

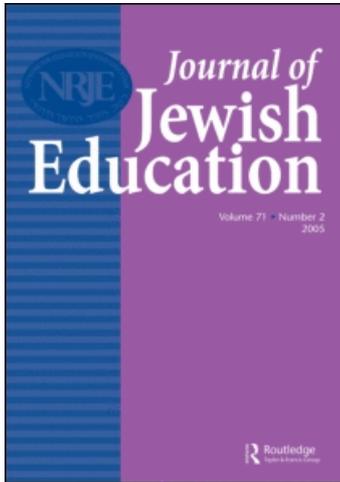
This article was downloaded by: [New York University]

On: 12 June 2009

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 731923835]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Jewish Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t714578333>

Restoring Jewish Lives Post Adult Bat Mitzvah

Lisa D. Grant

Online Publication Date: 01 September 2003

To cite this Article Grant, Lisa D.(2003)'Restoring Jewish Lives Post Adult Bat Mitzvah',Journal of Jewish Education,69:2,34 — 51

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/0021624030690205

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0021624030690205>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

- Rothchild, A. M. (1896-97). *Report of the Mothers' Club*. San Francisco: Third Annual Report of the Emanu-El Sisterhood for Personal Service.
- Sara to Ethel Feineman. (August 2, 1921). Western Jewish History Center, Berkeley, CA.
- Sinkoff, N. B. (1988). Educating for Proper Jewish Womanhood: A Case Study in Domesticity and Vocational Training, 1897-1926. *American Jewish History*, 77(June), 572-598.
- Sklar, K. K. (1985). Hull House in the 1890s: A Community of Women Reformers. *Signs*, 10(Summer).
- Smith, K. M. (2000). New Paths to Power 1890-1920. In N. F. Cott (Ed.), *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States* (pp. 353-412). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Solomon, V. D. (1977). *San Francisco Jews of Eastern European Origin, 1880-1940: A Community Oral History Project of the American Jewish Congress and Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum*.
- Sonia to Ethel Feineman. (April 20, 1922). Western Jewish History Center, Berkeley, CA.
- Toll, W. (2001). From Domestic Judaism to Public Ritual. In P. S. N. a. J. Sarna (Ed.), *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives* (pp. 128-147). Hanover: Brandeis University Press.
- Wenger, B. (1989). Jewish Women and Voluntarism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers. *American Jewish History*, 79 (Autumn), 16-36.

Restorying Jewish Lives Post Adult Bat Mitzvah

Lisa D. Grant

(Lisa D. Grant is Assistant Professor of Jewish education at the Hebrew Union College in New York.)

Over the past thirty years, thousands of American Jewish women have participated in intensive, long-term programs of study that culminated either in a group or individual ceremony of adult bat mitzvah. Although there is no basis in Jewish law or tradition for such a ceremony, the rite has grown increasingly popular among women who want to affirm their connection and commitment to Judaism and to claim what they perceive to be their legitimate place in public ritual expression. What began as a grassroots, "folk" phenomenon of the late 1960's and early 1970's, became a normative experience by the 1990's. Adult bat mitzvah classes are now part of ongoing, formal adult education offerings at hundreds of congregations, because rabbis and educators perceived that the experience effectively increases participation in worship and builds connections to the synagogue. Indeed, the recent publication of an adult bat mitzvah curriculum by the Women's League for Conservative Judaism (Grant, 2001) and a curriculum guide by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Schwartz, 2002) attest to the institutionalization of adult bat mitzvah in the liberal movements of American Judaism.

In 1999, I published a study that explored the perceived impacts on the lives of five women who participated in two years of study at a Conservative synagogue, culminating in a ceremony of adult bat mitzvah in 1996. Through a process of narrative inquiry, I created an opportunity for the women to both recount and interpret how their experiences fit within their Jewish life story. Each of them described the process of learning and the ensuing ceremony as a peak experience, an unforgettable moment in their lives. They consistently noted how their learning together and demonstration of mastery during a Shabbat morning service enhanced a sense of authenticity, legitimacy, and comfort in synagogue worship. One year after the experience, all of them reported a much greater sense of connection to and involvement in their synagogue community. Four of the five also described how the bat mitzvah experience led them to think differently about religious observance and motivated them to continue their Jewish learning. Three of the five said the experience helped them reflect more deeply about their belief in God.

At the time of the initial study, the impacts described by the women varied in intensity, but were profound in each case. More than five years later, I wondered whether the impact would endure. The purpose of this study is to examine these longer-term effects. Would these women interpret the adult bat mitzvah experience as a turning point in their lives in terms of how they defined themselves or how they acted as Jews? Would they follow through on the commitments and intentions they made closer to the event, or would other events of the life course take over in prominence? Did their initial enthusiasm for Jewish learning continue? Were the social bonds that were so strong among the group members lasting?

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Few studies trace the longitudinal impact of adult Jewish learning (Schuster, 2001), and none specifically examine the long-term effects of adult bat mitzvah. Prior research on adult bat mitzvah focused either on the historical and sociological phenomena contributing to the development of the ritual, or the near-term impact of the experience on the participants (Schoenfeld, 1987, 1989, 1992; Kahn, 1993; Grant, 1999). In this current study, I asked five women, who became adult bat mitzvah in 1996, to reflect back on how the experience of becoming an adult bat mitzvah had influenced their lives over the past five years. The point was not for them to recollect the specific details of what they experienced at that time, but rather to reconstruct the past relative to their current lives.

This analysis is informed by research on life course dynamics (Elder, 1985; Hulbert and Schuster, 1993). Life course studies discover connections between life experiences and transitions that are widely separated in time (Elder, 1985). Adult's lives do not always move along a straight path through a predictable set of developmental stages or challenges. Rather, people may experience a variety of transitions and move along different trajectories as life events, relationships, and other circumstances occur.

Elder identified two meta-themes in life course studies — transitions and trajectories. The former investigates the mainly linear formation and transformation of career paths and life decisions such as courtship, marriage, and children. The latter focuses on the turning points along the path, when life course decisions take an unpredictable or non-normative approach. Life course dynamics can be understood as the interaction between transitions and trajectories as they are played out over time.

