

If I'm Not For Myself-But Which Self?

Living in Multiple Identities

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Keynote Address, Association for Women In Psychology Conference, Ypsilanti MI

April, 2006

Thank-you for inviting me to be the keynote speaker at AWP today. AWP is my home in psychology, not simply in feminist psychology. I've been a member for 33 years. The first conference I attended as a graduate student, barely a month into that adventure, was also the very first AWP conference, held not too far from here in a student center in Ft. Wayne Indiana. I grew up in AWP, and put on two of these conferences, although it's odd to realize that the last one was in 1983, 23 years ago. I haven't been here much lately, and it's nice to be back. I was also born not too far from here, in Detroit, and spent my first two and a half years even closer, on Ten Mile Road in Oak Park; my earliest memories are of now-gone cornfields across the street from our suburban ranch house, and of cars, "car" allegedly being my first word, a propos for a child born here. All of which is actually germane to my topic today-bear with me. Because while one of these narratives is about my identity, the other is not-and therein lies some of my thinking about the question of whether it is our actual identities that are in conflict, or rather the variously imposed social roles that we, and others, mistake for those more enduring parameters by which we know self.

In my usual manner of creating work, I've been attempting to gestate this baby and bring it to fruition by spending many hours, most of them underwater--as the location of my creative musings has moved from dog-walk to 4 am swims as the dog in question has decided that he will not go out in the rain--thinking about what do I mean by identity? And of all of my selves, which of them are identities? Is it truly the case that my identities conflict? Or is it more likely that, as I explore more deeply into these questions, that I run into contradictions only when I accept others' constructions of the social roles that emerge from my identities? When I try to discover who I am, am I surprised by the answers?

If you would all take just a moment or two and think about these questions, then write down your answers. While I'm going to give you my responses to these questions this morning, we will all have a better map of this territory if our collective wisdom, rather than only mine, informs our outcome. Hold on to what you've written, and as I take you through my version, think about your responses. Do they change? Why or why not? If part of your identity—or your social role, or your self-concept, or whatever it is we're doing to land on-- is to speak up at question time, be prepared to share when we get to that point in the program.

When I teach diverse populations, I begin the class with an exercise learned from the late Ricky Sherover-Marcuse. The exercise names various target groups—groups whose heritage or current reality is of discrimination and oppression—and asks group participants to move across the room as their groups are named. Members of the dominant group stand in their original positions. I ask participants to consider what it means that in the course of the 40 or so groups that I name, most of them will be back and forth across the room, both target and dominant, and many of them will frequently find themselves parted from the peers with whom they are most connected emotionally. In doing this exercise—and I try to always do it with my students, so that I ask them to take no risks that I will not take as well—I find myself encountering multiple versions of me. I criss-cross the room, dominant and target mixing inside my skin. In me lies my self and the “other” to several versions of myself as well.

Thus the question about whether my identities surprise me is “Yes, I’m surprised and no I’m not, depending on my definitions.” If I pare away the extraneous variables and pay attention to what are really identities, no surprise at all. So I want to define my terms, which emerged in part from a conversation I had on the way to this talk with my dear friend Maria Root. Maria is one of the best feminist thinkers about identity development, and her work has heavily influenced all of my thinking on this topic. She has gone outside of the box repeatedly in her quest to accurately describe the experiences of people whose identities defy boxes—those of mixed racial and ethnic heritage.

In our discussion one night over dinner she challenged me to define what I meant by identity, and to differentiate that from other things that we frequently describe as our identities, but which are in fact social roles which may or may not derive from or reflect our identities. She argued that my beliefs that certain aspects of myself were identities was erroneous, a non-conscious submission to a definition with which I did not agree. She was, as usual, right.

This set of distinctions between identity and social role departs from the usual ones that can be found in the identity development literature of social psychology in which social roles and identities are both called identity, but divided into public or social identities which are collectively avowed or unavoidably visible, and private or individual identities which require disclosure in order to be known. Maria and I sliced the cake differently. We batted this idea back and forth, and arrived at the following tentative conclusions:

1. An identity is something enduring and pervasive. It is with you transsituationally, and persists across stages of development. Whether seen or unseen, social or individual, it is present with you always.
2. An identity informs a set of values which, in turn, define and inform your actions, and pervades your behavior in social roles. Conflicts tend to reflect a process of values clarification
3. An identity is a core felt sense of “self”-ness; “This is who I am”, not “this is what I’m doing right now.”

