The Impact of Feminism on American Jewish Life

by SYLVIA BARACK FISHMAN

Introduction

THE LIVES OF JEWS in the United States—like the lives of most Americans—have been radically transformed by 20 years of feminism. Some of these changes have been effected by the larger feminist movement and some by a specifically Jewish feminist effort. Thus, while many feminist celebrities, such as Betty Friedan and Bella Abzug, are Jews, the focus of their feminism has not been specifically Jewish in nature; they have profoundly changed the behavior and attitudes of American Jews as Americans and not as Jews. Pioneers of the contemporary Jewish feminist movement, on the other hand—women such as Rachel Adler, Paula Hyman, and Aviva Cantor—are primarily recognizable within the Jewish sphere. They and many other Jewish feminists have significantly altered the character of Jewish religious, intellectual, cultural, and communal life in the United States.

In the stormy late 1960s and early 1970s, when the rising stars of contemporary American feminism were publicly denounced from synagogue pulpits as aberrant and destructive, feminist attitudes and goals seemed revolutionary. Today, however, many general feminist and Jewish feminist attitudes and goals have been absorbed and domesticated within the public lives of mainstream American Jewry. Female rabbis and cantors have been trained, ordained, and graduated from Reform, Reconstructionist, and now Conservative seminaries, and are becoming accepted as part of the American Jewish religious scene. Life-cycle events for females, such as the *"Shalom Bat"* and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, are commonplace. Women's organizations which a short time ago expressed ambivalence about the impact of feminism on their ranks now officially espouse feminist goals.[1]

[1]The Women's Division of the Council of Jewish Federations, for example, a group which seems to epitomize commitment to establishment values and communal survival, featured a number of feminist figures at its 1987 General Assembly in Miami. Enthusiastically calling themselves "feminists," officers of the Women's Division gave a platform to Amira Dotan, an Israeli female brigadier general; Alice Shalvi, founder of the Israel Women's Network; Susan Weidman Schneider, editor of *Lilith* magazine; and other highly identified feminists.

In their private lives as well, American Jews demonstrate the impact of feminism. American Jewish women, historically a highly educated group, are even more highly educated today. Moreover, their educational achievements are by and large directed into occupational goals, rather than following the open-ended liberal arts and sciences mode that typified female higher education in the 1950s and 1960s. Partially because they are pursuing educational and career objectives, American Jewish women today marry later and bear children later than they did 25 years ago, and they are far more likely than married Jewish women in the past to continue working outside the home after they marry and bear children. The late-forming, dual-career family has become the norm in many American Jewish communities.

At the same time that feminism has become a mainstream phenomenon, important feminists have pulled back from the radicalism of their original positions. Most celebrated, perhaps, is Betty Friedan, who in *The Second Stage*[2] reevaluated family and voluntaristic activity as desirable goals for women. Many feminists have responded to the anti-Jewish bias of some strands of feminism not only with articulate denunciations but also with personal rediscovery of, and commitment to, more intensive Jewish experience, as Letty Cottin Pogrebrin, editor of *Ms.* magazine testifies.[3] A number of recent appealing novels about strong, intelligent, accomplished—and yet passionate and vulnerable—Jewish women have also helped to deradicalize the face of Jewish feminism. Indeed, left-wing militant feminists have angrily denounced this mainstreaming of feminism with the claim that bourgeois hierarchies have coopted the movement.

The gap between establishment American Judaism and contemporary American feminism seems to have narrowed. A quasi-feminist stance appears to be *de rigueur* in large parts of the American Jewish community. However, the extent of substantive influence exerted by both general and Jewish feminism on American Jewish communal, organizational, religious, and familial life has yet to be examined. It is the purpose of this article to survey the impact of both types of feminism on key spheres of American Jewish life.

It is important to note at the outset that neither general nor Jewish feminism was created in a vacuum and neither exerts its influence in a vacuum; factors other than feminism have also been at work in effecting transformations. Feminist emphasis on career achievement and individual fulfillment is part of a general cultural focus on the individual, rather than on familial or communal values. Feminist critiques of religious texts, in-

[2]Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (New York, 1981).

[3]Letty Cottin Pogrebin, "Anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement: A Jewish Feminist's Disturbing Account," *Ms.*, June 1982, pp. 145–49.

cluding Jewish feminist critiques, are an outgrowth of earlier historical, political, economic, and psychological critiques of those texts by biblical and rabbinic scholars. Jewish feminist attempts to create new rituals and new prayers surely have been encouraged by the countercultural, hands-on approach to religious experience epitomized by the successive *Jewish Catalogs*, three compendia of "how-to" information about Judaism and Jewish living. Jewish feminist efforts to change Jewish law reflect a religious environment in which, except for traditional Conservative and Orthodox Jews—a small minority among Jews in the United States—Jewish legal systems are not regarded as sacred and immutable. Feminist attacks on voluntarism take place in a context in which the great majority of both men and women are disinclined to volunteer. Thus, while general and Jewish feminism have certainly contributed to the transformation of certain Jewish societal norms and values, they have done so as part of a larger constellation of cultural patterns. Therefore, this article will briefly indicate, where appropriate, additional movements and trends contributing to alterations on the American Jewish scene that are sometimes wrongly ascribed to feminism alone.

The primary focus in this article will be a discussion and assessment of the impact of both general American and Jewish feminism on demographic, religious, and organizational spheres of American Jewish life. Source materials used for these sections include: statistical data from population studies of several Jewish communities; published and unpublished studies on particular segments of the Jewish population; analytical works (both books and journal articles) that explore relevant aspects of American Jewish life; and articles in the popular press.[4]

In order to analyze the impact of feminism, feminist attitudes and goals must first be defined. We therefore begin with a brief review of the framework of contemporary American feminism and Jewish feminism.

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[4]Much of the information in this study, both statistical data and literature, was gathered under the auspices of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. The author gratefully acknowledges both the Center facilities and the assistance of colleagues. The archival resources of the Center, made available through Prof. Marshall Sklare, were invaluable. Lawrence Sternberg, Center associate director, Prof. Gary Tobin, Center director, and Sylvia Fuks Fried, assistant director of Brandeis's Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry, reviewed the manuscript and made helpful suggestions; Dr. Mordecai Rimor, research associate, Gabriel Berger, research fellow, and Miriam Hertz, graduate student, helped gather statistical data; Dr. Paula Rhodes served as a student research assistant; and Sylvia Riese expedited the preparation of the manuscript. I am also grateful to several feminists and scholars whose generous assistance in discussing issues in this study was invaluable: Arlene Agus, Prof. Louis Dickstein, Rosalie Katchen, Prof. Debra Renee Kaufman, Prof. Egon Mayer, Prof. Jonathan Sarna, Prof. Nahum Sarna, Rabbi Sanford Seltzer, and Prof. Ellen Umansky.

CONTEMPORARY FEMINISM

The American Feminist Movement

Contemporary American feminism was born in an environment that nurtured utopian movements. Aiming to correct discrimination against women in both public and private realms, this feminism grew out of other protest movements in the 1960s: the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, and the general antiestablishment, antimaterialistic spirit of the age. However, feminism was a reaction to, as well as an outgrowth of, other protest movements. Disillusioned with the misogyny rampant among many male leaders of the protest movements, women protest participants came to the conclusion that they too were an oppressed group, perhaps the most universally oppressed group of all.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*[5] became an early bible of the movement. Friedan's book faulted the American dream, which posited that every woman's ideal fulfillment came in the form of a nuclear family in the suburbs: working father, homemaker mother, several children, perhaps a pet or two, in a single-family house (complete with appliances) in a green residential area with a station wagon in the driveway. Such a life-style, charged Friedan, trapped women in a gilded but deadly cage in which they became unpaid household workers and chauffeurs, cut off from meaningful work, intellectual stimulation, and personal development.

Friedan argued that the "feminine mystique" was based on the assumption that women were emotionally and intellectually unsuited for the brutal environment of labor-force participation and independent life. Even when they studied in universities, women were geared toward personal refinements rather than career preparation. Deprived of occupational skills and confidence in their ability to live independently, Friedan suggested, women evaluated themselves primarily in terms of their physical beauty and their housekeeping and hostessing skills. Removed from the graduated evaluations of the marketplace, they measured themselves against a standard of absolute perfection, and always came up lacking. Thus, rather than insuring women a life of fulfillment and serenity, the "feminine mystique" guaranteed women a life of emptiness and frustration. Furthermore, the seemingly idyllic, normative American family unit could be disrupted without warning, through death or divorce, leaving the bereaved wife without necessary occupational skills and without the confidence to face the world as an independent adult.

For many feminists, the family—long women's *raison d'être*—became

[5]Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1963; 20th anniversary ed., 1983).

the enemy. The patriarchal family was pictured as a repressive cultural institution which served to restrict women to the domestic domain. As Gloria Steinem explained, the "demystified" origin and purpose of marriage was "to restrict the freedom of the mother—at least long enough to determine paternity." Men promoted religious and societal restrictions of female sexuality so that they might control "the most basic means of production—the means of reproduction."[6] Shulamith Firestone found even gestation and childbirth a barbarous process that served no useful purpose except to enslave women.[7]

Numerous articles and books explored contemporary feminist issues. A wide variety of organizational subgroups formed, with the purpose of translating feminist insights into social change. The largest, the National Organization of Women (NOW), concentrated on economic issues, such as promoting legislation to prevent discrimination against women in the marketplace through the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Other groups, such as Women Against Pornography, called attention to, and actively opposed, pornographic literature and films, which they characterized as hostile to women; they worked to reduce rape and other overt violence against women, sponsoring marches to "Take Back the Night." Smaller, more extreme groups, such as the Society for Cutting Up Men (SCUM) and No More Nice Girls, were openly antimale, recommending either independent or lesbian life-styles. Together, these feminist groups comprised a movement devoted to nothing less than the radical transformation of the position of women in the United States.

Jewish Feminism

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a feminist movement with a specifically Jewish focus became distinct from generalized feminism. Jewish women began to examine the inequities and forms of oppression in Jewish life and, at the same time, to explore Judaism as a culture and religion from a feminist perspective. The critique of Judaism came from various quarters and focused on a range of issues. Some of these actually paralleled the broader feminist agenda; others addressed specific Jewish concerns. In the former category were attacks on Judaism for its part in relegating women to inferior status and to narrowly prescribed roles, at home and in the wider world. These attacks were often voiced by early activists in the general feminist movement, who also happened to be Jews. Thus, Vivian Gornick,

[6]Gloria Steinem, "Humanism and the Second Wave of Feminism," *The Humanist,* May/June 1987, pp. 11–15, 49.

[7]Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York, 1971).

in an article entitled "Woman as Outsider," characterized traditional Jewish relationships between the sexes as hateful and repressive, in a description that was fairly representative of certain strands within feminist thought:

> In the fierce unjoyousness of Hebraism, especially, woman is a living symbol of the obstacles God puts in man's way as man strives to make himself more godly and less manly. . . .These structures are not a thing of some barbaric past, they are a living part of the detail of many contemporary lives. Today, on the Lower East Side of New York, the streets are filled with darkly brooding men whose eyes are averted from the faces of passing women, and who walk three feet ahead of their bewigged and silent wives. If a woman should enter a rabbinical study on Grand Street today, her direct gaze would be met by lowered eyelids; she would stand before the holy man, the seeker of wisdom, the worshipper of the spirit, and she would have to say to herself:
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> Why, in this room I am a pariah, a Yahoo. If the rabbi should but look upon my face, vile hot desire would enter his being and endanger the salvation of his sacred soul. . . .So he has made a bargain with God and constructed a religion in which I am all matter and *he* is all spirit. I am (yet!) the human sacrifice offered up for his salvation.[8]

Jewish family values were denounced, with the family depicted as a woman's prison, echoing views expressed in the general feminist movement. Jewish communal attitudes came under attack as well. The female volunteer, in particular, was denigrated as a mere pawn, an unpaid slave laborer who made it possible for paid male organizational employees to achieve their goals.[9] Not only did male communal professionals exploit the labor of female volunteers, feminists charged, but even male volunteers were culpable: male, but not female, volunteers had the opportunity to rise through the ranks to decision-making positions of prestige and power, while women were contained in low-ranking, powerless organizational ghettos.[10] Furthermore, those women who did enter Jewish communal work professionally were kept in the most subordinate, least lucrative slots, while male Jewish communal professionals rose into executive posts.

The religious realm gave rise to a number of specifically Jewish issues. Jewish divorce law, for example, and women's role in communal worship were two that received wide public attention. To Jewish feminists, they exemplified women's unequal status and cried out for immediate correction. Involvement with these pressing matters was accompanied by, and some-

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[8]Vivian Gornick, "Woman as Outsider," *Women in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York, 1971), pp. 70–84.

[9]See, for example, Doris B. Gold, "Women and Voluntarism," in Gornick and Moran, eds., *Women in Sexist Society*, pp. 384–400; Paula Hyman, "The Volunteer Organizations: Vanguard or Rear Guard?" *Lilith*, no. 5, 1978, pp. 17–22; and Amy Stone, "The Locked Cabinet," *Lilith*, no. 2, Winter 1976–77, pp. 17–21.

[10]Aviva Cantor, "The Missing Ingredients—Power and Influence in the Jewish Community," *Present Tense*, Spring 1984, pp. 8–12.

times evolved into, deeper and broader consideration of women's place in Jewish history, law, and culture, past and present.

The growth of the Jewish feminist movement was aided by certain developments in the broader society.

The period of the late 1960s and early 1970s was one in which Jewish consciousness and pride were at a high in certain circles—particularly on college campuses—and in which challenges to authority were the norm among American middle-class young adults, especially among Jewish youth. Educated young Jews were actively exploring and challenging their heritage—but Jewish women found that their particular concerns were not being adequately addressed. Articles began to appear by women who were fluent in Jewish source materials, addressing specifically Jewish problems from a feminist perspective. Two early articles that sparked Jewish feminist thought were Trude Weiss-Rosmarin's "The Unfreedom of Jewish Women,"[11] which focused on the "unfairness of Jewish marriage laws to divorced and abandoned women," and Rachel Adler's "The Jew Who Wasn't There,"[12] which contrasted male and female models of traditional Jewish piety. Adler's article appeared in a special issue of *Davka* magazine—a counterculture publication—that included a variety of feminist articles.

By late 1971, Jewish women's prayer and study groups were being formed. Women from the New York Havurah (one of the new coed, communal worship-and-study groups that developed on college campuses) joined together with like-minded friends to explore the status of women in Jewish law. Eventually this group evolved into Ezrat Nashim (a double-entendre that refers to the area in the synagogue traditionally reserved for women but that also means, literally, "the help of women"), a particularly influential, albeit small, organization. Committed to equality for women within Judaism, Ezrat Nashim comprised primarily Conservative women, many of whom had attended the Hebrew-speaking Conservative Ramah camps. Their appearance at the convention of the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly in 1972—the same year that the Reform movement voted to admit women to its rabbinical program—was an important initiating step in the process of influencing Conservative leaders to consider admitting women to the Conservative rabbinical program.[13] Jewish feminism went from a small, localized effort to a broader, more diverse operation at the first national Jewish women's conference in 1973, organized by the North Amer-

[11]Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, "The Unfreedom of Jewish Women," *Jewish Spectator,* Oct. 1970, pp. 2–6.

[12]Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There," *Davka*, Summer 1971, pp. 6–11.

[13]Steven Martin Cohen, "American Jewish Feminism: A Study in Conflicts and Compromises," *American Behavioral Scientist,* Mar.-Apr. 1980, pp. 519–58.

ican Jewish Students' Network. Drawing more than 500 women of varied educational levels and religious backgrounds from throughout North America, the conference spawned new groups, regional and local conferences, and a National Women's Speakers' Bureau.[14]

The ideas and issues percolating within the formative Jewish feminist movement were published and widely circulated in a special issue of *Response* magazine, called *The Jewish Woman: An Anthology*.[15] Edited by Elizabeth Koltun, the 192-page issue included 30 articles and a bibliography. Many of the authors contributing to this issue became key figures in Jewish feminism: Judith Hauptman (Talmud), Paula Hyman and Judith Plaskow Goldenberg (women in rabbinic literature and law), Martha Ackelsberg (religious and social change), Aviva Cantor Zuckoff and Jacqueline K. Levine (communal issues), Marcia Falk (biblical poetics), Charlotte Baum (American Jewish history), Rachel Adler (women in Jewish law and culture), and others. The work was later revised for book publication by Schocken Books, and included additional articles by other Jewish feminist thinkers, among them Arlene Agus (women's rituals), Blu Greenberg (feminist exploration within a traditional context), and Sonya Michel (American Jewish literature).[16]

A second National Conference on Jewish Women and Men in 1974 also drew hundreds of participants and gave birth to the Jewish Feminist Organization (JFO), which was committed to promoting the equality of Jewish women in all areas of Jewish life. The JFO survived only a short time, however, and was succeeded by a more limited New York Jewish Women's Center, which was active from approximately 1975 to 1977.

