



Betty Friedan and the Feminine Mystique: Jewish Women's Role in Second Wave Feminism

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Abstract

This research examines Betty Friedan's evolving relationship with her Jewish identity and its role in her activism in the second wave feminist movement in the United States. Through an intersectional lens, it critiques collective identity theory's limitations in capturing the complexities of Jewish women's activism. While second wave feminism largely framed gender as the primary axis of oppression, Jewish feminists like Friedan navigated tensions between their feminist ideals and religious heritage. Analyzing *The Feminine Mystique* and Friedan's later speeches, this study traces her shift from downplaying her Jewish identity to openly embracing it. This transformation reflects broader struggles among Jewish feminists, who ultimately mobilized to challenge gender inequalities within Judaism, leading to the rise of the Jewish feminist movement. By highlighting intersectionality's role in identity negotiation within social movements, this research argues that while collective identity theory helps explain solidarity within feminism, it fails to fully capture the internal conflicts faced by those with complex intersecting identities, particularly Jewish women. This study advocates for a more nuanced understanding of feminist history that acknowledges religious identity as integral to shaping activism.

The second wave feminist movement, emerging in the 1960s, sought to dismantle pervasive social and political structures reinforcing gender inequality. This movement expanded the feminist agenda, pushing for systemic change in workplace discrimination, reproductive rights, and familial roles (Friedan, 1985, p. 7). One identity group that is narrowly discussed within the feminist movement is Jewish women. Many Jews in the feminist movement aligned with broader feminist goals but found themselves negotiating between their religious identity and the secular, often critical-of-religion stance of mainstream feminism. Figures like Betty Friedan exemplified this duality, as she navigated the tension between her Jewish identity and her commitment to gender equality. Jewish women in the second wave feminist movement occupied a distinct position at the intersection of secular feminism and Jewish tradition, fostering both solidarity and tension within the movement's collective identity. Betty Friedan's evolving identities as both a woman and a Jew shaped her role in the second wave of the feminist movement, contributing to the transformation of her Jewish identity. This process reflects the broader transformation of Jewish women's identities during the movement, ultimately leading to the emergence of the Jewish feminist movement. But to what extent did Friedan's experience reflect the broader struggles of Jewish feminists in reconciling their religious and feminist identities? And what does this reveal about

the application and limitations of collective identity theory in understanding the complexities of social movements?

To answer this question, I analyze the framing of Betty Friedan's arguments in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). In the context of the United States, I assess whether—and how—she asserts her Jewish identity, as well as explore possible reasons for its presence or absence. This analysis highlights the evolution of Friedan's Jewish identity from the 1960s to the early 1970s. I also examine Friedan's later activism in which she more explicitly embraced her Jewish identity within her feminist work—particularly her speech at the Women's Strike for Equality where she publicly acknowledged her Jewish background for the first time. Through this shift, I portray how when mainstream feminism's secular focus clashed with Jewish religious values, Jewish women struggled to reconcile their Jewish identity and feminist beliefs. Finally, I argue that understanding how the feminist movement's framing paved the way for the Jewish feminist movement is crucial to recognizing the role that social movements play not only in advancing collective goals but also in shaping individual identity negotiation and transformation within a broader collective framework. However, there are limitations in this analysis as Friedan's understanding of women in the United States is not all encompassing. Rather, the analysis in this essay when considering the





perspectives of women will be limited to the audience Friedan was addressing—middle-class white women.

Collective identity functions as a framework to explain what motivates people to join and remain committed to social movements (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, p. 290). Polletta and Jasper assert that collective identity is the emotional, moral, and cognitive connection individuals feel toward a larger group or community, shaped by shared experiences, cultural symbols, and mutual recognition. It fosters solidarity and a sense of belonging, distinct from personal identity or ideological beliefs (Polletta and Jasper, p. 285). Polletta and Jasper also acknowledge cross-cutting identities, identities that clash with collective identity alignment, impact the collective identity, and can lead to disengagement in a social movement (p. 292). However, they suggest that how an identity is framed—interpreted for mobilization—is critical for social movement activists (Polletta and Jasper, p. 291). By distinguishing a unified “us” from opponents and bystanders, identity framing fosters unity and solidarity among members (Polletta and Jasper, p. 292). These principles are essential to understanding Jewish women’s involvement in second wave feminism as they align with the collective identity of feminism.