We distinguished identities in this way from social roles. Social roles may look like identities, since we frequently preface our announcement of those roles with “I am a fill in the blank,” as if the role or the style define self-hood. Often the roles are closely tied into our identities, branches off the trunk of the identity tree. Because social roles are possibly more ephemeral, however, and potentially more context-driven, they may more

easily come into conflict with one another as the values that underlie them become more clear. Additionally, since social roles are by their nature developed in the relational space of our social worlds, some of those conflicts arise not from within internal experience but from the conflictual responses that our self-manifestations generate in those with whom we relate. Our social roles are not, however, our identities; we may grieve when we lose them, but we ultimately discover that our strongest sense of who we are does not disappear with their absence.

Buried in this discussion are some assumptions about the experience of self. I continue to waver about the whether human beings have a Self with a capital S that is essential and “True”, with a capital T. Certainly the phenomenological experience of many persons, particularly those inhabiting Western cultural locations, is of just such a creature. Identity and self and social role thus get further confused. In the words of Hillel, the Jewish sage and scholar, “If I am not for myself, who am I?” Hillel, a thinker of the First Century of the Common Era, deeply rooted in Jewish intellectual traditions, thought there was a self to be for. And largely because he did I seem to as well.

I do because as it turns out, when I began to attempt to discover what my identities were, I landed in a place that was not a surprise and will likely surprise few people here. Before everything, at the base of everything, is my identity as a Jew. It is the root from which everything else has grown. Each time I explore this question I discover this to be true. My core Jewish identity is a theme I’ve been exploring for the past two decades. In 1990 I wrote, “Whenever I review the writing that has emerged from my work as a feminist therapist, one of the most resilient themes is that of the relationship of my Jewishness to my feminism. Time and again I find myself quoting Jewish law and interpretation to explain the point of feminist therapy theory that I am making, or using metaphors that find their origins in Jewish experience to throw light on life in lesbian feminist communities. While I belong to many different groups- woman, lesbian, disabled, baby boomer, psychologist, upper middle class, lover of rain and trashy novels—my primary sense of myself is as a Jew. It is my first identity, the core around which all else has been built and shaped” (Brown, 1990, p. 41)

My relationship to my Jewish identity is unambivalent. This is odd; Judaism is a sexist, patriarchal religion which well into my young adulthood privileged the voices, even the bodies of men, over those of women—a thirteen year old boy counting as one of the ten Jews required to make up a *minyan*, the quorum for most of our prayers, while for many years, and still in some Jewish places, my adult female self counts for zero. When I chanted the story of Noah at my mother’s adult Bat Mitzvah at her very progressive, but very Orthodox, synagogue in Jerusalem in 2001, some men got up and left the room so as not to hear my voice lifted in song (although most of the men, including the rabbi, remained sitting on their side of the *mechitzah*, the literal wall dividing the women’s and men’s sides of the room). The only place in my childhood where anyone ever denied me access or opportunity due to gender was in Jewish settings, where I could not lead prayers or *leyn* (chant from) Torah. You would think that a lesbian feminist like me would have long ago left this thing behind for something more woman-centered, more congruent with my adult beliefs and values, or at least feel less proud, more conflicted, less attached to being a Jew.

Yet here’s how I could never have stopped being a Jew, even though the ways in which I socially construct the role of Jew may not always be recognizable to other Jews

in the room. As it turns out, all of my adult values, including most importantly, my feminist values and my ideas about how to be a feminist, grew out of my being a Jew. To quote Gershon Winkler and Lakshme Batya Elijor, “Judaism is not about laws and not about blind obedience to some ever-demanding deity. Nor is it about supporting Israel, or belonging to a synagogue.” (1998, p. xv). Those things, many of which get confused with being a Jew, are the social roles that emerge, for some people, from this identity. My parents, for example, both late-life adherents to Orthodox Judaism who immigrated to Israel in the early 1980s, would tell you that being a Jew is precisely that entire list of things, which may have something to do with why we do not discuss religion or Israel on the rare occasions when we are all in the same room.

What being a Jew *is* about, and is about to Jews no matter how we construct the social roles, seems to center on a few things that are core to my identity, and are examples of what makes an identity an identity. As I noted earlier, values are the expression of identity. One thing core to Jewishness is the presence of a relationally-based system of values. Jews do not exist in isolation; there is no enduring Jewish tradition of anchorism or monastic life. Most of the prayers of Jewish life, particularly those which are most sacred and central, require the *minyan*, that quorum of ten adults, to be said. Most of the rules in the list of 613 in Torah that have survived the end of sacrificial worship in 70 CE are rules about how to relate well to other humans, other creatures, the planet itself. Wave offerings and heave offerings died with the Temple; “treat the stranger as yourself because you were strangers,” and “pay the worker a fair wage and on time” are still with us. “*Al tiphrosh meen hatzibur*,” “do not separate yourself from community,” said our sages.