The autumn of 1974 also saw the publication of a special issue of *Conservative Judaism*, which explored topics connected to "Women and Change in Jewish Law." Among the articles was one that became a hallmark of Jewish antifeminism. In it, psychiatrist Mortimer Ostow characterized Jewish feminism as an attempt to obliterate "the visible differences between men and women" and a possible encouragement of "trans-sexual fantasies." Even if this were not a conscious or unconscious aim of Jewish feminists, Ostow warned, the end result of fully empowering women within public Judaism would be to emasculate Jewish men, producing a society where women dominated the synagogue but suffered frustration in the bedroom as a result.[17] Ostow's article evoked a flood of profeminist responses from

[14]Martha Ackelsberg, "Introduction," in *The Jewish Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Elizabeth Koltun, special issue of *Response* magazine, 1973, pp. 7–9.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Elizabeth Koltun, ed., *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives* (New York, 1976).

[17]Mortimer Ostow, "Women and Change in Jewish Law," *Conservative Judaism*, Fall 1974, pp. 5–12.

both men and women, which were gathered together in a second special issue of *Conservative Judaism*, titled "Women and Change in Jewish Law: Responses to the Fall 1974 Symposium." In a detailed statement leading off the collection, Arthur Green answered Ostow's objections to Jewish feminism point by point, noting that "the gentleness of a loving mother-God might serve as a good counter-balance to the sometimes overbearing austerity of God as father, king and judge. Mother Rachel, Mother Zion, and widowed Jerusalem have done much to add to the warmth of our spiritual heritage."[18]

Although Reform Judaism had no theological barriers to the ordination of women, it was not until 1972 that the first female Reform rabbi, Sally Priesand, was ordained. It would be another decade before the first female Conservative rabbi, Amy Eilberg, would be ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary (in 1985) and two women would be named to tenured positions in Judaica: Paula Hyman to a chair in Jewish Studies at Yale, and Judith Hauptman as associate professor of Talmud at JTS (both in 1986).

The development and growth of Jewish feminism in the interim have been documented in a variety of publications. One striking piece of evidence for the legitimation of Jewish feminism by the Jewish intellectual and organization establishments was the appearance in the 1977 *American Jewish Year Book* of a special article, "The Movement for Equal Rights for Women in American Jewry." In this piece, Anne Lapidus Lerner captured the atmosphere of hopeful ferment that pervaded many Jewish religious and communal arenas.

A unique product of Jewish feminism is a glossy magazine, *Lilith*, which was created to explore religious, political, communal, and personal aspects of Jewish life through the eyes of Jewish feminism. The premier issue, published in 1976, featured a photograph of a woman wearing *tefillin* and an interview with Betty Friedan. Although *Lilith*, which operates on a shoestring, has appeared on a somewhat irregular basis, each issue has a wide readership, especially among highly identified Jewish women. In addition, many books and anthologies have gathered and disseminated Jewish feminist thought. Among the most comprehensive, Baum, Hyman, and Michel's *The Jewish Woman in America* [19] utilizes historical, sociological, and literary sources to trace the odyssey of Jewish women in American Jewish life. Susannah Heschel's anthology *On Being a Jewish Feminist*[20] explores and updates these issues, with a special emphasis on "creating a

[18]Arthur Green, "Women and Change in Jewish Law: Responses to the Fall 1974 Symposium," *Conservative Judaism*, Spring 1975, pp. 35–56.

[19]Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, *The Jewish Woman in America* (New York, 1976).

[20]Susannah Heschel, ed., *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader* (New York, 1983).

feminist theology of Judaism." The Biblio Press has published several extensive bibliographies listing materials relating to Jewish feminism,[21] and Susan Weidman Schneider, editor of *Lilith*, compiled a broad-based practical compendium of Jewish feminist resource materials, including hundreds of names and addresses, as well as useful summaries and discussions, in *Jewish and Female*.[22]

The growth of Jewish feminism was helped, ironically, by the presence of anti-Semitism within the ranks of the general feminist movement. The anti-Semitism emerged on several fronts. The first was political and came as a tidal wave of anti-Israel criticism at a series of international women's conferences. Listening with horror to the repeated condemnation of "Zionist oppression," Jewish participants learned that even among women they could feel like outsiders.[23]

On the religious front, some Christian feminist theologians asserted that Christianity had been ruined by Judaism, with Jewish patriarchalism sullying what would otherwise have been a purely egalitarian Christianity. Just as Protestant thinkers once blamed the Old Testament for infusing values of vengeance and carnality into Christianity, feminist theologians managed to ascribe the strikingly misogynist and antisexual attitudes of some of the Gospels to "a concession to Judaism" or "an unavoidable contamination" by "the sexism of first century Palestinian Judaism." Consequently, Jewish feminist scholars sometimes felt chastened in their approach to classical Jewish texts, in the apprehension that their critiques might "be misunderstood or even misappropriated as providing further proof to Christian feminists for their negation of Judaism."[24]

A third form of anti-Semitism sought to deny Jewish women their own sense of group identity. A professor of American history and women's studies recalls that at a conference on women's issues, which included talks on the black female experience, the Hispanic female experience, and the Irish Catholic female experience, the conference organizer insisted, "Jewish women are just white middle class women. There is nothing that differentiates them from the ruling majority. There is no reason to treat them as a specialized minority or to devote any of our time to their particular experi-

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[21]Biblio Press, Fresh Meadows, New York.

[22]Susan Weidman Schneider, *Jewish and Female: Choices and Changes in Our Lives Today* (New York, 1984).

[23]See, for example, Friedan, *The Second Stage*, pp. 162–66; Pogrebin, "Anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement"; and Annette Daum, "Anti-Semitism in the Women's Movement," *Pioneer Woman*, Sept.–Oct. 1983, pp. 11–13, 22–24.

[24]Susannah Heschel, "Current Issues in Jewish Feminist Theology," *Christian-Jewish Relations* 19, no. 2, 1986, pp. 23–32. See also Judith Plaskow, "Blaming Jews for Inventing Patriarchy," and Annette Daum, "Blaming Jews for the Death of the Goddess," *Lilith*, no. 7, 1980, pp. 11–12, 12–13.

ence." As Ellen Umansky comments, "By the early 1970s, it seemed to many that they were embraced as women but scorned as Jews." In reaction to the pressure that they either repudiate their Judaism or at least keep silent about it, Umansky notes that "many Jewish feminists, especially secular feminists, began to assert their Jewishness, vigorously, forcefully, and with pride." Jewish feminism, Umansky adds, "emerged as a means of asserting both *Jewish* visibility within the feminist movement and *feminist* consciousness within the U.S. Jewish community."[25]

The goals of Jewish feminism—as distinct from general feminism—as Cohen[26] points out, can be divided roughly into "communal" and "spiritual" areas. Although communally oriented Jewish feminists have been most interested in gaining access to seats of decision making and power, the spiritualists have worked for development in the areas of ritual, law, liturgy, and religious education. However, it should be noted that the division between religious and communal feminist agendas is not always clear, and in fact the two areas often impinge upon and affect each other.

Similarly, while the themes of contemporary American feminism and Jewish feminism are distinct, within the lives of American Jews they often overlap. Thus, a particular Jewish woman, sensitized by the ubiquitousness of feminist values in society, may work toward both occupational development and fuller participation in public Jewish prayer and ritual. Within her life, these enterprises may be linked emotionally and intellectually. The particular blend of feminism and Jewish feminism found in the United States today is a unique American hybrid, which does not exist in exactly the same form among any other contemporary Jewish population.

Feminism and Family

Probably no single aspect of feminism has aroused as much anxiety and debate as its possible impact on "the Jewish family," long regarded as the foundation of Jewish continuity and strength. Even within the Jewish feminist world, lines have been sharply drawn over this issue. At one end of the ideological spectrum, Martha Ackelsberg asserts that "the nuclear family as we know it is not, in itself, central to the continuity of Judaism: it is instead, simply one possible set of relationships through which young people may be born, nurtured, and prepared for membership in the Jewish community, and adults may find opportunities for companionship and intimacy. Once we realize that there are other means to achieve those same

[25]Ellen M. Umansky, "Females, Feminists, and Feminism: A Review of Recent Literature on Jewish Feminism and a Creation of a Feminist Judaism," *Feminist Studies* 14, Summer 1988, pp. 349–65.

[26]Cohen, "American Jewish Feminism," p. 529.

ends, and that even 'undermining the family' need not necessarily threaten Jewish survival, the path is open to think about alternatives to the nuclear family."[27] Ackelsberg urges the Jewish community to accept and encourage a number of alternative household styles. Individuals can contribute to the survival of the Jewish community through many pathways, she maintains, not only by having children. "Heterosexual nuclear families are not the only contexts in which people can or do covenant, nor are they the only units in or through which people may express love, or long-term care and commitment," Ackelsberg insists.[28]

In an exchange with Ackelsberg in *Sh'ma*, Susan Handelman disputes the claim that Jewish vitality is separable from traditional normative Jewish family life. Reaching back to Genesis, with its poignant preoccupation with matchmaking, marriage, and procreation, Handelman posits that the Jewish family was the primary and most enduring institution of Judaism. The family not only educated the young and supported Jewish institutions, it was the embodiment of Jewish values. To speak of Judaism without the primacy of the traditional Jewish family, Handelman suggests, is to commit an irreparable violence upon both the religion and the culture.[29]

Other female Jewish intellectuals are wary of feminist agendas, especially as they seem to endanger Jewish values. Thus, Marie Syrkin states that Jewish women who eschew motherhood are maiming themselves and the Jewish community. She feels they should revise their values and recognize that, on a personal level, "some forms of achievement can be gained only through the loss of a vital aspect of womanhood." On a communal level, she warns that the feminist agenda may directly conflict with the survival of the Jewish people: "Insofar as feminism liberates women from traditional roles and encourages life-styles antithetical to procreation and the fostering of the family, feminist ideology affects the Jewish future."[30]

Lucy Dawidowicz states her case against the "new Amazons . . . of women's liberation" even more firmly. She dismisses most strands of Jewish feminism as "a kind of ideological *sh'atnez*, the mixture of wool and linen prohibited in Jewish law." Unlike "Jewish women of achievement" in the past, who were "animated as much by passion to Jewish commitment as by personal ambition," she argues, most contemporary Jewish feminists "are merely an adjunct of the worldwide feminist movement." Indeed, according

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[27]Martha A. Ackelsberg, "Families and the Jewish Community: A Feminist Perspective," *Response* 14, no. 4, Spring 1985, pp. 5–19, 18.

[28]Martha A. Ackelsberg, "Family or Community? A Response," *Sh'ma*, Mar. 20, 1987.

[29]Susan Handelman, "Family: A Religiously Mandated Ideal," ibid.

[30]Marie Syrkin, "Does Feminism Clash with Jewish National Need?" *Midstream*, June/July 1985, pp. 8–12.

to Dawidowicz, "only the most Jewishly committed feminists seem even to be aware of the incompatibilities between some objectives of the feminist movement and the Jewish communal need for stability, security, and survival."[31]

The normative Jewish family may indeed be a threatened institution, but it is not threatened exclusively by feminism. Other, equally important factors include: a cultural ethos that stresses individual achievement and pleasure; materialistic expectations that elevate the perceived standard of what a "middle-class" life-style comprises; a tightening economic market requiring dual incomes to maintain middle-class life-styles; the sexual revolution; and patterns of chronological polarization that split families by sending adolescents to far-off university campuses and grandparents to the Sunbelt.

Attitudinal Change

Whether the forecasts of doom concerning the Jewish family have merit or not, only future historians will be able to assess. What is clear at this point is that, in keeping with their general well-documented tendency to hold liberal social attitudes, Jews have warmly embraced the feminist idea. In a 1985 study of Jewish and non-Jewish women, conducted by Sid Groeneman for B'nai B'rith Women, non-Jewish and Jewish women were compared on a composite scale that measured attitudes toward "feminism, or . . . the modern version of women's roles and rights." Nearly half of Jewish women surveyed scored "high" on this scale, compared to only 16 percent of non-Jewish women. Several attitudes displayed by Jewish women can be construed as indicating a major change from traditional Jewish attitudes toward the family. Thus, 60 percent or more of Jewish women disagreed with the following statements: (1) "A marriage without any children will normally be incomplete and less satisfying"; (2) "When both parents work, the children are more likely to get into trouble"; (3) "Most women are happiest when making a home and caring for children." An overwhelming 91 percent of Jewish women—compared to 56 percent of non-Jewish women—agreed that "every woman who wants an abortion ought to be able to have one."[32]

Furthermore, the goals that these Jewish women had for their daughters indicated that feminist values were being passed to the next generation.

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[31]Lucy S. Dawidowicz, "Does Judaism Need Feminism?" *Midstream,* Apr. 1986, pp. 39–40.

[32]Sid Groeneman, "Beliefs and Values of American Jewish Women," a report by Market Facts, Inc., presented to the International Organization of B'nai B'rith Women, 1985, pp. 30–31. The data were drawn from 956 questionnaires roughly divided between Jewish and non-Jewish informants. Ages of the women who completed the questionnaires were 59 percent ages 25 to 44, 41 percent ages 45 to 64. The study presents dramatic documentation of the transformation of values among American Jewish women under age 45.

Only 22 percent of Jewish women had family-oriented goals for their daughters, such as wanting their daughters to "have a good family, husband, marriage, children," or being "loving, caring, good parents." In contrast, 69 percent of Jewish women wanted their daughters to have qualities that would help them function successfully in the world, such as being "independent, self-reliant, self-sufficient, self-supportive, determined, ambitious, intelligent, knowledgeable, talented, skillful and creative."[33]

The study also found its sample of Jewish women to be far more liberal than non-Jewish women in attitudes toward premarital and extramarital sex. More than three-quarters of Jewish women said that sex before marriage was acceptable, while fewer than half of non-Jewish women approved of premarital sex. Perhaps even more startling, given Jewish religious and cultural prohibitions against adultery, 28 percent of Jewish women said they "could envision situations when sex with someone other than one's spouse is not wrong," compared to only 12 percent of the non-Jewish sample.[34]

Lesbianism remains a force in the Jewish feminist movement, as in the general feminist movement. Anne Lerner notes "the degree to which lesbianism, in particular, has become an accepted fact of life" at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.[35] Evelyn Torton Beck, in her anthology *Nice Jewish Girls*, describes the painful encounters of Jewish lesbians with anti-Semitism among lesbian feminists, but also offers testimony to the creative force and Jewish pride of some lesbian Jewish women.[36]

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN THE LIVES OF AMERICAN JEWISH WOMEN

The true impact of feminism and related social forces can be seen in the daily lives of American Jewish women, men, and children. During the past 20 years, dramatic changes have taken place in patterns of American Jewish family formation and in the educational and occupational profile of American Jews. Areas of change in the lives of American Jewish women that have been substantively influenced by feminism include later marriage and childbirth, higher levels of education and occupational achievement, and changed patterns in labor-force participation.

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[33]Ibid., pp. 38–40.

[34]Ibid., pp. 23–24.

[35]Anne Lapidus Lerner, "Judaism and Feminism: The Unfinished Agenda," *Judaism*, Spring 1987, pp. 167–73.

[36]Evelyn Torton Beck, *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (New York, 1982). See also Batya Bauman, "Women-identified Women in Male-identified Judaism," in Heschel, ed., *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, pp. 88–95.