In Elder's language, "events and transitions modify life trajectories. Some events are important turning points in life — they redirect paths" (p. 35).

Exploring how the women connected their adult bat mitzvah experience to their life transitions and trajectories is part of a larger question, namely, was the adult bat mitzvah a transformative learning experience? In other words, did it lead to a fundamental change in the participant's sense of self, her worldview, her understanding of the past, and her outlook on the future (Brooks, 2000)? Ultimately, did such changes in turn, lead to changes in behavior?

Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Taylor, Marienau, and Fiddler, 2000; Brooks, 2000a, 2000b) focuses on the educational process by which people develop a deeper self-awareness. Mezirow argued that adults are transformed only when critical reflection on the assumptions, values, feelings, and cultural paradigms that have shaped their worldview results in a reframing and expansion of meaning. In recent years, this approach has been criticized for its over-emphasis on rational, cognitive thought processes. An emerging theory looks at transformative learning as a narrative process of re-casting one's life story. As Brooks (2000b) wrote, "this perspective is one of developing new narratives of experience through a process of group inquiry... As participants create new meaning out of a gestalt of all their narrated experiences, they construct a new shared narrative" (p. 167).

Throughout the life course, adults tell stories about themselves to help them to make sense of their lives and to give their lives a sense of unity and purpose (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; McAdams, 1996). Such stories extend "forward and backward in time to encompass my account of both where I come from and where I am going" (Randall, p. 226). They are influenced by inner dialogue, by relationships, by experiences, and by the social context in which one lives. Different events and experiences in their lives may be featured more prominently in the story as life forces change, and as people negotiate transitions and pursue new trajectories. In other words, people reconstruct their pasts to integrate them with how they perceive the present and anticipate the future. As Randall wrote, we do not receive an event "ready-made, with its 'meaning' assigned. Rather, we make its meaning for it, we construct the event ourselves. We story it" (p. 230).

Transformative learning can be seen as a process of *restorying* (Randall). Life stories are first constructed in adolescence when people begin to develop a historical perspective on the self (McAdams). Young adults in their twenties and thirties build their life stories by defining themselves through the various roles they take on in life through career, family, and community. At mid-life, the process can shift from clarifying and defining roles, to reflecting on how the different themes in one's life might be reconciled or balanced. McAdams' research suggested that adults over 40 seek to integrate the various aspects of self in a more balanced and harmonious whole. At this stage of life, adults also "begin to consider in more detail and with greater urgency the problem of construing an appropriate ending for their self-defining life story" (1996, p. 143).

At the time they became adult bat mitzvah, the women in this study ranged in age from 38 to 52, placing them at mid-life. In this follow-up study, I wanted to explore with them whether and how their experience of becoming an adult bat mitzvah changed the way they thought about and told their life story. I did this through an open-ended interview, where the goal was to construct meaning through a collaborative process

between the interviewer and the narrator (Oakley, 1981; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). This approach can be best characterized as a feminist perspective, where "the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (Oakley, 1981, p. 41). In this type of interview, the relationship established between the parties becomes important to the quality of the information. No presumptions are made of detachment or objectivity; rather the process is a co-construction of a narrative. Through dialogue, the "respondent does not just 'make things up' as much as he or she inventively, judiciously and purposefully fashions a story that is 'true to life,' faithful to subjectively meaningful experience even as it is creatively, spontaneously rendered" (Holstein and Gubrium, p. 28).

I began each of the five sixty to ninety-minute interviews with an open-ended question, asking the women to describe how the adult bat mitzvah experience fits into their life story at this point in time. Aside from asking clarifying questions and gently probing for more details, the interview basically flowed from that response. In addition, in each case I asked the women to reflect on how the bat mitzvah experience related to the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of their lives and to tell me about their involvement in any episodic or ongoing Jewish learning.

Initial Motivations and Impacts

As noted in the earlier paper, the five women in this study shared much in common. Four of the five came from backgrounds that could be best described as culturally Jewish, where Jewish identity was important, but Jewish education was not. The fifth woman, Roberta, who was an outlier in a number of dimensions, came from a strong Zionist background and had made several long-term trips to Israel in her late teens and early twenties. Her knowledge of Hebrew and Judaism was considerably higher than the other four. Like the other four, however, she too, was unfamiliar with and felt out of place in synagogue worship.

The initial motivations for enrolling in the bat mitzvah class were still clear in all the women's accounts five years later. For each one, their primary goal was to become full participants in the Shabbat morning service. In the earlier study, Ann said, "I guess the biggest thing I got out of it was being comfortable in a service, knowing what's going on" (1999). Now, she said, "I enjoy synagogue and the holidays more than I did. I feel more connected. The service goes faster when you know what you're doing." Likewise, Roberta originally said the bat mitzvah class was about "how to go to shul. How to find my place in the siddur. How to find my place in synagogue. How to sit comfortably. How to feel a sense of belonging" (1999). Consistent with these earlier comments, in the fall of 2001, she noted that she now felt much more comfortable at synagogue, though still did not consider it her sole, or even major place for spiritual expression.

I feel it is a place that I feel comfortable in. I feel more comfortable than most of the people who come, probably. I come in. I sit down in front. I know the service pretty well. And that's the aftermath of studying in the bat mitzvah class. But, I don't feel spiritually moved.

All the women wanted to learn to read Hebrew, chant from the Torah and develop the synagogue 'skills' to participate more fully in the service. Two of the women had

further intellectual goals as well. Susan and Roberta both indicated that their desire to learn more about Judaism was more important than the experience of becoming bat mitzvah per se. As Roberta said, "Remember, I didn't go for the bat mitzvah. I wanted to learn trope! And then they said, 'Oh, this is bat mitzvah.' So I said OK. I'm still incredibly happy I did it."

Family was an important motivation for Ann and Louise. In both sets of interviews, they noted how they felt they could not be legitimate Jewish role models for their children without these necessary skills.