Jews have sex; while Jewish writings about sexuality from previous centuries are toxic with sexism, those writings also serve as an affirmation of the value of sexual relatedness, particularly in women’s lives. Jewish women are intended to be sexual beings; heterosexual Jewish men owe it to their wives to have sex and give pleasure. Jews believe that objectification is a violation of the sacredness of relationship. “The place where you are standing is holy,” some alleged Divine Being supposedly said to a Jew several thousands of years ago (because who knows, really). Not where the Divine Being was hanging out, not the “the place where I the alleged Divine Being am standing”—but the place occupied by the human, made special by the presence of the human in it, and the relationship occurring at the place and in that time.

Jews argue. “*Yisra-el*,” the one who wrestles with G-d, is our people’s name. We wrestle with a divine being, we argue endlessly with each other—two Jews, three schuls, goes the folk saying, one for you, one for me, one neither of us will belong to because we both disagree with it—we argue with our sets of rules, with the world. We argue for 200 years about what is meant by the word “to work,” as in “Don’t work on Shabbat.” An observant Jew would probably consider how I got here, leaving Seattle on an airplane Friday evening, *Erev Shabbat*, and attempting to sleep on it, as work, because the airplane flies due to an internal combustion engine which is making sparks-- while what I’m doing right now, teaching, a secular *Dvar Torah*, a commentary for educational purposes, is not work--and I would argue the opposite right back, both of us 2000 years past that original discussion.

We not only tolerate ambiguity, but we actively insure its presence in the discourse. Leslea Newman, the Jewish lesbian writer, described a gathering once as

“typically Jewish” because “it raised more questions than it answered (plus there was coffee and cake)” (Newman, 2002, p. 30). Implied here, of course, is that Jews eat, with gusto and pleasure. We joke that the definition of a Jewish holiday is “They tried to kill us, they didn’t succeed, so let’s eat.” Notice as I go on my many references to Zingerman’s deli, where I intend to head after speaking today to eat the food of my culture, which is unavailable in Seattle. A pilgrimage to the sacred deli of Ann Arbor.

So if I actually get the essence of what it means to be a Jew, to be a relational, arguing, changing, sexual, hungry creature who may, in the process of living that identity, fulfill all or none of the social roles associated with Jewishness in my own mind or that of others, then I have no need for ambivalence about this identity. Although it seems quite common for Jews like myself--lesbians, feminists, secularists, or Jews not very like me, raised with no concept of Jewishness except the bagels at Zingermans or the forced torture of afternoon Bar Mitzvah class—to express ambivalence about their Jewishness, when I deconstruct their complaints what I find are reasonable and founded critiques of the social roles, but ironically, voices that speak loudly of and from the very values that are supposedly being critiqued. The critiques are rooted in that which is core to Jewishness.

So what grows out of the identity of Jew for me? Obviously, my being a feminist. “*Tzedek tirdof*,” run after justice, says Tanach. When I found feminism in the late 1960s (once again in a Jewish setting where someone was not allowing me to do something because I was a girl), it felt familiar, right, and clear. Justice, not a problem idea. And being an ally? “*Eem rak ani az mah li?*” if I am only for myself, then what am I, asked Hillel in the second line of his famous quote. A Jew is an ally, not only for self so I am one.

Doing anti-oppression work? Each year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, we chant, in the first person plural, “For wrong acts between one human and another, forgiveness only happens when the wrong-doer has made a full amends.” *Tshuvah*, the word which means “return” and is badly translated as amends, is not a simple oops, sorry. It’s an active process into which a Jew checks yearly, both by way of an annual offering of amends to those with whom one is in personal relationship, and through our collective confession, again in first person plural, of our collective failures of relationship—arrogance, narrow-mindedness, hating without cause (we are allowed to hate with cause, mind you, and of course we have a few causes), hypocrisy, exploiting the weak, giving way to “*yetzer harah*”, our hostile, angry destructive impulses—every year I have the privilege, as a Jew, of reviewing my willingness to walk my talk, to be reminded of how I don’t, to recommit to doing better. A Jew pursues *Tikkum Olam*, the healing of the world, which brings me back to how I am a feminist.

All of these are ways in which my feminism is clearly a branch of this tree of my identity. Thus, while feminist appears to be an identity of mine, and it is certainly an actively claimed social role, it is secondary to being a Jew. But what, you may ask, of the sexism in Judaism, the homophobia. What about Zionism? How do I reconcile my identities—but wait, say I, what’s the problem. Jews embrace change. In Talmud our sages say, “What was practiced by the ancestors was not practiced by the descendants.” (Baba Batra 120a, Babylonian Talmud). So, say I, in concert with lesbian rabbi Rebecca Alpert, the possibilities of transformation are inherent in Judaism and in the existence of Jews such as myself (Alpert, 1997). We don’t have a Pope who makes the rules; we get

together and argue and change how we understand the rules and what is at their heart. Oliva Espin will tell you (and probably did yesterday) that no Pope can tell her how to be a Catholic. In my case, me and the nine other Jews I gather with to pray at any given time are deciding how we will be Jews. We will argue about it. Sexism and homophobia are no more inherent in Judaism than in any other cultural production, and I would argue that fighting against them, both inside and outside of Jewish communities, is what is meant by running after justice.