Changes in Life-Cycle Patterns[37]

Few statistics more strikingly illustrate cultural change than the figures on marital status among American Jews (table 1). Twenty years ago the National Jewish Population Study found that four out of five American Jewish households consisted of married couples, the great majority of whom either had or expected to have two or more children. At that time, the percentage of Jewish singles was far below the percentage of singles in the general U.S. population: only 6 percent of American Jewish adults had never been married, compared to 16 percent singles in the 1970 U.S. Census data. In contrast, in the 1980s, the proportion of Jewish singles equals or exceeds that of the general population in many cities: about one-fifth of Jewish adults in most U.S. cities have never been married. Furthermore, the

[37]All nationwide figures for the American Jewish population in 1970 are derived from the National Jewish Population Study. Data from individual city studies are drawn from the following city studies completed in the 1980s, including: Gary A. Tobin, *A Demographic Study of the Jewish Community of Atlantic County* (Jan.1986); Gary A. Tobin, *Jewish Population Study of Greater Baltimore* (July 1986); Sherry Israel, *Boston's Jewish Community: The 1985 CJP Demographic Study* (May 1987); Policy Research Corporation, *Chicago Jewish Population Study* (1982); Population Research Committee, *Survey of Cleveland's Jewish Population, 1981* (1981); Allied Jewish Federation of Denver, *The Denver Jewish Population Study* (1981); Gary A. Tobin, Robert C. Levy, and Samuel H. Asher, *A Demographic Study of the Jewish Community of Greater Kansas City* (Summer 1986); Bruce A. Phillips, *Los Angeles Jewish Community Survey Overview for Regional Planning* (1980); Michael Rappeport and Gary A. Tobin, *A Population Study of the Jewish Community of MetroWest, New Jersey* (1986); Ira M. Sheskin, *Population Study of the Greater Miami Jewish Community* (1982); Bruce A. Phillips, *The Milwaukee Jewish Population Study* (1984); Lois Geer, *The Jewish Community of Greater Minneapolis 1981 Population Study* (1981); Paul Ritterband and Steven M. Cohen, *The 1981 Greater New York Jewish Population Survey* (1981); William L. Yancey and Ira Goldstein, *The Jewish Population of the Greater Philadelphia Area* (Philadelphia: Institute for Public Policy Studies, Social Science Data Library, Temple University, 1984); Bruce A. Phillips and William S. Aron, *The Greater Phoenix Jewish Population Study* (1983–1984); Jane Berkey and Saul Weisberg, United Federation of Greater Pittsburgh, *Survey of Greater Pittsburgh's Jewish Population* (1984); Gary A. Tobin and Sylvia Barack Fishman, *A Population Study of the Jewish Community of Rochester, New York* (forthcoming); Lois Geer, *1981 Population Study of the St. Paul Jewish Community* (1981); Gary A. Tobin and Sharon Sassler, *San Francisco Bay Area Population Study* (1988); Gary A. Tobin, *A Demographic and Attitudinal Study of the Jewish Community of St. Louis* (1982); Gary A. Tobin, Joseph Waksberg, and Janet Greenblatt, *A Demographic Study of the Jewish Community of Greater Washington D.C.* (1984); Gary A. Tobin and Sylvia Barack Fishman, *A Population Study of the Jewish Community of Worcester* (Sept. 1987). Percentages in this paper have been rounded from .5 to the next highest number. Data were collected through a variety of sampling methodologies to reach both affiliated and nonaffiliated Jews, with a strong emphasis on random-digit-dialing telephone interviews. Much of the data presented here is taken from published studies; in these cases the studies are cited. Some information has been taken directly from complete data files from Jewish population studies made available to the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. References to this data simply refer to the particular community.

percentage of divorced Jewish households has risen from 6 percent in 1970 to double or triple that figure in some cities. Even though the Jewish divorce rate is not higher than the national average, it is far higher than the previous Jewish divorce rate: in Boston, for example, the 5-percent divorce rate of 1985 is five times higher than the 1965 divorce rate of 1 percent. The percentage of American Jewish households consisting of married couples has dropped to two-thirds, as has the overall married-couple rate in the 1980 census data.

American Jewish women are marrying later and beginning their families later. Often, the age at which the first child is born is substantially later than the age of first marriage. In a common scenario, a woman who marries at age 28 may postpone bearing her first child until age 34 in order to finish her professional training and establish her career. In Baltimore, among the 87 percent of Jewish women ages 45 to 64 who had children, one-third gave birth to their first child before age 22 and another one-half gave birth between ages 23 and 29. Thus, for mothers ages 45 to 64, four out of five had given birth to their first child before they reached age 30. In contrast, for women currently ages 25 to 34, only half had ever given birth. While some analysts are sanguine about the effect of delayed childbirth on Jewish population growth,[38] others warn that postponing childbearing will, on average, mean smaller American Jewish families.[39]

There are several reasons why families may not achieve their expected

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[38]Calvin Goldscheider is the foremost proponent of the idea that expected family size, rather than the current number of children per family, reveals the actual completed family size that will be achieved by a given cohort. According to this view, delayed marriage and childbirth among a group can mean they have very few children during a certain period but will bear them later and fulfill their family-size expectations. Goldscheider states: "Expected fertility measures show a very high aggregate prediction for actual fertility. That has been the case particularly for Jews . . . who plan and attain their family size desires with extreme accuracy." Calvin Goldscheider, *Jewish Continuity and Change: Emerging Patterns in America* (Bloomington, Ind., 1986), pp. 92–94.

[39]U.O. Schmelz and S. DellaPergola argue strongly against the so-called optimistic position. See "Demographic Consequences of U.S. Population Trends," AJYB 1983, vol. 83, pp.148–59, 154. As noted in Gary A. Tobin and Alvin Chenkin, "Recent Jewish Community Population Studies: A Roundup," AJYB 1985, vol. 85, pp. 154–78, 162–63, the most striking evidence of the lowered Jewish fertility rate is the declining number of young people in the American Jewish population. Nearly one-third of the Jewish population was under 20 years old in the 1970 National Jewish Population Study, but in the post-1980 individual city studies only between one-fifth and one-quarter of American Jews were 19 years of age or younger. The figures for individual cities are as follows: New York—23 percent age 19 and under; Washington, D.C.—23 percent age 17 and under; St. Paul—21 percent age 19 and under; Minneapolis—27 percent age 19 and under; Milwaukee—24 percent age 17 and under; Rochester—24 percent age 19 and under; Pittsburgh—22 percent age 19 and under; Phoenix—25 percent age 17 and under; Philadelphia—17 percent age 15 and under; Nashville—28 percent age 19 and under; Miami—20 percent age 19 and under; Denver—21 percent age 17 and under; Los Angeles—20 percent age 17 and under.

TABLE 1. MARITAL STATUS OF CONTEMPORARY JEWISH POPULATIONS IN U. S. CITIES, COMPARED TO 1980 U.S. CENSUS, 1970 NJPS, AND 1970 U.S. CENSUS (PERCENT)

Location	Year Study Completed	Married	Single	Widowed	Divorced
Atlantic City	1985	67	13	13	6
Boston	1985	61	29	4	5
Baltimore	1985	68	19	9	5
Chicago	1982	65	23	6	6
Cleveland	1981	69	11	13	8
Denver	1981	64	23	4	9
Kansas City	1985	70	17	7	5
Los Angeles	1979	57	17	12	14
Miami	1982	61	7	23	8
Milwaukee	1983	67	14	9	10
Minneapolis	1981	66	22	7	5
Nashville	1982	70	17	8	5
New York	1981	65	15	11	9
Phoenix	1983	63	18	9	10
Richmond	1983	67	14	12	7
Rochester	1987	68	23	6	3
St. Louis	1982	68	9	17	6
St. Paul	1981	66	20	11	3
San Francisco	1988	69	19	4	7
Washington, D.C.	1983	61	27	4	7
Worcester	1987	69	14	—18—	
U.S. Census	1980	67	19	8	6
NJPS	1970	78	6	10	5
U.S. Census	1970	72	16	9	3

Source: See text footnote 37.

family size. First, where family size expectations are maintained, biological problems such as infertility are far more frequent as the age of the primipara (first-time mother) rises. Furthermore, the rate of fetal abnormalities rises along with age of the mother, sometimes further discouraging later childbirth. In addition, as numerous older first-time mothers have testified, the disruptive effect of children on an established dual-career household can serve as an effective motivation for limiting family size; sometimes expected

family size is revised downward in response to the emotional and logistical difficulties that follow the birth of a first child. Finally, some employers actively discourage the birth of more than one child.

In addition to its effect on population size, the postponement of marriage and family formation may have a deleterious effect on synagogue and Jewish organizational affiliation. As part of a long-standing pattern of American Jewish life, the great majority of Jews do not join synagogues and organizations until they have married and had children. This life-cycle effect, in addition to the time constraints suffered by dual-career couples, seems to be one reason for diminished proportions of American Jewish women being actively involved in Jewish institutions.

Feminist goals may also lead to stress within marriage, and thus to divorce. Noticing that a surprisingly high proportion of divorced women in the general population had master's degrees, researchers analyzed the relationship between higher education and marital history. They found that women who obtained their master's degrees before marriage were not more likely than average to be divorced, whereas women who obtained their master's degrees after marriage were far more likely than average to be divorced. The researchers hypothesized that marriages which from their inception included a woman already in a professional role were psychologically adjusted to weather the pressures of two careers far better than those which began with more conventionally divided gender roles, and later switched course.[40]

No study has been published analyzing Jewish populations in this way, but data on the relationship between educational levels and marital status among Jewish women indicate that there may be a correlation between educational achievement and divorce. Among Jewish women in Baltimore, 32 percent of divorced women had master's degrees, compared to 7 percent of singles, 15 percent of married women with children at home, and 22 percent of married women with grown children. In Boston, among women ages 35 to 45, 9 percent of married women had master's degrees compared to 26 percent of divorced women in that age group. Unfortunately, the population studies do not reveal the date of degree completion, so we do not know what proportion of the divorced women's M.A.s were obtained before, during, or after their marriages. It is not possible, therefore, to establish a causal relationship between the educational achievement of Jewish women and divorce.

[40]Sharon K. Houseknecht, Suzanne Vaughan, and Anne S. Macke, "Marital Disruption Among Professional Women: The Timing of Career and Family Events," *Social Problems*, Feb. 1984, pp. 273–83.

Educational and Occupational Achievement

Another area of American Jewish life clearly influenced by feminism is the freedom of educational and occupational opportunity that American Jewish women now enjoy. Jewish women ages 25 through 34 are far more likely than women over age 55 to complete their bachelor's degrees and to obtain postgraduate degrees, as shown in table 2, which uses data from MetroWest (Essex and Morris counties), New Jersey. However, while MetroWest Jewish women ages 25 to 34 are about as likely as men to complete bachelor's degrees and to obtain master's degrees, men are still over three times as likely as women to complete medical, dental, legal, and doctoral degrees.

Impressionistic evidence indicates that Jewish women are currently enrolling in large numbers in professional programs, and data on the career plans of Jewish college women also show that the aspirations of young Jewish females have changed. Charles Silberman reports that a "1980 national survey of first-year college students taken by the American Council on Education found that 9 percent of Jewish women were planning to be lawyers—up from 2 percent in 1969. The proportion planning a career in business management increased by the same amount, and the number planning to be doctors tripled, from 2 percent to 6 percent. In this same period the number of Jewish women planning to be elementary school teachers dropped . . . from 18 percent in 1969 to six percent in 1980; those choosing secondary school teaching plummeted from 12 percent to only one per-

TABLE 2. SECULAR EDUCATION OF JEWS IN METROWEST, N.J.,[a] BY SEX AND AGE (PERCENT)

Education Completed	25–34 F/M	35–44 F/M	45–54 F/M	55–64 F/M	65+ F/M
H.S. or less	16/15	15/10	24/14	42/18	63/39
B.A.	56/50	53/38	50/42	37/45	27/37
M.A.	24/23	27/26	23/23	18/21	7/15
D.D.S., M.D., Atty.	3/11	3/18	[b]/12	1/10	2/ 6
Ph.D.	1/ 2	2/10	3/ 9	2/ 6	2/ 3
Total %	100/101	100/102	100/100	100/100	101/100

Source: See text footnote 37.
[a]MetroWest data from Essex and Morris counties, New Jersey.
[b]Indicates less than 1%.
(N = 1,477 males, 1,623 females)
Totals above or below 100% due to rounding of numbers.

cent."[41] Data collected during the next decade will indicate whether the gap between male and female completion of professional degrees will continue to narrow.

Just as educational data show that Jewish women are achieving more than in the past, occupational data on American Jewish women show some areas of movement. Table 3, reporting the occupations of currently employed Jewish men and women in MetroWest, New Jersey, illustrates the advancement of women into medicine, law, engineering, and science, as well as into executive positions. Still, while women in the younger groups are twice as likely to be employed in those fields as women in the older groups, Jewish men are still far more likely than Jewish women to be doctors, lawyers, or engineers.

Jewish women ages 35 to 44 are twice as likely to be physicians or attorneys as are women ages 55 to 64—but Jewish men ages 35 to 44 are more than four times as likely as Jewish women to be practicing those professions. Women have increasingly been moving into engineering and the sciences, going from 2 percent in the 45 to 54 age group to 4 percent in the 25 to 34 age group, while men engineers and scientists from ages 25 to 54 have remained at a stable 8 percent.

Jewish women ages 35 to 64 are outnumbered by men three to one in managerial positions; however, women ages 25 to 34 almost equal men in these positions. Younger Jewish women are far more likely to be executives and far less likely to be clerical or administrative support workers. The percentage of managers and administrators doubles in the younger group: 22 percent of women ages 25 to 34, compared to 11 percent of the women ages 35 to 54. Seventeen percent of women ages 25 to 34 are employed as clerical workers, compared to 28 percent of women ages 45 to 54 and 38 percent of women ages 55 to 64.

Data from Washington, D.C. (see table 4) illustrate the occupational shifts that are most pronounced in those communities offering broad employment possibilities to women. In Washington, Jewish women ages 25 to 34 show a strong shift toward law as a professional career choice. However, while the percentage of Washington Jewish women practicing law has increased tenfold from the oldest to the youngest groups, Jewish men are still more than twice as likely to practice law, even in the youngest group.[42] (While Washington is unique in its atypically large demand for attorneys

[41]Charles Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York, 1985), p.123.

[42]Nine percent of women ages 25 to 34 are attorneys, compared to 1 percent of women ages 45 to 54. It should be noted that the practice of law among younger Jewish men has increased substantially also: 23 percent of men ages 25 to 34 are lawyers or judges, compared to 13 percent ages 45 to 54.

TABLE 3. OCCUPATIONS OF CURRENTLY EMPLOYED JEWS IN METROWEST, N.J.,[a] BY SEX AND AGE (PERCENT)

Occupations	25–34 F/M	35–44 F/M	45–54 F/M	55–64 F/M
M.D., D.D.S., etc.	1/ 6	2/ 9	1/ 8	1/ 8
Atty., judge	2/ 7	2/11	[b]/ 8	[b]/ 4
Engineer, scientist	4/ 8	4/ 8	2/ 8	1/10
Teacher, soc. worker	14/ 1	30/ 4	19/ 4	20/ 3
College prof.	[b]/ 1	1/ 3	2/ 1	1/ 1
Writer, artist	5/ 4	3/ 1	7/ 1	2/ 3
Allied health	9/ 4	6/ 1	7/ 2	7/ 2
Manager, admin.	22/25	11/30	11/33	9/29
Technical, sales	22/27	19/24	21/26	16/29
Clerical	17/ 3	20/ 2	28/ [b]	38/ 2
Service	4/14	2/ 7	2/ 6	3/ 9
Total %	100/100	100/100	100/97	98/100

Source: See text footnote 37.
[a]MetroWest data from Essex and Morris counties, New Jersey.
[b]Indicates less than 1%.
(N = 1,388 males, 1,427 females)
Totals above or below 100% due to rounding of numbers.

in government-related positions, the growth of law as the career of choice for Jewish women has been noted in many law schools and many Jewish communities.)

The practice of medicine, college teaching, writing, and artistic work is highest among women ages 35 to 44. While the data cited by Silberman indicate that teaching and social work are losing their appeal for young Jewish women, this is not the case in Washington. The percentage in these traditionally "female" fields climbs from older to younger working women, with 18 percent of Washington Jewish women ages 35 to 44 working as teachers or social workers. The percentage of Washington Jewish women involved in clerical work has diminished, but not radically: about one-fifth of Washington Jewish women ages 25 to 34 are clerical or administrative support staff.

As a city which offers broad occupational opportunities for women, Washington may dramatize some new trends in career movement. In the large metropolitan areas, especially on either coast, Jewish women are edging away from professional fields that are relatively weak in terms of

TABLE 4. OCCUPATIONS OF CURRENTLY EMPLOYED JEWS IN WASHINGTON, D.C., BY SEX AND AGE (PERCENT)

Occupations	25–34 F/M	35–44 F/M	45–54 F/M	55–64 F/M
M.D., D.D.S., etc.	2/ 7	4/ 8	1/ 7	3/ 4
Atty., judge	9/23	4/24	1/13	1/ 8
Engineer, scientist	3/11	4/12	2/21	5/16
Teacher, soc. worker	16/ 3	18/ 2	18/ 2	13/ 4
College prof.	3/ 4	3/ 5	2/ 8	3/ 4
Writer, artist	8/ 7	9/ 4	4/ 4	4/ 3
Allied health	8/ 2	4/ 1	3/ 4	3/ 1
Manager, admin.	20/16	19/28	24/28	20/31
Technical, sales	10/16	9/10	17/ 9	14/20
Clerical	16/ 6	20/ 2	24/ 2	29/ 2
Service	4/ 5	5/ 4	4/ 4	4/ 5
Total %	99/100	99/100	100/102	99/98

Source: See text footnote 37.
(N = 1,159 males, 998 females)
Totals above or below 100% due to rounding of numbers.

financial and status rewards and into fields that offer larger salaries. In most Midwestern and smaller cities, on the other hand, these new career trends among Jewish women have not yet had much statistical impact; in those areas, Jewish female professionals still cluster in the lowest paid fields—teaching and social work. Thus, among working Jewish women in Pittsburgh, 21 percent are social workers or teachers, while 4 percent are physicians, dentists, attorneys, or engineers. In Minneapolis, 16 percent of working Jewish women are social workers or teachers—more than five times the percentage in more lucrative professions. Denver has a relatively high proportion—almost 12 percent—of female doctors, lawyers, and engineers, partially because of the exceptionally high percentage of female engineers (8 percent, compared to 9 percent male engineers). In contrast, in Minneapolis, only 3 percent of Jewish women are doctors, lawyers, or engineers, compared to 17 percent of Jewish men; in Pittsburgh, the ratio is 4 percent women to 20 percent men; and in St. Louis, the ratio is 2 percent women to 17 percent men.