The collective identity theory tends to fit “cross-cutting” identities within the broader collective identity of a social movement, narrowly addressing the internal conflicts and complexities that arise from complex intersectional, or cross-cutting, identities. This limitation is particularly relevant to Jewish women who reconciled their feminist ideals and their religious identities. Thus, the collective identity framework struggles to capture the coexistence of multiple facets of identity and fails to address the nuanced tensions within these identities. While the collective identity theory helps explain the formation of solidarity among Jewish women in the second wave feminist movement, it is insufficient for understanding Jewish feminists’ subsequent involvement in the Jewish feminist movement.

Intersectionality emerges as a framework for understanding the relationship between women’s Jewish and feminist identities that the collective identity theory overlooks. Kimberlé Crenshaw examines the concept of intersectionality, focusing on

the intersecting identities of Black women, arguing that both feminist and antiracist discourses often overlook their unique experiences (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1242-1244). Crenshaw’s analysis offers valuable insights into the relationship between Jewish and feminist identities. Just as scholars fail to recognize how racism and sexism intersect to create compounded forms of discrimination for Black women, they underestimate how Jewish and feminist identities intersect in Jewish women (Crenshaw, p. 1243). This oversight is significant because the overlapping identities of Jewish women contributes to distinctive experiences and vulnerabilities that cannot fully be understood in isolation.

The historiography of the second wave feminist movement has largely concentrated on a secular portrayal of women’s struggles. Historian Paula Hyman discusses how among many prominent Jewish leaders in the feminist movement, several did not assert their Jewishness because American ideological and political culture emphasized the idea that “gender trumped all other aspects of identity” (Hyman, 2008, p. 223). Jewish women found themselves grappling with the pressure to align with a “vision of a common sisterhood” that often sidelined ethnic or religious identities, particularly for those perceived as part of the privileged white majority (Antler, 2018, p. 13). Most scholars researching second wave feminism focus on a “universal” female experience, overlooking the diverse identities of the women involved in the feminist movement (Antler, p. 32).

Consequently, there is a limited exploration of intersecting identities in the feminist movement, but when other intersectional identities are acknowledged, the focus remains on issues of race and class—not religion, as feminism historically treated religion as an opposing force to modern feminist values (Braude, 2004, p. 557). Ann Braude, a historian of American religious history and religious feminism, emphasizes how both secular feminist and religious feminist historians often share the assumption that religion and feminism are fundamentally incompatible (Braude, 2007, p. 233). Viewing these identities as opposing forces has led historians to “sympathize with those seeking liberation from religion but fail to understand those who desire religion and even find it





liberating” (Heschel, 2004, p. 585). Consequently, the historiography of the Jewish feminist movement is relatively sparse and tends to focus on the emergence of a distinct Jewish feminist identity without regard to feminism. Nonetheless, American feminism led Jewish women to recognize inequity in the Jewish religion that wasn’t being addressed in the secular feminist movement, leading to the initiation of the Jewish feminist movement (Hyman, 2008, p. 223). Yet, many scholars fail to explore the intersection of these movements focusing on a separate Jewish feminist identity that was formed among Jewish women without regard to their feminist identity.

Betty Friedan provides a compelling case study as to how Jewish identity can intersect with feminist ideals, particularly within a movement in which historians prioritize collective gender unity over individual intersectional identities. Following World War II, American Jewish identity was largely shaped by an “accommodationist culture,” as Jews sought to assimilate into mainstream American society amid widespread antisemitism (Dollinger, 2003, pp. 10-15). Many Jewish families moved to suburban, Christian-majority neighborhoods, taking advantage of growing middle-class mobility (Dollinger, 2003, p. 15). By blending in, Jews aimed to secure the same privileges of white Christian Americans shielding themselves from persecution due to their Jewish identity.