Because I am a Jew I am a feminist who pursues feminist justice in Judaism. In the moment, as I translate the words of Hebrew prayer into gender-inclusive language, speaking of “*eemahot*”, our mothers as well as “*avot*”, our fathers, as I discuss what is really meant by the Biblical prohibitions on male homosexuality (which can be read as “don’t have sex with a man the way you have sex with a woman,” implying that if a man has sex with a man he should do so in the way that honors that this is a man), I engage in transformation completely consistent with my identity. Looks like feminist, is feminist, and is inherently Jewish.

Zionism, I would like to suggest, has become a red herring among progressive people. I proudly identify myself as a progressive Zionist ally of the Palestinian people, and I do so because as a Jew I was raised to treat the other, the “*Ger*” as my sibling, my colleague, my friend, whose interests are ultimately inseparable from my own—to do so because I am reminded that my identity is built around an experience of being “*ger*”. *Eem ayn ani li, mi li? Eem rak ani az mah li?* To play on the old car commercial, I am not my parents’ Zionist. My identity informs my social roles; the roles of left feminist and Zionist may appear to be in conflict, but the identity of Jew is what’s informing them both. The conflict is in the eye of the beholder, not in my mind or heart.

So let me suggest, using this first component of my multiple identities as an example, that the notion that identities may create inner conflict may rise, in part, from the confusions between identities, which are large and over-arching, and social roles, which can be constructed in narrow, constraining ways that appear to be contradictory. I don’t think it’s about private and public, since my identities are both and neither depending on the moment. Social roles, thus conflated with identities, and enforced by social norms, may be experienced as problematic in ways that identities, when known at their core, are not. Clarification of my values is something inherent to my identity, and while potentially uncomfortable, is not actually conflictual.

To examine this supposition further I’d like to turn to Maria Root’s Ecological Model of Identity Development, which I’m referring to today with her permission, and with her powerpoint slides. (Readers of this article at my website can find her model on-line at www.drmariaroot.com) While Maria developed this model to understand the experience of persons of mixed racial/ethnic heritage, I have found that it offers a better explanation of how all identity develops, and of the ways in which one identity can lead to multiple and potentially conflicting social roles, extremely informative.

You will note immediately that this is not a linear model, but rather an interactive one in which identities are plural, not singular. A variety of factors can influence how identity expresses itself, and those factors may, in turn, be in conflict and lead to behavioral and internal experiences of contradiction. Maria suggests that people have a variety of options in their development of an identity, including

1. Accepting an identity as assigned by society. This implicitly includes accepting the social roles conflated with the identity, as it involves internalizing and applying to oneself the rules created by the larger social context. She notes that this strategy is a passive, rather than active one in which a person, by remaining congruent with societal expectations, is also disempowered in relationship to how realities are constructed by others (Root, 2004)
2. Identify (in the case of ethnically mixed people) monoracially- extending this construct, Root's model suggests that this is a way in which people develop their identities in an active manner where inner experiences trump social expectations and external variables such as, in the case of race, phenotype, but still fits a person into social roles constructed as congruent for the identity chosen (in her original model, the role of the monorace).
3. Her third strategy suggests an active, creative strategy in which identity is core, yet fluid, and the social roles emerging from this identity may or may not be consistent with how the external social context defines the person. This strategy embodies the feminist notion of resistance (Brown, 1994), which a person finds voice by refusing, overtly or passively, to collude with oppressive social norms; in other words, in this instance, frees identity from the constraints of social roles and deconstructs identity to support multiple, apparently conflicting social roles. Thus in the case of the racially/ethnically mixed people from whose lives Root derived her model, a person might decide that she is white and Filipina, not either, and neither in the ways defined by others.
4. Root's fourth strategy is a next level of identity creativity- grow your own. This strategy actively challenges the ways in which humans have been previously assigned, in the case of her original model, by phenotype. This strategy engages resistance at a deeper level because not only does the person refuse to accept social prescriptions, but also refuses to legitimize the categories from which those prescriptions have arisen. I'll talk a little more later about a model for this that I've found in cyberspace and which intrigues me greatly as a paradigm for thinking about identity development outside of the psychology box entirely.
5. Root's final strategy, what she describes as the creation of a symbolic racial identity, is slightly more challenging for me to translate beyond the specifics of her original theory, but because I think that this notion has huge promise, I will try. In this strategy the person has never internalized social rules governing identity, and decides that how they feel themselves to be trumps how others perceive them, and also trumps where they came from. This strategy can be controversial, and some will incorrectly read it as an endorsement of assimilation or passing. It is embodied by one of my students who says, "I'm a white guy whose great-grandparents all came from Japan." I will admit that my own identity makes it a struggle to embrace the validity of this strategy, knowing how history and oppressors tend to overpower this sort of symbolic identity-certainly my own history as a Jew teaches me that.

