

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND: SELF-CREATION AND SELF-EXILE IN VANESSA DAVIS'S *MAKE ME A WOMAN*

ABSTRACT

This article examines the portrayal of selfhood in the American cartoonist Vanessa Davis's graphic narrative, *Make Me a Woman* (2010). Characterized by multiple artistic styles and a general lack of clear-cut panel divisions, her collage-like memoir incorporates sketches alongside narrative and diary comics. The text visualizes the struggle of responding to preconceived notions of the self—especially what it means to be a secular Jewish American woman—and frames these intersectional identities as continually revisable and deeply individual processes of becoming. Formally and textually, Davis's memoir reveals the ways that graphic narratives offer potentially complex, expansive, and anti-essentialist ways of representing and reading Jewish identity.

In their introduction to a special issue of the academic journal *Biography* (2008), Gillian Whitlock and Anna Poletti define autographics as “life narrative fabricated in and through drawing and design using various technologies, modes, and materials.”¹ For Whitlock and Poletti, the key to reading autographics is recognizing it as “an interpretation of self-portraiture that deliberately attends to textuality and texture.”² Such a dynamic understanding of the intermingling of the autobiographical and the visual is especially helpful in reading autobiographical comics, where the representation of the self as a “process of assemblage” takes place before the reader's eyes.³ The autobiographical narrator—what Vivian

Gornick terms the author's "persona"—is drawn over and over, and she literally changes form, however nuanced the change, with every drawing.⁴ The study of autographics, particularly in relation to graphic narratives or comics, promotes a deeper understanding of what it means to illustrate the self on the page. It is an especially helpful mode of understanding texts that integrate verbal and visual narratives in order to grapple with the representation of various intersecting facets of identity, such as what it means to be a Jewish American woman.

In her graphic memoir *Make Me a Woman* (2010), the cartoonist Vanessa Davis's uses of various life-writing modes and genres, in addition to her incorporation of diverse page architectures and color strategies, reveal her comics to be strikingly representative of autographics.⁵ Characterized by multiple artistic styles and a general lack of clear-cut panel divisions, her narrative portrays the self as a textured, patchworked entity that changes from moment to moment, depending on framing and context. Her sketches, as well as her narrative and diary comics, collectively and often humorously visualize the animated and inexhaustible project of claiming and representing the self.⁶ The title of Davis's graphic memoir reinforces Simone de Beauvoir's famous words about the construction of female identity, namely, that "one is not born, but rather becomes, woman."⁷ But the name of the book, presented ambiguously somewhere between a directive and plea, also highlights the notion that there is an active subject forging the creation of that woman. Whether the final authority over that subject lies with the author herself or with someone else is a puzzle that repeatedly surfaces in the many layers of her work, and it is a puzzle which is generally left unsolved. As Davis has pointed out, "The comics form might not come up with a lot of answers, but it can really illuminate the questions."⁸

Davis's interest in categorizations of identity extends beyond the question of gender, a question forefronted in the book's title. Her comics more generally visualize the struggle of responding to pre-conceived notions of selfhood based in ethnic, religious, and even regional identifications. Davis is a secular Jewish woman raised with something of a religious background, and her exploration of her Jewish identity, which was a precursor to the book, often illuminates her examinations of other facets of her selfhood.⁹ But unlike the works of many contemporary Jewish American women and artists, her comics do not evoke religious or ethnic identity primarily as a response to stereotypes.¹⁰ Rather, she frames her intersectional identities, especially as a woman and Jew, as continually revisable and deeply individual processes of becoming that are foremost navigated by the artist in her work. The persona on the page is always in-process, rather than an entity that has definitively changed, or moved away from a previous iteration, over time. In this way, her graphic memoir is a narrative of continual self-creation and revision, or a testimonial to the present, rather than a narrative of disaffiliation rooted in the past, or in a conception of the self as it is seen by others.¹¹

Yet even as *Make Me a Woman* illustrates the very private and individual nature of the process of becoming, it also accentuates the boundaries that are blurred between personal or inward explorations and public performances, exposures, and influences. The text includes previously published and often full-colored comics alongside black-and-white journal and sketchbook entries. The divergent uses of color reflect various narrative tones, with the more muted black-and-white sketches and ink washes suggesting intimacy and the brighter colored pictures reinforcing the distance between reader and text.¹² The introduction by Davis describes what she has included in the book, which could otherwise be seen as a slapdash or arbitrary collection of comic art. She writes: “This book collects comics and drawings that I made between 2004 and 2010. Some are as yet unpublished strips and sketchbook pages. I moved: Diary entries take place in New York, where I used to live; California, where I moved in 2005; and Florida, where I grew up and where my mom still lives. A lot of the stories were printed in zines and anthologies. And a bunch of them appeared on-line as part of a monthly column I did for *Tablet* magazine.”¹³ The introduction implies that the text loosely tracks some kind of structured narrative based in the author’s geographical relocations over time (the move from Florida to New York to California), although it also reinforces the possibility that the works contained in the collection, as well as their arrangement, are somewhat random. This introduction complicates audience expectations, given the format of Davis’s text as a large book and the often inaccurate association of that format (the “long form” comic, better known as the “graphic novel”) with the “structure, breadth, [and] coherence” of the novel.¹⁴ What the reader encounters over the course of the memoir, instead, is a chronicle of the process of recording the self as it is made, unmade, and remade at the boundary of assorted and often overlapping genres.

The opening image featured in the book reinforces the instability of all life writing and drawing as precariously situated on the border of public performance and private act. In this colored self-portrait, Vanessa sits naked, on a stool, with a guitar covering her “privates” and a harmonica lodged in her mouth (fig. 1).¹⁵ She looks nonchalantly at the reader. The image portrays her as preoccupied: her hands and mouth, the tools of creation of her verbal and visual narratives, are engaged. The artist exhibits confidence in her self-exposure, even as she conveys herself as almost too busy to notice the audience that inevitably watches her. This somewhat satirical self-portrait advertises some access into the author’s most intimate self, while offering up the pretense of private engagement and inevitable secrecy. Certain parts will remain covered.