Similar to the suppression of Judaism by numerous Jewish Americans, Friedan did not explicitly assert her Jewish identity in *The Feminine Mystique* or much of her early feminist writings in the 1960s. Building a platform that focused on white women, Friedan conformed to societal expectations to gain credibility and influence within the feminist movement. This pressure to downplay her Jewish identity was something Friedan witnessed in her own white, middle-class, Jewish immigrant family, where her parents minimized their Jewish identity to assimilate into American culture and avoid discrimination (Johns Speese, 2023, p. 74). Friedan’s choice to downplay her religious identity likely stemmed from a desire to align with the broader feminist movement and be taken seriously in her efforts to insight change. For Friedan, this meant prioritizing a unified collective identity that advanced feminist ideals for white women without

regard to other intersectional identities.

The Feminine Mystique highlighted the dissatisfaction of American women, though largely reflecting the experiences of suburban, white, middle-class women, who were expected to find fulfillment solely through marriage and motherhood—the “feminine mystique.” Friedan outlined this “problem with no name,” as women felt pressured to feel satisfaction living the “American dream” in their role as an “American Housewife” (Friedan, 1963, p. 21). Friedan aimed to raise awareness of women’s frustrations and emphasize that they were not alone. She notes this disillusionment was shared by numerous other women, but many were “too ashamed to admit her dissatisfaction” (Friedan, 1963, p. 19). Friedan was able to unearth the isolated feelings numerous American women were experiencing (but limited to white women) allowing the doors of “all those pretty suburban houses” to open slightly, and “permit a glimpse” of this problem that so many were suffering from (Friedan, 1963, p. 25).

Friedan’s identity as a Jewish woman undeniably informed her understanding of oppression and unintentionally influenced her writing, although she did not explicitly link these identities in *The Feminine Mystique*. The only mention of religion by Friedan was her critique of patriarchal structures in religious traditions that reinforced the “housewife image,” noting that it is “enshrined in the canons of religion” (Friedan, 1963, pp. 351-352). Nonetheless, Friedan’s understanding of oppression was influenced by the social ostracism her family faced due to their Jewish identity. For instance, Friedan and her family were excluded from their town’s country club and other social circles, heightening her awareness of systemic oppression (Antler, 1997, pp. 263-264). Additionally, Friedan herself encountered anti-Semitism in high school, as she was the only Jewish girl at school and the only one not invited to join a sorority (Antler, p. 263). Friedan’s unique experiences growing up played a significant role in shaping her understanding of the inequities women faced. However, the collective identity theory downplays individual identities, limiting scholars’ ability to fully grasp the impact of Friedan’s Jewish background on her feminist activism.

Inherent in Friedan’s feminist activism is her





Jewish identity, as she references the Holocaust and her Jewish mother to mobilize women to fight for gender equality. Betty Friedan continuously sought to appeal to the broader feminist movement in *The Feminine Mystique*, but her references to the Holocaust reveal the complexities of her Jewish identity and the unique perspectives brought by Jewish women within the second wave feminist movement. In Chapter 12, titled “Progressive Dehumanization: The Comfortable Concentration Camp,” Friedan employs Holocaust references to critique the problematic role of the housewife. She argues that this role reduces women to mere shells of their former selves, engendering feelings of “emptiness, non-existence, and nothingness” that replicate a prisoner in a concentration camp who “surrendered their human identity” (Friedan, 1963, p. 305). This portrayal of women’s suffering, being as intense as a prisoner in a concentration camp, heightens intensity of the problem women are facing due to their gender. Friedan goes on to describe how housewives engage in work that produces fatigue not from physical exhaustion, but from its monotonous nature that offers no hope for advancement or recognition, mirroring that of the work of prisoners in a concentration camp (Friedan, p. 306). Friedan’s comparison of the mental strain women face due to being confined and repressed as housewives to the horrors of a concentration camp reiterates the intensity of the feminine mystique. This critique resonates with her Jewish background, where historical narratives of suffering and resilience inform her understanding of oppression, though mainly reflecting the frustrations of white women. Although she stays within the bounds of gender inequality and the broader feminist movement, she integrates her feminist and Jewish identities—though not explicitly divulging her Jewish identity. By drawing parallels between the dehumanizing experiences of housewives and the historical trauma of the Holocaust,

