine ethic of success, individualism and aggressive stances, but as a

source of power and strength for themselves as well. They negotiate their familial and marital roles in ways, they claim, that help them maintain control over their bodies and their sexuality. They also claim strong family-centered values for the community at large and hold men accountable to them and family life on those grounds. They symbolically reconstruct the sex/gender system not only to enhance female status but also bring men's aspirations and value systems more in line with women's. In this sense, they are protofeminist.

However, although they have little doubt that they are theologically equal to men, they do not directly challenge the social structural sources of gender inequality. They do not challenge male hegemony in the public, legal community that is identified as Jewish Orthodoxy (the world of synagogue and study). They ignore the very premise of orthodoxy which places men at the center of the religious community as rabbis, leaders and as those who study and interpret the heart of orthodoxy—religious law. They do not explicitly acknowledge that the feminine virtues they celebrate also help to maintain a gendered religious division of labor. That division of labor helps to maintain their secondary status to men—in public religious ceremony and in religious law. In this sense, they are depoliticized.

Feminist anthropologists have contributed to a burgeoning literature on the ways in which women have actively negotiated their own social and physical space within patriarchal societies (Rosaldo 1974). Feminist historians have pointed to the ways in which the defense of the domestic sphere and "femininity" have served feminist as well as antifeminist purposes (see *Feminist Studies*, Spring 1980). Even more recently, some feminist sociologists have pointed to the ways in which "evangelical theology and institutions may be flexible resources for renegotiating gender and family relationships, and not exclusively in reactionary or masculinist directions" (Stacey and Gerard 1988, p. 2; see also Pohli 1983; Brusco 1986; Ammerman 1987).

Indeed, in the orthodox Jewish community the shared belief system for both men and women is steeped in patriarchy. Feminists are not incorrect in their recognition that this serves as a powerful social control mechanism in maintaining male-dominance and in keeping women in their secondary place within the community of synagogue and study. Yet there is another set of belief systems that affect the everyday actions of men and women as separate groups. In this specific sense, women's shared meanings of the religious community with one another are simultaneously accommodation and resistance to patriarchy; they simultaneously ignore those institutions important to men and to what maintains male-dominance, while creating and/or maintaining their own more relevant systems of meaning. In turn, these systems help them negotiate their familial and marital roles.

CONCLUSION

Interpretive models of sociology encourage us, as Weber claimed, to give "an interpretive understanding of social action insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it" (1964, p. 88). Or as Blumer suggests to "get inside their worlds of meanings" (1969, p. 51). The epistemological and methodological basis

of the majority of feminist and interpretive sociology call for analytic categories as complex as the lives people actually live (see Cook 1983; Stacey and Thorne 1985; Farganis 1986; Kasper 1986; Cook and Fonow 1986; Grant, Ward and Rong, 1987; Stacey 1988). Feminist models focus on women's value systems through their own self-understandings. A feminist framework does not begin with the assumption that what goes on in the public world of men's relations is the most important focus in an analysis of female relationships or of community relations in general. Interactionist models highlight consciousness, language and agency. Together the two provide an analytic model capable of capturing the complexities and tensions that make up everyday behavior of any gendered subgroup. As "minded" social actors, women are capable of constructing their own systems of meaning and of negotiating their social reality; they are not simply or necessarily "robots," "victims," or "fools" (Stacey 1983).

However, a feminist model forces us to move beyond the value-neutral description of the actor's point of view to the consequences of action, behavior and belief in light of the larger social and historical relations in which they are embedded. These women selectively adopt and even incorporate protofeminist attitudes and values into their familial lives. However, their female consciousness (Kaplan 1982) is limited to Orthodox, heterosexual, Jewish women. Since the most important roles for these women surround their functions as wives and mothers, unmarried, divorced, widowed, separated, and childless women face clear problems within such communities. Moreover, although the *baalot teshuva* may reclaim or retrieve values attached to the women's community, those values are limited almost exclusively to the roles of motherhood and wifehood (within the family). Furthermore, while they may claim positive values associated with the feminine, they do so without the mechanisms or legitimacy to reject what is still oppressive to them and others. Or, as Lipman-Blumen notes in her discussion of women who have used moral authority in the past, most "fail to extend moral authority so that it becomes part of social institutions beyond the family" (1984, p. 32).