Additionally, Davis’s book includes a whole series of full-colored portraits of women interspersed between various narrative comics and journal entries, challenging the notion that an autobiographical narrative must consistently



FIGURE 1. Vanessa Davis, *Make Me a Woman*.

feature the self as principal actor. With one exception, these images do not reflect a clear relationship to the ones that come before and after them, and they are accompanied neither by narrative explanations nor clear indications of who is being portrayed.¹⁶ Although some of the drawings feature a woman who resembles Vanessa—generally, a brunette with brown hair, freckles, and a curvy figure—many are images of women who are clearly *not* the same as Vanessa, as indicated by their hair color, body types, and certain ethnic/racial features (like skin color). A good number of these “anonymous” portraits display bodies in motion, with colorful outfits contrasted against the white background of an otherwise empty page (fig. 2). As the subtle but significant movements of the bodies captured in these images reveal, these are not women who are merely being looked at and drawn as they have been adorned, or as adornments in themselves, but, rather, these are women engaged in the process of being looked at, who are somehow consciously and actively involved in the making of themselves as visual subjects. Their accessories—hair styles, jewelry, purses, shoes—as well as

their basic outfits point to individual histories that have been woven together on these pages through the eyes (and hand) of a single artist. These fashion choices have the capacity both to unite and distinguish them from one another.¹⁷ The dancing, moving portraits, set between other types of image/text combinations, contextualize a self in the making among a larger community of women or, more generally, a self-portrait created alongside other self-portraits.

By including this collective of anonymous women in an autobiography, the text reflects its interest in exploring what Hillary Chute describes as “the self in conversation with collectivities.”¹⁸ Chute uses this description to talk about the cartoonist Lynda Barry’s *Naked Ladies! Naked Ladies! Coloring Book*, a work that Barry created after discovering a pack of pornographic playing cards in Las Vegas displaying and advertising fifty-two women.¹⁹ As Chute explains, *Naked Ladies!* “is a book that involves but decentralizes the self,” revealing a “desire to move beyond the individual” by displaying a sequence of images of women



FIGURE 2. Vanessa Davis, *Make Me a Woman*.

alongside a seemingly unrelated prose narrative about a single self.²⁰ Like Barry's work, Davis's *Make Me a Woman* is a text that forefronts an individual narrative but immerses it in a sea of the dynamic postures and poses of anonymous women. In this way, both texts attempt to show how conceptions of the self and identity are inextricably, and often ambiguously, located in portrayals of the self in relation to numerous communities. As Smith and Watson argue in *Interfaces*, "Identities materialize within collectivities and out of the culturally marked differences that constitute symbolic interactions within and between collectivities."²¹ The portraits of women included throughout *Make Me a Woman* represent Vanessa's affiliations at the boundaries of many different communities, both real and imagined.²² The range of colors depicted in these images connects them not only with the self-portrait that opens the book, but also with the many full-colored narrative comics contained within it. These communities are bridged together through surface-level resemblances—colors, styles, and clothing, for example—which act as a unifying backdrop to the diverse themes explored in greater depth through the lens of Vanessa's individual life.

The inclusion of anonymous women in *Make Me a Woman* also reinforces the book's investment in exploring the documentation of a self through questions of identity and categorization—questions that inevitably link that self with larger publics. One of the earlier comics in the memoir, the title story, demonstrates the way that the identities explored, and specifically Jewish and female identities, are assembled as a series of images that are always changing based on the unfolding of these explorations. The one-page, black-and-white comic "Make Me a Woman" first pictures Vanessa standing at a podium in front of a crowd reading her bat mitzvah Torah portion speech (fig. 3). The narration begins, "So the big day finally came . . ." while her speech bubble reads, "Tamar showed lots of INITIATIVE when she tricked her fiancée's father into impregnating her by posing as a prostitute." The irony of the seriousness of her pose juxtaposed with what the twelve-year-old narrator is saying highlights one of the recurring themes of the text, which is the contradictory nature of Jewish identity for women—and especially young, unmarried women—who often figure as second-rate citizens in Jewish culture and history. At twelve, Vanessa, who attends an all-Jewish day school, has no means of evaluating her place in the community, or of assessing the narratives passed on to her as "empowering." She has no other community to contrast with her own, no sense of what actual empowerment or "initiative" could potentially mean for her.

In the image that follows, a young woman sits in a chair being drawn by a cartoonist, while the narrator explains that "my party didn't have a theme, but we did have kind of a mean-spirited caricaturist."²³ The young woman—who could be, but is not necessarily, the same person as Vanessa—is drawn by the cartoonist with wild, unkempt hair, an upturned nose, and long, exaggerated



FIGURE 3. Vanessa Davis, *Make Me a Woman*.

arms, while her actual self sits meekly in a chair with arms folded. In both the narrative about Tamar and the drawing by the bat mitzvah cartoonist, the young Vanessa (or someone like her) is depicted as the object of projections that are being passed on to her by others. It is not a coincidence that the “mean-spirited” caricaturist is engaged in a vocation that Vanessa will take up later in life perhaps, in part, in order to revise this earlier, detached, and misguided portrait composed of herself and of others like her. Only at the end of the comic can she acknowledge this earlier lack of perspective, when she includes a reflection about her bat mitzvah from the point of view of the present-day artist drawing and drawing on this memory. This coming-into-consciousness stems partly from her exposure to another version of the Jewish coming-of-age ritual, this one emerging from a television show called *The Wonder Years*.²⁴ She writes about arriving at a new understanding about her own bat mitzvah upon watching the show and recognizing the distance between the main character’s experience and her own: “Years later I watched the wonder years where Paul has a sweet bar mitzvah party at a rec center and I was embarrassed because mine was so fancy.” Here, in being presented with another version of this religious rite of passage, Vanessa comes to understand that her own perspective is rooted in the context of a particular time and place, and specifically, in this case, in her economic background. This consciousness about growing up in a privileged class—and the realization that it was not a universal background for all American Jews—sets her on a path of understanding her own Jewish identity as highly individualized. In this way, the comic reveals how identifications of all kinds—in this case, of class and ethnicity/religion—often intersect to influence the way that subjectivity emerges and transforms over time. It is as a self in relation to other, often overlapping collectivities, including those that she does and does not belong to, that Vanessa can productively reflect on her earlier life.²⁵

This narrative comic, placed early on in *Make Me a Woman*, suggests that what will inevitably make Vanessa into a “woman” (and, similarly, into a “Jew”) is the belated but essential recognition that the meaning of identity is always in

some ways dependent on context, and especially the context of one individual or community seen in relation to an other or many others. Vanessa's notion of identity will inevitably transform over time and in different settings. However, past definitions and understandings of identity are not to be simply dismissed or forgotten. While all of the comics in the book are drawn by a present-day artist who has been exposed to many more ideas and communities than the adolescent that she draws and who therefore has a perspective that dramatically differs from her younger self, the book still manages to show how disparate notions of identity over time continue to be relevant to the present-day artist. In this way, *Make Me a Woman* remains a text that is very much fixed in the present while still being indebted to the past. The juxtaposition of past and present perspectives within the same comic demonstrates how conceptions of Jewish identity change over time for every individual even though they are always connected to static notions of identity based in both communal and individual histories. The black-and-white nature of this particular narrative, which serves to level the various time frames and communities, also emphasizes their relationality.