Friedan underscores the gravity of women’s oppression.

While the collective identity theory can explain how comparing the Holocaust to women’s suffering reinforces belief in American feminist goals, it fails to encompass the influence of Friedan’s Jewish identity on her feminist identity. As Crenshaw emphasized the

importance of intersectionality, examining Friedan’s work solely through her feminist identity limits scholars’ understanding of an imperative component of her activism—her Judaism. Friedan’s ability to weave together her Jewish identity with her feminist activism illustrates how Jewish women in the second wave feminist movement were uniquely positioned at the intersection of secular feminism and Jewish tradition.

Friedan’s focus in *The Feminine Mystique* is relevant to the grievances of a highly educated, suburban, white, middle-class woman—an image that aligns with the stereotypical Jewish mother (Horowitz, 2010, p. 236). This is reflected in Betty Friedan’s Jewish mother, Miriam, as she replicated the “domesticity of the traditional Jewish woman” (Horowitz, p. 236). Miriam exemplified the feminine mystique that Friedan is emphasizing: a college-educated woman who was forced by her husband to abandon her career and take care of their children (Horowitz, p. 236). Friedan observed how Miriam lived vicariously through her children, a dynamic that highlighted her extreme discontent as a housewife (Antler, 1997, p. 261). Friedan’s perception of her mother is displayed in *The Feminine Mystique*, as she describes how women confined to traditional housewife roles lose a sense of identity and purpose, “Housewives who live according to the feminine mystique do not have a personal purpose stretching into the future...It is the purpose which gives the human pattern to one’s days” (Friedan, 1963, 313). Friedan’s critique of the dissatisfaction of American housewives is directly influenced by her understanding of her Jewish mother. Nonetheless, Friedan does not personalize her activism to include her Jewish identity despite this strong connection between stereotypical Jewish mothers and the feminine mystique.

However, by the early 1970s, Friedan began to engage more openly with her Jewish heritage, directly connecting feminist issues to her Jewish upbringing and personal experience. This differed greatly from her typically more secular approach to feminism. In Friedan’s speech at the 1970 Women’s March for Equality, she openly referenced her Jewish heritage for the first time. Although not religious, Friedan described feeling compelled to turn to her Jewish





roots, breaking into prayer as she spoke:

In the religion of my ancestors, there was a prayer that Jewish men said every morning. They prayed, “Thank thee Lord, that I was not born a woman.” Today I feel, feel for the first time, feel absolutely sure that all women are foreign to be able to say, as I say tonight: “Thank thee, Lord, that I was born a woman, for this day” (p. 195).

Betty Friedan’s acknowledgment of her Jewish identity publicly, among a crowd of 50,000 people that she called to rally, marked a pivotal moment in Friedan’s activism. Notably, Friedan integrated her Jewish and feminist identities. At this moment, Friedan also recognized the patriarchal sentiments within the Orthodox prayer which reflected gendered language (Antler, 1997, 195). Through the direct integration of her Jewish identity and feminist identity, she began to accept the “convergence of these two deep strains” of her identity (Friedan, 1985, p. 6). This transformation of Friedan’s identity within the feminist movement allowed her to perceive the significance of her Jewish identity in understanding and addressing the injustices faced by women in the United States.