Labor-Force Participation

In 1957, only 12 percent of Jewish women with children under six worked outside the home, compared to 18 percent of white Protestants. As recently as 15 years ago it was still true that Jewish women were likely to work until they became pregnant with their first child, and then to drop out of the labor force until their youngest child was about junior-high-school age. Barry Chiswick has suggested that the high occupational achievement level of Jewish men may owe a great deal to Jewish women who provided an environment of family stability.[43]

The labor-force participation of Jewish women today departs radically from patterns of the recent past. In most cities the majority of Jewish mothers continue to work, at least part-time, even when their children are quite young. This phenomenon can be examined in two ways: by looking at age group and by looking at family type. An examination of changes among age groups is useful, because it permits comparison with earlier data. Thus, in the 1975 Boston study, the labor-force participation of Jewish women dipped lower than that of any other white ethnic group during the childbearing years. Among women ages 30 to 39, the number of working Boston Jewish women in 1975 fell to 42 percent, compared to about half of white Protestant, Irish Catholic, and Italian Catholic mothers. Past age 40, the percentage of Boston Jewish women at work soared higher than that of any other subgroup, with almost three-quarters of Jewish women in the labor force.[44]

Data from the 1985 demographic study of the Boston Jewish population show a very different picture, as seen in table 5. The majority of Jewish women in every age group except for those over 65 are working, and the younger the age group the more likely they are to be employed. Only about one-third of Boston Jewish women in the two age groups most likely to have young or school-age families—ages 30 to 39 and 40 to 49—are not employed.

If we examine the working-mother phenomenon from a life-cycle vantage point, the present high rate of labor-force participation by Jewish mothers with even the youngest children emerges unequivocally. Table 6 compares the employment patterns of mothers of preschool children in ten cities. In Boston, Baltimore, San Francisco, and Washington, three out of every five Jewish mothers of preschool children are employed.

Perceived economic need is probably the single most significant factor affecting the proportion of Jewish women who work outside the home. As

[43]Barry R. Chiswick, "The Labor Market Status of American Jews: Patterns and Determinants," AJYB 1985, vol. 85, pp. 131–53.

[44]Goldscheider, *Jewish Continuity and Change*, pp. 125–34.

TABLE 5. EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF BOSTON JEWISH WOMEN, 1985, BY AGE (PERCENT)

Ages	Not Employed	Employed Full-Time	Employed Part-Time
18–29	15	65	19
30–39	28	38	34
40–49	35	45	19
50–64	43	33	25
65+	94	3	2

Source: Adapted from *1985 CJP Demographic Study,* p. 25.

has been widely demonstrated among the general American population, for middle-class families today, two incomes are often needed in order to attain and maintain a middle-class standard of living: that is, purchase of a single-family home in a desirable location, relatively new automobiles and major

TABLE 6. LABOR-FORCE PARTICIPATION OF JEWISH MOTHERS OF CHILDREN UNDER 6, COMPARED TO 1986 U.S. CENSUS (PERCENT)

Cities	Full-Time	Part-Time	Homemaker	Other
Boston	29	36	33	2
Baltimore	27	38	35	1
Kansas City	28	21	44	7
MetroWest	22	26	49	4
Milwaukee	18	32	36	14
Philadelphia	23	14	59	3
Pittsburgh	29	25	42	4
Phoenix	26	21	50	3
Rochester	22	32	42	4
San Francisco	36	25	31	8
Washington	34	30	30	6
Worcester	15	34	51	1
U.S. Census	—54—			

Source: Adapted from Gabriel Berger and Lawrence Sternberg, *Jewish Child-Care: A Challenge and an Opportunity* (Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, *Research Report* No. 3, Nov. 1988), p. 20.

appliances, and attractive educational options for one's children, including college and possibly private school and/or graduate school. It is also true that perceptions of what constitutes a middle-class life-style have been significantly revised upward, so that more income is needed by "middle-class" families. These factors are especially significant for American Jewish families, which have traditionally had a strong ethic of providing their children with "everything."[45]

However, in addition to economic need, employment opportunities, job preparation, and social pressure are equally important factors in the labor-force participation of Jewish women. Younger Jewish women are more likely than their mothers to have used their schooling to prepare for specific careers, and they are often less willing to let those careers lie fallow while they become full-time homemakers. Younger women are also more likely to be surrounded by peers who urge them to work, rather than to become homemakers. By and large, women over 50 received their schooling at a time when most Jewish women did not work after marriage unless there was dire financial need. Consequently, even women who completed college often had no specific career preparation; the liberal arts degree was used as a kind of intellectual finishing school. Moreover, a wife's working might indicate that her husband was an inadequate provider; therefore even women who were trained as teachers or librarians sometimes hesitated to return to the job market. Furthermore, according to David Reisman, 20 years ago a woman who successfully combined career and family life was likely to be greeted with "shrewish and vindictive" envy by her peers, rather than admiration or a spirit of live and let live.[46]

The great majority of middle-aged and older Jewish women, therefore, have worked only part-time or not at all for many years. Their daughters, on the other hand, have matured with an ethos that is more likely to make the homemaker feel defensive. Among women 40 and under, especially those who live in cities with a strongly career-oriented atmosphere, even women with young children often complain that they are made to feel inadequate if they are not pursuing careers at the same time that they are raising their families.

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[45]Marshall Sklare states the matter well: " . . . [H]e offers the child what are sometimes termed the 'advantages' or, in common American-Jewish parlance 'everything,' as in the expression: 'they gave their son everything.' 'Everything' means the best of everything from the necessities to the luxuries: it includes clothing, medical attention, entertainment, vacations, schools, and myriad other items." Marshall Sklare, *America's Jews* (New York, 1971), p. 88.

[46]David Reisman, "Two Generations," *Daedalus*, Spring 1984, 711–35.

Personal and Communal Implications of Demographic Change

As we have seen, substantial proportions of today's American Jewish households no longer fit the classic pattern of a working, highly educated husband living with a nonemployed, somewhat less educated wife and their several mutual children. Better education and career aspirations for women, later marriage and later childbirth, smaller families, rising rates of divorce, and widespread labor-force participation of Jewish mothers have changed the demographic profile of the American Jewish family. These changes have serious implications for individuals, who are confronted by difficult life-style decisions. They have also challenged the organized Jewish community to evaluate and make adjustments to new demographic realities.

It should be noted that although this discussion places the concept of "working mother" in a contemporary feminist context, the attempt at fusion of the two roles has long historical antecedents in the Jewish family. European and immigrant Jewish women often had a "characteristic aggressiveness and marketplace activism"[47] which they saw as an intrinsic part of their commitment to family and to society at large. Jewish women worked long hours at the sewing machine; they took in boarders; they ran grocery stores to help support their families. They also took active and often dangerous roles in union organizations because they believed that they could help better society. At the same time, connections between work and family were the norm in many traditional Jewish families.

For Jewish couples who married before the impact of women's liberation, there was almost always a commitment to the primacy of the family. They did not wonder whether or not to have children, and postponement of the first child was likely to depend on the father's career—as many couples waited until the conclusion of a residency or other professional training—rather than the mother's. Today, however, there are no *a priori* commitments to marriage and family, or to traditional gender roles. A 1985 survey found that only one-third of Jewish women believe that home-centered women make better mothers than women who work outside the home; while close to one-half of non-Jewish women think that employed women are less effective mothers and that children are more likely to get into trouble when both parents work.[48]

Couples now deciding to have children face an entirely different set of psychological barriers from those in the past. Rather than worrying about family or communal disapproval if working mothers decide to continue working, many are anxious about employer and peer-group disapproval if

[47]Hasia Diner, "Jewish Immigrant Women in Urban America," unpublished paper for the Mary I. Bunting Institute, Radcliffe College.

[48]Groeneman, "Beliefs and Values of American Jewish Women."

they curtail their working hours and career advancement to make time for child care. Contemporary values, which emphasize holding a stimulating job, personal development and growth, and experiencing the pleasures of an open and vital society, make the decision to have children a difficult one.

Young women who have devoted many years to higher education and professional training and then to establishing careers are torn by conflicting desires. As they edge into their 30s and beyond, many long for a child but worry that the limitations imposed by pregnancies and maternity leaves will stunt their professional growth. Most are less willing than earlier working women to fall back temporarily to part-time or free-lance work and to risk jeopardizing career advancement.[49] In Baltimore, for example, more than half of the married women who haven't yet had children are professionals, compared to one-third of the women with children at home and fewer than one-quarter of women with grown children.

Again, it is important to remember that women alone are not responsible for these decisions: many potential fathers too are concerned that children will change a very pleasant dual-career life-style by limiting their freedoms, diminishing their financial status, and imposing on them a portion of child-care and family-related household tasks.[50]

The changes that have taken place in attitudes and life-style have certainly not met with universal acceptance. Some critics warn that feminism has introduced attitudes and behaviors that may be destructive, in both the short and the long run, to the survival of the Jewish people in the United States. Others regard feminist agendas as a litany of immature demands. If Jewish women want to work and have children, claim these critics, they are making the decision and ought to be willing to shoulder the responsibilities themselves.

Blu Greenberg, a modern Orthodox feminist, is torn between desire for feminist advancement and fears for the physical survival of the Jewish community. Although she has written and spoken widely on behalf of feminist agendas, especially within traditional religious realms, she points out that "by delaying childbirth from the 20s to the 30s, we lose an entire generation every three decades. Career counseling with the Jewish people's needs in mind," she suggests, "would temper feminist claims with Jewish ones; it would enable couples to consider more seriously the option of having children first and then moving on to dual careers."[51]

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[49]Fertility decisions by career couples have been a favorite topic for the media. Among many articles, see Darrell Sifford, "Couples Agonize Over Parenthood," *Boston Globe*, Apr. 24, 1980; Nan Robertson, "Job VS Baby: A Dilemma Persists," *New York Times*, Nov. 18, 1982.

[50]Nadine Brozan, "New Marriage Roles Make Men Ambivalent About Fatherhood," *New York Times*, May 30, 1980.

[51]Blu Greenberg, "Feminism and Jewish Survival," in *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1981), pp. 151–69, 164.

Both Midge Decter and Ruth Wisse see the conflict between career and family as basically an individual, rather than a communal problem. They assert that individual women can deal with career/family conflicts through strength of character and good planning. Decter portrays "the liberated woman" as a spoiled child of the sixties, who does not have enough common sense and self-discipline to know "that marriage is not a psychic relationship but a transaction, in which a man forgoes the operations of his blind boyhood lust, and agrees to undertake the support and protection of a family, and receives in exchange the ease and comforts of home." Decter notes wryly that "if a woman opts to have both marriage and a career, she will put herself in the way of certain inevitable practical difficulties, the managing of which will on the other hand also widen her options for gratification."[52]

Wisse shares Decter's jaundiced view of the *angst* that some feminists report when they think about juggling career and familial responsibilities. She tells modern mothers to be more firm in urging their daughters to marry and have children at the biologically appropriate time. If daughters speak of careers, perhaps mothers should answer as Wisse's mother did: "*Bay yidn zaynen nishto kayn nones*"—"We Jews have no nuns." Furthermore, she has nothing but scorn for women who do not appreciate the blessings of the conventional marriage: "Happy is the woman whose husband is prepared to carry the economic burden of the family during at least her child-rearing years, and those who have enjoyed such protective blessings are nothing short of wicked when, explicitly or implicitly, they contrive to destroy the fragile contract that promotes them."[53]

On the other side of the spectrum are Jewish communal leaders and thinkers who either approve of the feminist agenda and think it should be supported in Jewish life, and/or who take a pragmatic approach to the landscape of American Jewish family life as it exists today. Paula Hyman castigates Jewish community leaders who seem to value women more for their reproductive value than for the contribution which they *as individuals* can make to the Jewish community.[54]

In reality, while some women reject traditional family life in the single-minded pursuit of a career, many Jewish women today do indeed feel their familial and professional interests to be organically related. It is these women who are most likely to state that their traditional orientation helps them to balance dual responsibilities. Sheila Kamerman points out that in the past even working women "shaped and fitted their work around their

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[52]Midge Decter, *The Liberated Woman and Other Americans* (New York, 1971), p. 94.

[53]Ruth Wisse, "Living with Women's Lib," *Commentary*, Aug. 1988, pp. 40–46.

[54]Ben Gallob, "Leader Flays Appeal for Larger Families," *Jewish Advocate* (Boston), Sept. 20, 1979, quoting recent issue of *Sh'ma*.

families and their family responsibilities while men have shaped and fitted their families around their work and job demands. Some of the tensions now emerging are a consequence of some women adopting men's attitudes and behavior, while others are insisting that some modification is required of both men and women if the goal is for individual, family and child well-being."[55]

Some observers feel that regardless of one's approval or disapproval of feminism, it is incumbent on Jewish communal organizations to work to accommodate new life-styles, rather than to judge them, to exhort against them, or to hope they will go away. Gladys Rosen points out that the near-demise of the extended family opens the way for communal involvement in support for dual-career families: "There is a desperate need for universal Jewish day care for preschoolers and expanded opportunities for day school education which would enable mothers to work while offering enriched Jewish education to their children."[56] Rela Geffen Monson notes that in terms of support, the relationship of Jewish institutions and the Jewish family has actually been reversed: the family is becoming "the recipient of community services rather than their support." This reordering offers Jewish communal organizations and institutions the opportunity to assist in transmission of values to the children of the new American Jewish family, she urges.[57]

Shirley Frank suggests that a number of broad attitudinal and practical changes by the Jewish community are needed to support Jewish families. Jewish community leaders who say they want larger Jewish families ought to champion expanded after-school Jewish programs which incorporate Hebrew school curricula with recreational programming, she says. They ought to make sure that every community has attractive Jewish day-care programs. Every synagogue service, every adult educational program, every Jewish social event ought to automatically offer good child-care provisions. Children should be seen as a welcome part of Jewish life by the very people who urge women to have more children—and then "openly discriminate against" or "ostracize" families with "restless small children or wailing infants."[58]

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[55]Sheila B. Kamerman, *Being Jewish and Being American: A Family Policy Perspective on the U.S. Social Policy Agenda and the Jewish Communal Policy Agenda*, a paper prepared for the American Jewish Committee's Task Force on Family Policy, Feb. 1981, p. 23.

[56]Gladys Rosen, "The Impact of the Women's Movement on the Jewish Family," *Judaism*, Spring 1979, p. 167.

[57]Rela Geffen Monson, "Implications of Changing Roles of Men and Women for the Delivery of Services," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 63, no. 4, Summer 1987, pp. 302–10.

[58]Shirley Frank, "The Population Panic: Why Jewish Leaders Want Jewish Women to Be Fruitful and Multiply," *Lilith*, no. 4, Fall/Winter 1977/78, pp. 13–17, 17.

Despite the problems associated with balancing the demands of family and career, many of those who are doing it find that the blend leads to general feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and fulfillment. The great majority of Jewish career women with large families in Kuzmack and Salomon's study (Washington, D.C., 1980) were pleased with their lives on both a personal and a professional level. Almost 85 percent felt they were "successful" or "very successful" at child rearing; three-quarters described themselves as personally "extremely satisfied" or "very much satisfied"; and over 80 percent said they were "successful" or "very successful" at work.[59]

When considering the challenges faced by dual-career Jewish families and the Jewish communities they live in, it is important to note that feminism is often practically combined with deep emotional ties to Jewish values. While some have attempted to identify the dual-career couple with an assimilationist, "egalitarian" family model,[60] many of the women who aspire to combine work and motherhood are more committed Jewishly than either men or stay-at-home mothers.[61] Dual-career couples are an important, even predominant, group among young and middle-aged cohorts in every Jewish denomination. Kuzmack and Salomon's study showed that the great majority of such women are deeply committed to Jewish life. All but six of the women belonged to synagogues, three-quarters sent their children to religious schools, and more than half marked the Sabbath with some form of observance.

Although the Washington women said that their Jewish values and lifestyles enhanced familial devotion, stability, and structure, and increased the family's ability to weather dual-career stresses and strains, they felt that the local Jewish community was sadly failing Jewish dual-career families. They voiced the complaint that "the Jewish community is urging us to have more children, but it isn't willing to help us meet the cost." The area of largest dissatisfaction was that of day care and Jewish education. "Mothers of young children . . . complained bitterly about the lack of Jewish day care centers. 'Children should be raised in a Jewish environment, and day-care is part of that,' " said one. Others complained that Hebrew schools, day schools, and Jewish camps were unwilling to lower tuition fees for large Jewish families unless their income was very low. Jewish organizations, they felt, retained the attitude that Jewish women should have more children

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[59]Linda Gordon Kuzmack and George Salomon, *Working and Mothering: A Study of 97 Jewish Career Women with Three or More Children*, National Jewish Family Center, American Jewish Committee, 1980, p. 23.