Stuart Charmé, a scholar with an interest in the psychology of religion, has written about the importance of recognizing the fluid and individual dimensions of Jewish identity, which vary over time. In his section of the collectively written essay "Jewish Identities in Action," Charmé writes about two dimensions of identity—the "diachronic" and the "synchronic"—that have largely been ignored in conventional models of Jewish identity, often based in the assumption that there is a shared and identifiable essence, or core, among Jews.²⁶ Charmé refers to these traditional approaches toward understanding Jewish identity as, collectively, the "drink-your-milk" model, one that "suggests that a healthy identity, like a healthy body, depends on what one 'consumes' during the period of maximum growth in childhood and adolescence."²⁷ Unlike this static or crystallized notion of Jewish identity, Charmé's own paradigm, which he describes as the "spiral" model, recognizes identity to be a process that continually changes over time and that is affected by various, interposing, and sometimes contradictory conceptions, which are often present at the same instance. As he explains, "'Synchronic diversity' refers to the multiple forms of Jewish *identities* that comprise 'the Jewish community (or communities)' at any particular moment in time. By 'diachronic diversity,' I mean the phenomenon of Jewish identity as a 'journey' over time, as a process that changes and unfolds in a variety of directions over the course of an individual lifetime, not to mention over the course of history in a broader sense."²⁸ Davis's explorations of her Jewishness throughout *Make Me a Woman* reflect the two dimensions integral to Charmé's model. The narrative comics throughout reveal a self whose perception of her own Jewish identity has changed over time, as well as a self who is always conscious of the many other identities (especially her gender) that

intersect with and help define her understanding of Jewishness as something that is never independent or isolated in its existence.

The structure of Davis's individual comics, as well as the arrangement of the text as a whole, reinforce this notion of a spiral development of identity—what Charmé, in borrowing from Jean-Paul Sartre's ideas, describes as “a series of revolutions that preserve the past but also move on to higher levels of integration.”²⁹ These “higher levels of integration” are reflected on the page, for example, in the general lack of clear borders between panels; instead, various panels bleed into one another, both across and down the page. Her comics generally do not include gutters, the spaces between panels that have so often been theorized in conversations about the way that comics function and are read. Scott McCloud and other critics have written about the gutter as “host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics.”³⁰ According to McCloud, the spaces between panels require the participation of the reader, who must use her imagination to fill in gaps or account for lost time between panels.³¹

In contrast, Davis avoids drawing panels completely on most of her journal entries, and even her longer-form comics do not allow for any spaces between panels that often meld into one another or are separated by white spaces filled with the handwriting of the author. Davis has described this style as reflective of a desire “to be spontaneous . . . to feel out the process . . . [and to make] improvisational visual connections.”³² This visual tactic makes the author more accountable for the work in one sense—the reader, after all, cannot fill in spaces that do not exist—while allowing the reader greater freedom in how she chooses to read the text. The lack of spaces between panels visually compounds the past and present, as the moment of transition between time frames (generally represented by the gutter) is excised. In this way, the arrangement of the images reinforces the notion that impressions of past experiences are always connected to, and somehow based in, previous understandings and reflections—a “spiral” integration of the past into the present.

A journal entry pictured around the middle of the memoir, dated September 1, 2005, demonstrates this spiraling anatomy of the book as a whole through its anticlimactic visual execution (fig. 4). The September 1 entry marks the moment when Vanessa first mentions, and reflects on, her move from the East to the West Coast, a shift that shapes the structure of the narrative. The September 1 entry is unique—it is a full-colored drawing instead of a black-and-white sketch—yet it is also the first in a mini-series within the text, preceding a number of similar, full-colored journal entries. These journal entries involved pre-planning rather than more spontaneous drawing. They figure somewhere between sketchbook drawings and long-form finished narrative comics (coloring takes time and is unusual in a journal entry or sketchbook), and were made to appear like finished works.³³ The juxtaposition of the September 1 journal

entry among a series of full-colored entries downplays this particular page's significance, and instead presents it as one of many equally weighted experiences. The September 1 entry also lacks panel divisions—instead, the image functions as a kind of oversized, full-page panel. The opening narration bubble introduces the thematic illusion of time passing even as it simultaneously encapsulates the emotional paralysis that overcomes Vanessa in reflecting on this life change. “I’ve been gradually freaking more and more out about moving away,” she states, and the sentence is presented in short line breaks, like poetry. In format as well as in syntax—the phrase “freaking out” is divided by a slow but steady increase in anxiety marked by the words “more and more”—this wording emphasizes the fragmented sense of time that dominates this individual comic and the book as a whole. Similarly, the serialization of Vanessa’s image reflects an anxiety that is both fluid and weighted; her head is drawn a total of five times from different angles and displaying a subtle variety of expressions of general angst and worry. Speech bubbles emanate from Vanessa and her friends, crowding the middle of the page. These almost overlap and offer only snippets of longer conversations. All of the formal elements combined thwart a simplistic or chronological delineation of Vanessa’s emotional states. In this way, the page visually represents the impact of Vanessa’s move as a series of small shocks whose significance can only be fully distilled through their compounded effect. Additionally, the images are shaded in dark and rich reds and browns, a color scheme that embeds the manifold, disparate figures and elements of the entry into a single amorphous mass, almost, but not quite, frozen in time.

The visual impression portrayed here of time simultaneously passing and slowing down, with past and future experiences and emotions blending into one another, evokes that notion of a “higher level of integration” that Charmé attributes to his spiral model of identity. Vanessa, about to leave her job, experiences varied, sometimes conflicting thoughts and reactions regarding her impending move from coast to coast. “Don’t people leave New York all the time? Everyone’s lives go on! Things change!” she asserts at one moment, although at another she is pictured sobbing in response to an e-mail asking her if she feel scared. “I—I dooooo!” she types onto the computer screen. These confused and sometimes contradictory reflections mark a moment in the text when Vanessa’s perspective is to be dramatically unsettled—she is moving from the East Coast, where she lives, often among a community of others ostensibly like her (including but not limited to Jews), to the West Coast, where she exists in what she later describes as “self-exile.” Yet, the chaotic nature of time frozen but still passing that this comic journal relates highlights the way that Vanessa’s past experiences, perspectives, and identifications continue to affect and influence her, no matter what changes she endures over the course of the entire text. In a sense, this spiral representation of time represents Vanessa’s sense of self over the course of the entire memoir; it reveals how an impending and pivotal shift in her point of view is tied not, as it may seem at first, to a single event,



FIGURE 4. Vanessa Davis, *Make Me a Woman*.

but rather to a journey of self-exploration that begins much earlier, and ends much later, than this particular geographical relocation.