Friedan’s understanding of oppression was influenced by the social ostracism her family faced due to their Jewish identity. For instance, Friedan and her family were excluded from their town’s country club and other social circles (Antler, 1998, p. 263). These experiences heightened Friedan’s awareness of systemic oppression. (Antler, p. 264). Additionally, Friedan herself encountered anti-Semitism in high school, as she was the only Jewish girl at school and the only one not invited to join a sorority (Antler, p. 263). The exclusion Friedan faced throughout her life—individually and as part of a Jewish family—profoundly shaped her perspective on injustice.

Later, Friedan contributed to the 20th Annual America-Israel Dialogue, featured in Congress Monthly, a periodical of the American Jewish Congress. The publication, titled *Woman as Jew, Jew as Woman*, explored themes of Jewish identity and feminism, including discussions, reflections, and promotions of Jewish-related cultural and political topics. In her article, “Woman and Jews: The Quest for Selfhood,”

Friedan reflected on her speech at the Women’s Strike for Equality. Friedan’s reconciliation of her Jewish identity at this event perplexed her, as it seemed like a random assertion of her Judaism. She noted that reciting a Jewish prayer felt “strange because my own background was not religious, and I cannot remember ever having heard the familiar prayer before” (Friedan, 1985, p. 7). Friedan’s unpurposeful engagement with her Jewish identity became a moment of awakening in reference to her Jewish identity that she had not realized left such an impression on her feminist thought. In this article Friedan also reflected on how her words in *The Feminine Mystique* inspired other women to fight for women’s rights, but she found herself wondering, “Why me?” How was she able to “revive” an entire group of women to mobilize for the second wave feminist movement? Friedan turns to her experiences of injustice growing up as a Jew that inspired her to address the inequities women were facing in America (Friedan, 1985, p. 7). Furthermore, Friedan’s public acknowledgement of her Jewish identity was also reflected in American society at this time. By the late 1960s, the rise of Black Power and the strengthening of Black identity inspired a renewed emphasis on Jewish identity, often framed as the catalyst for the “return to the grandparents tradition” of embracing Judaism (Dollinger, 2003, p. 10). Therefore, Friedan’s pursuit of women’s rights and Jewish Americans’ revitalization of their Judaism likely played into her sudden acknowledgement of her Jewish identity in her feminist activism.

As Friedan’s feminism evolved, she began to recognize that her Jewish identity was not something she could simply suppress or ignore, rather the tension she felt between her feminist and Jewish identities led her to question this duality as to whether or not one identity piece—her feminism—would have to be in lieu of another aspect of her identity—her Judaism. Could she be a feminist and still honor her Jewish heritage, or would embracing one mean rejecting the other? This internal struggle reflects a broader dilemma faced by many religious women in the feminist movement: On one hand, mainstream feminists often viewed religious women as either complicit in their own oppression or as apologists for patriarchy; on the other hand, religious institutions often viewed women’s feminist activism as





a challenge to their authority and faith (Braude, 2004, p. 550). These battling identities were something that Jewish women were forced to grapple with as they navigated their place within both the feminist and the later Jewish feminist movement.

Betty Friedan's journey toward embracing her Jewish identity mirrored that of many Jewish women who found themselves at the intersection of Judaism and feminism, a dynamic that influenced their feminist perspectives. In Chicago, feminist pioneers Amy Kesselman, Heather Booth, Vivian Rothstein, and Naomi Weisstein, collectively known as the "Gang of Four," did not explicitly address their Jewish identity despite all being Jewish. However, their Jewish heritage was implicit in their friendship and evident in their activism (Antler, 2018, p. 32). The Holocaust, in particular, shaped their "notions about protest and collective action" (Antler, p. 32). This connection between the Gang of Four's Jewish background, particularly the Holocaust's influence on their activism, is significant when compared to Friedan's portrayal of the feminine mystique as a Holocaust concentration camp, as Friedan devoted an entire chapter in *The Feminine Mystique* to this metaphor. Similarly, just as Friedan's passion for justice was recognized by her father, which Friedan said, "originated from my feelings of the injustice of anti-Semitism," the Gang of Four also shared "a consciousness of oppression, the strong pull of social justice ideals derived from Jewish values, and a sense of themselves as outsiders, often alienated from the general culture" tied to their Jewish identity (Antler, 1997, p. 263). This shared experience of oppression motivated the Gang of Four to "work for radical change" for women, just as Friedan became a central figure in the feminist movement (Antler, 2018, p. 32). Ultimately, the unique experiences of the marginalization of Jewish women in society contributed to their influential impact in the feminist movement, as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was instrumental in the second wave feminist movement, the Gang of Four served as the vanguard of the women's liberation movement in Chicago (Antler, 2018, p. 1). Jewish women's nuanced understanding of injustice was crucial to the development of second wave feminism.