[60]Norman Linzer, *The Jewish Family: Authority and Tradition in Modern Perspective* (New York, 1984).

[61]Abraham D. Lavendar, "Jewish College Women: Future Leaders of the Jewish Community," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 52, Summer 1976, pp. 81–90.

and that Jewish women should bear the financial and psychological burden of raising those children.[62]

While Jewish women were taught for centuries that the home was their proper sphere of influence, American Jewish women today energetically pursue educational and occupational accomplishment as well. At the same time, many American Jewish women reject the notion that they are uniquely responsible for the well-being of their households; rather, they seek to share responsibility for that sphere with husbands, paid household help, and family-support institutions.

Despite the skepticism of both male and female critics of the feminist agenda, the influence of feminism on the educational and occupational lives of American Jewish women seems to be growing, rather than weakening. As a result, feminism is having a major impact not only on the family but on another cornerstone of Jewish society as well—Jewish communal organizations.

CHANGES IN COMMUNAL LIFE AND ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

The Feminist Critique of Voluntarism

Jewish communal and organizational life, like other spheres of Jewish life in America, has been strikingly affected by feminism. Women have penetrated former male bastions of power as volunteers in Jewish organizations and have worked for equity as professional Jewish communal workers. Not least, Jewish organizations have become more aware of the needs of contemporary American Jewish women, men, and children in changing households. Voluntarism fit well into the lives of American Jewish women, especially in the years after World War II. In the 1950s, the typical American Jewish woman was better educated and more leisured than her Gentile counterpart. Jewish women had two or three children as compared to a rate of three to four children for non-Jews, and they spaced their children carefully, beginning childbearing later and finishing earlier than non-Jewish women. The majority of American Jewish children were in school by the time their mothers reached their late thirties.

Articulate and well educated, many Jewish women poured their energies into communal work. Volunteer communal work earned familial and communal approval. It was seen as an extension of the role of the nurturing Jewish mother and drew on the long tradition of the Jewish

[62]Ibid., pp. 19–21.

woman as a giver of charity and a doer of good deeds. Jewish women and the organizations they served thrived together: voluntarism gave women the opportunity to use their intelligence, organizational ability, and talents in challenging projects; communal organizations on local, national, and international levels were enabled to complete major projects because Jewish women treated volunteer work with dedication and seriousness.

However, in the 1960s and 1970s female voluntarism came under the critical scrutiny of the feminist movement. To feminist critics, voluntarism was a subterfuge, an escape from the emptiness of the homemaker's existence. Doris Gold, for one, lambasted a system that exploited "more than 13 million volunteers who 'work' for no pay at all—a virtual underground of antlike burrowers in our social welfare institutions." Calling female voluntarism "pseudowork," Gold wondered "why have trained, educated, 'aware' women opted for voluntarism, instead of structured work or creativity, during or after childrearing years?"[63]

In "The Sheltered Workshop," Aviva Cantor asserted that Jewish organizational work was nothing more than "a placebo," or "a distorted form of occupational therapy," designed to keep Jewish women "busy with trivia and involved with a lot of time-consuming social activities."[64]

For many Jewish feminists, the issue is not so much that the volunteers are not paid—male volunteers, after all, are unpaid as well—as that female volunteers have been systematically cut off from opportunities for decision making and power. One vivid symbol of institutional resistance to change is the UJA's policy of sexual exclusiveness in its local leadership cabinets and its prestigious National Young Leadership Cabinet, which grooms future leaders of federations. Because only men are allowed in many local cabinets and in the national cabinet, feminists charge that they serve the function of perpetuating an anti-egalitarian bias. UJA leaders cite "intense male camaraderie" as a primary reason for excluding women from the cabinet: it has been claimed that men in leadership positions bond together in intense personal and idealistic relationships, and that women would disrupt male bonding; and it has been feared that the presence of women in the pressured and deeply involved atmosphere of weekend retreats and working weekends would entice men into extramarital relationships. The national UJA leadership has so far withstood pressure to change its policy and to admit women to its most effective structure for molding future leaders.[65]

Jewish women who have attained positions of power in Jewish organiza-

[63]Gold, "Women and Voluntarism," pp. 384–400.
[64]Aviva Cantor, "The Sheltered Workshop," *Lilith*, no. 5, 1978, pp. 20–21.
[65]Stone, "The Locked Cabinet," pp. 17–21.

tions have joined in the critique. Although, unlike many feminist critics, they do not find organizational activities worthless per se, they say that women have been consciously excluded from opportunities for power. One of the first to voice distress publicly over inequities in the Jewish communal world was Jacqueline Levine, then vice-president of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds (CJF). Stating that she had frequently been included as "the only—and therefore the token—female representative" in Jewish communal leadership settings, Levine cited leadership figures as they existed in 1972: in three of the top ten cities, 13 percent of the combined boards of directors and 16 percent of the persons serving on federation committees were women. The percentages of women involved were somewhat larger in the medium-size and smaller cities.[66]

From a feminist standpoint, the situation has improved in the past decade and a half, but is still far from equitable. Women now comprise between one-quarter to one-fifth of federation board members, executive committee members, and campaign cabinet members. Women have been federation presidents in Baltimore, Boston, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Omaha, Toledo, and San Jose. Shoshana Cardin has served as the first female president of CJF. The percentage of women on the boards of federations and federation-funded agencies rose from 14 percent in 1972 to 40 percent in the mid-1980s.[67] According to a 1987 JWB study, women comprise one-third of all Jewish community-center board members.[68] Ironically, perhaps, as Chaim Waxman observes, among Jewish women's organizations, where it might be expected that all chief executive officers would be women, a substantial number of male directors are to be found.[69]

The Contemporary Jewish Female Volunteer

The Jewish population studies conducted in more than 20 U.S. cities since 1980 give us figures on the current percentage of American Jewish women who volunteer for Jewish causes. Testimony by Jewish communal leaders, organizational records, and anecdotal evidence indicate that 25 years ago the percentage of American Jewish women who volunteered for Jewish causes was much higher. However, we lack sufficient comparable data from the past to state this as a firm fact.

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[66]Jacqueline K. Levine, "The Changing Role of Women in the Jewish Community," *Response*, Summer 1973, pp. 59–65. This is an edited text of an address to the 1972 General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds.

[67]Reena Sigman Friedman, "The Volunteer Sphere," *Lilith*, no. 14, Winter/Spring 1985–86, p. 9.

[68]Edward Kagen, *A Profile of JCC Leadership* (New York, 1987).

[69]Chaim I. Waxman, "The Impact of Feminism on American Jewish Communal Institutions," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Fall 1980, pp. 73–79.

Jewish women are more likely than non-Jewish women to volunteer for certain kinds of organizations. According to one targeted study, Jewish women are ten times more likely than non-Jewish women to volunteer for ethnic causes, such as B'nai B'rith (compared to NAACP and Polish Women's Alliance, among non-Jewish populations), by a margin of 39 percent to 3 percent. Although Jewish women are substantially less likely to volunteer for a church or synagogue group than are non-Jewish women (59 percent of Jewish women compared to 69 percent of non-Jewish women), the synagogue group remains the single activity most likely to attract Jewish women. Among nonsectarian causes that attract Jewish women, high on the list are business and professional activities, which draw the membership of 28 percent of Jewish women but only 16 percent of non-Jewish women. This may be related to the relatively high rate of careerism among Jewish women. Jewish women are also far more likely to volunteer time for cultural activities, civic and public affairs, and feminist causes.[70]

No research has yet been published analyzing the Jewish organizational behavior of a large sample of American Jewish women. However, several studies both of the general population and of Jewish women have focused on specific groups of active volunteers. These studies give some indication of the demographic factors that correlate most closely with a propensity to volunteer.

The factors motivating Jewish women to volunteer may be somewhat different from those motivating women in the general population. Among the latter, research indicates an inverse correlation between careerism and voluntarism. A study of a Midwestern population found that women who were highly educated but were married to men who disapproved of their working outside the home were the group most likely to participate in volunteer work. The portrait of the typical volunteer in this nonsectarian study revealed a woman younger than 45, well educated, and satisfied with her traditional marriage.[71] In contrast, several leadership studies of active Jewish women volunteers suggest that many Jewish women who volunteer are labor-force participants. The "Council of Jewish Federations Women's Division Leadership Survey,"[72] a 1987 profile of CJF Women's Division

[70]Groeneman, "Beliefs and Values of American Jewish Women," pp. 11–12.

[71]Vicki R. Schram and Marilyn M. Dunsing, "Influences on Married Women's Volunteer Work Participation," *Journal of Consumer Research* 7, Mar. 1981, pp. 372–79. Data from this study are part of the Quality of Life Survey 1976–77. The data are drawn from interviews with 228 homemakers in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, originally contacted through random sampling in the 1970–71 Survey of Life Styles of Families. Only married women under age 65 with children and husbands were included in this study.

[72]Gary A. Tobin and Sylvia Barack Fishman, "CJF Women's Division Leadership Survey Executive Summary," Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University. The data for this study were gathered from 130 completed questionnaires, which were distributed

activists, showed that well over half of those with school-age children, ages 6 to 17, worked outside the home.

Household income seems to be positively related to volunteer activity, especially in leadership positions. Annual household income among the CJF Women's Division leaders in the sample was $135,000 for women ages 35 to 44 and $171,000 for women ages 45 to 64. Both average incomes are approximately two to three times higher than average incomes for Jewish families in those age brackets.

Ninety-four percent of the Women's Division leadership sample were currently married. Like most American Jewish women, they were highly educated: 62 percent of the respondents had B.A.s, 24 percent M.A.s, and 3 percent doctorates, medical, dentistry, or law degrees.

The Women's Division volunteers in the sample tended to be more traditional than other American Jewish women, both in terms of family formation patterns and in terms of religious observance. Respondents in the study averaged about three children each in their households, compared to about two children typical of all American Jewish households. Likewise, respondents were far more likely to mark the Sabbath and Jewish holidays with some observance.

Similarly, a study of Jewish women volunteers in Dallas[73] revealed a group of affluent, highly educated, fairly traditional women. The group was far more likely than average to maintain Jewish observances such as lighting Sabbath candles, fasting on Yom Kippur, eating only matzah and no bread on Passover, and to belong to a synagogue. Like the Women's Division leadership, the annual household income of Dallas Jewish leadership is relatively high: over one-third of the group enjoyed a household income of over $100,000 and another one-quarter had a household income of between $75,000 and $100,000.

The Dallas study seems to illustrate a disparity between behaviors and attitudes toward feminism that may be peculiar to Southern Jewish populations, which are more likely to be influenced by cultural prescriptions of traditional feminine roles. While more than half of the group worked outside the home, almost two-thirds said they perceived themselves as "home-

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to Women's Division leaders during and after the 1986 CJF General Assembly. Respondents represented a diverse group from federations throughout the United States.

[73]The Dallas study of Jewish leadership was conducted during the spring of 1981 by mailing survey questionnaires to board officers and committee heads in Jewish organizations. Ninety-three women responded; they included leaders in the Federation, Jewish Family Services, Jewish Vocational Counseling Service, Jewish Community Center, Home for Jewish Aged, American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, and all temples and synagogues. Jeffrey Becker Schwamm, "Recruitment of the Best: A Study of Why Dallas Jewish Women Leaders Volunteer," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 60, no. 3, Spring 1984, pp. 214–21.

makers," 40 percent said they perceived themselves as "career women," and only 36 percent said they perceived themselves as "feminists." Despite this reluctance to identify themselves as feminists, when asked about incentives to volunteer in Jewish communal organizations, two-thirds of the Dallas volunteers said that "dealing with problems which are challenging" was "very important." More than half named "intellectual stimulation" and "self-actualization and personal growth" as "very important." Thus, even in some highly traditional Jewish environments where women are loathe to identify themselves as feminists, mainstream Jewish women have tended to internalize feminist perspectives.

Volunteers, Employed Women, and Jewish Communal Responses

Money is a factor in voluntarism for obvious reasons, but also for some that are not so obvious. The authors of the Dallas study comment that "transportation, convenience of meeting location, and alternative child-care arrangements represent no problem to almost all the respondents." Many less affluent Jewish women who combine careers and motherhood, however, have indicated that transportation, convenience of location, and alternative child-care arrangements are crucial issues indeed. A university professor participating in a panel discussion on "American Jewish Women and the World of Work" described her difficulties in chauffeuring her six-year-old from Jewish nursery school in the morning to nonsectarian day care in the afternoon. "After a day of working and driving back and forth," she commented, "I can't imagine a Jewish communal cause which would be interesting or important enough to drag me out of the house to start driving around for more child care."[74]

Conflict between labor-force participants and homemakers adds another, troubled dimension to the impact of feminism on the Jewish communal realm. Jewish mothers who do not work outside the home sometimes express hurt that the contemporary Jewish community does not assign them adequate status. Homemakers may feel that career women expect them to carry an unfair share of volunteer work, yet look down on them because of their apparent lack of ambition and skills. Still, Zena Smith Blau points out that although fewer Jewish women today are willing to throw themselves heart and soul into the many Jewish communal organizations that have flourished on the free talents, intelligence, and time of Jewish wives, volunteerism among Jewish women remains significantly higher than among high-status Protestant and nonreligious women. Blau speculates that the traditional emphasis on community work in Jewish families may have

[74]Ileana Gans, panelist commenting at the Conference on Jewish Culture in the South: Past, Present, and Future, Asheville, North Carolina, Apr. 1988.

contributed to Jewish marital stability: the optional social interactions and ego-gratification derived from communal work refreshed the marital bond and relieved stress.[75]

Some women use their volunteer work as a basis for vocational retraining after their children are grown and become career women after all.[76] However, others find that their volunteer activities and "life experience" do not gain them much ground in the job market, and that they must retrain themselves to gain occupational skills and credentials.[77] Other Jewish homemakers devote considerable time and energy to self-development, enrolling in classes of all kinds, partially in an effort to demonstrate to themselves that they are just as accomplished as their salaried sisters. These women also may be less willing than women in the past to volunteer, because they perceive the call to voluntarism as a form of exploitation of their nonemployed status.

It cannot be stressed enough that feminism has affected the voluntaristic activity of Jewish men as well as Jewish women. This is especially true in dual-career families. For couples who are under intense pressure during the working hours, evenings and weekends become a haven not easily abandoned for communal causes. Furthermore, when dual-career couples decide to have children, they are often extremely "professional" about the concept of "quality time" with their children. Volunteer activities which cut into these times are sometimes perceived as diminishing, rather than enhancing, the social aspects of their lives. This new generation of Jewish parents is often repelled, rather than attracted, by the segregated structure of synagogue brotherhoods and sisterhoods and federation women's divisions and leadership cabinets.

The Professional Jewish Communal Worker

Feminism has affected Jewish communal life not only through its volunteers but through its professionals as well. Jewish communal service is a field increasingly populated by women; the 1988 enrollment of the Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service at Brandeis University, for example, consisted of 26 women and 11 men. Still, despite the presence of qualified women in the field, many of whom hold graduate degrees and many of whom have more seniority than the men they work with, very few

[75]Zena Smith Blau, "A Comparative Study of Jewish and Non-Jewish Families in the Context of Changing American Family Life," prepared for the American Jewish Committee Consultation on the Jewish Family and Jewish Identity, 1972.

[76]John Corry, "Mrs. Lieberman of Baltimore: The Life and Times of an Organization Lady," *Harper's*, Feb. 1971, pp. 92–95.

[77]Schneider, *Jewish and Female*, pp. 482–84.

women are promoted to executive positions. One recent article noted that "a 1981 survey of over 2000 professional staff in 273 agencies, conducted by the Conference of Jewish Communal Service (CJCS), indicated that although women constituted over half (58 percent) of the total staff, they made up only 8 percent of executive directors and assistant directors. A great majority of professional women (92 percent) were in the two lower job categories: 32 percent as supervisors and 60 percent line staff."[78]

Those who do achieve executive positions frequently earn salaries far lower than those of their male colleagues. Thus, a report by the Jewish Welfare Board in 1984 noted that 112 men were employed as executive directors, compared with 4 women, and that the average male director earned $51,500 while the average female director earned $44,250. In a similar 1984 CJF report, among the 80 male executive directors, the average salary was $53,179, while among the 8 female executive directors the average salary was $25,294.[79] Some of the reasons cited for not promoting women are the same as those given in the nonsectarian world: women are reluctant to relocate; women get married and pregnant and are therefore unreliable employees. Other reasons are peculiar to the world of Jewish communal service. It is a constant struggle to find high-caliber persons interested in the field, therefore attention cannot be "wasted" on efforts for equal opportunities for women; if women flood the executive strata of Jewish communal service, salaries in the field will automatically be depressed.[80]

Few wealthy female volunteers who have risen to power have worked to substantively improve the situation for female professionals in Jewish communal service. Moreover, some powerful female professionals have been loathe to rock the boat in order to benefit the female line workers below. Jacqueline Levine asserts that "too often those who have been accepted, or co-opted, or have 'made it,' don't look any farther than their own inclusion."[81] Many Jewish agencies have published statements and formed commissions to promote affirmative action, including the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, the Council of Jewish Federations on a national level, as well as many on local levels. However, as many observers have commented, acknowledging and studying the problems have not always led to equity even within those organizations themselves.