Throughout adulthood, and particularly in mid-life, adults tend to see education as a source of support to help them cope with new demands and times of change in their lives (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980). The decision to enroll in the bat mitzvah class was connected to a current or anticipated transition for almost all the women. For instance, Susan connected her participation in the class to a search for meaning as she approached the milestone of her 50th birthday. Ann anticipated the bat mitzvah of her twin daughters. Though still years away at the time of her enrollment, Ann said, "One of the major reasons that I did it was because the kids were going to have theirs coming up, and I wanted to really understand what they would have to go through for their bat mitzvah. How could I expect them to go through something that I had never experienced?" Roberta noted how she had recently joined the synagogue and felt overwhelmed by its size and formality. She described how the class helped her make personal connections with other women in the synagogue and "feel at home there."

The linkage to a series of life crises was most profound for Meredith. At the time of the original study, she had recently experienced the death of her sister; struggled with infertility, adoption, and the eventual conception of a biological child; and acknowledged a long-term problem with depression and substance abuse, and begun to seek help. Going to synagogue was one of the few stabilizing forces in her life, which she clearly recognized at the time. Enrolling in the bat mitzvah class seemed to her the logical extension of this pattern of frequent attendance.

In the original study, I asked the women to reflect on how the adult bat mitzvah experience had influenced their Jewish beliefs, behavior, and sense of belonging. Consistent with their own goals, the most significant and clearest impact for everyone was a deepening sense of connection to their synagogue community. All the women indicated that they attended services more often as a result of their bat mitzvah study, and that the services were more meaningful to them. Each of the women also noted the powerful group bonding that took place during the two years of study. The impacts extended to changes in religious practice and belief for many of the women as well. Meredith initiated several major changes in her family's religious observance during her bat mitzvah study, including keeping kosher and regularly performing the Friday night table blessings over candles, wine, and challah. Susan and Louise both connected their study to activating their dormant thinking about God. Also for Louise, the bat mitzvah experience was an immediate catalyst for continued Jewish study. At the time of the first interview, however, she had not yet connected her intellectual involvement to the profound changes in her religious life that we will soon read more about.

Later Reflections and Restorying

Educational experiences help adults develop new meanings and new understandings of experiences and events that may lead to new stories emerging in one's life. Randall

wrote that restorying is a process of seeking coherence when life's component parts become incoherent. For instance, "we seek restorying when a particular episode fails to fit with the dominant story we tell ourselves, about who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going" (p. 238). Applying this metaphor to the five women in this study, we find that three of them have indeed gone through a process of restorying and have taken their lives on a new trajectory. Two others wove the adult bat mitzvah experience into their life story without taking such profound new directions. The balance of this paper will focus on the different dimensions of these transitions and trajectories and the underlying developmental forces that contributed to them for three of the five women: Louise and Susan, whose stories clearly describe new trajectories, and Ann whose story has equally clearly remained basically unchanged.

New Stories, New Directions

Louise and Susan each pursued new trajectories in their lives since their adult bat mitzvah ceremony. They also both traced their life course changes to the adult bat mitzvah experience. For Louise, this new direction touched virtually every dimension of her life. For Susan, it focused principally, but not exclusively, on her pursuit of Jewish learning.

Louise

The most pronounced change overall in terms of Jewish life occurred for Louise. One year post bat mitzvah, Louise described her decision to enroll in the class as being motivated by a sense of hypocrisy. If she could not read Hebrew, she wondered how she could force her children to do so. At that time, she said the most significant impacts of the experience were her increased sense of authenticity as a Jew within her family and her synagogue, as well as her own intellectual growth. During that earlier interview, when I asked her about her religious observance, her responses were hesitant and unclear, suggesting some possible tension within her family about moving towards greater ritual practice. Five years later, Louise told a far different story about her experience. Now, she said she began the process not for her children or out of a sense of obligation as a mother, but for herself. "This was something I had to do for me — not because of my children and not because of my husband. It was something I felt compelled to do somehow. And then actually *doing* it, it's hard to verbalize, but doing it forges more of an identity." In fact, this sense of identity formation was so profound that Louise said: "The bat mitzvah experience *became* me, or I became it, part of the process. It helped me see who I really am. Doing that and it grows inside of you somehow. You start to view the world in a completely different way."

In this statement, Louise unknowingly expressed the most fundamental aspect of transformative learning theory. The adult bat mitzvah precipitated a series of decisions and actions that led to Louise developing a new sense of self, a new way of living, and new understanding of her past and her future. The most apparent changes took place in the realm of religious practice. However, a multidimensional complex of social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual factors influenced these outward behavioral changes. Early in the interview, Louise said, "My level of observance has gone from cursory, I would say, to real serious." As she elaborated, she spoke of this in terms of a something she "needed to do," rather than wanted to do. For example, she described the process of how she began keeping kosher. A trial run became what she now described as a lifelong commitment, saying:

That happened after the bat mitzvah, but it was something I was thinking about before then. And we went from trying it out, to buying books and saying let's move it to where it should be. You can get the dishes and all those things, but you don't necessarily have it in your mind to do it the way it should be done.

When I asked Louise to reflect on the reasons why kashrut has become so important to her, she said that there were both intellectual and emotional parameters to her actions.

When I think about it intellectually, and I say this is a commandment that I'm following, that's separating me from the animals, and making me appreciate what I'm putting into my body. I can do that intellectually. But it is also emotional also because I can look at lobster that I used to love, and be completely unable to imagine liking it.

Louise also spoke at length about the changes she made in her Shabbat observance, at home and in the synagogue. Her description of how Friday night dinners evolved since her bat mitzvah ceremony in 1996 show how Shabbat has become a centerpiece of her life.

Oh my goodness! We added all the prayers. We just lit the candles in 1996. I don't think we even made Kiddush. We used to have Shabbat dinner and go to a movie! We never had people over. And I would no sooner think of doing that anymore than anything. We've had to rethink our entire Saturday. Now, on Friday nights I have to make enough food for Saturday. It's a whole new way of living.