While women's Judaism influenced their

feminist thought, Jewish women's feminist perspectives helped them recognize sexism within Judaism, contributing to the emergence of the Jewish feminist movement. To understand how the belief systems of Jewish feminists developed both within and apart from the broader feminist movement, it is crucial to examine how Jewish women framed their arguments during the second wave of feminism. Snow et al. (1986) identifies key framing strategies in social movements, including Frame Bridging and Frame Amplification. Frame Bridging refers to linking ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames—in this case, connecting the fight against gender inequality in American society with the inequalities Jewish women faced within their own communities (Snow et. al, 1986, pp. 467-468). Frame Amplification involves clarifying and energizing a frame to emphasize the significance of a particular issue or set of problems (Snow et. al, p. 469). For instance, Betty Friedan's comparison of American women's suffering to the horrors of concentration camps amplifies the problem women were facing, underscoring the critical and urgent need to address gender inequality. This strategy not only heightened the prominence of feminist issues, as there was a national understanding of the horrors of the Holocaust but also implicitly connected feminist ideals to Judaism. Moreover, this framing process facilitated Value Amplification, which emphasizes certain values to inspire collective action (Snow et. al, p. 469). By framing inequality within Judaism as intertwined with broader feminist struggles, Jewish feminists unintentionally leveraged their cultural background to motivate the Jewish feminist movement and elevate awareness of sexism within Judaism.

Judith Hauptman explains the lack of concern among Jewish women regarding gender inequality in Judaism prior to the feminist movement. She shares how historically women were excluded from leading prayers, receiving an aliyah to the Torah, serving as rabbis, or preaching in synagogues (Hauptman, 1985, p. 36). The synagogue liturgy was dominated by masculine depictions of God, and girls were denied significant rites of passage comparable to those granted to boys, further entrenching gender disparities. Women were assigned responsibilities not to God, but to their male counterparts who were considered their





“immediate masters” (Hauptman, p. 36). Despite these patriarchal practices, before the women’s movement, Jewish women were not “chafing over this marginality” in religious practices, rather these gender differences became a way to express femininity (Hauptman, p. 36). For example, Hauptman recalls attending a Jewish day school where girls would study the Talmud for five years. Yet, they did not feel upset by the fact that their study would cease, without choice, after the age of sixteen, reflecting the normalized acceptance of these limitations within the community (p. 36). These discriminatory religious practices in Judaism were considered a core part of the Jewish religion and went largely unchallenged prior to the feminist movement.

Jewish feminism was uniquely positioned to merge the strengths of both feminist and religious networks, enabling Jewish women to embrace both their feminist and Jewish identities. The experiences of Jewish women in second wave feminism catalyzed a re-evaluation of gender roles within Judaism, leading to the formation of organizations like Ezrat Nashim (Antler, 2018, p. 207). Ezrat Nashim, a women’s study group, was the first organization to publicly challenge sexism within Judaism (Antler, 2018, p. 206). Scholar Joyce Antler notes that Ezrat Nashim, “provided the flame that ignited the movement for gender equality within Jewish religious life” (Antler, 2018, p. 207). While feminist activism made Jewish women more aware of gender inequality within Judaism, Jewish feminist leaders relied on networks of Jewish feminist organizations to promote a vibrant feminist discourse within Judaism (Braude, 2004, p. 568). Since Jewish women were already connected through feminist networks, they quickly recognized the validity of feminist critiques of Judaism, leading to the rapid and widespread acceptance of the Jewish feminist platform (Hauptman, 1985, p. 37).