Various critics have written about contemporary Jewish American women's literature as preoccupied with a desire to reflect on, remember, and sometimes even return to the past. In her essay "Recalling 'Home' from Beneath the Shadow of the Holocaust: American Jewish Women Writers of the New Wave," Janet Handler Burstein argues that unlike works from the earlier part of the twentieth century, which featured narrators leaving home in order to find themselves, contemporary Jewish American women's writing (from the

last thirty years or so) often shares a common theme of women who set out on journeys to understand and connect with their pasts.³⁴ Burstein explains, “Women’s writings of the new wave . . . seek continuities, often imagined as reconciliation with people long estranged from the writer.”³⁵ What many of these women writers are looking for, in an effort to better understand themselves, is to reunite with a notion of home that “has been lost or denied,” or “to retrieve what they believe has been withheld.”³⁶ For these authors, many of whom are the children or grandchildren of immigrants (if not immigrants themselves), “home” is often an estranged relationship to a person, history, or place. The desire to find or return “home” resides in a need to better understand their relationship to the present, and how their identities as women and Jews connect with the experiences of the generations that came before them, and especially the worlds of their mothers.

In a sense, *Make Me a Woman* is a text that depicts this move away from and subsequent search for “home” within its pages, beginning with the diary comic from September 1, 2005. In Davis’s book, as in many other contemporary works of Jewish American women’s literature, this notion of home is chiefly metaphorical, and consistently aligned with the pursuit of a secure and familiar sense of self. But Davis’s memoir is not primarily interested in a return to or a reflection on the past, so much as it is focused on an integration of past experiences and reflections into the present moment, or a revised understanding of home as something that both is and is not bound to a particular place or concept. In *New Jews*, Caryn Aviv and David Shneer call into question the “rise of diaspora” as a persistent characterization of Jewish identity that “has discounted or overshadowed the extent to which people—as individuals and as groups—are creating new forms of home in a more mobile world.”³⁷ As such, Aviv and Shneer recognize the notion of home as “constantly shifting” and as connected “not just to particular pieces of land but also to concepts, ideas, stories, and spaces.”³⁸ Davis’s work similarly establishes “home” as a notion that is not simply tied to a particular time and place, but is an expansive concept that morphs over time, encompassing many differing versions of familiarity and estrangement, intimacy and isolation. *Make Me a Woman* is a book that emphasizes not a return to (or move away from) some lost place or past, but rather identifies the question of home as one that persists over the course of a lifetime and one that, for the artist, must be contended with afresh with every piece of self-representation. The search for home thus serves as a repeating trope in Davis’s work, bridging together the epistemological pursuit of coming to terms with one’s various identities along with the aesthetic enterprise of representing those identities. The text does not easily fit into any category or genre: no single artistic form or style—from black-and-white sketches to full-colored portraits—represents the artist’s “home,” as each instead forms part of a larger mosaic of self.

The second half of *Make Me a Woman* tracks Vanessa’s journey as she leaves New York City for California. But this moving coasts is not presented

as a clear or seamless shift within the text. Instead, various diary comics noting experiences that happen in venues in New York City (on the subway, in SoHo, or at the Yaffa Café, for example) are suddenly interrupted by the September 1 entry. The journal entry is then followed by other comics that take place in established New York locales—in the sex shop *Toys in Babeland*, for example—and then several comics that do not give any clear indication of where they take place. In fact, these entries, including one dated September 3, 2006 (a full year after the September 1 comic, although positioned only several pages later), and a narrative comic titled “Nightmoves,” convey a sense of confusion and chaos regarding time and space as Vanessa finds herself at various parties, thrown together among groups of people, many of whom are strangers.

What follows these jumbled-up comics often taking place in public spaces are two narrative comics that situate Vanessa in a most intimate space, her mother’s house in Florida, where she grew up and her mother still lives. In the first of these, titled “Me ’n My Sister,” she and her sister sit on a flowery sofa in a cozy living room, perusing old family albums. Two pages later, the comic “Crispy Christmas” begins with Vanessa explaining that she normally goes home to Florida “for Christmas” while her boyfriend stays in California. The news that she now lives in California (and has a boyfriend) comes suddenly, almost as an afterthought in the context of a story about the family dynamic on her visits to her childhood home, which ironically are prompted by the celebration of a Christian holiday. The inclusion of these comics, which convey a deep sense of intimacy with her surroundings at the point of the memoir in which Vanessa shifts her life from New York to California, reinforces the aimlessness and confusion that she feels in the midst of this move, and especially the inconsistent nature of her sense of familiarity in all places or more generally in notions of the familiar versus the unfamiliar. Vanessa’s depiction of Florida as a place that both is and is not “home” triangulates her journey from the East to the West Coast, foreshadowing the consistent sense of simultaneous rootlessness and rootedness that Vanessa feels throughout the memoir. What the move from the East to the West Coast above all demonstrates is the somewhat arbitrary nature of the concept of home.

Vanessa focuses directly on her experiences in California toward the end of the memoir. In particular, the narrative comic “Stranger in a Strange Land” conveys the feeling of “homesickness” that she experiences in her new surroundings. As she explains, “Every place I’ve lived, from my upbringing in South Florida, College in the Midwest and South, to even a short stint in Central America, I’d always been around New York Jews. I couldn’t imagine any place being THAT different.” She describes Santa Rosa, her new locale, as a “funny place” with a “limited number of professional opportunities, bars, and guys to date.” Several drawings of green fields on the opening page accentuate the difference between her new and old cities. But the main element that sets apart Santa Rosa is not

the number of Jews but the ways that they relate to their Jewish identities. She explains that, although there are “some Jews here . . . and they’re my friends . . . I think that they might connect with their Judaism in a different way than me—I’ve never been in a situation where I had to feel like it made me different.” Below this textual explanation, in a set of three images, Vanessa is seen having a conversation with a friend about what it was like to grow up Jewish in California (fig. 5). Vanessa explains, “Yeah, when we were little, we just didn’t tell people we were Jewish!” Her friend replies, “That is so weird! And you guys are only half Jewish anyway so what’s the big deal?” In the third and final image tracking this dialogue, Vanessa looks annoyed and her friend sheepishly admits, “Oh my gosh. I didn’t mean it like that! I’m sorry—I’m an idiot!”