This new lifestyle has had an impact on Louise's social life both in terms of friendships and communal service. In the years following the adult bat mitzvah experience, she served a term as president of her synagogue's Sisterhood, enrolled in a two-year program of adult Jewish learning, participated in a weekly Torah study group and other adult education, and recently became volunteer editor of the synagogue's newsletter as well. She said even her family's decisions about philanthropic giving shifted dramatically, almost exclusively to Jewish education and other Jewish communal needs.

Louise became a Shabbat morning "regular" at service during the two years of study leading up to bat mitzvah. She chanted Torah for the first time at her bat mitzvah; in the subsequent years, she reads on a monthly basis and is one of the most frequent lay people to chant Torah. Louise noted that about one year prior to our interview, she and her husband began attending Shabbat mincha/maariv services almost every week as well. "We love that service. I had been talking about having a havdalah ceremony at our daughter's bat mitzvah and we decided we couldn't do it unless we knew it ourselves."

Despite her steady presence and active participation in communal worship, Louise claimed that "the spiritual is very allusive for me. Although, I'm still searching." Though reluctant to ascribe her changes to a spiritual connection with Judaism, she also recognized that it has not been exclusively an intellectual process. She said, "I don't

do the critical reflection thing so well. I mean I can when it's something I need to do to alleviate pain. But this is way beyond that. This is something that I'm just compelled to do. It's an inner pull."

Susan

Susan's new story since the adult bat mitzvah is more circumscribed than Louise's, but she clearly has begun a new chapter in her life, with Jewish learning at the center. While Louise made substantive changes in religious observance, Susan's religious behaviors have changed very little. What has changed, however, is the depth and intensity of both her intellectual and spiritual connections to Judaism. From the start, Susan's motivations were primarily intellectual. During the initial interview, she noted that the rabbi of the congregation encouraged her to enroll in a two-year program of adult Jewish learning in the community, but as she said, "I didn't feel ready for that." As an alternative, she joined the adult bat mitzvah class, "because that was at the right level for me." One year after the bat mitzvah ceremony, Susan did enroll in the two-year program. At the more recent interview, Susan referred to her experience in this program and thought ahead about her next step in Jewish learning.

[The two-year program] was wonderful because it was so much more in-depth, so much more academic and intellectual. And I really liked that. I finished a little over a year ago. And now, I'm feeling kind of in between things and not sure what I want to do next and how this all fits together.

While Louise did not work outside the home, Susan had a full-time position as head librarian at a local university. As she was completing the two-year program of study, she became editor of a professional journal that she described as "practically another full-time job." Given these demands on her time, Susan said she juggled between Jewish study and professional activities. "I've been on a more intensive track with one for a couple of years and then it switches to the other. It would be nice to be able to integrate them, but both of them are so time-consuming on top of a job, so I haven't been able to do that."

This internal conflict would never have arisen without the bat mitzvah experience. Susan now feels a steady need to engage in Jewish study. She may not always find the time for it, but it is part of her consciousness. She said, "I want to study Judaics. It's not that I want to be a perpetual student, but I do really want to learn more about Judaism."

These were not just wistful aspirations. Susan acted upon them by urging her rabbi to begin an evening text study class for working people. She noted how most of the adult education programs at her synagogue occurred either during the day or on Sunday mornings when they seemed more geared to parents of children in the religious school.

I said what we need is some kind of thing after work, so you can stop by and have a little dinner and then have an activity, so you're done. You're out of there by 8:00 p.m. so you can get home from a long day. And now I see they're going to start that and I'm really delighted.

This focus on study has had ramifications beyond the intellectual. While her outward behavior may not appear different, her inner thinking has shifted considerably.

She said, "My study has definitely changed my thinking about observance. Even if I don't observe all the holidays, now I'm aware of what they're about." Similar to her stance regarding study, again, we note a conflict between a perceived ideal and the current state of her life.

I would like to be more observant. For example, I would like to have Shabbat dinner here once and a while. But, it's just so hard to do that with all the other work-related things I'm doing. And yet, it bothers me, because obviously you have priorities and make decisions about what's important and I'm not doing it. So it bothers me that I'm not doing it when I realize that I could.

During the earlier interview, Susan mentioned that she did not think much about God prior to the bat mitzvah class. While the bat mitzvah experience itself did not change her belief system, it served as a catalyst for ongoing reflection. Apparently, this reflection is still part of her life. Just as Louise said, "the bat mitzvah *became* me, or I *became* it," Susan described how her theology became part of her when she was able to move away from a strictly intellectual conception of God. Her account of the impact the rabbi's Yom Kippur sermon had on her provided a clear example of how her intellectual curiosity sparked complex emotional and theological changes.

I've always had a little trouble, I guess one doesn't figure out the spiritual. For a long time, I could only think about this on an intellectual level. And it didn't make any sense. But during this year's Yom Kippur service, probably because of the World Trade Center attack, somehow it did make sense. As horrible as that was, suddenly I realized that God couldn't go around (not that God is a person) diverting the planes, or striking the hijackers dead or something. You couldn't make any meaning thinking like that. And so because there was no meaning, somehow the notion of free will and God can't control everything made a kind of sense. And that those aren't the kinds of things that one should bother praying for because they're meaningless. All of these things somehow I guess became a part of *me*, as opposed to just my brain.

Same Story, New Chapters

Ann told her story from a different perspective than either of the other two women. Susan and Louise both described the changes that took place in their lives as being driven by inner forces. In the earlier interview, Ann said she started the bat mitzvah class "on a dare," in order to learn to read Torah. Five years later, however, her focus was almost entirely on her role in relationship to her family. This may be due to the timing of the interview that was about six weeks before her daughters' b'nai mitzvah. At this moment, she noted:

I first took it on as a challenge, and later on it evolved into so I could help them and see what they would be going through. I have to say that's the biggest thing. Going through it with them now, they kind of look to me. Now, I really have a feel for what they're doing, the time and the diligence that it takes.