The First National Conference for Jewish Women in 1973 was significant in portraying the emerging Jewish feminist identity. This conference, with nearly five-hundred Jewish women, created solidarity among Jewish feminists to fight for sexism within Judaism (Antler, 2018, p. 205). It perpetuated the core beliefs of the Jewish feminist movement to build a “collective entity that could unify Jewish women,” while “supporting their efforts to come out as

Jews within the feminist movement and creating a new activist force within the Jewish community” (Antler, p. 205). This conference, inciting women to “come out” as Jews within the feminist movement, is reflective of Betty Friedan’s identity shift in the second wave feminist movement. Friedan “came out” as a Jew at the Women’s Strike for Equality when she began reciting the Jewish prayer with the feminist ideals of gender oppression. This transformation from solely focusing on gender to fighting for gender equality in Judaism is crucial to understanding how a Jewish feminist identity evolved within the feminist movement.

The growing Jewish feminist movement laid the groundwork for future change, leading to the reinterpretation of Jewish texts and the challenging of Jewish traditions. Hauptman’s analysis in 1985 emphasized a need for change in Jewish laws inherent in the objectives of Jewish feminism. Hauptman highlights how rabbinic scholars of the Talmud 2,000 years ago recognized the discriminatory nature of the Torah’s inheritance laws, which granted estates to sons but not daughters. In response, they introduced laws to address these inequalities, such as the *ketubat banin dikhrein*, a provision in the marriage contract that encouraged fathers to provide their daughters with a portion of their estate upon marriage (Hauptman, 1985, pp. 37-38). Picking apart this biblical narrative, Hauptman challenges the patriarchal nature of Jewish law. Furthermore, tangible changes were made in the Jewish religion that reflects Jewish feminist ideals. In 1973 the Conservative movement decided to count women in the minyan just as the women of Ezrat Nashim called for in their issue “Call for Change” (Hauptman, 1985, p. 38; Hyman & Kranson, 2021). Ultimately, while the Jewish feminist movement didn’t succeed in creating a “comprehensive organization” (Hyman & Kranson, 2021), its platform was able to extend and incite change through the foundations built within the feminist movement.

The collective feminist identity of the feminist movement often ignored or opposed expressions of Jewish identity, fostering tension and ultimately catalyzing the transformation of individual identities among Jewish feminists. Jewish women were compelled to navigate a complex intersection of secular feminist ideals and Jewish traditions, frequently finding these





identities framed as distinct or even conflicting. For Betty Friedan, this complexity likely influenced her decision to downplay her Jewish identity in her early feminist activism, fearing it might complicate her message or undermine her credibility within a movement that often viewed religious traditions as sources of female oppression. During the 1960s, like many Jewish feminists of her time, Friedan confined her Jewish identity within the broader feminist collective identity, which prioritized shared womanhood above all else. This approach proved effective, as *The Feminine Mystique* is widely credited with catalyzing the second wave feminist movement (Braude, 2004, p. 556). However, examining the evolution of Friedan's assertion of her Jewish identity—from its implicit presence in *The Feminine Mystique* to her more explicit embrace in her later speech at the Women's Strike for Equality—reveals the limitations of collective identity theory in capturing the internal tensions she experienced. Ultimately, this tension led Friedan to initially draw on her Jewish background unintentionally before eventually embracing her Judaism more publicly, becoming an active participant in the Jewish feminist movement.