This conversation demonstrates the alienation that Vanessa experiences in her new element; she cannot hold a conversation with a friend about her Jewish identity without inadvertently (though deservedly) being perceived as offensive. Yet what this dialogue also reveals is how sharing a common Jewish identity, much like any other shared affiliation, does not necessarily or easily unite her with others. Instead, in this particular case, it becomes a fracturing entity, dividing two people presumably belonging to the same community. Visually, the comic reflects this separation between the two women as Vanessa is slowly silenced over the course of the three panels. In this situation, even though Vanessa finds herself in conversation with a Jew from the West Coast, she still feels homesick for what she calls “the ubiquity of Jewishness in East Coast culture—how lots of people seem kinda Jewish, the diversity of Jews there.” However, it is not necessarily being or identifying as Jewish that unites Vanessa with others or makes her feel comfortable around them, but, rather, a more intangible characteristic of being “kinda” Jewish—an identity that cannot easily be summed up or defined. In this way, the comic reflects the slippery nature of the term *Jewish* as



FIGURE 5. Vanessa Davis, *Make Me a Woman*.

something without an essential core, a term that is always partly dependent on the point of view of the person who uses or claims it, as well as the setting in which it is used. Vanessa's seemingly simplistic delineation of home versus not-home is revealed as insubstantial and flawed from its very inception.

In addition to articulating the somewhat arbitrary and constructed nature of identity labels—how one's individual perspective is what leads to qualifying another person as “kinda Jewish” or “only half Jewish”—this narrative comic also explores the question of individual agency in light of such identifications of self and other. Titled “Stranger in a Strange Land,” the name of the comic emphasizes Vanessa's role as the stranger who does not belong, even though she is the one composing the narrative. The name of the comic stems from a story in the biblical book of Exodus, in which Moses names one of his sons Gershom because, he explains, he has been a “stranger in a strange land,” having been banished from Egypt by Pharaoh and having thus borne his son in exile. The title of the comic therefore alludes to a person who has been forcefully exiled from his home country, unlike Vanessa, who has chosen to leave the East for the West Coast. In this way, the name of the comic, as well as the content contained within it, suggests the possibility that Vanessa's sense of rootlessness is simultaneously a chosen state and one that has been forced upon her. Additionally, in the context of the memoir as a whole, it is possible to understand her homesickness as a feeling that is not altogether new to her, but, rather, a state of being that has followed her from the East to the West Coast. Although this particular narrative comic seems to align a comforting sense of being “kinda Jewish” with those living on the East Coast, as opposed to those living on the West Coast, the earlier comics and journal entries in *Make Me a Woman* make it clear that this set of binaries (Jewish, East Coast, and home versus not Jewish, West Coast, and exile) is not as straightforward as it seems.

Early on in *Make Me a Woman*, for instance, Vanessa often has the sense of being an outsider or different from others. She encounters this feeling of marginality both as a member of a tight-knit Jewish community and, later, as one who has moved outside that community. In “Modern Ritual” and “Preparation Information,” comics tracing her thoughts about Judaism just prior to her bat mitzvah, she recognizes the apprehensions she feels about her relationship to certain religious and cultural aspects of being Jewish. “Modern Ritual” begins with Vanessa explaining how she grew up “almost exclusively around Jews.” Despite her continued exposure to Jewish life and rituals, before her own bat mitzvah she finds herself experiencing “some doubts.” Her rabbi somewhat alleviates these concerns with his observation that “the Torah is full of metaphor!” and his suggestion that she take her religion less literally. Nevertheless, she continues to experience strong misgivings, as evidenced by her fainting spell on the day she practices her Torah portion in front of a cantor. Both comics end

by focusing not on religious aspects of this rite of passage, but on social and commercial traditions surrounding the bat mitzvah, like the excesses related to those having the parties. The shift from the spiritual to the material reveals the complexity of Vanessa's relationship to her Jewish identity. Her questioning stance, which in this context defines her understanding of what it means to be Jewish, is more than simply a strictly religious issue (a difficulty with believing in a monotheistic god, for example). Instead, Jewishness is, in this case, a highly stressful classification linked to the expectations of others, whether from those in her own peer group or religious representatives and authority figures. This early ambivalent response to Jewishness is one that she maintains over the course of the text and that reveals itself almost entirely through her interactions with others. It is an outlook that simultaneously encompasses her affinity with, and her separation from, a consistent or communal notion of what it means to be Jewish or to identify as Jewish.

Several years after her bat mitzvah experience, Vanessa finds herself having switched from a private, Jewish day school to a public school. As with her move from the East Coast to California, the change in environments leaves her with conflicted feelings. On the one hand, as she recounts in the narrative comic "Dyspeptic Academic," she finds a resemblance between these two communities in the fact that "at both schools I was ensconced in a small, tightly-knit community, where we were told we were special." In that sense, her desire to belong is appeased in both of these early educational environments. On the other hand, it is through her exposure to public school, and the opinions of those who are not part of her early, religious community, that she recognizes how much she is concurrently connected to and distanced from that earlier affiliation. In one scene from the same comic, she argues with her public school social studies teacher about a map of Israel that marks the West Bank and Gaza Strip as disputed territories. "No it isn't! Israel won it in the Six-Day war!!" she argues. Several panels later, in a conversation with a public school peer who likens the "situation in Gaza" to "ethnic cleansing," Vanessa, pictured with a scowl on her face, thinks to herself, "What do I even know about anything anymore!" These two incidents highlight the confusion that she undergoes in hearing, possibly for the first time in her life, opinions about Israel that question what she once thought she understood. At the same time, she experiences an equal discomfort in a dialogue that she depicts between herself and a peer from her Jewish day school after she has left that school. As her childhood friend talks about the religious persecution of the Jews and how, as a result, they too deserve affirmative action, Vanessa counters, "Jews weren't brought here as slaves and then terrorized for 100 years after!" The distance that Vanessa experiences from her childhood peer reflects her aversion to the view of Jews as victims or as a persecuted minority in modern-day America. As these two conversations, set side by side on the page, disclose, in

interactions with others in both public and private school, Vanessa finds herself sounding out the voice of a questioning minority, presenting an alternative point of view to one who might not otherwise be exposed to such an opinion. Her status in both of these communities is, in this way, strongly defined by her ability to question, and oftentimes reject, the majority by offering a unique perspective. Even in the context of being at “home,” then, Vanessa is not necessarily always an insider, just as in situations that impart to her a sense of homesickness, she is not necessarily always an outsider.