At this later interview, Ann also connected her earlier personal motivation to master Torah cantillation to an outer desire to please her husband. She said, "Well you know, Andy was getting more religious, and reading Torah was something that he would enjoy having me do." At the time of the first interview, there was some tension in their relationship, because he had been attending a variety of classes at Chabad and Ann was anxious about his moving towards Orthodoxy. Now, she said that they were still in "different places" but that they compromise "and that makes it ok."

This shift in perspective about her motivations for becoming adult bat mitzvah seemed to be the most significant change in Ann's story over the five years. This is not to say that the bat mitzvah experience did not result in any behavioral change. However, it appears that few changes occurred other than those that took root early on. For example, during the first interview, Ann spoke about how they went from "just wine and candles" on Friday night, to a more enriched ritual observance. Most of the ritual elements they introduced at that time are still in place. She said, "first we do the *tzedakah* and the candles and then the whole service — *Shalom Aleichem* and everything. We usually don't get to the after part — you know *birkat hamazon*. The kids participate."

Ann's Jewish learning goals focused on developing concrete skills much more than Susan or Louise's eclectic and complex thirst for learning. At the time of the first interview, Ann indicated that she wanted to read Torah the requisite seven times her synagogue required in order to be given the public recognition and a *Tikkun*, a book designed to help Torah readers prepare. She accomplished this goal about two years after the bat mitzvah ceremony. At the more recent interview, I asked her if she was still reading Torah. She noted how a turnover in the position of ritual director at the synagogue left her feeling somewhat out of the loop.

The Ritual Director used to call me and tell me I had to read. I don't get that now. I read twice a year at the Family Service. I like that. But I haven't read in the big sanctuary in a while. There are so many people who want to read now. You have to sign up months in advance.

Formal Jewish learning is an episodic part of Ann's life. When I asked her if she was reading anything with Jewish content or attending any classes, she replied, "I did go to the rabbi's class last year, for those sessions on prayer. It's just hard. I'm tired. A lot of times during the bat mitzvah classes, I didn't have a clue what the rabbi was saying."

Ann had a similar reaction to a class on Kabbalah that she took with her husband a year earlier. "I would leave there thinking I hope we're not getting tested on this because I don't understand one thing he said! I felt so stupid."

Ann's tendency towards concrete thinking was apparent in the earlier interview and does not appear to have changed. This is most clearly reflected in her unrequited struggle to accept the literal interpretation of Torah that she sees her husband embracing. Although she cannot accept this point of view, she seems locked into an understanding that this is the one correct interpretation and that she is somehow flawed if she cannot believe in this way.

Andy will say it's Shabbat and if you don't do this or that, certain things will happen. The rains won't come, you know, different things in the Torah. It's so hard for me to buy into that sometimes. Then

I get from him, that if you don't, something bad is going to happen. I don't want to scare the kids that if they do something wrong that something bad is going to happen to them. In that sense it's hard. I would like so much to believe what I'm reading, but it's beyond me.

Ann's struggle to reconcile her beliefs did not in any way diminish her sense of self as a Jew. She said, "There are certain things I can't accept, but I still feel very Jewish." She then circled back to more comfortable terrain and said, "I hope the kids feel that way too. I like them to be around Jewish people. I want them to marry a Jewish person. That's really important to me."

Towards the end of the interview, Ann spoke at great length about preparations for her daughters' upcoming bat mitzvah. This was clearly a major preoccupation in her life at this moment in time. I asked her, however, to try to think ahead past the bat mitzvah to reflect on how her patterns of practice might change. Again, she spoke in terms of her family rather than herself as an individual, but her remark was telling in that she understood her goal was to preserve the level of connection and commitment that they currently maintained. She said: "We have to make sure that things don't change. Because that's the whole thing. Bat mitzvah is not the end. It's the beginning. I don't want to just stop everything we've been working on."

Making Sense of the Stories

Louise, Susan, and Ann all went through a transition of some kind. They felt empowered through their new skills and competencies, they found greater meaning in worship and religious practice, and they acquired a deeper connection to their synagogue community. For Louise and Susan, the transitions precipitated or enhanced by the bat mitzvah experience ultimately led them on new life trajectories in terms of their religious observance and the meaning they drew from Judaism. For Ann, the bat mitzvah was an important accomplishment, but did not have a significant effect on her self-awareness, her beliefs, or her understanding of Judaism. How is it that a group learning experience can produce such different outcomes among its participants?

A familiar rabbinic adage teaches that "study is greater than practice, for it leads to action" (Kiddushin 40b). The truth of this precept certainly appears evident for Susan and Louise. The changes that took place and the ways they now interpret meaning in their lives began in study and ultimately led to action. For Susan this action centered on further study and her evolving beliefs; in Louise's case, the action can be seen in virtually every aspect of her life.

Numerous studies show a direct correlation between Jewish education in childhood with Jewish observance in adulthood (Goldstein and Fishman, 1993; Schiff and Schneider, 1994; Wertheimer, 1997; Cohen, 1999). The relatively few studies of adult Jewish learning patterns note that the greater the level of affiliation and involvement in Jewish life, the more likely someone is to engage in Jewish learning (Horowitz, 1999; Cohen and Davidson, 2001). However, these studies do not directly explore whether Jewish learning in adulthood leads to changes in Jewish beliefs and behaviors. A soon-to-be-published study of the two-year program of the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School suggests that learners are far more likely to attribute greater meaning to the Jewish practices they choose to perform, than they are to say that their study led directly to increases in Jewish behaviors (Grant, Schuster, Woocher, and Cohen

forthcoming). Thus, from these studies we cannot conclude that study leads to action, at least in terms of changes in Jewish practice; and yet the experiences of Susan and Louise stand in contrast to these data. Certainly, we cannot generalize from the experiences of just two women. What we can do, however, is explore how their experiences may help increase awareness of the developmental needs and learning processes of women who make up the great proportion of adult Jewish learners, which in turn can lead to more thoughtful and ultimately more effective planning for programs of adult Jewish study.