If we look carefully at Root's model and utilize either the third or fourth strategies, it becomes quite possible to have a strong core identity containing apparently conflicting social roles. The conflicts, Root would argue, are either externally imposed, or reflect internalization of oppression. When the person becomes empowered to be the author of their own identity or identities and to assert that any social role will be congruent in some way with those identities, some of the apparent conflicts melt away.

I discovered the truth of this as I was teasing out my social roles, formerly known as identities, from my identities, which I now define as I have earlier today. I used to have a social role piece called "not an athlete." I believed that this was a part of my Jewish identity—Jews do not play sports. I missed every intramural game because I was on my way to afternoon Hebrew school.

Then I became an athlete, as evidenced by my nice blue belt, achieved after two and a half years of showing up at the aikido dojo, crying for the first two months of class, claiming repeatedly that I could not do this because I (read, identity-self) was a klutz who could not learn to do sports, and, due in large part to one of my other identities which includes being stubborn, persisting until one day I came off the mat and shocked myself by saying "that was a fun class." I have a photo, still in white belt, testing for said blue belt. I look at the photo and both recognize myself and don't.

Jews can, of course, be athletes. Israel fields teams composed mostly of Jews in the Olympics. Poor and working-class Jewish men dominated the world of boxing in the late 1880s and early 1900s. Jews populate the ranks of Olympic fencing champions. Hank Greenberg and Sandy Koufax, the great baseball players, were Jews. There have been ten Jewish NBA basketball greats. But it's also true that we number great Jewish athletes easily on two hands (with Mark Spitz making up at least one hand). This is an artifact of oppression, both external and internalized. It's about allowed and forbidden social roles. Jews were forbidden to participate in sports in many of the countries to which we dispersed. Although in places such as The Netherlands, Germany, and Austria where Jews became assimilated in the late 19th Century we formed our own teams (in Amsterdam, Ajax, the great soccer team created by Jews prior to the Holocaust, and now with not a single Jewish member, is still known as the Jewish team and its fans call themselves the Jews) Jews in general made a social role/identity conflation out of oppression and declared ourselves people of the mind, not the body.

But there is nothing contradictory to my identity as a Jew to take on the role of martial artist; I simply needed to get past internalized oppression to get there.

So enough about that identity. As I said much earlier, I was surprised by what I figured out to be my other identities. They are NOT the majority of my social roles. Despite where I was born and where I spent my formative years, I'm not a Midwesterner, for instance (I told you those data bits were going to show up later in this talk). Woman, lesbian, psychologist, all, as it turns out, are not core identities although one would think that, given my career, they would be. Woman is a biological fact; I probably have two X chromosomes, I've been menstruating for 41 years now, still, seems like forever, and I have the various secondary sex characteristics that go along with that biological regalia. But I was raised in a family context where gender was a deeply unimportant variable for organizing experience. I appear gender-conforming on some dimensions, and am deeply not on others, and none of that mattered very much to me or ever did. My partner, who is about 12 on the 10-point scale of gender-nonconforming was, on the other hand, raised in

a family context where gender was extremely important, although in highly problematic ways; there were things boys did and things girls did (all of them, she says, less fun), and breaking those rules came with serious penalties. Defining herself out of the social roles ascribed to women has been a life-long pursuit for her, thus making gender far more central to her identity than to mine. Gender is something I perform, but there's nothing essential to me about being female.

I have always found essentialist models of gender problematic. I believe that transwomen are women who arrived at that social role via a different path than I did, and that they experience being female in ways that are informed by their prior lives as men—and, of course, that there is as much variability and diversity among transwomen as there is among natal women. But I don't think that there is a "real" woman who is defined by having lived in the body and the role since birth. That's the dominant path, but not the "real" one as far as I'm concerned.