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[78]Reena Sigman Friedman, "The Professional Sphere," *Lilith*, no. 14, Fall/Winter 1985–86, p. 11.

[79]Debby Friss, "Room at the Top?" *Hadassah Magazine*, Jan. 1987, pp. 20–23.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Levine, "Changing Role," p. 60.

Interestingly, both men and women in power have indicated that feminist goals in the Jewish communal world will be achieved when women learn to be more aggressive in furthering their own cause. Thus, Irving Bernstein, former UJA executive, discussing the underrepresentation of women on the National Executive Committee and Campaign Cabinet of the national UJA, states that women's progress is impeded by women's discomfort with the idea that they must forcefully assert themselves and their views, even in the face of opposition.[82] Naomi Levine, former executive director of the American Jewish Congress, urges women to study job descriptions, salaries, and promotions, and to take legal action where necessary to eliminate discrimination.[83] Anne Wolfe, who served as national staff director of the American Jewish Committee's committee on the role of women, says that "nice conferences" change little; "a much more revolutionary push by women" is needed to achieve feminist goals.[84]

Despite feminist progress in many areas—and despite the apparent mainstreaming of feminist attitudes within many national Jewish organizations—the relationship between Jewish communal life and feminist goals is still troubled. Feminism has brought new conflicts into Jewish communal life and has exacerbated older ones. However, it also presents the Jewish communal world with the opportunity to utilize more fully the skills of American Jewish women, both as volunteers and as professional workers for the Jewish community.

FEMINISM AND JEWISH RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The Feminist Critique of Judaism

More than in any previous period of Jewish history, women today have made themselves central to the public functioning of religious life. This has led to sharp conflict, with opponents arguing that feminist efforts in this area will undermine normative Judaism. The evidence is, however, that feminist interest in Jewish prayer, study, ritual, and life-cycle celebrations has been marked by high creativity, and that as feminists have explored Jewish religious life, they have often demonstrated a renewed commitment to Judaism. Feminists argue that they have involved Jewish women in their Judaic heritage on an egalitarian basis for the first time in Jewish history:

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[82]Steven M. Cohen, Susan Dessel, Michael Pelavin, "The Changing (?) Role of Women in Jewish Communal Affairs," in Koltun, ed., *The Jewish Woman*, pp. 193–200.

[83]Cantor, "The Missing Ingredients," p. 12.

[84]Ibid.

that they have empowered Jewish women to acquire the intellectual tools needed to deal competently with Jewish source materials and texts, as well as the liturgical skills which make them equal partners with men in prayer; that they have examined Jewish source materials from a female-centered, rather than a male-centered perspective; and that they have created rituals and midrashim which deal specifically with the feminine experience of Jewish life cycles, history, and culture. According to feminists, Jewish women are at last gaining the opportunity to explore their own spirituality.

Some aspects of this creative renewal—such as Jewish life-cycle celebrations for females—affect huge numbers of American Jewish women; other aspects—such as female ordination and the practice by women of traditionally male-focused rituals—directly affect only highly committed and involved women. However, even women who are not directly involved in the more intensive forms of Jewish feminist spirituality may be indirectly shaped by an environment in which women have increasingly become public Jews.

It is of course ironic that at a time when most American Jewish men seem to be drawing away from Jewish ritual, and few men worship regularly with *tallit* and *tefillin*, some Jewish women have been exploring these and other traditionally male modes of religious expression. While fewer Jewish men are attracted to the rabbinate, partially because restrictive codes barring them from other professions have almost disappeared, increasing numbers of Jewish women have been entering the field, first in the Reform (1972) and Reconstructionist (1975) branches and later in the Conservative (1985) denomination. Among the masses of American Jewish boys and girls, the education of Jewish females has drawn close to approximating the education of Jewish males.

For most of Jewish history, the role of women within Judaism was shaped by rabbinic law (Halakhah). Although this body of law prescribed behavior for Jewish women, they were not involved in the formal discussion or decision-making processes—they were passive recipients of a nonrepresentative system.[85]

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[85]Blu Greenberg summarizes the laws and concepts which most determined a Jewish woman's role thus: "Talmudic law spelled out every facet of the law as it applied to the woman. She was exempt from those positive commandments that must be performed at specific times, such as wearing the *tzitzit* and *tefillin*, reciting the *Shema*, and the three complete daily prayer services (Kiddushin 29a; Eruvin 96b; Berakhot 20a-b; Menahot 43a). She was exempt also from certain commandments that were not time specific (Eruvin 96b). In various communal or group events, she could be a participant-observer but had no equal status in performance of ritual. This held true for the mitzvah of *sukkah*, the celebration of *simhat bet ha-sho'evah*, the redemption of the firstborn, inclusion in the minyan for grace after meals, and reading the Torah at the communal prayer service (Sukkah 2:18, 53a; Kiddushin 34a; Megillah 47b, 23a)." Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism*, pp. 62–63.

According to some Jewish feminist scholars, such as Rachel Biale, the Halakhah has not excluded Jewish women nearly as much as the folk cultures that have surrounded it. It was folk culture, not postbiblical Jewish law, for example, that perpetuated the notion of menstrual contamination and made menstruating women feel unwelcome in synagogues in certain European Jewish communities. Contrary to popular opinion, Biale suggests, "the law may have preceded common practice in what to the contemporary eye are liberal, compassionate attitudes toward women."[86] Most feminist scholars of Judaism, however, would be inclined to agree with Judith Plaskow's view[87] that the Halakhah contains much that is objectionable because it has been male-centered from its inception. Even at Mount Sinai, she points out, Moses addresses the community as though it were composed exclusively of men. This exclusion is deeply troubling to feminists because biblical memory is an active force in the spiritual lives of Jews. Plaskow maintains that the issue of female exclusion extends into, and is exacerbated by, later developments in Halakhah, as expounded through the Talmud, its commentators, and the responsa literature. Because "Halakhah is formulated by men in a patriarchal culture," she asserts, it defines the normative Jewish experience as the experience of men. According to Plaskow, "Feminism questions any definition of 'normative' Judaism that excludes women's experience."

Jewish feminists involved with religious issues can be divided between those who feel bound by Jewish law and those who do not. The former have been careful to maintain all ritual requirements incumbent upon Orthodox women, while working to effect change within the law itself. The latter feel that rabbinic law can be treated as a flexible guide to practice rather than as a rigid set of demands. They have worked for behavioral change within Jewish religious life, urging women to take on religious duties and roles previously proscribed to women, even if those duties and roles are prohibited by traditional law. Both types of Jewish feminists have sought to revitalize traditional modes of religious expression for women, as well as to create new rituals and liturgies.

American Jewish Life-Cycle Celebrations

In the past, ritual responses to the birth of a girl were pallid. The father was one of several men in the synagogue called to make a blessing on the

[86]Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law: An Exploration of Women's Issues in Halakhic Sources* (New York, 1984), p. 7.

[87]Judith Plaskow, "Standing Again at Sinai: Jewish Memory from a Feminist Perspective," *Tikkun* 1, no. 2, 1987, pp. 28–34; idem, "Halakhah as a Feminist Issue," *Melton Journal*, Fall 1987, pp. 3–5.

Torah, and there he would recite a prayer for the health of mother and child and name his daughter. Some families would also mark the occasion by serving simple refreshments after Sabbath services, but no talk was given and no songs were sung, nor was the infant herself brought to the synagogue. As recently as 25 years ago, a lavish *kiddush* for a girl could arouse sarcastic commentary: "You're doing all this for a girl?" Today, however, an elaborate *kiddush* is expected for the birth of a daughter, even in strictly Orthodox circles. Moreover, neglected customs have been revived and new customs have arisen to give both mother and daughter the opportunity to mark these momentous events. In some synagogues, women who have just given birth recite *birkat hagomel* aloud during the Torah-reading portion of the Sabbath service, thanking God for the deliverance from danger, rather than leaving such thanksgiving to the father's proxy recital. The once unknown ceremony of "*Shalom Bat*," welcoming a daughter, has become ubiquitous in Jewishly knowledgeable communities. In the home or synagogue, with mother and daughter present, friends gather to listen to talks, eat, sing, and celebrate together. Some parents compose new prayers for the occasion; others make use of printed materials that have been written and disseminated in liberal Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist circles.[88]

Reconstructionist founder Mordecai Kaplan, who was also closely associated for many years with the Jewish Theological Seminary, may have been the first to suggest the concept of Bat Mitzvah,[89] and Conservative Judaism made popular the actual celebration of this event. At first, few families chose to celebrate the Bat Mitzvah,[90] and many Conservative synagogues limited the celebration to less problematic Friday-night services, when the Torah is not read. By the late 1980s, however, most Conservative and almost all Reform congregations had made Bat Mitzvah and Bar Mitzvah ceremonies virtually identical, including calling girls to the Torah.

For women who missed having a Bat Mitzvah in their youth, such a celebration at a later stage in life provides the opportunity for both a renewed commitment to Judaism and a feminist assertion of personhood. One recent adult Bat Mitzvah states, "In the midst of our Jewish lives, there was a void—something that was not quite okay for us. One of us said she wanted to stand where her husband and four children stood and read a *haftarah* from the same bimah. Two of us are making up for being denied

[88]For a listing of printed materials on *Shalom Bat* ceremonies, see Schneider, *Jewish and Female*, pp. 121–29.

[89]Carole Kessner, "Kaplan on Women in Jewish Life," *Reconstructionist*, July-Aug. 1981, pp. 38–44.

[90]Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (New York, 1972), pp.154–55.

this chance years ago when we were told in our shuls there was no such thing as girls being bat mitzvah."[91] These ceremonies involve women ranging in age from young adulthood to old age and are a regular feature in many Conservative and Reform congregations.

Orthodox practitioners have slowly responded to the pressure to celebrate a girl's religious majority. Some congregations have established a format for celebrating Bat Mitzvah on Sunday morning or Shabbat afternoon at a special *se'udah sh'lishit*, the traditional festive "third meal." At these occasions the girl typically delivers a *d'var torah*, a homiletic address illustrating her familiarity with biblical texts, marking the seriousness of the occasion. Other congregations leave the mode of celebration up to the discretion of the child and her parents. These celebrations have become commonplace in many Orthodox circles, with families sometimes traveling great distances to be at a Bat Mitzvah, just as they would for a Bar Mitzvah. Much feminist commentary on this phenomenon has tended to concentrate on the disparity between limited Orthodox forms of Bat Mitzvah, on the one hand, and egalitarian Conservative and Reform modes of Bat Mitzvah, on the other. This, however, misses the point that Orthodoxy has in fact traveled a farther road than the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist branches in breaking away from previously prevailing norms.

Synagogue Participation and Ritual Observance by Women

The diversity of congregational attitudes toward female participation in synagogue services is illustrated in a 1978 study that evaluated questionnaires filled out by the rabbis of 470 congregations of different sizes, drawn from different branches of the American Jewish religious community and distributed among the several geographic areas of the United States.[92] Investigators Daniel Elazar and Rela Monson found that mixed seating and women leading the congregation in English readings were almost universal among Reform and Conservative congregations. Almost all Reform congregations counted women toward a *minyan* (required prayer quorum) and allowed them to chant the service; slightly less than half the Conservative congregations did so; and none of the Orthodox. Nearly all Reform congregations and about half of Conservative congregations honored women with *aliyot* to the Torah, while none of the Orthodox congregations did. Women gave sermons in almost all Reform congregations, more than three-quarters of Conservative congregations, and 7 percent of Orthodox congregations.

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[91]Susan Gilman, "Bat Mitzvah Ceremonies Not Just Kid Stuff," *Queens Jewish Week* (New York), May 27, 1988.

[92]Daniel J. Elazar and Rela Geffen Monson, *The Evolving Role of Women in the Ritual of the American Synagogue* (Philadelphia and Jerusalem, 1978).

Most Reform congregations and almost two-thirds of Conservative congregations had women opening the ark and chanting *kiddush* and *havdalah*, but only 2 percent of Orthodox congregations did similarly. As these data were gathered in the late 1970s, and before the Conservative movement's landmark decision to ordain female rabbis, we can safely assume that considerable movement has taken place in most Conservative congregations to increase egalitarian practices.

Egalitarian attitudes toward prayer become especially important to women who wish to say *kaddish* daily for departed loved ones. Traditional synagogues are the most likely to have daily prayers—and they are also the most likely to be unwilling to count women for a *minyan*, posing a serious problem for the would-be female *kaddish* reciter. Greta Weiner recalls entering one Conservative synagogue, only to be pushed to the back of the chapel by a man who insisted that her presence would be "disruptive to the men trying to pray." Refusing to count her and her teenage daughter for the *minyan*, the congregation that evening had only nine men and did not include the *kaddish* in its prayers.[93]

The egalitarian prayer model is championed outside established synagogues in many *havurot*. *Havurot*—prayer and study groups which often involve relatively small numbers of fairly knowledgeable and/or committed Jews—have a participatory and egalitarian ethos. They have been the locus of much creative ferment in the American Jewish community, ferment which has often filtered out and eventually influenced more established synagogues and temples. Because *havurot* have no rabbis, cantors, or other professionals to lead services, read from the Torah, deliver sermons, and teach classes, and rely on group members to undertake these responsibilities, they have been pioneers in providing opportunities to women in these areas.

The expansion of female participation in worship takes place not only in an egalitarian context but in an all-female setting as well. In all-female prayer groups, women have the opportunity to lead prayers and read the Torah, and in general to be active participants in a ritual sphere in which for millennia they were nonessential auxiliaries. Even in all-female groups, however, conflicts arise between Orthodox and non-Orthodox women. While some non-Orthodox women welcome the all-female context so that they can read, lead, and pray without the potentially intimidating presence of men, Orthodox women need the all-female format because they will only perform in this way if men are not present. Furthermore, many Orthodox women will not recite the approximately 20 percent of the prayer service reserved for a quorum of ten men unless they receive permission to do so from a recognized male rabbinical *posek* (person recognized as a competent

[93]Greta Weiner, "The Mourning Minyan," *Lilith*, no. 7, 1980, pp. 27–28.

formulator of Jewish law). As Steven Cohen notes, feminist religious styles "are predominantly determined by differences in approach to Jewish life rather than by differences in approach to feminism."[94]

Prayer is far from a new concept for women in the Orthodox Jewish world. According to Maimonides and other classical rabbinical commentators, women are required to pray daily, although they are excused from the time restrictions for prayer and are not counted as part of a *minyan*. Consequently, in the past, numerous Orthodox European women prayed daily in their homes, as do many contemporary Orthodox American women. Nor is group prayer by women per se controversial, as it is a regular occurrence in many Orthodox girls' yeshivahs. Two new phenomena have infuriated some Orthodox rabbis, however: women choosing to pray separately, rather than being relegated to separation by men; and women carrying and reading from Torah scrolls.

In the words of one participant, Rivkeh Haut, "Reading from a *sefer torah* is at the heart of every women's prayer service. The Torah is carried about the room, so that every woman present may reach out and kiss it. The entire Torah portion for that week is read. This Torah reading is the basic innovation of women's *tefillah* [prayer] groups."[95] Orthodox Jewish women of all ages have reported being moved to tears the first time they looked into a Torah scroll as part of a women's prayer group. "I never realized how much I was excluded from—or how much it meant to me," said one Boston grandmother.

Despite the cautious respect with which Orthodox women approached this activity, some Orthodox leaders launched vigorous campaigns against female group prayer. Thus, in 1985 Rabbi Louis Bernstein, then president of the Rabbinical Council of America, invited five Yeshiva University Talmud professors to issue a responsum on the appropriateness of female *minyanim*, this despite the fact that the prayer groups scrupulously avoided identifying themselves as such. The resulting one-page responsum prohibited women's *minyanim* as a "falsification of Torah," a "deviation," and a product of the "licentiousness" of feminism. The responsum, condemned by more moderate modern Orthodox figures for its startling, undocumented brevity and blatant lack of halakhic objectivity,[96] was followed by a more scholarly but no less inflammatory 17-page article by Rabbi Hershel Schacter.[97] When some of the rabbis involved were interviewed by the popular Jewish press, their remarks underscored the personal and political

[94]Cohen, "American Jewish Feminism," pp. 530–31.

[95]Rivkeh Haut, "From Women: Piety Not Rebellion," *Sh'ma*, May 17, 1985, pp. 110–12.

[96]See, for example, David Singer, "A Failure of Halachic 'Objectivity,' " *Sh'ma*, May 17, 1985, pp. 108–10.