In *Women's Lives Through Time*, Hulbert and Schuster (1993) identified several key themes that contribute to change in women's lives. The role education plays is central to women's growth. Three other themes also stand out as salient factors in what changes did or did not take place for these graduates of an adult bat mitzvah experience. These include: (1) the role of reflection and self-awareness, (2) the importance of relationships, and (3) the women's openness to new opportunities for personal growth.

Reflection and Self-Awareness

The new trajectories Susan and Louise took began with study, but extended far beyond intellectual engagement with Judaism. Mezirow claimed that people do not change without engaging in an intellectual process of critical reflection. Both Louise and Susan appeared to be thoughtful and self-aware, but neither attributed their change in focus and life course to this exclusively rational and cognitive process. Rather, they spoke about transcending their intellectual understandings through inner experience and making emotional connections.

Human development or growth can be understood as the ability to reframe experience (Taylor, Marienau, and Fiddler). Louise and Susan both reframed their experiences through a form of inner dialogue, where they questioned prior assumptions and meanings and revised the value systems that shaped their behavior. This reframing took place on multiple levels — affective, spiritual, intellectual, and behavioral. Ann did not reframe her understanding of her experience in any way — intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually; hence, her story remained virtually unchanged

Judaism is Relational

Another way adults learn and grow is through dialogue with and connection to others. Change occurs within a social and cultural context. Identity is formed, reshaped and transformed, in relationship. These processes may be catalyzed by the inner experience, such as those Louise and Susan described, but they cannot be sustained without the support of community. This is especially true with Judaism where so much of Jewish identification and practice is tied to and reinforced by community.

The multi-dimensionality of Louise's new life path is strongly rooted in her communal connections, including her Shabbat service attendance, her volunteer job at the synagogue, her social life that focuses around Shabbat dinners and the new set of friends she acquired as a result of all these changes. In addition, this transformation most likely would not have occurred without the full support and participation of her husband. Oddly, she spoke little about him during our interview, and her reflections on the changes in her life were almost entirely personal. In fact, she said that they never really spoke about the changes that were taking place. Nonetheless, the hints of tension that were evident between them in the earlier interview seemed to have

altogether disappeared at this later point. She did say that even without conversation they were in concert with one another. In fact, her husband overtook her in some ways, having recently decided to become completely *Shomer Shabbat* (observant of all of the Sabbath laws).

Susan's transformation may be more limited than Louise's because of her focus on the "sovereign self" (Cohen and Eisen). The trajectory she pursued was a private one relating to how she personally makes meaning from Judaism. She did not have and did not build the social network or communal support system that was so integral to Louise's Jewish life at this point. She never brought her husband into the conversation. She spoke somewhat ruefully about not having the energy or commitment to change her religious practices at home, but did not seem prepared to take action. She also spoke about her frustrations with her extended family, saying her relationships have not changed because the people are the same. What had changed, however, was her disappointment and concern about their lack of commitment and interest in Judaism.

Interestingly, Susan noted how the interview process helped her sort through her question of what to do next to continue her Jewish studies. She said, "I'm really glad that we talked because it's given me a chance to think about where I want to go now." Given the limited opportunities for dialogue about her inner Jewish life that she has among her current relationships, it appears that the dialogical process of the interview fulfilled this relational role by prompting further reflection that gave her the direction she had been unable to find on her own.

Family relationships were at the heart of how Ann defined herself as a Jew. Like Louise, she indicated her husband encouraged her learning and was involved in Jewish study himself. In fact, according to Ann, he wanted the family to become more observant, while Ann was the one who held back. For instance, when I asked her whether they had guests for Shabbat dinner, she replied:

Andy says we'd make friends if we start having people over on Friday nights. And he's probably right. But, it's so hard. I'm not a very good cook. And when I come home, 8 o'clock at night, I'm on my treadmill. That's really important to me. I could be making chicken soup then, but my priorities are to exercise.

Although Ann had the support of her husband, what she was lacking that Louise and Susan both possessed was the inner drive for change. The adult bat mitzvah experience met concrete needs for her to learn to chant Torah, to feel comfortable with the synagogue service, and to understand first-hand what her daughters would need to go through as they studied to become bat mitzvah themselves. Apparently, the process did not spark any further intellectual or theological curiosity, nor did it touch her emotionally in the same way it did for Susan and Louise.

Keeping Open to New Ideas and New Ways of Thinking

One of the fundamental principles of adult education is that adult learners are the authors of their own lives, and as such are responsible for the decisions they make and the directions they take as a result of their learning. While most teachers of adults implicitly or explicitly ascribe to this point of view, paradoxically perhaps, they also hope to promote growth through learning. Without overstepping into the realm of

indoctrination, effective adult educators must delicately navigate between imparting knowledge and encouraging their learners to think about implications of that knowledge for their own lives. Jane Vella described this as a process of educating towards transformation, which she defined as a deeper self-awareness, "not grasping an external set of information, knowledge, or skills, but changing into one's self, informed by the new knowledge and skills" (Vella, 2000, p.10). This type of self awareness requires an openness to new ways of thinking and being in the world. Mezirow described this as a two-step process of "changing the structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167).

The three women in this study bring these theories to life. We readily can see how Louise and Susan's new trajectories were propelled by more complex and nuanced systems of meaning. Through a combination of cognitive, relational, and emotional processes, they both changed their habitual ways of thinking and then acted on these changes. According to developmental theorist Robert Kegan (1994), this situated them at a higher level of cognitive development than Ann, who appeared to apply a concrete and uniform system of meaning to the information and experiences she encountered. This concrete, non-reflective thinking left her somewhat troubled and confused about what she was supposed to believe. While Susan and Louise seemed more comfortable functioning as self-authors, Ann still looked to an outside source of authority for direction. Since she could not accept what she thought that authority was telling her, she remained stuck in her ambiguity, and her story remained virtually unchanged.