As revealed in these early comics in *Make Me a Woman*, Vanessa’s Jewish identity surfaces most often at the moments that she confronts and interrogates the opinions and expectations of those around her. Regardless of their affiliations, she is most “Jewish” when she engages with others in dialogues that allow her to express her differing opinions or that lead her to moments of internal crisis about the status of her own points of view. In each of these encounters, she experiences a kind of satisfaction from voicing (or merely thinking) her oppositional viewpoints, even though the conversations generally lead her into further lines of inquiry regarding her own identity instead of presenting her with any definitive answers. These earlier encounters differ from the conversation that she has with the woman who describes her as “half Jewish” in the later comic “Stranger in a Strange Land.” This comic ends with the friend apologizing for her comment, and in this scenario it is Vanessa who stands as the minority or outsider, as the one challenged by a majority (in this case Jewish). The idea that someone is Jewish only if she was born to a Jewish mother is a belief that is often expressed in more conservative or orthodox religious Jewish communities, like the one of Vanessa’s private school upbringing, as the result of a religious statute.³⁹ Yet for Vanessa, whose own experiences have revealed to her the myriad ways that a person can be Jewish, this utterance reveals an ignorance and insensitivity to the importance of allowing others to take charge over their own identities, and to question the dominant opinion.

Beneath the conversation where she is called “only half-Jewish,” the comic “Stranger in a Strange Land” ends with Vanessa sheepishly, and somewhat reluctantly, accepting the reality of her new home, as open-ended and confusing as that reality feels. She narrates, “Oh, well. I moved here partly to get away from East Coast sensibilities and values. Isn’t homesickness just part of self-exile? Isn’t it a Jewish legacy to not fit in really anywhere? Isn’t it always that you can take the girl out of Brooklyn, but not Brooklyn out of the girl?” The open-ended questions link this comic to Vanessa’s earlier childhood comics in which questions were posed but never fully answered. Under this set of questions are three consecutive images of Vanessa sitting in bed with Philip Roth’s famous novel, *Portnoy’s Complaint* (fig. 6).⁴⁰ In the first image, Vanessa enjoys the novel, as illustrated by her entertained facial expression and speech bubble,

“Ha!” In the second image, Vanessa looks annoyed, her eyes rolling upward instead of focused on the novel. In the final image, Vanessa is asleep, one of her hands still touching the book and the other clasped at her side. This series of drawings prompts a connection between Vanessa’s reactions to a touchstone of contemporary Jewish American literature and her feelings of rootlessness in relation to her Jewish identity. It unites Vanessa’s sense of exile in California with her experience of being a Jewish woman whose image has already been narrowly written and established in the mainstream canon of Jewish American literature. The comic links the experience of being stigmatized with the experience of having been part of a stigmatized collective. “Self-exile” is therefore a state of having lost sensitivity to the porousness of categorizations, to the way that naming someone else is a way of asserting power and taking away that person’s authority over her own identity. Vanessa significantly points to her location as a state of “self-exile” and not exile, thereby taking responsibility for the ways that she has imagined Jewish identity, for herself and others. Self-exile is a matter of perception. It is a state of forgetting, and of having to be reminded, of one’s complex relationship to belonging in any defining category.

The images of Vanessa reading *Portnoy’s Complaint* additionally link this forgetfulness to Vanessa’s own experience of reading other imagined Jewish identities in acclaimed works of literature that supposedly represent universal experiences of what it means to be Jewish. Much has been written about images of women that have emerged from a Jewish American literature (or, at least, from a publicly visible “canon”) that is, too often, based in a misogynistic viewpoint that stereotypes Jewish women. In *Fighting to Become Americans*, Riv-Ellen Prell argues that the fracturing that occurs within minority groups, as between Jewish men and women, often reveals the dynamic of the group



FIGURE 6. Vanessa Davis, *Make Me a Woman*.

as a whole as it does or does not fit into larger society.⁴¹ She writes, “One is not simply in or out of a group, assimilated or merely acculturated. Rather, relations between members of the minority group continue to mirror relations between the minority and majority groups.”⁴² The way that many Jewish men have depicted Jewish women over time is a reflection of the way mainstream American culture has generally perceived and interacted with Jews. In her introduction to *Talking Back*, Joyce Antler additionally chronicles the stereotypes that Jewish men have created of Jewish women: the “Yiddishe Mama, the Jewish Mother, and the Jewish American Princess.”⁴³ Antler argues, “Such contradictory images of Jewish women—domineering and vulnerable, manipulative and quiescent, alluring and unattractive—highlight the impressive yet threatening aspects of Jewish women’s roles and their power.”⁴⁴ Both Antler and Prell’s books trace the ways that Jewish American women, especially since the second wave of the feminist movement, have responded to such representations in their own art and writings. Prell, for example, discusses 1970s feminist novels as counter-representations to earlier depictions of the Jewish woman’s body, as well as 1990s “talk back art,” which “envision a Jewishness that does not depend upon the consuming woman as an icon.”⁴⁵

Davis’s representation of Vanessa in bed reading Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint* is also a response to such earlier representations of Jewish women. However, unlike other “talk back art,” Davis’s work is not primarily focused on looking *back* at stereotypical representations of Jewish women. Instead, as the comic “Stranger in a Strange Land” demonstrates, Davis’s exploration of stereotypes begins with the very personal question of what it means to be an artist engaging in acts of representation that involve the danger of oversimplifying the subject at hand, whether that subject is the self or an other. The comic begins with Vanessa talking to a friend about a column that she has been hired to write for *Nextbook*—a conversational tidbit that emphasizes Vanessa’s controlling status as artist and creator.⁴⁶ At other points of this same comic, Vanessa recounts conversations with people that reflect her own propensity to categorize others, as well as her struggle to understand this inclination. In another set of panels, she somewhat apologetically e-mails an old Israeli lover to tell him that the film *You Don’t Mess with the Zohan* reminded her of him.⁴⁷ In his response, he tells her, “An obnoxious reason indeed! It’s like if I told you I saw some dumb American girl at McDonald’s doing her stupid American thing, and thought of you!” By including Vanessa’s own personal experiences not just with stereotyping other Jewish women, but also with being stereotyped by Jewish men, Davis’s comics reveal the porousness between those on the inside of a particular community and those on the outside, between those who have been stereotyped and those who stereotype. Her work thus both responds to and creates anew representations of identity across various communities, as her comics engage with and account for

her own artistic imagination in the present as much as they do with influences from the past that continue to affect her artistic choices and enterprises.