I have very interesting arguments about this with a student who is a post-op transwoman and a lesbian, who tries to disqualify herself as a "real" woman because a buccal smear would find her Y chromosomes. She is a physician currently morphing into a psychologist, and so had the social class privilege allowing her to pay for surgeries that have made her body look like mine and allowed her to be in the world as a woman among women. She has an easier time going into women's restrooms than does my XX partner, who is butch and tall and gets called "sir" when we're on the road. But is the pre-op transwoman who lives on a near poverty wage and who may be able to afford hormones, but never the surgery, less of a woman because she cannot afford to get her shrunken penis removed and a vagina constructed? As a feminist I want us to think about how social class affects that woman's options, and to ask ourselves why we see her as less of a "real woman."

And now I can honestly say that my feminist question is apparently deeply influenced by the absence of gender from my core identity. I tend to support my constructivist views of gender with references to Rhoda Unger's research, but I'm coming to believe that I find her research compelling in part because of where "woman" sits in my identity. My not having woman as a core identity has, it would seem, informed my biases about the entire topic.

Lesbian is another important social role in my life, but it doesn't inform my values, my choices (other than of partner), or my politics nearly as much as does Jew. Thus it's not an identity as I'm defining it. In fact I have frequently asserted that when I figured out that I was a lesbian I knew how to do it because I knew how to be a Jew, and simply transposed knowing how to be a stigmatized minority from one location to another, skipping all of those steps of the sexual orientation identity development models we've all used. I have come to realize that some of my long-standing feelings of mild alienation in some lesbian settings have arisen from their not-Jewishness; the only queer organization in which I regularly participate is my LGBT synagogue, where all parts of me feel nicely connected and at home. It's not that lesbian is a social role in conflict with being a Jew—as it happens, Jewish teaching is almost entirely silent on the topic of lesbians, categorizing us with other women who are no longer virgins and thus ineligible to marry men of priestly families (no loss to me, who wants to marry no man anyhow) and not prohibiting sexual relationships between women (and this is not due to a failure to acknowledge women's sexual agency, as sexual contact between a woman and a non-

human animal is expressly forbidden in Torah. That contact is seen as wrong, but the subtext acknowledges women as sexually agentic creatures who could, like men, do wrong things with that agency.)

Rather, it is that my identity as a Jew has apparently created my sense of what home and family feels like, and that has led me more often to emotionally intimate connections with straight women of color than to Euro-American non-Jewish dykes, since there's apparently something about being of color in the US that feels like being a Jew, a sense with which Bev Greene agrees when we've discussed this point. Something woven into the identity about an experience of oppression that happens from early in life, perhaps? I can't tell; but I know that I am a lesbian in the manner that I am a Jew; a lesbian who doesn't play or watch softball, who couldn't relate to "Ode to a gym teacher," but had intellectually tough, powerful Jewish women Hebrew school teachers whose images I could substitute when the rest of the dykes in the audience were blissfully singing along with Meg Christian.

But I was going to leave Jewish identity to talk about my other core identities. One I'm proud to claim; the other I have no ambivalence about, but believe that my having discovered it as core is suspect and elitist. So my second important identity- I am a Brown, a member of my family of origin, a challenging group. Brown is not, as you might guess, the original family name; my *Zeide*, my father's father who came from Poland after the first World War, changed it on the advice of his uncle to sound "more American." Being a Brown is a powerful identity for me, meeting all of the criteria. While it intersects with Jew, since Browns are Jews in an active, engaged, and happy way, it has some of its own characteristics, one of which I alluded to in my discussion of how I stayed at the dojo. My *Zeide* used to say, "We're *achshans*, our family." Stubborn people, in Yiddish; stubborn, persistent, do-not-give-up-or-give-in people. Browns are oppositional and contrarian; as I've noted in a paper on how I became a psychotherapist (Brown, 2005), the family motto, passed down through the generations to my nieces, is "don't be a sheep and follow the flock." We are even oppositional for Jews, although I imagine that the first Varuna to say "we're *achshans*" did so while arguing some point of Jewish law. Browns are faithful, a sub-category of our stubbornness that makes it hard to get rid of me once I've decided to have a relationship with you, and harder still for me to let go even when the relationship is killing me (but, as my partner points out, therefore someone who you can count on in a relationship). When I broke up with my former partner of nearly 20 years back in 1999 I was the first divorce in the Brown family for as many generations as I know of-and remain the only.

Brown-ness informs my politics and my way of being a psychologist. Being a critical psychologist who challenges the mainstream values of my field is a very Brown thing to do, aided and abetted by Jewish identity and that whole wrestling thing. Brown-ness made me a feminist therapist, because to be otherwise would have meant to follow a flock. In an article I wrote about why I really became a therapist, I said,

My point is that, although I find compelling and interesting many aspects of dynamic, existential, and constructive theories, and use a technically integrative approach in my work as a therapist, I believe that I could not have ended up anywhere in psychology but in feminist practice. My tendency to be drawn to that which is critical, radical, and outside the dominant paradigm found resonance with feminist psychology from the first moment I encountered it during

in the halcyon days of the women's movement. A theory of therapy that could stand outside the mainstream and critique what was wrong with it, how perfect, how familiar to me intellectually and emotionally... And still, when I am brutally honest, I can see that my thorough training in my family to not be a follower of anyone else made it almost impossible to be a student of the old. I had to be an inventor of the new (Brown, 2005).