Implications for Adult Jewish Educators

How can the stories of these women help teachers become more effective adult Jewish educators? First, we can readily see that these women did not pursue new trajectories exclusively through a cognitive process of critical reflection. This appears to be a key component of the change, but neither Louise nor Susan retold their stories from a strictly intellectual perspective. In fact, it was not until this perspective was expanded, and perhaps even overtaken by emotional and relational needs, that their perspectives and actions transformed.

People seek to restory their lives when something stops making sense. This may have to do with the direction or coherence of life choices, such as Susan's deliberation over how to balance competing priorities between her desire to develop professionally and to continue Jewish learning. This may also have to do with relationships with others and with our own self-image and self-definition. When Louise expressed frustration over her relatives' indifference to Judaism, she acknowledged that they had not changed, but her perception of what ought to be important to them had changed. When Susan said, "the bat mitzvah became me," she began to imagine her life in a completely different way. Like Louise and Susan, Ann also had questions about beliefs and behaviors. She did not, however, seem to have the inner resources or the outer support to get them resolved. While the other two women felt empowered by their learning, the effect on Ann was less certain. She still looked to outside authorities for answers, rather than accepting the validity of her own voice.

One way of looking at adult Jewish education is as a process whereby teachers help learners find themselves in, and make deeper connections to, the Jewish story. If educators accept this premise, they must understand that their role is not just about

helping to deepen or change *what* someone knows but also *how* one knows (Kegan 2000; Taylor, Marienau, and Fidler). This requires igniting the possibility for making meaning from a variety of perspectives. Some of this takes place in formal learning, but as we saw from Louise and Susan's experience, much continued outside the classroom setting through informal relationships, personal reflection, prayer, and other kinds of experiences. They both readily associated the genesis of their new story to the adult bat mitzvah class.

Randall described using the metaphor "life-as-story" as a method of adult education. He outlined four overlapping functions for educators involved in facilitating transformative learning. First, teachers are not simply conduits of information, but are characters in their learners' life story. Second, teachers can create a safe space for learners to make relevant connections to the subject matter through the telling of their own stories. He described this role as helping learners "shift from being a character who is unquestioning with [their story], going along with its flow, to being its narrator, one step closer to being its author" (p. 241).

Third, educators can serve as what Bruner (1990) termed a "helpful editor," who facilitates a critical reading of one's story. This means helping people to identify, question, or perhaps even replot the assumptions, values, perspectives, relationships, and beliefs that shaped one's story or world view. Lastly, teachers — and as in the case of this study, interviewers, too — can function as co-author, serving as "a catalyst for [learners] as they fashion an inside story that is more reflective of the breadth and complexity of their actual existence and more in harmony with their expression to the outside world" (p. 242).

Through the interview process, I served in part as a "critical editor" and in part as a co-author to help Louise and Susan reflect on the new stories that they could now tell about their lives. The interview gave them the opportunity to reflect, and hence I helped to shape the process; however, they remained the primary authors of their lives. They both engaged in active inner dialogue, that was not entirely cognitively-driven but was a form of critical reflection nonetheless. Both found ongoing Jewish learning to be essential to their sense of self and well-being. Both were comfortable in accepting responsibility for their choices and taking action on their commitments. Louise, more than Susan, sought connection with others, though Susan perceived this as a need that she had not yet found a way to meet.

Ann did not appear to move along any of these dimensions, which is not to say that the learning experience was not positive or successful for her. She met her goals, which were to feel more comfortable and competent in synagogue worship, and to be able to personally relate to what her daughters would experience when they became b'not mitzvah themselves. Adult educators must accept that not everyone wants to or can change. Daloz wrote, "Most adults are richly enmeshed in a fabric of relationships which hold them as they are..." (1988, p. 7). We saw this with Ann, who had neither the relational support, the passion for ongoing study, nor the internal drive to push her to reframe meaning from her learning in any way — cognitively, emotionally, socially, or spiritually.

Classes of Jewish adult learners will include people like Louise and Susan, and like Ann as well. Some will be active seekers, some will have concrete and specific learning goals, and some may discover new motivations and the potential for new plot lines as the learning unfolds. Most likely, at some point all will want to tell their story or at

least some part of it. When thinking about themselves as keepers, editors, and co-authors of their learners' stories, educators (and interviewers) must be careful to distinguish between shaping the learner in their own image, and creating a safe space that is rich in content and accessible to the learners, and that enhances opportunities for learners to develop their own image and decide how it connects to Jewish identification and practice. To paraphrase *Pirkei Avot*,¹ adult educators are not obliged to finish the task, but they are obliged to tend to it by attending to the learners' needs and creating opportunities for new stories to be told.

References

- Aslanian, C. B., and Brickell, H. (1980). *Americans in Transition: Life Changes as Reasons for Adult Learning*. New York: College Board.
- Brooks, Ann K. (2000a). "Transformation," in Elizabeth Hayes and Daniele D. Flannery, (eds.), *Women as Learners: The Significance of Gender in Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 139-154.
- _____. (2000b) "Cultures of Transformation," in A. Wilson and E. Hayes, (eds.), *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bruner, Jerome (1990). *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cohen, Steven M. (1999) "The Impact of Varieties of Jewish Education Upon Jewish Identity: An Intergenerational Perspective," in R. Farber and C. Waxman, *Jews in America — A Contemporary Reader*. Hanover, NH and London: Brandeis University Press.
- Cohen, Steven M. and Davidson, Aryeh (2001). *Adult Jewish Learning in America: Current Patterns and Prospects for Growth*. New York: The Florence G. Heller/JCC Association Research Center and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.
- Cohen, Steven M. and Eisen, Arnold M. (2000). *The Jew Within: Self Family, and Community-America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Connelly, F. Michael and Clandinin, D. Jean. "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry." *Educational Researcher* (1990) vol. 19 (5) pp. 2-14.
- Daloz, Laurent, "The Story of Gladys Who Refused To Grow: A Morality Tale for Mentors." *Lifelong Learning* 11, no. 4. (1988), pp. 4-7.
- Elder, Glen H., ed. (1985). *Life Course Dynamics: Trajectories and Transitions, 1968-1980*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Goldstein, Alice and Fishman, Sylvia B. "Teach Your Children When They Are Young: Contemporary Jewish Education in the United States." *CMJS Research Report 10*. (December, 1993). The Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and Jewish Education Service of North America.
- Grant, Lisa D. "Adult Bat Mitzvah: An American Rite of Continuity." *Courtyard* (1999/2000) vol. 1, pp. 142-171.
- _____. (2001) *Aytz Ha'yim He — She is a Tree of Life: Adult Bat Mitzvah Curriculum*. New York: Women's League for Conservative Judaism.