[97]See Michael Chernick, "In Support of Women's Prayer Groups," *Sh'ma*, May 17, 1985, pp. 105–08, for a discussion of Schacter's article in Yeshiva University's journal *Beit Yitzhak*, Mar. 1985.

nature of their "halakhic" ruling. "What are they doing it for? A psychological lift? It has no halakhic meaning. If they want to get their kicks there are other ways to get it," said one, under cover of anonymity. Bernstein dismissed the importance of Orthodox women's spiritual explorations by stating, "They [the rabbis] don't owe the women anything."[98]

Despite the negative reaction among key elements of Orthodox leadership, women's prayer groups continue to flourish in many cities. Even in areas where women's prayer groups do not meet on a regular basis, they meet for special occasions, such as Simhat Torah. They have become a popular locus for Orthodox Bat Mitzvahs, since they offer girls the opportunity to read from the Torah and recite the *haftarah*, the reading from Prophets.

The impact of feminism on Orthodox women's observance can be seen in other phenomena as well, such as the pressure that exists in many communities to construct an *eruv*. The *eruv*, a Sabbath boundary marker, transforms a given area from a public realm to a private realm, according to talmudic law, thus making it halakhically acceptable to carry objects on the Sabbath—and to push a baby carriage as well. Prof. Nahum Sarna suggests that when Orthodox communities assumed that young women would simply remain home with their children until they could walk to the synagogue, few communities went to the trouble of setting up and maintaining an *eruv*. Today, however, far larger proportions of Orthodox women assume that their proper place is in the synagogue on the Sabbath morning, even after they have attained the life-cycle stage of motherhood. Consequently, notes Sarna, construction of an *eruv* has become a high communal priority in areas where large numbers of young Orthodox couples have settled.[99]

Jewish Education

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Jewish education in helping women to advance significantly within the religious sphere. In Judaism, no activity is more revered than study; study confers status on the individual and makes possible the mastery of the basic Jewish sources. For most of Jewish history, study was an activity available to women only on the rudimentary level and in informal contexts. Widespread formal Jewish education for women is a relatively recent phenomenon.[100]

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[98]Larry Cohler, "Orthodox Rabbis' Responsa Condemns Women's Prayer Groups," *Long Island Jewish World*, Feb. 15–21, 1985.

[99]Nahum Sarna, personal conversation, Sept. 1988.

[100]Deborah R. Weissman, "Education of Jewish Women," *Encyclopedia Judaica Year Book, 1988* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 29–36.

The slow, cumulative growth of Jewish education for women is linked to the process of Emancipation and acculturation to Western society. In Germany, where the Jewish community was profoundly affected by the ideals of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), both the burgeoning Reform movement and the enlightened neo-Orthodox movement of Samson Raphael Hirsch sponsored formal Jewish education for girls. In Eastern Europe, where the Jewish community proved more resistant to Westernization, such schooling came somewhat later. After World War I, some secular Jewish schools, both Yiddishist and Hebraist, provided formal education for girls. Most importantly, Sara Schnirer[101] established the Bais Yaakov movement, which revolutionized Jewish education for girls in the Orthodox world. Schnirer's educational work won the support of such leading Orthodox figures as the Hafetz Hayyim and the Belzer Rebbe, who pointed out that women receiving sophisticated secular education but rudimentary Jewish education were likely to abandon Orthodoxy. Today, intensive Jewish education of girls is widely accepted by all Orthodox elements as an absolute necessity. In day schools ranging from Satmar's Bais Rochel system, which eliminates the 12th grade to make sure its graduates cannot attend college, to coeducational Orthodox schools such as Ramaz in New York and Maimonides in Boston, which provide outstanding secular education and teach both boys and girls Talmud, a rigorous Jewish education for girls has become an undisputed Orthodox communal priority. During the past decade, it has also become increasingly popular for Orthodox young women to spend a year of religious study in an Israeli yeshivah between high school and college.

Young American Jewish women today are far more likely than their grandmothers were to receive some formal Jewish education (see table 7).[102] In MetroWest, New Jersey (Essex and Morris counties), only 56 percent of women over age 65 had received some formal Jewish education, compared to 80 percent of girls ages 14 to 17. Additionally, data *not* included in table 7 show that among American Jewish women over age 55, the Orthodox women are the most likely to have received some formal Jewish education

[101]The daughter of a Belzer Hassid, Sarah Schnirer was born in 1883 and received minimal Jewish education as a child, but pursued her education on her own and later with neo-Orthodox teachers in Vienna. She returned to Krakow determined to "rescue Judaism for the new generation" by providing intensive Jewish education for girls in an Orthodox setting. In 1917 she opened a school with 25 girls; the school expanded rapidly and new branches were established. In 1937–1938, 35,585 girls were enrolled in 248 Bais Yaakov schools in Poland alone. See Menachem M. Brayer, *The Jewish Woman in Rabbinic Literature*, vol. 2 (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1986), pp. 79–80.

[102]This discussion draws upon Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Learning About Learning: Insights on Contemporary Jewish Education from Jewish Population Studies*, Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 1987, pp. 25–29.

and the nonobservant and the "just Jewish" the least likely.[103] Sunday School education for girls is most frequent in the Reform movement, while Orthodox girls are most likely to be exposed to day schools, private tutors, Yiddish schools, and the like.

Ordination

In 1972, Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary, ordained Sally Priesand as the first female rabbi. Since then, the school has ordained well over 100 women. Over one-third of the entering rabbinic class in 1986 was female. Still, most Reform congregations continue to express a preference for a male primary rabbi; women rabbis are far more likely to find employment as assistant rabbis, chaplains, and Hillel directors.[104]

Now that the earliest female Reform rabbis have attained some seniority within the movement, it remains to be seen if they will also attain rabbinical posts with the prestige and salaries commensurate with their status.

Female Reform cantors have found much more widespread acceptance and have obtained employment in many prestigious congregations. In 1986 the entire entering class of cantors at Hebrew Union College was composed of women. Halakhically, women cantors pose as many problems as women rabbis (although the problems are somewhat different), and there is no halakhic difference between a primary rabbi and an assistant rabbi. Therefore, the bias against women primary rabbis but in favor of women cantors and assistant rabbis would appear to be cultural. Clearly, despite assumptions of full egalitarianism, a substantial number of Reform congregants seem content to relegate female clergy to subordinate positions.

The struggle within the Jewish Theological Seminary in moving toward Conservative ordination of women provides a well-documented case study of the evolution of women's role within American Judaism. The way toward considering such an idea was opened by the votes first to give women *aliyot* (1955) and later to count women for a *minyan* (1973) by the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. During the late 1970s, there was strong pressure within the Conservative movement to change the Seminary's policy and to begin to ordain women as Conservative rabbis. Seminary chancellor Gerson D. Cohen and Rabbi Wolfe Kelman,

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[103]"Just Jewish" refers to respondents in the Jewish population studies who did not define themselves by any wing of Judaism, i.e., Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, or Traditional, but said instead that they were "just Jewish." In addition, some population studies categorize people by the number of Jewish rituals they observe, independent of their denominational identification, as "highly observant," "moderately observant," "low-observant," and "nonobservant." "Other" (generally a very small percentile) refers to people who do not currently define themselves as Jewish.

[104]I am grateful to Rabbi Sanford Seltzer for a conversation clarifying many of these issues.

TABLE 7. FORMAL JEWISH EDUCATION OF JEWS IN METROWEST, N.J.,[a] BY AGE, SEX, AND DENOMINATION (PERCENT)

	Age and Sex									
	0–5 M/F	6–13 M/F	14–17 M/F	18–24 M/F	25–34 M/F	35–44 M/F	45–54 M/F	55–64 M/F	65–74 M/F	75+ M/F
Total ever received Jewish education	33/39	85/80	88/80	89/79	82/64	89/63	89/63	87/55	85/56	90/58
Total received no Jewish education	65/58	13/18	12/20	11/20	18/33	10/35	9/34	11/43	13/39	8/41

	Denomination and Sex														
	Orthodox			Conservative			Reform			Just Jewish			Other		
	All	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F	All	M	F
Total ever received formal Jewish education	81	89	73	78	88	69	75	84	66	51	63	39	61	74	48
Total received no Jewish education	18	10	26	19	10	28	24	15	33	48	36	59	35	25	47

Source: Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Learning About Learning: Insights on Contemporary Jewish Education from Jewish Population Studies* (Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 1987), pp. 26, 27.
[a]MetroWest data from Essex and Morris counties, New Jersey.

executive vice-president of the Rabbinical Assembly, were strongly in favor of the change, as were many younger pulpit rabbis. At the annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly in May 1977, the majority of rabbis voted to ask for the formation of an interdisciplinary commission "to study all aspects of the role of women as spiritual leaders in the Conservative Movement." The final report of the commission, presented in 1979, minimized both halakhic difficulties and the strength of feeling of dissenting rabbis. It stated that it would be morally wrong for the Conservative movement to continue to deny ordination to qualified women. A majority of Conservative congregations, said the commission, were ready to accept female rabbis, as were three-quarters of current rabbinical students. The commission strongly recommended "that the Rabbinical School of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America revise its admission procedures to allow for applications from female candidates and the processing thereof for the purpose of admission to the ordination program on a basis equal to that maintained heretofore only for males," and that the Seminary "educate the community" properly "so as to insure as smooth and as harmonious an adjustment to the new policy as possible."[105]

The commission's premises and recommendations were opposed by several older and senior Seminary professors who themselves had studied at Orthodox yeshivahs and were committed to traditional halakhic Judaism. At the Seminary chapel, for example, men and women were seated separately, despite the long-standing and accepted Conservative custom of mixed pews, and despite the majority opinion of the Rabbinical Assembly's Law Committee permitting the counting of women as part of the *minyan* for public worship, issued in 1973. The ordination of women was also opposed by a substantial group of Conservative pulpit rabbis.

Shortly after the commission report appeared, Charles Liebman, then a visiting professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Saul Shapiro, an active Conservative layman and a senior planner with IBM, prepared *A Survey of the Conservative Movement and Some of Its Religious Attitudes*,[106] for the Biennial Convention of the United Synagogue of America in November 1979. Liebman and Shapiro divided the Conservative laity into a large group that had little if any commitment to the halakhic process and a small, loyal core that took Halakhah seriously. Liebman and Shapiro suggested

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[105] *Final Report of the Commission for the Study of the Ordination of Women as Rabbis*, Jan. 30, 1979. Signed by Gerson D. Cohen, Victor Goodhill, Marion Siner Gordon, Rivkah Harris, Milton Himmelfarb, Francine Klagsbrun, Fishel A. Perlmutter, Harry M. Plotkin, Norman Redlich, Seymour Siegel, and Gordon Tucker.

[106] Charles S. Liebman and Saul Shapiro, *A Survey of the Conservative Movement and Some of Its Religious Attitudes*, sponsored by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in cooperation with the United Synagogue of America, Sept. 1979.

that the traditional minority might well represent Conservative Judaism's best chance for a viable and vital future, but warned that it could be alienated from the Conservative movement if female rabbis were ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Liebman and Shapiro's view did not deflect the agenda of the pro-ordination factions. A group of women who wanted to become Conservative rabbis were already studying at the Jewish Theological Seminary. On December 6, 1979, they sent a letter to members of the faculty, in which they said:

> . . . .We are seriously committed to Jewish scholarship and to the study of Jewish texts. Although some of our specific practices vary, we are all observant women who are committed to the halachic system.
>
> We wish to serve the Jewish community as professionals in a variety of educational and leadership capacities. We are interested in teaching, writing, organizing, counseling and leading congregations. Although we realize that these tasks can be performed by people who are not rabbis, we desire to receive rabbinical training, and the title "rabbi," because we feel that with this authority we can be most effective in the Jewish community. We believe that our efforts are sorely needed and that there are many communities where we would be fully accepted and could accomplish much towards furthering a greater commitment to Jewish life.
>
> We are fully aware that there are a number of complicated halachic issues related to Jewish women. We feel that these issues should be addressed carefully, directly and within the scope of the halachic process. This process, however, should not delay the admission of women to the Rabbinic School. We wish above all to learn and to serve God through our work in the Jewish community.[107]

In December 1979, the faculty senate of JTS voted 25 to 18 to table the question of ordination. In the spring of 1980, Gerson Cohen announced the initiation of a new academic program for women, which would be parallel to the rabbinic program but would sidestep the emotional issue of ordination. In May 1980, however, the Rabbinical Assembly voted 156 to 115 supporting women's ordination. Although the entire senior faculty of the Seminary's department of Talmud continued to oppose ordination, as did a large minority of pulpit rabbis, in October 1983, the Seminary faculty voted 34 to 8 to admit women to the rabbinical program. The first women entered the rabbinical school in September 1984; the class included 18 women and 21 men. Amy Eilberg, already an advanced student, was the first woman to receive Conservative ordination, graduating in 1985.

The Orthodox movement could hardly remain untouched by all this, despite the denunciations of leading Orthodox figures. Indeed, a few Orthodox rabbis responded positively to feminist ferment within the Conservative movement, suggesting that something similar might eventually happen in

[107]Signed by Debra S. Cantor, Nina Beth Cardin, Stephanie Dickstein, Nina Bieber Feinstein, Sharon Fliss, Carol Glass, and Beth Polebaum.

the Orthodox community. Rabbi Avraham Weiss stated: "There are aspects of the rabbinate such as public testimony, involvement in a bet din and leading a public liturgical service that women may not, according to Jewish law, be involved in. However there are aspects of the rabbinate—the teaching of Torah and counseling—in which women can fully participate on the same level as men. . . .a new title must be created for women to serve this purpose."[108] Blu Greenberg went one step further. In an article entitled "Will There Be Orthodox Women Rabbis?" she answered in the affirmative:

> Will it happen in my lifetime? I am optimistic. At this moment in history, I am well aware that the Orthodox community would not accept a woman as a rabbi. Yet we are moving towards a unique moment in history. More than any other, the Orthodox community has widely educated its women in Torah studies. Thus, though it rejects the formal entry of women into rabbinic studies, *de facto*, through the broad sweep of day school, yeshiva high school education and beyond, it has ushered them, as a whole community, into the learning enterprise. At the very same moment in time, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Judaism are providing us with models of women as rabbis. At some point in the not-too-distant future, I believe, the two will intersect: more learned women in the Orthodox community and the model of women in leadership positions in the other denominations. When that happens, history will take us where it takes us. That holds much promise for the likes of me.[109]

Feminist Ritual, Midrash, and Liturgy

Jewish feminists concerned with religious issues have urged the inclusion of female experience and female images of the divine in Jewish ritual, midrash, and liturgy.

At the radical end of the spectrum are those who seek to discover and recreate "goddess spirituality." The popular Jewish press reported that a student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Jane Litman, was building small goddesses and ostensibly worshiping them. Litman denied this, saying that the goddess episode was misinterpreted by "name-callers who seek to halt the forward march of social justice." She stated that "most liberal Jews accept that images of God are psycho-social symbols, not descriptions of any tangible reality," and insisted that "women's images of the Deity must be given the same credence as men's." Several other feminists came to Litman's defense, including novelist E. M. Broner, who argued that goddess worship was a way of gaining access to a deity which

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[108]Quoted in "First Woman Set for Conservative Ordination Looks to Future," *Jewish Week* (New York), Mar. 1, 1985.

[109]Blu Greenberg, "Will There Be Orthodox Women Rabbis?" *Judaism*, Winter 1984, pp. 23–33.

"Judaism had expunged." Such creative exploration, said Broner, put "women on the cutting edge of Judaism, making us stretch."[110]

Most Jewish feminists seeking to develop female-oriented rituals recoil from incorporating goddesses into Judaism. Ellen Umansky, for one, urges exploration that is mindful of both Jewish tradition and the spiritual needs of Jewish women.[111] Arlene Agus states bluntly, "Worship of other deities is simply not a legitimate route for Jews to take." Agus notes that there are several "continuums" in Jewish feminist thinking, and that most seek to build and expand, rather than to totally transform, normative Judaism.[112]

Many Jewish feminists are interested in revisions of the liturgy that incorporate feminine attributes of the godhead and references to the matriarchs. Traditional Jewish prayers, Umansky points out, refer repeatedly to God in male imagery and continually recall the interaction of God with male biblical figures. She argues that if "Jewish women are not subordinate and if their relationship with God is every bit as intimate as the relationship of men, then let us change the liturgy to reflect this awareness." She goes on:

> How many times can I praise God as the Shield of Abraham or the Shield of Our Fathers without feeling that if He left out our mothers, surely He must be leaving out me. . . . The image that dances before me is of a male God who blesses His sons, those human beings (our fathers) who were truly created in His image. To Jewish medieval mystics, God was not simply a King and a Father but also Shechinah, She-Who-Dwells-Within. The Shechinah represented the feminine element of the Divine. It was She who went into exile with the people of Israel, She who wept over their sorrows, She they yearned to embrace. The Kabbalists, then, knew God as Mother and Father, Queen and King. Might we not incorporate these insights into our worship service?[113]

Jewish feminists have also worked to create rituals which express women's spirituality within the context of Jewish tradition. Agus[114] describes the Jewish feminist attraction to the celebration of Rosh Hodesh, the festival of the New Moon, which "traditionally held unique significance for women perhaps dating back as far as the Biblical period." The Rosh Hodesh celebration is appealing to tradition-minded yet creative feminists, says Agus, precisely because "it offers unlimited opportunities for exploration of feminine spiritual qualities and experimentation with ritual, all within the

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[110]"Can a Reconstructionist Rabbi Go Too Far?" *Baltimore Jewish Times*, Mar. 27, 1988. Jane R. Litman, "Can Judaism Respond to Feminist Criticism?" *Baltimore Jewish Times*, Apr. 24, 1987.