Brown-ness also creates some aspects of me that most of you don't know exist. Browns sing, loudly, exuberantly, in public. One of the ways that I'm a Jew is that I lead services, which means singing, since most of our liturgy is chanted. My ability to stand up here today and talk easily and with enjoyment, in fact my whole capacity to be a teacher, is an outgrowth of the singing branch of the Brown tree.

And now my third major identity. I've been trying to find a politically correct way to say this one, but there simply isn't. My current euphemism for it is "brain with large storage capacity and fast processor chip." What I'm really trying to say, though, is that being an intellectually capable person, a smart person, has been and continues to be another defining aspect of the me I know as myself. I can, and do, engage the critique of how intelligence is defined in Western cultures in terms of verbal and analytical capacities. I know better than most the reality of multiple intelligences because the gap between my kinesthetic intelligence, which is average in the most supportive of circumstances, and my verbal intelligence, which is a few SD's away from the norm, led at least one PE teacher of my childhood to claim that I must be cheating on my standardized tests because no child so utterly stupid about volleyball could get those SAT scores. I joke that I developed my intellectual and verbal skills over here down the highway in Oak Park in order to defend myself, being raised by a parent who doesn't know how to relate to non-verbal creatures. There is a photo of me with a book that I can't read yet-she's only about 18 months old-but will be doing so shortly.

Psychologist is a social role that's an outgrowth of an identity I've come to call "smart girl"—girl on purpose, because she's young and curious and perpetually sitting at the front of the classroom waving her hand begging you to call on her to answer the question. Smart girl has been my most difficult identity to embody socially and interpersonally, although it's also completely congruent with Jew and Brown, since I represent the stereotype about smart Jews, as does my entire extended biological family. The one time that someone suggested that I might be too smart for a girl my mother nearly took her head off.

But this is the location where conflict between social roles and identities has come to play a part in my experiences. I have never felt uncomfortable as smart girl; she's simply who and how I am. I cannot pass even were I to try. But she has apparently been very uncomfortable-making for a lot of other people, which has been socially painful at times, especially when I was young. The social role of a small child or adolescent is a bad fit with this identity. Smart girl had odd ideas of what might be a fun way to spend time—reading the encyclopedia, how was that not the best fun ever-- and thought about and asked questions that troubled other people. Didn't everyone wonder whether they were really living in the dream of some larger being and didn't really exist but only, like the characters in our own dreams, did so as long as we were dreaming? That one got me into very serious trouble with peers and teachers alike when I was fourteen. Smart girl didn't realize that not everyone's brains ran as fast as hers did, and the adults who she

encountered were frequently nonplussed by her and made her pay the price for their discomfort.

It's easier to be smart girl now that I'm the old wise crone of 53 than it was when I was fourteen, the kid who had just won the National Bible Contest but ate by herself in the lunchroom, largely because I can hang out with all of the other smart kids any time I want today. I have found a social role as an expert and authority on human behavior that both is congruent with smart girl, and also allows her to say whatever she wants under the cover of Dr. Brown. I'm beaming in my photos from my doctoral graduation. Even when I'm not hanging with all of us other smart kids, the other kids aren't mean to me anymore, but instead ask very respectful questions and take what I say quite seriously. My mother told me very few true things about myself, but the one she did tell me was that people would like me better when I grew up. I don't know if everyone actually likes me, but this identity lives more easily in my adult skin.

Where I'm going with all of this is that I'd like us to begin questioning and challenging the until-now taken for granted notions about multiple identities being likely to be in conflict. Maria Root has been saying this for a while as regards people of mixed race, that the experience of conflict frequently comes from social pressures to embrace someone else's idea of what your identities are or should be, not necessarily from essential conflicts internally. As feminist psychologists I see one of our jobs here as deconstructing the models of identity and identity development that we have available from psychology, tossing them aside, and developing something that both is truer to the data of lived experience (which Hannah Lerman has said is necessary for feminist theories), and is also more able to support feminist modes of practice of research, psychotherapy, and activism. For this I turn away from psychology entirely and boldly go (one of my other social roles—Star Trek fan) very elsewhere.