¹"You are not obliged to finish the task. Neither are you free to neglect it." *Pirkei Avot*, Chapter 2:21.

- Grant, Lisa D., Schuster, Diane T., Woocher, Meredith, and Cohen, Steven M. *Meaning, Connection, and Practice: Contemporary Issues in Adult Jewish Learning*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Holstein, James A. and Gubrium, Jaber F. (1995). *The Active Interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Horowitz, Bethamie. *Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity*. New York: UJA-Federation, 2000.
- Hulbert, Kathleen D. and Schuster, Diane T. (1993). *Women's Lives Through Time: Educated American Women of the Twentieth Century*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kahn, Nancy Ellen (1993). *The Adult Bat Mitzvah: Its Use in Female Development*. unpublished doctoral dissertation, Smith School of Social Work.
- Kegan, Robert (1994). *In Over our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- _____ (2000). "What Form Transforms? A Constructive-Developmental Approach to Transformative Learning." in Jack Mezirow & Associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 35-70.
- McAdams, Dan P. (1996). "Narrating the Self in Adulthood." in Birren, Kenyon, Ruth, Schroots, and Svensson, (eds.), *Aging and Biography: Explorations in Adult Development*. New York: Springer Publishing Co., pp. 131-148.
- Mezirow, Jack (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- _____ (2000). "Learning To Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory." in Jack Mezirow & Associates, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 3-34.
- Randall, William L. (1996). "Restorying a Life: Adult Education and Transformative Learning." in Birren, Kenyon, Ruth, Schroots, and Svensson, (eds.), *Aging and Biography: Explorations in Adult Development*. New York: Springer Publishing Co., pp. 224-247.
- Schiff, Alvin and Schneider, Mareleyn, "The Jewishness Quotient of Jewish Day School Graduates: Studying the Effect of Jewish Education on Adult Jewish Behavior." *Research Report 1*. (April 1994). New York: Yeshiva University
- Schoenfeld, Stuart (1987). "Integration into the Group and Sacred Uniqueness: An Analysis of Adult Bat Mitzvah." in W. P. Zenner, (ed.) *Persistence and Flexibility Anthropological Perspectives on the American Jewish Experience*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- _____ (1989). "Ritual Performance, Curriculum Design and Jewish Identity: Towards a Perspective on Contemporary Innovations in Bar/Bat Mitzvah Education." *Bikurim*, 6/2: 19-22, Winter-Spring.
- _____ (1991). "Interpreting Adult Bat Mitzvah: The Limits and Potential of Feminism in a Congregational Setting." in Menchem Mor, (ed.) *Jewish Sects, Religious Movements, and Political Parties*. Omaha, NE: Creighton University Press.
- _____ (1992) "Ritual and Role Transition: Adult Bat Mitzvah as a Successful Rite of Passage." in Jack Wertheimer, (ed.) *The Uses of Tradition — Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary.

- Schuster, Diane. "From Life to Torah: Jewish Adult Learners on the Journey." Paper delivered at the Network for Research in Jewish Education, Toronto, 2001.
- Schwartz, Frances (2002). *Adult B'nei Mitzvah: Affirming Our Identities*. New York: UAHC Press.
- Taylor, Kathleen, Marienau, Catherine, and Fiddler, Morris (2000). *Developing Adult Learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Vella, Jane (2000). "A Spirited Epistemology: Honoring the Adult Learner as Subject," in L. M. English and M.A. Gillen, (eds.) *Addressing the Spiritual Dimensions of Adult Learning: What Educators Can Do*. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education. No. 85. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 7-16.
- Wertheimer, Jack, (1997). *Jewish Identity and Religious Commitment: The North American Study of Conservative Synagogues and Their Members, 1995-1996*. New York: The Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism, The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

Teacher Talk: Reflections on Teaching in a Jewish Day School

Carol K. Ingall

(Carol K. Ingall is the Dr. Bernard Heller Professor of Jewish Education at the Jewish Theological Seminary and past chair of the Network for Research in Jewish Education.)

Until forty years ago, American Jews were among the staunchest supporters of public schools. Unlike Catholics, who viewed the emerging common schools of the first half of the nineteenth century with alarm, Jews did not rush to set up a system of parochial schools. The values of the founding fathers of American public education like Noah Webster, Horace Mann and the brothers McGuffey were values to which the Jewish community could readily subscribe — hard work, responsibility, and education as the keys to self-improvement and economic betterment. The role of the teacher was to Americanize immigrant children and their parents. While transmitting cultural literacy, public school teachers were expected to make little Americans out of millions of ragged immigrants, a task applauded by their parents. Weiss (1982) quotes Ellwood Cubberly, professor of education and former school superintendent, as saying that the task of schools was to "assimilate and amalgamate these people (the immigrants) as a part of our American race, and to implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government." (p. xiii)

A quiet revolution has occurred. Today, Jewish day schools are "hot," the darlings of Federations, family foundations, and parents looking for a quality Jewish education for their children. Fueled by philanthropic funds and parents searching for values education, new day schools have sprouted across North America. Today, more than 200,000 children are enrolled, with the rate of enrollment growing 12-15% in the decade of the nineties (Schick, 2000). While the proliferation of Jewish day schools has increased exponentially over the past decade, there have been only a handful of studies devoted to who the teachers in these schools are and what happens to new inductees into the profession.