The images pictured at the end of the comic, of Vanessa reading Roth's novel, are an epilogue to the narrative, reflecting a complicated response to stereotypical depictions of Jewish women in American literature and art. Significantly, in the first image in this series of three, Vanessa finds enjoyment in the book—an important acknowledgment that although Jewish women as depicted in Roth's novels in many ways hurt Jewish women's perceptions of themselves (not to mention Jewish men's perception of *themselves*), they also contribute to a persistently influential cultural celebration of Jewishness in America, however flawed and contradictory that celebration. As Davis has argued, "*Portnoy's Complaint* was important—those depictions had never been put out there, that Jewish voice was important to hear, for so many reasons."⁴⁸ The central panel picturing Vanessa grimacing at the novel reflects more typical and public feminist responses to the works of Roth, not to mention reactions to other important Jewish American male literary figures (as well as comedians) from the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁹ Yet, this image is followed by a final one that is perhaps unique to a generation of Jewish women coming of age in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, whose relationship to feminism differs from the generations before them. In this third image, Vanessa has fallen asleep, and drool emerges from the corner of her mouth. One of her hands still clutches the book, but the other is aimed away from it. The connection to the past is still there, in traces, but the post-assimilated Jewish woman artist, as depicted here, in a sense has moved forward; she is fully engaged in an imaginary dreamworld that still barely grasps at what ostensibly put her to sleep.

These images, presented as a series with no panels dividing the individual pictures, are visually linked to the set of images representing Vanessa in conversation with her friend. By including these two sets of panels in the same narrative about homelessness and self-exile, Davis's work connects the violence of publicly feeling exiled from one's own identity with the private, everyday interactions that often lead a member of a group to marginalize another within that group. That Vanessa presents her reaction to Roth's novel in the very private space of her bed—her individualized heart-covered pillows propping her up—suggests an inevitable muddling of public and private spaces when it comes to self-perception. Homesickness is therefore a state of feeling like an outsider at "home," as much as it is a state of feeling like an outsider far away from "home." It is recognition that the notion of home, in itself, like identity, is a concept that changes over time, and that also holds many sometimes contradictory meanings within the same present. In the end, in Davis's memoir, self-creation is simultaneously cast as self-exile: even as the

artist literally composes and recomposes herself, she is never any closer to forming a complete image or understanding of her personhood as a single, chronological entity. Instead, the very process of composition, of piecing the self, line by line, on the page, is where the artist can finally find and claim a space of belonging.

NOTES

I would like to thank Vanessa Davis for giving me permission to include her images in this essay. Please note that some of these images are in full color in the original text. For their valuable comments on previous drafts, I would also like to thank Nancy K. Miller, Yevgenia Traps, Jonathan Waldauer, and an anonymous reader. Finally, this paper was made possible in part with the help of a Goldie and David Blanksteen Fellowship in Jewish Studies from The Graduate Center at CUNY.

1. Gillian Whitlock and Anna Poletti, "Self-Regarding Art," *Biography* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2008), v.
2. *Ibid.*, vii.
3. *Ibid.*, xv.
4. For more on her delineation of the narrator in memoir writing as a "persona," see Vivian Gornick's *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), and esp. 3–26.
5. Vanessa Davis, *Make Me a Woman* (Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2010). Prior to *Make Me a Woman*, Davis had one other collected work of mostly diary comics, entitled *Spaniel Rage* (Oakland: Buenaventura Press, 2005). Interestingly, in this work, there is almost no overt recognition of Davis's Jewish identity.
6. In this essay, I use the phrase "narrative comics" to describe the often already published comics that Davis includes in the text. I use this term to differentiate these pieces from Davis's diary comics, which are generally marked with dates, and her one- or two-page sketches, which do not include any text.
7. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovaney-Chevallier (New York: First Vintage Books, 2011), 283.
8. Vanessa Davis, interview by Sasha Watson, "Vanessa Davis Keeps It Complicated," *Publishers Weekly Online*, Sept. 7, 2010, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/book-news/comics/article/44386-vanessa-davis-keeps-it-complicated.html>.
9. Many of the narrative comics included in *Make Me a Woman* were originally written for and published by the online daily magazine *Tablet: A New Read on Jewish Life*, between 2007 and 2010.
10. Two of the most well-known contemporary cartoonists whose works explore stereotypes of Jewish American women are Diane Noomin and Aline Kominsky Crumb. For more on Jewish identity in Kominsky Crumb's comics, see my article, "Visualizing the Jewish Body in Aline Kominsky Crumb's *Need More Love*," *Studies in Comics* 1, no. 2 (Nov. 2010): 213–32, as well as Federica Clementi's "The JAP, the Yenta, and the Mame in Aline Kominsky Crumb's Graphic Imagination," *The Journal*

- of *Graphic Novels and Comics* (June 2012): 1–23. The visual artist Deborah Kass's Jewish Jackie series is also representative of art that engages in visual stereotypes as part of an exploration of contemporary Jewish women's identities.
11. In Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), the authors categorize various types of popular memoirs. Among these, they describe "narratives of family," which include narratives of discovery, reaffiliation, or disaffiliation. See esp. chap. 5, "In the Wake of the Memoir Boom," 127–65.
 12. The cartoonist Will Eisner has discussed the connections between color and tone in his works. For example, in an interview about his sepia-colored *A Contract with God* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), he explained, "It was the only way of introducing color in a way that gave the book a tone. I felt it developed an intimacy between me and the reader, as if we were talking in hushed tones." See Will Eisner, interview by Frank Miller, "The Walk Through the Rain: Excerpt from *Eisner/Miller*," in *The Best American Comics Criticism*, ed. Ben Schwartz (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2010), 86. Eisner and Scott McCloud agree that black-and-white comics demand closer, more careful readings, whereas comics drawn in colors call attention to the text as surface. For more on the topic, see McCloud's "A Word About Color." in *Understanding Comics* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 185–92.
 13. The entire text of *Make Me a Woman* does not include page numbers, a formal omission that adds to the sense of timelessness in the way that identity gets figured, again and again, in the present, as though each time it is being (re)made anew.
 14. Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 5. For more on the history of the term "graphic novel," its relation to the history of the format of comics, and the reception of comics by the public, see chap. 1 in *Alternative Comics*, "Comix, Comic Shops, and the Rise of Alternative Comics, Post 1968," 3–31.
 15. To differentiate between the author and her persona, who share the same name, I will refer to Davis's persona on the page as "Vanessa," while the full name "Davis" or "Vanessa Davis" will refer to the cartoonist herself.
 16. The exception is an image on the page succeeding the short comic, "Make Me a Woman," and preceding the slightly longer comic, "Big Fun," of a young woman wearing a Hard Rock Café tee-shirt and doing sit ups. Since the subsequent comic is about Vanessa's experiences at "Fat Camp," the image prefigures the narrative that follows.
 17. Davis's interest in fashion—and her understanding of it as potentially both a political tool and a means of subjugation—comes across in the narrative comic, "Money Can't Buy Jappiness." She was also the illustrator of a book written by Leora Tanenbaum, entitled *Bad Shoes & the Women Who Love Them* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2010). The book is something of a nonacademic sociocultural history of women's shoes. As Tanenbaum explains in her introduction to *Bad Shoes* (7), "My fervent hope is that when you finish reading this book, you will choose to reduce the amount of time you spend standing and walking in [high heels]."