As I've been playing with this question of what is an identity and what a social role, and realizing how my identities have rarely been in conflict even when my social roles have appeared to be, I've stumbled across a strategy for thinking about identities that removes it from linear models and gets us out of the notion that anything which is genuinely an identity might actually be in conflict with anything else so configured inside us. This is a model that has nothing to do with identity development, and yet everything to do with a potential paradigm for understanding living in multiple roles that don't always play well together, and are in flux and in context. My thoughts about this are very raw and preliminary and I'm sharing them extremely early in gestation—a sort of intellectual first sonogram, if you will.

Let me introduce some of you (some of you have already encountered this critter, I'm sure) to a phenomenon from the blogosphere. That, for the non-yet-informed, is the growing neighborhood of cyberspace in which blogs, people's on-line diaries, musings, and commentaries on every topic under the sun, live. I'm in the process of becoming a blogger, having figured out that it's a way for me to stay a teacher after I leave the employ of the corporation at the end of August. (At this point I need to thank my partner and fearless webmaster, Lynn Brem, who has introduced me to this corner of cyberspace and the phenomenon I'm about to discuss).

Bloggers use something called "tags" to assist people to find their work. A tag is a search term, pure and simple. It's self-generated by the person creating a work, whether it be a blog, a podcast, a photo, or whatever. It's a creature of a development in web life

called Web 2.0, which envisions the Web as an interactive, creative, dynamic universe. Tags create the identity of a blog, so to speak- they tell you, the reader/searcher, what it is about.

So for instance, were I to turn this talk into a blog or a podcast (something else I'm likely to do-stay tuned to my website next Fall to see if I follow up on these ideas), I'd decide what tags I'd like to use to assist people in finding my words of wisdom. I might choose identity development, Jew, psychologist, multiple identities—you get the drift. I would tag the blog entry, and then a set of programs that work for blogs a lot like Google works for all of cyberspace, would come sweeping through cyberspace and find my tags so that when you searched on these topics, or told your podcaster to find anything on these topics, my blog or podcast would come up. I could retag the blog or podcast if, after consideration, I didn't agree with my first set of tags. Ergo, the "identity" of the blog would change. But in reality, the blog would be itself, the way in which I socially construct its meaning would be what changed.

So far so good, right? And this has to do with multiple identities how? Well, the next step is that these programs create something called a "tag cloud." It turns out that in the blogosphere and other parts of interactive web space like del.icio.us and Flickr there are some very common tags. Flickr, for instance, is a site onto which people post their photos, then tag them. Here's the Flickr tag cloud from the day I was writing this talk. The words are the tags most frequently accessed by those who use the site to post their personal photos. The picture of the tag cloud that I took on March 11th, 2006 at 3 pm Pacific Time will not be the picture of the tag cloud that you'd see if you went to Flickr today, because the tag cloud is dynamic, not static. It changes every moment to reflect the changes occurring on the site—and this is true for every tag cloud in the blogosphere. The photos do not change; their social meanings do, and the parameters most likely to infer social meaning change as well.

I'm going to suggest that the tag cloud, added on to Root's ecological model, could be a paradigm for thinking about identity that we want to explore as feminist psychologists. Here's why. It's self-generated. No external authority decides what tags—what identities—go with what. Only the person creating the blog, podcast, photo—or in our case, self—gets to decide what constitutes the contents of the tag cloud. Authority is centered in the person. I will acknowledge right now that this model is shockingly individualistic—but consider that tagging could be a collective activity, it need not be individualistic. What's central to this vision is that the authority to tag, to name an identity, rests with those identified. I do not know who you are, and I do not have the power to decide what constitutes your identities.

Salience of tags is social, however; the social and interpersonal environments operate with the tags to create tag clouds. So the social and interpersonal environments may search here, today, for the "psychologist" tag, and it gets big. The environment at school will search "teacher." The tags are there, created by me, but their visibility and power also reflect how the social ecology relates to them. This paradigm is dynamic, relational, and multi-layered.

Thus with identity. It's there, pervasive, connected to me, but likely to look different at different times because the tags themselves change, become larger and smaller, disappear, enter. As I said, this is a VERY tentative proposal; but the factors about it which intrigue me- the power to define, the relational factor, the dynamicism,

and the centeredness in the social ecology-are the pieces that I'm hoping you take away with you, whether you like the form into which I've poured this batter or not.

So if I am for myself, which selves? My social roles may or may not play nicely with each other. When they struggle, however, they allow me to refine my sense of my self, to clarify the values that inform my identities. If I am for myself, and own the definition of what makes self, then living in multiple social roles is a human, and exciting component of living out my identities.

Thanks to you all for this chance to contemplate this truly interesting topic. And now for your turn-let's go back to those questions I asked an hour ago. Now that you've heard my take on this, what are your answers? And what are your questions?

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