[111]Prof. Ellen Umansky, telephone conversation, Sept. 1988.

[112]Arlene Agus, telephone conversation, Sept. 1988.

[113]Ellen Umansky, "(Re)Imaging the Divine," *Response*, no. 13, Fall/Winter 1982, pp. 110–19.

[114]Arlene Agus, "This Month Is for You: Observing Rosh Hodesh as a Woman's Holiday," in Koltun, ed., *The Jewish Woman*, pp. 84–93.

framework of an ancient tradition which has survived up to the present day." In the Rosh Hodesh ceremonies suggested by Agus, women wear new clothes, give charity, recite prayers, poems, and a special *kiddush*, recite *sheheheyanu* (thanksgiving prayer) at the eating of new fruits, have a festive meal featuring round and egg-based foods, and include the prayers said on festivals, *shir hama'alot* and *ya'aleh veyavo,* in the grace after meals.

The Passover Seder has provided another opportunity for creative feminist spirituality. In describing the evolution of the first of her feminist Haggadahs, Aviva Cantor deals with both the strengths and the limitations of feminist transformations of Jewish ritual. She states:

> I rewrote the Haggadah, first taking care of the minor changes: making God "ruler of the universe" instead of "king," adding the names of Jacob's wives to the Exodus narrative, and changing "four sons" to "four daughters." The major change was to utilize the four-cups ritual and to dedicate each cup of wine to the struggle of Jewish women in a particular period. The Haggadah's aim was to provide connecting links between Jewish women of the past and us here in the present. A great deal of material came from Jewish legends and historical sources, some only recently discovered.

Although the feminist Seder experience was quite enjoyable for the participants, Cantor reports, she missed the heterogeneity of the traditional ceremony:

> As much as I loved a Seder with my sisters, what gnawed at me was the memory of the Seders I had at home, in my parents' house, Seders of men and women of several generations, with children running underfoot and spilling the wine. The Seder has always been a family celebration and, for me, a Seder just for women seems incomplete.

At the ideal Seder, Cantor concludes, "women would be as 'visible' as men, but neither men nor women would be the entire focus of the Seder."[115]

One ritual in which women are indisputably the entire focus is the traditional immersion in the *mikveh*, the ritual bath, related to the laws of family purity. Orthodox Jewish law requires married women to bathe thoroughly and then to immerse themselves in the *mikveh* prior to resuming sexual activity, following menstruation and seven "white" days. In some non-Orthodox communities, brides visit the *mikveh* before their weddings, even if they do not intend to maintain the family purity laws after marriage. Much to the surprise of older American Jews, many of whom regarded the *mikveh*—when they thought of it at all—as a quaint relic of outmoded attitudes and life-styles, interest in the *mikveh* has enjoyed a renaissance of sorts in certain circles. A key factor was Rachel Adler's positive discussion

[115]Aviva Cantor, "Jewish Women's Haggadah," in Koltun, ed., *The Jewish Woman*, pp. 94–102. See also "An Egalitarian Hagada," *Lilith*, no. 9, Spring/Summer 1982, p. 9.

in the first *Jewish Catalog*.[116] Feminists exploring Jewish women's spirituality and religious expression, together with well-educated younger generations of Orthodox women who take religious obligations seriously, and newly observant women who seek the structured environment and sexual limits of Orthodoxy, have revitalized *mikvehs* in many communities. Positive articles about *mikvehs* have appeared in several publications, including the *Reconstructionist* and *Hadassah Magazine*. Two students at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College explain how *mikveh* ties in to their search for Jewish feminist spirituality:

> It appeals to the individual on the many levels of her spiritual existence and relationships. First, it addresses her relationship with her future husband—that intimate, binding relationship of two people who at times fuse in body and soul. Next, it addresses her relationship with other Jewish women, who have ancient and current ties to her through water. Finally, it addresses her relationship with all Jews, through Torah and its folkways.[117]

Their "Ceremony for Immersion" includes prayers and blessings in Hebrew and English, some drawn from traditional sources and some newly composed.

Traditional Women and the Ba'alot Teshuvah

Ironically, the feminist striving for liberalization of the role of Jewish women has produced at least two species of backlash: right-wing emphasis on the intensification of woman's traditional role and increasing numbers of women who retreat from the sexual and social pressures of contemporary American life into highly structured Orthodoxy, within the *ba'al teshuvah* (religious renewal) movement.

During the past few years the *New York Times* has run attractive full-page advertisements, paid for by the Lubavitch movement, showing a Jewish mother and daughter blessing the Sabbath candles. The texts of the advertisements speak of the importance of tradition in the lives of American Jewish women, and the importance of women in preserving Judaism. In their own way, these Lubavitch advertisements are a vivid testimonial to the new prominence and visibility of women in contemporary American Jewish life.

Davidman[118] and Kaufman[119] have documented the surprisingly feminist

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[116]Rachel Adler, "Tumah and Taharah—Mikveh," in *The Jewish Catalog*, comp. and ed. Richard Siegel, Michael Strassfeld, and Sharon Strassfeld (Philadelphia, 1973), pp. 167–71.

[117]Barbara Rosman Penzer and Amy Zweiback-Levenson, "Spiritual Cleansing: A Mikveh Ritual for Brides," *Reconstructionist*, Sept. 1986, pp. 25–29.

[118]Lynn Davidman, "Strength of Tradition in a Chaotic World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism" (doctoral diss., Brandeis University, 1986).

[119]Debra Kaufman, "Coming Home to Jewish Orthodoxy: Reactionary or Radical

mentality that motivates some women to seek an Orthodox setting, in which they feel women are less harassed and more respected than in the outside world. Some of Davidman's Orthodox informants stated that Orthodox Judaism offers integrity for women in a way that contemporary society does not:

> . . . [I]t also has to do with not being seen as a sexual object, which I think is a totally pro-woman attitude. You have to love me for what I am and not for what you can get off me, and that's the laws of *tum'ah* (ritual impurity) and *taharah* (ritual purity) in Judaism. . . . Take a look at what's going on out there, how women have been objectified. On the one hand you can say it's keeping women down on the farm by keeping their heads covered. On the other hand, you could say, hey, it's by maintaining a certain attitude towards women which is not to objectify them as a sexual object.

However, for some women seeking Orthodoxy, it is precisely the retreat from the pressures of feminism that is appealing. Women such as these often seek out Hassidic settings, where gender roles are most clearly defined—women are expected to be loving and pious wives and mothers. As one of Davidson's informants put it:

> . . . [F]or many women, to relearn devotion, to replace narcissism with devotion, is really a very natural thing because it's more feminine to be devotional than to be narcissistic . . . just the way our bodies are built, a woman is, by nature, going to give of herself. . . . So when you teach a woman about devotion and marriage and selflessness and altruism, what you're really telling her is to be herself. . . . The biological function is consistent with the rest of her so that the way her body behaves is also the way the mind behaves and it's also the way the soul behaves.

In her study of modern Orthodox, Agudah-affiliated, and ultra-Orthodox women, Sarah Bunim[120] shows that many "have internalized the value system of the secular world." They are often highly educated and committed to careers, and they are also often agitated by what they perceive as inadequate religious roles for women in Orthodox Judaism—leading them to place even greater emphasis on the satisfactions of career achievement. Even among the most Orthodox *kollel* groups which Bunim studied, in which contact with secular values is kept to a minimum and women occupy a clearly subservient position as enablers of husbands who devote themselves to full-time study, feminism has had a curious impact: the status of the husband in the community is influenced by the money and prestige of his wife's job.

Women?" *Tikkun* 2, no. 3, July-Aug. 1987, pp. 60–63; idem, "Women Who Return to Orthodox Judaism: A Feminist Analysis," *Journal of Marriage and the Family,* Aug. 1985, pp. 541–55.

[120]Sarah Silver Bunim, "Religious and Secular Factors of Role Strain in Orthodox Jewish Mothers" (doctoral diss., Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University, 1986).

"Get": The Unsolved Problem

A long-standing problem for Jewish women, one that has resisted solution, is in the area of Jewish marriage and divorce law. It is a problem that affects not just Orthodox and Conservative Jews, who follow Halakhah in this area, but any woman who wishes to marry or remarry in a Jewish religious framework.

According to traditional Jewish law, when a couple divorces, the man must place a *get*, a divorce contract, into the hands of his wife, indicating that she is no longer his wife. Without a *get*, the woman remains his wife in the eyes of Jewish law. If she then marries another man without receiving a *get*, she is legally an adulteress and children resulting from the new union are illegitimate, *mamzerim*. *Mamzerim* are not allowed to marry other Jews; they can only marry other *mamzerim*. Under certain circumstances, however, the husband can legally marry again even without a *get*.

Because women have far more to lose than men do if no *get* is obtained, some men have used this as a means to blackmail their wives during divorce proceedings. For example, they threaten not to give their wives a *get* unless they receive custody of the children, or unless their wives relinquish court-ordered financial settlements or alimony payments. Both feminists and concerned rabbis have worked for methods to prevent such extortion, either through use of a prenuptial agreement or through a religious annulment of the marriage. Several Orthodox lay leaders have banded together to form an organization to deal with the problem, appropriately named G.E.T., Getting Equitable Treatment. However, according to Honey Rackman, they have made little headway:

> Despite the attention *get* blackmail has been given in the Jewish media and the waste of young women spending their childbearing years in ugly and often vicious conflict with recalcitrant husbands, the Orthodox establishment has not responded. Ostrich-like, some Orthodox rabbis have even suggested that there is no problem. They maintain that they are dealing satisfactorily with the individual cases that come before them. With their best handwringing gesture, they gently shoo from their presence "feminist" troublemakers, with condescending assurances that they too are deeply troubled and suffer sleepless nights but cannot change the law.[121]

Rackman, for one, is convinced that the "patient is curable if only the qualified doctors would administer the medicine at their disposal."

It is not inconceivable that resistance to punishing men who will not comply with the *get* is related to general hostility to feminist goals, particularly in the Orthodox community. The rising rate of divorce among Jews is often attributed to the female independence, both emotional and occupa-

[121]Honey Rackman, "Getting a *Get*," *Moment*, May 1988, pp. 34–41, 58–59.

tional, fostered by feminism. Jewish women who divorce their husbands, like Jewish women who put on *tefillin* or study the Talmud, can be profoundly unsettling to a community long accustomed to the principle that women are ideally domestic, rather than public, beings.

In Israel, the *get* issue is of pressing concern to all women, since matters of marriage and divorce are controlled entirely by Orthodox rabbinic authorities. American Jewish feminists have been instrumental in supporting the Israel Women's Network—through the New Israel Fund—which has as one of its main goals the reform of the rabbinical courts.[122]

CONCLUSION

In tandem with other factors making for change in American society, feminism has had a powerful impact on the American Jewish community. Increasing numbers of American Jewish women pursue career-oriented educational programs and the careers which follow. Partially as a result, they are marrying later and having fewer children than Jewish women 25 years ago. Moreover, a majority of today's American Jewish women, in contrast to the pattern of the past, continue to work even when they are the mothers of young and school-age children.

These demographic changes have affected the Jewish community in several important areas. First, they have created a large population of single adults, including never-married and divorced persons, who are far less likely to affiliate with the Jewish community in conventional ways. Second, they have produced a population of beginning families who are, as a group, older and more focused than beginning families 25 years ago. Third, they have fostered a dual-paycheck work ethic among Jewish parents, which makes both men and women disinclined to volunteer time for Jewish organizations. Fourth, they have resulted in a client population of Jewish children who are in need of child-care provision from birth onward, and a corresponding parental population demanding that the Jewish community provide Jewish-sponsored child care for children of varying ages.

Jewish religious life and Jewish culture have been profoundly transformed by Jewish feminism in all its guises. From birth onward, American Jewish girls today are more likely than ever before in Jewish history to be treated in a manner closely resembling the treatment of boys vis à vis their religious orientation and training. Increasing numbers of Jewish girls are welcomed into the Jewish world with joyous ceremonies, just as their brothers become official Jews with the ceremony of *Brit Milah.* American Jewish

[122] *New Israel Fund Annual Report*, 1988, p. 23.

schoolgirls receive some sort of formal Jewish education in almost the same numbers as their brothers. Bat Mitzvah has become an accepted rite in the American Jewish life cycle in all wings of Judaism, with the exception of the ultra-Orthodox.

Jewish women are counted for *minyanim* and receive *aliyot*, in all Reform and a majority of Conservative synagogues. Despite vehement attacks by some Orthodox rabbis, women's prayer groups around the country give Jewish women of every denomination the opportunity to participate in communal worship and Torah reading. College-age and adult Jewish women take advantage of greater access to higher Jewish education, with increasing numbers of women augmenting their knowledge of traditional Jewish texts. Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative female rabbis and cantors have been graduated and serve the Jewish community in pulpits and in other positions. Women hold tenured positions in Judaica in universities—including the Ivy League—and rabbinical seminaries. In addition, many women find meaning in traditional and innovative Jewish feminist liturgy and rituals. Through Jewish women's resource centers, networks, and publications of all types, Jewish feminists communicate with each other and increase communal understanding of Jewish feminist goals.

In the Jewish communal world, women assertively pursue both professional and volunteer leadership positions in local and national Jewish organizations. During the past 15 years, the number of women in such leadership positions has increased substantially, although neither the number of female executives nor the status and salary level of most of their positions comes close to matching that of male executives. Similarly, female representation on communal boards has improved in the past decade but does not come close to equaling that of men. Jewish women who express a desire for a more equal distribution of communal power have been advised by communal leaders that they must be prepared to fight aggressively for that power, including litigation, where necessary.

Despite the mainstreaming of feminist and Jewish feminist goals within the American Jewish community, the relationship between feminism and Judaism remains troubled. Some elements in rabbinical and communal leadership have a "knee-jerk" antifeminist response to any and all items on the Jewish feminist agenda. On the Jewish feminist side, there often exists a kind of tunnel vision which puts feminist agendas ahead of Jewish communal well-being and survival. In truth, there are certain areas in which the goals of feminism and the goals of Judaism are at odds with each other. In their "Orthodox response" to "Women's Liberation," Chana Poupko and Devora Wohlgelernter point up these differences:

> It is here that we come to the question of priorities. Of the 36 capital crimes of the Torah, 18 deal with crimes which undermine the family unit: homosexuality,

> incest, etc. The other 18 are things which ensure the preservation of *Klal Yisrael*. . . . It seems clear that the priority is survival and for the sake of survival much must be sacrificed. . . . The concept of sacrifice is alien to the modern feminist movement. But, sacrifice is inherent in Jewish thought. The Midrash says that Yitzchak was blind after the *Akedah*. Perhaps what the Midrash is telling us is that when there is a priority involved, one never gets away as a whole person. The point of the *Akedah* is that every Jew is a sacrifice on the altar. The feminist notion of "self-fulfillment" is likewise foreign to Jewish thought and attempts at translation result in the derogatory expression, *sipuk atzmi*, which has a selfish connotation. . . . It seems that our Sages saw self-fulfillment in terms of the nation's preservation.[123]

Personal agendas, family agendas, and communal agendas—as we have seen in the preceding analysis—are often in conflict in the lives of contemporary American Jewish men and women. Personal fulfillment often conflicts directly or indirectly with optimum family life, and both personal and familial goals may diverge from communal goals. In resolving these conflicts, the American Jewish community is faced with an extraordinary challenge, one, Jewish feminists point out, that should not be perceived as a challenge facing women alone.

To strong proponents of feminism, the multifaceted flowering of American Jewish women overshadows any communal difficulties which may result. Jewish feminists argue that the personal needs of female individuals are as significant as the personal needs of male individuals. If those needs must be sacrificed for the sake of the family, the community, or *klal yisrael*, they contend, women should not bear the burden alone. Women will no longer consent to be the "sacrifice" that guarantees the well-being of a male-centered community.

Remembering that women comprise, after all, at least one-half of the Jewish people, it seems appropriate for Jewish survivalists of all denominations to reconsider the validity of feminist goals case by case and to search for constructive ways in which to reconcile Jewish feminism with the goals of Jewish survival. It is hard to imagine what communal good could be served by religious and communal leaders rigidly adhering to an automatic antifeminist stance. On the other hand, it seems appropriate for Jewish feminists, to the extent that they are serious about Jewish survival, to weigh carefully the repercussions of proposed changes and to consider their responsibility to the community as a whole. Indeed, it is one of the achievements of American Jewish feminism that women are now in a position to examine these issues—and to make choices.

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[123]Chana K. Poupko and Devora L. Wohlgelernter, "Women's Liberation—An Orthodox Response," *Tradition*, Spring 1976, pp. 45–52.