18. Hillary Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 104.
19. Chute's analysis of *Naked Ladies!* is part of a full-chapter discussion of Barry's works, and especially *One Hundred Demons* (Seattle, WA: Sasquatch books, 2002). For more, see esp. chap. 3 of *Graphic Women*, "Materializing Memory: Lynda Barry's *One Hundred Demons*," 95–134.
20. Chute, *Graphic Women*, 104, 105.
21. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, introduction their edited volume *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 10.
22. In contemporary theoretical discourse about nationalism and transnationalism, the term "imaginary community" has come to refer to a group of people who affiliate with one another and assume certain commonalities even though every individual is not known to every other individual. See Benedict Anderson's introduction to *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2003), 1–7. In the case of Davis's drawn women, I mean "imagined" in both Anderson's sense of an established community based on a shared construct – like the imagined communities of "women" or "Jews" or "Americans" in general—but also "imagined" in the sense of the made up, or imaginary.
23. Since there are no clearly defined boundaries between Davis's panels, my reading of the "following" panel as the one just under the first is my own interpretation. While the page generally suggests this particular sequence, as it is chronologically sound, one might also read the comic from left to right in three segments going down the page. This "alternative" reading is especially likely upon the reader's first encounter with the page, since most English-speaking comics are meant to be read from left to right.
24. *The Wonder Years* was a popular and acclaimed television show that aired from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. The show followed a man recalling his coming-of-age in a middle-class American suburb in the 1960s.
25. For a thoughtful reading of how works of contemporary Jewish American literature gage Jewishness not only in relation to non-Jews, but also intra-ethnically, see Helene Meyers's *Identity Papers: Contemporary Narratives of American Jewishness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).
26. Stuart Charmé, "Jewish Identities in Action: An Exploration of Models, Metaphors, and Methods," with Tali Hyman, Jeffrey Kress, and Bethamie Horowitz, *Journal of Jewish Education* 74, no. 2 (2008): 117–23. I would like to thank Lois Elinoff Rubin for bringing my attention to this article. For a genealogy and further explication of such anti-essentialist readings of Jewish identity, see *Mapping Jewish Identities*, edited by Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: New York University Press, 2000), and esp. his chapter, "Mapping, Not Tracing: Opening Reflection," 1–36. Silberstein's approach to Jewish identity through the metaphor of mapping connects it also with recent feminist scholarship, such as Susan Stanford Friedman's *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).
27. Charmé, "Jewish Identities in Action," 117.

28. Ibid., 119. Italics in the original.
29. Ibid., 122.
30. Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 66.
31. While some take issue with McCloud's oversimplified formulation of the gutter, scholars generally agree that it plays a fundamental role in the medium's workings.
32. Vanessa Davis, interview by Chris Mautner, "A Womanly Chat with Vanessa Davis," *Robot 6*, July 23, 2010, <http://robot6.comicbookresources.com/2010/07/sdcc-10-an-interview-with-vanessa-davis/>.
33. These full-colored journal sketches were published in 2006 in the comics anthology, *Kramers Ergot #6*, published by Buenaventura Press. Their inclusion in this anthology, which includes mostly full-colored comics, might also explain why these particular journal comics were so carefully colored.
34. Janet Handler Burstein, "Recalling 'Home' from Beneath the Shadow of the Holocaust: American Jewish Women Writers of the New Wave," in *You Should See Yourself: Jewish Identity in Postmodern American Culture*, ed. Vincent Brook (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 37–54.
35. Ibid., 39. Sylvia Barack Fishman similarly argues that "fiction by American Jewish female writers in the second half of the twentieth century often depicts women remembering their past." See Fishman's "'The Girl I Was': The Construction of Memory in Fiction by American Jewish Women," in *Gender, Place and Memory in the Modern Jewish Experience: Re-placing Ourselves*, ed. Judith Tydor Baumel and Tova Cohen (London: Valentine and Mitchell, 2003), 145.
36. Burstein, "Recalling 'Home,'" 43.
37. Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 18.
38. Ibid., 18, 20.
39. According to the Mishna, the first religious document to assemble the Jewish oral tradition, a person is only considered a Jew if she has been born to a Jewish mother or if she has converted to Judaism.
40. Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
41. Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble Between Jewish Women and Jewish Men* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).
42. Ibid., 20.
43. Joyce Antler, introduction to her edited volume *Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 1. See also Antler's *You Never Call! You Never Write!* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). In this more recent work, she provides a thorough history and analysis of stereotypes of the Jewish American mother, from the early 1900s to contemporary times, as well as feminist and postmodern responses to such stereotypes.
44. Antler, introduction to *Talking Back* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 1.
45. Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans*, 242.
46. *Nextbook* is the name of the nonprofit organization that runs *Nextbook Press* as well as *Tablet Magazine*.

47. *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* is a 2008 American comedy starring Adam Sandler, who plays an Israeli soldier who has left his life combating terrorism to become a hairdresser in New York City. The film is overloaded with satirical stereotypes of Israelis, not to mention Jews and Arab Americans.
48. E-mail message to author, Nov. 16, 2010. For a full-length interview based on these and other email exchanges, see Vanessa Davis, interview by Tahneer Oksman, "In Search of the Whole Truth: An Interview with Vanessa Davis," *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, first published online Aug. 20, 2012 (print version forthcoming), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21504857.2012.703961>.
49. For more on the birth of the Jewish woman as "comic monster," see chap. 4, "From Marjorie Morningstar to Jennie Grossinger: The Suburbs, the Catskills, and the Jewish Mother Joke," and chap. 5, "'American Mother of the Year' Versus Monster Mothers: Will the Real Sophie Portnoy Please Stand Up?" of Antler's *You Never Call!* 100–47.

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