Why did this change in identity occur, and why is it important? Why did Betty Friedan not assert her Jewish identity at first but later embrace it? The growing feminist consciousness among Jewish women led them to recognize the inequalities they faced within their own religious communities (Antler, 1997, p. 206). These ideas were likely enhanced by how Jewish women in the feminist movement framed their arguments in relation to Judaism, even if it was indirectly, and how Jewish women's Jewish background influenced their perspective of feminism. Additionally, Jewish women could use the networks forged by the feminist movement to create a basis for the Jewish feminist movement. Polletta and Jasper's concept of "free spaces"—structural environments separate from dominant power structures—informs how Jewish women came together to recognize the limitations of the collective feminist identity that focused only on gender (Polletta and Jasper, 2001, p. 288).

Despite the apparent tension between Jewish women's Jewish identities and feminist ideals, Judaism remained a fundamental part of their identity.

Furthermore, Jewish feminists recognized that their Jewish identity could not be fully addressed "solely through their feminist ideology and affiliations" (Hyman, 2008, p. 225). Therefore, many Jewish feminists felt they could not turn their backs on their Judaism, as they fought for gender equality, but looked to confront inequality within the Jewish religion. Jewish feminist beliefs stood apart from the broader feminist movement's collective identity, which prioritized gender issues while often ignoring the intersecting identities of its participants. Unlike the broader second wave feminist movement, Jewish feminists fought against gender inequality within Judaism itself, so they were able to acknowledge their intersectional identities as both Jews and feminists (Antler, 2018, p. 8).

The discourse surrounding feminism and Jewish women often positions Jewish and feminist identities as separate or even incompatible, creating identity conflicts for Jewish women. They may feel compelled to choose between their religious identity and feminist ideals. In the feminist movement, women are urged to reject their patriarchal religious background, while in the Jewish feminist movement, they are encouraged to embrace their Jewish identity and seek reform within Judaism. Understanding how Jewish feminists, like Friedan, navigated these tensions offers important insights into the broader evolution of feminism and the intersectional dynamics within social movements. Yet, the collective identity theory emphasizes unity and solidarity within a movement, often overlooking the internal conflicts and ambiguities individuals face, especially when they hold multiple, intersecting identities. By failing to fully encompass the intersectional challenges of Jewish women in the feminist movement, this minimizes Jewish women's experiences that contribute to their unique perspectives on feminist issues.

The second wave feminist movement opened the eyes of Jewish women to see that discrimination in the secular system of law also existed in the Jewish system of law (Hauptman, 1985, p. 37). Jewish feminists sought not to reject their faith or their religious communities, but to reclaim and reinterpret Jewish traditions and texts in ways that were inclusive, empowering, and feminist. As Friedan said, the feminist movement had enabled women to pursue their





“authentic identity as women,” and now, Jewish women in the Jewish feminist movement began to confront their “authentic identity as Jews” (Friedan, 1985, p. 7). The embrace of Jewish women’s intersectional identities allowed them to challenge patriarchal structures within both religious and feminist contexts, acknowledging that Jewish women’s oppression could not fully be addressed by focusing on either gender or religion alone. Additionally, the feminist movement extended beyond Judaism. Phyllis Tribble, a Christian woman, reinterpreted literary devices in the Hebrew Bible through a feminist lens. Inspired by the feminist movement, she challenged the patriarchal perspectives that have shaped traditional interpretations of God and gender, in her 1978 book, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Johnson-DeBaufre, 2014, pp. 219-220).

The challenge of reconciling multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities remains an essential area for further exploration within both feminist and religious studies. My research is limited by its focus on Betty Friedan, thus further investigation could consider a broader range of Jewish feminists and their personal experiences within the movement. Additionally, while I focused solely on Jewish women in the feminist who wanted to maintain aspects of their Jewish and feminist identities, some religious scholars, such as Phyllis Tribble—a key figure in the feminist movement—encouraged women to reject their patriarchal religious structures and turn away from religion entirely. Overall, the dynamics of religion and feminism have much to be explored, as there is a complex interplay between these two identities that is unlike other intersectional identities.

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