The feminine principles, of which the *baalot teshuva* speak, are abstract qualities, giving, perhaps, an ideological cast to the community, but without the mechanisms to change or claim such practices for the community as a whole. In this sense the social practices from which the feminine are born still emanate from the world of women, not from the community of men and women. These women do not directly challenge a system of law defined and continually refined by men. At best, then, these women adopt short term tactics which may provide a certain amount of psychic autonomy and space from men but are not capable, in the long run, of directly addressing and changing the politics of religious patriarchy or the division of labor that helps to maintain it.

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NOTES

1. Some contemporary feminists believe that the female experience ought to be the source for dominant values for the culture as a whole (Miller 1976; Rich 1976), others argue that women are not only different from men but superior to them (Rich 1976; Daily 1978). Among both *baalot teshuva* and some contemporary feminists, there is a celebration of the feminine and the female, especially in light of her seemingly greater relational capacities.

2. In most social science studies the orthodox Jewish community is generally explored and then analyzed through the perspectives and experiences of men, especially through the male-oriented activities associated with synagogue and study. Even the two most recent books published on Jewish orthodoxy, despite their rich detail and keen insights, fail to give us any compelling sociological explanation of orthdoxy's potential appeal to women. In his book *From Suburb to Shtetl* (1979), Egon Myer cannot gain access, in that highly sex-segregated community, to the institutions relevant to orthodox women's lives nor can he explore women's experiences within them. In *The World of the Yeshiva* (1982), William Helmreich confines his study to the all-male world of the yeshiva. Neither focus exclusively on *baalei teshuva* (Hebrew plural for newly orthodox Jews). Moreover, while the only full length book on *baalei teshuva, Return to Judaism: Religious Renewal in Israel* (1983), written by Janet Aviad, contributes much to defining some of the characteristics and properties of newly orthodox Jews, it is limited to only those within yeshivot (schools of higher education) in Israel.

3. These data reflect one half of a larger sample of women (150) and are the basis for my forthcoming book about feminism and the religious right (Kaufman 1990).

4. The five cities are: Boston, Cleveland, New York City and the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. All five cities have among the largest recorded orthodox Jewish populations in the country (from 5% to 13% claiming orthodox affiliation).

5. There are no demographic portraits of *baalei teshuva* after they have committed themselves to marriage, family, and community. No claims are made that the *baalot teshuva* under study were randomly drawn as a sample of a defined universe, nor can the interviewed be considered statistically representative of those who return to orthodoxy nor of orthodoxy itself.

6. Since my interest was in the orthodox world according to the women who had embraced patriarchal living, I did not interview men of the community. I did spend time talking with husbands and lay leaders in each of the communities.

7. The family purity laws require a two week separation between husband and wife during menstruation.

8. As newly orthodox women, only three remained active in any political feminist causes. Three had signed a petition for the Equal Rights Amendment.

9. In Orthodox Judaism women are exempt from commandments which are related to time and place. For example, men must pray at specific times during the day, women need not.

10. The custom, as opposed to legal tradition, in Orthodox communities, is to bear as many children as possible. Yet, despite this tradition, the average number of children for this population of women was 3.4.

11. Only forty percent (30) of these women had earned less than a bachelor's degree. Of

these women, five worked. Of the forty-five who had earned more than a bachelor's degree, 20 had earned at least a master's degree and 11 of these had professional degrees (four lawyers, two doctors, and five Ph.D.s). Of those who work, only those with advanced degrees work in what might be classified as male-dominated professions (e.g., law, university teaching, medicine, or executive positions). Except for several computer analysts, the reaminder are in female-dominated semi-professional occupations (teachers, librarians, social workers, nurses). The higher her educational degree, the more likely the woman was to work full time. Similarly, the average number of children for those working was less (3.2) than for those who were not working (3.6).

12. These *baalot teshuva* are squarely within a middle-class socioeconomic category. The combined average income for this group was $37,000 a year.

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